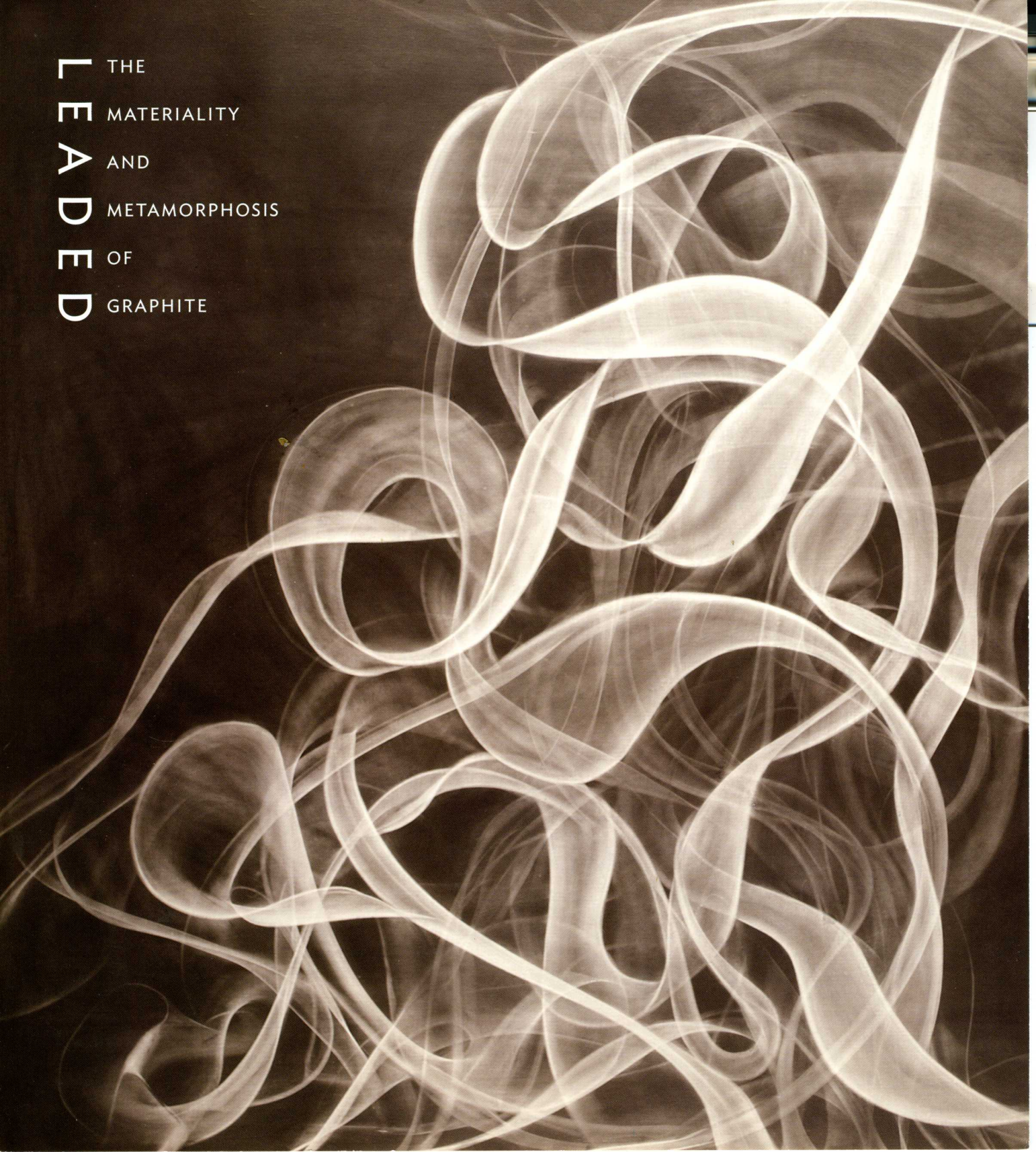


LEADED THE
MATERIALITY
AND
METAMORPHOSIS
OF
GRAPHITE



INTRODUCTION

Even though you may think they [the galaxy drawings] came from lying under the stars, for me, they came out of loving the blackness of the pencil. It's almost as if I was exploring the blackness of the pencil along with the image that went with it.

—Vija Celmins [interviewed by Chuck Close in *Vija Celmins*, ed. William Bartman. Los Angeles: A.R.T. Press, 1992.]

A certain color will give a specific meaning, but the tone of black and white does not limit imagination or space. In this colorless world, we still can see the color and radiant source of life, which penetrate through the layers of graphite.

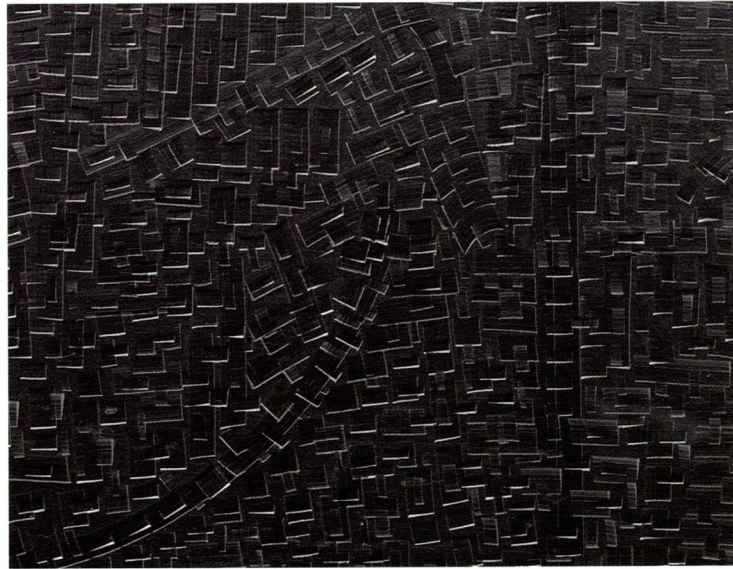
— Hsin-Hsi Chen [from the artist's statement]

The seamless union between media and content that contemporary artist Vija Celmins describes is the foundation of all the artwork in *Leaded*. In these two- and three-dimensional works, the artists extrapolate qualities unique to graphite (a silvery richness, an endless range of tonality) or to pencils (a ubiquitous writing and drawing tool, a mass-produced product) to create art that is wholly dependent upon the medium. While some of the artists have retained graphite's traditional function as a means of creating a visual representation of something else, their subject matter is often imaginary, mundane, or even another medium itself (as in **Shimon Okshteyn's** paintings of brushstrokes). Some artists manipulate and apply graphite in nontraditional ways to transform surfaces and shapes whereas others use the material as units of construction, as in **The Art Guys'** sculpture of a skyscraper composed of thousands of pencils.

To examine the art in this exhibition, and, in fact, the versatility of the medium and the skill the artists apply, we can group the work into three overlapping themes: graphite as content, graphite as transformative agent, and graphite as sculpture. These groupings are suggested as entry points not endpoints. Each piece in *Leaded* features a unique approach to a medium that initially seems to present artistic constraints but actually enables endless variety.

N. Elizabeth Schlatter

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Marco Maggi, *Drawriter* (detail), 2007, graphite on graphite tablet, 20 x 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Josée Bienvenu Gallery, New York



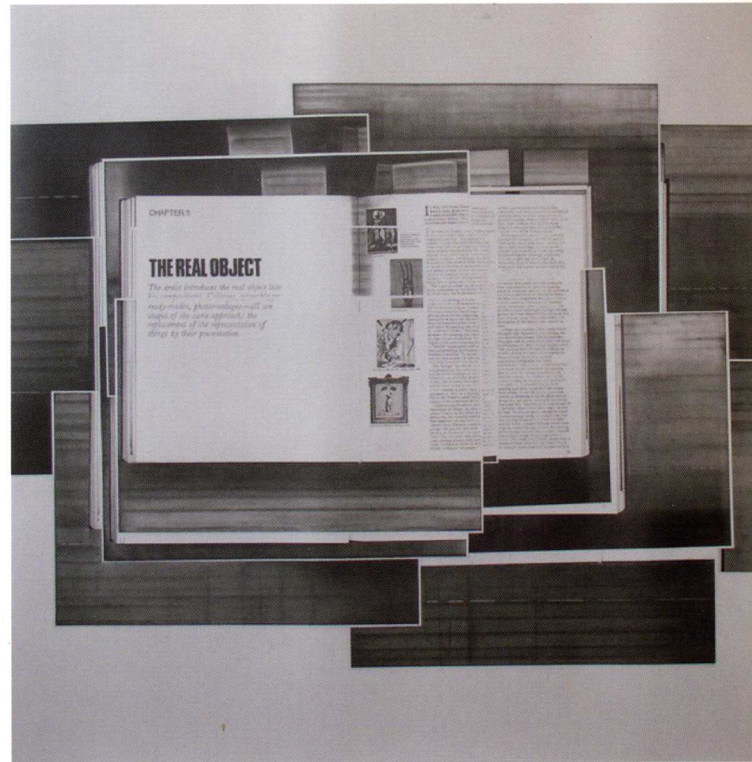
Christopher Cook, *Probing*, 2006, graphite powder, oil, and resin on aluminum, 48 x 59 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Mary Ryan Gallery, New York

We use graphite because it has become ubiquitous and seems to be the primary tool of visual culture. We learn with pencils.

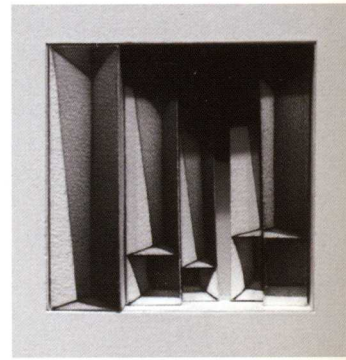
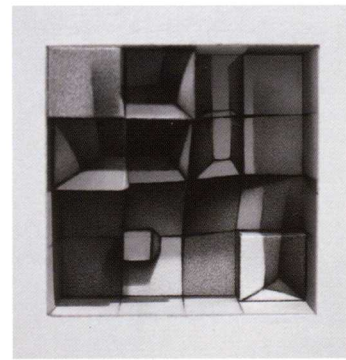
—**The Art Guys** [from curator's correspondence with the artists]

Although the pencil appears malleable, it has a mind of its own. It will not be forced beyond its limits and when pushed too far it muddles, peels off, or simply quits making marks. How far to go, how much to ask, are limits that remain elusive and must be tested every time a drawing is made.

—**Gloria Ortiz-Hernandez** [from correspondence with the artist]



Molly Springfield, *The Real Object* (detail), 2006, graphite on paper, 42 x 66 inches. Courtesy of Steven Wolf Fine Arts, San Francisco



From left to right: **Creighton Michael**, *SQUIGGLE linear B407*, 2007, graphite, paper, acrylic, and rope, dimensions variable (6 to 13 feet in length). Courtesy of Lesley Heller Gallery, New York; **Hsin-Hsi Chen**, "*Penumbra*" Series 1 and 11 of 16, 2005, pencil on paper, 9 ½ x 9 ½ x 1.8 inches. Courtesy of the artist

