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PURPLE

art FRED EVERSLEY

FLAWLESS PARABOLIC SCULPTURE MADE BY A FORMER NASA ENGINEER LEND AN OPTICAL AND SCIENTIFIC EDGE TO CALIFORNIA'S ICONIC LIGHT AND SPACE MOVEMENT

INTERVIEW AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY OLIVIER ZAHM
SHOT IN FRED EVERSLEY'S NEW YORK STUDIO

FRED EVERSLEY, *UNTITLED*, 1970, CAST POLYESTER
UNTITLED, 2004, CAST BRONZE
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OPPOSITE PAGE: FRED EVERSLEY, *UNTITLED*, 1970-
THREE-COLOR, THREE-LAYER CAST
POLYESTER
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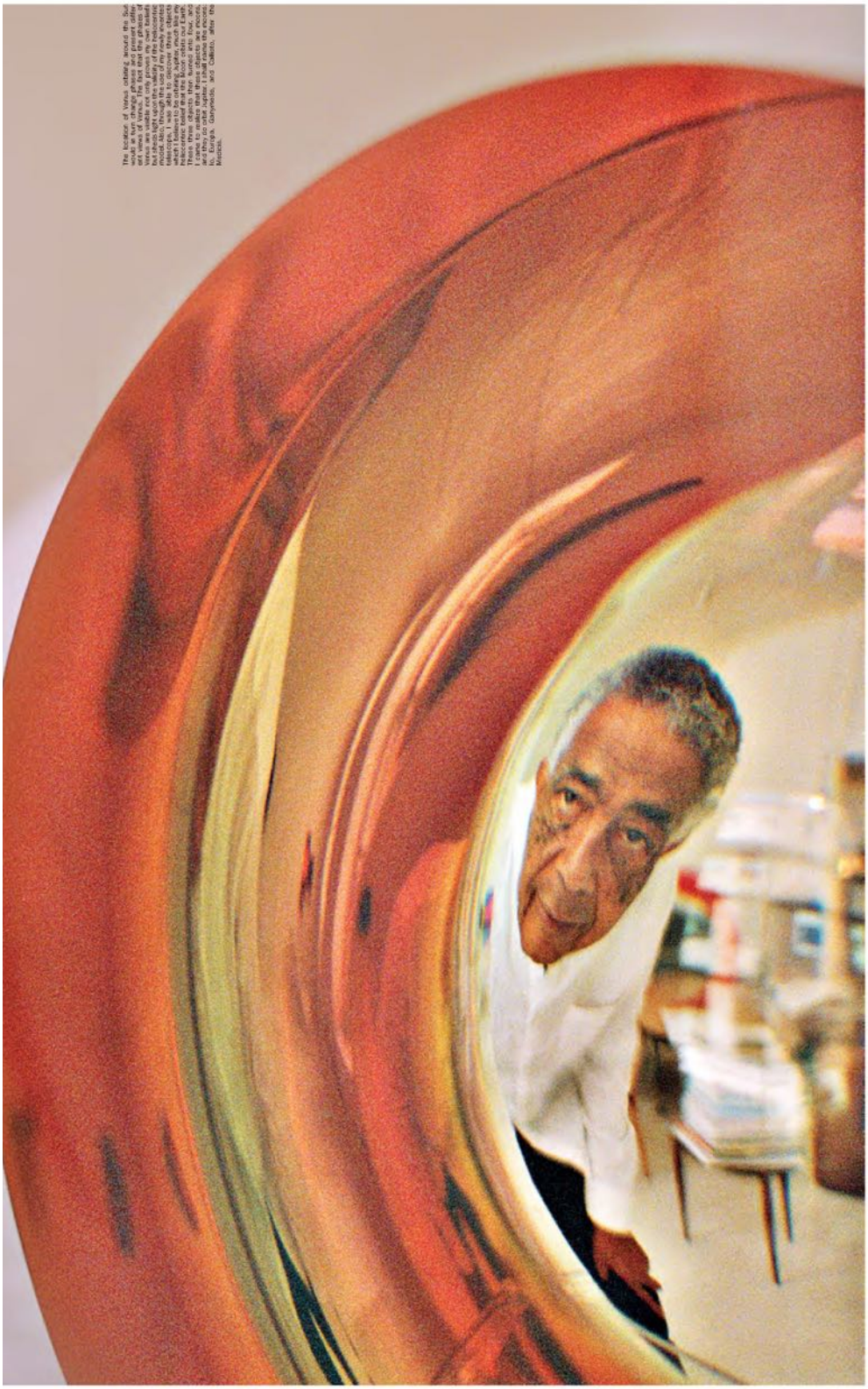

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FRED EVERSLEY, *UNTITLED*, 1970,
THREE-COLOR, THREE-LAYER CAST POLYESTER

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OLIVIER ZAHM — Your show at the David Kordansky Gallery in LA was called “Chromospheres.” What does that mean?
FRED EVERSLEY — I try to make my art universal. And I think the one thing we all have in common is that we all are affected by the energy that is universal. The genesis of energy is central to the mystery of our existence as animate beings in an inanimate universe, and I use the parabola to concentrate energy.

OLIVIER ZAHM — What kind of energy?
FRED EVERSLEY — The original and ultimate source of all energy on Earth is the sun — the chromosphere is the layer of the solar atmosphere. Since the very beginning, my sculptures have been directly influenced by the concept of the solar energy source. The original goal of my early pieces of sculpture was to create kinetic art without using kinetic elements. I preferred to employ natural changes in the light, the environment, and the spectator to create the kinetic effects. All forms of energy are concentrated to the same focal point. So, there’s light, heat… And I postulated that if there were metaphysical energies, they’d get concentrated to the same point. My experience has been successful — in that people are attracted to my art, the sculptures, and they all try to find the focal point. I don’t talk about it — I just let people do it.

OLIVIER ZAHM — They go straight to the center.
FRED EVERSLEY — Yes, they try to. At my show in Los Angeles and here at Frieze, you see the same phenomenon of people approaching the pieces, trying to find the focal point, stepping back, and just absorbing them. It draws people in.

OLIVIER ZAHM — That’s beautiful. But by “energy,” do you mean the energy that attracts people to the center point like a gravitational force?
FRED EVERSLEY — To the center point, yes. Most people don’t even know about the center point, but they’re sucked in. As they move their heads and their eyes, they try to find what’s happening, and they end up exploring…

OLIVIER ZAHM — Space.
FRED EVERSLEY — Yes, everything else around them that is captured in the lens.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Looking at your work, there’s a sort of distortion of space.
FRED EVERSLEY — Right. This is a parabolic lens or a parabolic mirror, like in this black piece.

OLIVIER ZAHM — It could be a mirror.
FRED EVERSLEY — The black piece is a mirror, with a little translucency in the center.

OLIVIER ZAHM — There’s physical energy, but you also mentioned metaphysical energy. In what sense is there something spiritual?
FRED EVERSLEY — I postulated that if there are metaphysical energies, it’s impossible to measure them. If they exist, the only practical assumption is that they obey the same laws of physics that the known forms of energy do. I think I’ve successfully witnessed it, just from the feedback I’ve gotten over the years — [be it from] sophisticated art viewers or kids.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Because you believe in universal experience. Should art be universal, in your opinion?
FRED EVERSLEY — Yes. There’s a story about a collector I sold a piece to in the early ’70s who happened to be a famous, major collector, and who was also a psychiatrist. Without my knowledge, he put one of my pieces at the end of the couch his patients used. And without even informing me or talking to me, he decided to put it as an item of contemplation. Three or four years later, when I saw my sculpture and how he used it, I knew I was onto something.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Does it change over the years or not? Are people more attracted by your work?
FRED EVERSLEY — No. When I look at people’s reactions to my sculptures at the gallery in Los Angeles and at the show I recently had at Frieze in New York, they’re all the same. It sucks people in. My art always causes people to stop and play with it, visually. And once in a while, they even get their ear in the right place, and they can hear the concentration of the whole room — inside their head.

OLIVIER ZAHM — It’s a multisensory experience because there’s the eye, there’s also the power of the shape, and there’s a sort of “fixed movement.” I read that you do it with resin on a turntable.
FRED EVERSLEY — Yes, I make it on a spinning turntable, and the parabolic shape is the result of it.

OLIVIER ZAHM — A manual turntable?
FRED EVERSLEY — Electric. I use a very simple turntable that I retrofitted for my needs, so that I can vary the speed. And the speed causes the depth of the parabola. The faster the speed, the greater the depth.

OLIVIER ZAHM — So, maybe you’re touching on space, time, gravitation…
FRED EVERSLEY — Yeah, exactly, it’s the combination of gravitational force and centrifugal force. It’s basically a result of an article I read when I was a kid about Isaac Newton’s bucket theory, where he spun a bucket of water around a vertical axis, which created the parabolic form. He couldn’t do anything with it except look at it, you know? But I used that theory to attempt to create a parabola by spinning fluid polyester resin around a vertical axis, and by using plastic, I could “freeze” the parabolic-shaped matter, which you couldn’t do with water. The moment you stop spinning water, it goes flat again. Plastic hardens while it’s spinning. My monochrome pieces are simple in a way, as they are made with one layer of plastic. But I also do three and two layers of plastic, spun one after another, at the same speed for all three layers. And so you have a parabolic shape lying on top of another parabolic shape, on top of another parabolic shape, which creates a very interesting optical effect.

OLIVIER ZAHM — How do you choose the color? Is it very intuitive?
FRED EVERSLEY — The early pieces were all in the same colors. The same three colors look very different if you vary the speed

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of each layer, and if you vary the concentration of color and amount of resin for each layer… Every one comes out different, and you can't even appreciate what it looks like until you sand and polish it and create the appropriate optical surface. Casting is the easy part. The polishing is 95% of the work. That's the hard part.

OLIVIER ZAHM — You want perfect reflection, a shiny surface?
FRED EVERSLEY — Right. It doesn't have to be shiny, but it has to be a perfectly polished parabolic shape, so you get this optimal energy concentration.

OLIVIER ZAHM — I read that you imagined this show in the early '70s?
FRED EVERSLEY — Well, I didn't envision this show, but you probably read that I envisioned and started my earliest lenses in 1969 and made them in the early '70s.

OLIVIER ZAHM — But you finally created new ones with the same vision last year?
FRED EVERSLEY — Yes, in a way — I hadn't made multilayered pieces in a long while, and last year I started to play around and experiment with the old recipes and principles again. But I wanted to push the visual boundaries and explore new effects, so I started to swap the color order and also to allow other color combinations than what I had used before. So, in that sense, the whole body of work is radically different from my past work, though the formula is the same.

OLIVIER ZAHM — And the technique didn't change? And the resin?
FRED EVERSLEY — The technique hasn't. The resin is essentially the same. What you can buy now is just slightly different from the plastic you could buy in 1970, but it's fairly similar.

OLIVIER ZAHM — It's pretty incredible to see this work resurfacing. It's beautiful. Would you call them cosmic?
FRED EVERSLEY — I would call them cosmic, yes. Because the cosmos, basically, is a concentration of energy.

OLIVIER ZAHM — And there's the expansion of the universe, which is strangely accelerating, and people don't know why.
FRED EVERSLEY — It's always been accelerating. It's just a matter of how fast the acceleration's been at any given time. The whole universe is spinning, and so it's pulling itself apart, slowly. They're talking millions of years, but what the ultimate effect will be, we don't know.

OLIVIER ZAHM — That's why we end up with metaphysics.
FRED EVERSLEY — That's why we end up with metaphysics, and we have scientists out there trying to measure all of this. I just read of a new mission to Mars that's planned for two years from now, where, for the first time, they're going to bore a hole and analyze it to see if there's any evidence of life.

OLIVIER ZAHM — It's under the surface.
FRED EVERSLEY — All we've done so far is to look at the surface. We have no idea what's inside. We know there's some water and some methane, but we don't know if there's any evidence that anything ever grew in it, plants or some kind of animals.

OLIVIER ZAHM — But if you think about the number of planets in our galaxy and the number of galaxies, that's…
FRED EVERSLEY — Enormous.

OLIVIER ZAHM — So, there is a high possibility of other forms of life.

FRED EVERSLEY — Undoubtedly, somewhere out there, there's something similar to this. Where, in what galaxy, who knows?

OLIVIER ZAHM — Have you always been interested in space?
FRED EVERSLEY — Yeah. From the time I was a teenager, at least. My father was a major aerospace engineer.

OLIVIER ZAHM — It's in your blood?
FRED EVERSLEY — It's in my blood, and I'm an engineer.

OLIVIER ZAHM — You're an engineer, too?
FRED EVERSLEY — Yes, I'm a graduate electrical engineer from Carnegie Mellon. I designed two laboratories for NASA in the mid-'60s. Before going into art. And my specialty was high-intensity acoustics, for testing the space capsule, and using the parabola for concentrating the sound.

OLIVIER ZAHM — For sound, too?
FRED EVERSLEY — Yes, for concentrating sound. Most telescopes also have a parabolic reflector.

OLIVIER ZAHM — They capture waves?
FRED EVERSLEY — They capture light in waves. I used the parabola to intensify sound for testing in spaceships — for the Apollo and Gemini programs — because we had no idea what effect acoustical energy was going to have in competing and causing the spaceships to fail during the launch. You have heat to worry about.

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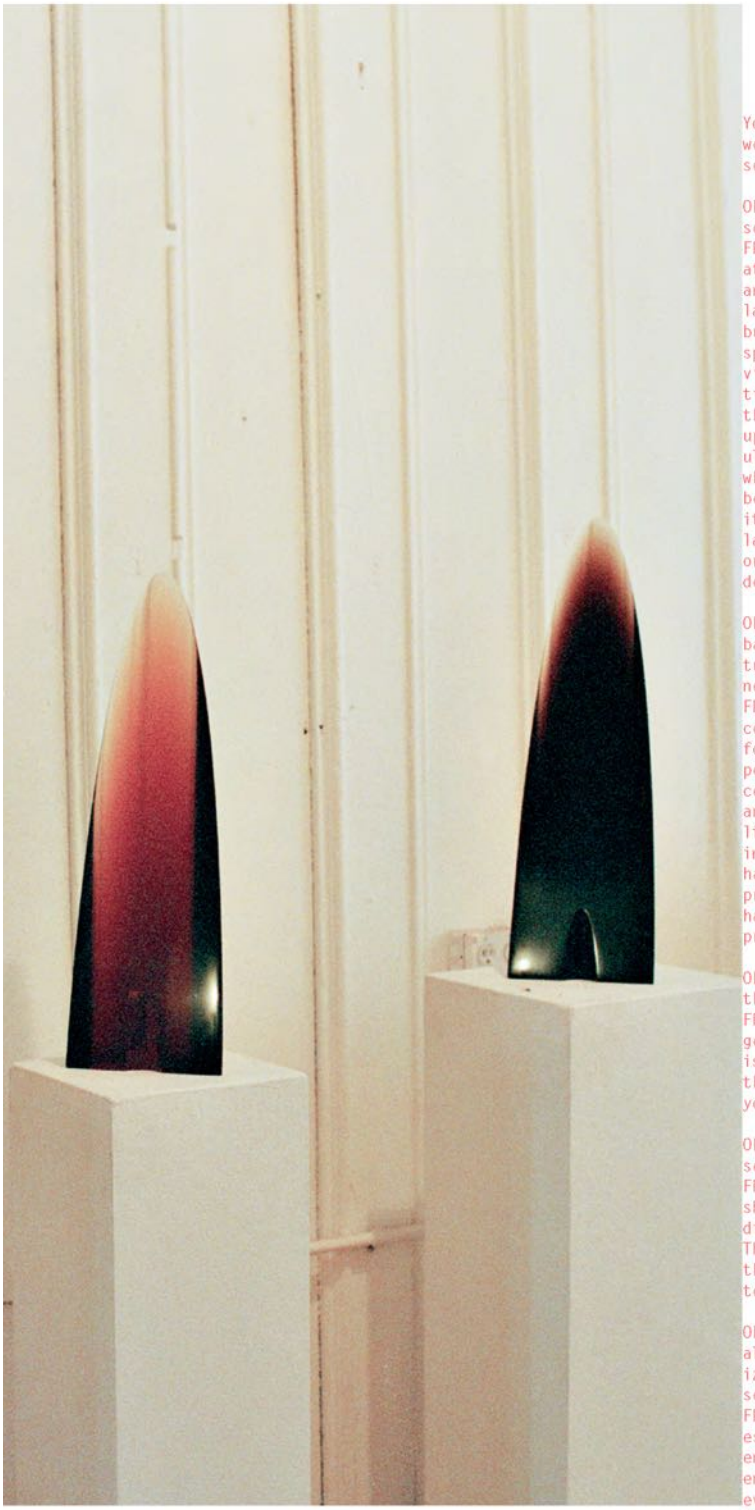

LEFT TO RIGHT:
FRED EVERSLEY, *UNTITLED*, 2001, CAST POLYESTER,
UNTITLED, 2001, CAST POLYESTER,
UNTITLED, 2003, CAST POLYESTER
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You have solar radiation to worry about, and you have sound to worry about.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Is there sound in space?
FRED EVERSLEY — You generate sound through the sound and vibration in just the launch. In other words, it's busting through the atmosphere. And sound creates vibrations, and the vibrations fatigue the metal of the spaceship and heat it up. And so, you have to simulate this the best you can while you're still on Earth because you have no idea if it's going to burn up at the launch and kill everybody or just fall apart. And some do, you know.

OLIVIER ZAHM — So, we're back to energy. Your sculptures, in a way give off a net energy…
FRED EVERSLEY — My lenses concentrate all kinds of forms of energy to a single point. They are energy concentrators. Kind of like an instrument that you live with that is engaging you. My sculpture does have sound-energy capturing properties. But they also have light-energy capturing properties.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Sound is not the same around your piece?
FRED EVERSLEY — Until you get a focal point, which is a point in space, and they get the whole room in your ear.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Like with a seashell?
FRED EVERSLEY — Yes, but a shell is not a parabola. It disperses energy somewhat. The parabola is the only shape that concentrates all energy to a single focal point.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Concentrates all energy? I didn't realize that it is concentrating sound, too.
FRED EVERSLEY — I'm interested in various forms of energy because most of the energy out there I don't even know about. But I know it's concentrated to the same point. You know, the parabola cannot be polished easily because it constantly changes slope as you go around. So, you can't polish it in a conventional polishing machine.

OLIVIER ZAHM — You do it step-by-step?
FRED EVERSLEY — Step-by-step as you go around. Which is why telescope mirrors are so expensive — because it takes 10 years of somebody hand-polishing it. A big telescope mirror takes an incredible amount of time and is very, very expensive to make. And the breakthrough came when they started making cheap little cameras. And then, what they did was to just cast the parabola in little instant cameras, by using a plastic, parabolic lens as a single element, made in an injection mold. You don't get such high quality, but it's high quality enough. Expensive cameras are hand-ground surfaces. They don't attempt to do the parabola. They use a sphere that can be machine-polished, but then they use several elements in multiple layers, each to correct the errors of the previous element. And if you use enough elements, it's not perfect, but it gets close enough to being perfect that you can get away with it.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Sort of an artificial eye.
FRED EVERSLEY — It is an artificial eye. The parabola being the only perfect single element shape that concentrates raw forms of energy.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Beautiful.
FRED EVERSLEY — So, if you go up to Mount Palomar in California and look at the reflectors, they're parabolic reflectors, but they took 10 or 15 years to make and some enormous amount of energy, some enormous amount of money.

OLIVIER ZAHM — So, the parabola is your vocabulary. How did you find this shape.
FRED EVERSLEY — It's my vocabulary. I found this shape; I found a way to do it. Now, I'm just exploring other forms of space, like black holes, to see how I can, sort of, use the inspiration. And in a parabolic shape. So, it's almost endless. I'm going to run out of time before I run out of possibilities.

END