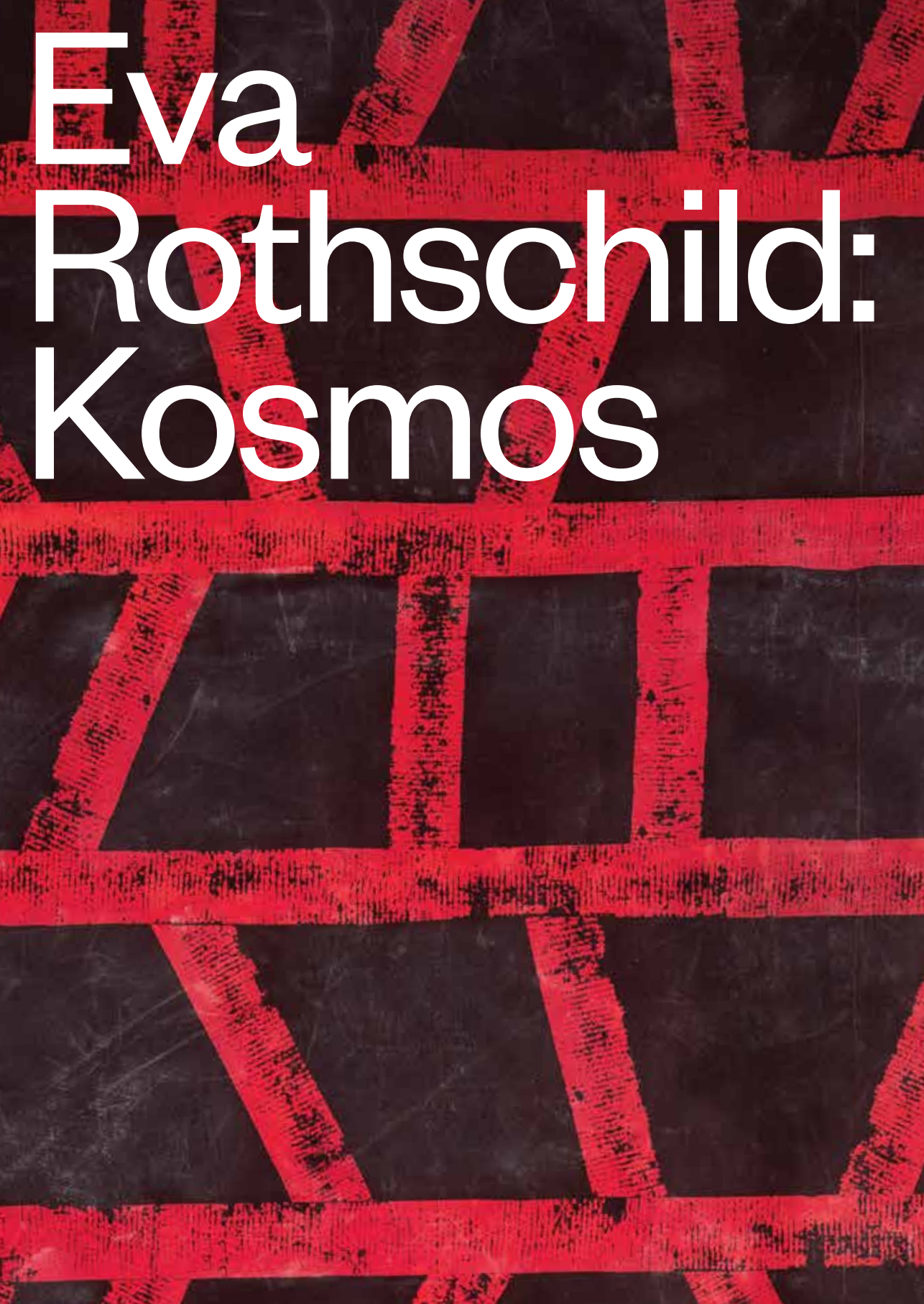

Eva
Rothschild:
Kosmos

Eva Rothschild: Kosmos

acca

City Gallery Wellington
Te Whare Toi

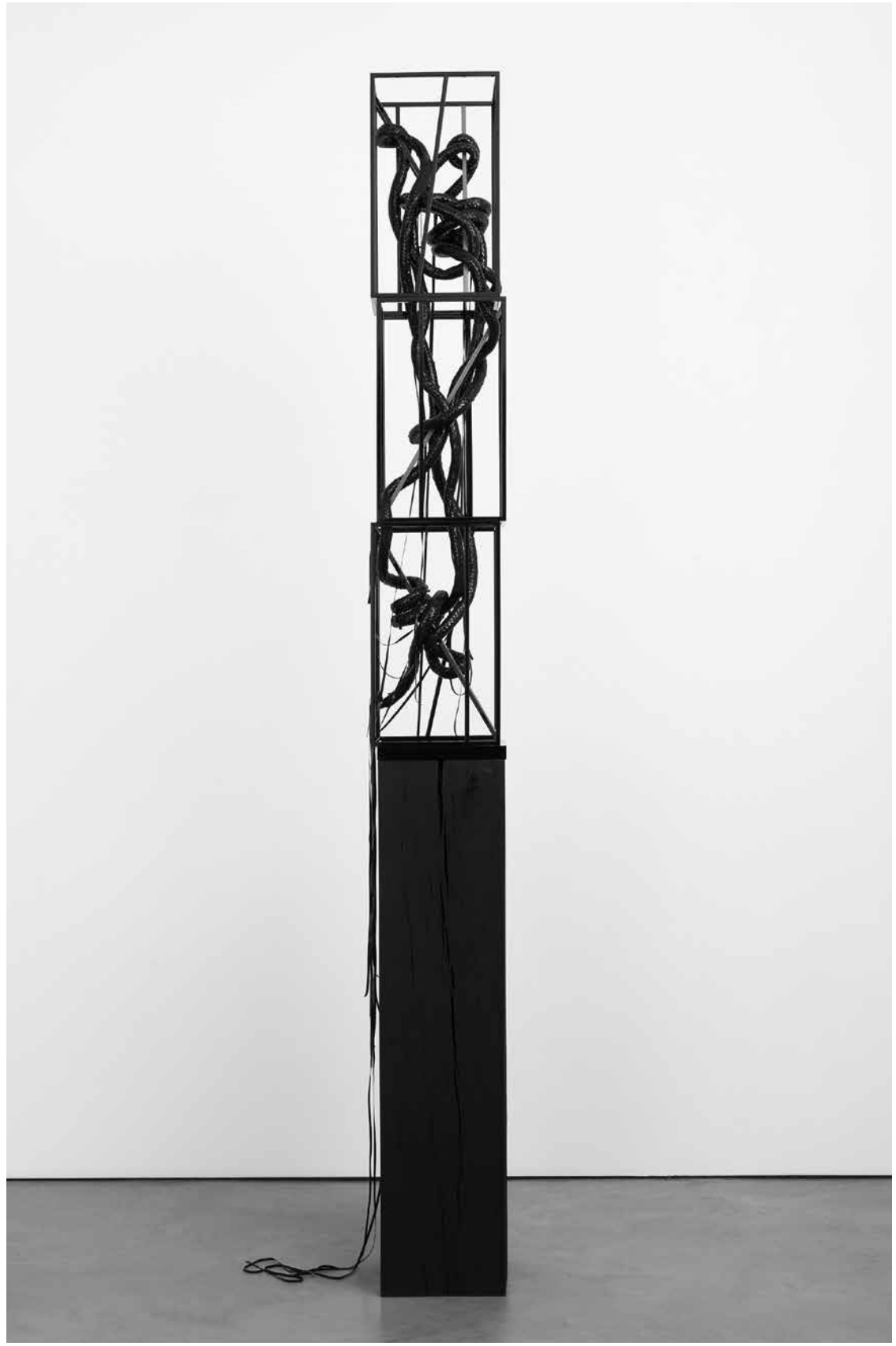
MELBOURNE International Arts FESTIVAL

Culture Ireland
Cultúr Éireann

Australian Centre
for Contemporary Art
28 September –
25 November 2018

City Gallery Wellington
6 April –
28 July 2019

Curators: Max Delany
& Annika Kristensen



The way in 2018, leather, aluminium, fabric, tape, painted steel, dyed oak plinth, 273.0 x 30.5 x 29.0 cm
Photo Robert Glowacki, courtesy Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London

Foreword

We are delighted to present *Eva Rothschild: Kosmos*. The exhibition was initiated by ACCA and is presented in association with Melbourne International Arts Festival. It is part of an ongoing series of ACCA exhibitions presenting work by leading international artists.

Kosmos is the first survey of Rothschild's work in Australasia and timely, immediately preceding her representing Ireland in the 2019 Venice Biennale. Curated by ACCA's Max Delany and Annika Kristensen, *Kosmos* brings together newly commissioned sculptural installations alongside works spanning the last decade.

Rothschild's practice has been shaped by diverse influences — from classical architecture to minimalism, and spiritualism to pop culture. Assembled from diverse materials, her sculptures can be striking and spare, flamboyant and enigmatic.

Rothschild's sculptures are attentive to bodies — the body making them and the bodies experiencing them. Some serve as spatial interruptions or thresholds, reorienting our passage, perception and behaviour. Others suggest social settings in which to convene and converse, or ritual sites where architecture, power and people intersect. As a space in which to reflect, dream and act, *Kosmos* invites chance encounters.

The exhibition also offered the mise-en-scène for a one-night-only dance performance. Choreographed by Melbourne's Jo Lloyd, *Cutout* was presented within and in response to the exhibition. It featured ten of Melbourne's leading contemporary dancers, in costumes designed by Rothschild in collaboration with Andrew Treloar. As the dancers negotiated Rothschild's sculptures, a dialogue between artist and choreographer emerged, exploring renewal and collapse, structure and fluidity, and open and closed forms.

We are grateful to Rothschild for making this significant exhibition, and especially the ambitious new work created for it. It has been a pleasure to work with Rosthschild and her studio over the past eighteen months, and exhilarating to see this uncompromising work unfold with such dexterity and panache. We look forward to seeing how the show engages our audiences. We also thank Rothschild's gallerists — Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow — for their assistance; and Irish writer, critic and academic, Declan Long, for his lively and insightful catalogue essay.

Projects of this scope are not possible without the significant support of cultural agencies, partners and donors. The presentation of *Kosmos* with Melbourne International Arts Festival continues a longstanding partnership that allows ACCA to exhibit the work of some of the most significant artists of our time. It is also supported by Culture Ireland, to whom we extend our appreciation. ACCA acknowledges the support of its government partners: Creative Victoria, the Australia Council for the Arts, the City of Melbourne, and the Australian Government's Catalyst Arts and Cultural Fund. We also acknowledge exhibition and media partners, Dulux and 3RRR, and the donors who maximise ACCA's impact through their visionary philanthropy. City Gallery Wellington acknowledges the support of Wellington City Council through Experience Wellington and of City Gallery Wellington Foundation.

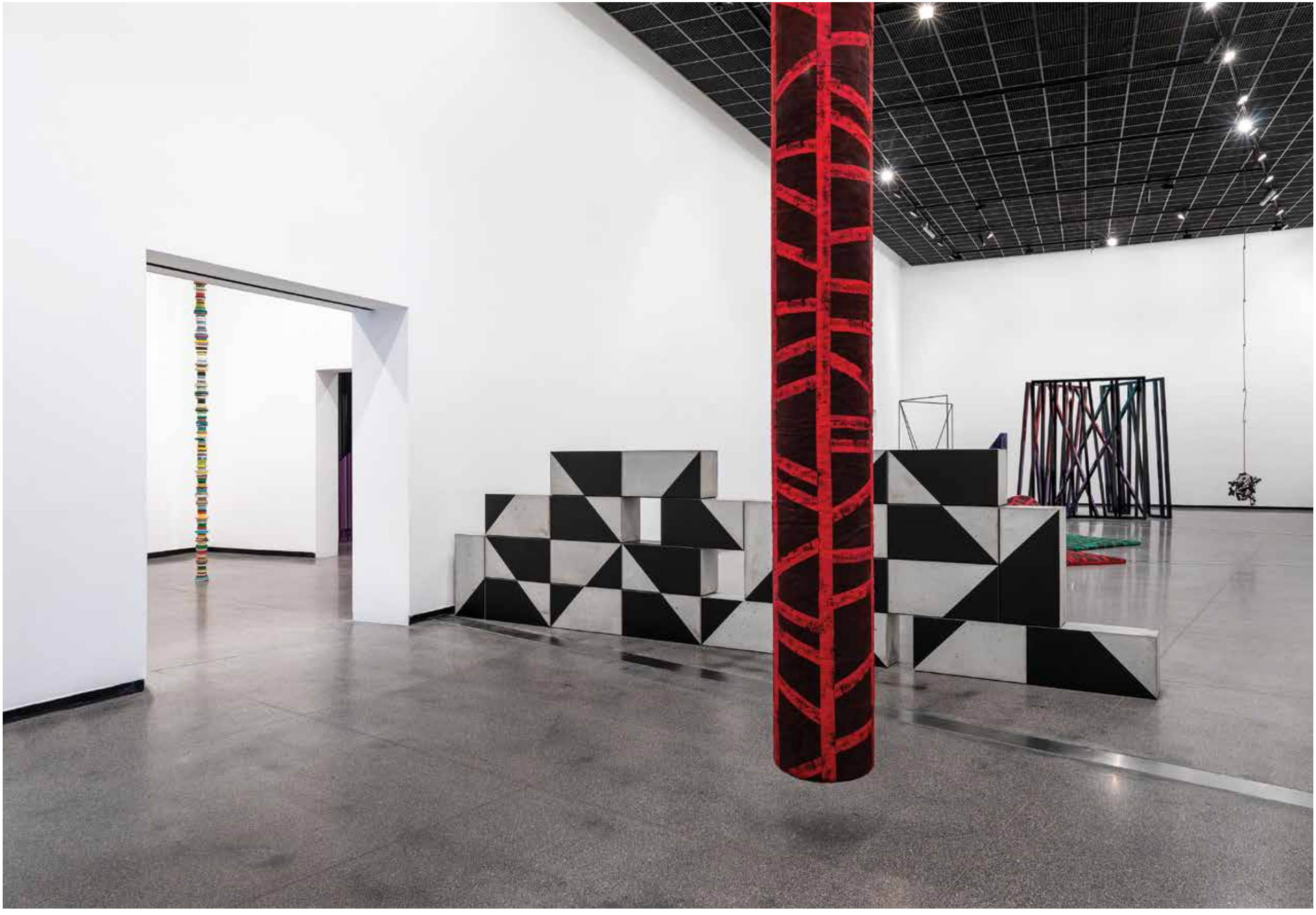
Finally, for their contributions in bringing this exhibition to fruition, we acknowledge again the exhibition curators, ACCA's Artistic Director and CEO Max Delany and Senior Curator Annika Kristensen, plus, in Wellington, Chief Curator Robert Leonard—and the wonderful teams at both institutions.

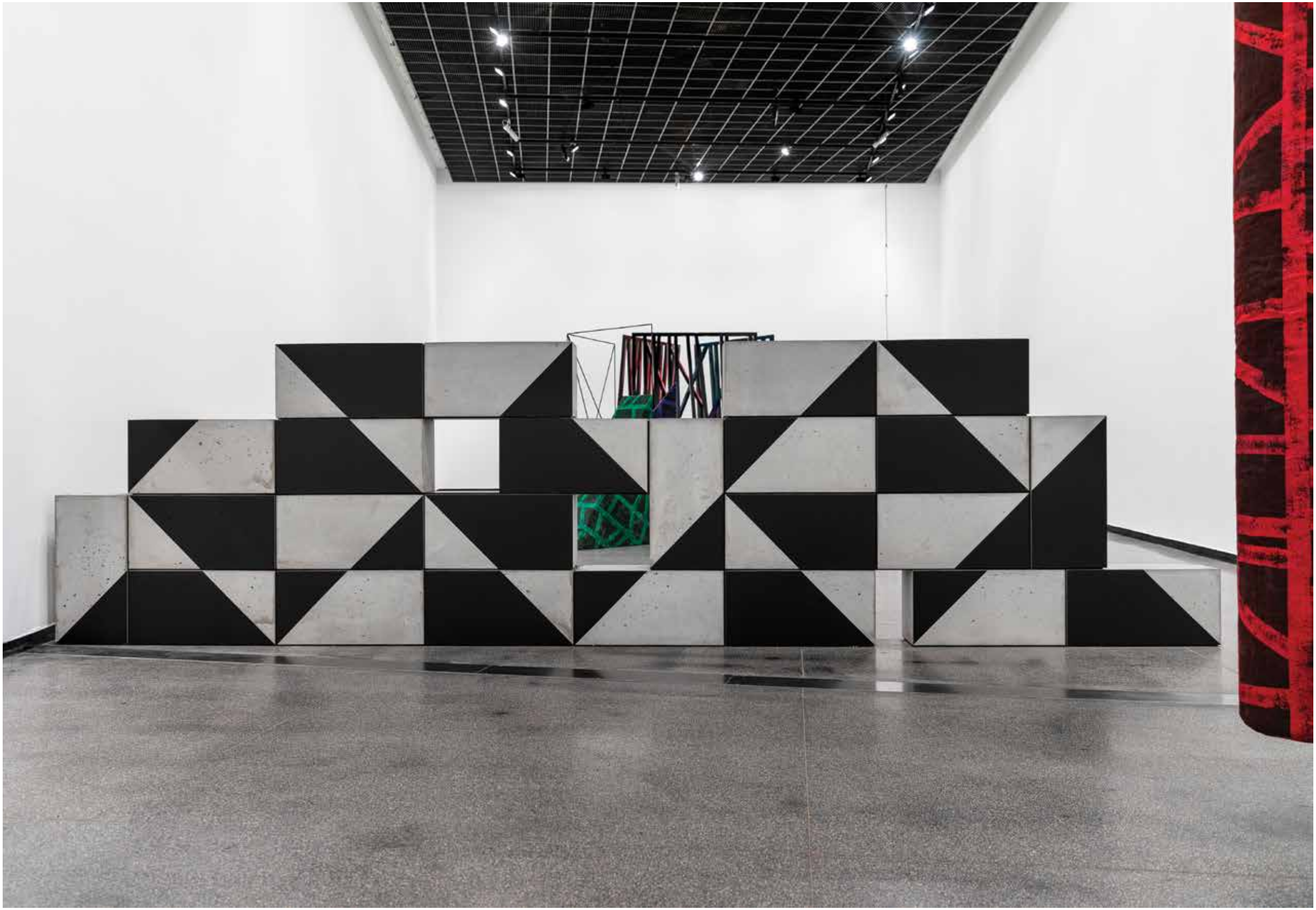
Linda Mickleborough, Executive Director, ACCA
Elizabeth Caldwell, Director, City Gallery Wellington

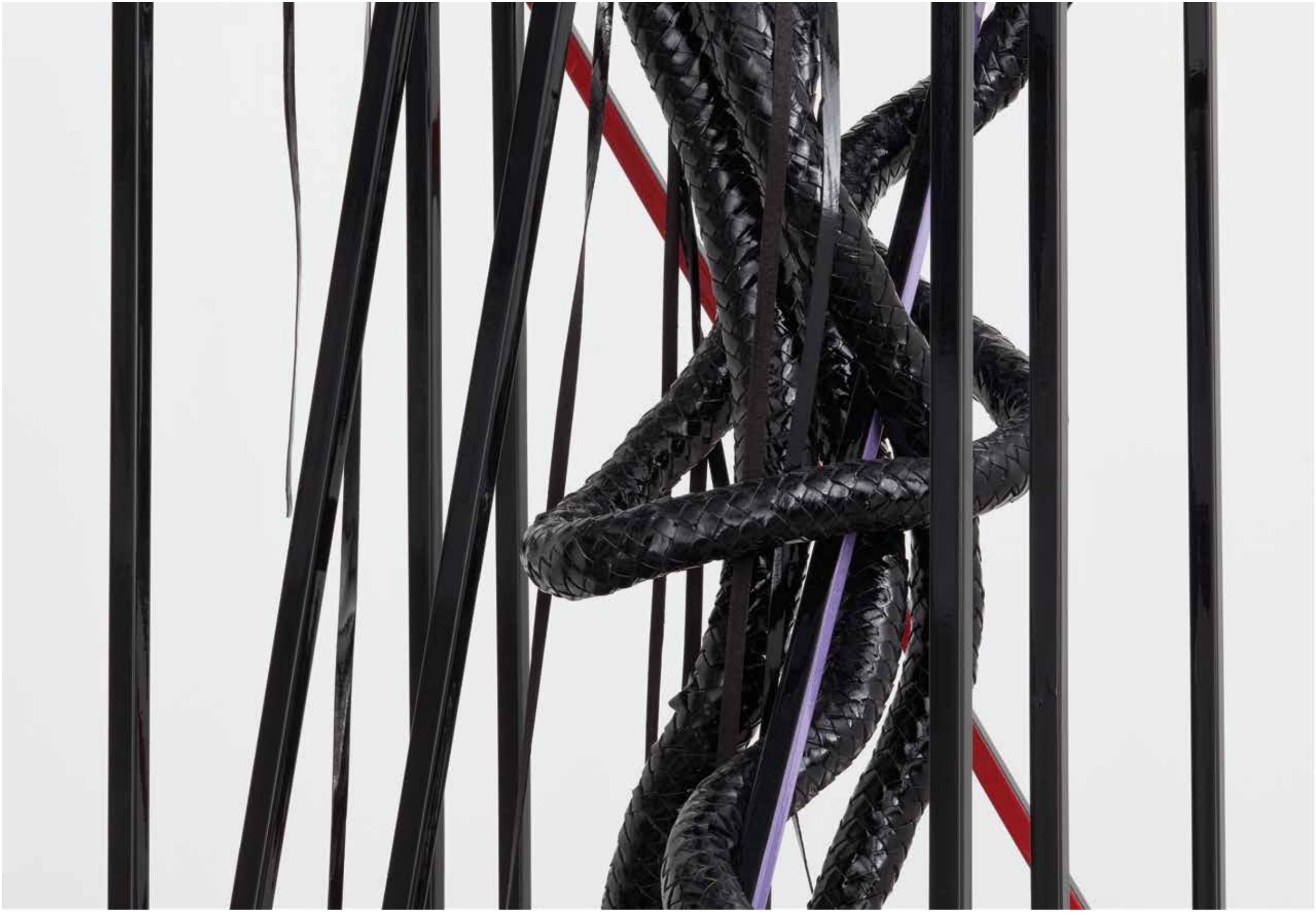
Eva Rothschild: Kosmos
ACCA installation views (l-r)

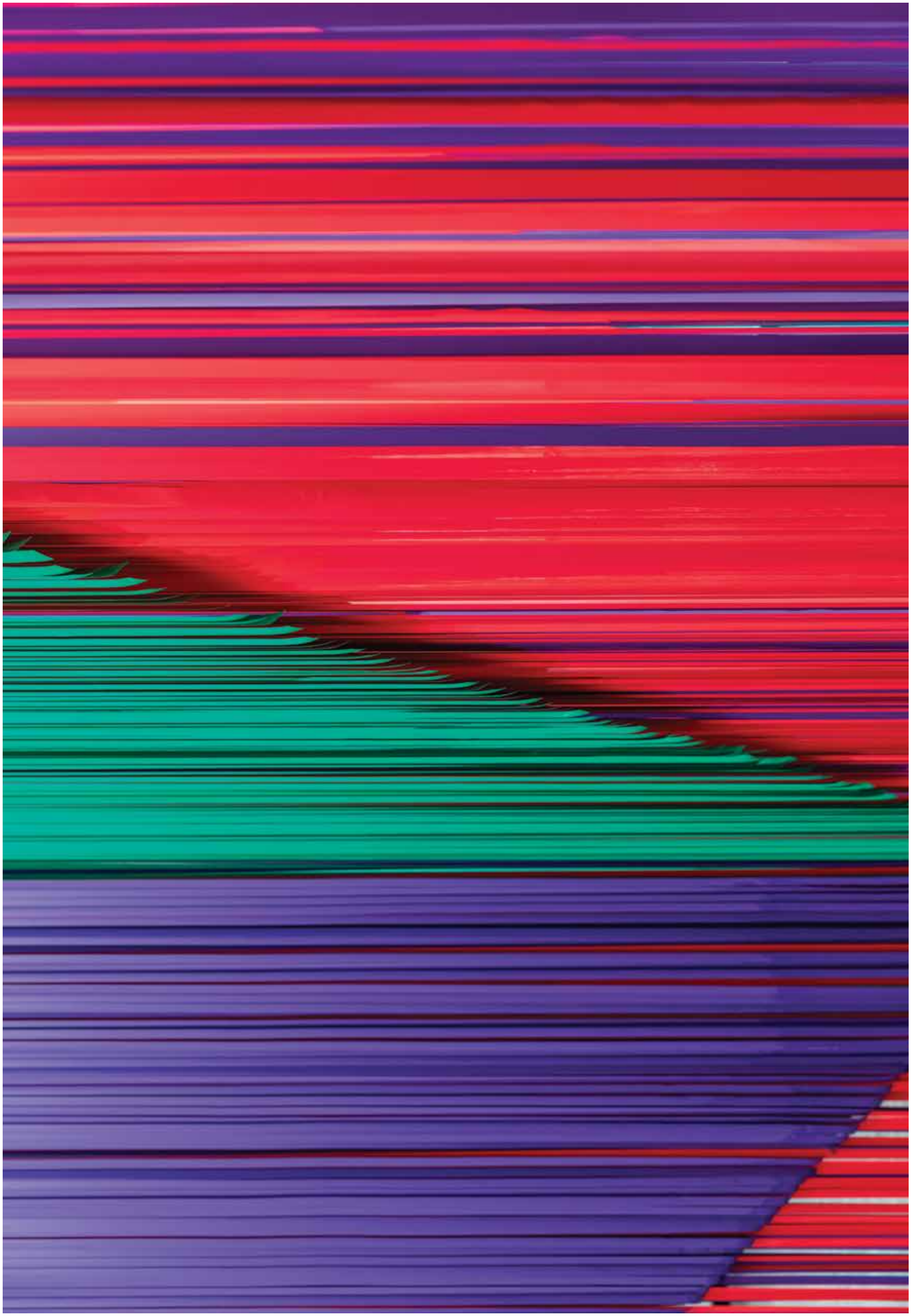
6-7 *Black atom* 2013
10-11 *Technical support (ACCA)* 2018; *Hazard* 2018
Iceberg hits 2018; *Cosmos* 2018; *Black atom* 2013
12-13 *Hazard* 2018; *Iceberg hits* 2018 (detail)
14-15 *Iceberg hits* 2018; *Hazard* 2018; *Black atom* 2013;
An organic threat 2018
16-19 *An organic threat* 2018
20-21 *An organic threat* 2018; *Cosmos* 2018
22-23 *Cosmos* 2018 (detail)
24-25 *Tooth and claw* 2018; *The way in* 2018; *Cosmos* 2018
26-27 *The way in* 2018; *Tooth and claw* 2018;
Risers (black) 2018; *Crystal healing* 2018
28-29 *Tooth and claw* 2018 (detail)
30-31 *The way in* 2018 (detail)
32-33 *Stool 4* 2018; *Stool 8* 2018; *Stool 6* 2018; *Stool 10* 2018
34-35 *TroubleMaker* 2018
36-37 *Risers (black)* 2018; *A sacrificial layer* 2018 (detail);
Tooth and claw 2018; *TroubleMaker* 2018
38-43 *A sacrificial layer* 2018 (details)
44-45 *A sacrificial layer* 2018 (detail); *Technical support (ACCA)* 2018 (detail)
46-47 *Do-nut* 2011; *Technical support (ACCA)* 2018; *A sacrificial layer* 2018 (detail)

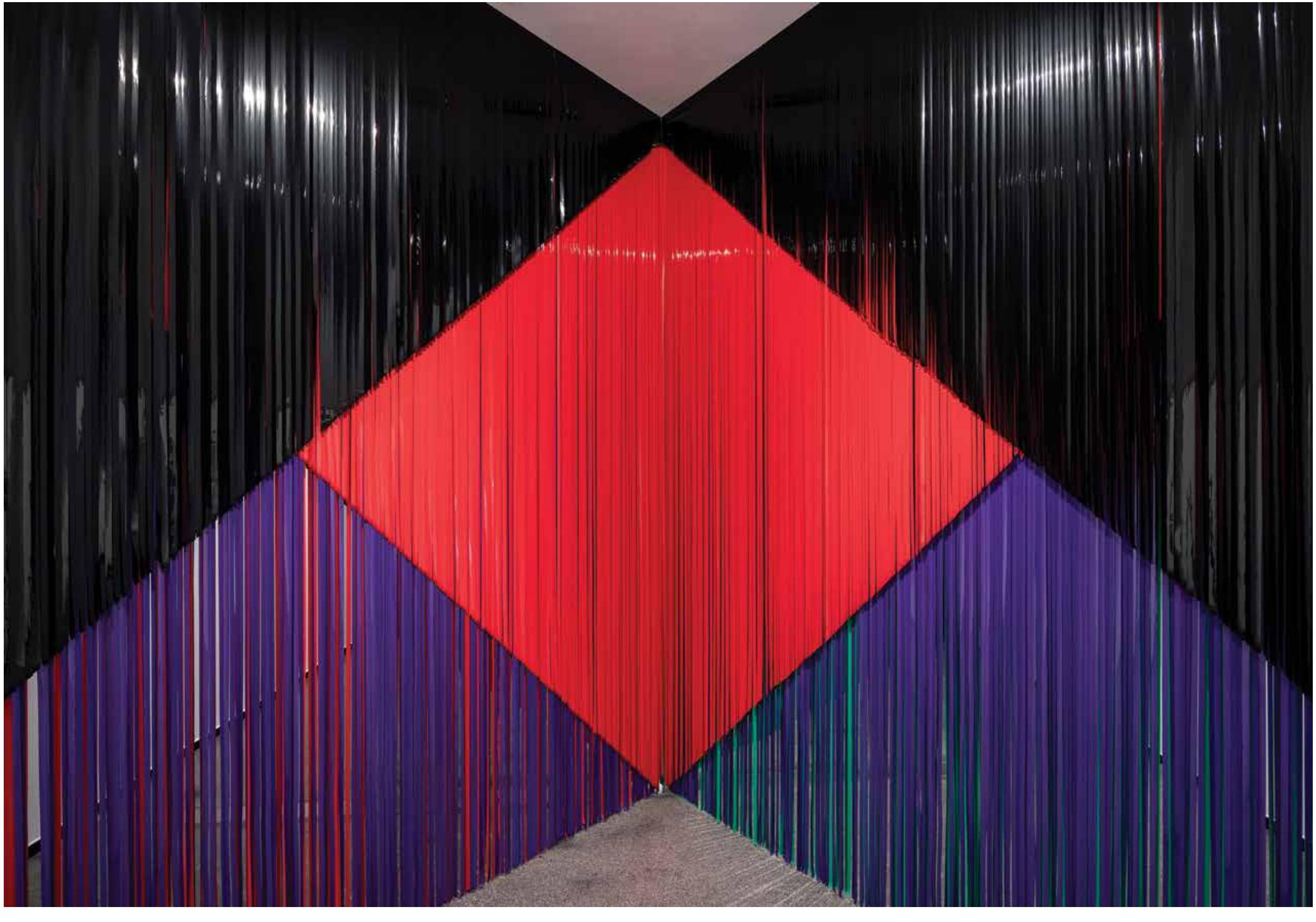
For full catalogue details, see the list of works, pages 72-75

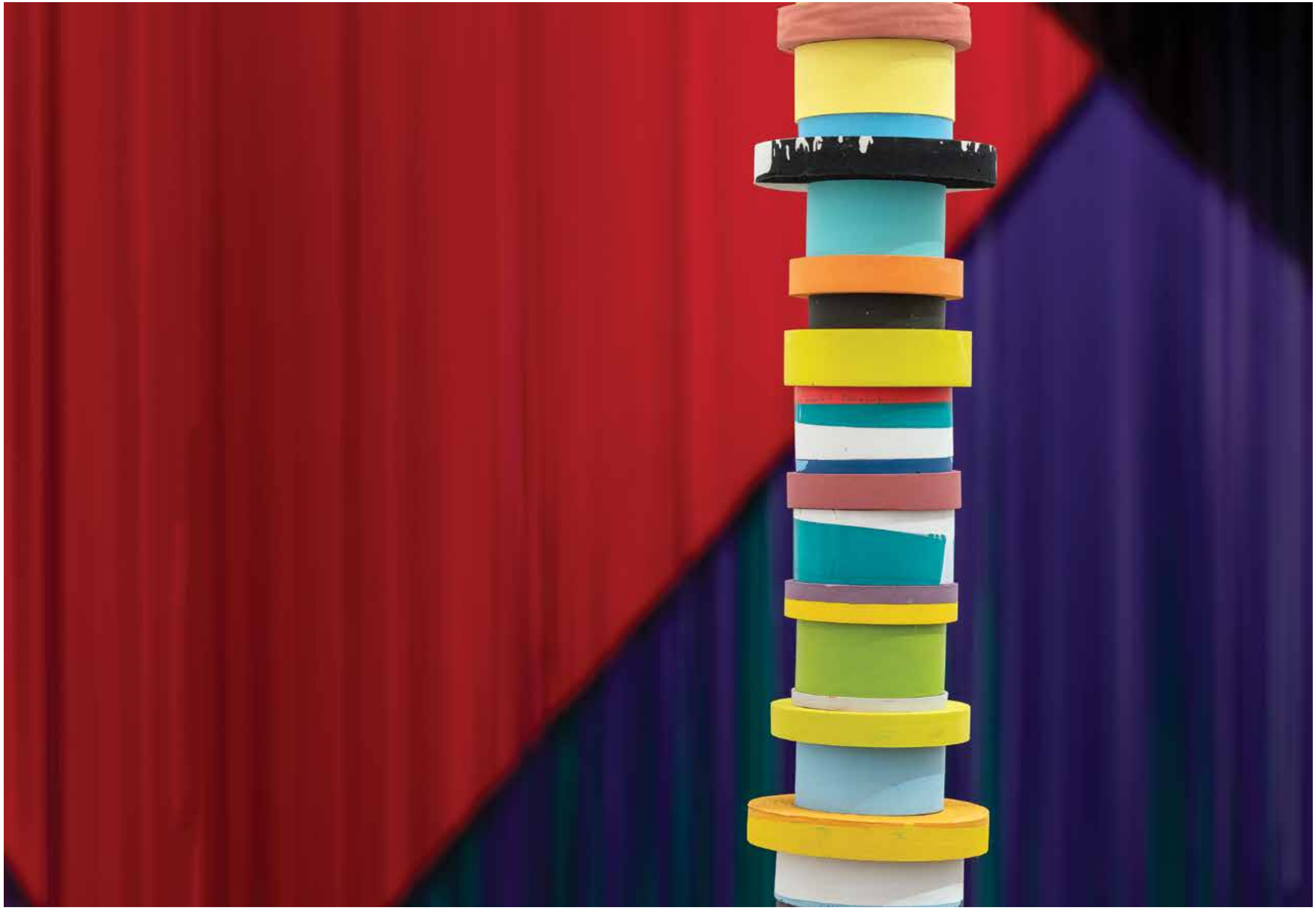












Things being various

Declan Long

Is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give the rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves?

Virginia Woolf, 'Street Haunting'.[1]

World is crazier and more of it than we think,
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
The drunkenness of things being various.

Louis MacNiece, 'Snow'.[2]

1

One essential, hoped-for effect of Eva Rothschild's art — as she noted in a 2017 interview with *The Brooklyn Rail* — is 'a flickering sense of materiality and presence'.[3] Rothschild's sculptures are endlessly novel abstract constructions, each one a distinctive presence within an expanding family of forms, all borne from steady, exacting engagement with dependable, variously tactile materials (steel, plaster, wood, concrete, fiberglass, jesmonite, leather and more). Her works are enigmatic entities — often carrying themselves with a purposefully gawky, nervy grace — and strange structures, by turns intricate and elemental in style. At times, Rothschild fashions teetering, spindly, one-on-top-of-another ensembles of open, linear shapes that achieve a kind of lanky, gangly, offbeat glamour. At other moments, the lines become harder, thicker, longer, forming more assertive, large-scale interventions that evoke elaborately designed barriers, gates or enclosures — sturdy-seeming physical limits that are nonetheless see-through, permeable, escapable. Sometimes too, she crafts and conjoins rotund volumes: bulky blocks and balls that — alone or added together — hint at organic authenticity, architectural eccentricity or imaginary modes of totemic idolatry. Mostly, these striking shapes inhabit galleries, but frequently they stake out space in the outside world too, standing as alien interlopers in public parks or civic plazas. In such manifold ways, Rothschild brings sets of strong, peculiar sculptural personalities into being. Her diversely configured works are conscientious in their variegated materiality; they are precise and decisive in their realized presence.

2

And yet, yes, they have a way of *flickering* too: they are evasive, deceptive, hard to pin-down. In Rothschild's work — even at its most bluntly matter-of-fact — our sense of materiality and presence is tested, even tricked. Encountering a recent sculpture such as *Cosmos* 2018, for instance, is to apprehend, first of all, a physically imposing alignment of black aluminium beams. More than twice the height of an average person, it is a dramatic, monumental, open-form structure, composed of three irregular truss-like frameworks — each containing differently angled near-vertical struts — that tilt towards one another, intersecting with an inner arrangement of criss-crossing diagonal supports. The combination of emphatic sculptural vectors is commanding, forceful. But come closer — moving around and through the structure — and *Cosmos* appears to become less rigid, less materially stable. The black aluminium beams , polished to a high shine, gleam and shimmer under gallery lighting. The surfaces mirror and distort each other, showing us dark, fragmentary reflections of our passing bodies. (The effect alerts us to Rothschild's interest in — but not wholehearted adherence to — certain precepts of minimalism: notably, as Hal Foster has written, its 'partial shift in focus from object to subject, or from ontological questions about the nature of the medium to phenomenological questions about particular bodies in particular spaces'.[4]) In places, the internal faces of the sculpture have been spray-painted with glossy coats of gorgeously luminous colour. Within this sternly defensive, potentially oppressive structure, they become (to borrow from Kanye West) ultralight beams: brightly overlapping lines of green, purple and red, like light-sabres clashing inside a dark chamber. Our sense of the

1 Virginia Woolf, 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure', in David Bradshaw (ed.), *Virginia Woolf: Selected Essays*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, p. 182.
2 Louise MacNeice, 'Snow' [1935], in *Selected Poems*, Faber & Faber, London, 1988.
3 'In Conversation: Eva Rothschild with Tom McGlynn', *The Brooklyn Rail*, 7 September 2017; accessed at https://brooklynrail.org/2017/09/art/Eva-Rothschild-with-Tom-McGlynn.
4 Hal Foster, *The Art-Architecture Complex*, Verso, London, 2013, p. 134.

fixed material composition of *Cosmos* — its formidable, immovable, metallic presence — quickly begins to flicker: it becomes visually dynamic, an energetically animated form. Considering the excitements and tensions of the sculpture in relation to the connotations of its title, a description of philosophy once proposed by William James comes to mind: 'it is our individual way of just seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos'.[5]

3

On occasion, Rothschild's sculptures make visual statements that are quickly subverted. With methodical, mischievous rigour, hierarchies are inverted, initial directions diverted. Consider the evident, immediate sturdiness of a sculpture such as *Do-nut* 2011: a circular suite of six curved, chubby cylinders — each part high and broad enough to comfortably accommodate a resting human body — clustered together and laid horizontally on the floor as a neatly unified seating area. A first-impression response would, no doubt, centre on solidity and stability, heft and harmony. The pieces seem weighty, regular, grounded. They are grouped with orderly, settled decorum. They bulge like densely padded furniture; but equally, clad in ceramic tiles, they appear to have the hard, decorative durability of classical architecture. And once again — as is so often the case in Rothschild's art — the colour black dominates, determining the initial mood, prioritising a monotone, monolithic demeanour. If, however, *Do-nut* directly declares itself in such terms — as a physically heavy, formally coherent and homogeneous presence — other qualities carry equal and opposite significance. It is obviously, of course, a sculpture composed of six separate pieces; it is a broken circle, an imperfect, sliced-up shape. Not one thing but several, its complete visible form includes sizeable gaps as well as substantial parts; it is composed of air as well as matter. What's more, the stiff surface of each discrete, chunky 'bench' is not one thing but many. The ceramic exterior is a mosaic of tiny, light-catching tiles, countless sparkling shards that cause the robust blocks to become busily fragmentary, to lose their static certainty and appear, instead, as flickering material multiplicities, concentrations of 'shifting brilliancies'.[6] Here and there, we can spot flecks of colour too: rogue red tiles that disrupt the chromatic consistency. Rothschild's dark materials, like Hamlet's 'customary suits of solemn black', are dominant but not defining aspects of an outward display.

5 William James, *Pragmatism* [1907], Dover Publications, New York, 1995, p. 1.
6 The phrase is from Seamus Heaney's 'Lightenings' in *Seeing Things*, Faber & Faber, London, 1991, p. 55.
7 'Eva Rothschild: Influences', *Frieze*, 10 August 2017; accessed at https://frieze.com/article/eva-rothschild-1.

(Indeed, she repeatedly returns to contrasting applications of her 'beloved red and green', her 'essential opposites'.[7]) There is always necessary, intermittent variation — complicating details that evince Rothschild's enduring fascination with the unfathomable depths of surfaces.

4

A further twist — or a series of teasing twists — is made possible by that oddly punctuated title, *Do-nut.* For Rothschild, the task of titling, and the harnessing of language to objects to more generally, is of utmost importance, playing a critical part in a canny process of unsettling our sense of what things are, or what they might be. In a 2007 review for *Frieze*, Kristin M. Jones compared Rothschild's art with that of her influential post-minimalist precursor Eva Hesse, by noting that while the latter 'strove for her sculptures to offer no more than what was materially present', Rothschild's tendency is rather to explore 'how objects acquire meanings that are extraneous to the objects' material reality'.[8] More likely, maybe, Rothschild's work thrives in a questioning space between these potential positions, but the title 'Do-nut' certainly demonstrates the tricksy style of her meaning-making explorations. The spelling of 'Do-nut' *almost* unites the huge chopped-up ring of the sculpture as an absurd, outsize 'donut' (a word which is itself a chopped-up version of the original 'doughnut'). But the intrusive dash gets in the way, opening up an awkward gap in meaning. Split apart, one word becomes two words, with the separated 'do' now reading more like a verb than a noun, newly activating and complicating the named thing. (Aptly, Rothschild understands *Do-nut* in active terms, referring to it as a 'social sculpture'). Meaning in Rothschild's art, like our perception of surface and substance, flits from one possibility to another. A title could clarify our inchoate sense of what a particular piece resembles, or it could contradict that hunch, instantly redirecting, or misdirecting, our disorderly thoughts. Words in Rothschild's world, as with things, are pleasurably unstable, determinedly unpredictable. In piecing together linguistic and physical combinations — either within individual artworks or across complementary sets of sculptures — it is expected, she says, that 'one element might seem to almost undo what another element is doing'.[9] It's an incremental, compare-and-contrast approach to sculptural construction that we might, if so inclined, call 'deconstructive': a practice of perpetually progressing

8 Kristin M. Jones, 'Review: Eva Rothschild', *Frieze*, 2 October 2007; accessed at https://frieze.com/article/eva-rothschild.
9 'In Conversation: Eva Rothschild with Tom McGlynn', *The Brooklyn Rail.*

via diversions, proceeding through calculated differentiation, while denying authority to any final trajectory or position.

5

For a few moments: a diversion. Close to the end of Rachel Cusk's remarkable novel *Outline*, the narrator recalls a visit to the Agora in Athens, where headless statues of goddesses line an ancient colonnade. In this place, 'the massive marble bodies in their soft-looking draperies, so anonymous and mute' were 'strangely consoling' presences. Cusk's narrator, at this time, has been forced to extend her stay in Greece as a volcanic eruption has led to the cancelling of all flights:

> though you couldn't see it, it was said that there was a great cloud of ash in the sky; people were worried little pieces of grit might get stuck in the engines. It reminded me … of the apocalyptic visions of the medieval mystics, this cloud that was so imperceptible and yet so subject to belief.[10]

Like an Eva Rothschild sculpture, Cusk's beautifully ruminative novel isn't strictly one coherent, linear thing — rather, the book is constructed as a sequence of parts that are both elegantly synthesized and insistently separate (it's pitched as 'a novel in ten conversations'). But, at the micro-level too, among the intricately pieced-together ideas contained in this fragment from a larger narrative mosaic, there is much that corresponds to Rothschild's long-standing preoccupations. For instance, in the coincidence of classical statues and corrupted jet engines, we find a concern with past and future ruins that parallels Rothschild's recurrent thematic interest in the scattered material leftovers of former civilizations: the remainders of once-reigning societies — including, imminently, our own. The recent work, *An organic threat* 2018, for example, is a tightknit jumble of assorted geometric blocks and cast architectural objects that might be variously compared to a pile of children's toys at the end of a pre-school day or to the broken columns and tumbling pediments of a once-grand building at the end of an historical era. But Cusk's digressive observations also dwell on a dichotomy that is integral to Rothschild's thinking: the division between the tangible and the intangible, between the visible, visceral world and more unseen, elusive spheres of being.

Cusk's narrative scene, like Rothschild's art, pairs heightened awareness of palpable materiality with an appeal to the mysterious and the mystical. It plays the sophisticated physical actuality of the statues — those 'massive marble bodies' that have a seductively 'soft-looking' surface — against the vagueness of the threatening, 'imperceptible' cloud and the unverifiable forebodings of antiquated, esoteric beliefs. Sculptures by Rothschild such as the recent *Iceberg hits* 2018 (a suspended black-and-red punchbag that seems to levitate just above the floor) or the earlier *Black atom* 2013 (a hanging, tangled bundle of interwoven steel rebar and little resin cylinders) allusively signal an abiding interest in diversely imperceptible, or barely perceptible, dimensions of the measurable universe. Since quite early in her career, however, Rothschild has also pondered the ways in which objects and images can gain, in ritual, religious or subcultural contexts, an auratic or supernatural authority. Should we choose to believe — in whatever fantastically expanded version of reality one prefers — ordinary things will become transformed by imperceptible forces. The ubiquity of geometric figures in Rothschild's multi-faceted oeuvre comes, in part, from continued engagement with the legacies of the twentieth century's most pared-back aesthetic modes, but such shapes are equally valued in her art for their symbolic power and, more narrowly, for their potency as core graphic components of occult iconography. (Rothschild has described her merged response to these twin influences as 'magic minimalism'.) Fundamental, rational, outline forms — circles, triangles, hexagons, pentagons, squares — are gathered in overlapping and sequential arrays, gesturing towards the abstruse sign systems of sorcery and other cabalistic practices. These allusions are, typically, indirect and indistinct. If there are hints of hermetic orders of knowledge, there are also intimations of cultish scenes much closer to the present-day mainstream. Certainly, the vivid, vampy couplings of high-shine black surfaces and sleek leather accessories can recall the sensuous severity of goth style, with its mournful, dreamy aspirations towards mystical otherness and its stark, glamorous vision of outsider togetherness. By contrast, some past and present work evokes more folky social circles. The inclusion of humble, hand-crafted objects, woven fabrics and even joss sticks, declares an interest in the drop-out attitudes and spiritual trappings of hippie lifestyles, whether in their first-generation counter-cultural form or in their lingering New Age legacy as a set of dress-up

10 Rachel Cusk, *Outline*, Faber & Faber, London, 2018, p. 247. [First published 2014.]

(or dress-down) codes for dissident, stoner youth. None of these associations stem from any special subcultural devotion on Rothschild's part, and none of the various supernatural inklings indicate straightforward attraction to particular faiths, sects or customs — however appealingly unorthodox or subversive they might seem. But there is, nonetheless, a stubborn, still-sceptical fascination with the resistant human yearning for an indiscernible something else and with the perverse, way-out ideals of communities that cluster round that transcendent possibility. Maybe, with the coming-and-going of these metaphysical suggestions, Rothschild wants us to wonder for a moment about subjective or collective situations, either anxious or optimistic, when other worlds suddenly seem accessible. Maybe, at such times, in such contexts, our habitual sense of reality becomes a little less settled, and the fixity of our everyday certainties begins to flicker.

6

In ancient Greece, the Agora was a gathering place: an essential, central site in the city for public encounter and exchange. Eva Rothschild's exhibitions are gathering places too: situations in which contrasting materials, disparate forms and competing ideas come together. Increasingly, the appearing and disappearing presence of people has become indispensable to this studied plurality. Rothschild regularly constructs scenarios that invite degrees of participation from a viewing public, though there is always, inevitably, a little ambiguity, hesitancy or unpredictability in the offer. Her extraordinary 2012 work *Boys and sculpture* (made as a children's commission for London's Whitechapel Gallery) is an extreme case. For this riveting, joyously riotous fly-on-the-wall film — a rare foray into that medium — Rothschild staged a gallery presentation of her sculptures (actually a set of mocked-up replicas) and invited eleven, unsupervised, pre-teen schoolboys to look and even touch. The key advice given by the artist was that, whatever happened, 'they wouldn't get into trouble'.[11] What did happen — gradually, with tentative patience at first, followed by a glorious burst of giddy enthusiasm — was that the boys took the liberty of testing the sculptures' stability: shaking them to see which would stand firm, pushing to see which would stay upright, pulling to see which pieces would bend or break. At one critical juncture, a tall tower of stacked-up 'heads' — a key item in Rothschild's catalogue of recurring forms

11 Eva Rothschild quoted by Aidan Dunne in 'Eva Rothschild: What Are You Looking At?', *The Irish Times*, 24 May 2014.

— comes crashing down under pressure from the boys' uninhibited investigations. Suddenly, each released sphere becomes a ball that can be thrown, bounced or kicked through the space. The sculptures are no longer aloof and untouchable. The boys become boldly engaged, unintimidated, free to re-make and re-use the disassembled material in their own creatively destructive way. It's an exciting scene: a comically liberating version of institutional critique, perhaps, and an ebulliently alarming meditation on the gang motivation in young males. (Here again is an alternative vision of togetherness, beyond accepted social rules.)

7

At the other end of Rothschild's participatory scale are sculptures that encourage less risky and demanding modes of interaction: very simply, they provide places to sit. As we have seen, *Do-nut* does this — but among more recent works there is also a series of small stools that Rothschild locates in loose groups throughout gallery spaces, like mini break-out areas. Their unfussy design — each a cast, patterned, spray-painted seat on an open-form metal cube — speaks of non-precious, easy-going use. Together they compose modest, movable supports for looking, talking, waiting, day-dreaming. There is nothing prescribed about their staging, nothing strict and defined in their style. And yet, in their unfixed, unforced coaxing of fleeting companionship — or confrontation — they represent an undemonstrative dimension of the public-spirited tendency in Rothschild's art. Elsewhere, her sculptures have exercised this inclusive impulse in a more expanded manner; but, even when scaled-up, a certain vulnerability, a necessary air of imperfection and impermanence, is retained. *Amphitheatre* 2016, included in her exhibition *Alternative to Power* at The New Art Gallery, Walsall, England, is, for example, a curved bank of tiered seating in broadly the same framework style as the recent stool pieces. The minimal, functional aesthetic might call to mind the bleachers at an amateur sports field — informal social settings for collective spectating, for solidarity with fellow supporters. But this stepped construction has loftier antecedents too: the amphitheatres of antiquity, and more specifically, perhaps, the ancient Roman 'rostra' — raised platforms from which to address an assembled public. (The earliest version of which, the *Rostra Vetera*, was a rudimentary, curved structure.) *Amphitheatre* has a provisional quality, a look of something that can be pieced together or

taken apart at any time. It seems neither fully secure nor entirely precarious. And in this regard it might, indeed, be like the idea of the 'public' itself: a democratic prospect that flickers as an empirical and historical presence, varying in meaning and value in different places, at different times, appearing and disappearing with erratic energy and effect. ('Democratic public space', Rosalyn Deutsche has written, 'might be called a phantom because while it appears, it has no substantive identity and is, as a consequence, enigmatic'.[12])

For some, the seemingly unstable idea of a 'public' will be strengthened, or progressed, through vigorous plurality and inclusive participation: through an open, ongoing negotiation of what it means to share our lives with others. For more reactionary constituencies — ever-more brutally dominant in our present era — public value is defined, with bullying conviction, in terms of narrow, nativist exclusivity: Trumpian build-the-wall bigotry, the neo-colonial xenophobia of Britain's deluded Brexiteers. Such nightmare visions of monolithic societies are also, implicitly, a dire, inevitable context for Rothschild's recent reflections on participation and public space. Sculptures such as *Border* 2018 and the more recent *Hazard* 2018 are uneasy products — at once blunt and oblique — of our dangerous contemporary predicament. Borders can be material or imaginative limits, physical or fantasy structures. A closed border can determine, with terrible cruelty, individual and collective destinies. But, as Rebecca Solnit has said (with partial optimism), a border can be envisaged as 'the line across which we will carry dreams, wounds, meanings, bundles of goods, ideas, children'.[13] Borders are situations of plural exchanges, proliferating stories. Rothschild's *Border* and *Hazard* are in some ways grounded, austere sculptures, but also purposefully indeterminate constructions. Broken walls of painted concrete blocks, op-art patterned with chessboard checks and zig-zagging diagonals, they are bewildering, multi-dimensional barriers. Rather than establishing terminal points, their design creates puzzles about perspective and position. As with so much of Rothschild's art, they are both absolutely present, fixed forms and busily unsettled objects. They occupy the world with intensity and integrity, while, crucially, pointing in many directions at once.

12 Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996, p.324.
13 Rebecca Solnit, 'Crossing Over', *The Paris Review*, 20 March 2018; accessed at https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/03/20/crossing-over/.

Kosmos
Eva Rothschild in conversation with Max Delany

MAX DELANY: Eva, the first work we encounter in *Kosmos* is a new work, *Hazard* 2018, a stack of concrete blocks that dissects the gallery, painted in a geometric pattern. It is reminiscent of minimalist sculpture and geometric painting but also of road blocks that might have been familiar growing up in Ireland in the 1970s and 80s. These defensive architectural forms, for policing boundaries and inhibiting passage, are increasingly prevalent again today. To what extent does your work seek to reflect or comment upon the character of the urban and architectural contexts in which we find ourselves?

EVA ROTHSCHILD: It is reminiscent of road blocks but not really the kind we used to see in the north of Ireland – they were generally manned checkpoints. It has more in common with the more recent passive-aggressive barrier placing that has started to proliferate in response to the new terrorism. These blocks are becoming ubiquitous and they share a lot with what I call the 'hazard architecture' seen around ports, road works and transitional urban areas. These more traditional hazard objects are generally striped and marked to denote that we should or should not pass. They have a confident clarity of purpose whereas the new blocks are apologetic and reviled. Attempts are made to make them acceptable with planting, commissioned graffiti or – one of my most hated contemporary things – urban knitting. They are the same objects with a different psychic and social presence.

In sculptural terms, placing an object that is so resolutely itself into the urban landscape is interesting because most objects we encounter have continuous active functions whereas these new objects exist only for an unlikely eventuality. They are functionally dormant, but their presence physically reminds us of our newly anxious normality.

In Northern Ireland, sectarian divides are often shown by communities painting their curb stones with the colours of their allegiance in an aggressive marking of territory. I have been interested in this since I was at college there in the 90s, but it is only recently I noticed that the built environment in Ireland is full of stripes; local street signs are on black-and-white posts, motorway works are marked by striped red entrances and the iconic striped 'pigeon houses' loom over Dublin port, the first and last thing you see if you travel by ferry. I have used stripes in the work for many years as a way of breaking up continuous surfaces, but these new works use the painted surface as a way of presenting a visually separated form on a physically divided whole.

MD: To what extent has the specific architecture of the exhibition space – or the context of your exhibition being staged in Melbourne – informed the development of the new commissions and the selection of recent work?

ER: The new works are informed by both the size of the spaces at ACCA and the fact that they are being shown as part of an exhibition that encompasses such a range of making. With a show of this scale, I am always interested in allowing both connections and disconnections between the work. It is important to me that there is a conversation between the pieces and the rooms, but they don't all need to be saying the same thing, or even agreeing with each other.

MD: The question of manufacture – of making by hand – is important to your work. The artist's hand is clearly evident in many of your sculptures – there is a kind of bodily presence and a material life and poetic in your work – whilst others are the product of a cooler, industrial process. Can you describe your studio process, and the relationship between the handmade and industrial production, the organic and the technical or geometric?

ER: My making takes place based on what is necessary for the work. I personally need to be making. The work of the studio is at the core of everything and I work with two or three people there on most things. However, there are works that require processes that can't happen in the studio. Larger pieces, such as *Cosmos,* require technical fabrication and engineering as well as a huge amount of space, so I work closely with fabricators on them. I don't find these ways of making

conflicted. They are just the pragmatic ways to make the sculptures exist as they need to.

MD: You are known as a process-oriented artist, working with a rich variety of materials. This interest in the materiality of making extends to a consideration of the viewer's physical experience of an art object in space. Your ongoing work *Technical support*, for example, speaks to a daily studio practice, making a monument from humble studio materials and processes, while also referencing art-historical precedents such as Constantin Brancusi's *Endless column* 1918. Can you elaborate on your process of making?

ER: I love additive processes. The suggestion of endlessness implicit in modular or episodic form is something I constantly return to. Making in this way leaves the endpoint of a piece open. It acknowledges that the elements are not definitive and may be subject to change. Brancusi's column isn't endless but the suggestion that it could be is always there. This sense of endless additive possibility is very much part of *Technical support*. It's also a nod to the workhorses of any making practice, the rolls of tape that allow the provisional sculpture to take shape. I initially began casting rolls of tape many years ago when I found that the best way to support the head-like forms I was making was on rolls of tape, but then I would need the tape! So I made these non-tape tapes, and then I made more of them, and then I began casting almost every type of tape I could find. And then I had loads of them and suddenly they were their own thing. They accumulated themselves into being.

MD: I'm interested in the ways you imbue irrational ideas of magic, sorcery, ritual and play into what might once have been considered rational, formalist sculpture. And how you grapple with, and sometimes subtly undermine, formalist legacies. How do you feel about your formalist inheritance?

ER: I find formal composition appealing, but I am also resistant to the tyranny of taste and the limits that it can impose on the work and there is often an internal aesthetic tension that plays out for me while making. I think, though, that we are sometimes mistaken in our reading of what we think of as formal or minimal art as free from a spiritual or ritualistic 'taint'. To me, these ways of making are deeply associated with esoteric consciousness – in the work of

Robert Smithson or John McCracken, for example. Hardcore minimalist art of the 60s, exemplified by Donald Judd, is perhaps one of the few times that formalism has attempted to distance itself from associative and transcendent thinking. I am interested in where the way we view art intersects with the way believers view objects and images associated with their beliefs. I do not want to empty art of belief and the possibilities of transformative communication.

MD: *A sacrificial layer* 2018 is another ambitious and experimental new work which invokes geometric painting, but on a far grander scale, akin to a theatre curtain or operatic backdrop. It also invokes ideas of ceremony and pageantry, banner marches and portals. You grew up Catholic and have also had an interest in wider forms of public pageantry and procession. To what extent do these histories inform your work?

ER: I have made banners before, notably the huge *Alternative to Power* banner that accompanied my show at The New Art Gallery, Walsall, in 2016. It was made in response to the Brexit referendum. I also made a series of images called *Black psycore* in 1999, which reference mandalas and the idea of transcendent looking. With this new curtain work I wanted to explore a kind of soft making in a phenomenological and immersive way. I was interested in re-engaging with this architectural and porous format.

The space that the curtain piece occupies at ACCA can become compromised into being a kind of corridor between the two adjacent galleries. I wanted to do something that completely disallowed this reading of the space. The curtain's X form divides the room into triangular quadrants and stops the viewer from looking through to the galleries beyond. Moving through the exhibition forces a direct engagement with the piece.

Geometric forms have been present in my work from the beginning. I have always been interested in how the eye perceives a familiar form and the ways that can be disrupted. *A sacrificial layer* presents the whole room as an accumulation of repeating and inverting shapes, layered over each other – each colour in each quadrant is half seen and half hidden, each layer is mirrored in another, and each colour hangs on a separate plane to the other, so they are somewhat independent in terms of movement. I have worked a lot

with weaving and tapestry and this piece has a close relationship to that mode of making in which masses of linear material are transformed into a planar whole. Here though, there is no horizontal counterpoint to unite the vertical and it remains constantly subject to change within its own boundaries.

MD: In this and many of the works, *Cosmos* in particular, there are perceptual plays with colour, space and movement. Can you reflect on the role of colour in your practice?

ER: Colour is tricky but it's also essential. I used to be scared of colour. I only ever used it to differentiate areas but recently I feel more open to using it in different ways. In the more hard-edged sculptures, and in the curtain installation, it is generally used in a very clear way, occupying and delineating different planes within an overall structure, re-enforcing the physical presence of the object. I tend to use colours of similar intensities so the eye perceives them equally alongside the black, which operates not so much as a colour to me but almost another material within the work.

In recent cast polystyrene works I've been using spray paint in a very different palette and mode of application. I use spray paint on these objects because it increases their resonance as urban and somewhat discarded or ignored objects, and it allows for a material dissonance to occur also – because spray paint actually dissolves polystyrene; it's like the meeting of the two toxins is too much to bear and neither can survive!

In *Cosmos*, the spray paint and the hard surface meet. The black delineates the external form while the internal gradients of paint changing from one colour to another visually dissolves the internal surfaces, creating an ambiguous and complicated space where our visual engagement with the painted surface is at odds with our physical sense of its sculptural materiality.

MD: A number of your plinth-based sculptures also have ambiguous scale, recalling diverse forms from classical still life to constructivist sculpture, and from sculptural maquettes to architectural models. Some have specific narrative references, such as *Tooth and claw*, which includes a cast of your forearm in reference to Jacques-Louis David's *Death of Marat* from 1793. Can you reflect upon your

interest in these specific histories and the relationship between sculpture, architecture and public space?

ER: My ideal is for the work to float free of narrative or reference, but I know that this is impossible and there are isolated instances where direct references sneak in, as in *Tooth and claw* and in the platform-based pieces, such as *An array* 2016 [in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne], which makes reference to the compositional multiplicity of Théodore Géricault's painting *The Raft of the Medusa* of 1818-19. In terms of specific histories, my engagement with those paintings is not just related to the compositions though, they are both images which have a very strong resonance in this moment.

I prefer to think of outdoor work in terms of social sculptures and I look closely at the site and how it is used by the community around it. I don't aim to make pieces that are defined by the narrative or history of a certain locality but rather seek to engage by making works that perform the function of a meeting place or landmark – which perhaps opens up a new or expanded use or sense of the place it is situated in. My approach generally favours making porous open structures that allow individuals to occupy the same space as the sculpture. I don't want to make objects that sit lumpen in the landscape, disallowing an active engagement.

One of sculpture's roles – which I see as an increasingly vital role – is its resistance to representation and mediation. Sculpture, by its nature, is experiential. It is apprehended by the eye and the body in tandem. It is about presence rather than reproduction and distribution. Given that we live in a world dominated by two-dimensional screen-based images, sculpture feels both optimistically anachronistic and actively vital.

MD: Your longstanding interest in the social relations played out between sculpture and the spectator or audience has led more recently to an interest in performance and its relation to sculpture – such as the film work *Boys and sculpture* 2012, in which a group of young boys are let loose in a gallery, where they encounter and subsequently dismantle your installation, and the performance work *A Set Up*, developed in collaboration with choreographer Joe Moran, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 2015, and

recently restaged at Kettle's Yard in Cambridge. For your exhibition at ACCA, you have designed costumes for choreographer and dancer Jo Lloyd, whose work for ten dancers took place in your exhibition. Can you reflect upon your interest in the dynamics of performance and social contexts in relation to the stability and fixity of sculpture and architecture?

ER: The question of 'interactivity' arises constantly around sculptural work, especially in a practice like mine where ambiguous elements, such as seating or the curtain piece, openly invite a specific physical engagement. The *Boys and sculpture* film shows the absolute limits of interactivity, where the work is 'interacted with' out of existence.

Increasingly, however, I want to interrogate the concept of interactivity, to throw the question back at the audience – what is meant by interactivity? Is looking and being with the art work not interaction? For me, it is the primary interaction! How do you as an audience intend to interact? Do you plan to tentatively stroke the artwork and privilege that over looking? Have you a plan for your interaction? This is one of the reasons that I have become interested in working with choreographers. Making the work available to dancers and choreographers is a way of examining the possibilities of interaction at a different level. The dancers bring with them a depth of embodied knowledge that allows an interaction to take place that goes beyond the basic 'stroke and sit' that are the orthodoxy of gallery 'interaction'. Working with people who are fully engaged with their own creative practice opens up the work to a wider possibility of interpretation and action. At this moment I don't want to approach the choreography myself but to see what comes from outside.

Jo Lloyd & Eva Rothschild
Cutout 2018
performance, 1 October 2018
Commissioned by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, in association with the Melbourne International Arts Festival
Photography Peter Rosetzky

List of works

EVA ROTHSCHILD
Born 1971 Dublin, Ireland
Lives and works in London

A sacrificial layer 2018
polyvinyl chloride
two dissecting curtains:
500.0 x 1323.0 x 12.5 cm;
500.0 x 1212.0 x 12.5 cm
Courtesy the artist, Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow
[A variant of this work will be presented at City Gallery Wellington.]

An organic threat 2018
hand-dyed cotton, wax, jesmonite, resin, steel, paint, fibreglass, foam, polystyrene and plywood
250.0 x 650.0 x 350.0 cm
Courtesy the artist, Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Cosmos 2018
spray-painted aluminium
350.0 x 370.0 x 340.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London

Crystal healing 2018
fibreglass, polyurethane, jesmonite, paint, concrete plinth
247.0 x 30.0 x 30.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and 303 Gallery, New York

Hazard 2018
concrete, steel, synthetic polymer paint
163.5 x 625.5 x 30.0 cm
Courtesy the artist, Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Iceberg hits 2018
fabric, wax, wood, card, foam, wadding, steel
471.0 x 42.0 x 42.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London

Risers (black) 2018
painted steel, rubber, oak plinth
340.0 x 30.0 x 30.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Stool 1 2018
steel, jesmonite, fibreglass, paint
41.0 x 32.0 x 31.5 cm
Courtesy the artist, Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Stool 2 2018
steel, jesmonite, fibreglass, paint
41.0 x 31.0 x 31.5 cm
Courtesy the artist, Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Stool 3 2018
steel, jesmonite, fibreglass, paint
41.5 x 30.5 x 32.5 cm
Courtesy the artist, Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Stool 4 2018
steel, jesmonite, fibreglass, paint
41.0 x 40.5 x 33.0 cm
Courtesy the artist, Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Stool 5 2018
steel, jesmonite, fibreglass, paint
41.0 x 40.5 x 34.0 cm
Courtesy the artist, Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Stool 6 2018
steel, jesmonite, fibreglass, paint
41.5 x 42.0 x 32.0 cm
Courtesy the artist, Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Stool 7 2018
steel, jesmonite, fibreglass, paint
41.0 x 40.5 x 33.5 cm
Courtesy the artist, Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Stool 8 2018
steel, jesmonite, fibreglass, paint
42.0 x 40.5 x 34.0 cm
Courtesy the artist, Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Stool 9 2018
steel, jesmonite, fibreglass, paint
41.0 x 32.5 x 30.5 cm
Courtesy the artist, Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Stool 10 2018
steel, jesmonite, fibreglass, paint
41.5 x 32.0 x 30.0 cm
Courtesy the artist, Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Technical support 2018
jesmonite, steel
height variable,
diameter 16.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London

The way in 2018
leather, aluminium, fabric, tape, paint, steel, dyed oak plinth
273.0 x 30.5 x 29.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London

Tooth and claw 2018
aluminium, polyurethane, fabric, glass beads, jesmonite, fibreglass, paint, composition board, acrylic plinth
252.5 x 38.0 x 50.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London

TroubleMaker 2018
jesmonite, polyurethane, synthetic polymer paint, steel
250.0 x 252.0 x 130.0 cm
Courtesy the artist, Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Black atom 2013
steel, resin
68.0 x 98.0 x 61.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Do-nut 2011
ceramic tiles, jesmonite, polystyrene, adhesive, grout
58.0 x 365.0 x 365.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

ALSO ON DISPLAY AT CITY GALLERY WELLINGTON

Boys and sculpture 2012
high definition digital video
25:30 mins
Courtesy the artist and Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London, The Modern Institute, Glasgow, 303 Gallery, New York, and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich
Children's Art Commission, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2012

JO LLOYD (choreographer)
EVA ROTHSCHILD (artist)

Cutout 2018
choreography for ten dancers
Costumes: Eva Rothschild in collaboration with Andrew Treloar
Composer: Duane Morrison
Producer: Michaela Coventry, Sage Arts
Dancers, 1 October 2018: Deanne Butterworth, Belle Frahn-Starkie, Sheridan Gerrard, Hillary Goldsmith, Rebecca Jensen, Shian Law, Claire Leske, Jo Lloyd, Harrison Richie-Jones and Thomas Woodman

Commissioned by ACCA, in association with Melbourne International Arts Festival, and supported by the Dance Board, Australia Council for the Arts, and The Substation.

Biography

Eva Rothschild was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1971, and lives and works in London. Rothschild completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours at the University of Ulster, Belfast, in 1993. Following a period in San Francisco in 1992, Rothschild moved to Glasgow, where she lived from 1993 to 1996, becoming involved with Transmission Gallery and holding a solo exhibition at the Centre for Contemporary Art in 1996. She moved to London in 1997, completing a Master of Fine Arts at Goldsmiths, University of London, in 1999, with early exhibitions at The Modern Institute, Glasgow, 1999, and *Peacegarden* at The Showroom, London, 2001.

Rothschild has exhibited widely since the early 2000s, with notable individual exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Zurich, 2004; Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, 2005 and 2012; Tate Britain, London, 2009; Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, 2012; Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2012; and Sonneveld House, Rotterdam, 2016.

Rothschild has had major public commissions, including *Cold Corners*, for the Duveen Galleries, Tate Britain, London, 2009, and *Empire*, a monumental, multidirectional archway in Central Park, for the Public Art Fund, New York, 2011. Rothschild was elected to the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in 2014; and will represent Ireland at the 2019 Venice Biennale.

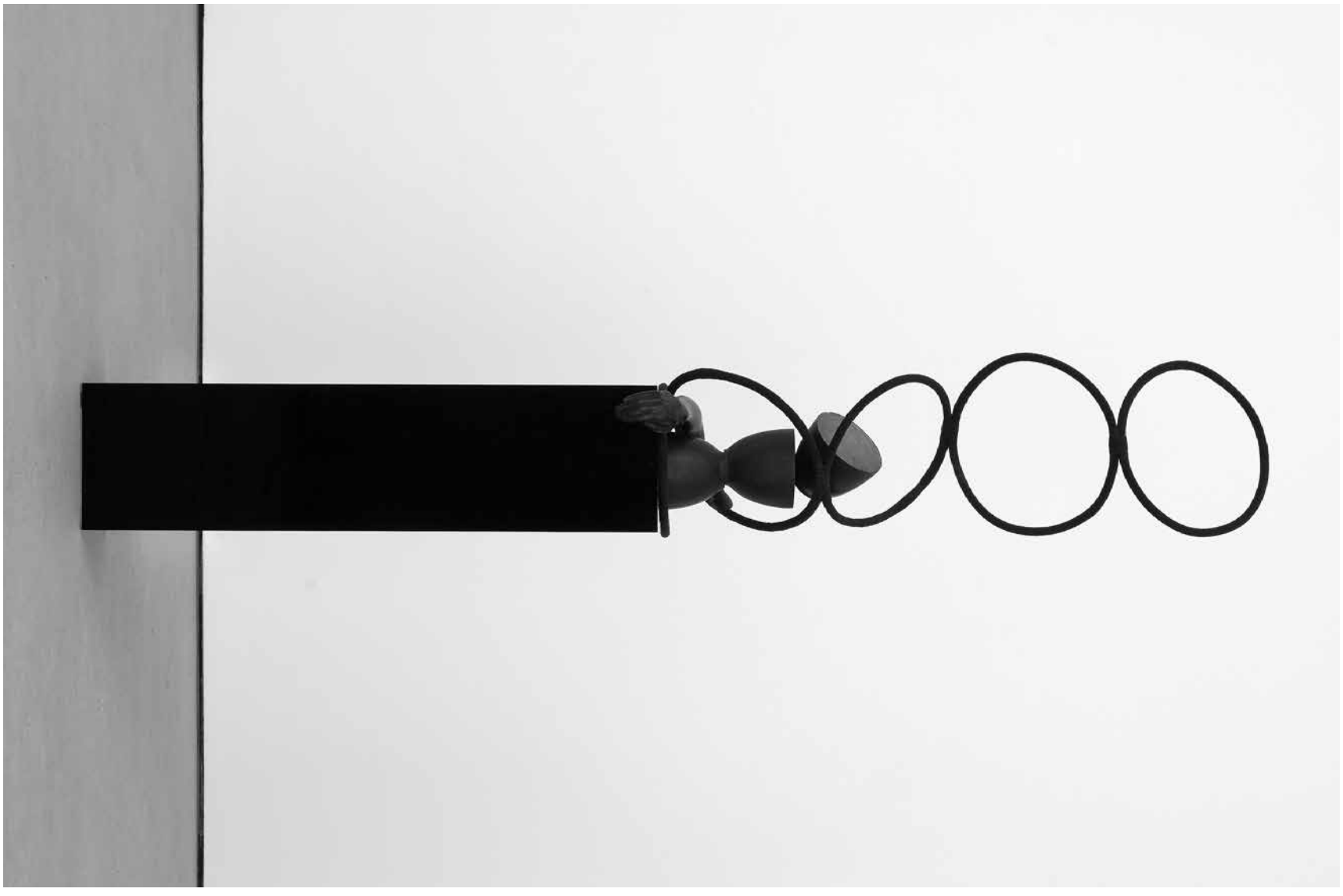
Recent individual exhibitions include *Eva Rothschild: Kosmos*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 2018 and City Gallery Wellington, 2019; *Iceberg Hits*, Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London, 2018; *Alternative to Power*, The New Art Gallery, Walsall, 2016; *Eva Rothschild,* Hugh Lane Museum, Dublin, 2014; *Boys and Sculpture – Children's Art Commission*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2012; *Hot Touch*, The Hepworth Wakefield, 2011, and touring; and *Eva Rothschild*, Kunstverein Hannover, 2011-12.

Recent group exhibitions include *The Oslo Museum of Contemporary Art*, Kunsthalle Oslo, 2017; *Then for Now,* Delfina Foundation, London, 2015; *Lustwarande '15: Rapture & Pain*, Fundament Foundation, Tilburg, 2015; *You Imagine What You Desire,* 19th Biennale of Sydney, 2014; *We Are Living on a Star*, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo, 2014; *This is Sculpture – Conversation Pieces*, DLA Piper Series, Tate Liverpool, 2011; *Undone: Making and Unmaking in Contemporary Sculpture*, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, 2010; and *Big New Field*, Dallas Museum of Art, 2010.

Eva Rothschild is represented by Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London; The Modern Institute, Glasgow; Gallery 303, New York; Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich; and Kaufmann Repetto, Milan.

For further information, see:
modernart.net
themoderninstitute.com
303gallery.com
presenhuber.com
kaufmannrepetto.com

Tooth and claw 2018, aluminium, polyurethane, fabric, glass beads, jesmonite, fibreglass, paint, composition board, acrylic plinth, 252.5 x 38.0 x 50.0 cm
Photo Robert Glowacki, courtesy Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London



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CURATORS' ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been a great pleasure to work with Eva Rothschild on the development of the exhibition and the production of newly commissioned works. We extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to Eva and her studio team, Noah Sherwood, Pippa Connolly, Rosie Edwards and Ilsa Colsell.

An exhibition of this scope would not be realised without the significant support and contributions of many collaborators and supporters. The exhibition has been developed by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in association with City Gallery Wellington and the Melbourne International Arts Festival, and we would like to especially thank Elizabeth Caldwell, Robert Leonard, Judith Cooke and Aaron Lister at City Gallery Wellington for their partnership and collaboration; along with Jonathan Holloway, Kath Mainland, Mark Burlace and Rose Harriman at the Melbourne International Arts Festival. We are also grateful to Culture Ireland for their support and contribution.

We are especially appreciative of the support, advice and assistance of Eva's galleries: Stuart Shave, Jimi Lee and Antonella Croci at Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London; and Toby Webster, Andrew Hamilton and Caroline Kirsop Carter at The Modern Institute. And we also acknowledge the advice of Ryan Moore, Fine Arts, Sydney.

It has been a pleasure to work with choreographer Jo Lloyd on the development of *Cutout*, developed in collaboration with Eva Rothschild, along with Andrew Treloar who collaborated with Eva on costume design; and we thank the participating dancers and contributors who are noted elsewhere in the catalogue.

Many thanks also to Declan Long for his insightful catalogue text, and Andrew Curtis and Peter Rosetzky for installation and performance photography.

ACCA's Exhibitions Manager Samantha Vawdrey has been involved with all aspects of the production and installation of the exhibition, which she has accomplished with great skill, focus and commitment. We also thank curatorial intern Nikki Van der Horst for her contribution to curatorial research and the development of interpretive materials; Cherie Schweitzer for production documentation and advice; and ACCA's Curatorial Manager Miriam Kelly who has recently stepped in and contributed to installation and catalogue production with aplomb. We acknowledge Brian Scales and Huw Smith for their expert technical advice and production, along with all of ACCA and City Gallery Wellington's installation teams.

We thank each and every one of our colleagues at ACCA and City Gallery Wellington for their commitment and professionalism in the development and unfolding of all aspects of the exhibition and its community engagement.

Finally, the artist would also like to thank Alisdair, Robin, Henry and Arthur Steer.

— MD & AK

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JO LLOYD is a Melbourne-based dance artist, working with choreography as a social encounter. A graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, Lloyd has presented award-winning work nationally and internationally over the past fifteen years, including for the Biennale of Sydney, Dark MOFO, Dance Massive and the Melbourne International Arts Festival. Lloyd was Resident Director of Lucy Guerin Inc. in 2016 and was the recipient of the prestigious Australia Council Fellowship in Dance in 2018.

DECLAN LONG is Program Director of the Master of Arts program, Art in the Contemporary World, at the National College of Art & Design, Ireland. He is a regular contributor to *Artforum* and *Frieze* and recently published the book *Ghost-Haunted Land: Contemporary Art and Post-Troubles Northern Ireland* (Manchester University Press, 2017).

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