

paul myoda  
poly-perspectives

essay by lindsay caplan

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SPILT Gallery

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# *Multiple Perspectives as Symbolic Form*

Lindsay Caplan

“... it is essential to ask of artistic periods and regions not only whether they have perspective, but also which perspective they have.”

Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 1927.

When describing a painting, we often take refuge in metaphors that reiterate the flat, rectangular constraints of the canvas: window, mirror, wallpaper, screen. To describe a sculpture, however, is to invoke the viewer's body through a language of balance, movement, and scale. Relief jams these two modes together; it juxtaposes perspectives and mixes metaphors. Both experientially and conceptually, relief asserts the partiality of any single perspective, appealing variably to eye and body, phenomenological and illusionistic space. When it comes to relief, perspective is never synthesized or settled.

When, in 1937, the art historian Erwin Panofsky called one-point-perspective *symbolic form*, he sought to implement this unsettling, relativizing effect through art-historical analysis.<sup>1</sup> Using formal analysis and comparison—in a sense, a method that echoes the very structure of relief—Panofsky demonstrated that perspective is not universal, biological, or static but historically contingent, determined variably by convention, expectation, precedent, belief. Denaturalizing linear perspective was particularly challenging, however. From its invention in fifteenth-century Florence, linear perspective (what Panofsky calls *perspectiva artificialis*) purported to synthesize experiential with ideal, diagrammatic space. Finally, it appeared, the laws of logic aligned with

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<sup>1</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, translated by Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone, 1997). The epigraph is on pg. 41.



*Poly-Perspective: Tokonoma, 2023-24*  
Copper, brass, acrylic, LED light  
36" x 23" x 9"

the operations of observation.<sup>2</sup> A formula could generate, as if by magic, a precise depiction of depth, space, orientation, and in so doing create a sense of continuity among real and depicted ground. And while scholars have since demonstrated that this seamless synthesis was perhaps the most illusionistic aspect of linear perspective, it was only when the camera could do it better that artists decided that there was something else to do with the humble materials of canvas and paint.

Armed with relativizing comparison, Panofsky challenged not only the assumed naturalism and universalism of linear perspective, but also this fantasy of perspectival correlation. Comparison is often dismissed as operating through likeness, but it is premised on recognizing difference and arguing which differences matter. Panofsky might have unsettled one synthesis (among mathematical and empirical space), but his argument about the social significance of form relied on another one: between the artistic depiction of space and epistemological structure. When Panofsky expanded his analysis of perspective into a generalized method of iconology in 1939, he defined it as “a method of interpretation which arises from synthesis rather than analysis.” The “equipment for interpretation” for iconologists is “synthetic intuition,” defined as “familiarity with the essential tendencies of the human mind, conditioned by personal psychology and *Weltanschauung*.”<sup>3</sup> Art history develops in this space pried open by Panofsky; he is emblematic of a move that came to characterize a central focus of art historians who, aiming to relativize and multiply perspective—uncoupling it from biology and nature—came to correlate the depiction of space with a historical *worldview*.

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<sup>2</sup>For more on this alignment, see Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven, Yale, 1990).

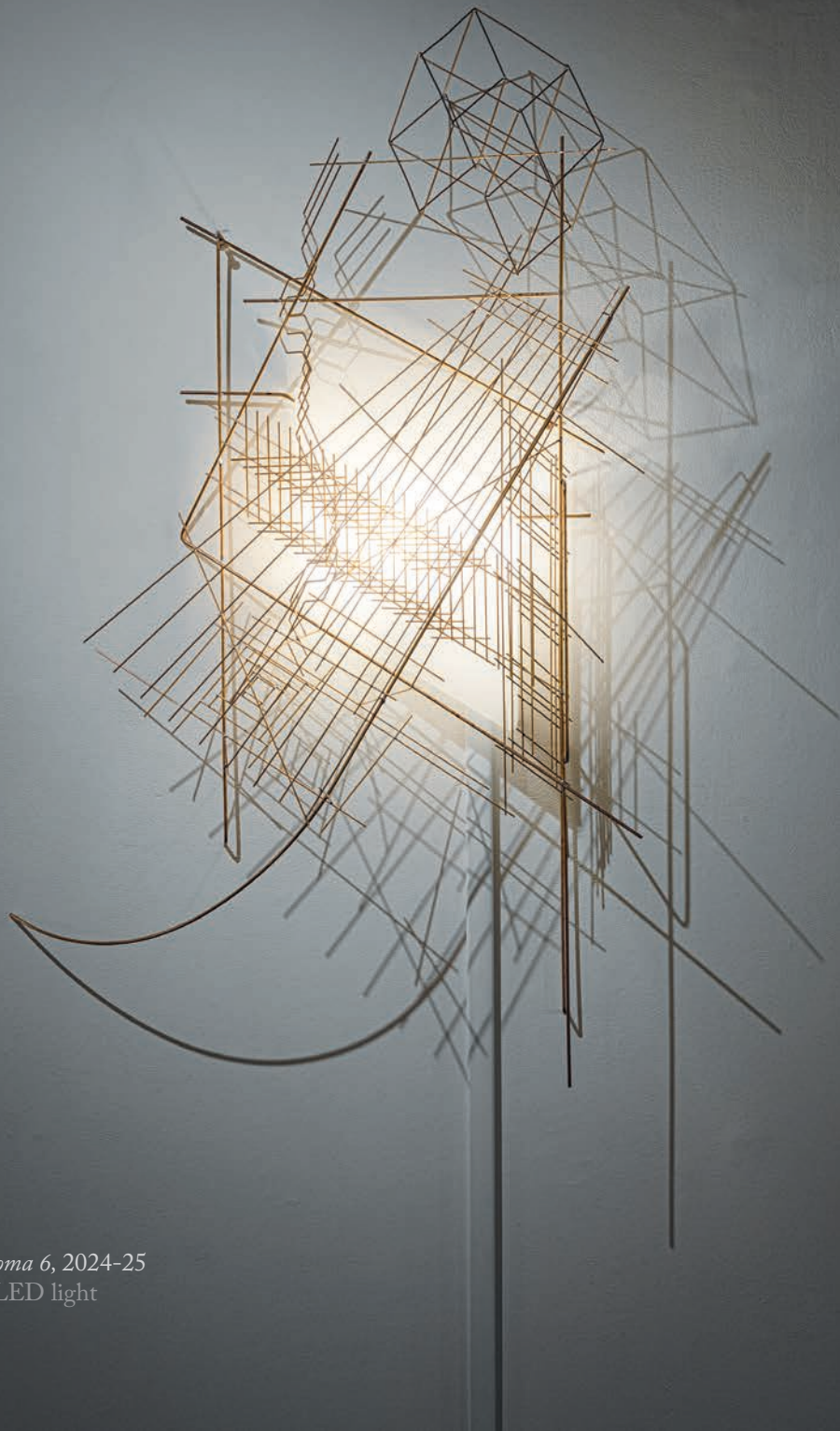
<sup>3</sup>Erwin Panofsky, “Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art,” in Donald Preiosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 229.



*Poly-Perspective: Tokonoma 4, 2024-25*  
Copper, brass, acrylic, LED light  
26" x 34" x 16"

In Paul Myoda's *Poly-Perspective* reliefs, the contemporary artist plays with this association of systems of visualization, subjective orientations, and the historicity of perspectives and mutability of points of view. Myoda's work functions as a deliberate divergence from the unified symbolic form. His works stage a confrontation with multi-perspectives and what it might mean to materialize this multiplicity as itself a kind of symbolic form. When discussing the work, Myoda invokes all sorts of ways of viewing, thinking, and experiencing the world: mathematics, music (and its rhythms), digital space, virtual reality, video games, to say nothing of myriad painting and sculptural traditions spanning cultures and countries. To be sure, the work's abstraction allows it to invoke these many references—abstraction is notoriously unrestrained in its mnemonic capacity. But there is also something entirely ordinary about the work's multi-perspectival points of view: it resonates with quotidian ways of seeing, a reminder that one moves across machine-aided perspectives and our embodied, historical, biographical, and contingent positionalities over the course of a single day.

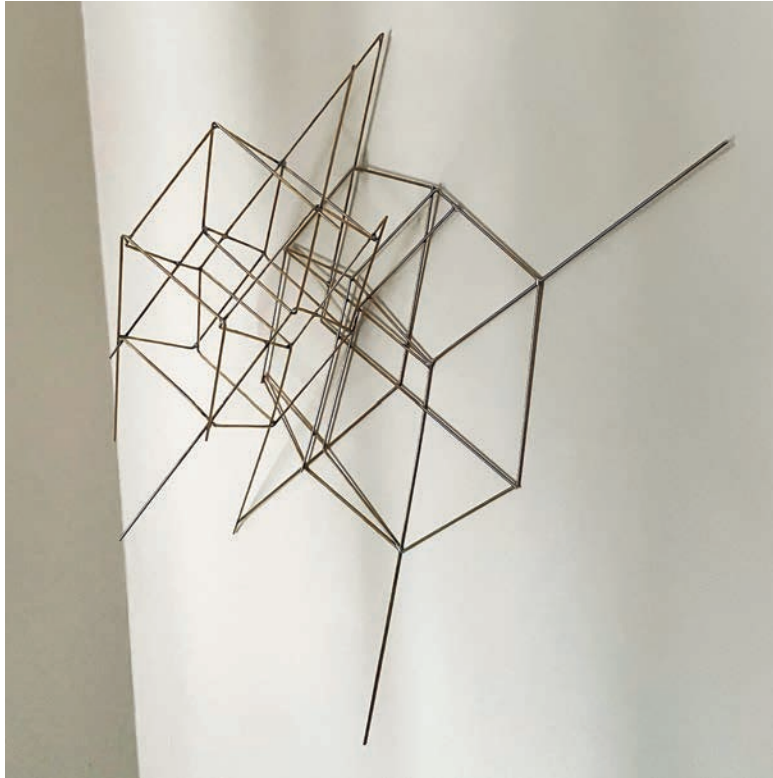
This dynamic of mediation and movement shapes Myoda's process of producing these works. He proceeds by shuttling back and forth between simulated and material means. Working across pen, markers, and 3D software, sketching and modeling, Myoda operates at the interface of experiential and ideal space even before beginning to compose a piece. A varied approach that combines hand-drawn renderings with the use of computer programs allows the artist to work across multiple perspectival systems—linear, isometric, even impossible. Myoda frequently starts the compositional process with the concept of the hypercube, a mathematical principle (a cube in  $n$  dimensions) that is impossible to experience. With



*Poly-Perspective: Tokonoma 6, 2024-25*  
Copper, brass, acrylic, LED light  
40" x 21" x 10"

the advent of computerized tools for diagramming and visualizing concepts, engineers attempted a picture of a hypercube (the tesseract, or cube in 4D), but notoriously the result is more a meta-commentary on the impossibility of integrating mathematical and experiential space. The tesseract is thus an emblem of divergence; it is a shape that the mind can imagine, but the eye can never see.

Myoda's work materializes this conceptual and physical friction. They are at every step of the creative process iterative and experimental: the making and breaking of composition proceeds over time as Myoda himself shuttles between the position of artist (creator) and spectator (stepping back to observe what the machine has generated). Once Myoda arrives at a shape he wants to pursue from diagram to material, he works with a machine to help with the fashioning of copper, brass, and bronze wire, further integrating hand-made and automated processes in order to execute these idiosyncratic curves and shapes. He then assembles the elements into a sculptural object, incorporating light both within the work and considering the surrounding space. Once installed, more iterations follow as he considers the reflectivity of the wire as well as the shadows on the wall. In both the modes of modeling and manufacture, Myoda is drawing on a history of modern artists who turn to machines, automation, and simulation software to break the programming of perspective, to expand, amplify, and multiply one's experiences and worldview. So too is he invoking a long history of artists working with light to assert the mutability and contingency of experiential space.



*Poly-Perspective: Hypercube Shadow, 2023*  
Copper, bronze  
12" x 14" x 8"

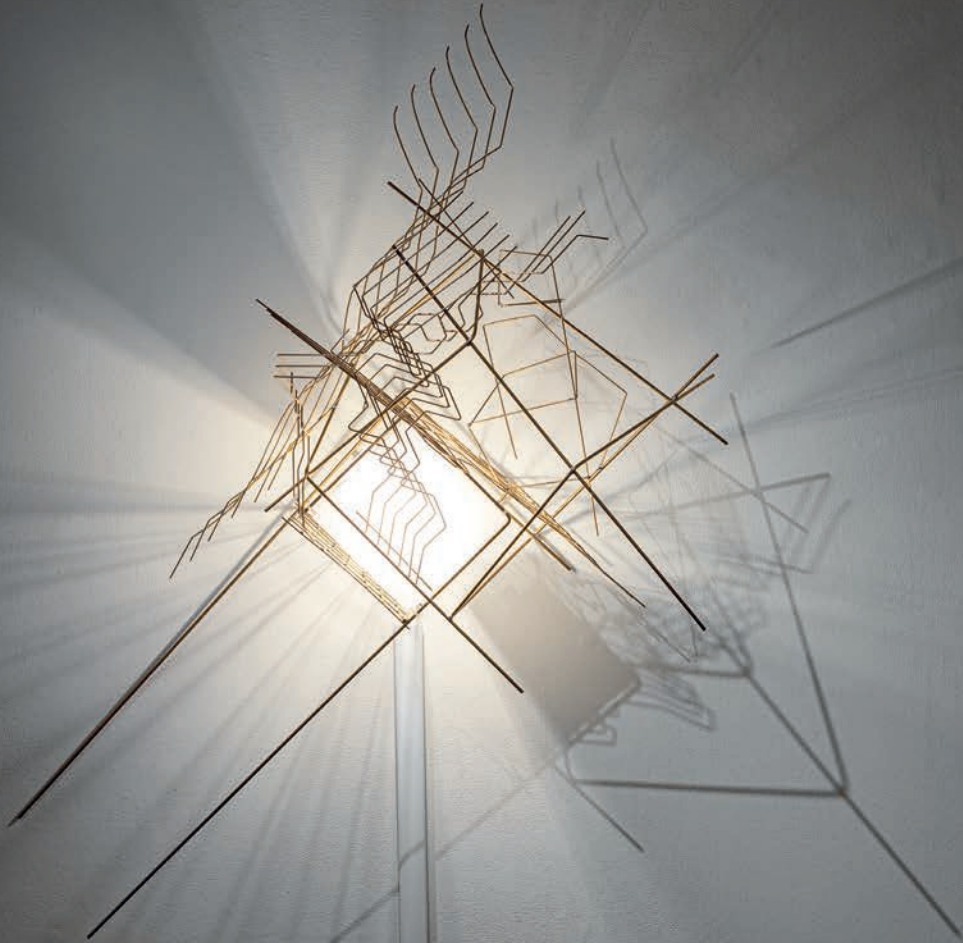
If linear perspective was the symbolic form of a centralized, individualized ego, these spindly, abstract objects made from illuminated planes and wire lines are the symbolic form of a decentralized, unstable, fragmented engagement with the material world. Perspectival systems coexist but never converge. This constitutes its own kind of reconciliation; in Myoda's work, there is a straddling—not synthesis but rather simultaneity—across different sculptural traditions, and with it the struggle with whether art should reimagine or concretize space.<sup>4</sup> Of course, this idea that reconciliation (between art and life, experienced and logical space) was always a fantastical illusion. Myoda's reliefs take their place among artistic and art-historical poly-perspectival practices that aim not to stabilize certainties or reconcile real and imagined but to exist in the space and time among the convergences and divergences as a uniquely contemporary symbolic form. His *Poly-Perspectives* reinsert an awareness of the relationality and relativity of perspective, giving this artistic and art-historical convention new resonance with our multifariously machine-mediated age.

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<sup>4</sup> It was in pursuit of ending instability and the vicissitudes of subjective perspective that motivated Russian artist Vladimir Tatlin to make what he called “counter-reliefs” in 1914, taking everyday materials like wood, metal, paper, and string, assembling abstract forms that blurred the lines between painting and sculpture. Writing of Tatlin's work in the 1970s, art historian Rosalind Krauss described them as eradicating the distance between art (depicted) and life (real). Certainly, Tatlin was working at a time when art's political impact hinged on dispensing with illusion and reconnecting viewers to their sense of embodied, lived experience (and thus one another and the world). Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), 53–56.



*Poly-Perspective: Becoming Hypercube 4, 2024-25*  
Copper, brass, acrylic, LED light  
32" x 22" x 9"



*Poly-Perspective: Becoming Hypercube 3, 2024-25*  
Copper, brass, acrylic, LED light  
32" x 22" x 9"



*Poly-Perspective: Hypercube Shadow*, 2024-25  
Copper, brass, acrylic, LED light  
32" x 22" x 9"



*Poly-Perspective: Becoming Hypercube 2, 2024-25*  
Copper, brass, acrylic, LED light  
32" x 22" x 9"

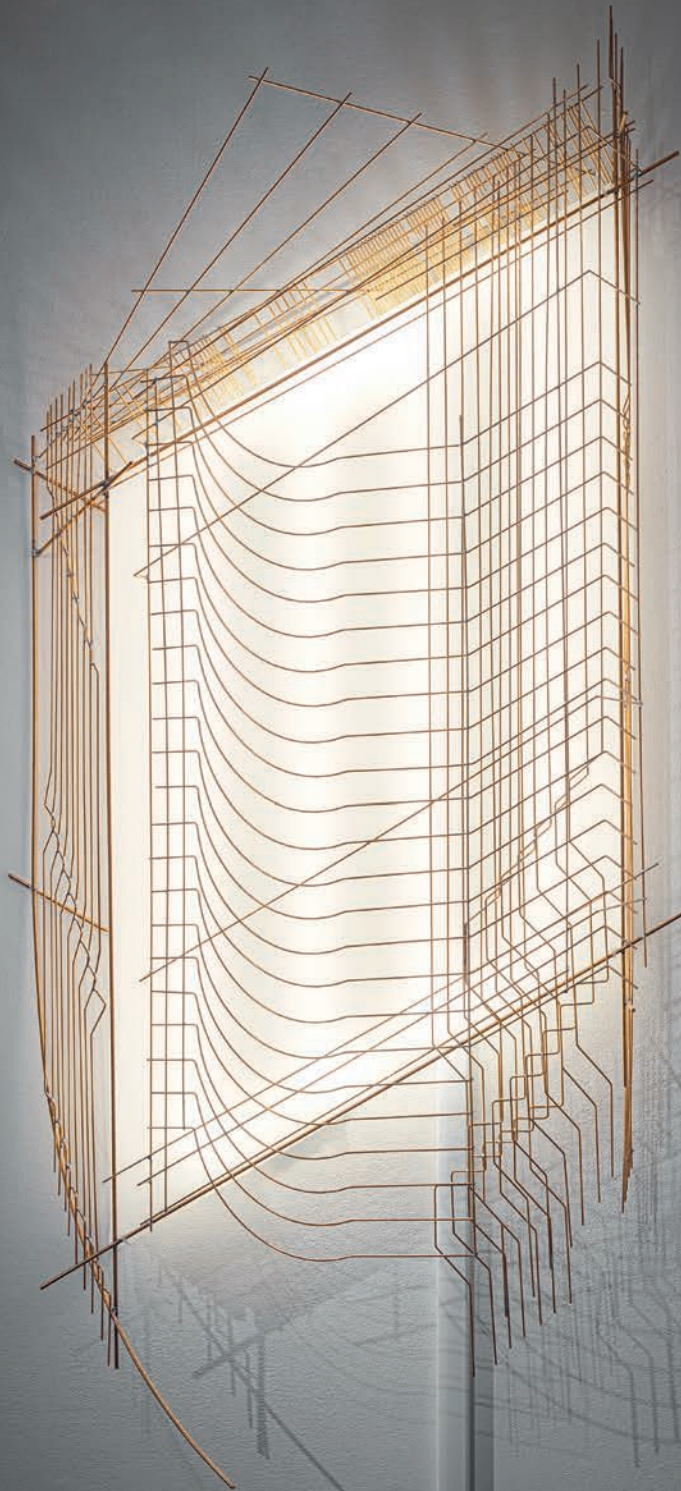




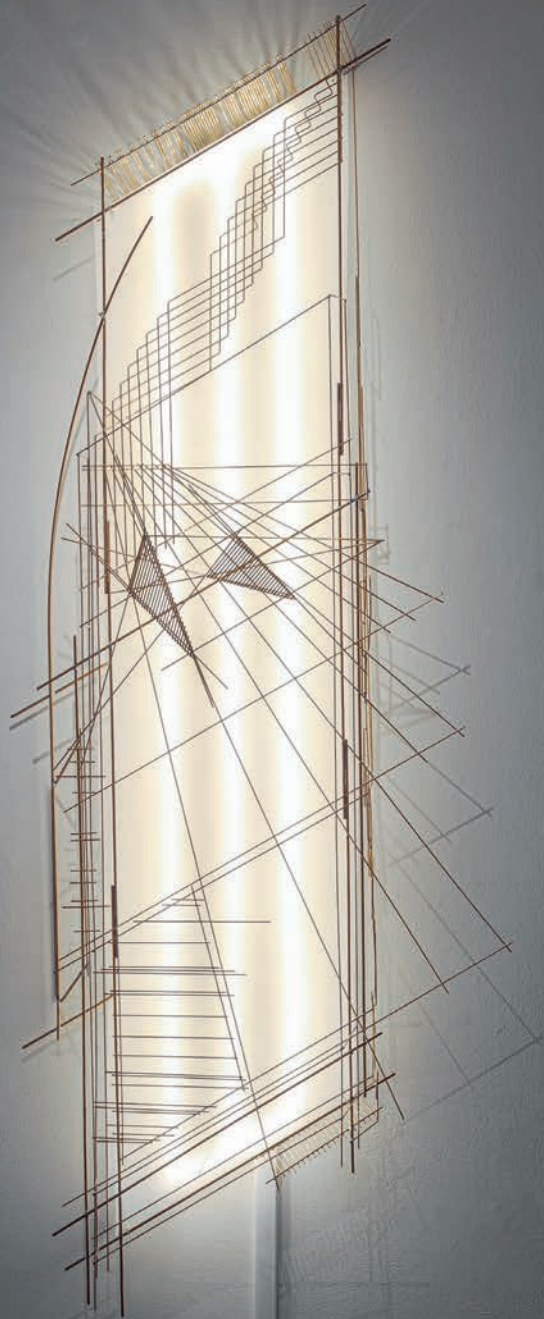
*Poly-Perspective: Warped Plane, 2025*

Copper, brass, steel, acrylic, LED strip lights

36" x 24" x 12"

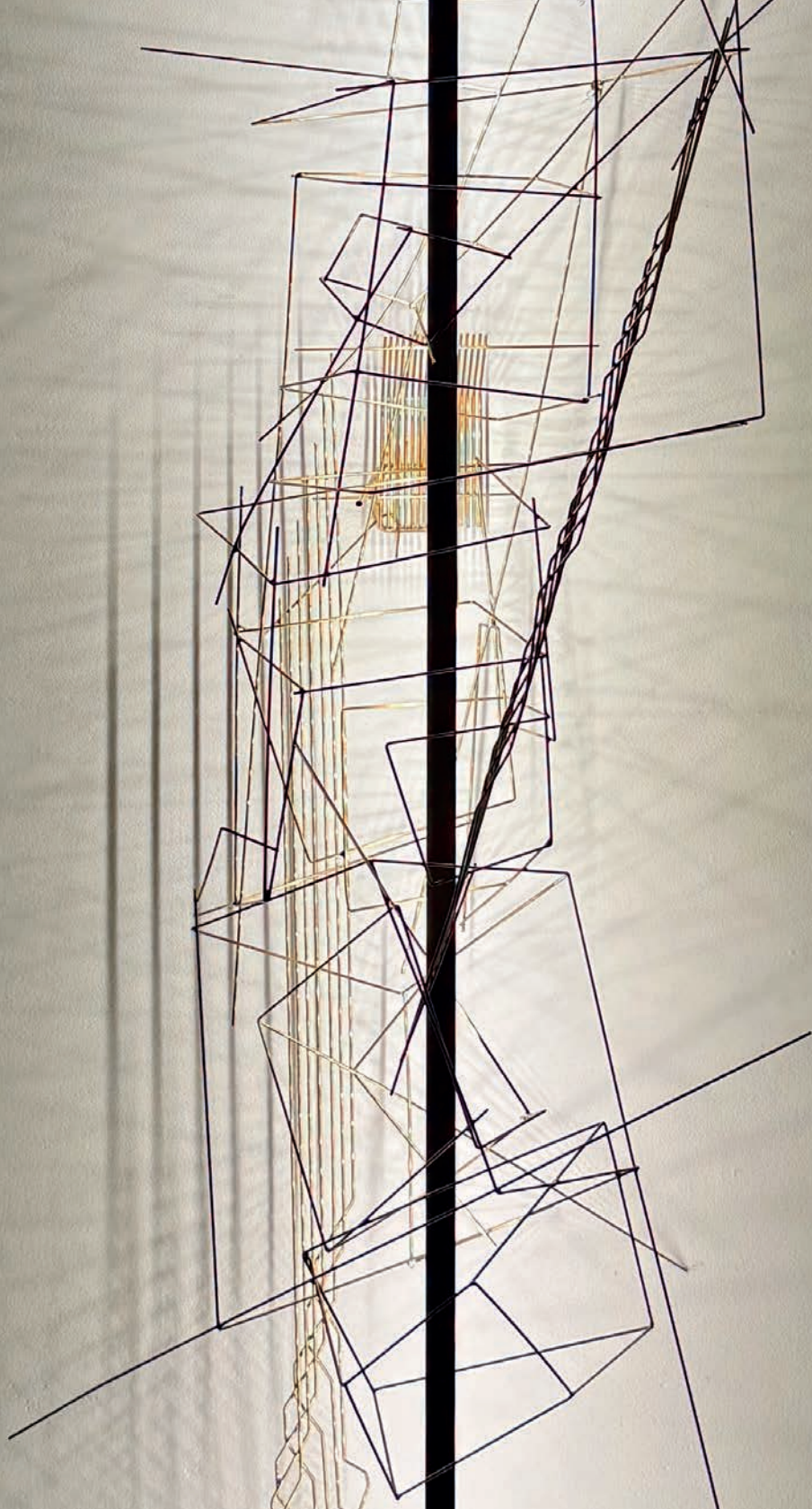


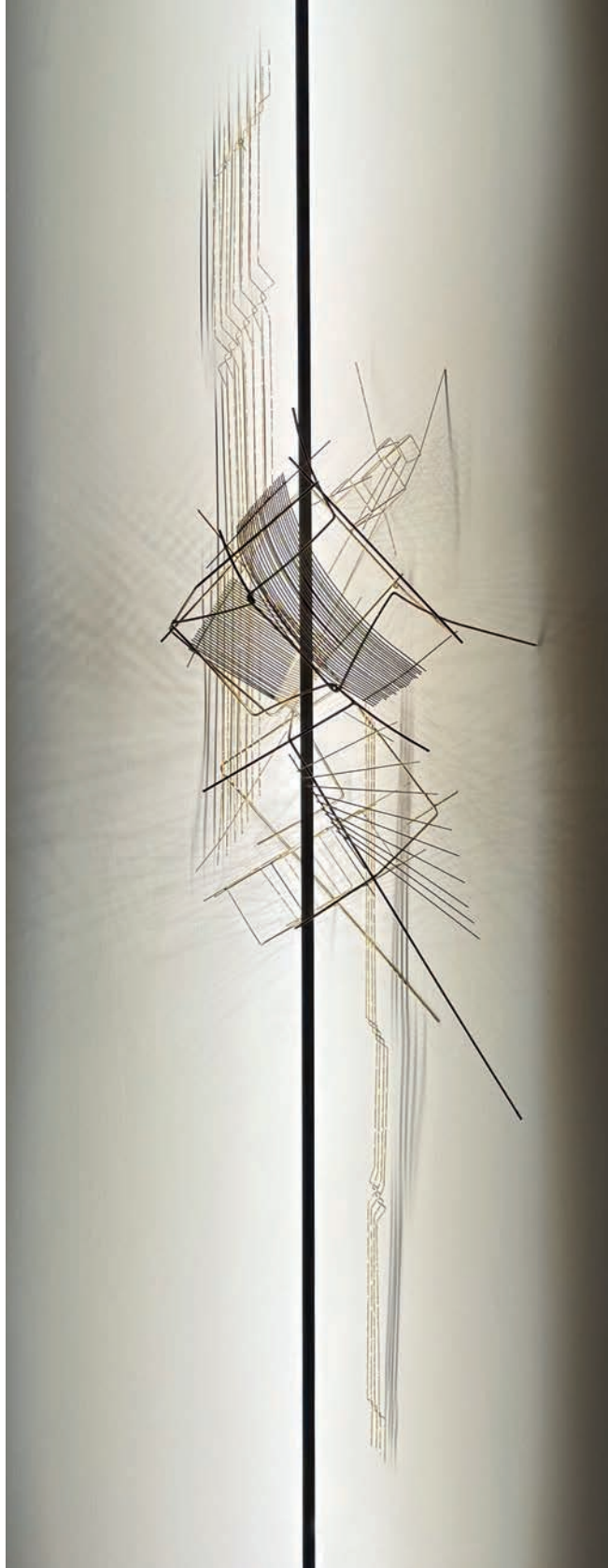
*Poly-Perspective: Desargue's Configuration, 2025*  
Copper, brass, steel, acrylic, LED strip lights  
48" x 12" x 8"



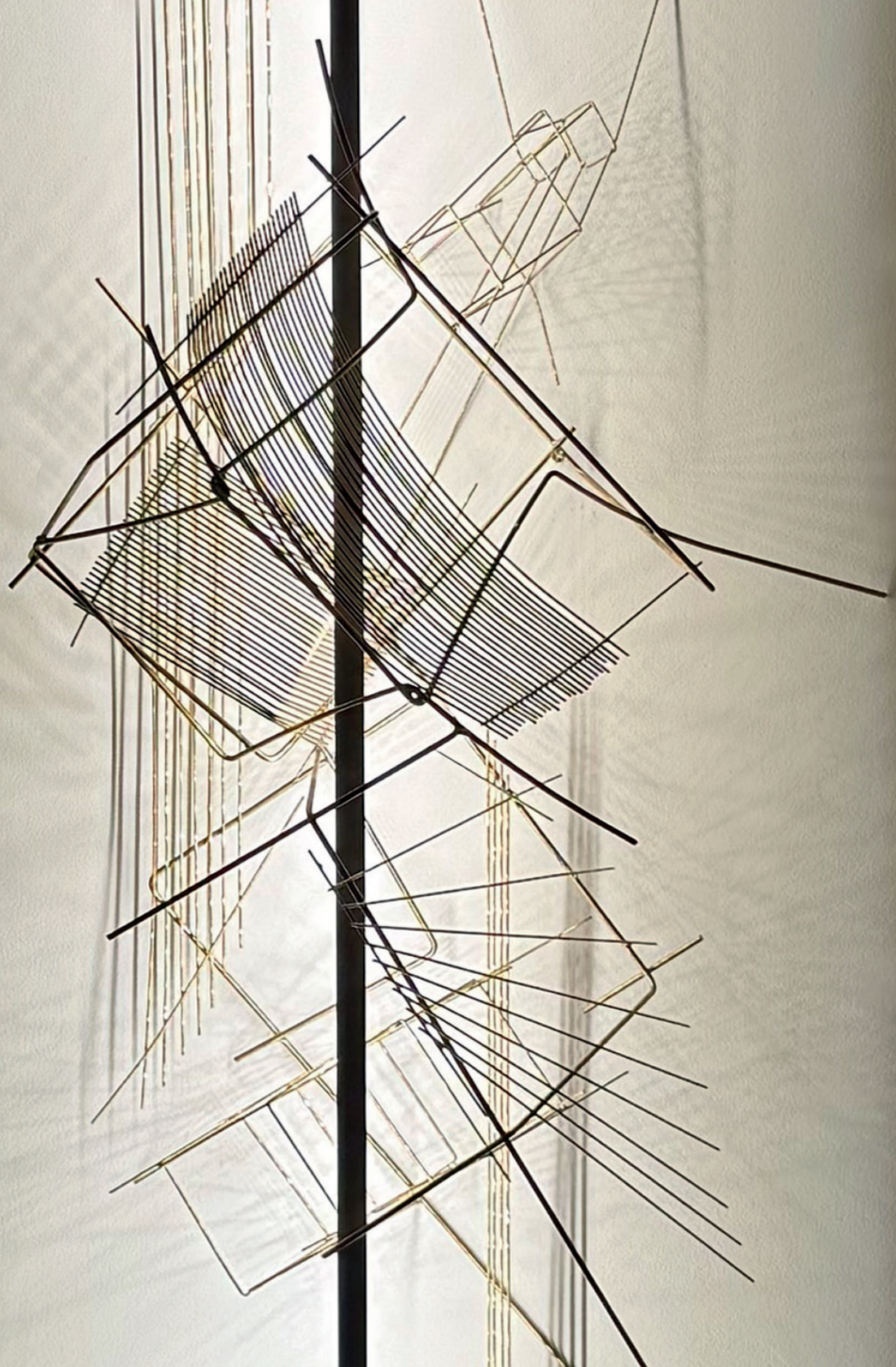
*Poly-Perspective: Vertical 2, 2025*  
Copper, brass, aluminum,  
LED strip lights  
93" x 21" x 12"

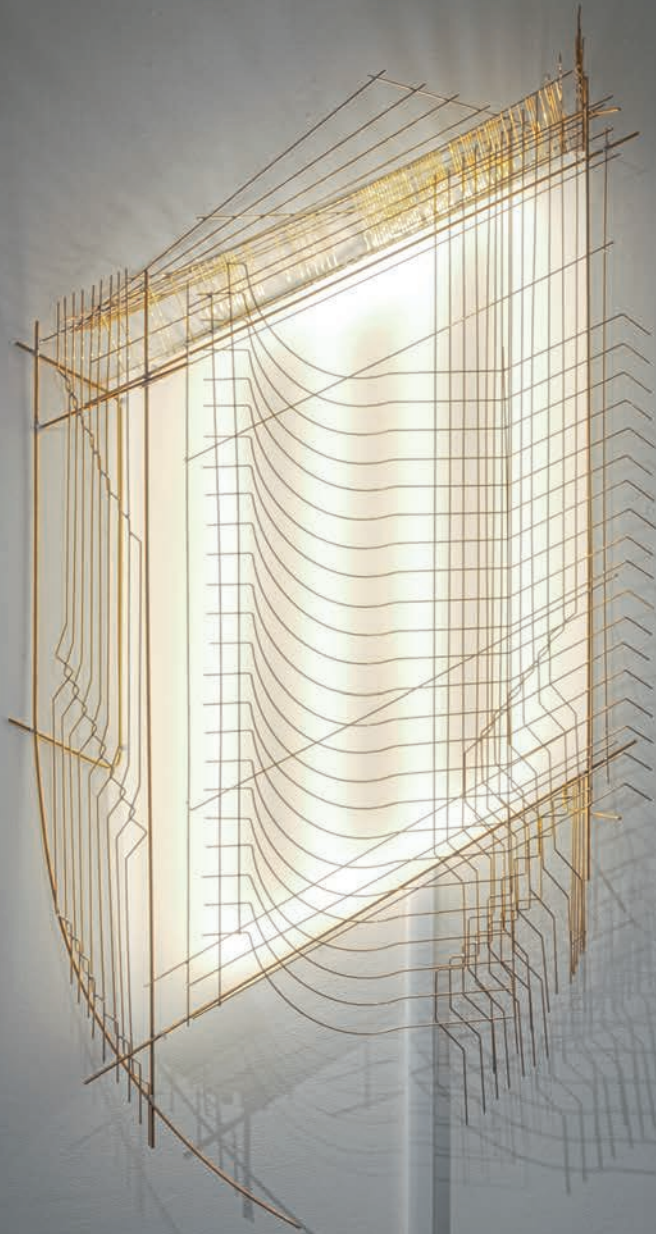


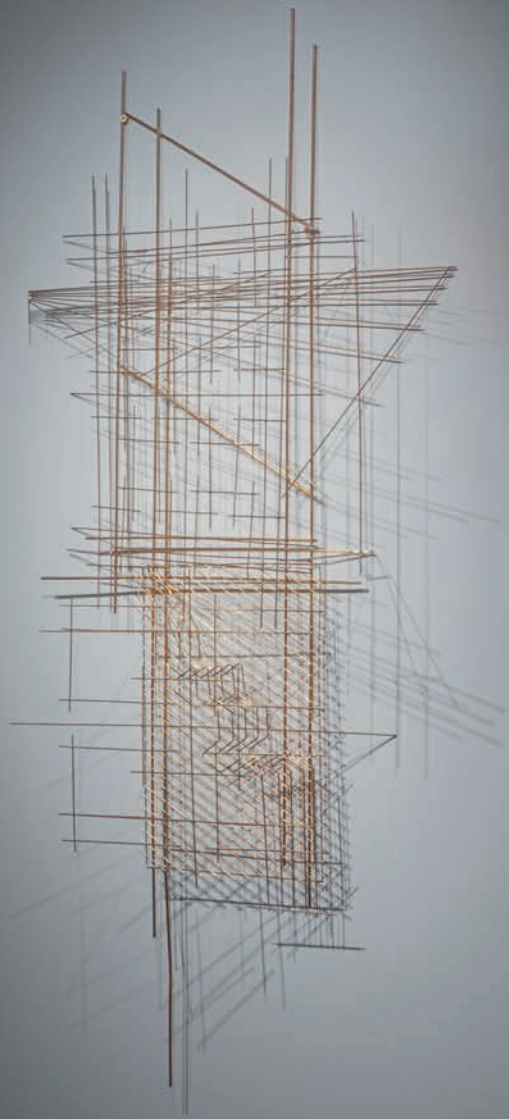


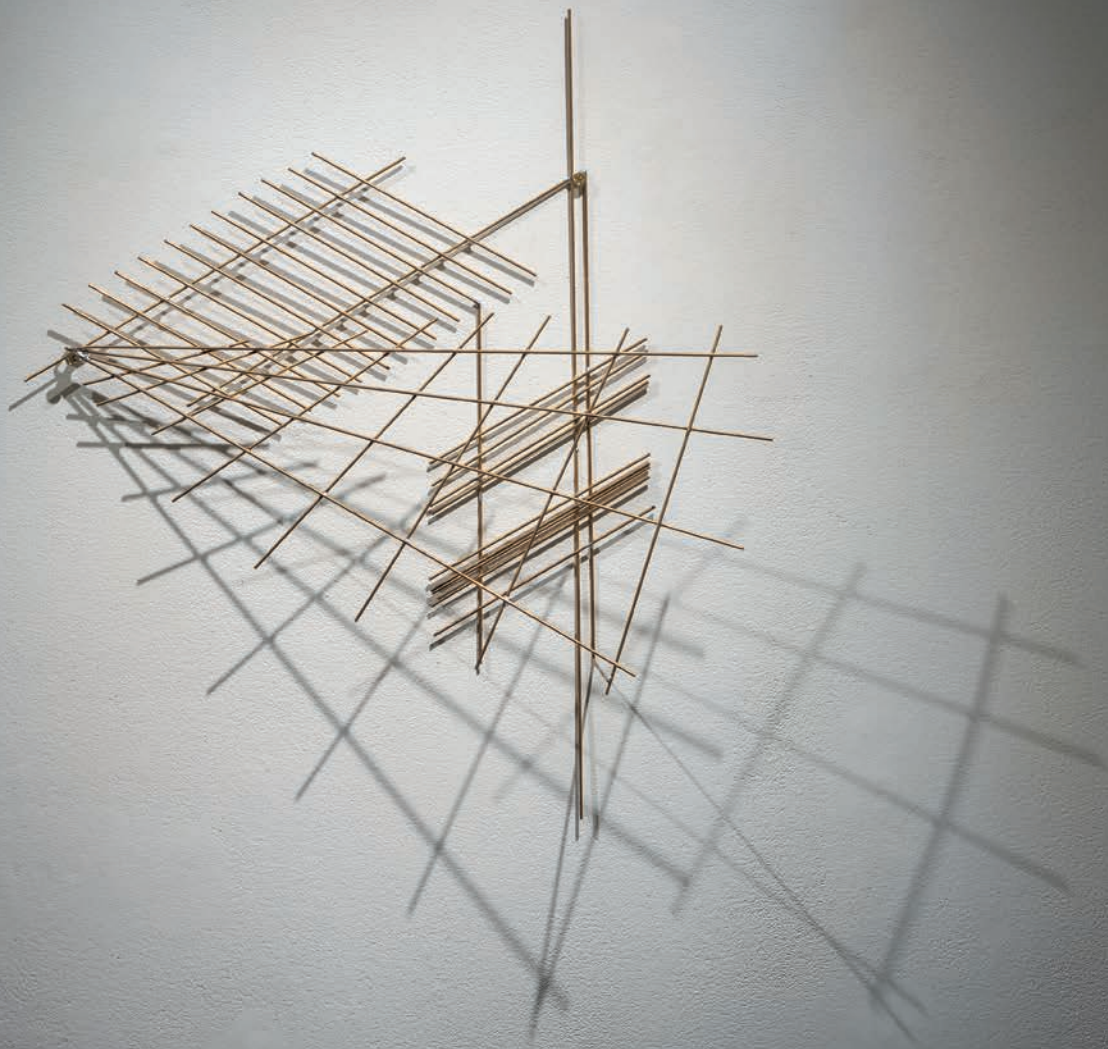


*Poly-Perspective: Vertical 1, 2025*  
Copper, brass, aluminum,  
LED strip lights  
93" x 21" x 12"

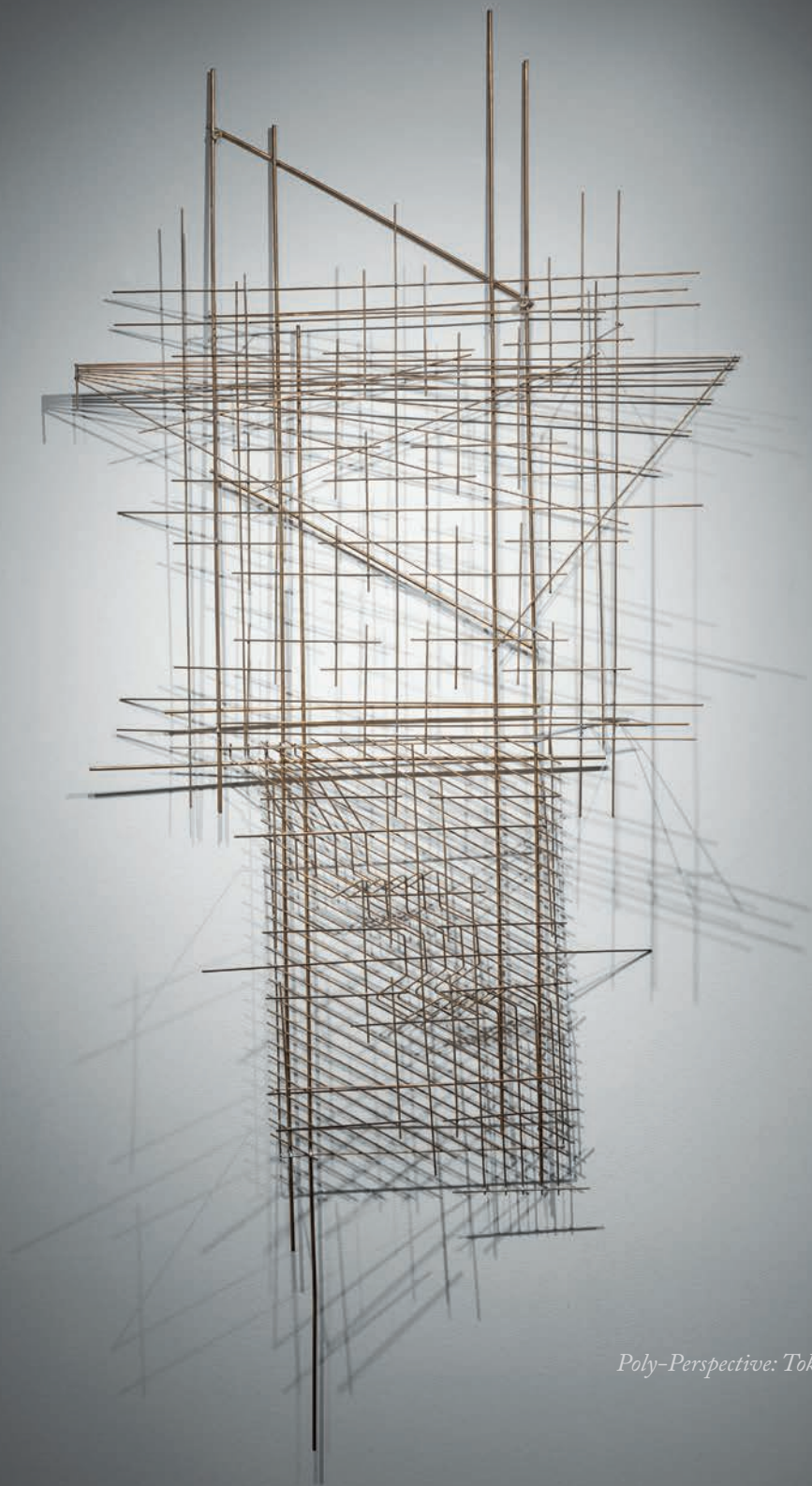






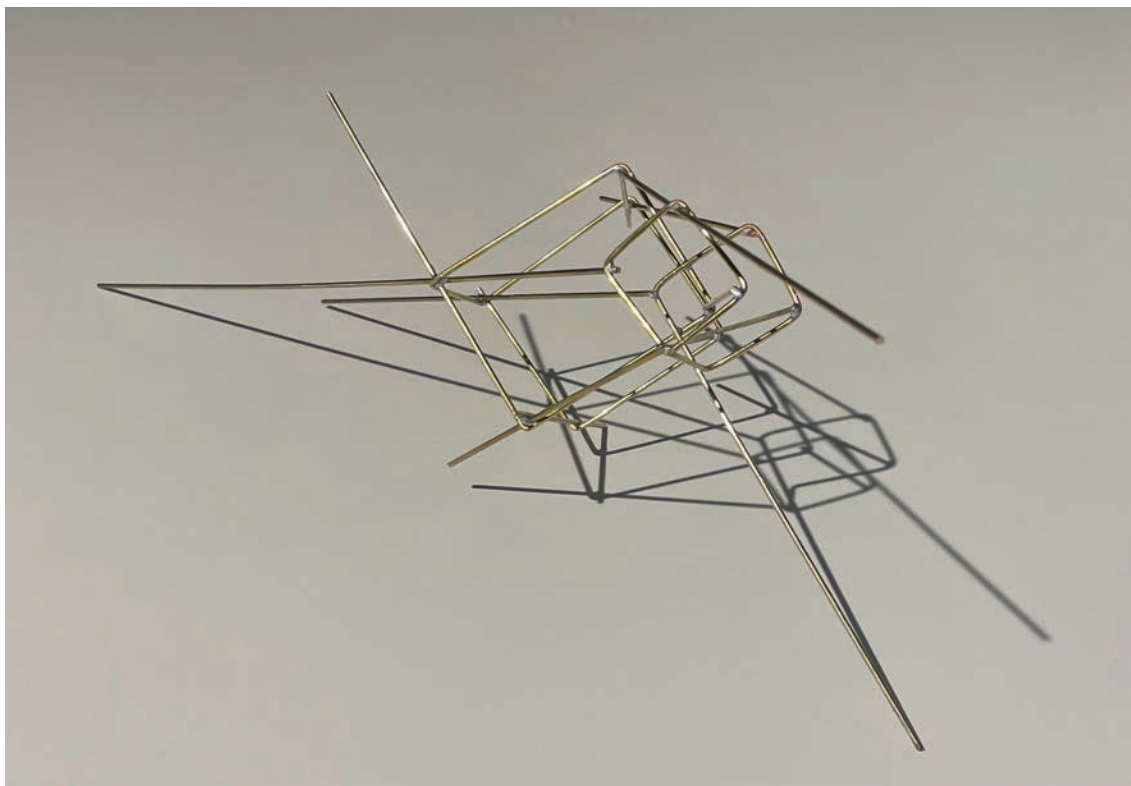


*Poly-Perspective: Two-Point Over Isometric, 2023*  
Copper, bronze  
10" x 10" x 2"



*Poly-Perspective: Tokonoma 2, 2024-25*

Copper, bronze  
48" x 22" x 6"



*Poly-Perspective: Hypercube study, 2024*  
Copper, bronze  
10" x 10" x 4.5"

## Paul Myoda

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Paul Myoda (b. 1967, United States) is a Japanese-American sculptor based in Chepachet, Rhode Island. Myoda is inspired by the underlying logic and formal principles of the natural world and applies them to his work with new media and industrial materials. The results are compositions of light and form that investigate tensions between beauty and ugliness, tradition and experimentation, and the natural and the built. His sculptures and installations are regularly exhibited both nationally and internationally.

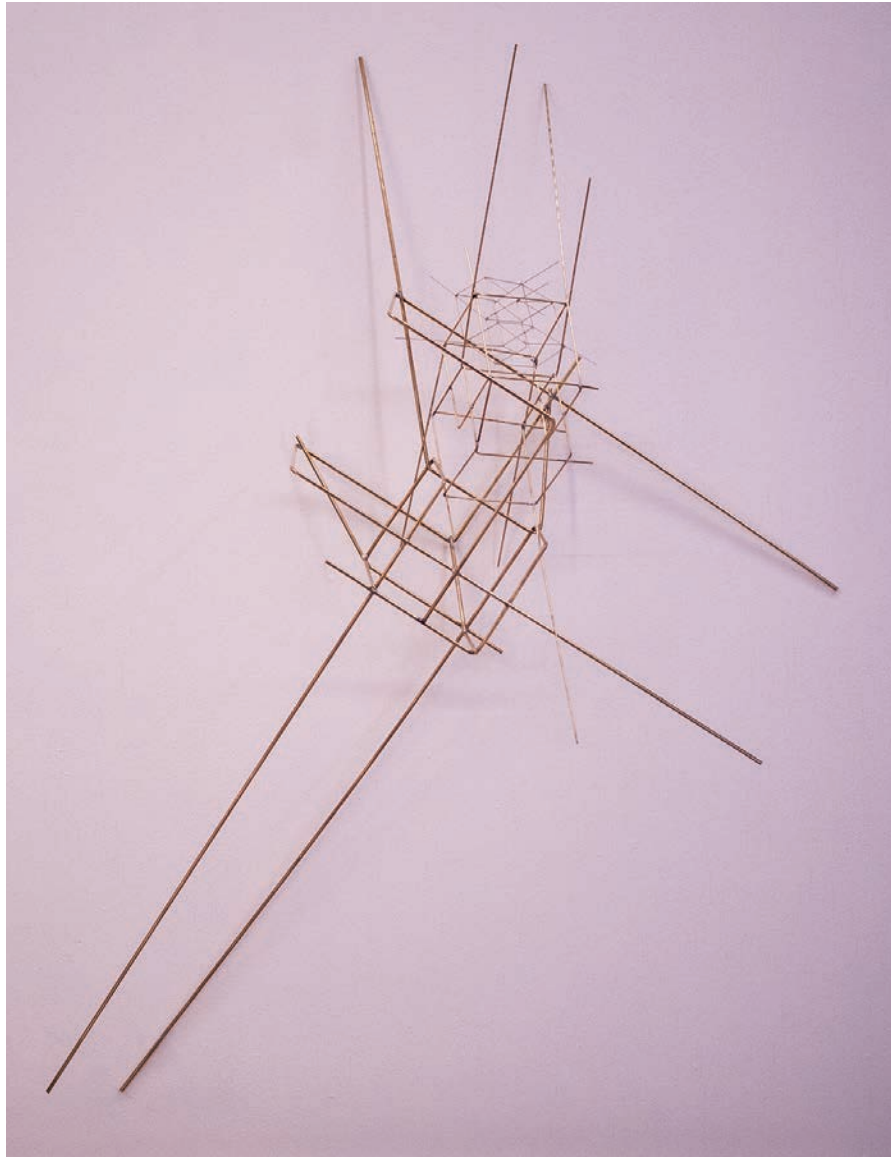
Myoda earned a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design ('89) and an MFA from Yale University ('94). Based in NYC from 1990-2006, Myoda was the co-founder of Big Room, an art production and design collective in New York City. He was also a contributor to *Art in America*, *Flash Art* and *Frieze*. He is a recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Warhol Foundation and Howard Foundation, among others.

In 2001, he participated in the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's *World Views Program* and had a studio on the 91st floor of WTC I. In March of 2002, he co-created *The Tribute in Light* in memory of the tragic events of September 11th, 2001, which has since become an annual installation.

Over the past three decades, Myoda has been creating illuminated sculptures and sculptural installations. Their compositions consist of a wide range of forms and references, such as bioluminescent fauna, crystal morphology, religious nimbuses, and different graphical perspective systems.

His works are part of the collections of the Queens Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami and the Library of Congress, among others. He has had solo exhibitions at the Friedrich Petzel Gallery, NY; the Dorsch Gallery, Miami, FL; the Project 4 Gallery, Washington DC; the Yellow Peril Gallery, Providence, RI; the Maine Museum at the University of Maine; the Peligro Amarillo Gallery, San Juan, Puerto Rico; and the Plug-In Exhibition, Istanbul, Turkey, among others.

He is an Associate Professor in Brown University's Visual Art Department, where he has taught sculpture and drawing since 2006.



*Poly-Perspective: Hypercube Transform 1*, 2026  
Copper, bronze  
28" x 32" x 8"

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## Lindsay Caplan

Lindsay Caplan is Andrea V. Rosenthal Assistant Professor in the History of Art and Architecture Department at Brown University. She is author of *Arte Programmata: Freedom, Control, and the Computer in 1960s Italy* (Minnesota, 2022) and co-editor of *Model Collapse: European Contemporary Art in a Time of Democratic Crisis* (Manchester, 2025).

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