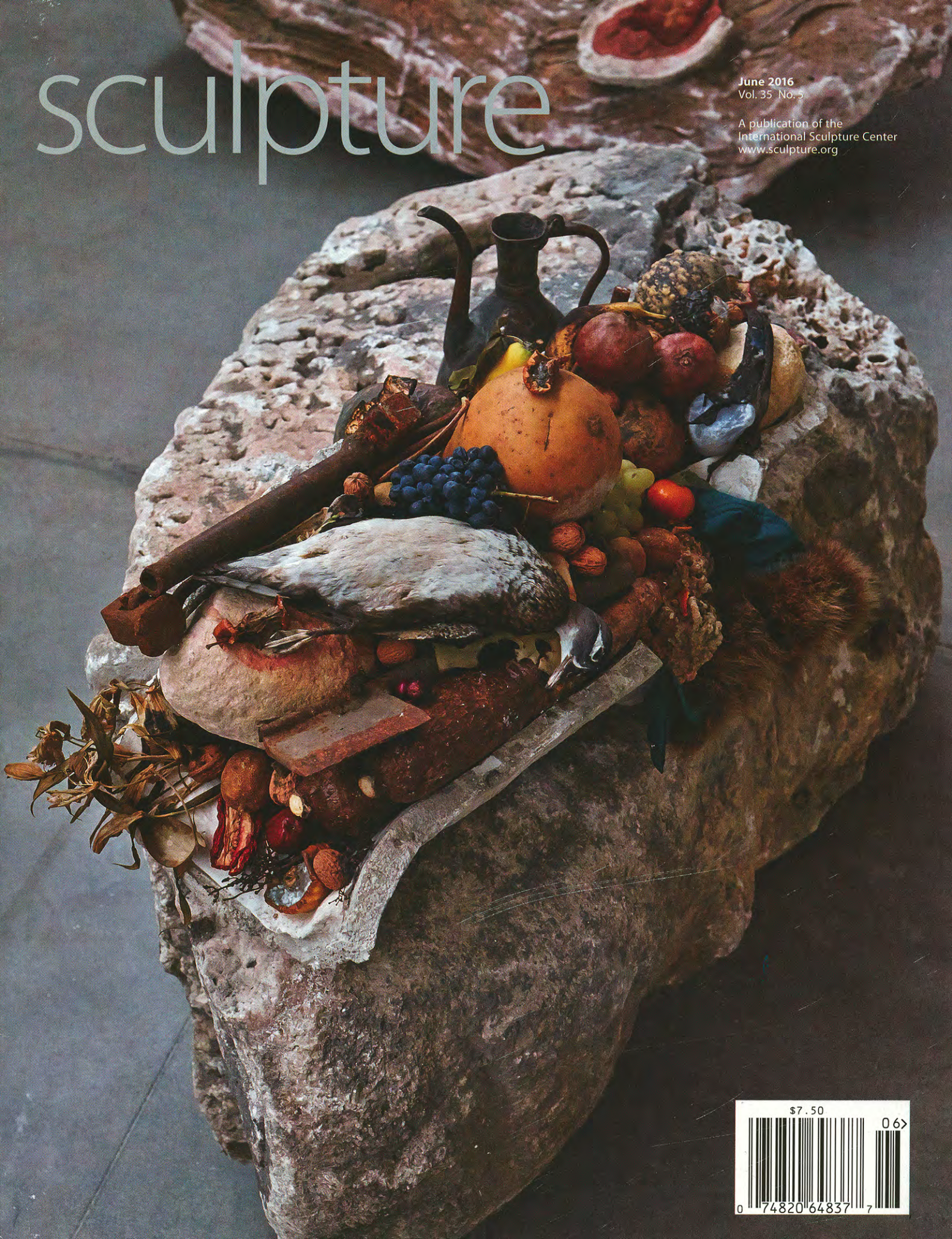


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Left and below: Joan Tanner, *The False Spectator*, 2016. Metal, wood and wood veneer, barrier netting, clay paper, sandpaper, and Styrofoam, 2 views of installation, 12 x 30 x 50 ft.

#### SEATTLE

##### Joan Tanner Suyama Space

Huddled in impromptu groups, excluding passage in some directions and open to being traversed in others, Joan Tanner's recent multi-part installation seemed to lumber, stride, and even careen through space. Continuing her distinctive arrays of curiously awkward and yet oddly familiar forms, *The False Spectator* could be characterized as off-the-cuff, extemporized, or make-shift. Yet Tanner's installations exude an air of compositional determination even as they appear to head in several different directions simultaneously—a polysemantic strategy that makes seeing them in person a pleasurable experience and retelling them in text a daunting task.

*The False Spectator* consisted of multiple sculptural entities, which expanded to collectively occupy the space as they moved from left to right and front to back. They seemed to be mostly vertical structures, reaching up to the beamed ceiling. There were trough-like erections, leaning columns, wedges, irregular shapes, and ribbed arches made of conduit tubing and covered with sheets of metal, wood, plastic, and other industrial materials. Nicknamed by the artist with a quirky and purposefully misaligned logic, the forms eluded precise definition while alluding to a number of possible meanings. In truth, Tanner's work often activates the viewer's sense of kinesthetic engagement, causing it to seem alive. With variegated surfaces and "skins" made of textured materials, these new works also engaged the viewer's

physical curiosity by activating the haptic sense of touch.

The overall array was dominated by *Horizontal Sawbuck*, which resembled an elongated and spindly sawhorse with large eyebolts functioning as footings. Towering overhead, its curved tubes partially paneled in colored wood, it seemed to be holding the others in formation much like the head of a pack. Tall, lozenge-like forms called *Bent panels* stood at several different points: two made of wood veneer panels and four of solid blue foam. These quirky shapes, with their one folded cut, seemed to just mill around, projecting a sense of petulance, if not outright defiance. A *Vertical Sawbuck*, smaller than the horizontal one, sat wistfully back on one end, a variety of blue plastic embellishments adorning the ends of its vaulted crossbars. Farther out and clustered in parallel groups, *Flying buttresses* were propped against the wall, wiry threaded rods holding shield-like, curved surfaces off their long thin frames. The densest entities, *Troughs*, were scattered throughout, most sheathed in dull metal plate over metal and wood frames. They sat obdurately on the floor, each trough defined as a negative space. A flurry of plastic orange safety mesh wrapped around an inverted conic section in *Orange Wedge*, topped with an unruly group of wooden shelf-like accretions called *Tilts*. Finally, Tanner's *Wall* redundantly covered the south wall, functioning like a high relief drawing that backstopped the entire crowded aggregation of forms. Combining threaded rods, modular chain-like metal, and meshed elements with draped white paper and plastic and foam fragments, *Wall* came closest to addressing a pictorial dimension.

Strategically placed to disrupt patterns of movement through the space, these forms and groupings raised questions of passage and

blockage, of storage or transference. They resonated with memories of displaced, possibly abandoned, objects, discarded or even useless. They constituted a multitude of obstructions, both literally and metaphorically.

One obvious question loomed: Who is the "False Spectator?" The viewer who tries to ferret out Tanner's intent from this purposefully rambling composition? The artist herself, abandoning any stylistic continuity in order to throw the work into a vortex of activity that only ceases because the show must open, even as it hints at continuous re-working and endless noodling? Never giving themselves over as finished things, these perpetually temporary forms didn't allow viewers to formulate anything other than a changing assessment of what they had before them. It is a curious contradiction because even if the individual works were quite stable, there was something about the loopy sprawling composition that rendered it palpably unstable and utterly captivating.

2016 marks the final year for Suyama Space. Since 1998, George Suyama, together with Seattle curator Beth Sellars, have invited artists to respond to the gallery's unique architecture with installations that take into account its immense volume, the wood-planked floors, concrete walls, and high, open-beam ceiling—contextual and physical parameters that pose serious challenges. Experimental in its curatorial approach, Suyama Space has been an important experiential forum, bringing together unimagined artworks and a powerful spatial presence to create awkward and exciting unions. The physical answers explored there often catalyzed the later work of exhibiting artists, which is another part of Suyama Space's unique legacy.

—John David O'Brien