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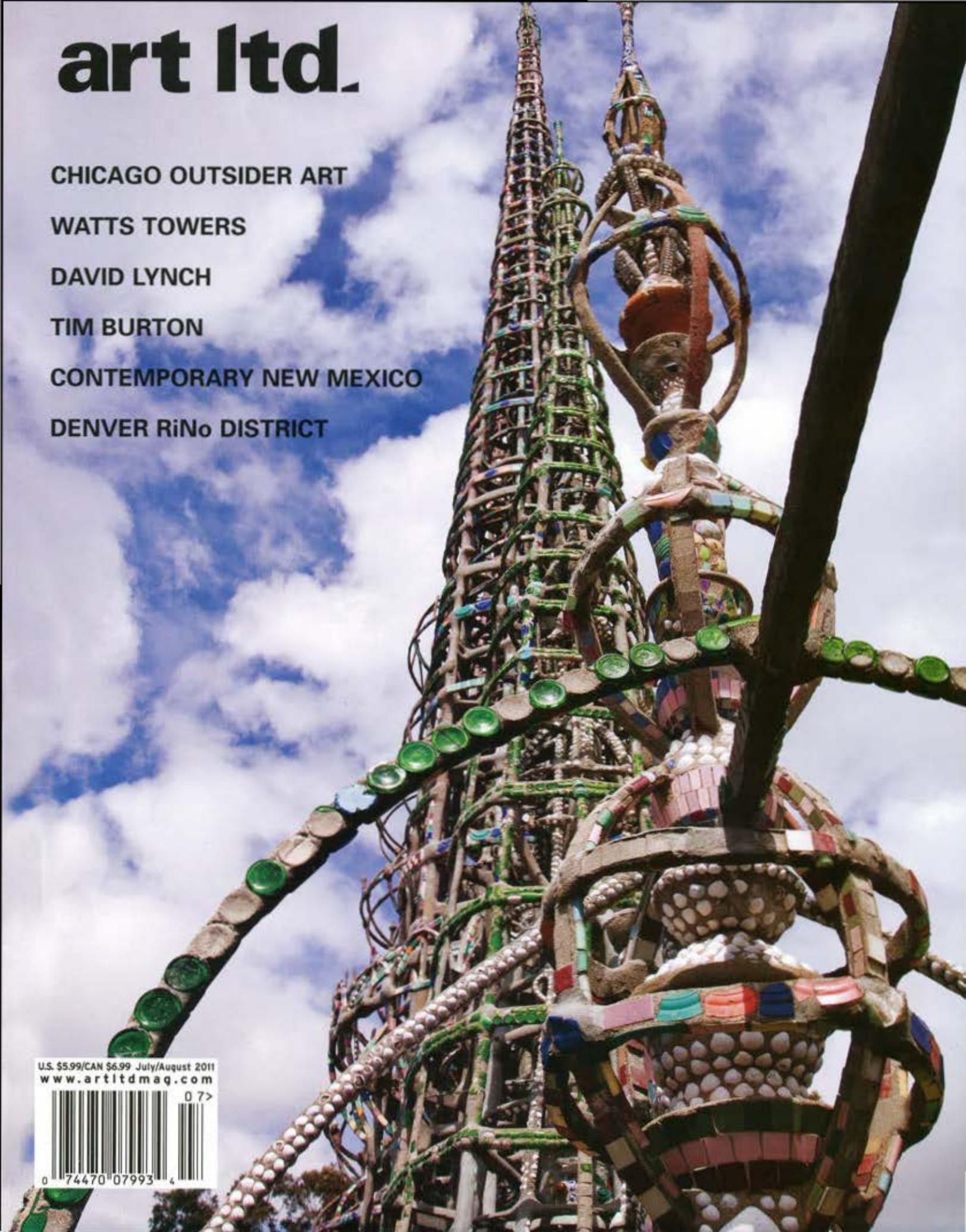
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"Artifact Wall," John White, INSTALLATION VIEW CONSISTING OF ARTWORKS AND ARTIFACTS OF JOHN WHITE'S ARTISTIC PRODUCTION ARRANGED BY CURATOR
PHOTO: GENE OGAMI, COURTESY OF THE PASADENA ARMORY

PASADENA

"Lifelines: A Retrospective Exhibition of Performance, Installation, Sculpture, Painting and Drawing by John M. White" at the Armory Center for the Arts

The vital peregrinations of John White's existence form the core of his artwork. Whether it is contriving to turn his experiences of golfing, fishing, fathering or psychotherapy into art, White brings wit and insight to bear in the multifaceted production of his art stuff. The path he has charted is loopy, unpredictable and unafraid to take tangents. Much like the feeling in the art world at the time when he started, one's life was to be guide for the art making, abandoning the traditional meter of stylistic continuity and favoring instead momentary inspiration and technical improvisation. In this retrospective, curator Betty Ann Brown has magisterially corralled his numerous forays into art making allowing the complex nature of White's art to come to the fore.

Overall, John White worked in three principal areas of overlapping concentration: performance, installation, and drawing/painting. In

this survey, this span is primarily recreated using the stuff his creative activities left behind. So performances are recounted through photo and installation, while his copious drawn, written and painted records, notations and art pieces are scattered throughout. Episodic in nature, the exhibition mirrors how works are connected without being interdependent. The room in which the artist has created a sand trap is a particularly satisfying work and a good example of how time-based performance work (the golf) intersects with the installation (an illustrated landwork of sorts), then also relates to drawings on the walls nearby. The link established in the room can be best described as parallel mediations on how to extricate one's self from a series of accumulated molecular bits of stuff (be it sand or words in the therapeutic task of working through language traps.) The attention to the disentanglement is interwoven without being spelled out didactically.

Because his work is autobiographical, White necessarily touches upon the foibles of life. He courageously trolls through his own experiences, fusing that which he gleans into intriguing art works. The works are marked for their generosity in sharing the personal and yet they are elliptical in their storytelling, implying and suggesting meaning. That is an important enigma of White's work: the viewer can indeed peer in and see a life in translation, yet it is our imaginative projection that connects the dots, actions, and lines into a narrative. So in the moment that the viewer (or viewers) do close in on a narrative, they find themselves in John's mischievous mirror looking back at their own reflection and at those around them.

—JOHN DAVID O'BRIEN