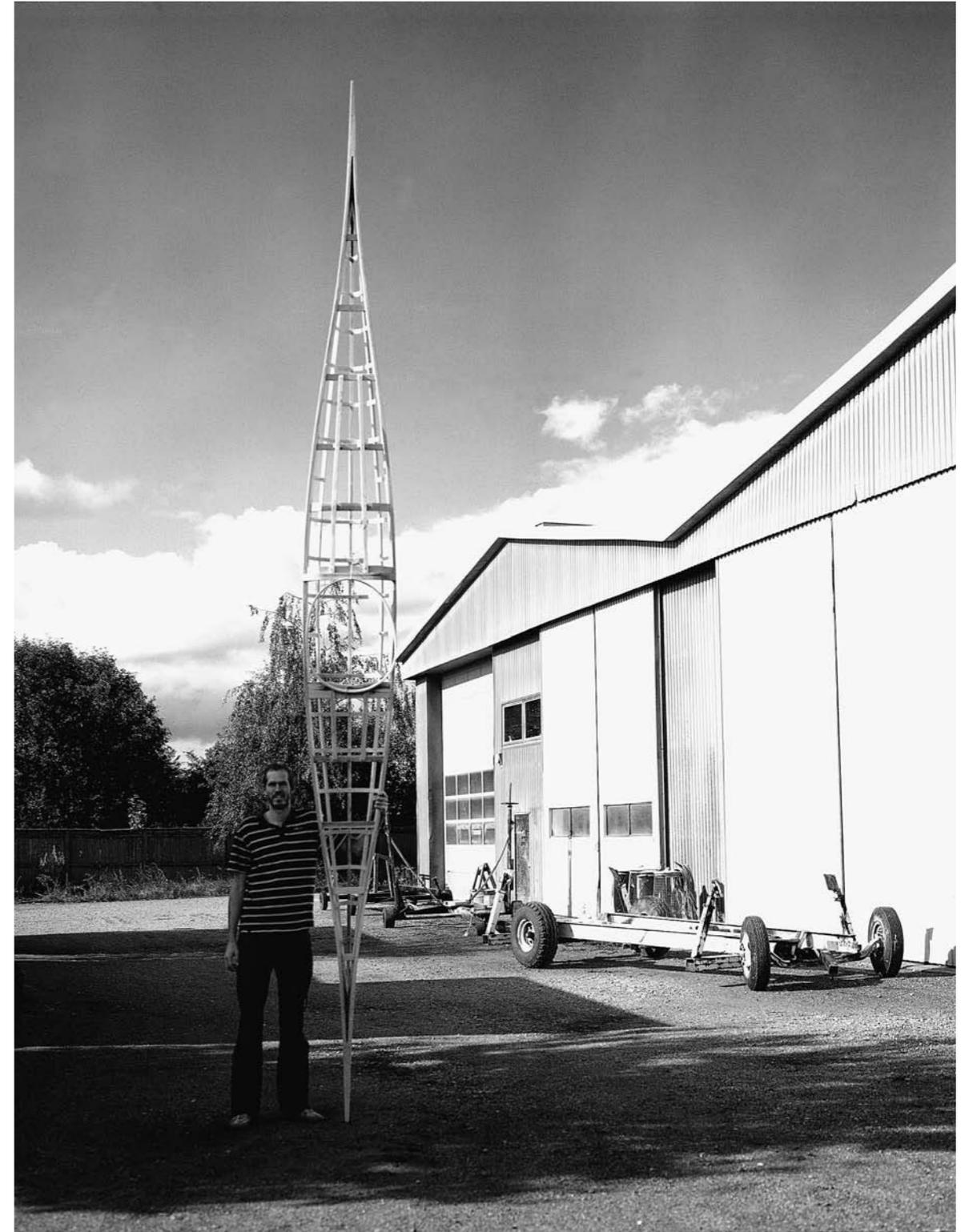


ESKE REX : SILENT ACTION



The airplane is about to land in Copenhagen. Behind the window – total uniform whiteness, soft, silent and extremely present. You don't grasp the exact moment when it is replaced by the «full-screen» view of the sea: gray, rippling, and, again, as present as can be. Next comes some airport-related tower: lightweight, pyramidal, stand-alone on a tiny island. The airplane descends and you start noticing details...

As a boy, Eske used to join his father who was fond of building things with his own hands. It was their way of being together, a conversation that needed very little talking. Today, father comes to help Eske in his workshop, and Eske's partner, Maria, belongs to the same breed of «makers»: the two of them have recently built a weekend cabin, one of its walls made from typical Danish window frames salvaged from a 1930s building.

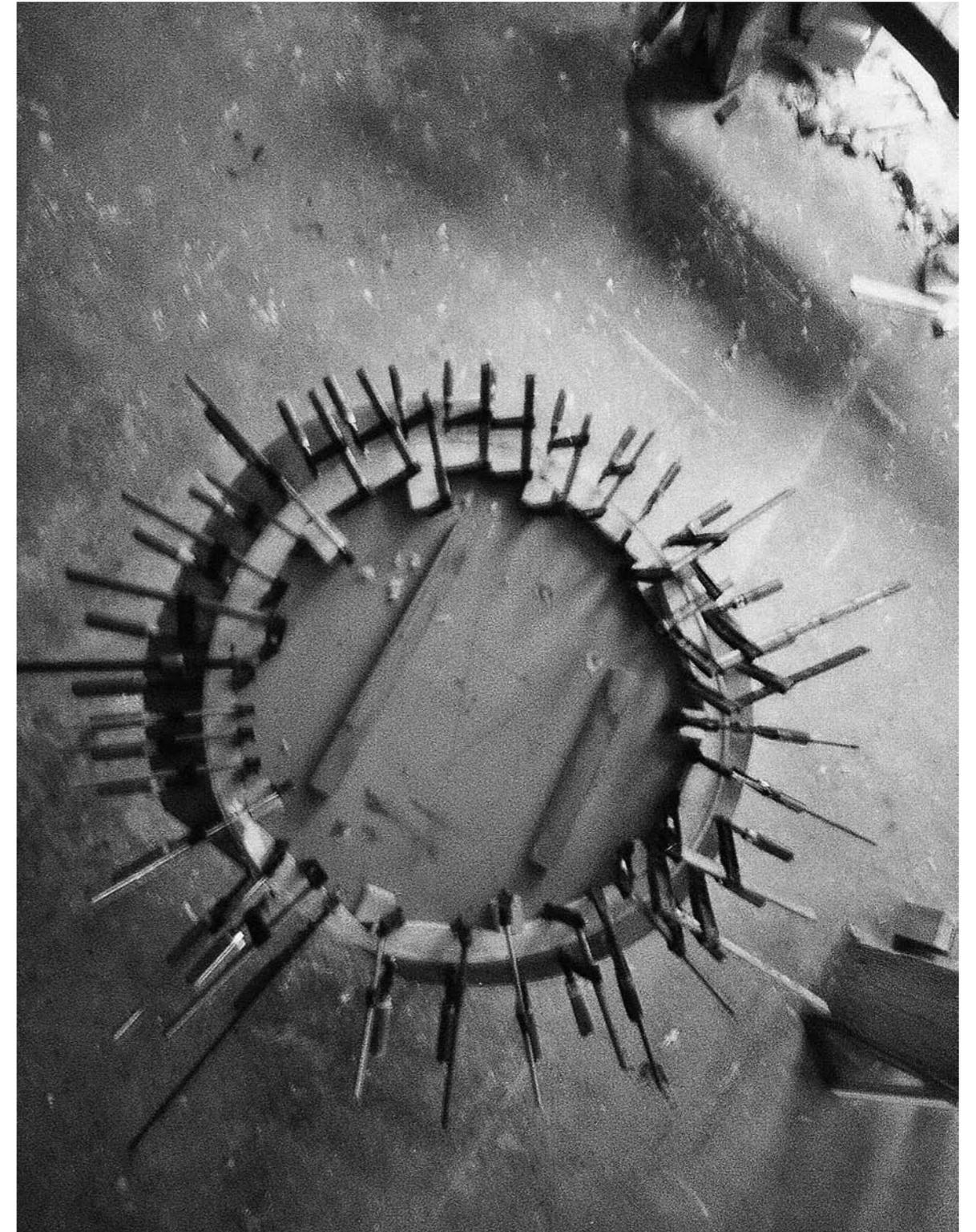
Eske Rex wanted to be a boat-builder, became a carpenter and went on to study design and art – as soon as he realized that the process interested him more than the final product. His terrain is the crossroads of art, design and architecture: «Not that I am trying to connect them all; that's just the way I am,» says Rex who needed an outlet for exploring functionality unbounded by pragmatic concerns – somewhere on the border between designing meticulously calculated structures and working with forces he could only control to a certain extent.

In 2011, his Drawing Machine occupied the entire basement of the Milanese gallery that hosted the annual Mindcraft exhibition. A showcase for the long-lasting dialog between design and craft in Denmark, in 2011 and 2012 Mindcraft was focused on «quality, materiality and functionality» – with this statement curator Cecilie Manz summed up the Danish-ness in design. The Drawing Machine – a device that would have been perfectly in place in a Renaissance workshop – consisted of two wooden towers, each supporting a pendulum loaded with concrete weights. The pendulums were connected to a single ballpoint pen, translating their movements into circular motion across a vast spread of paper.

That was definitely a piece of functionality, dealt with in a most direct manner. A cup or a chair are obliged to be functional because they are

*Danish Art Workshops:
work in progress
2010*

*Previous page: Eske Rex
with the Greenlandic
kayak (structure)
he has built for himself
2006*

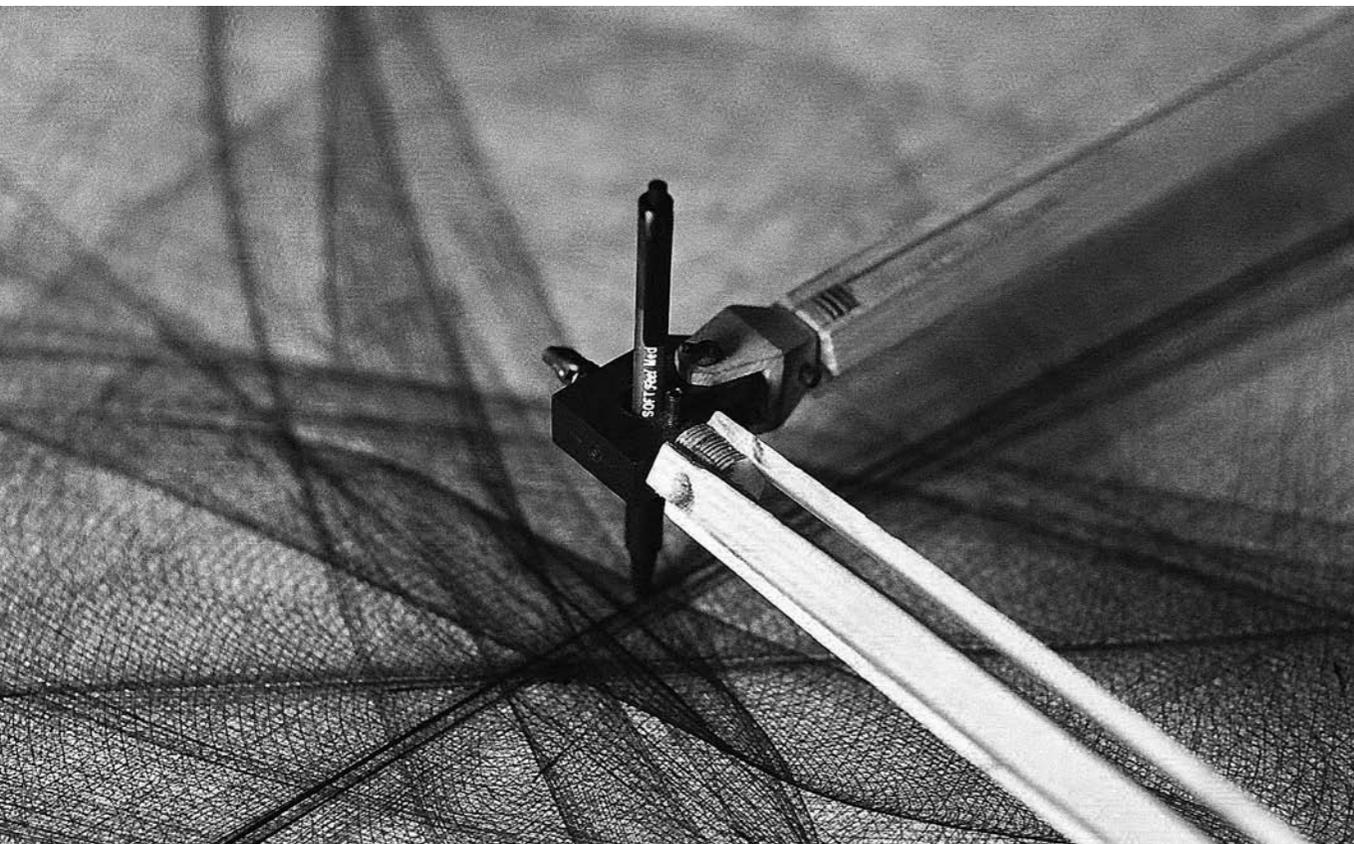




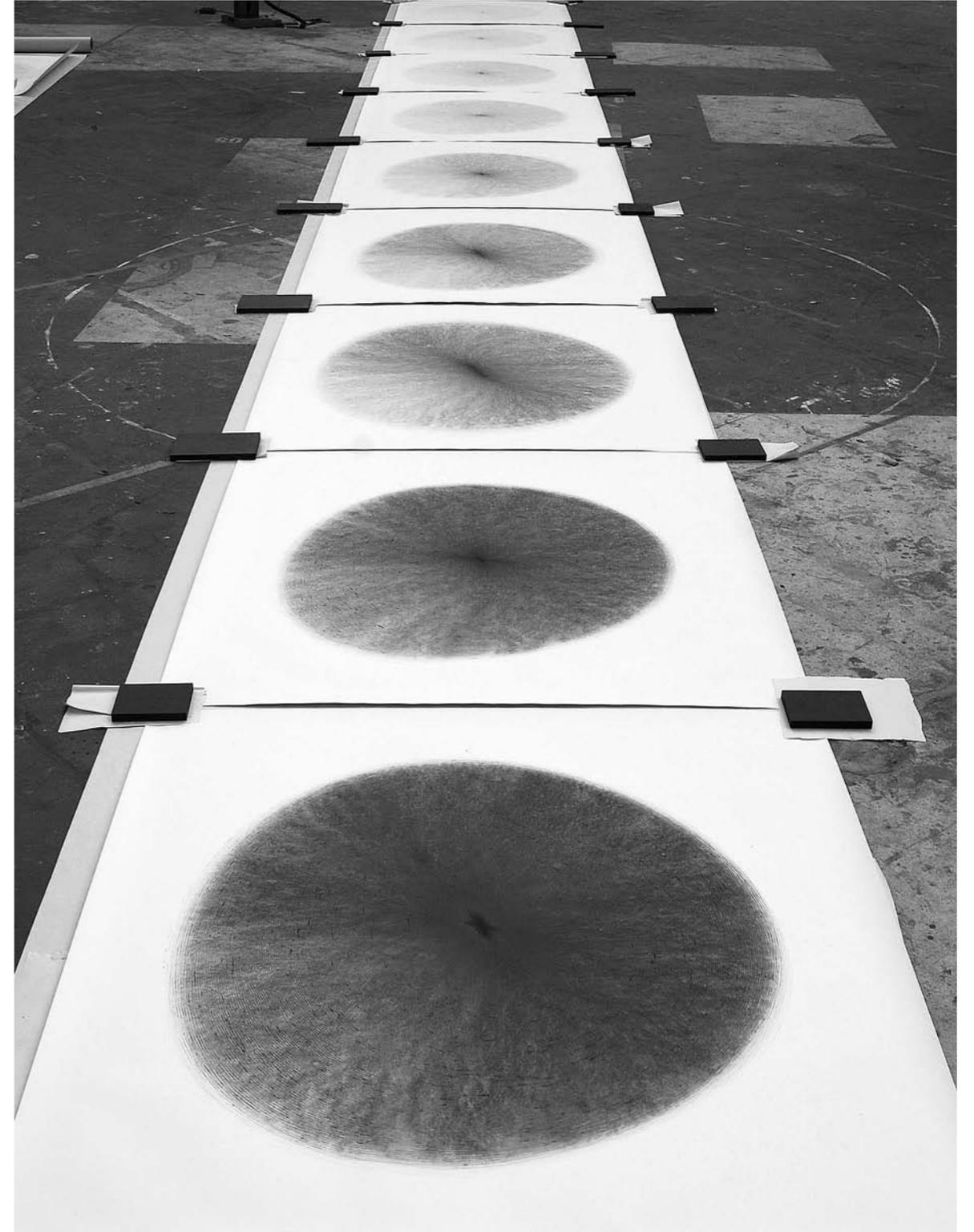
Drawing Machine
larch wood, metal,
concrete, vinyl, ballpen
250 x 450 x 450 cm
2011

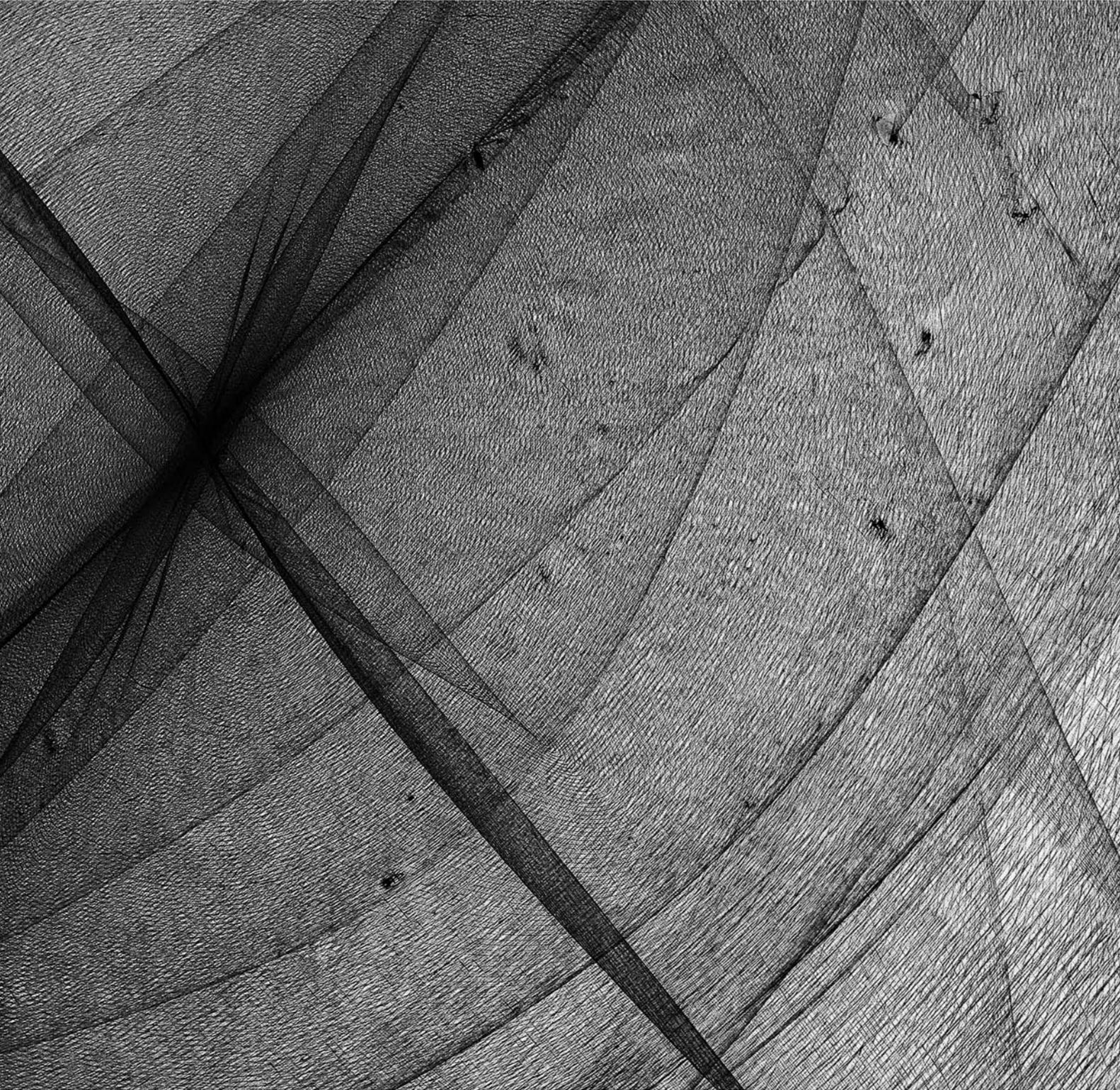


Black Blue Red Green
ballpen on paper
272 x 272 cm
2010



Fibonacci Series
ballpen on paper
151 x 151 cm
2010





Black Blue Red Green
/ Black Drawing
ballpen on paper
272 x 272 cm
2010

intended for specific tasks, but the Machine was simply *about functioning*. About defining proportions and adjusting the weights, smartly hooked at the tower's bottom for instant availability. About pushing the pendulums so that their coordinated movement would produce a drawing. About transferring energy from man to mechanism to paper...

With the Space Meter, presented on his second Mindcraft year, Eske Rex looked into gravitation. The exhibition was laid out along two parallel walls, and Rex had to provide a connection between them. In search of a minimalist solution, the artist turned to magnetic power, which held in suspension a thread stretched across the room and terminated by a wooden funnel nearly touching the opposite wall. At the beginning, you were impressed by the thinness and length of that curious trumpet thing that stretched across a 6-meter span. A few moments later you realized that the trumpet actually floated in the air, leaving a gap between itself and the wall... a connection that was also a non-connection. While the Drawing Machine was a tool that helped visualize force through documenting the pendulums' movement, the Space Meter was itself an evidence of the concentrated presence of force. The dynamics of force is powerful and fluid; its statics is imbued with that special kind of silence that is charged with potentiality.

More recent «magnetic works» reveal yet another quality of concentrated force. («It's like the moment when you hold your breath,» says Rex about one of them, the Magnetic Diagonal.) From the Space Meter, abstract as a vector, – to another series, called Measuring Space and featuring graceful yet extremely robust wooden solids suspended in mid-air; they are both whole and split, united and separated. Built-in magnets generate attraction between the two wooden halves that delicately spin and swing when disturbed. A combination of physicality and high precision, the whole series seems to vibrate with tension, yet these strings may instantly become limp and lifeless – suffice to tear them one extra millimeter apart. An effect that reminds of the fragility of life – but also of the soul that animates the body. A similar quality is concealed in the Tensioned Wood structures that gain their strength and stability from the very force that aims to destroy them: resilient and full of internal energy, once the pressure is too much, they collapse.

Vorschub
2007

below, Part 1:
plywood, pull buckle
320 x 320 x 320 cm

above, Part 2:
wood, string
28 items, each sized
40 x 320 x 320 cm





Tensioned Wood

left, Ear

oak and ash wood, metal

180 x 110 x 115 cm

2010

right, Pull

various woods, metal

140 x 110 x 115 cm

2010





Tensioned Wood

left, Unfolded Plank

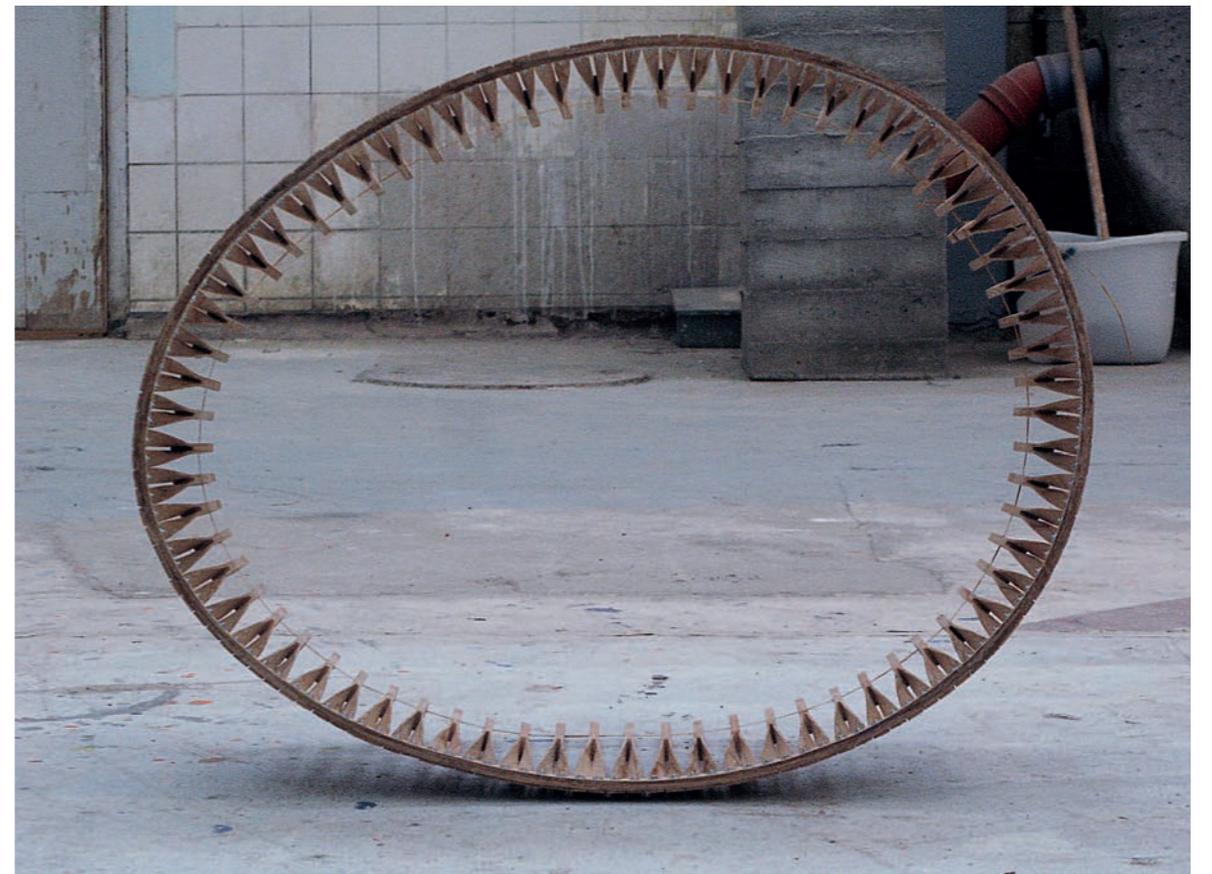
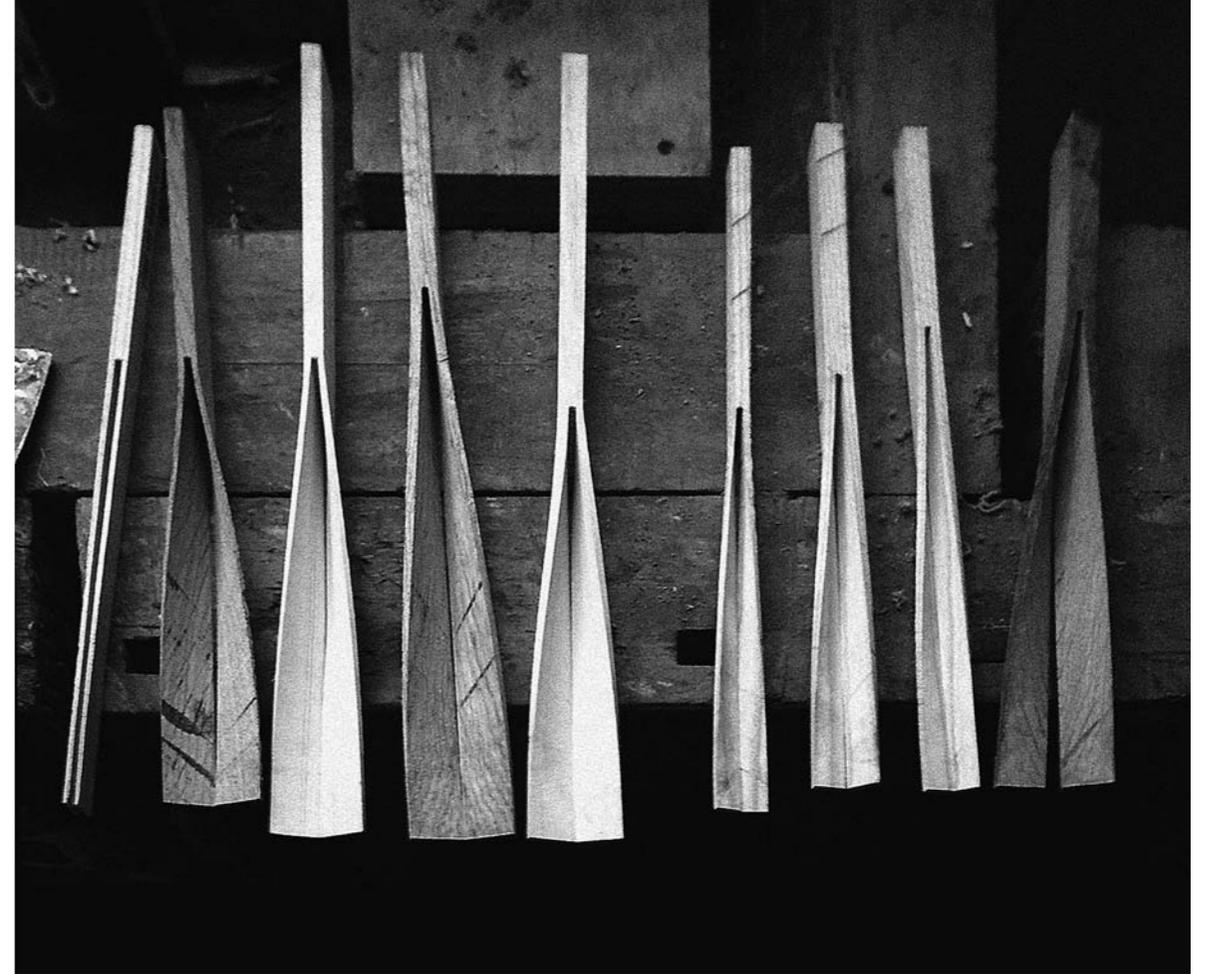
oak wood

280 x 25 x 40 cm

2010

right, work in progress

2013





Tensioned Wood

left, Unfolded Plank
oak wood
280 x 25 x 40 cm
2010

right, Untitled
ash and oak wood, leash
40 x 80 x 65 cm
2013





Space Meter
ash wood, magnets,
metal, string
funnel diameter: 15 cm
wall-to-wall distance: 6 m
2011



«...there is a good deal of decision making for me about my control over a piece – deciding the limits beyond which my specific intentions can no longer have an influence. This might seem vague or incomplete, though of course I don't find it so, and I'm certainly not interested in any formalized notion of «indeterminacy.» It's simply a matter of penetration – making the situation as dense and complex as possible without faking anything,» said minimalist Fred Sandback whose work is highly esteemed by Eske Rex. These qualities – going deep into the essence then surrendering control – are fundamental for his own work.

Once control is released, «nature comes in. A swinging pendulum can do something I could not have done even if I were a skilled draftsman or a computer geek; nature still does it better. Then again, it has this fantastic poetic feel: you can work, and think, and sketch, and build – and then you launch it and just see it happen. No two drawings will be the same; the machine will always work differently depending on how you start it, or how much weight you apply to the pendulum.» The Machine takes on the role of the creator, while the creator – who is he now? A trigger? An enabler?

But before you push the pendulum, the idea should crystallize into a gesture as clear-cut and pure as possible. This requires a structural approach on one hand and the capacity to «listen to the silence» on the other. The Tensioned series where plain wooden planks unfold like hands or flower petals, emerged from an ability to hear the material: only then will it cooperate and reveal what it wants to be. These are not the kind of ideas you get straight out of your head: they are driven by the intimate knowledge of material and process, allowing you to hear the answers hidden inside the thing itself.

In Rex's works, form results from problem-solving, yet it remains an open possibility, a materialized principle rather than a «final product.» That's why it can potentially exist in different scales – like the Unfolded Planks that are as architectural as supporting pillars or as tender as the oval, hugging cocoon of a newborn's crib. Even the Machine drawings have this richness of scale, as they imply different levels of interaction: at the size of nearly 3 x 3 m, a drawing becomes a spatial experience that varies with the distance between viewer and artwork, gradually revealing its finesse as you come closer... It's a bit like landing in Copenhagen on a silent afternoon.



left, Measuring Space
oak wood, magnets, strings
dimensions: variable
2012

right,
One Plus One is Three
oak wood, magnets, strings
dimensions: variable
2013



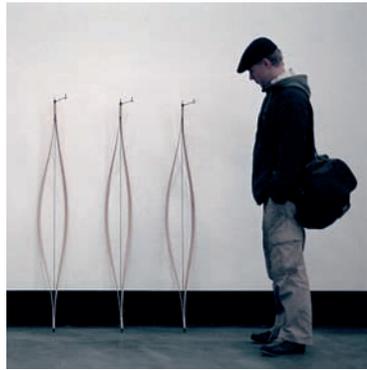


Magnetic Diagonal
maple wood, magnets,
metal, string
30 x 30 x 11 cm
2012





Space Meter
work in progress
2012



PASSENGERS

Materials: wood, metal
Dimensions: variable
Parotta Gallery / Stuttgart, 2007

Eske Rex: «The Passenger was designed after I had built a Greenlandic kayak. I was fascinated by the simplicity of the technique behind the boat's shape: for hundreds of years, Eskimos have been building kayaks with very basic tools and driftwood coming from Canada. The Passenger inverts the original principle: instead of pushing a board in between, I used a rod to strain the wooden lamellas, arching them outward to produce a boat-like shape. Set in a vertical position, the whole thing turned into something different than a boat...»

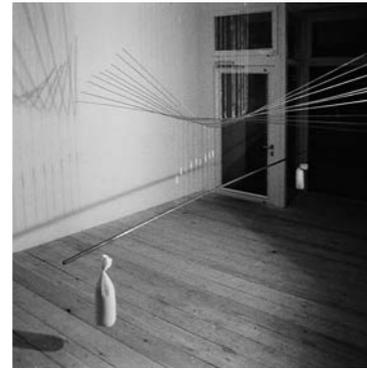
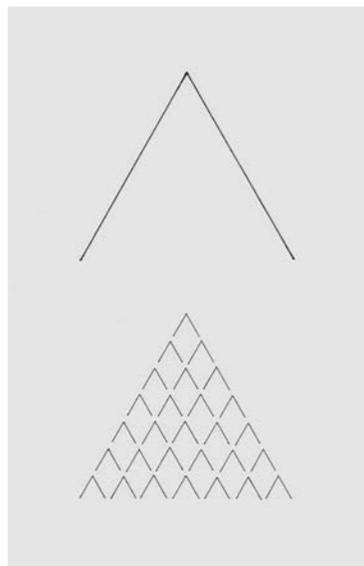
VORSCHUB

Part 1
Materials: plywood, pull buckle
Dimensions: 320 x 320 x 320 cm

Part 2
Materials: wood, string
Dimensions: 40 x 320 x 320 cm

First presented at the group exhibition
«Jeppe Hein Emphielt: Vorschub»
Berlin, 2007

Diagonal traction applied to two flat, square-shaped wooden frames transformed them into a self-supporting three-dimensional structure. First, visitors encountered a large construction in the courtyard (Part 1). Entering the exhibition space, they saw 28 similar but smaller structures (Part 2), arranged in a triangular formation that corresponded to the major construction's footprint.



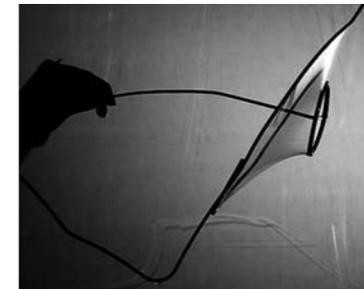
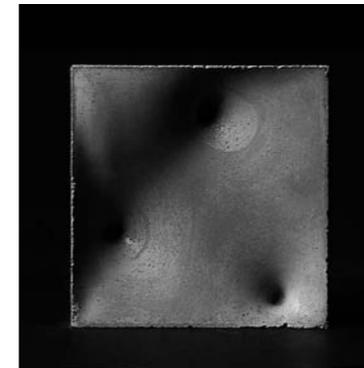
FLUGT

Materials: ash wood strips, metal rod, threads, sandbags
Parotta Project Space / Berlin, 2008

«Flugt» is Danish for «escape». The exhibition space sloping towards the fully transparent street front was interpreted as a launch pad that opened into the light/world outside. Thin wooden strips were suspended on threads from the ceiling and connected to a set of other strings, which, in their turn, held a metal rod with attached sandbags. Together, they created an extremely sensitive wing-like structure that came to life every time someone opened or closed the door. A silent space filled with small fluttering movements, like those of birds taking off...

SOAPBUBBEL/CONCRETE

Materials: metal, soap, concrete, casting molds with one flexible side
Dimensions: 15 x 15 x 4 cm
Experiments while studying at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts - School of Design / Copenhagen, 2006

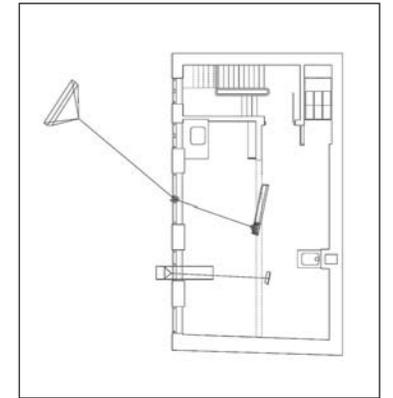


Soap and concrete were both used for exploring the transformation of a plain surface into a three-dimensional body. Concrete was cast into molds with flexible skin; soap bubbles presented another possibility for surface-tension experiments, inspired by German architect/engineer Frei Otto and his tensile roof structures. The latest in the series of concrete casts were considered as scale models for wall-sized artworks.

UDTRAEK

Materials: wood, metal string, elastic textile, weights
Modtar Projects / Copenhagen, 2009

Stretching through the facade openings, the installation connects the exhibition space to the courtyard. A box projects out the window and channels light indoors, while a panel corresponding to the size of the window sash is balanced on the floor in the middle of the room. The door frame is «mirrored» into the exhibition space, but also down into the courtyard where it is kept in balance by means of elastic fabric, string and weights.



«Udtraek» means «extract» in Danish. Symbolically extracting windows and doors from the façade, Eske Rex wished to continue the space both inwards and outwards, drawing the courtyard into the exhibition room and vice versa. Planar elements acquire a spatial quality: in this project, you do not only look through windows and doors – you walk around them.

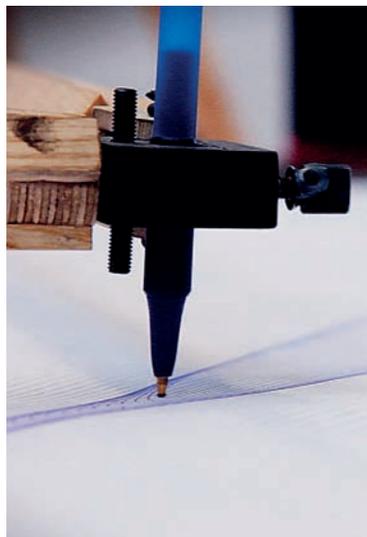


DRAWING MACHINE

Materials: wood, metal, concrete, vinyl, ballpen

The first Drawing Machine, sized 320 x 600 x 600 cm, was constructed in 2009. In 2011, Rex designed a smaller version (250 x 450 x 450 cm), intended for traveling to international events.

It was presented at the Mindcraft11 exhibition / Milan, 2011



The Drawing Machine has two pendulums, each suspended from a tower construction and connected by means of «drawing arms» with flexible joints. A ballpoint pen is fixed where the arms meet. Set in motion by hand, the pendulums move the pen along the drawing surface, leaving on the paper traces of their combined movement. Adding or removing weights, the operator changes the amplitude of the pendulums and, consequently, the pattern drawn by the pen. The technique of using pendulums and weights was invented during the Renaissance period; in the mid-19th century, it was applied in the mechanical apparatus called Harmonograph.

The powerful swinging of the Machine's pendulums affects the entire room. While beholders pause mesmerized by the rhythmic repetitions, a drawing emerges in front of their eyes.



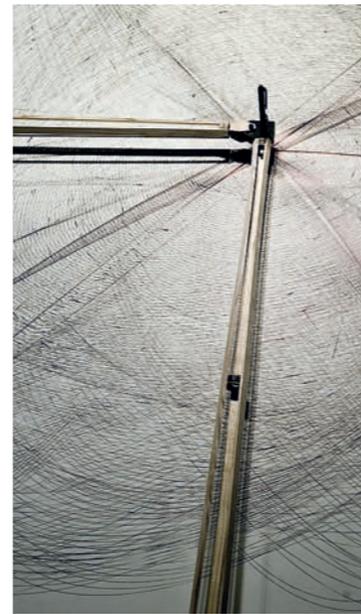
BLACK BLUE RED GREEN

Materials: ballpen on paper

Dimensions: 272 x 272 cm

Exhibited at the opening of Spinderihallerne / Vejle, 2010

Four days, four colors, four wall-sized drawings. Each morning a new color pen was installed in the Drawing Machine. Throughout the day, the pendulums kept working (short breaks were only allowed when pens had to be replaced), which amounted to ten daily hours of continuous drawing.



FIBONACCI SERIES

Materials: ballpen on paper

Dimensions: 151 x 151 cm

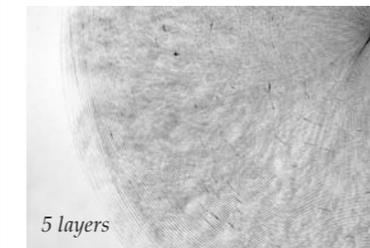
Exhibited at «Designers Investigating» / Copenhagen, 2010

Described in the early 13th century by Italian mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci and known way before in Indian mathematics, the Fibonacci sequence proceeds as follows: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, ... Each next number is calculated by adding the previous two. The Fibonacci sequence is tightly related to the golden proportion: the closest rational approximations to the proportion are $2/1$, $3/2$, $5/3$, $8/5$. As some of us may remember, in mathematics and the arts, from music to architecture, two quantities are considered in the golden proportion

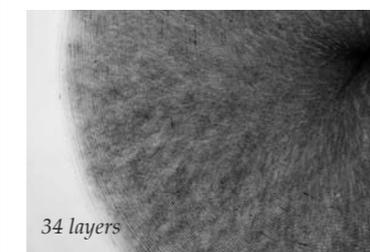
if the ratio of the sum of these quantities to the larger quantity is equal to the ratio of the larger quantity to the smaller one. Besides, the golden ratio and the Fibonacci numbers are widely present in nature: the branching of a tree, the arrangement of a pine cone, and plenty of other biological settings follow the same principle... From a single layer on the first drawing, Eske Rex's series proceeds to 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, and finally, 55 layers on the ninth and final sheet. The result is a light to dark gradient, visualizing the amount of time the machine has spent on each drawing. As multiple layers of curved lines superimpose, we observe the increasingly hypnotic moiré effect.



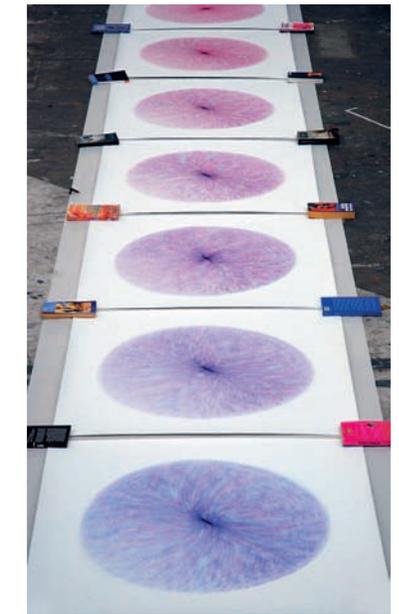
1 layer



5 layers



34 layers



BLUE TO RED

Materials: ballpen on paper

Dimensions: 100 x 100 cm

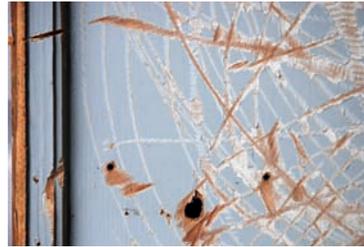
/ Copenhagen, 2010

Each sheet in this dichromatic series has ten drawing layers, evolving from 10 blue layers on the first sheet; 9 blue + 1 red on the second one, 8 blue + 2 red on the third one, and so forth, up to 10 red-only layers on the eleventh sheet.



GRINDER

Materials: wood, steel, oil barrels, sand, concrete, grinder
Dimensions: 600 x 800 x 800 cm
Presented at the Artists' Fall Exhibition (KE10) / Copenhagen, 2010



The Grinder is an upscaled version of the Drawing Machine. It uses the same principle with one exception: while the Drawing Machine works with pen on paper, the Grinder cuts and drills into the surface of metal, glass, or wood.

The idea of the Grinder was born from the desire to work with materials that could be incorporated directly into space/architecture (floor, facades, and other surfaces).



TENSIONED WOOD

Materials: wood, metal, textile, linoleum, mesh
Dimensions: variable
Produced at the Danish Art Workshops. Selected pieces were presented at the Artists' Fall Exhibition (KE11) / Copenhagen, 2011



Tensioned Wood looks into built-in spatial qualities of something as simple as a wooden plank. Partially split in halves and unfolded with the help of a steam box, the plank reveals its inner space, expanding into an object that has a backbone and a volume, an inside and an outside, surface and depth. The degree of unfolding, as well as the plank's



dimensions, suggest different potentials: from 3 m high architecture-scale elements to fine lamellas that add up to form more complex items.

The latter are further explored in the later series, *Untitled* (pp. 17, 19), that deals with resilience and visible impacts of force: the duality of simultaneous unfolding and clamping.

SPACE METER

Materials: ash wood funnel, magnet, string

Dimensions: funnel diameter – 15 cm, string length – approx. 600 cm

Produced at the Danish Art Workshops and presented at the Mindcraft12 exhibition / Milan, 2012



Space Meter is an instrument that spans the space between two walls. The key to this project lies in the «in-between» of both the immediate space separating the two exhibition



walls, and the inconspicuous gap that occurs in the magnetic field. Stretched by magnetic force, the metal string is at the same time held back by its length – precisely so that the magnet and the wall do not touch each other. The string terminates with a wooden funnel that literally floats in space a few millimetres from the opposite wall. This creates an intense field of tension where gravity seems overruled.



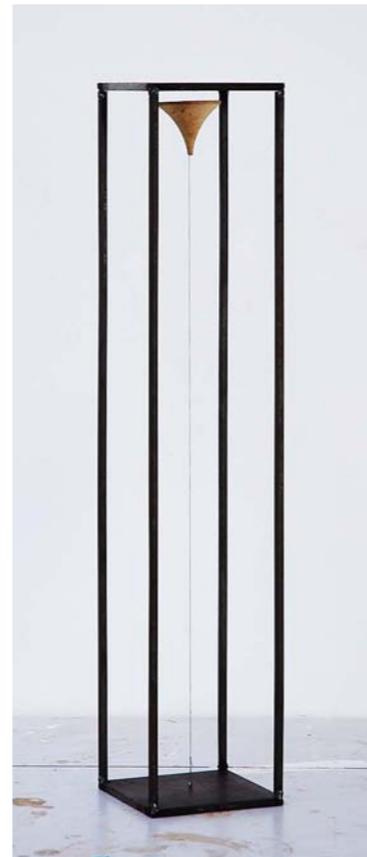
MEASURING SPACE

Materials: solid oak elements, magnets, strings

Dimensions: variable

First presented at Modtar Projects / Copenhagen, 2012

Playing with the tension between part and whole, the Measuring Space series moves away from the more symbolic representation of magnetism: here, Eske Rex introduces some substantial, sculptural objects as he seeks to enhance the experience of overcoming gravity. Figures



in turned oak wood seem to hover in mid-air; their weight and physicality are opposed to the free-floating condition as the objects spin or slightly sway when one tries to move or pull them.

ESKE REX / born 1977, lives and works in Copenhagen, Denmark

2008 / The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Design

2007 / Internship at studio Jeppe Hein, Berlin

2006 / University of Art and Design Helsinki

1999 / Carpenter, Bronzemedal, Hillerød

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2013 / Silent Action, Gallerie Maria Wettergren, Paris, France

2012 / Measuring space, Modtar Projects, Copenhagen, Denmark

2010 / (Parentes), Modtar Projects, Copenhagen, Denmark

2009 / Udtræk, Modtar Projects, Copenhagen, Denmark

2008 / Machine, Parrotta Project Space, Berlin, Germany

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2013

/ MINDCRAFT13, Galleria Alessandro De March, Milan, Italy

/ PAD Paris, Galerie Maria Wettergren, Paris, France

/ O'Clock, Cafa Art Center, Beijing, China

/ Locus of Control, Etage Projects, Copenhagen, Denmark

2012

/ Design Miami, Galerie Maria Wettergren, Miami, USA

/ PAD London, Galerie Maria Wettergren, London, UK

/ 1st UCD Imagine Science Film Festival, Dublin, Ireland

/ Sejerø Festival, Sejerø, Denmark

/ MINDCRAFT12, Galleria Alessandro De March, Milan, Italy

2011

/ O'Clock, Triennale Design Museum, Milan, Italy

/ KE11, Artists' Fall Exhibition, Den Frie, Copenhagen, Denmark

/ Sejerø Festival, Sejerø, Denmark

/ Design in Motion, Sydney Design Festival, Sydney, Australia

/ MINDCRAFT11, Galleria Alessandro De March, Milan, Italy

2010

/ KE10, Artists' Fall Exhibition, Carlsberg Ny Tap, Copenhagen, Denmark

/ Designers Investigating, Øksnehallen, Copenhagen, Denmark

/ Opening of Spinderihallerne, Vejle, Denmark

/ Charlottenborg Spring Exhibition, Copenhagen, Denmark

/ Fröhliche Gesellschaft - Editionen, Centre d'Édition Contemporaine, Geneva, Switzerland, and Parrotta Contemporary Art Gallery, Stuttgart, Germany

2009

/ The Cabinetmakers Autumn Exhibition, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen

/ Charlottenborg Spring Exhibition, Copenhagen, Denmark

2007

/ Machine, Parrotta Contemporary Art Gallery, Stuttgart, Germany

/ Jeppe Hein Emphieht: Vorschub, Berlin, Germany

ESKE REX : SILENT ACTION

www.eskerex.com

Concept, text and layout Anna Yudina

Fred Sandback quote (p. 20) is part of the artist's statement, first published in English and Flemish in Plan & Space, exhibition catalogue (Gent: Koninklijke Academie, 1977)

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Eske Rex (unless credited otherwise)
2011 Danish Crafts / Jule Hering (Drawing Machine, pp. 4-5)
2012 Danish Crafts / JeppeGudmundsen.com (Space Meter, pp. 20-21 and 26-27)
www.JosephBarnett.net (Drawing Machine, p. 30)
Berit von Enoch (portrait, p. 35)

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