

**Josiah
McElheny**

**CC
VA**



**Two Walking
Mirrors for
the Carpenter
Center**



Two Walking Mirrors for the Carpenter Center

James Voorhies

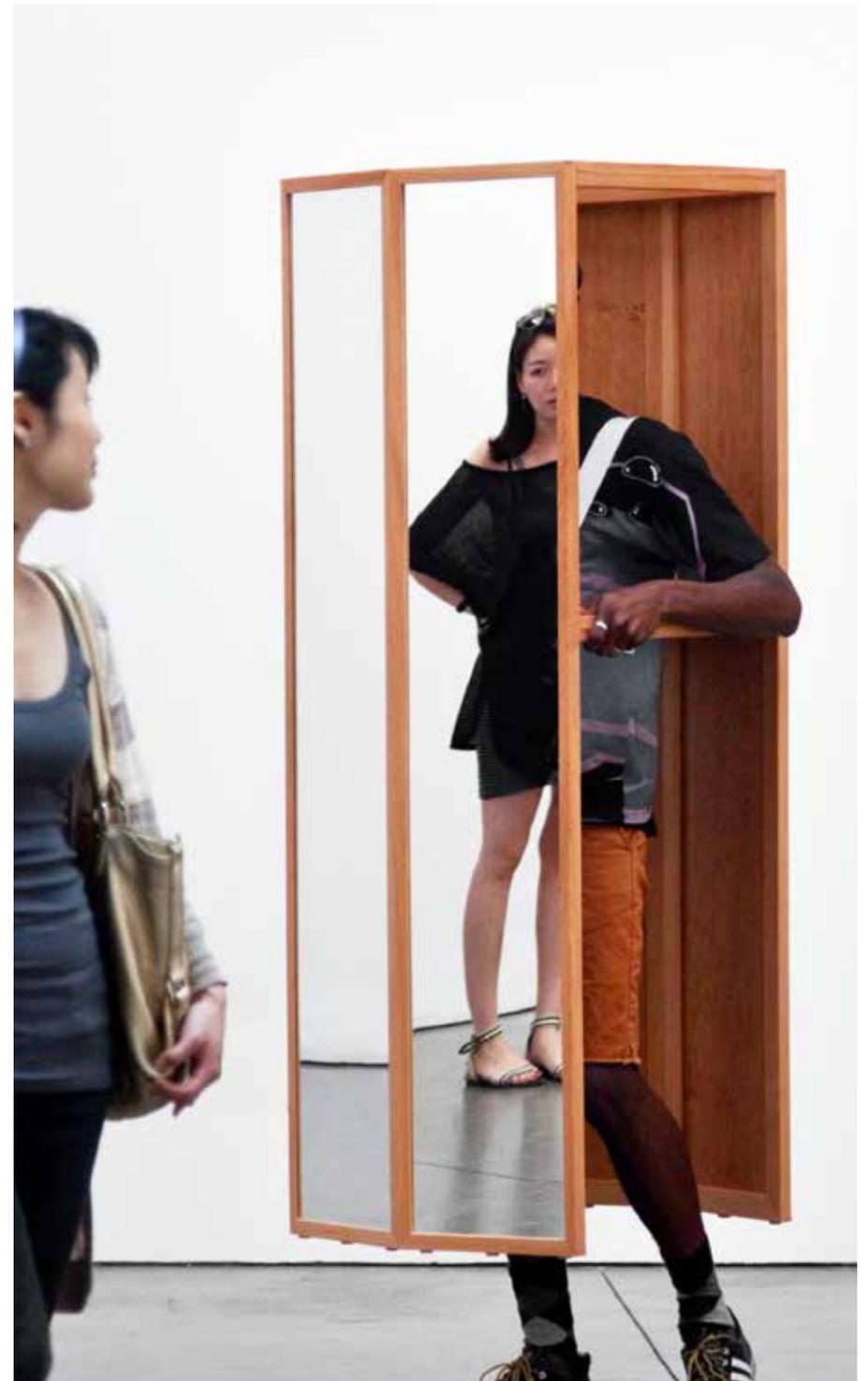
The five-foot-high objects in the exhibition by Josiah McElheny are sculptures. They are finely crafted of familiar materials—cedar and mirror—and rest on pedestals, displayed beyond the reach of viewers: a clear sign that “this is art.” The pedestals, made of the same wood, are integral to the overall abstract design of basic geometric forms that together defy easy understanding of what they represent. But the two parallel rectilinear panels, each standing tall and consisting of a wood frame and mirrors, point to a history of figural sculpture with their full-length corporeal qualities, emphasized even more when viewers catch reflections of their own bodies. The sculptures, indeed, traverse centuries of art history’s interest in the bodily form, from the towering equestrian sculpture of

Marcus Aurelius (ca. 175 CE) to the reductive bodily presence found in Modernist works such as Tony Smith’s *Die* (1962), while bouncing contemporary viewers’ reflections right back at them in a wry nod to the current fixation on “participation,” as we see ourselves embodied in the works. It’s all here in a singular sculptural moment. And by taking us into the depths of art history, McElheny seems, remarkably, to turn on that history to pull sculpture and its relationship to the spectator away from the originating borders toward something else.

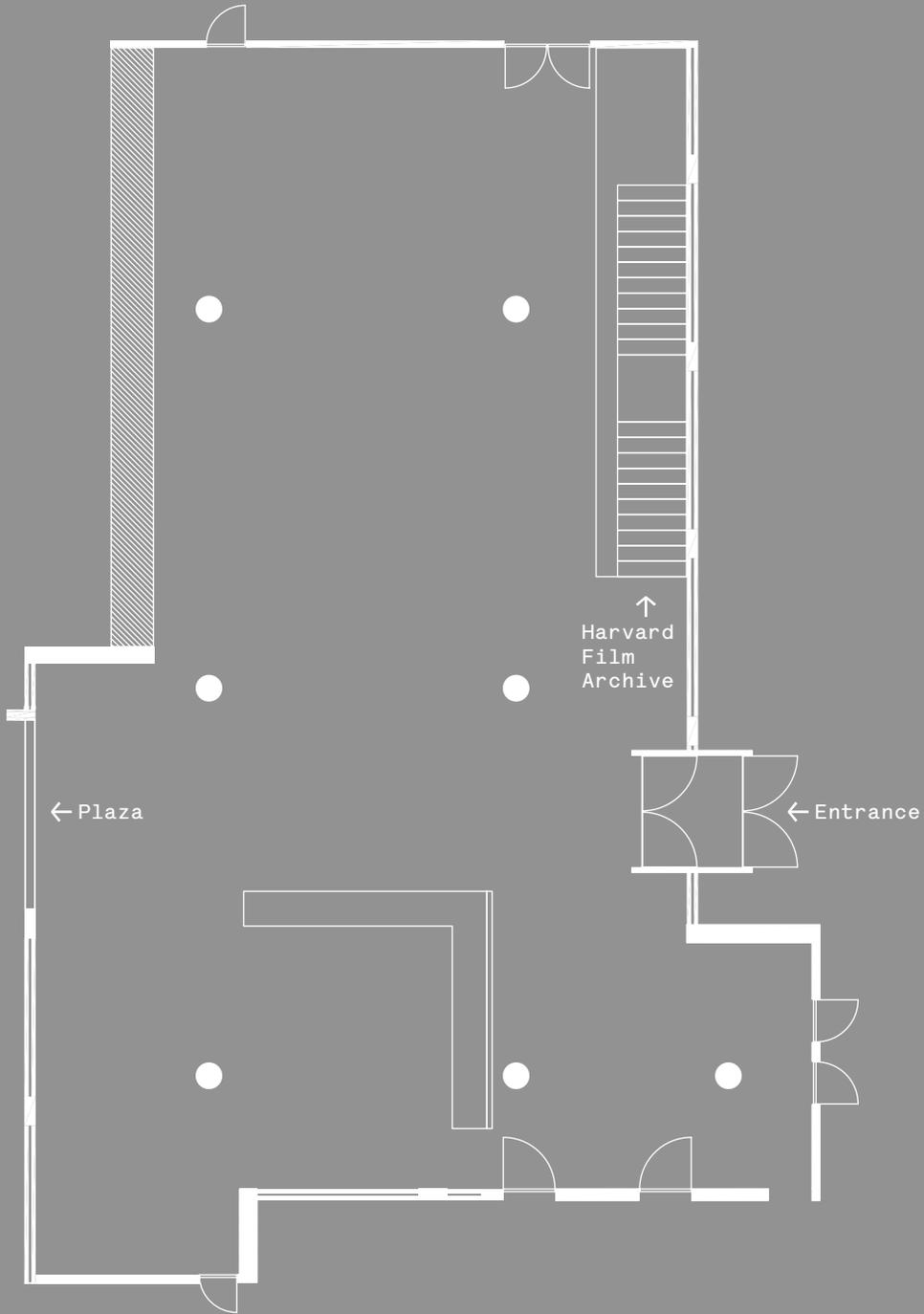
These sculptures by Josiah McElheny are also performances. Actual human forms—in fact, Harvard University dance students—inhabit the sculptures on a published schedule, transforming them into a kind of costume. Interrupting the inanimate stature of sculpture, the performers put on the objects using nylon shoulder straps. Once harnessed, they lift the objects off the ground and begin to walk, stepping into the surrounding realm of exhibition and moving amongst viewers at whatever pace they choose, interacting verbally (or not) with visitors. The performers, however, are unable to see directly in front of them because the vertical panels block their sight line. They need to look down at the floor to follow lines drawn by McElheny. This line drawing is inherently articulated by the specific architectural qualities of the exhibition site and location of the pedestals. In this way, the objects leave a static position to become more than sculpture, to become performance intervening in the space of exhibition and disrupting expectations for how a sculpture behaves. The performances are between 15 and

30 minutes in duration. As these sculptures-cum-performances move through the exhibition, behaving differently each time, viewers find their reflections in the mirrored surfaces—and an extraordinarily playful tension develops between figural abstraction and representation.

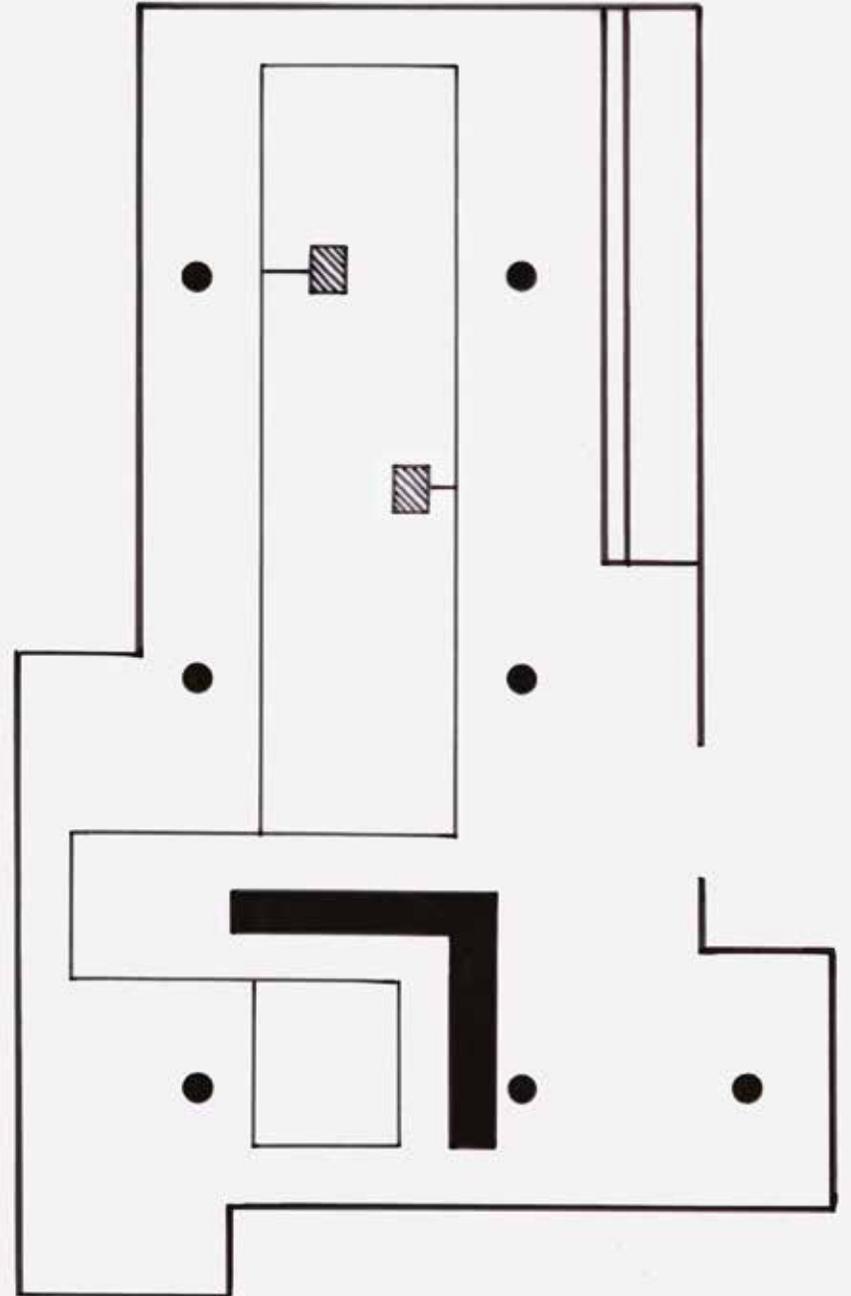
This combined presentation of sculptures, performances, drawings, and interventions by Josiah McElheny is titled *Two Walking Mirrors for the Carpenter Center*. Le Corbusier's interest would be piqued. He, too, was deeply engaged with questions connected to the body, especially its relationship with architecture. Here, at the Carpenter Center, those questions are apparent as visitors approach the building, uncertain where the entrance is, wondering whether to walk up the ramp or down the stairs. The open façade is a disruption to the familiar, and that is intentional. The open plan on the inside has a plotted forest of *pilotis* supporting the building's weight, so the plate-glass walls of windows further obscure an obvious understanding of interior and exterior, generating more questions. And that is also intentional. The combination of McElheny's *Walking Mirrors* inside Le Corbusier's Carpenter Center is a kind of perfect storm where familiarity is leveraged only long enough to be disrupted. Instilling the works of art and the architecture with an immediacy, even urgency, this dynamic intersection of sculpture, performance, bodies, and building gives us something altogether unpredictable in *Two Walking Mirrors for the Carpenter Center*.



CCVA Level 1



Carpenter Center floor plan



Josiah McElheny: Two Walking Mirrors for the Carpenter Center choreography floor plan

Josiah McElheny
**Two Walking Mirrors for
the Carpenter Center**

Oct 1–25, 2015

Curated by James Voorhies

Performances

Thu, Oct 1, 5 pm Tue, Oct 20, 5 pm

Wed, Oct 21, 6 pm Thu, Oct 22, 5 pm

Fri, Oct 23, 6 pm Sat, Oct 24, 2 pm

Josiah McElheny

Josiah McElheny was born in Boston in 1966. He received a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design and was an apprentice to master glassblowers Jan-Erik Ritzman, Sven-Åke Carlsson, and Lino Tagliapietra. He has exhibited widely, including solo shows at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus (2013), Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2012), Whitechapel Gallery, London (2011), Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2009), Moderna Museet, Stockholm and Museum of Modern Art, New York (2007), Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain (2002), Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco (2001), Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston (1999), and the Seattle Art Museum (1995). Group shows include Fundament Foundation, Tilburg, Netherlands (2013), Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, CCS Bard, New York (all 2011), The Power Plant, Toronto (2009), Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2006), CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2003), Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2001), Whitney Biennial, New York (2000), and the Art Institute of Chicago (1998). In 2006, McElheny was awarded the MacArthur Fellowship.

Harvard Dance Project

Performances are realized in collaboration with the Harvard Dance Project.

A very special thank you to Jill Johnson, Dance Director, Office for the Arts Dance Program; Senior Lecturer, Department of Music, Harvard University.

The Interstitial

Josiah McElheny: Two Walking Mirrors for the Carpenter Center is part of The Interstitial, a CCVA program that takes advantage of the time and physical space between exhibitions. The Interstitial hosts performances, installations, and other time-based events that transpire over the course of an evening or several days.

Photography Credits

Walking Mirror 1, 2012. Cedar wood, mirror, cloth straps, metal hardware, wood pedestal, china marker drawing, performance instructions, periodic performance. 61 9/16 x 20 15/16 x 19 9/16 inches. ©Josiah McElheny. Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Photo by Jason Mandella (cover, page 2).

Walking Mirror 2, 2012. Cedar wood, mirror, cloth straps, metal hardware, wood pedestal, china marker drawing, performance instructions, periodic performance. 66 x 33 x 30 1/4 inches. ©Josiah McElheny. Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Photo by Jessica Eckert (page 1).

Performance during the exhibition *Some thoughts about the abstract body*, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. May 19–June 30, 2012. Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Photo by Jessica Eckert (facing page).



**Carpenter Center
for the Visual Arts**

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**Two Walking Mirrors for
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Oct 1–25, 2015

Gallery Hours 12–7 pm, Wed–Sun
Free and open to the public

Mission

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University is dedicated to the synthesis of art, design, and education through the exhibition of existing works and production of new commissions. In addition to a site for exhibition and public events, CCVA is home to the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies and Harvard Film Archive. At CCVA, visual literacy, knowledge production, contemporary art, and critical inquiry seamlessly meet, ultimately enriching the creative and intellectual lives of our audiences. The Carpenter Center is the only building in North America designed by Swiss-born architect Le Corbusier.

Program

The Carpenter Center fosters meaningful engagement among artists, art, and our audiences. Choreographing exhibitions, lectures, residencies, publications, performances, screenings, and informal gatherings, CCVA brings people, ideas, and objects together in generative ways that provide unparalleled experiences with contemporary art.

