

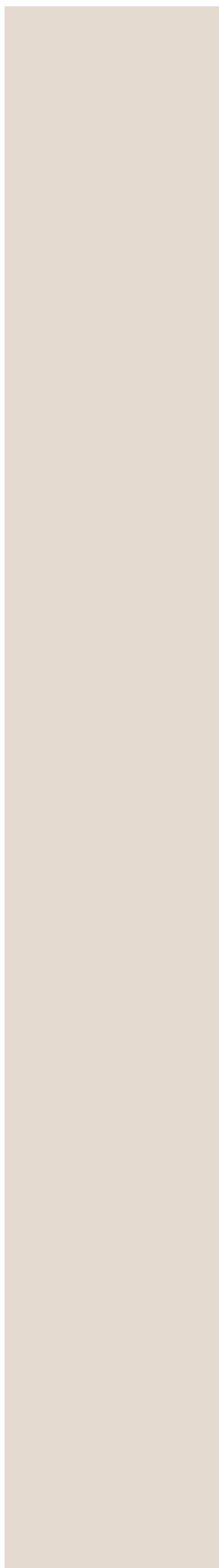


**FREY
NORRIS**
CONTEMPORARY
& MODERN

THE WORLD OF THE SURFACE
Lionel Bawden

October 1 – November 29, 2011





Beyond the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, my thinking is inspired by scientist explorers who cross over from 'the world of the surface' delving deep underground, investigating terra incognita.

-- LIONEL BAWDEN

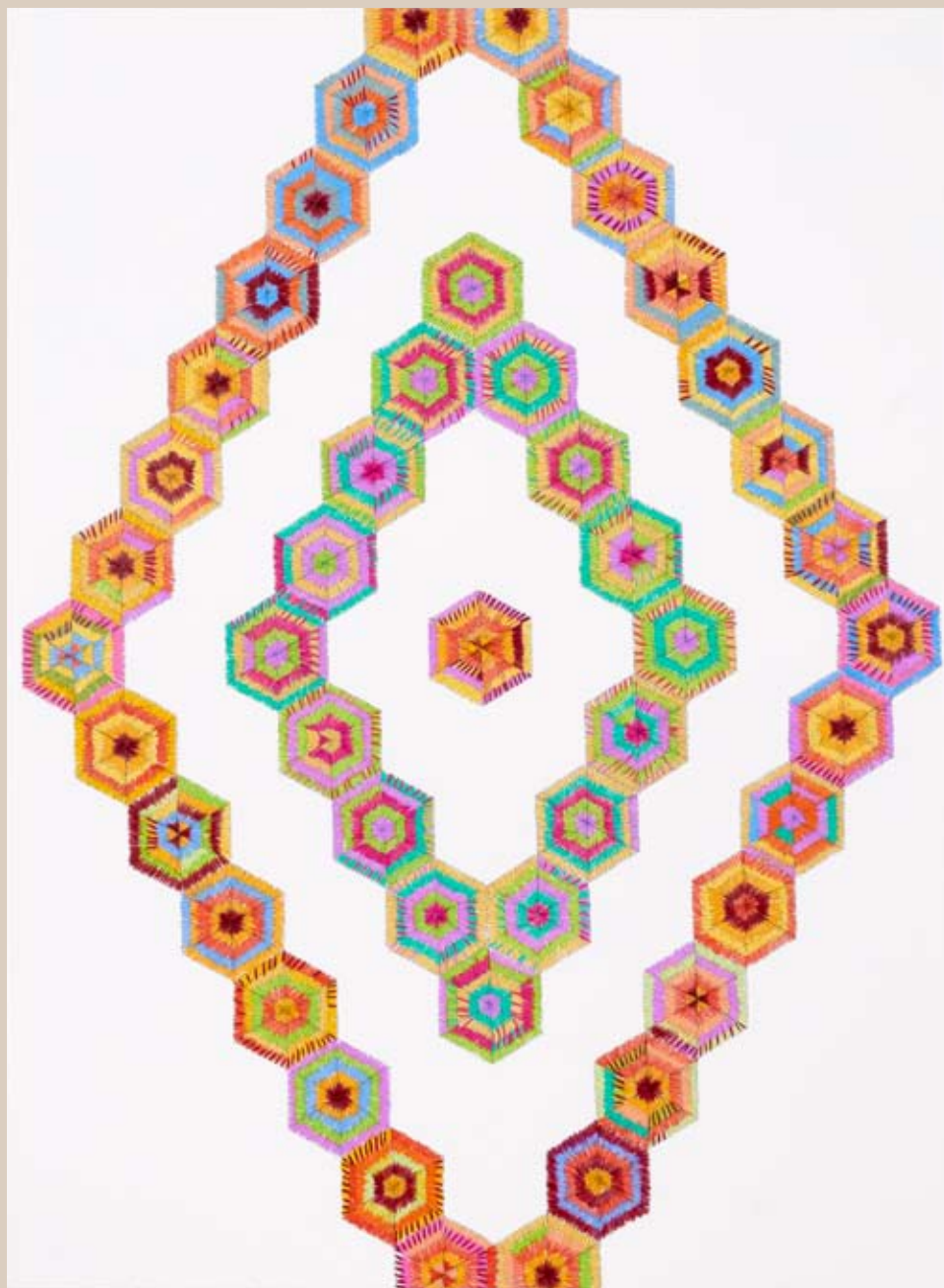
01

the world of the surface *Cover Image*
coloured Staedtler pencils, epoxy, incralac on black Perspex shelves
left form: 11 ½ x 9 x 11 ½ in. (29 x 23 x 29 cm); right form: 10 ½ x 9 ½ x 4 in. (27 x 24 x 10 cm),
2011
Photo by Craig Benders



02

flipside (II)
coloured Staedtler pencils, epoxy, incralac on black Perspex shelf,
12 ¼ x 6 x 3 ½ in. (31 x 15 x 9 cm), 2011
Photo by Craig Benders



03

jewel linking (inner-world II)
coloured pencil on paper, 30 x 22 in. (76 x 56 cm), 2011
Photo by Craig Benders



Crossing Over

by Maura Reilly

Since the late 1990s, Lionel Bawden has been experimenting with the sculptural virtues of the coloured pencil. Through the years, these exquisitely executed sculptures have alternately resembled river stones, phalluses, delicate molecular forms, amulets, topographical landscapes, gooey monsters, crystal caves, and, more recently vaguely anthropomorphic forms. The sculptures are constructed using innumerable hexagonal pencils, which the artist binds together with epoxy glue in varying patterns and colour gradations. Using this block as his foundation, he carves, shapes and sands the structure into a diverse range of forms. For the artist, the resulting structures have become an extension of his imagination, and stand-ins for his body.

Like many artists of his generation, Bawden is interested in uncovering unexpected qualities in the most commonplace materials and objects. Jason Rhoades, Tara Donovan and Tom Friedman have equally drawn attention for their ability to transform huge quantities of prosaic manufactured materials — Styrofoam cups, pencils, tar paper, bubblegum — into sculptural installations that suggest the wonders of nature. Working in the lineage of Marcel Duchamp, these artists have reclaimed and recontextualized their materials, elevating the quotidian to the monumental. For Bawden, it is the essential qualities of the common pencil—colour, geometry, and metaphorical possibilities—that drive his practice.


However, whilst their construction is visually accessible—especially since the material itself is one that all can identify with, imbued as it is with early memories and the awakening of one's first creative act—they are conceptually complex sculptures. For each body of work, Bawden has sought inspiration from diverse sources that range from Polish sci-fi novels

(e.g. Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* from 1963) and specific landscapes, to admired artists (such as Felix Gonzales Torres and Tony Cragg). For this new body of work, his American debut exhibition at Frey Norris in San Francisco, the artist has taken his inspiration, in part, from two primary sources: a National Geographic documentary and a film by Jean Cocteau.

It was in 2010, whilst on the treadmill at the gym, that Bawden viewed a documentary about Naica, the world's largest crystal cave in Mexico. The prehistoric underground chamber was portrayed as having unbearable physical conditions (temperatures hover consistently around a steamy 136 degrees Fahrenheit), reminding one of the mythological underworld, where darkness and evil reign supreme.

Toward the end of the documentary, video footage shows a geologist emerging from the subterranean cave on the verge of losing consciousness—at which point the narrator dramatically states “and now he returns to the world of the surface.” It was this statement that was a revelation for the artist. As he explains, ‘the world of the surface is the world that we live in every day; our darker shadow world is the one that lives inside us.’ The allegories proposed by the documentary enhanced Bawden's previous interests in subterranean “innerworlds,” concepts of surface and depth, illusion and reality, e.g. *the amorphous ones*, (2008 – 2011) which resemble selenite structures, as well as wall pieces such as the *caverns of temporal suspension* (2010) and the *atrium of the invisible* (2010).

For this most recent body of work, titled ‘The World of the Surface’, Bawden seeks to explore similar territory, but with a difference. The literal cave has disappeared, and has been replaced by an emphasis on surface and pattern, as signifiers for that intermediary space between



illusion and reality. In other words, the pattern becomes the 'world of the surface'. This is the starting point for this new body of work, in which the artist investigates sculptural surface as visual sensation, which can in turn lead (he hopes) to a meditative or entranced state. This surface is also manifests in patterned drawings, correlating in two dimensions to the objects. These 2-D works ground the ideas in a time-intensive practice that also brings to mind quilting and other patterned processes that speak of enormous investments of time and attention.

Bawden's newfound interest in the crossing from the world of the surface/reality into an-other space led him inevitably to a feature film by Jean Cocteau, titled *Orphée* (Orpheus) (1950), a contemporary adaptation of the Greek myth in which one of the key scenes shows the protagonist crossing through a mirror and into the underworld—which is to say from reality to illusion, from surface to depth. (Bawden had seen the Cocteau film in the mid-nineties and the mirror scenes percolated with him as a "slow hunch," which suddenly catalysed when he saw the Naica documentary.) In 'The World of the Surface', his now signature anthropomorphic sculptures act as miniature stand-ins for Orpheus. The reflectivity of the black Perspex shelves mimics the reflective surface of the mirror in Cocteau's film, allowing the playful sculptures to interact, double and multiply with 'their' mirror. In *The Reflection*, for instance, two diamond-shaped forms face one another at an angle, as if in conversation; in *Crossing the Mirror*, a squiggly-shaped form appears to reach for the reflective black shelf, as if for a fictitious mirror. *Crossing Over*, on the other hand, shows one of the 'figures' passing through the shelf/mirror, as if a literal (albeit abstract) re-representation of the Cocteau scene.

The artist has long been fascinated with the mirror scenes in the Narcissus and Orpheus myths. For him the two men represent archetypes of the masculine who are both lost in a shadow world, and who struggle with the real-life emotions of vanity and desire, jealousy and love.

As an installation, 'The World of the Surface' series appears something like a funhouse of dark mirrors, which functions ultimately to multiply the potency of Bawden's composite pencil sculptures, and to expand upon their metaphorical possibilities. Inside and outside, reality and illusion, surface and interior—these are dualities common to us all, and as such Bawden's extraordinary sculptures hover between our world and the underworld, challenging us all to make that existentialist leap, and to 'cross over'.

Maura Reilly is Professor of Art Theory at the Queensland College of Art.



04

flipside (III)
coloured Staedtler pencils, epoxy, incrallac on black Perspex shelf,
9 x 10 1/2 x 5 in. (23 x 27 x 24 cm), 2011
Photo by Craig Benders



05

crossing the mirror (II)
coloured Staedtler pencils, epoxy, incralac on black Perspex shelf
12 x 10 x 6 1/2 in. (31 x 25 x 17 cm), 2011
Photo by Craig Benders



06

gate keeper (II)
coloured Staedtler pencils, epoxy, incralac on black Perspex shelf,
11 1/2 x 9 1/4 x 4 1/4 in. (29 x 24 x 11 cm), 2011
Photo by Craig Benders



07

underworlder

coloured Staedtler pencils, epoxy, incralac on black Perspex shelf
11 1/2 x 8 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. (29 x 22 x 27 cm), 2011

Photo by Craig Benders





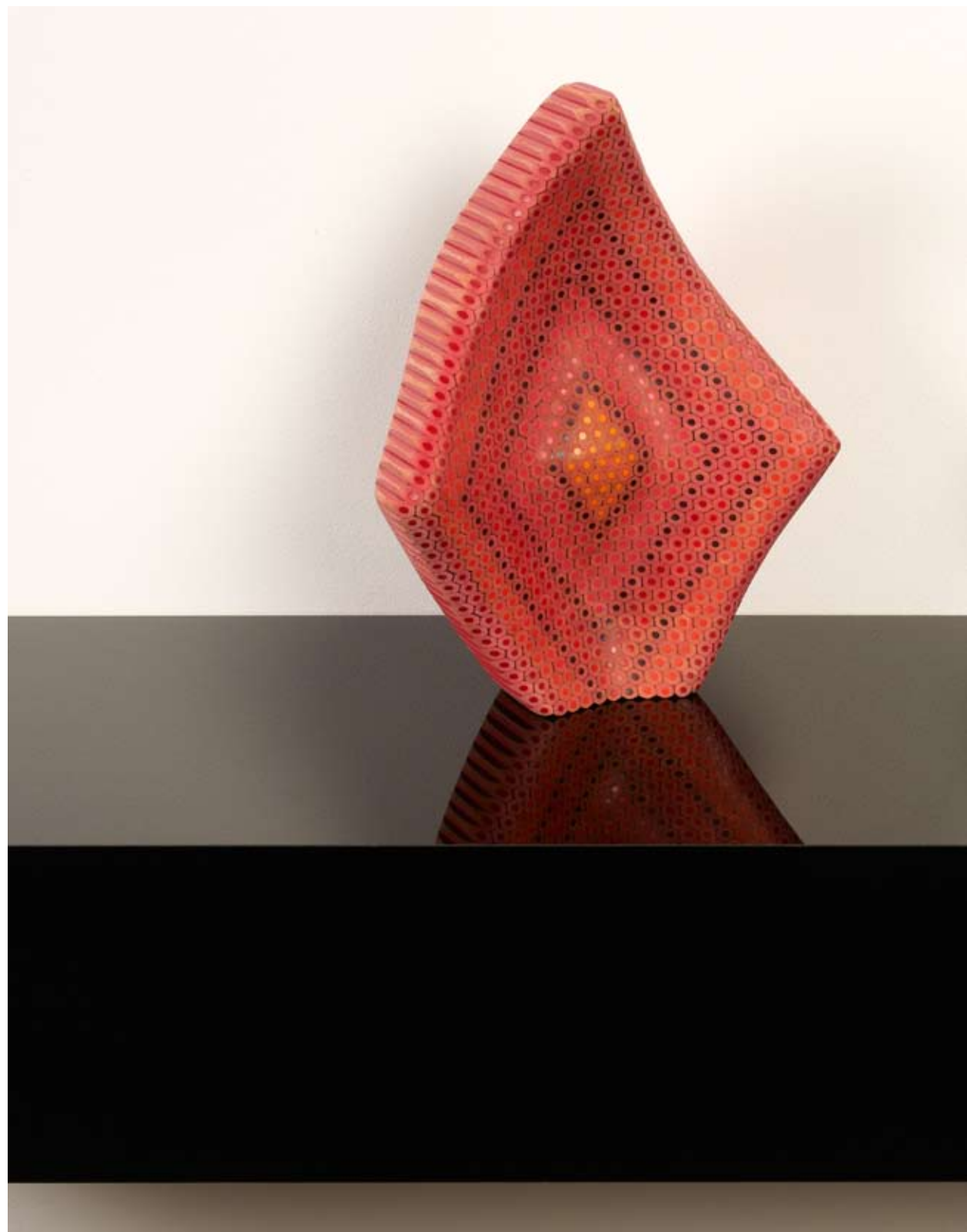
08

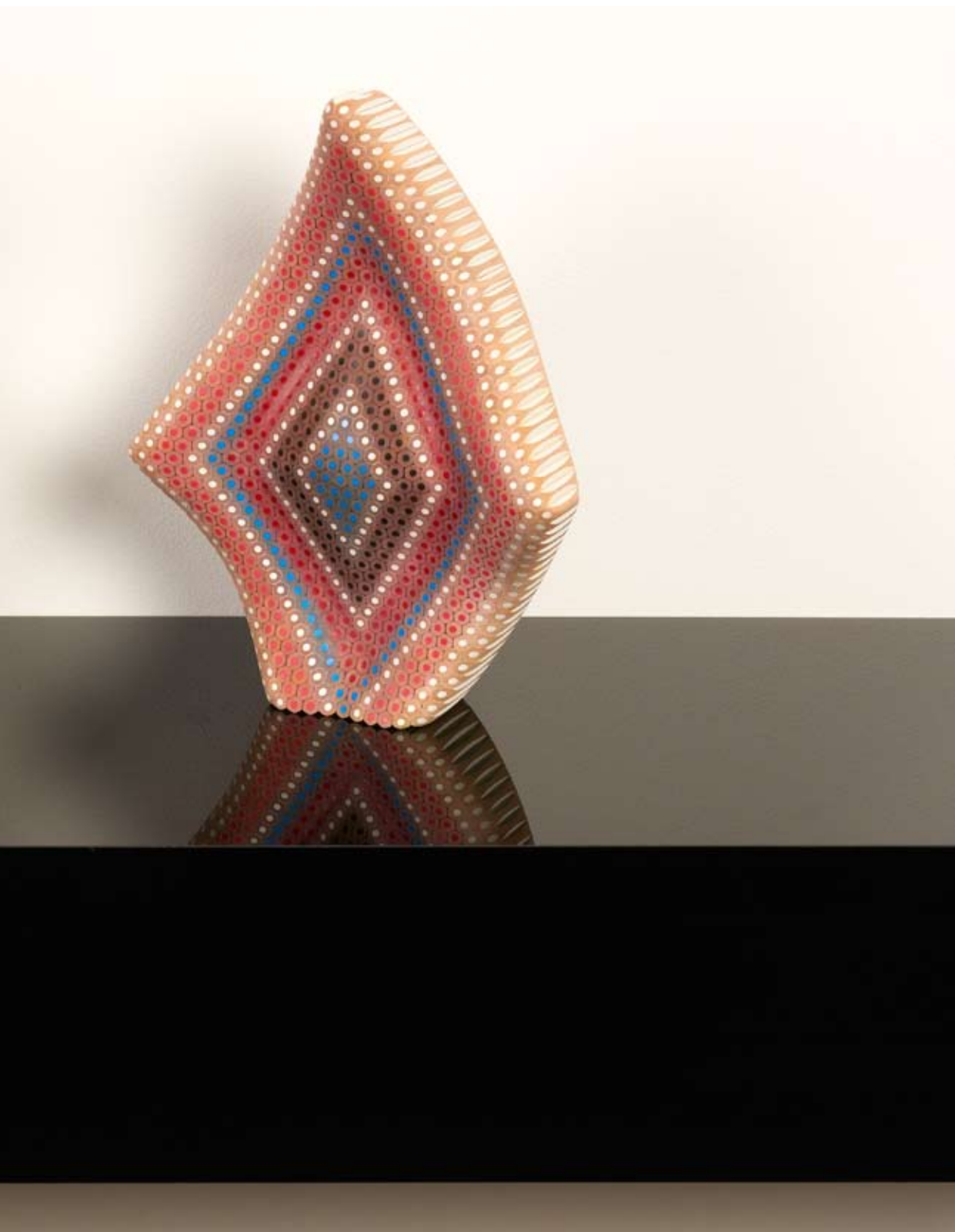
jewel linking (the cascades)
coloured pencil on paper, 30 x 22 in. (76 x 56 cm), 2011
Photo by Craig Benders



09

crossing the mirror (III)
coloured Staedtler pencils, epoxy, incralac on black Perspex shelf,
12 ½ x 11 x 8 ½ in. (32 x 28 x 22 cm), 2011
Photo by Craig Benders





10

the reflection
coloured Staedtler pencils, epoxy, incralac on black Perspex shelf,
22 x 15 in. (56 x 38 cm), 2011
Photo by Craig Benders



11

crossing the mirror

coloured Staedtler pencils, epoxy, incralac on black Perspex shelf,
12 x 10 x 7 in. (31 x 25 x 18 cm), 2011

Photo by Craig Benders





12

flipside
coloured Staedtler pencils, epoxy, incralac on black Perspex shelf,
11 x 13 x 5 in. (28 x 33 x 13 cm), 2011
Photo by Craig Benders

13

crossing over

coloured Staedtler pencils, epoxy, incralac on black Perspex shelf

left form: 11 x 5 x 3 in. (28 x 13 x 8 cm); right form: 13 ½ x 6 x 4 ¼ (34 x 15 x 11 cm), 2011

Photo by Craig Benders





Curriculum Vitae

LIONEL BAWDEN



Artist, Lionel Bawden.



14

underworlder (II)

coloured Staedtler pencils, epoxy, incralac on black Perspex shelf
11 x 9 x 11 in. (28 x 23 x 28 cm), 2011

Photo by Craig Benders

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