



**PLATFORM17**  
**stephanie cardon**



## PLATFORM 17 Stephanie Cardon: *Beacon*

Using color, pattern, and geometric forms, Stephanie Cardon explores what she refers to as “intermediary spaces” in her art. *Beacon*, Cardon’s first large-scale, outdoor sculpture, is a commission for deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum. It consists of two eleven-foot concrete towers connected by a high canopy of two layers of thin, yellow vinyl-coated steel cables (Cover and Fig. 1). The sculpture is fully realized as an artwork when viewers walk through, around, and under its gateway and engage with its spatial and visual qualities. The yellow wires produce shifting optical effects, which vary with the viewer’s angle of approach. When observed from the hillside above, *Beacon*’s canopy appears as a solid field of color. Walking towards the work, the planes of color separate into two rows. Standing directly beneath it, the canopy separates into individual strands. A further optical effect occurs when the two sets of lines are seen at an angle, creating irregular waves that seem to ripple, a kinetic effect known as a moiré pattern. Placed out in the landscape, the sculpture’s hues are distorted by sun and shadow, as dappled light filtered through the adjacent trees generates camouflage designs along the yellow wires and blue-gray concrete columns. The viewer discovers that *Beacon*’s monumental structure belies its true nature as a form in a constant state of flux affected by light, weather, and changing perspective.

Fig. 1

As inspiration for her simultaneous interest in dynamic optical effects and architectural stability, Cardon cites sources as varied as the trompe l’oeil wall murals of ancient Roman villas and the interactive sculptures and installations of the 1950s Brazilian Neo-Concrete movement. Neo-Concrete artists felt that abstract geometric art (known as Concrete art) was too cerebral and closed off from the external world. They sought ways to enhance the viewer’s corporeal relationship to a work of art. Hélio Oiticica, one of the leaders of the movement, was known for his *Penetrables* (or *Penetráveis*) from the 1960s and 1970s. These installations encouraged the viewer to walk within labyrinths and chambers made of painted walls, plastic panels, and textiles, fostering an immersive experience of color and form. Cardon’s *Beacon* similarly involves the viewer’s body and mind as one meanders through and around the sculpture, observing its color and geometric forms.

Cardon’s previous sculptures are low-standing concrete block and bamboo thread constructions. As with *Beacon*, it is the space between these works’ anchoring architectural elements that carries their visual and conceptual weight. Titles such as *Lyre* and *Oil vs. Water* enrich these otherwise abstract



forms with evocative associations. The suspended threads of *Lyre* recall instrumental strings in the same way that *Beacon's* title and bright color suggestively evoke beams of light or a watchful lighthouse. *Oil vs. Water* (Fig. 2) connotes instability: its intersecting blue and yellow panels of strings will never blend into a unified entity.

Cardon's sculptures are informed by her earlier experiments with photography, specifically camera-less cyanotypes, in which she incorporated elements of pattern interference. Cyanotypes are made using light-sensitive paper that develops a white imprint when a negative form or an object is placed on it. Areas exposed to light turn rich blue or cyan. Like Cardon's use of bright yellow in *Beacon*, the color blue adds an expressive quality to these works. Cardon refers to author Rebecca Solnit's concept of a "blue of longing," in which landscapes become layered with a blue tone when viewed from a faraway distance.<sup>1</sup> Inspired by the way in which color can convey meaning, Cardon's cyanotypes draw attention to the intermediary spaces between distinct colors, lines, or patterns. In *Untitled (Dot on Checkers)* (Fig. 3), a design of small circles layered over a tight grid generates an entirely new visual effect that Cardon says encapsulates "not being in one place or another, [but] existing in the space between, a third space."<sup>2</sup>

This articulation of space created through distance or layering is a recurring motif in Cardon's work. Born in the United States to a French father and American mother, she was raised in France, studied in the

Fig. 2

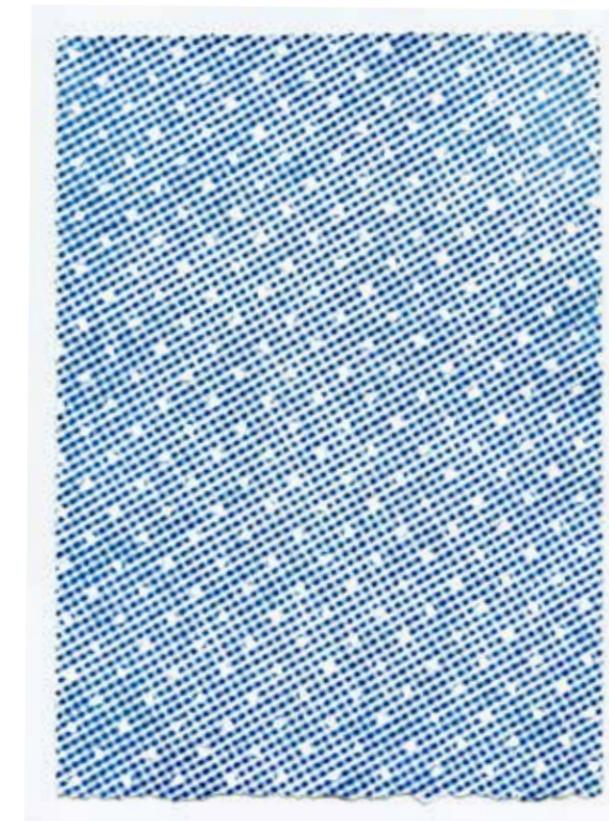


Fig. 3

United Kingdom, and for the last several years she has lived in Boston. Autobiographical connections to her intercontinental life surface in her art. The sculpture *Transatlantic (the weight of water)* (Fig. 4) is exemplary of such sources in her work. A long, twisted band of blue knitted wool that droops at the center to the floor imbues the physical heaviness of the material with the psychological weight that can accumulate while traversing between different cultures.

Cardon's focus on the "in-between" and creation of a "third space" in *Beacon* relates to a broader cultural context. Contemporary lives are built across enormous distances due to immigration, opportunity, and chance. Yet, despite these distances, the contemporary world is becoming ever more interconnected. The resemblance of *Beacon's* electric yellow cables to telephone wires evokes this connectivity, which Cardon reinforces by referring to them as "channels of communication and exchange."<sup>3</sup> The constantly changing optical patterns created by the cables echo the plurality of vision with which we experience the world today.

Helen Lewandowski  
Koch Curatorial Fellow

#### IMAGES

Cover: Stephanie Cardon, *Beacon* (detail), 2015, 186 x 432 x 60 inches, concrete, wood, and vinyl coated steel cable. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 1: Stephanie Cardon, *Beacon*, 2015, 186 x 432 x 60 inches, concrete, wood, and vinyl coated steel cable. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 2: Stephanie Cardon, *Oil vs. Water*, 2013, cement and bamboo string, 11 x 36 x 15 ½ inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 3: Stephanie Cardon, *Untitled (Dot on Checkers)*, 2013, cyanotype, 10 ¼ x 7 ½ inches. Courtesy of the artist. Photograph by HV-Studio, Brussels.

Fig. 4: Stephanie Cardon, *Transatlantic (the weight of water)*, 2014, mohair and wool yarn, linen rope, and cement, 2 x 20 feet (installation dimensions variable). Courtesy of the artist.

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<sup>1</sup> Solnit, Rebecca. "The Blue of Distance." *In A Field Guide for Getting Lost*. New York: Viking, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Artist in conversation with author. October 22, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Fig. 4



## BIOGRAPHY

Stephanie Cardon (b. 1978) was born in New York and raised in France. She earned her MFA from Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston, and a graduate certificate from The International Center of Photography, NY, NY. Cardon was formerly the Executive Editor at Big Red & Shiny, a Boston-based non-profit organization and online publication committed to contemporary art. She teaches at Massachusetts College of Art and Design and University of Massachusetts Boston. Cardon has exhibited her work nationally and internationally at venues including the Boston Sculptors Gallery; Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockport, ME; Fondazione Forma per la Fotografia, Rome; Galerie Michèle Chomette, Paris; and Kingston Gallery, Boston.

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## PLATFORM

PLATFORM is a series of one-person commissioned projects by early- and mid-career artists from New England and the world, that engage with deCordova's unique landscape. The PLATFORM series is intended as a support for creativity and the expression of new ideas, and as a catalyst for dialogue about contemporary art.

