



Museum  
of  
Craft  
and  
Folk Art

**FIAT LUX**

Randy Colosky New Works

## FIAT LUX : Randy Colosky New Works

November 11, 2011–March 10, 2012

Museum of Craft and Folk Art

MOCFA proudly presented newly commissioned work by Bay-Area conceptual artist Randy Colosky. The artist works with exacting physicality using commonplace and industrial materials altering the standard functions of traditional craftsman processes with a strong emphasis on the architectonic. Delving deeply into the character of materials, he dissects their codes and activates them with new ideas and associations.

Randy Colosky's practice is both conceptual and material-driven. Informed by theories from the domains of science and philosophy, Colosky probes the hidden properties of utilitarian and cast-off materials. Many of the works revolve around structures of repetition, tension, containment and the unorthodox possibilities of sculptural transformation.

Trained in traditional ceramics and building construction, Colosky freely incorporates anything within his intellectual and physical reach. Subtle, thought provoking and often witty, the work subverts received definitions of craft, art and design. These newly commissioned pieces challenge assumptions, while hovering around universal ideas of spirituality and transcendence.

— CURATED BY NATASHA BOAS AND JENNIFER MCCABE

Photography by Jay Jones.

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## Detonating Spent Light in a Treasury of Shadows

BY DAVID CUNNINGHAM

*“The world is not a fixed image. It is always necessary to blow up the universe of things, or to reduce it to a grain of sand or into molecule clouds in order to reconstruct it in the imagination” —THOMAS BAYRLE*

There are no pyrotechnics in FIAT LUX. The work is not kinetic, there are no moving parts or special effects, there is no sound or video and the lighting is even and un-theatrical, yet the first impression on entering the space is of a convulsive energy barely contained by the gallery walls. For all their factual ‘stasis’ and the ordinariness of their materials many pieces exhibit highly kinesthetic and optical qualities that require the observer to constantly shift their vantage point to fully apprehend the work. Propelling visitors through the space, the installation induces a strong awareness of the bodily and a foreshadowing effect that is also eerily cinematic. There is a palpable sense of expansion and contraction, compression and tension in the space that is echoed in many of the individual pieces, some of which leak out to the lobby and the exterior windows of the Museum. Appearing to float, leap, crawl and even slice the gallery walls the installation engenders a powerful sense of the explosive.

Read as a collection of fourteen discrete works, they are notable for their outward diversity of form, material and method. Seemingly autonomous and independent—no two pieces (aside from two paired drawings) are alike, constructed in the same way or made from the same materials. However this apparent heterogeneity is belied by a palpable sense of cohesion and connection between the works that is not a mere function of their proximity in the space of the gallery and suggests that they are acting somehow in concert—that they are somehow one, not just components of a greater whole but different manifestations of a singular entity.

Closer inspection reveals shared characteristics and strategies. All works display an impressive economy of means—materials are non-exotic and most works use only one or two materials. These are employed as basic units (or ‘building blocks’) in repetitive or iterative structures. In many of the pieces complex patterns and systems develop out of the multiplicity of simple interactions between the slightly differentiated base units evoking the concepts of ‘emergence’ and ‘spontaneous order’ associated with natural structures such as ant colonies, bee hives

*(cover)*

**The McNear Attenuation**, 2011

Approximately 2600 soap shape bricks  
(1/2 brick lengthwise) custom made at  
McNear Brick Company in Marin County  
and power chiseled, 8 x 157 x 120 inches



(right)  
**Axis Mundi**, 2011  
Approximately 1000 1 inch aluminum shower  
tubes with end caps and aluminum wire

and snow flakes and the unplanned development of cities. The materials are subjected to physical forces or processes such as compression, tension, oxidation, transference that remove the use component of the material, effecting (sometimes violent) physical transformations resulting in material and spatial expressions evocative of spiritual concepts of transcendence.

Colosky has discussed his use of meditation and there is a strong sense that his practice and approach are highly autotelic. Many of the pieces (especially the Iteration drawings) suggest that they may have been created while the artist was in a 'flow-state' and recurrent themes in the work suggest an affinity with the Taoist discipline of overcoming the duality of self and object. This is further amplified in readings of the work that consider Colosky's deep interest in cosmology, history and areas of scientific research such as string theory, relativity, space-time, and quantum mechanics to name but a few. He has described the drawings in the 'Iteration' and 'Non Deterministic Algorithm' series as "moments of space time". Big Bang and Cyclical Universe theory share many affinities with older cosmological systems and philosophies such as the Hindu concept of a universe in a constant state of flux through cyclical phases of creation, life and destruction (Brahma | Vishnu | Shiva).

*"When you break something up, you create things.  
When you create something, you destroy things.  
Material things have no creation or destruction.  
Ultimately these concepts connect as one."  
—ZHUANGZI (4TH C. CHINESE PHILOSOPHER, PROTO  
ANARCHIST, AUTHOR OF 'THE BUTTERFLY DREAM')*

Paradoxically reconciling contradictions, each piece operates on a polarity or dualism—mass/ lightness, transparency/ opacity, reflection/ distortion, delicacy/violence. Appearing alternately archaic or futuristic they are objects both out of time and of it, timeless and timely. In an era of exponentially accelerating knowledge and mind boggling research—where theory struggles to stay ahead of reality and concepts such as claytronics, smartdust, cloud computing and quantum urbanism

are rapidly prototyped and materialized as product—Colosky's practice exhibits a deep awareness and familiarity with current theory across a wide range of fields and a measured skepticism about the virtual utopias promised by new technologies. Far from a reactionary position it is born of an advocacy for, and spiritual awareness of the human need for embodied experience and what Lydia Mathews refers to as the Craftsman's "participatory knowledge" which she defines as "the accumulated memory resulting from direct practice within one's body..." positing it as a form of conceptualism that "manifests the intricate relationship" between the cerebral and the corporeal. Irish sculptor Michael Warren has further observed that mystic Simone Weil considered the sustained attention required by craft "as a sort of metaphysical counterweight...especially when it is directed towards inert matter." A type of 'moral gravity'.

Considered as a non-linear series of sustained experiments in the extraction and projection of ideas from and onto form, the objects emerge not as mere repositories of knowledge, graveyards of fact, frameworks for narrative but as accumulators of experience, amplifiers of consciousness, catalytic agents of personal transformation. Distilled, abstract and rooted in their own materiality they are also densely allusive. Physical manifestations of embodied thought they function as flux capacitors, porous mirrors, vehicles for reflection and contemplation. Positing the individual pieces as analogs for discrete 'events' in space-time collectively manifesting a morphing topology, with the gallery itself a type of manifold—a temporary map or measure of Colosky's constantly unfolding practice emerges—triggering a labyrinthine series of associations for which their titles are not clues but a form of 'Ariadne's thread' to help us each along our own "single dancing path to the center and out".

*"All material in nature, the mountains and the streams  
and the air and we, are made of light which has been  
spent, and this crumpled mass called material casts a  
shadow, and the shadow belongs to light."  
—LOUIS KAHN*







**Another Shape of Things to Come – Part 2, 2011**  
Cut and joined stainless steel  
spheres, 48 x 60 x 48 inches



**The Pressure to Hold Together that Which Held Things Back, 2011**  
Salvaged 8 x 12 inch redwood  
retaining wall timbers, all  
thread, bolts, washers, poplar  
dowels and PL adhesive,  
90 x 115 x 122 inches





**The Misguided Carpenter**, 2011  
Architectural intervention with saw blade,  
¼ inch x 22 feet

*(next page, spread)*  
**Caption?**









**Barbican, 2011**  
Engineered Corderite ceramic honeycomb  
and PL adhesive, 80 x 21.5 x 6 inches

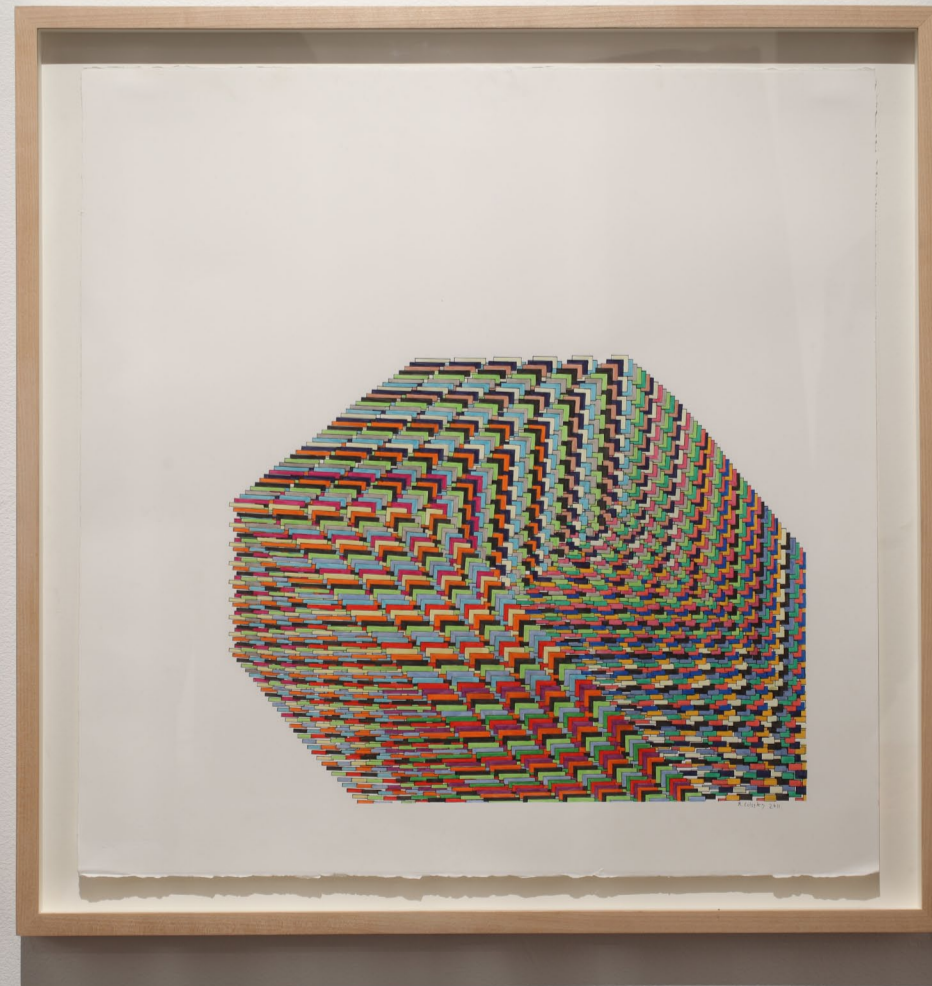
*(right)*  
Detail of Barbican, 2011





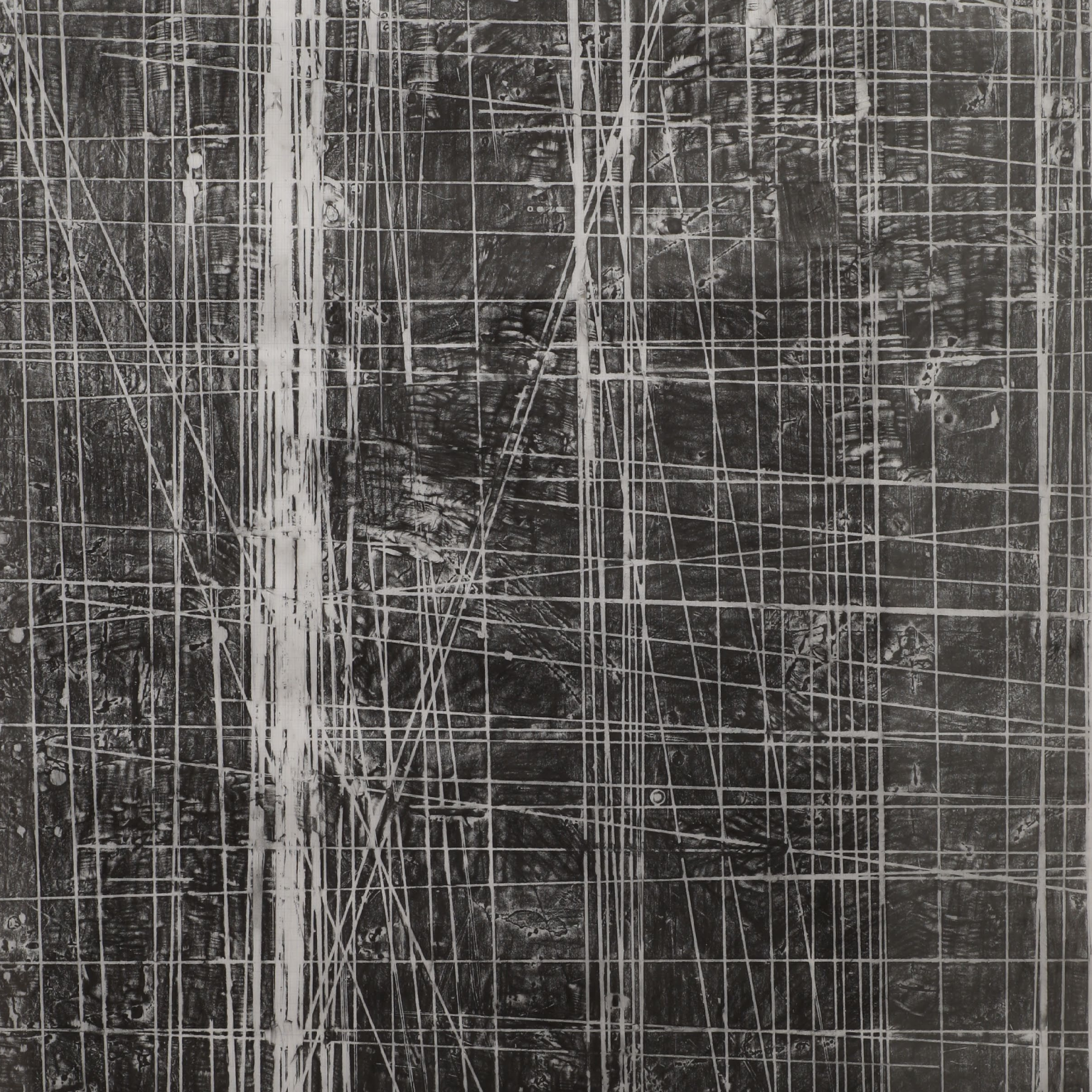


Iteration #3, 2011  
Pen and ink on paper, 22 x 22 inches



Iteration #6, 2011  
Pen and ink on paper, 22 x 22 inches





Detail of **Untitled**, 2010  
Rubbing with graphite on artist's cutting table, 54 x 34 inches

## Interview with Randy Colosky and Curator Natasha Boas

**NATASHA BOAS:** Randy, when I think of your work I think of the Richard Artschwager quote: "I am making objects for non-use... by killing off the use part, non-use aspects are allowed living space, breathing space."

**RANDY COLOSKY:** I love this, I really relate to it, it's part of my practice for sure. I like to use materials that are familiar to a wide range of people but show that the materials in and of themselves are design elements and content or that the their function can be elevated to a higher plane of thought or optical dynamic, like the "Axis Mundi" piece or the "Barbican" piece. You know Artschwager was a furniture maker at one point in his life and had intimate knowledge of those materials, I think that's why it can't really be imitated. I love his work.

**NB:** *FIAT LUX* marks a shift in your practice from say your *Ampersand* show of last year. Is it the scale or the focus that has changed for you? I see the works in *FIAT LUX* as very clearly articulated and related to each other, as if you have moved to another level of practice.

**RC:** The deviation—if you want to go there—between the two shows for me is that the work in the *Ampersand* show was more cerebral. The scale of the works was designed so they could be absorbed and reasoned with. The *Ampersand* show was also a revisiting of ideas that I had been working around for many years that finally found a place to be fully expressed without any attenuation.

The opportunity you have presented me with a commissioned show at MOCFA sort of opened my Pandora's box. This show is also cerebral in the same way, but it's loaded with a lot of emotional content. I think this has evolved out of the validation that I received from the *Ampersand* show after hanging around the art world for so long (pause), and now I feel more liberated to share that part of myself in the work. So in regards to the scale of the works yes, there are some that are larger in scale because with greater emotion come greater gestures.

**NB:** You have a traditional art-school background in ceramics as well as hands-on experience with building. How do both of these paths converge in *FIAT LUX*?

**RC:** My art history in school was more about the cultural history of ceramics, which at its base is about form, function and design. Working in the building trades, ceramic industry, set building and as a cook in restaurants, you have no choice but to find the most economical ways to get things done which is also a predominant theme in the history of ceramics. In my occupations, I have had to do a lot of design or process problem solving. What happened for me working construction jobs is that I began to see the interesting formal aesthetic moments in the materials and processes of work I was doing. Seeing giant orderly stacks of building materials, smoothing plasters with slightly different colors in them or when I was a cook, watching the swirl of different color liquids mixing in a giant vat with the steam rising up, became inspiring and the line between what art was and what I was doing as an occupation became blurred.

Now the sense of discovery in my work comes through working this line with materials. For example, the engineered ceramic piece "Barbican" is made of a material that is manufactured for purely industrial purposes but has some unique optical and sculptural properties that offer an opportunity for the viewer to personally connect with the work beyond any theoretical concepts.



**NB:** You have some central themes in *FIAT LUX*—can you address some of them? Modular repetitions, tension, optical qualities of materials, use of empty space?

**RC:** Well, the elements in your list are for me poetic design tools to get at something more elusive. *FIAT LUX* is more an overall theme of the show, which directly translates to “Let light be made.” This concept for me is my way of attempting to find ways of aligning myself with what I see is the larger creative force that is our existence—and then exploring ways to share the inspiration I feel working on art. So utilizing concepts like iteration, fractals, quantum mechanics, chemistry, biology, physics, scale (and the list goes on and on) help me try to understand, in a more intimate way, the nature of what we are. By creating physical manifestations of these ideas, however awkwardly, helps me move toward this concept of *FIAT LUX*.

**NB:** There is a strong spiritual element to the work. “Axis Mundi” is a direct reference to the cosmic axis in religion or mythology, the connection between Heaven and Earth, the higher and lower realms. The image appears in art history in both religious and secular contexts. You have expressed to me that it is important that art engages spirituality as a central part, not in a religious way, but in the largest humanist way.

**RC:** Well first off, to be honest, I didn’t know what “Axis Mundi” was when I was making the piece (laughs). The concept for the piece started around the idea of how rain falling for some can cause a catastrophic situation but for others rain falling can be a solution to a catastrophic situation—but in the end the rain is rain either way. The overall idea was based in Buddhism and how natural elements function in our world.

But when my assistant Alison OK Frost and I started physically working on the piece, it started to take on this quality of an apparition like a ghost floating in the air between two places. She referred to it as the “Axis Mundi” and I was like, what’s that? (laughs). So it became the title of the piece.

There is a point I would like to clarify here (pause) and that is that my own experience with my work is not an experience that I expect viewers to have. I think “Axis Mundi” is a nice overall concept title for how the piece functions in idea and appearance, but I really try to make my work as economical as possible in regards to narrative or reference. Part of why I have become so interested in artists like Fred Sandback, Richard Long and Agnes Martin and the other minimalists, is that their works—although very theoretical—allowed the viewer to ultimately have his or her own reaction. So yes, the piece for me is about the idea of dimensions overlapping, which could be about heaven and earth or it could easily be about something like neutrinos passing through the earth.

**NB:** You don’t really make a separation between your artistic practice and your life?

**RC:** A lot of the underlying ideas of why my pieces exist revolve around the ideas of contradiction, tension, impulse control and transformation. One example in the show is the redwood piece which is titled “The Pressure to Hold Together That Which Held Things Back.” The wood was actually salvaged from a retaining wall in Walnut Creek and was literally used to hold something back, and I have made this piece with bolts that actually hold the piece together with the force of pressure. But it’s more than that for me, it’s a physical manifestation of how in the past I would build up these formidable angry walls in my mind against things and then it would take all this energy to maintain the walls. As I get older, with a lot of help and the incorporation of some very basic spiritual principals, I am now able to manifest these experiences in my work.



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