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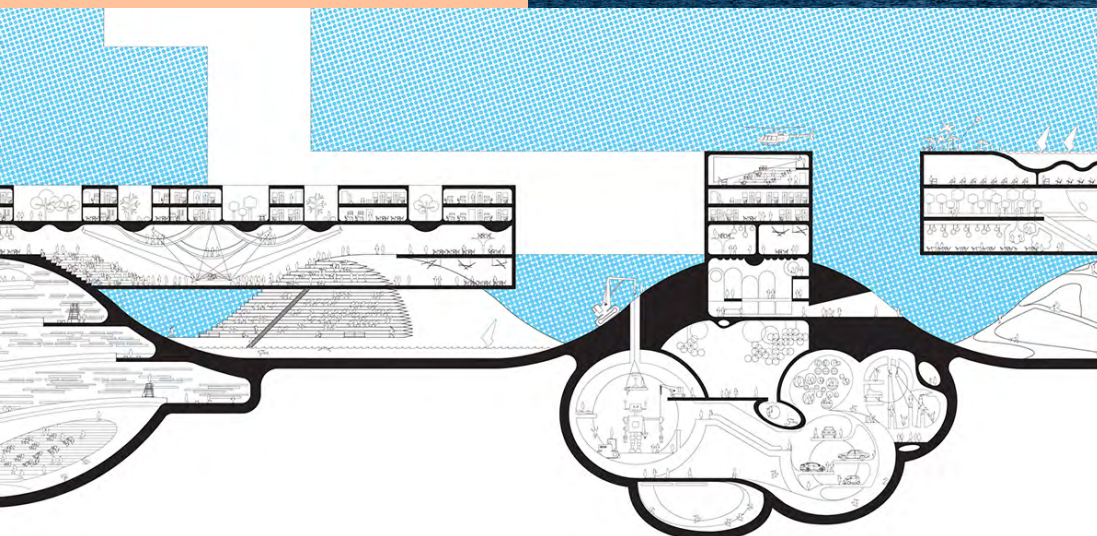
Inspiration for Creatives
from *Wolf-Gordon*

Issue 11, 2025 —
Curated by David Sokol



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—— Feature

In the Aggregate

Ficus Interfaith embraces—and tests—the timeless appeal of terrazzo.

Ficus Interfaith
Two Roosters (2020)

Cementitious terrazzo in wood frame

18" x 20" x 1.5"

Photo courtesy of Ficus Interfaith



Ryan Bush and Raphael Cohen (2024)

Photo courtesy of Ficus Interfaith

Three years after Ryan Bush and Raphael Cohen began making art together as Ficus Interfaith in 2014, the Rhode Island School of Design graduates had a revelation: terrazzo could be their medium of choice. Experimenting with this combination of cement and aggregate, the duo saw the material's potential to achieve vast scale. Cohen recalls that, at the same time, he and Bush were grasping that "terrazzo is rarely attributed to an individual. Unlike the paintings that we studied as vessels of individual genius, terrazzo is described anonymously, as part of a culture." Enamored with those contradictions—monumental yet authorless—the artists speedily amassed craft knowledge from YouTube videos and trial and error, and by that winter Bush and Cohen were using terrazzo for a Los Angeles

gallery show and pouring it into a Berkeley, California, sidewalk. Ficus Interfaith has centered its practice on the material ever since.

The newly minted experts handle terrazzo in a manner that harkens to the 1920s, when the invention of the electric grinder lowered terrazzo's fabrication costs. Bush and Cohen solder strips of zinc or brass into cookie cutter-like forms that they lay within a mesh metal tray, into which a slurry of dyed cement and various aggregates is then poured. After setting, the composition undergoes grinding, polishing, and sealing. "The strain is very rewarding, because it matches the weight of our ideas," Cohen says of the labor required of each artwork. Bush further comments that that process has helped the artists discern their individual expression from Ficus Interfaith: "There are limits to the line widths of the metal strips that we solder, there are limits to the dye sources. Those limitations make our two sets of hands disappear and allow us to create a third voice."

And that voice is loud, as Bush and Cohen deliberately distinguish Ficus Interfaith from the anonymous artists and artisans that preceded them. For one thing, careful viewers will spot aggregates that are unique to the partnership. Whereas terrazzo has been embedded with stone chips, sand, and crushed concrete since its invention, Cohen says, "We smash our own glass, we collect deer bones from the woods, and we experiment with these materials as well as shells, peach pits, and oyster shells." These ingredients are not only a personal signature—they also advocate to viewers to consume materials mindfully.

A second distinction between Ficus Interfaith artwork and conventional terrazzo is plainer to see. Rebuffing the colorful swaths and classical patterns of Art Deco-era terrazzo, Bush and Cohen treat the medium as a canvas by fashioning their cookie-cutter inlays into attention-grabbing words and images.

Top: Ficus Interfaith
Exit Sign (2024)

Cementitious terrazzo, zinc

10 x 14 x 1.5"

Photo courtesy of Ficus Interfaith

Bottom: Ficus Interfaith
Stop (2021)

Cementitious terrazzo, deer bones, walnut frame

30.5" x 30.5" x 2"

Photo courtesy of Ficus Interfaith



Ficus Interfaith
Believe What You Read (2022)

Cementitious terrazzo, zinc, cherry wood

21.5" x 43" x 1.25" (open)

21.5" x 21.5" x 2.5" (closed)

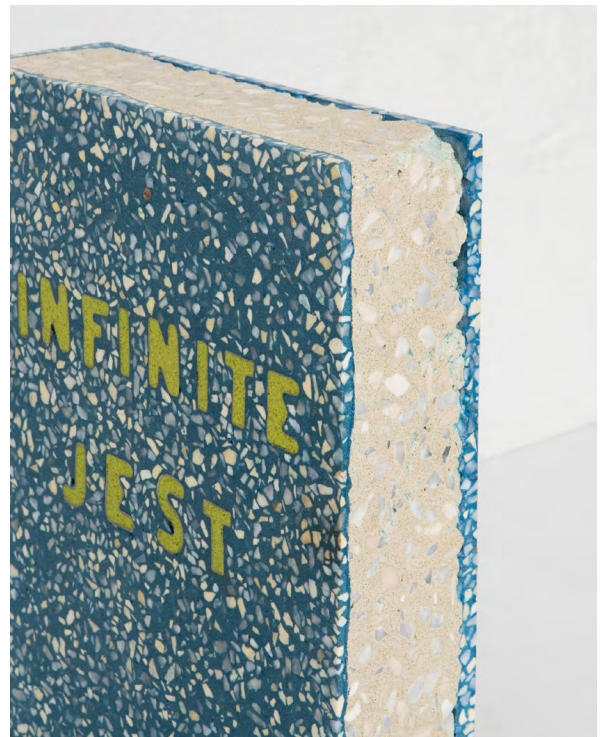
Photo courtesy of Ficus Interfaith



Cohen explains that he and Bush carefully select representations that engage in dialogue with terrazzo’s millennia-spanning durability. “The inlays allow us to explore different themes of mythology and timekeeping,” he says. Tapped by a Los Angeles homeowner to floor a freestanding backyard office in 2021, Ficus Interfaith completed a medallion of Icarus to invoke LA’s short but grand history of ambitious visions and broken dreams. For Deli Gallery’s exhibit “Earthly Pleasures” two years later, the duo created a demountable medallion of the river nymph Daphne—a meditation on solid and liquid, among other readings. “Myths are like terrazzo; both have lasted a long time.”

While commissioned works typically employ time-honored motifs, “we’re trying to push into new territory with exhibition works,” Cohen continues. For these self-initiated pieces, Ficus Interfaith often questions which artifacts of contemporary culture will have the same longevity as the stories of ancient Greece. The 2024 sculpture *Spongebob* is one case in point. Another is the terrazzo-poured versions of the Bible and *Infinite Jest* completed that same year: the juxtaposition prompts viewers to consider which books they consider to be timeless expressions of human experience, and it also pokes a little fun at the idolization of David Foster Wallace that Bush and Cohen observe among their peers.

Terrazzo dates back at least to ancient Egypt, where it served as the basis for mosaic tiles. Since then the material has undergone waves of reinterpretation and popularity. Long before the electric grinder’s appearance, 16th-century masons covered Venice in terrazzo made from marble scraps, while in the more recent past terrazzo has been reinvented by designers Shiro Kuramata and Max Lamb. Only time will tell whether we’re living in a golden age of terrazzo on par with the Renaissance-era Venice or the Roaring Twenties. But if future historians deem it so, then the innovative artwork of Ficus Interfaith will certainly have played a role.



Top: Ficus Interfaith
Infinite Jest Doorstop (2024)

Cementitious terrazzo

10.5" x 8" x 3"

Photo courtesy of Ficus Interfaith

Bottom: Ficus Interfaith
Spongebob (2024)

Cementitious terrazzo

24" x 18" x 1.25"

Photo courtesy of in Ficus Interfaith



—— Feature

An Epic Transformation

The Norwegian Scenic Routes program has turned less-traveled roads into must-see showcases of nature and culture.

The Atlantic Road, or *Atlanterhavsvegen* in Norwegian

Photo: Eline Karlsdatter Fladseth, Visit Northwest

In October 1984, transportation crews constructed the final bypass of Route 66 in Williams, Arizona. Protesters rightfully predicted that the work spelled the end of America's Main Street, and 15 percent of Route 66 is now gone. Could there be another way to deal with aging infrastructure?

In Norway, construction of the E39 connection to Denmark represents the largest transportation investment in its history. Yet the Scandinavian country has simultaneously reinvented vintage arteries as celebrations of place. Since 1993, the Norwegian Scenic Routes initiative has worked almost entirely with young Norwegian architects and landscape designers to build or modernize rest facilities and viewing spots along 18 roadways that may otherwise have faded into obscurity. This undertaking's geographic reach spans from Stavanger to Lapland. Its cultural ambitions are equally far-reaching. Whether upgrading ferry waiting rooms or building an all-new scenic overlook, the government has encouraged its collaborators to create deeply meaningful designs. Numbering approximately 200



Knut Wold with Jensen & Skodvin Arkitektkontor
Mefjell rest stop on the Sognefjellet route

Photo: Werner Harstad, Statens vegvesen

so far, some interventions amplify a site's natural features while others stand in stark contrast to landscape. All enhance visitors' comfort as well as their understanding of Norwegian identity—while providing a career break to dozens of talents in the process.

With the scenic routes now complete and Route 66's centennial on the near horizon, Americans may want to revive their historic infrastructure according to the Norwegian roadmap.

Sognefjellet

Statens vegvesen, Norway's government bureau of roadways, initiated the Norwegian Scenic Routes with four routes. One of these routes is Sognefjellet, which gets its name from the 4,705-foot mountain pass that it traverses between villages Lom and Gaupne. Sognefjellet is also home to the first cultural commission of the Scenic Routes initiative, at Mount Mefjellet. Working with Jensen & Skodvin Arkitektkontor, artist Knut Wold assembled enormous slabs of igneous rock into a craggy monolith whose center comprises a square void. Upon its opening, tourists flocked to the sculpture, using its portal-like interior to frame photographs of the rugged landscape.

Varanger

Skirting the Arctic Ocean, Varanger is the northernmost and most remote of the 18 scenic routes. The road may be even better described as a necklace of bird-watching destinations: a Vardø station made of angular concrete planes; a similarly muscular form in Hamningberg that's finished more like a cabin; and a suite of three whitewashed buildings on Mount Dømen whose pink-tinted glass stands apart from the snowy landscape and wards off rare Arctic birds from taking aim at watchers. All were designed by the young Norwegian studio Biotope.



Top: A bird-watching station on the Varanger route

Photo: Frid-Jorunn Stabell

Bottom: In Vardø, the Varanger route includes one of the only installations designed outside Norway: *The Damned, The Possessed and The Beloved* (2011) by Louise Bourgeois in collaboration with Peter Zumthor; architect Zumthor's separate Steilneset Memorial is visible in the background.

Photo: Jarle Wæhler, Statens vegvesen



Todd Saunders/Saunders & Wilhelmsen

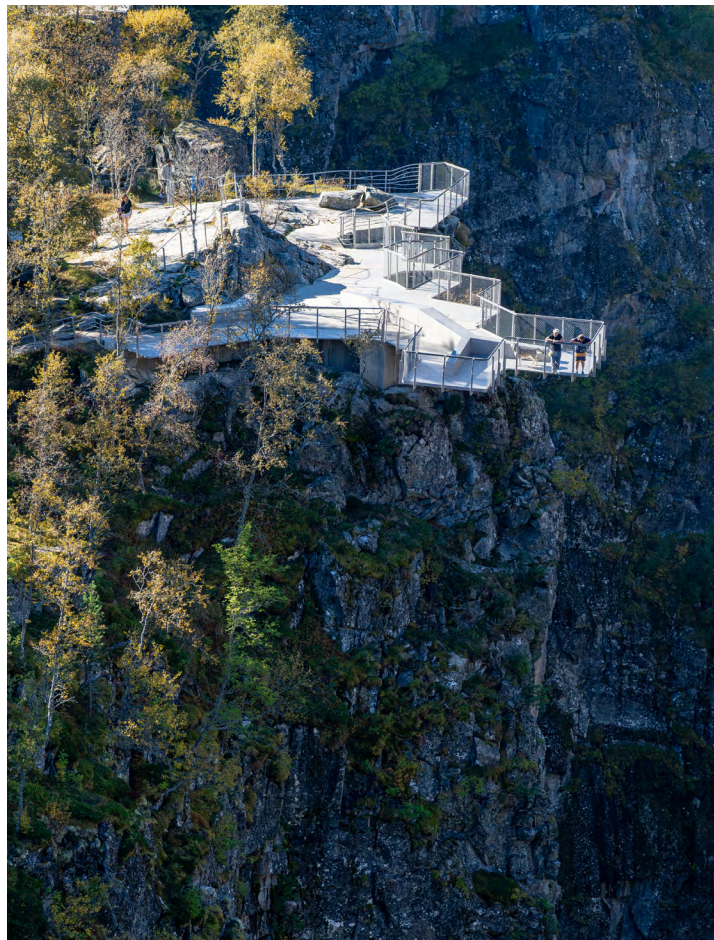
Located on the Aurlandsfjellet route, the Stegastein viewing platform is one of the most popular destinations in the Norwegian Scenic Routes program.

Photo: Frid-Jorunn Stabell

Hardangervidda

Due to its proximity to Bergen, Hardangervidda is a well-trod tour in the Norwegian Scenic Routes portfolio and a fitting spot for one of the final projects undertaken by Statens vegvesen. (Norway has deemed the routes “complete” because the roads are fully networked. The government is still commissioning architectural interventions and art installations and keeping existing ones in good working order.)

Driving along Hardangervidda feels like a glimpse into the planet’s roiling formative years. A mountain plateau plummets into a valley, which transitions just as suddenly into the head of one of Bergen’s largest fjords. The Vøringsfossen waterfall marks the first critical point in this palpably tectonic journey, and the Carl-Viggo Hølmekbakk-designed rest facility that shares its name with the falls has remade an unsafe overlook into a space for experiencing awe. After Hølmekbakk earned this commission in 2009, crews immediately got to work on viewing platforms whose sharply geometric podiums and spaghetti-like railings evoke the jagged rocks and eroded surfaces visible in the water. The architect’s full vision of Vøringsfossen as a campus, woven together by landscaped paths and stunning bridges, reached completion last fall.



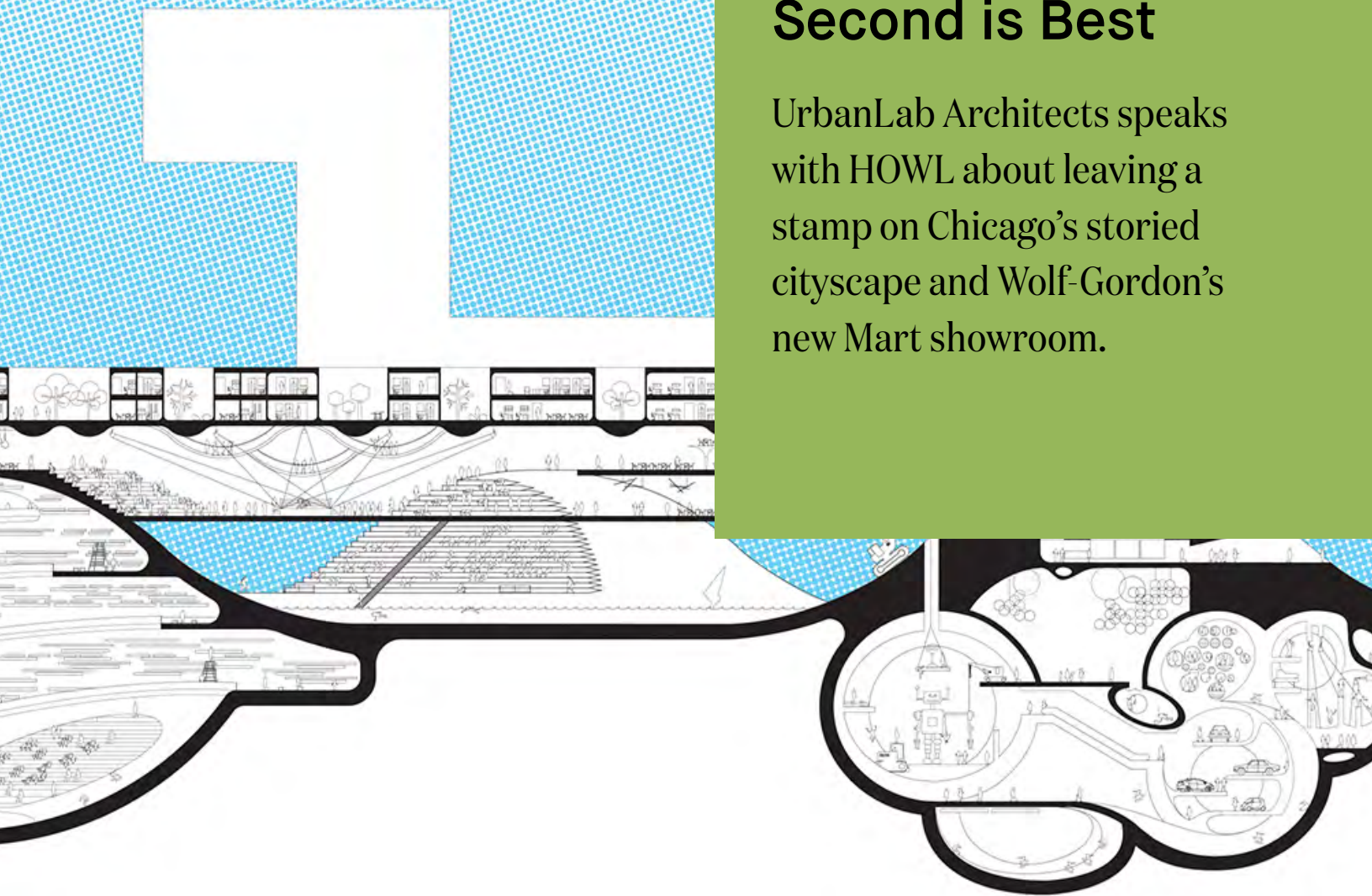
Carl-Viggo Hølmekbakk

Fossatromma viewing platform at Vøringsfossen

Photo: Frid-Jorunn Stabell

Second is Best

UrbanLab Architects speaks with HOWL about leaving a stamp on Chicago's storied cityscape and Wolf-Gordon's new Mart showroom.



Detail of Free Water District, a visioning plan for attracting water-intensive industries to the Great Lakes region

Photo courtesy of UrbanLab



With Riverview Bridge, UrbanLab connected two public parks flanking the north branch of the Chicago River to minimize erosion and vegetation disruption on the shorefront.

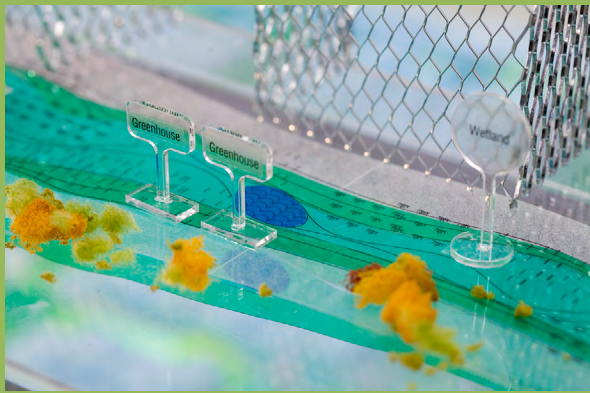
Photo courtesy of UrbanLab

—— While career opportunities brought you to Chicago, and what inspired you to stay?

Martin Felsen: Chicago has this culture of architecture—everyone knows something about it or is interested in it—which makes it different from New York or Los Angeles. And it doesn't have the boutique practices like those cities do. After we started building some of our own projects here, the possibility of forging our own identity here felt real.

—— That culture of architecture is borne from all these iconic buildings. Did you feel intimidated or energized by that legacy?

Sarah Dunn: When you're young and a little naïve, you practice with a certain freedom. For me that meant surveying the environment and questioning why things are the way they are, then proposing an alternative.



In Growing Water, a series of eco-boulevards capture and clean stormwater before it flows back to Lake Michigan. UrbanLab posited that eco-boulevards could simultaneously support biodiversity and public amenities, while mitigating urban heat island effect.

Photo: Michelle Litvin



An aerial view of Growing Water shows stormwater returning to Lake Michigan.

Rendering courtesy of UrbanLab



UrbanLab transformed a Chicago warehouse into the Shane Campbell Gallery while celebrating the building's industrial origins.

Photo: Michelle Litvin

——— What did that effort turn up?

Felsen: We had two ideas at the beginning. One had to do with our surprise that Chicago takes water out of the Great Lakes and relocates it out of the city, dumping it like waste. We gave a presentation to the mayor, which felt like unbelievable access for a young architect, and he shared our belief that we should hold onto that resource. So, we started thinking about infrastructure and working on some groovy design projects. The second idea also concerned Lake Michigan, which was to create an ecological trade zone for companies that use large amounts of water. That opened a lot of doors for us in urban design.

——— That's a bit of an understatement! For the next 15 years UrbanLab worked primarily on spectacular, city-building projects.

Felsen: Working across scales was really exhilarating and interesting. It gave us a chance to stretch what architecture can be and what architecture can do.

——— What compelled you to focus more on buildings and interiors recently?

Dunn: The smaller-scale projects offer us more control and speed. They also feel more important to the fewer people who are involved in them. This all speaks to our desire to produce a project that a client loves, while also letting us pursue ideas we're always interested in, like form and proportion.

Felsen: I've also realized that it's so much better to work on projects with fellow designers and design thinkers. I'm interested in thinking about pretty complicated organizational systems. With our recent design-build and speculative projects, the scale is different, but the organizational challenges and the potential impacts are still thrilling.

——— Could you say more about "ideas we're always interested in"? What motivates you to go to work each day?

Dunn: We're always trying to envision new worlds: new possibilities for how people live, or for supporting the lifestyles they have. When given more freedom by a trusting client like Wolf-Gordon, we do have a tendency to be more playful. But universally we're in conversation with architecture and the city, thinking about the way things are and how they can be better. Right now, for example,



For Mohawk House, UrbanLab removed volume from the residence's top floor to yield a courtyard.

Photo: Michelle Litvin

we're working on a series of houses in which there are very typical typologies nearby, and instead we're organizing the buildings to form courtyards. We're wondering how that produces a new set of possibilities for occupying an interior, for connecting to nature and your surroundings, and for experiencing one another.

Felsen: But when you're doing this world building, you can never say that things have to be better—implying that they're bad now. People don't want to hear that kind of criticism lobbed at their current lived experience. Change is hard enough.

—— Would you provide some more preview of the new Wolf-Gordon showroom?

Felsen: What I'm most excited about is how we dynamically portray the materiality of Wolf-Gordon. It happens at two different scales, picking up on our earlier talk about scale. In the most low-tech way possible, a visitor can experience individual products as well as Wolf-Gordon's vision just by walking the length of the showroom. It's going to be really interesting.

—— Looking back on your ambitious early work through newer lenses like landscape performance, biophilia, or participatory design, does it hold up?

Dunn: I think so, now more than ever. We surfaced ideas that other people were thinking about, because we weren't proposing anything that wasn't possible. (For some of our competition entries, we have proposed things for which the technology didn't exist.) Some people thought we were insane at the time, but most people are now conversant in those ideas. And we continue to flesh them out ourselves.

—— How do you stay ahead of the curve? Or, using this word in the most complimentary way, how do you stay insane?

Dunn: People don't like the word insane, or naïve, or hopeful, or open, or idealistic. These words are under assault. But you need to stay insane! You want to engage with the world, and the only way to do it every day is to look at the glass as half full. We don't consciously cultivate that attitude—maybe that's how we are, naturally—but something about Chicago makes it conscious. This city has a history of remaking itself again and again, and when you get to know a lot of different people, there is a positive, we're-in-this-together approach. I would say Chicago promotes a bold and collectivist approach, and we've made it our own.



On To 2050: Comprehensive Regional Plan for the Chicago Metropolis

Rendering courtesy of UrbanLab



Christine Tarkowski
Molten Drawing (2018-2021)

Molten glass and copper poured over steel

Commissioned for private client, Chicago, 2018

"New Glass Now," Corning Museum of Glass, 2019

"Sculpture Milwaukee," Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, 2021

Photo courtesy of Christine Tarkowski

——— @christinetarkowski

A Glass Act

Christine Tarkowski is an independent Chicago-based artist, a professor of fiber and material studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and, thanks to her inclusion in "Project: HI > AI," a lauded addition to Wolf-Gordon's lineup of contributors. The multihyphenate uses sculpture and installation to explore how social values manifest in the built environment and to question the stability of Western institutions. Tarkowski's Instagram account, launched in early 2023, documents her work's recent concentration in glass. That change of medium has been accompanied by a conceptual shift toward abstraction, highlighting the fragility of human-devised systems more generally.



Windy Chien
Diamond Ring (2024)

Sunbrella cordage, 24k gold thread, plywood

64" x 64" x 3"

Photo courtesy of Windy Chien

—— @windychien

Knowing the Ropes

Predating the axe and the wheel, ancient knots were likely originally used for trapping food, and then paved the way for more recent historical innovations like sailing, surgery, and even data storage. Yet by 2016, when San Francisco-based artist Windy Chien decided to learn and tie a new knot for every day on the calendar, most of humanity's 4,000 or so knots had fallen into obscurity. Chien's year of knots yielded a tremendous following, a 2016 book of the same name, and a new practice of rope sculpture. Ranging from handheld objects to monumental commissions, these works explore the potential of a single knot—taking the eye on a journey that reclaims the knot as a crucible of technology and expression.



Coil + Drift

Ridge Pendant

Brass with verdigris patina

24" x 21" x 22"

Photo: Zach Hyman

— @coilanddrift

Northern Exposure

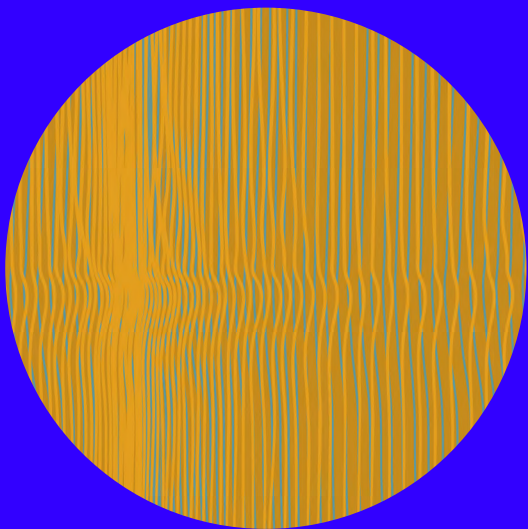
Thanks to the physical demands of performance, planning for a career beyond the stage is practically written into a professional dancer's job description. For John Sorensen-Jolink, whose company credits include Sleep No More and Lucinda Childs Dance, design beckoned as a second act. Since founding Coil + Drift in Brooklyn in 2016, Sorensen-Jolink has made furniture and lighting that embody the movements and shapes of his postmodern dance background, as well as choreography for film and live performance that underlines the relationship between humans and objects. The Portland, Oregon, native now runs the company entirely from upstate New York, and the move has added a place-based dimension to this minimalist, energetic work, with recent designs inspired by the natural forms and artisan communities of the Western Catskills.



— Upholstery

Mass

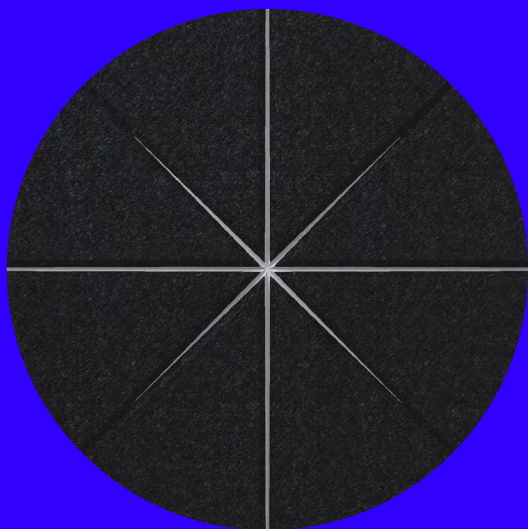
Terrazzo-inspired shapes in a low relief “float” on a high-loft marled ground woven with a diagonal orientation in this statement upholstery textile by Mae Engelgeer. The irregular shapes are shaded in a shiny ombré effect that contrasts metallic yarns into the cotton and wool backdrop of the fabric.



— Wallcovering

Striae

The gently wavering lines of this wallcovering resulted from designer Bradley L Bowers’ exploration of gesture and motion while algorithmically manipulating moiré effect patterns. *Striae*’s vertical lines contract and expand in a steady visual rhythm, inviting a stunning moment of pause and reflection in any interior.



— Acoustical

Pulsar

Like a bright star blinking in the night sky, GATHER Acoustical *Pulsar* catches the eye. The innovative gradient V-groove engraving allows the color of the design’s bottom layer to slowly reveal itself, intensifying the design’s starburst effect.



Exhibition

Letters Beyond Form: Chicago Types

Design Museum of Chicago

Chicago, Illinois

Until April 4, 2025

Just as people associate places with gardens or parks, buildings, and public art, typography contributes to community identity. In “Letters Beyond Form: Chicago Types,” curator Amira Hegazy gives typography its due as a placemaking tool. From graffiti writing and sign painting to more conventional forms of publication, the exhibition explores how Chicago’s diverse neighborhoods have been defined by letterforms historically—and how local designers and lettering artists express love and advocacy for their neighborhoods to this day. Workshops as well as an open-source map of Chicago’s typographic landscape invite viewers to directly participate in this heritage.

Tubs
Calligraphy inspired by the Chicago flag,
created on opening night (2024)

Photo: Ceninye Harris, Design Museum of Chicago



Exhibition

Visible Vault: Open Collections Storage

National Building Museum

Washington, DC

Ongoing

Most museums lack room to show their permanent collections with any breadth. In the case of the National Building Museum, limited space at Washington, DC’s Pension Building has prevented the institution from displaying large or unruly objects that are essential to understanding the history of the constructed environment. “Visible Vault: Open Collections Storage” remedies this absence, by showcasing building mockups and drafting tools that had belonged to renowned architects like I.M. Pei, César Pelli, and Frank Gehry. The just-opened exhibition also includes sections dedicated to architectural toys, the work of artist Raymond Kaskey, and the Pension Building itself.

“Visible Vault: Open Collections Storage” at the National Building Museum. Photographed by Stephen A. Miller, StudioM13

Photo: Stephen A. Miller



Publication

Modernist New York Map

Blue Crow Media

Drops May 8, 2025

In 2009, Derek Lamberton parlayed an international career in journalism into an independent publishing house devoted to city maps for fellow globetrotters. Six years later he struck cartography gold with the launch of maps dedicated to Brutalist architecture. Lamberton’s New York map whetted residents’ and tourists’ appetite for even more Big Apple, and in response he has produced guides to the city’s trees, subways, and Art Deco masterpieces. The latest entrant to that series is *Modernist New York Map*, a broader survey of 20th-century feats, and *Black History New York Map* follows closely on its heels in June.

Blue Crow’s previous New York-themed publications include *Art Deco New York Map*, *Concrete New York Map*, and *New York Subway Architecture & Design Map*

Photo courtesy of Blue Crow Media



— Exhibition

Confluence of Nature: Nancy Hemenway Barton

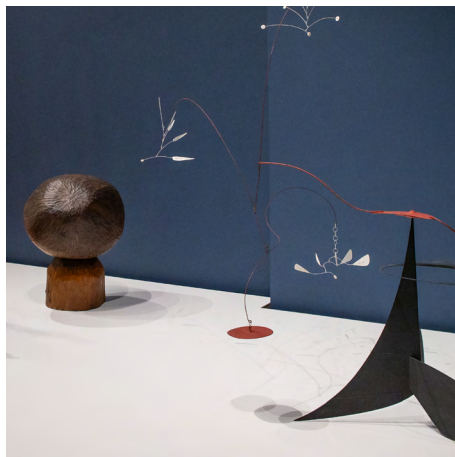
Denver Art Museum
Denver, Colorado

Until October 8, 2025

"Each artist develops his or her style from the environment. Usually, it is the place of birth and childhood that burns brightest in the expression of a creative need, sometimes the development comes from circumstances of life." So posited Nancy Hemenway Barton, whose own tapestry work straddled multiple life stages. This exhibition focuses on the 31-year period when Hemenway sourced handloomed fabrics from the communities where she had lived and traveled, which she then sculpted into large-scale wall reliefs that celebrate Indigenous craft and the landscape forms of her native Maine.

Undated portrait of Nancy Hemenway Barton

Courtesy of Wheaton College: Gift of the Barton Family. Folder Title: Nancy Hemenway Barton Collection. Marion B. Gebbie Archives and Special Collections. Wallace Library. Wheaton College (MA).



— Exhibition

Following Space: Thaddeus Mosley & Alexander Calder

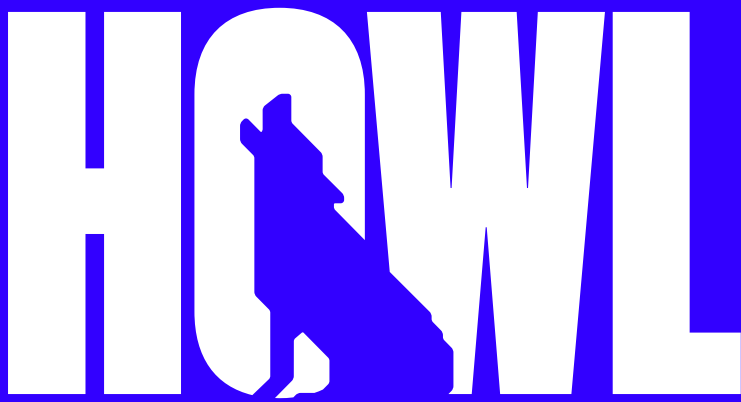
Seattle Art Museum
Seattle, Washington

Until June 1, 2025

Calder at SAM is a newly launched initiative to steward 45 important artworks by Alexander Calder donated to the Seattle Art Museum by collectors Jon and Kim Shirley, and to examine Calder's continuing impact on American culture. Pairing selections from the Shirley collection with sculptures by Thaddeus Mosley, "Following Space" is the second exhibition to highlight Calder's still-unfolding creative legacy. In collaboration with curator Catharina Manchanda, Mosley chose five Calder pieces to put on view alongside 17 meditations on weight and balance that he created between 2001 and 2024.

Installation view of "Following Space: Thaddeus Mosley & Alexander Calder," Seattle Art Museum, 2024, © 2024 Calder Foundation, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Photo: Natali Wiseman



Inspiration for Creatives
from *Wolf-Gordon*

Next Issue: Summer 2025.
See you then!

Feedback and suggestions for
future content should be addressed
to howl@wolfgordon.com.



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