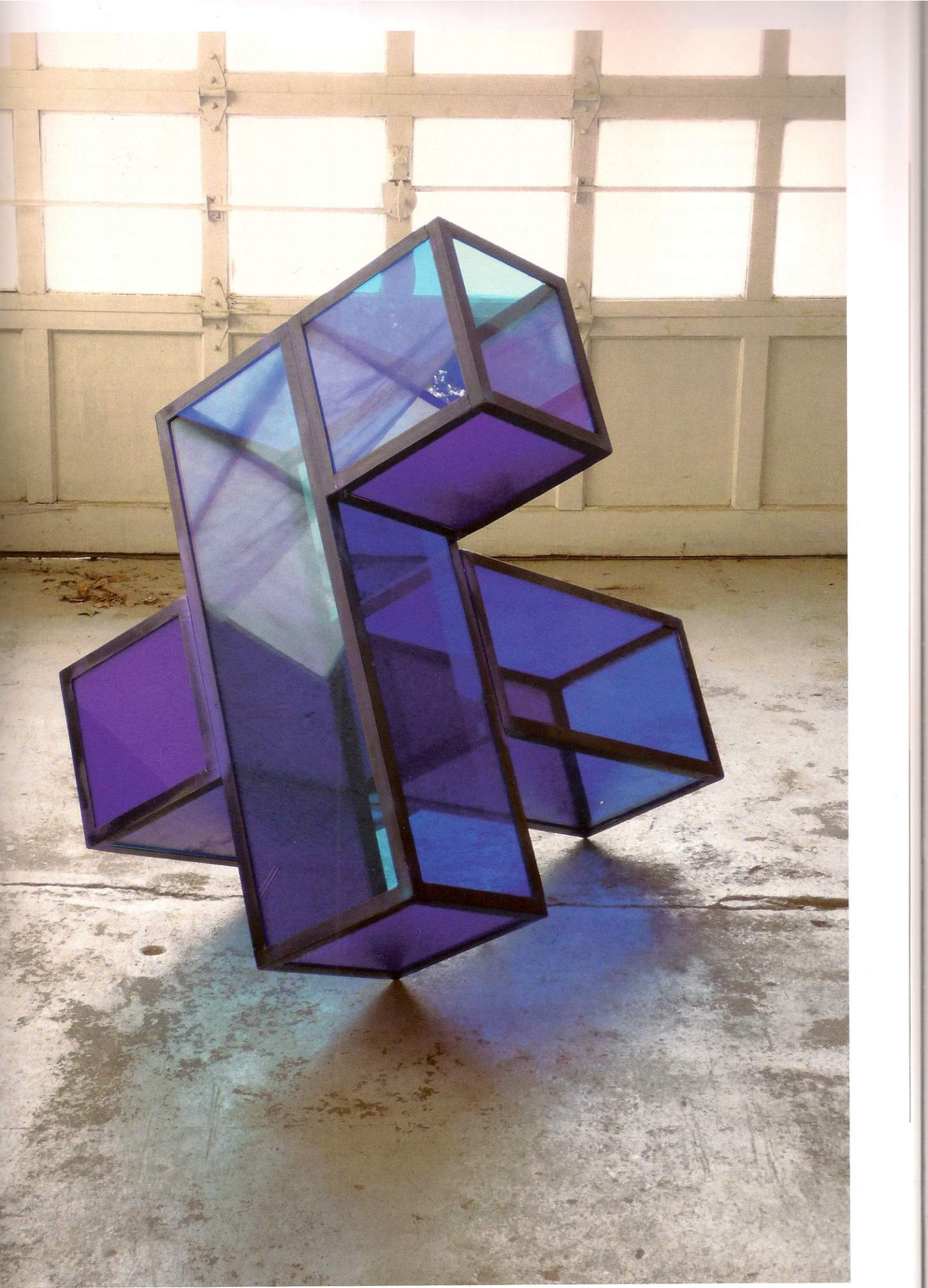




ONE DAY, WHILE  
TINKERING AROUND ART  
SCHOOL I WAS GIVEN  
THE TASK OF MEETING  
WITH A YOUNG WOMAN



and convincing her to join our graduate program. Sarah came from rural Massachusetts. She had been accepted to other, fancier schools, but lucky for us, she was broke and the one thing our Philadelphia school had to offer was big scholarships. I don't remember much about the work she applied with other than it was sculpture and mainly purple or blue and she arrived holding a six-month-old baby in her arms, which was mainly pink.

While everyone was sweating it out trying to be the smartest artist, Sarah was making work about failure and love and personal offering, which came easily to her. When the faculty threatened to fail her, she protested by making more purple sculpture and having another baby. For the past 10 years she has collaborated in owning and running Canada, a gallery on the lower west side of the Lower East Side and not a single day has gone by that I don't thank heaven for her.

**We're going to do this interview in our underwear because we're married and it's very hot and if we run the air conditioner, it's too loud to record.**

That's not the right way to start an interview.

**I'm Phil and this is Sarah, and we have a long relationship together. We got married, but that doesn't matter.**

Scratch that.

**OK, start again. Now your studio is a Frisbee toss from Emily Dickinson's grave. Has the proximity of Emily's bones affected the work that you've been making recently? How is that for a first question?**

It's hard.

**I was going to say that your work always seems to have some sort of relationship to geography and nature, and maybe you should come clean.**

It's really weird being interviewed by you.

**OK, you want to start again?**

No, no, it's good... It's good. You can ask me about nature, that's fair. Geography, the place and landscape, are natural to sculpture anyway, but I can't get away from it. It's funny, I was reading about Chagall and he was talking about how a lot of his early paintings... and actually throughout his whole life, he kept painting the landscape he grew up in and the feeling of that town. I guess I can't get away from where I grew up.

**Where did you grow up?**

I grew up in Ashfield, a small town in Massachusetts, in a house my mom built very deep in the woods. And, you know, I was outside a lot and it just sticks. I don't know how that translates into the work exactly, but even in the last show at Museum 52 I felt like there was this mountain range in the first room and then it opened up like a meadow with a big boulder in it. I just sometimes think of the work like that.

**What's your favorite color?**

Blue.

**Why?**

I don't know.

**You use color in your art. Is that, uh, fair? We're terrible! This is a terrible idea! Are you pissed?**

No, I'm not pissed. Is this take three? This is harder than I thought it would be.

**It's impossible.**

Is it on? Why are you still holding it?

**Because I'm in charge here. OK, Kermit the Frog here.**

Sesame Street News?

**Yeah. OK, Gonzo, why do you make sculpture?**

Wow, that's hard. I don't know, I feel compelled. I think it's kind of a way to mark time. Like, life is short and making things seems to make the time more expansive, or it marks the time in a way that it doesn't slip away so fast, maybe.

**OK.**

There is also the physicality of it, and I like using my body to move stuff

around. There are those kinds of things too, and I like color, and seeing things, but I think there's something about wanting to mark time, and being in the world fully. And with sculpture you get to make these things that are in the world with you.

**I've come to know the work pretty closely for the last 15 years or so, but one of the things I did notice early on was that even though historically sculpture titles have been pretty straight-forwardly attached to their forms, yours seem more related to the emotional state of being or feeling, like *Let's Stay Desperate*, *Jody's Good With Lasers* or *In the Kitchen*. Why don't you talk about how the work might be related to a more romantic, emotional place?**

Yeah, I guess since the work is made from a place in time or experience or feeling, the sculptures are a way to express feelings and thoughts that can't be expressed in words.

**Are the feelings attached to your state of mind when you make the sculpture, or an emotion that might come from looking at it?**

It's a lot of memory, my state of mind at that time, but also maybe thinking back. A lot of time it feels like the memories are marked by seasons, weather, time of day, or people. I don't know, it seems like the physical—what's going on outside—is a big influence. Thinking about summer a lot. Even in the winter, I guess even this past winter, when I was making work, it was all about the spring and summer. I just was kind of feeling that, and wanting to feel that, even though it was in the dead of winter. There is a lot of work that was made in February and January that has a lot of color. I was just thinking about the garden and what it feels like when spring comes to New England, which is pretty intense. I guess I sometimes feel guilty that the work and the titles might be nostalgic. And I know nostalgia is not supposed to be a good thing, and I know



there are reasons for that, I'm just not sure what they are.

**Do you cry at greeting cards? Cereal boxes? Do you cry easily?**

Yeah...

**Songs on the radio?**

Yes.

**Car ads? What? Anything?**

Yes. I don't know that I've ever cried at a car ad, but definitely songs on the radio. Reading a greeting card. Yes.

**OK. That's not a bad thing.**

I don't know, it's hard for me to judge. Sometimes I am more weepy than others.

**So about building your garden into the work, or building the change of seasons into the work, this time travel idea, or transportation into another space when you're making the sculpture... Is there some way that the work also transports you to a better place consistently? Like, isn't this kind of reflection of your emotions more of a transportation out of them? Because the work doesn't go to dark places, I think, or am I wrong about that?**

That's a good question. I think it does both of those things. It definitely transports me outside of myself and that's great. That's getting lost, and not knowing where I am and not understanding anything, and not knowing how to get back. All those things are good parts of life and making art. But also, I think, sometimes it's just a reflection of the way I am feeling. In the last show, there was the sculpture *Teenage Spaceship*, and that was a pretty direct reflection of the kids getting older and Saul turning 15, you know, trying to imagine the feeling of what 15 is and was and could be for him, and also an expanse of spirit at that age. There was a lot of camping out with friends, swimming, the driving—endless driving around the hills. I was making art at that time, I guess. I was just doing a lot of drawing. I did have a really inspirational art teacher in high school. Her name was Willa Breslaw, and she would get really upset and yell at the class about not caring enough about what we were doing, like, "What do you want to do? Pump gas your whole life? You guys don't care about anything!" That was the first person I had seen so passionate about art and I did really know what I wanted to do from a pretty early age on. I did a lot of art in high school, but it was more private, it wasn't something I had a friend to talk to about. So, I guess in that way my sculptures are very specifically about feelings that I have, but also when I'm in the making, I don't know really know where I am, and that's a good thing too.

**I was thinking about your dad and how he had been sick for a long time and then he died, and how in the work, there haven't been monuments to that sort of thing. You know, the passing of something, or the loss of it. These things don't really get built into the work, or do they? Is it mostly kind of a release from these places?**

Not to be too clichéd, but if the work is about some moment in time or expression of the spirit of a moment, you can't really do that without it somehow being about the loss of the last moment. A lot of the time I do think of the sculptures as monuments to people I love. Some of the titles have been pretty specific like that. So, inherently I do think making a monument to somebody I love comes with the knowledge—and is partly because of the knowledge—that they're going to die, and I'm going to die, and they may have already died, so to celebrate the moment of some part of a person, or a relationship or a love for someone, that celebration also comes with an awareness of our impending death. But it doesn't feel dark.

**Right.**

It just is sort of an acknowledgement of that.

**I was thinking about the color you apply. You never hesitate to adjust the sculpture that you are making with color. You use color, from markers, or paint, or stickers, or however you could get color into the thing, to kind of adjust the tone of the work, and that was always equal and valid and it wasn't in this kind of—you know when I was going to school, the idea of coloring up your art was—**

Distasteful.

**Yeah, well, there was some kind of bullshit academic chatter around the validity of those issues. Then, when I ran into you, you didn't even care.**

Give a shit.

**You did not give a shit about that. Did you ever have to break away from those issues, or was that just never an issue? Did you come from a painting/surface place and move to sculpture, or did that just never happen? Because I do think that the color has allowed the work to build this kind of emotional dynamic pretty directly in a way that most grey sculpture or colorless sculpture doesn't.**

I didn't come from painting, I came from a sculpture background, and I can't really get away from sculpture. I don't know how. And paint is very physical, you know, surfaces are really physical too. Paint feels nice on cardboard, it spreads around. I mean, who doesn't like paint and color? Maybe a lot of people...

**Like rainbow-haters. Fuckers. Get out of my house and don't come back.**

...paint it black. I guess there's a place for that, I just don't know how to do without color. It is just always there.

**And you prefer soft rock to hard rock, is that right?**

Um, no, no!

**No, you do hard rock. You do all kinds of rock. Do you have any questions for me? Let's turn the tables!**

You are doing a good job as far as asking questions.

**Really? Ugh, God, I feel like a real douche. Douchesaurus. I think that Bill and Joe's thing is going to be so much better.**

Yeah, that goes without saying.

That's why they asked us to do this thing, to make those two look better.

Like they need to look better.

Yeah, it's true, they're so good looking.

Joey looks like he's lost weight, or it's like he got tanned out on Fire Island.

And you know, when you can't tone it—Tan it!

Joe! Ha ha ha.

I should be interviewing you.

About what?

About the history of Canada.

No, that is going to take another issue of *the journal*—several in fact. But you've brought a lot of artists to the gallery. We should talk about how that relates to your work.

I mean, I'm pretty lucky that you started the gallery and I got to be around it. It's amazing to be around all the art that we get to see.

Well, you know, the gallery was started largely around your work. I mean it's your work that I knew. I think it's confusing, because people know that we're married and they think, "Oh, this guy hooked up his wife," and that kind of story. But the truth of the matter is that, you know, I knew you as a sculptor a long time ago, and we got married way into this thing. It wasn't supposed to happen like that. And the first thing that I liked about you, you know—

Besides...

Besides...

Go again.

That you, uh, oh shit! Maybe we should put our clothes back on... I was going to say that I knew your art a long time before, because we met in graduate school. So when we started the gallery you were one of the people that we wanted to show from the very beginning. I think you were in the second show or something. And that was way before we were married, or were even together.

In 2000.

Yeah, in early 2000, sure. And before that we had done group shows, curated group shows—

In 1999.

In 1999. It was some of the first sculpture that we showed in the gallery, and its influence on the program was pretty large. I think it's kind of interesting. I don't know. Do you think there's anything to say about that?

I just feel lucky to get to be around as much art as we are around. The great thing about having the gallery is that you get to sit with the work for a month.

That doesn't happen when you visit museums or gallery shows. You go in, you look at the work, maybe you go back a second time, but we get to be around the work day in, day out, and go to studios and get to know the artists.

It's just a privilege and a joy. Yeah, it's very lucky to be able to have a close relationship with so much art that we love. I guess, if you can afford it you get to live with the art, to buy it and put it in your house, and that must be amazing, too. It's not in our homes—we have a few things at home—but mostly we get to be around it. Sometimes, the artist makes the work in the gallery and you get to watch Eunice Kim make a sculpture show, and that's awesome.

Going back to that early gallery stuff, those were kind of difficult times—

Good times!

They were good, and they were—

Funny times!

Funny—

A lot of yucks.

Some yucks, but they were trying times. I remember running into someone on the way over to the gallery. Remember that time? We were talking about stuff and said something like, "We clean the houses," remember? And he was like "What? You clean houses?" And we were like "Yeah, I'm the vacuum guy, and she does the—  
Toilets.

Yeah, "...the toilets, and we clean houses to keep the gallery going." And he was like "What? You mean you clean the insides of houses?"

Right.

Remember that stuff?

That was a good six-year job.

That was a long shitty ride!

It wasn't that shitty.

I mean, I found vacuuming other people's homes to be backbreaking.

Well, maybe you had the worse job.

I hated it.

Did you like the house cleaning or the construction work better?

Yeah, I did a little construction work.

The construction work was lonely because you weren't there.

But you did it with Whit!

Yeah, I love Whit, but it was kind of nice to be able to do this job with you because we could—

Talk and be together.

Talk and curate shows, and talk about shows while we were vacuuming. You know sometimes I would turn the vacuum off and be like, "Hey! I've got a great idea!" Remember all that stuff?

Yeah.

And the pay was shitty but we could, you know—

Actually we made about the same amount of money that we're making now, a little shittier, I guess, but those were fine times. They were fair. I don't know how sustainable it was, but you know, there were good things happening. It was kind of a struggle sometimes, but there was a lot of good art going on in the gallery at that time.

Yeah. Yeah.

You know, making stuff.

Yeah. But recently you've been selling more work, and you've got this problem of real shows, and it's kind of starting to change, like a windfall.

Is it?

Yeah, do you think it's going to start to corrupt the work and you'll turn into a little show-boaty jerk-off?

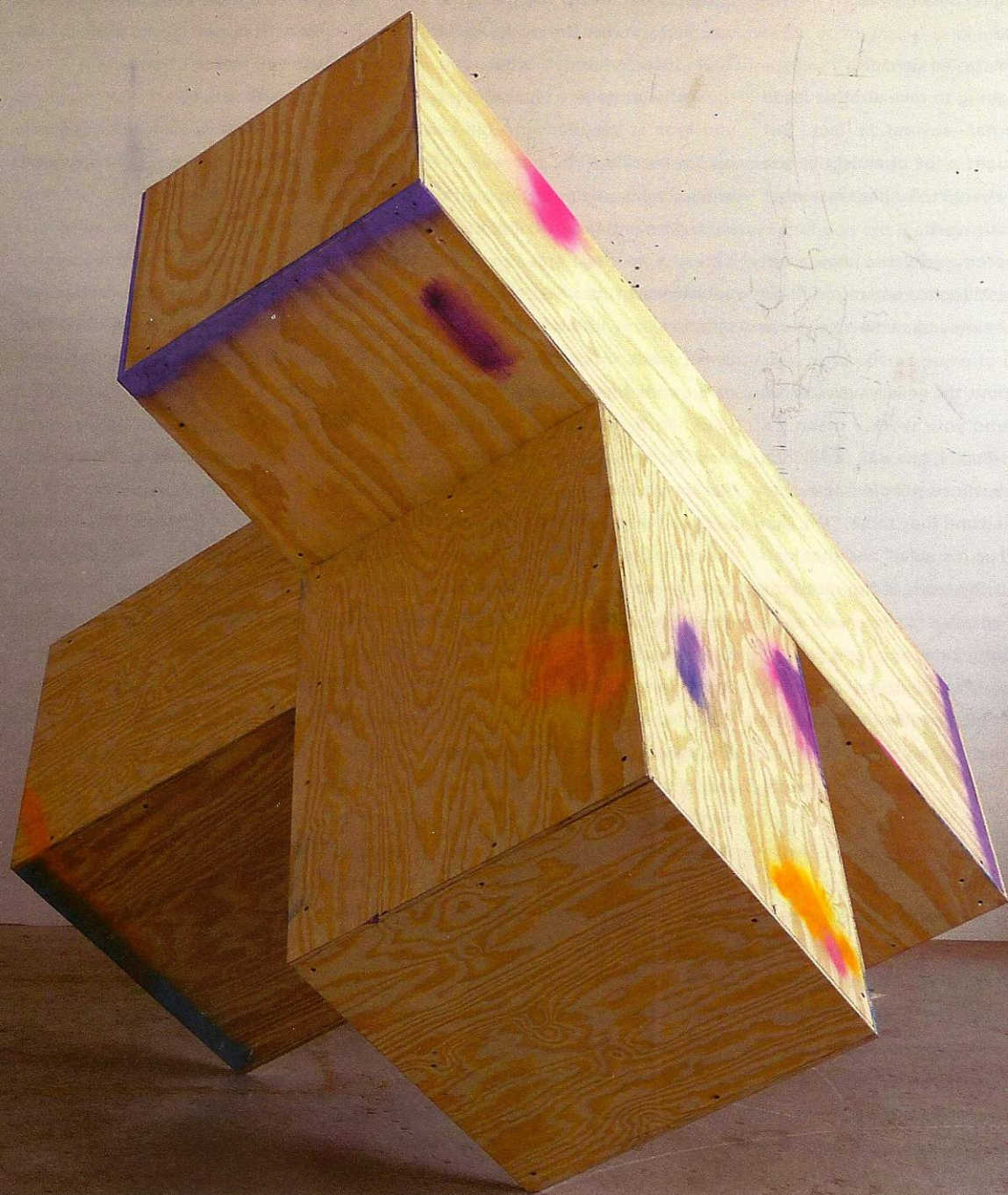
We'll see...

It's like *A Star Is Born*: You're Streisand, you're going to start to drink and do coke and come down hard!

That sounds good. It's more *Seabiscuit*.

Yeah, shit.

Yeah, but getting the opportunity to make work for public space is uh—



**Demented?**

Demented and, um, fun.

**Fun? Are you nervous?**

Terrified.

**You have to get on an airplane and go to France and make a big art show of this crazy shit that you invented up in Massachusetts, that are these Hallmark cards that are sculptures—**

Junk art?

**Junk art, whatever you call it, and you must be intimidated about that because of these Frenchmen. You know, that's where Marcel Duchamp is from. Those guys, they like their art all smarted up.**

Yeah, he'll be rolling in his grave.

**How do you feel about that?**

Yeah, I'm terrified.

**Yeah? Do you think they're going to crush you?**

Could do! Yeah, right into oblivion, but that's not that bad. I'm terrified but I'm just going to do it anyway. It's OK, I don't mind being scared. I can't mind, so I think being scared is fine.

**Tell me more about how that happened.**

I got invited to make a show at Confort Moderne, in Poitiers, France, by this guy named Yann Chevalier, who is amazing. It's a large foundation, where I think they have about five shows a year, they bring the artists in to make the work for the show there and seem really dedicated to bringing in art to be. It's a huge space, really huge. It is terrifying, but also really exciting to not have space restrictions and there is also some funding, so it is going to be a very new experience. Going away for three weeks is the longest, by far, that I have ever been away from my kids, even the gallery. It's just a crazy opportunity to be able to work on sculpture and it sounds like it is a really supportive environment.

**You make art that invests itself into a kind of emotional—not romantic, but you called it nostalgic, kind of energy.**

Yeah, romantic too. Sure.

**What do you think about other work that does that well?**

**Who else, I mean I brought up that Duchamp guy. Who else does it for you?**

Besides Longmont Potion Castle?

**Shut up. You know that woman from Chelsea, what was her name? "Towers of Color?"**

Anne Truitt?

**Do you like color field people?**

Yeah, I've always liked her work. I'm bad with names.

**OK, why don't I just name some names and you go "yes/no," "thumbs-up/thumbs-down," wouldn't that be fun?**

Um...

**Oh come on! That would make good copy.**

OK.

**Matt Barney.**

Thumbs down.

**Woah, harsh! Um...**

It's too hard. I like Odilon Redon, the spiritualist.

**Yeah, yeah, yeah.**

And the colors in those paintings, I don't even know if they're

called spiritualist, but that type of—he was French, right? I can't remember.

**Yeah, sounds kind of Euro.**

Euro, right? And I actually like Chagall, you know, and Gustave Moreau. This kind of fantasy, but it just seemed to have some relationship to the human spirit and how they portray that in painting, the color in these paintings is kind of crazy. It's so good.

**Yeah, well it's easy to find color in the canvas world, right?**

But it's not just the color. You know, going for some other spiritual place.

**Yeah.**

But in terms of culture, Chamberlain was the guy that freaked me out early on, and his work, to me, feels incredibly emotional. And his titles were always something like *Lucy In The Yellow Dress*, you know, some very specific description or idea. And those things seemed romantic to me because of the color, even though they're very formal. They catch the light well. Matta-Clark...

**The people that you're going to hook up with a little bit at Franklin Parrasch are these kind of old California dudes, like Peter Alexander. All that weird surfer, plexiglass, trippy art, you know, it's not James Terrell so much, but Robert Irwin, color and all that—**

Yes.

**And that, does that speak to you?**

Sure! I got introduced to Peter Alexander's work through Franklin Parrasch Gallery.

**Franklin came to you, and you saw the work?**

No, I saw it. I don't know if I saw it online or in his booth. I can't remember where I saw it first, sometime in the last couple of years. I didn't know his work specifically before that, and then seeing one firsthand, yeah, I was knocked out by those, the light... It seems like the kind of sculpture that would change a lot with the time of day, in a home, and that's pretty awesome. So I told Franklin and he suggested that we do a two-person show, and Peter was into it and I am really excited about it. So we're doing it in November.

**And I guess this plexiglass fetish thing came when?**

I don't know. 2000?

**How did it come? What happened?**

I don't know. I was kind of building form out of cardboard boxes and tents, trying to get large form in color cheaply, and quickly, and—

**Camping tents?**

Yeah, camping tents, sometimes with the zippers open. I was making cardboard box sculptures, and I just wanted some transparency in there. And then the color... oh I know! I was using that sticky tape from Canal Plastics to put the cardboard sculptures together and also to make those big wall mural stickers. So I was down at Canal Plastics to buy those rolls of sticky tape, and there was some transparent sticky Mylar, and I started using that, and then I moved to hard plastic to make the planes. The layering of the color is exhilarating, you know. Yeah. Also, it's like being in the car, and the reflections on the windows, and things moving. There was something about



the tents and the cars that was kind of personal. It sounds so dry to say. It doesn't really describe it, you know, personal architecture, it's so boring sounding. We spend a lot of time in the car, you and I. I always have, growing up, you know, I got my license at 15-and-a-half and drove around forever. And spending half the week in Amherst, where our house is and the kids go to school, and a little less than half the week in New York, we end up driving a ton. In and out of the city all the time, driving the kids up in the hills. And there is something about that, being inside of this pod, and it's safe and it's a transporter, and the glass is reflective.

**Is your sculpture like a kind of Chamberlain that's been unfolded back into itself, re-bent, sort of?**

Re-bent? That's a very nice thought. Yeah, he was more into the material, it was not so much about how a volume was formed, I guess.

**The other thing I remember about you quite early on is that you were pregnant in graduate school. You had already had a kid, a baby, so in your mid-20s you already had two children, and I remember specifically that the faculty didn't know what to do with that, and they themselves were women. I remember these women that ran the sculpture department, and they were all in their early 40s or beyond, and they were childless. And here you were in your mid-20s, with two kids already, trying to make sculpture. There seemed to be an inability on their part to comprehend how and why you were doing this, and almost whether this was a good thing. It's hard to believe, but it was a circulating topic of discussion around your thesis show and around your potential as an artist. How do your children play a role in your sculpture and vice versa?**

Well, I remember that time, it's actually still heartbreaking to believe that that was an issue. But there was some doubt that as a mother of two children, I would have the time and focus to take sculpture seriously. It was almost like you should choose one or the other. So that was weird, but whatever, my mom had kids young, and built a house with her own hands and it didn't seem like an issue, a real issue. I don't know. Well, Saul and Jody are, you know, miracles in my life, probably in our life, and uh, yeah, it's just what life is.

**But you make sculpture—**

I do make sculpture—

**Within a mind.**

Within a mind. I guess I have less time, but people do all sorts of things, and work jobs.

**Since the kind of sculpture that you have been building is invested in the emotional content of your day and days and your existence, is it fair to say that these children in some way have provided you with a whole body of work? So, in**

**some ways it's been proved opposite?**

Yeah, sure. That mother/career thing is just hogwash.

**Yeah, it's just hogwash!**

Yeah, complete and utter hogwash.

**Let it be known. Let it be known to all the women out there.**

I mean, whatever.

**Yeah, I mean it sounds dumb, but here you were, this wasn't 150 years ago. This was like 10 years ago, so, that's something that is still kind of shocking.**

Yeah, that's true, but I didn't give it that much thought to be honest. It just was weird and surprising. I mean, I haven't had a real studio since graduate school, which was like 15 years ago. I got my studio only a couple of years ago. So I've always worked at home or made sculpture for a show right in the gallery, a few days before the show. And with the kids, it's been pretty mishmash, you know, making art at home with them helping, or not helping and commenting, and them making stuff that's kind of—and that goes without saying—way better than mine, and all that. So that's kind of the way it's been. Then I had a tiny studio. It was in the center of Amherst and Saul could walk and meet me from school there, and Jody could do his homework there, so that was cool. And now, thanks to Jeff Vespa, I have this pretty private place and it's larger, and a little bit further away from our house, so the kids don't come over that much. But there's still a lot of work around the house.

**Do you miss their input?**

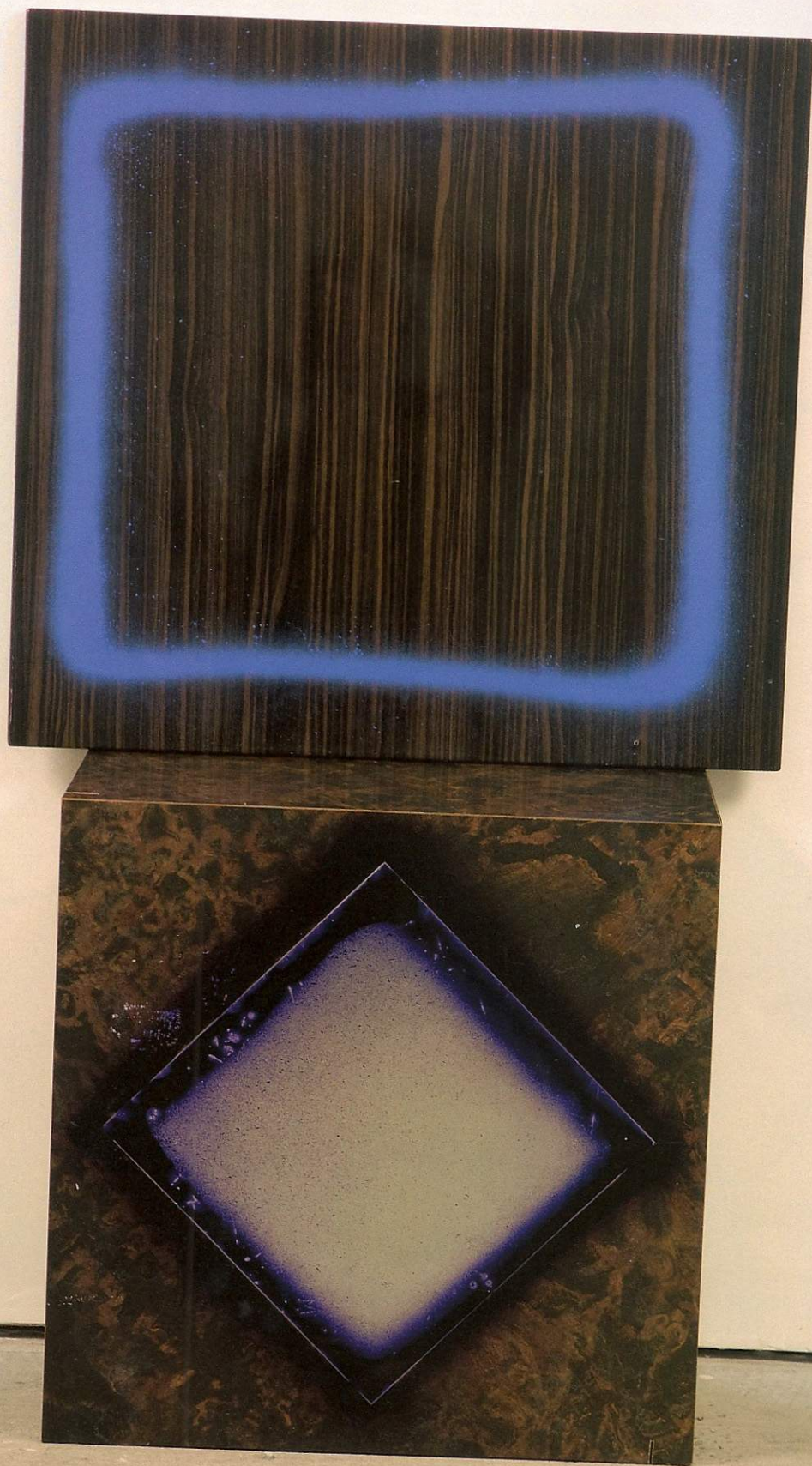
A little... They saw a little bit of the show at Museum 52—they came for the opening—and I was terrified before the opening and they, you know, they've always been interested and talked about the work, what they like and don't like, but one of the things that was so surprising was that they just seemed so proud of that show in particular. It made me feel relieved, too. Jody even said to me, "You know Mom, you've come so far, come such a long way," when he saw the show.

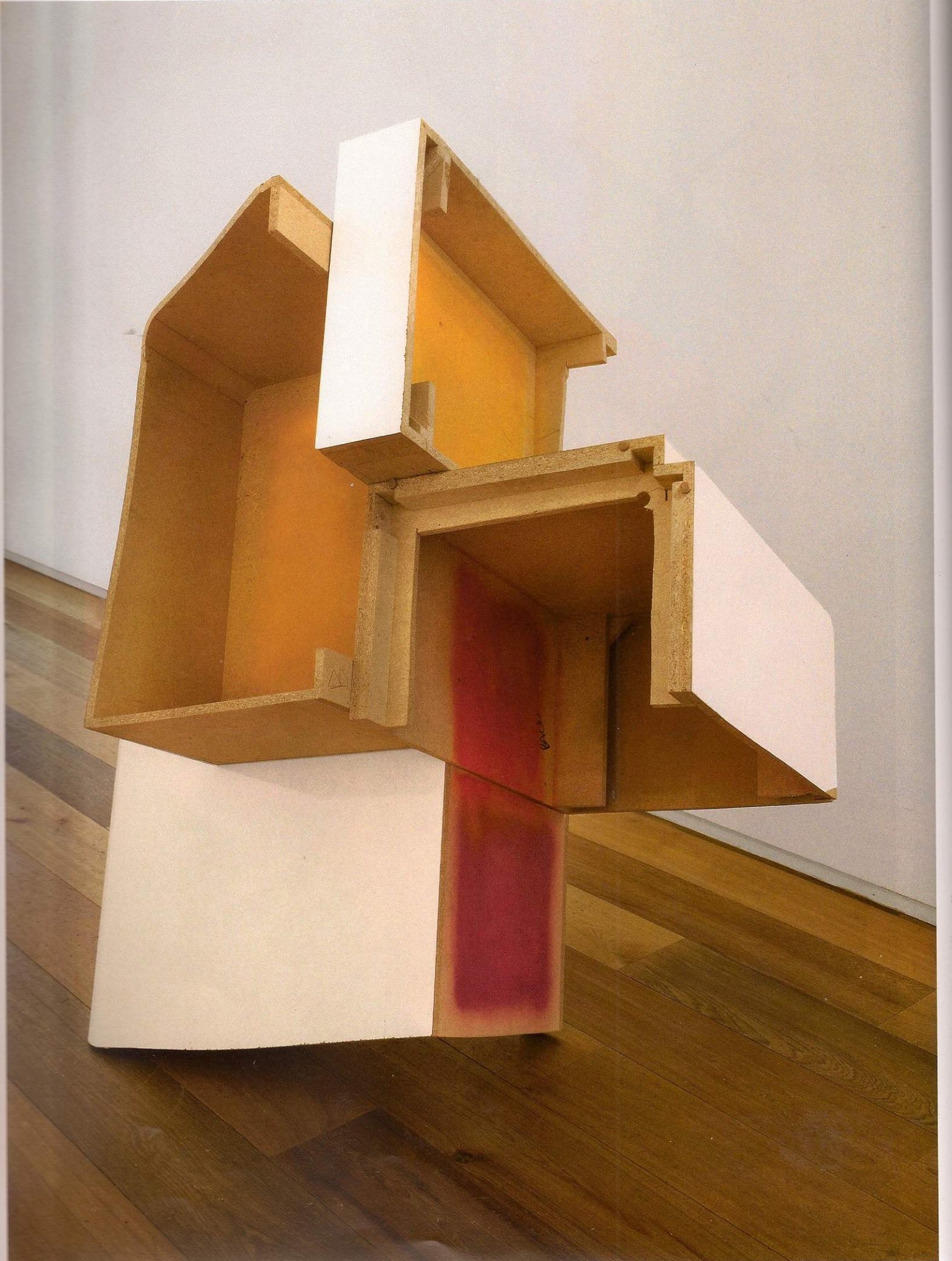
**What distance was he talking about?**

Well, just remembering me working at home, and the house being crammed with sculpture, and cleaning houses. I guess I just didn't realize that he had such a sense of the background story, that he had an awareness of it. He was just really proud, and it was nice because there were times when I would go to the studio and they would be home—you remember this—and maybe I'd rather be home with them. But when you have a show coming you go to the studio and you get into it. They contributed by letting go of me a little bit when I needed to work, and just by helping around the house and whatever. They contribute, and it is just pretty amazing that he was proud, that was the nicest thing. That was the nicest thing ever!



Tuesday Morning, 2010 Found furniture, car parts, marble and paint 67 x 27 x 24 inches Courtesy of Museum 52





Malyoko, 2010. Found furniture and paint. 67 x 60 x 39 inches. Courtesy of Museum 67