

December 15, 2023–April 7, 2024

John Chamberlain:
THE TIGHTER THEY'RE WOUND,
THE HARDER THEY UNRAVEL

curated by Urs Fischer

Aspen Art Museum

John Chamberlain: *THE TIGHTER THEY'RE WOUND, THE HARDER THEY UNRAVEL* is organized by the Aspen Art Museum in collaboration with Dia Art Foundation. The exhibition is curated by Urs Fischer, in collaboration with Nicola Lees, Nancy and Bob Magoon Director, and Daniel Merritt, Director of Curatorial Affairs.

John Chamberlain: *THE TIGHTER THEY'RE WOUND, THE HARDER THEY UNRAVEL* is made possible with major support from Bank of America. Additional support is provided by Sasha and Edward P. Bass, Susan and Larry Marx, and Crozier.

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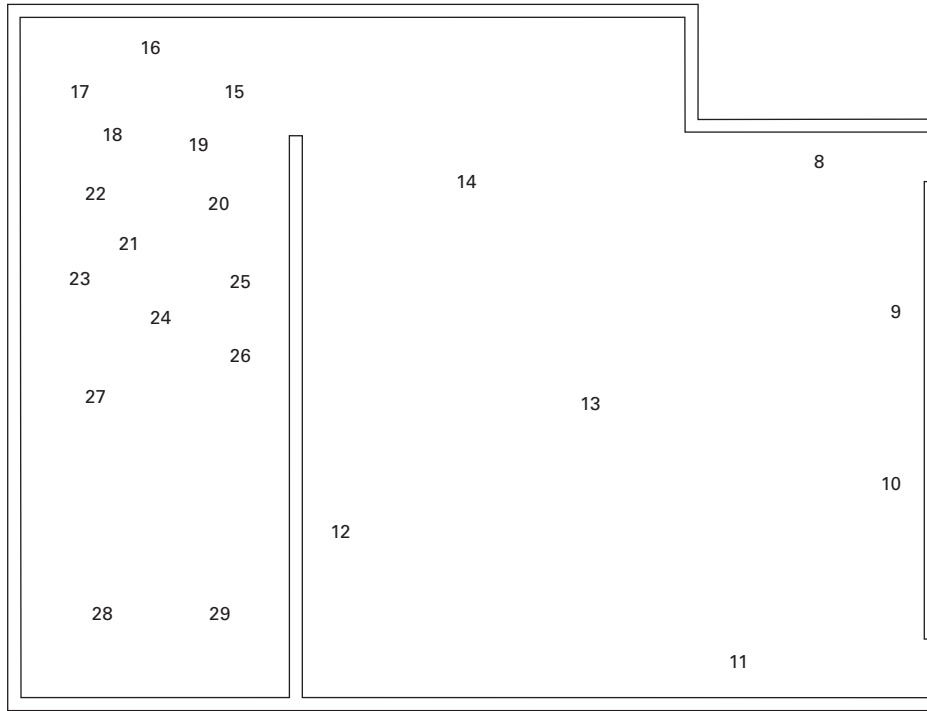
In a career extending over six decades, roving through big cities and quiet towns of the United States, artist John Chamberlain (1927–2011) generated a radical visual world in which motion, pressure, and color crystalize within manufactured objects. He is widely recognized for sculptures made from crushed automobile parts, a material the artist continually revisited throughout his career, though additional bodies of work, ranging in scale from monumental to miniature, are composed of foam, foil, resin, paper, steel, and dismantled appliances, amongst others. Developed in collaboration with Dia Art Foundation, *THE TIGHTER THEY'RE WOUND, THE HARDER THEY UNRAVEL* is the first institutional survey devoted to John Chamberlain in over a decade. The exhibition, which spreads across the museum's three floors is divided into five groupings: The End and The Beginning; The Sixties and The Seventies; Foam and Galvanized Steel; Photographs; and The Line Up, Miniatures, and Models. Together, these categories tell a story of a relentlessly independent artist whose key motivation in artmaking was "to find out what you don't know."

Pursuits of the unfamiliar governed Chamberlain's life since childhood. Fascinated by aviation, Chamberlain learned to fly a plane at 11 and joined the United States Navy while underage during World War II. After a stint as a hairdresser, Chamberlain briefly enrolled at the Art Institute of Chicago, where he became acquainted with techniques of Abstract Expressionism, and later, Black Mountain College, where he began a lifelong engagement with words and poetry. These eclectic origins produced an artist who resisted categorization in an age of artistic movements, both eliding and incorporating contemporary philosophies of Pop Art, Action painting, and Minimalism. For Chamberlain, art was a means of engineering irregularities into equilibrium. With a characteristic irreverence and deadpan humor, he described his signature sculptural technique as "articulate wadding."

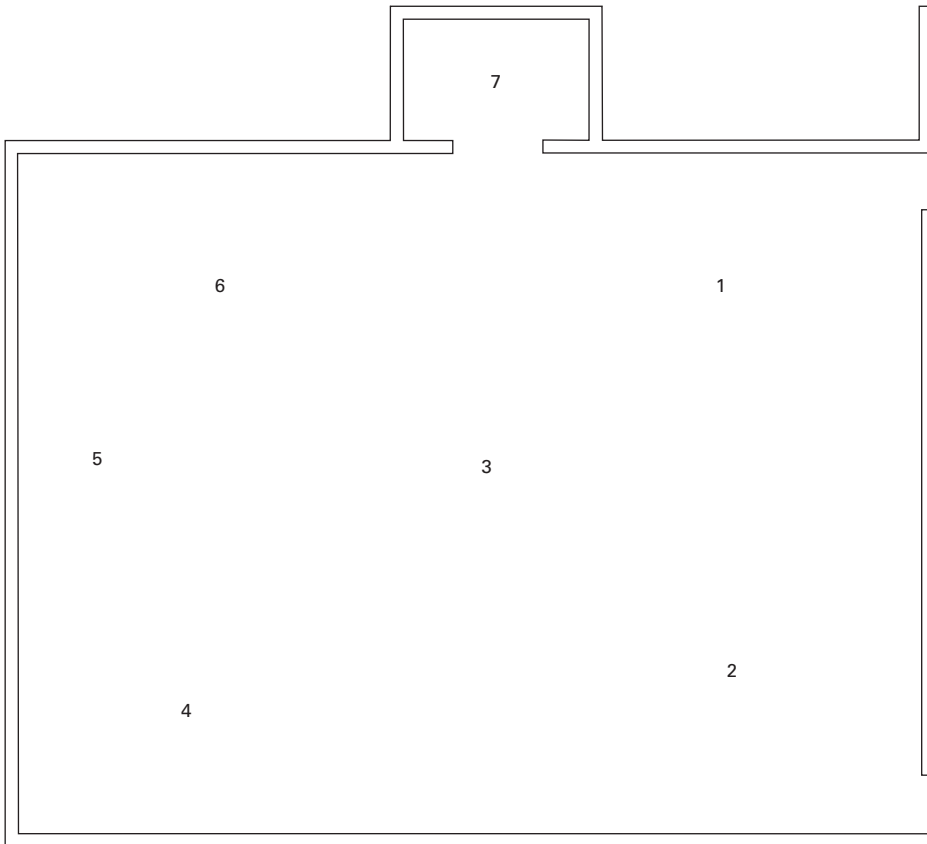
These varied experiments in squeezing, folding, and compressing populate the galleries of the Aspen Art Museum. Devoted to towering late works placed in dialogue with some of Chamberlain's rarely exhibited earliest sculptures, the museum's second floor gallery merges a practice's beginning and end. Across the ground floor, works primarily on loan from Dia Art Foundation mingle along East Hyman Avenue in a surreal street scene. Chamberlain's foam works, considered a radical departure when first exhibited in 1965, congregate in an adjacent gallery. In the museum's Lower Level, visitors are encouraged to immerse themselves in projections of Chamberlain's psychedelic Wide-Lux photographs. Chamberlain's camera was a near-constant companion, passively shooting panoramas from hip level. The result is a collection of disorienting quotidian scenes, as well as luminous shots of the artist's life on the road, all of which mirror the alluring warp of his sculptures. This leads to a gallery devoted to Chamberlain's miniatures, providing a bird's-eye view of the artist's material manipulations.

On the occasion of the exhibition, Urs Fischer has produced a new artist book: *The Tighter They're Wound, The Harder They Unravel: John Chamberlain Against The World*. The publication is a companion to the show, and visitors are encouraged to take a copy. In his introduction to the book, Fischer writes that "Artworks make us see the world in a new light. We associate." As such, the book sees Chamberlain placed in dialogue with artistic predecessors, peers, and those who might be "descendants."

Street Level



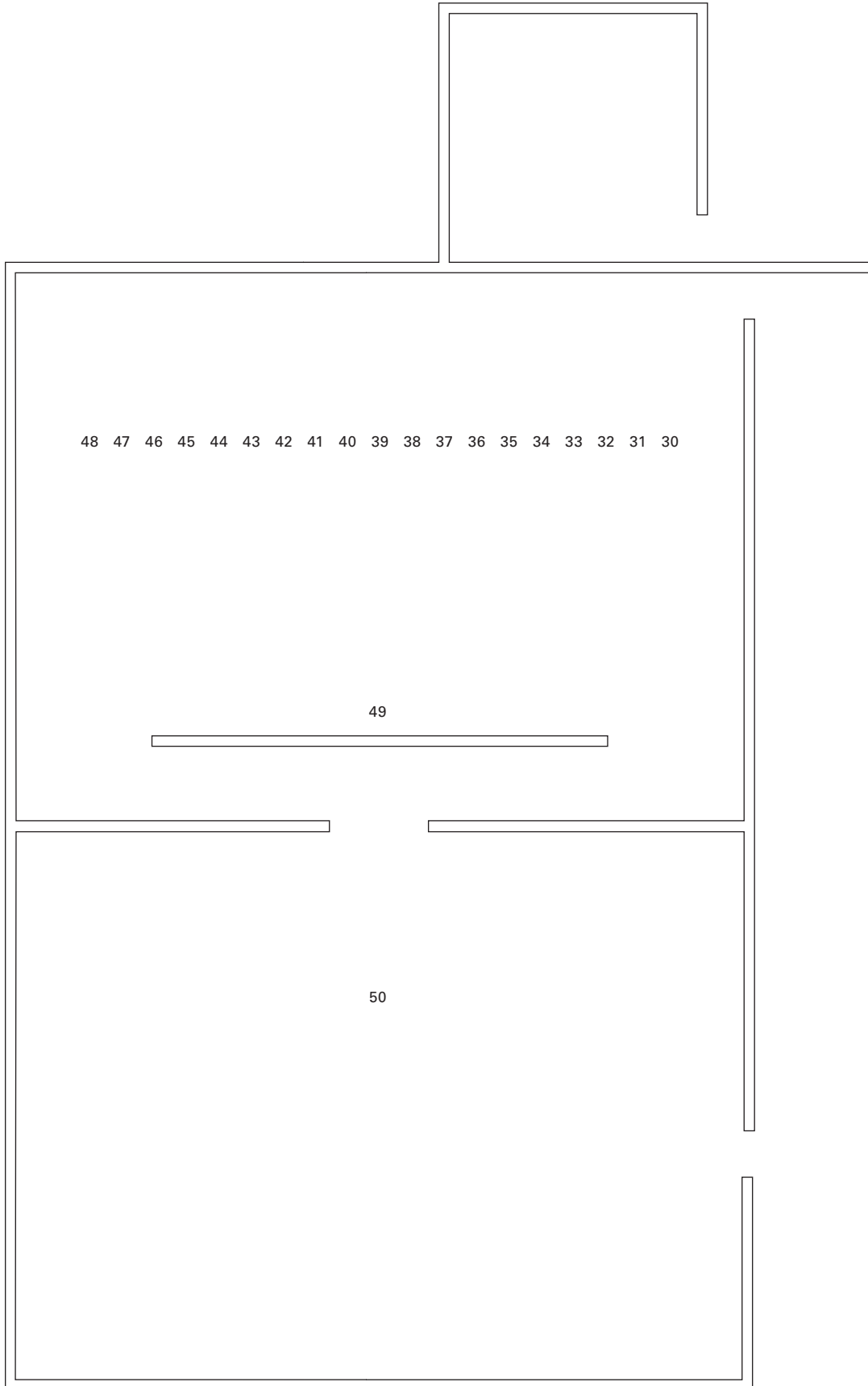
Second Level



1. *WETSTARESCORT*, 2011
Painted and chrome plated steel
138 1/2 × 85 1/4 × 75 in
Private Collection
2. *Rochester*, 1958
Steel
47 × 77 × 9 in
Private Collection
3. *WITCHESOASIS*, 2011
Painted and chrome-plated steel
84 1/2 × 89 × 75 in
Private Collection
4. *TAMBOURINEFRAPPE*, 2010
Painted and chrome-plated steel
116 3/4 × 90 × 86 1/2 in
Private Collection. Courtesy of Gagosian
5. *Projectile D.S.N.Y.*, 1957
Steel
23 × 38 × 22 1/2 in
Private Collection
6. *EUPHORIAINHAT*, 2010
Painted and chrome-plated steel
92 × 67 5/8 × 55 1/4 in
Private Collection. Courtesy of Gagosian
7. *Cord*, 1957
Steel
16 × 12 × 10 in
Private Collection
8. *Toy*, 1961
Steel, paint, and plastic
53 1/2 × 38 1/2 × 30 1/2 in
Art Institute of Chicago. Gift of William Hokin
9. Dan Flavin
"monument" for V. Tatlin, 1966
Fluorescent light and metal fixtures
120 × 28 × 5 in
10. *The Hot Lady from Bristol*, 1979
Painted and chrome-plated steel
83 × 51 × 50 in
11. *Three-Cornered Desire*, 1979
Painted and chrome-plated steel
70 × 103 × 70 in
12. *Coup d'Soup*, 1980
Painted steel
120 × 28 × 5 in
13. *Hidden Face*, 1962
Painted and chrome-plated steel
41 × 50 × 33 1/2 in
14. *Norma Jean Risen*, 1967/1984
Galvanized steel, acrylic paint
66 × 38 × 38 in
15. *Stuffed Dog 9*, 1970
Urethane foam, cord, and paint
12 1/4 × 20 3/4 × 19 3/4 in
16. *A*, 1969–70
Urethane foam and paint
13 1/2 × 17 × 15 1/2 in
17. *Stuffed Dog 4*, 1970
Urethane foam, cord, and paint
10 1/2 × 14 × 13 3/4 in
18. *Soopad*, 1967
Urethane foam and cord
34 × 44 × 33 in
19. *Stuffed Dog 6*, 1970
Urethane foam, cord, and paint
11 1/4 × 15 1/4 × 14 1/4 in
20. *Stuffed Dog 1*, 1967
Urethane foam, cord, and paint
7 × 10 × 9 1/2 in
21. *Stuffed Dog 7*, 1970
Urethane foam, cord, and paint
10 1/2 × 15 × 14 5/8 in
22. *Mesa*, 1981
Urethane foam, wood, and rug
8 × 11 × 8 in
23. *Stuffed Dog 8*, 1970
Urethane foam, cord, and paint
12 1/4 × 18 1/8 × 16 1/8 in
24. *Lop Nor*, 1967
Urethane foam and cord
37 × 51 × 50 in
25. *Stuffed Dog 2*, 1970
Urethane foam, cord, paint, and lead weights
9 7/8 × 12 5/8 × 10 3/4 in
26. *Stuffed Dog 3*, 1970
Urethane foam, cord, and paint
8 1/2 × 14 1/2 × 13 in
27. *Stuffed Dog 5*, 1970
Urethane foam, cord, and paint
11 × 13 × 12 in
28. *Ultrafull Private*, 1967
Steel and galvanized steel
66 3/4 × 54 1/4 × 57 1/2 in
29. *Royal Vantor*, 1967
Galvanized steel, steel, aluminum
61 3/8 × 57 1/8 × 46 1/2 in

All works courtesy Dia Art Foundation

Lower Level



On pedestal

30. *Penthouse Series*, 1969

Paper and resin
5 × 6 × 4 in

31. *Untitled*, 1973

Foam and resin
5 × 8 × 7 3/4 in

32. *MISSIFNIFF*, 1969

Painted steel
12 1/2 × 18 1/2 × 8 1/2 in

33. *Mermaid*, 1988

Cookie tin
6 × 9 1/2 × 4 in

34. *MISHEGAS*, 1988

Tin
3 1/2 × 4 1/2 × 3 1/2 in

35. *Cherry*, 1988

Tin
6 1/4 × 6 × 5 in

36. *FRANTICCALMNESS*, Date unknown

Steel
6 × 2 × 1/2 in

37. *Untitled*, 1986

10 1/2 × 2 × 11/2 in
Colored aluminum foil

38. *Untitled*, 1986

Colored aluminum foil
10 1/2 × 3 × 2 3/4 in

39. *Untitled*, 1986

Colored aluminum foil
9 1/2 × 2 1/2 × 1 1/2 in

40. *Untitled*, 1986

Colored aluminum foil
9 1/2 × 2 3/4 × 2 in

41. *Untitled*, 1986

Colored aluminum foil
10 × 4 1/2 × 1 3/4 in

42. *Untitled*, 1986

Aluminum foil
13 1/2 × 1 × 3/4 in

43. *Untitled*, 1986

Colored aluminum foil
12 × 2 3/4 × 3/4 in

44. *Tonk #9-88*, 1988

Model train car
4 × 14 × 5 in

45. *Tonk*, 1988

Tonka truck
3 3/4 × 6 3/4 × 3 1/2 in

46. *SPHINX GRIN*, 1986

Aluminum foil
5 1/2 × 5 1/2 × 3 in

47. *LUCKYEGYPT*, 1986

Aluminum foil
5 3/4 × 3 1/2 × 2 in

48. *WINGINGSATIRE*, 1986

Aluminum foil
3 3/4 × 5 1/4 × 2 in

49. *The Line Up (Dedicated to the Sarasota Police Department)*, 1982

Painted and chromium-plated steel
81 × 198 × 49 in
Dia Art Foundation

Unless otherwise noted, all works private collection

50. *Wiley's Island III*, 1997

Foam and muslin
100 × 156 × 44 in
Private Collection

On walls: Projected Photographs by John Chamberlain, 1989–2007

Developed in collaboration with the Estate of John Chamberlain.
Special thanks to Janet Goleas and Angelo Piccozzi

ABOUT THE ASPEN ART MUSEUM

Accredited by the American Alliance of Museums in 1979, the Aspen Art Museum is a thriving and globally engaged non-collecting contemporary art museum. Following the 2014 opening of the museum's facility designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Shigeru Ban, the AAM enjoys increased attendance, renewed civic interaction, and international media attention. In July 2017, the AAM was one of ten institutions to receive the United States' National Medal for Museum and Library Services for its educational outreach to rural communities in Colorado's Roaring Fork Valley and its fostering of learning partnerships with civic and cultural partners within a 100-mile radius of the museum's Aspen location.

Aspen Art Museum
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Aspen, Colorado 81611

aspenartmuseum.org
(970) 925-8050

Hours
Tuesday–Sunday, 10 AM–6 PM
Closed Mondays

Admission to the AAM is free courtesy of Amy and John Phelan.

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