

Carolina Sardi: Space and Vacuum

by Rodolfo A. Windhausen

Argentine sculptor Carolina Sardi has created a special relationship between space and volume, one that highlights her uncanny ability to manipulate steel. A graduate of the University of La Plata, Argentina, Sardi moved to Miami in 1995. There, her career bloomed, and her work has received increasing critical attention. Her sculptures in iron, many of which can be seen in public spaces such as Miami's Seaport and the Ilona building in South Beach, have captured the interest and the imagination of South Florida's thriving art and collectors community.

Sardi has a studio at the Art Center/South Florida, a publicly supported, innovative space for artists, where they work and exhibit under the eye of colleagues, passersby, and tourists alike.

The curiosity and admiration generated by her works was evident during her 2003 solo show "Bee," in which she developed her vision of the beehive as a microcosm of the universe. That show sparked so much interest that it was featured again, between November 2003 and February 2004, at Miami International Airport's MIA Art Gallery.

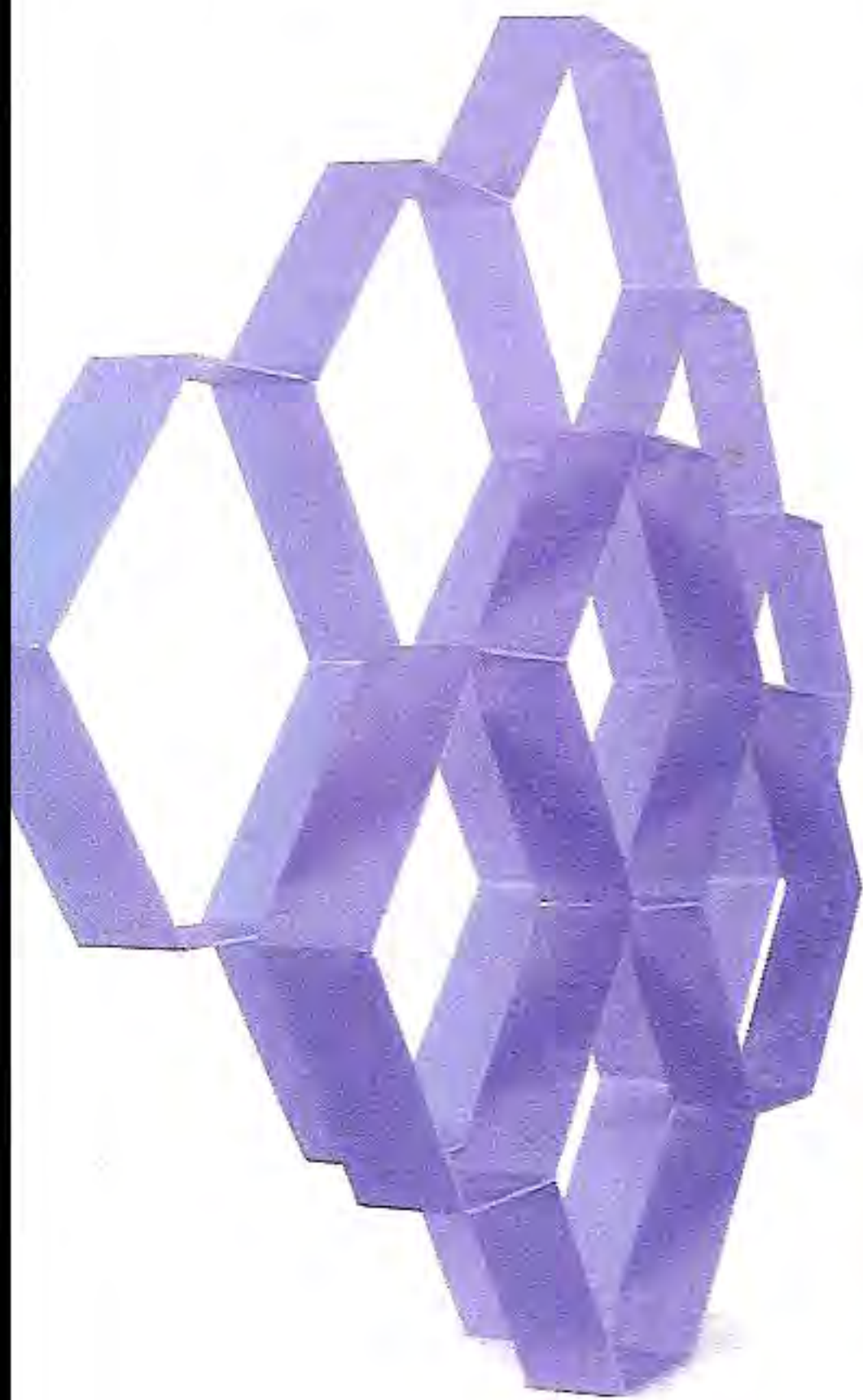
Recently, Sardi participated in the "Sculpture in Four Dimensions" show at the Organization of American States' Museum of the Americas, in Washington, DC. In 2005 she has shows at the Cultural Resource Center of Miami's Department of Cultural Affairs and at the Gallery at Flashpoint in DC.

For Sardi, sculpting equates to "playing with a visual alphabet: the line, the point, and the plane." In that regard, her production has a trajectory in which backwards movements—some of them autobiographical—are her way of advancing her conception of a given work. In the 24 pieces she produced for

Miami-Dade County's Art in Public Spaces and installed in the harbor area reserved for cruises, the predominant theme was suitcases, which, in her view, represent the theme of continuity. "I had already explored the subject of suitcases back in 1995," she says. "I tried to look for a link connecting water, travel, and suitcases, and the whole work alludes to the port." Some of these works were also exhibited in "The Language of a Generation," a group show at City Hall in Orlando, Florida, in 2000–01 that included three other Argentine exile artists living in South Florida. They were also featured in a solo show at Fort Lauderdale's Museum of Art, in February–March, 2000. Discussing Sardi's works, curator Ginger Gregg wrote: "Each symbol has the ability or power to stand alone, signifying one idea. Together, they can be grouped or arranged to reveal new or more complex meanings; each symbol or component is like a word and each grouping a phrase."

In September 2002, Sardi was invited to participate in the Sculptors at Work project organized by Clarendon Park in Clarendon, Virginia, Strathmore Hall

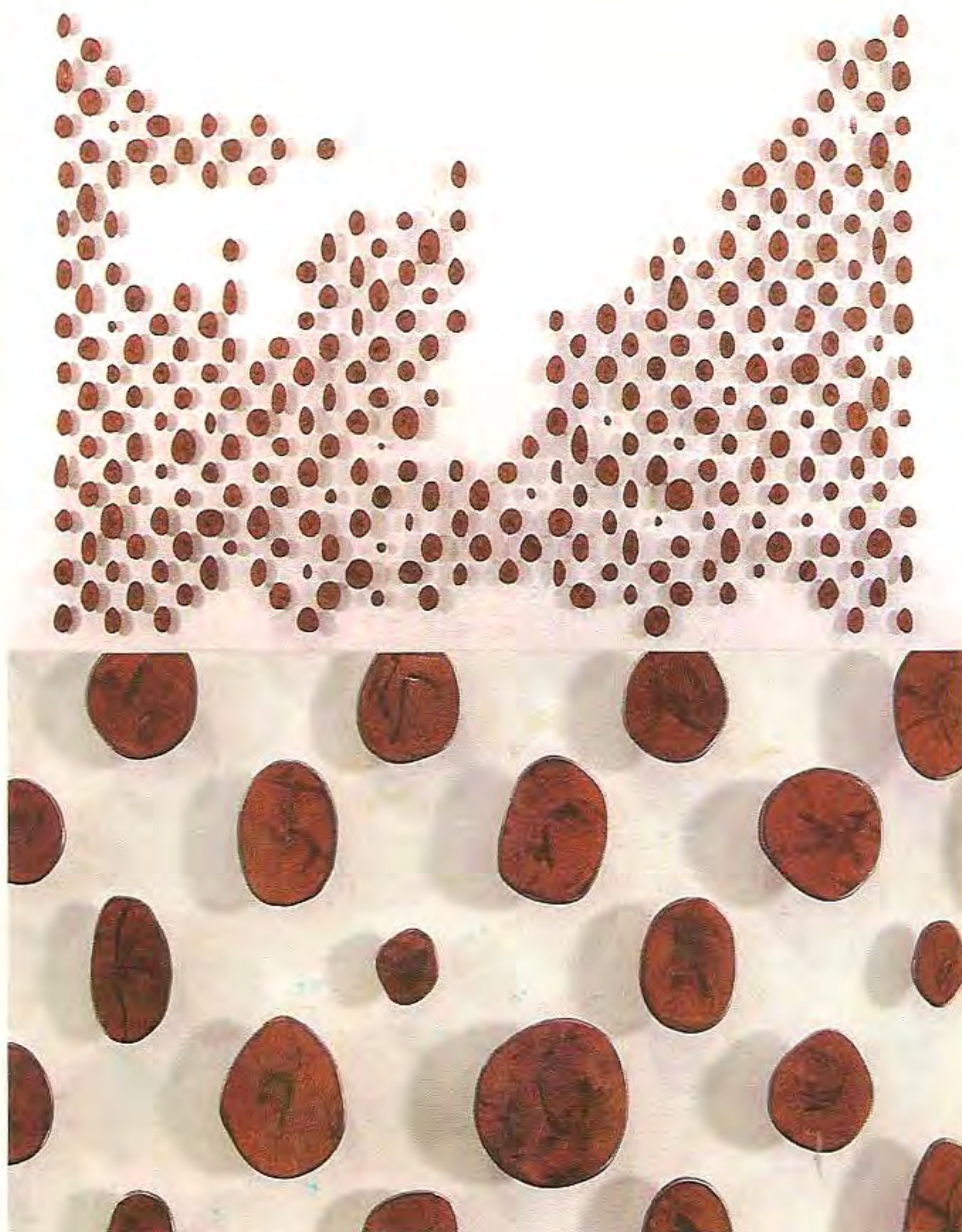
Left: *Sky Cells*, 2003. Painted steel, 78 x 78 x 9 in. Below: View of "Bee" exhibition at the Mia Gallery, Miami International Airport, 2003–04.



in Bethesda, Maryland, and the Organization of American States. The goal was to create sculptures in public places where pedestrians could see the artists at work. Later, the completed works were exhibited in a special show at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. For this assignment, Sardi chose to elaborate what she called a "garden sculpture," which consisted of steel wires that configured a space. In turn, the space contained a bed of grass. Thus, she sought to demonstrate a merger between a construction element (the steel wires) and nature. In another exhibition, "Nests," Sardi showed pieces composed of organic forms and planes interacting with the surrounding space to create the sensation of different depths and an absence of concrete shapes.

For Sardi, evolution and exploration serve as the foundation of her work. "It's like something necessary. One never knows what one will do tomorrow. The universe is the language," she says. "Despite the fact that steel is a very strong material, my pieces are very delicate. It's a synthesis that I believe calls the viewer's attention." Sardi prefers to define her production as "a work about a space that materializes my creative freedom." She believes that all of her work "talks about human life. In the end, it seems wonderful to me that spectators see different things in it. It matters to me that my pieces are deliberately ambiguous. That's much more interesting for me and for the audience." In fact, as the Orlando show catalogue says, all of her work is linear, which at first sight might suggest some simplicity. However, such a Minimalist approach, as a critic has noted, can be deceiving: in addition to autobiographical aspects, Sardi's work also contains sociological and historical elements.

One of the most salient features of Sardi's work is that her pieces can be admired as individual works or in a thematic grouping. In the final analysis, they all tell a personal history, which develops in space. As with written language, each component can be taken in isolation or added together to



Top and detail: *Love/Blood*, 2004. Painted steel, 84 x 144 x 2 in.

form a complete discourse. In that regard, her production is closely related to the impact of Minimalism in her native Argentina. In architecture, that movement is best exemplified in the landmark National Library building in Buenos Aires, which was designed by the world-renowned architect Clorindo Testa.

For critic Michael McManus, who wrote the catalogue text for Sardi's show at MIA gallery, her sculptures also reflect segments of society through a successful mixture of conceptualism and Minimalism. But she is not trapped by either approach; instead, a blend of the two allows her work to evolve continuously. When Sardi

exhibited at the Museum of the Americas, her vaginal shapes, triangles, and other geometric forms reflected a passion for synthesis, as well as a celebration of women's biological identity and an allegory of life's cycle. "My art is a form to express my view of the world. Concept is as important as image, and space as important as shapes," she says. "Although I work primarily with steel, my pieces have an organic sensitivity that shows my interest in life's basic interactions."

Rodolfo A. Windhausen is a freelance arts writer who has covered the Latin American art scene in the U.S. for the last 26 years.