

Agarum clathratum (fka Agarum cribosum) has a variety of common names including sea lace, sea colander, sieve kelp, Devil's apron or shotgun kelp. The holes on the seaweed's blade are characteristic to this perennial species and are thought to decrease the influence of high water motion. This species is often found within beachcast after severe storms and naturally found in the Pacific Northwest as well as the northwestern Atlantic subtidal urchin-barrens.

JESSICA F. MUHLIN, PH.D.  
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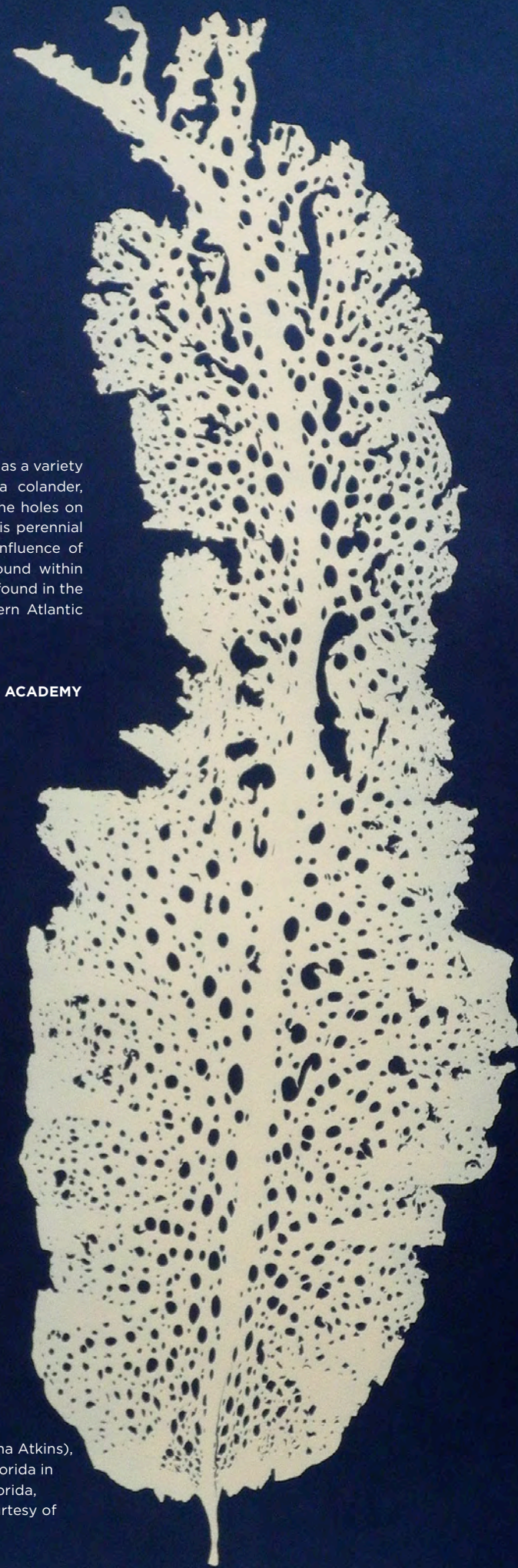


Fig. 8: Sea Lace Cyanotypes (Homage to Anna Atkins), 2014. Produced by Bleu Acier, Inc., Tampa, Florida in collaboration with the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, Graphic Design Program. Courtesy of the artist

#### EXHIBITION CHECKLIST:

All works are by Celeste Roberge and are lent courtesy of the artist. Dimensions are in inches, height preceding width preceding depth.

What I Saw on the Glacier, 2008  
Found glass objects on four 72 x 36 digital prints of original ink drawings  
72 x 144 inches overall (height variable)

Ocean Floors II, 2010  
Found cast iron pots; gold and copper leaf  
84 x 84 inches (height variable)

Marina, 2012-2013  
Seaweed (Agarum cribosum, or sea lace), sheet metal, magnets  
60 x 120 x 4 1/4 inches

Flotilla, 2011-2014  
Bronze and sheet metal  
Approximately 84 x 78 inches (height variable)

Flotilla II, 2013  
Cast iron, enamel, and cast brass  
Cast at Kohler Arts/Industry Program foundry, Kohler, Wisconsin  
Five boats, 44 x 15 x 17 inches each

Seaweed Cyanotypes (Homage to Anna Atkins), 2014  
Cyanotypes  
Produced by Bleu Acier, Inc., Tampa, Florida in collaboration with the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, Graphic Design Program  
22 x 30 and 11 x 15 inches each

Sea Lace Boat, 2012  
Digital print face-mounted on acrylic  
9 1/2 x 16 1/2 inches

Seaweed Boat, 2012  
Digital print face-mounted on acrylic  
9 1/2 x 14 inches

Sea Lace Boat on a Sea of Polka Dots, 2012  
Digital print face-mounted on acrylic  
9 1/2 x 14 inches

#### CRISP-ELLERT ART MUSEUM | FLAGLER COLLEGE

48 Sevilla Street, St. Augustine, FL 32084  
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**CELESTE ROBERGE** was born in Biddeford, Maine, and received her art education at the Maine College of Art, the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. She has held resident fellowships at Baie Ste. Marie, Nova Scotia; Reykjavic, Iceland; and Kohler, Wisconsin, through the Arts/Industry program of the Kohler Arts Center. Her work is represented in the collections of the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Arkansas, the Portland Museum of Art and the Farnsworth Art Museum in Maine, the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno, Harn Museum in Florida, and the Runnymede Sculpture Farm in California, among others. She lives in Gainesville, Florida, where she is a Professor of Sculpture at the School of Art and Art History, University of Florida. She maintains a summer studio in South Portland, Maine.

The artist wishes to thank Erika Schneider of Bleu Acier, Inc, Tampa, Florida for her expertise in the printing of the cyanotypes. The cyanotype project was partially funded by a travel/research grant from the School of Art + Art History, University of Florida.

The artist wishes to acknowledge the support of the College of Fine Arts, University of Florida through a Scholarship Enhancement Fund Award for the residency at Kohler Arts/Industry in Wisconsin for the production of the series of Seaweed Boats.

Built in honor of Dr. JoAnn Crisp-Ellert and her husband, Dr. Robert Ellert, the Crisp-Ellert Art Museum offers Flagler College students and the Northeast Florida community a venue for fostering knowledge and a deep appreciation of contemporary art. As an educational resource for the College, the Museum exhibits regional, national and international artists, and provides opportunities for critical engagement and exposure to a variety of exhibitions and personal interactions with visiting artists. The Museum challenges students, the Flagler community and the public to cultivate individual creativity, critical reflection, historical consciousness and respect for the free exchange of ideas. In this spirit, the Museum also hosts public programs, including artist talks, readings, panel discussions and film series that provide a platform for vital interdisciplinary dialogue.

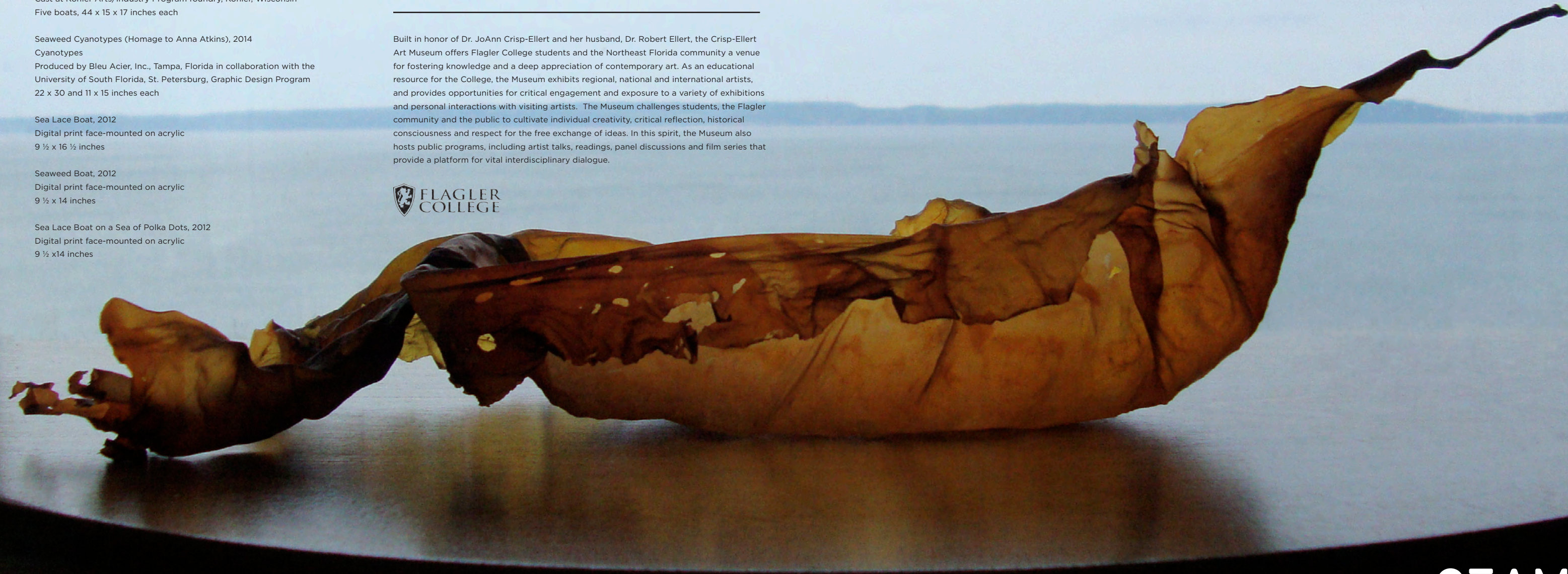


Fig. 1: Seaweed Boat, 2012. Courtesy of artist

# CELESTE ROBERGE

## OCEAN FLOORS

EXHIBITION DATES:

March 7 - April 19, 2014

**CEAM**  
CRISP-ELLERT ART MUSEUM

## OCEAN FLOORS

### Works by Celeste Roberge

Jessica Skwire Routhier

The ocean has been a near-constant presence in artist Celeste Roberge's life, but until recently it was only a subtext in her art. The turning point came during a 2008 visit to Nova Scotia, when seaweed churned up by a storm triggered a memory and opened up a whole new avenue for artistic exploration.

It was not Roberge's first trip to Nova Scotia; in fact, she had lived there in the 1980s while working on her M.F.A. from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax. Since then she has returned frequently to gather inspiration and materials for her work, notably the surf-rounded beach stones used in her acclaimed *Cairn* sculptures. But the 2008 trip was the first time she had walked the beach in the fall, and she was struck by the proliferation there of a kind of seaweed she hadn't noticed in previous visits: dark brown, leaf-like, and dramatically perforated in an almost machine-like way.

Further research revealed that the algae known as *Agarum cribrosum*, and now as *Agarum clathratum*, is also known as "sea lace," sea colander," "shotgun kelp," or "Devil's apron," because of its shape. It grows deep in the North Atlantic's subtidal zone, which means that it sees the light of day only during extreme tidal events or when churned up by a storm, as before Roberge's visit. The relative rarity of the sighting, combined with the seaweed's distinct appearance and its intriguing taxonomy of names, sent Roberge back to a book she'd once picked up, on a whim, at New York's The Drawing Center. It was the catalogue for *Ocean Flowers: Impressions from Nature*, a 2004 exhibition of seaweed drawings, pressings, and cyanotypes by the mid-nineteenth-century British botanical artist Anna Atkins, who is widely credited with first using cyanotype—the same medium used for architectural blueprints—as a photographic process. Atkins stretched her specimens across chemically treated paper and then exposed them to sunlight, turning exposed areas of the paper blue. Removing the original specimen left a perfect white silhouette of its shape. Attracted to the ghostly beauty of Atkins's images as well as the intellectual rigor behind her technical innovations, Roberge began to experiment with cyanotype and to seek other ways to bring seaweed and science together in her art.

Two residencies in Nova Scotia's Baie Ste. Marie, in 2010 and 2011, sponsored by the Maine College of Art, gave Roberge ample opportunity to observe the area's sea flora. She became fascinated with seaweed harvesters, gathering algae to use for food additives, cosmetics, medicine, and other purposes. Seeing fleets of small boats piled high with seaweed, an idea took hold in her mind of boats made of seaweed, encapsulating in one object this intersection of nature and industry. An early boat of paper-thin brown *laminaria* kelp, documented in a breathlessly spare photograph (cover image), gave way to a troop of small sea lace boats. As I wrote in the University of New England's 2013 exhibition catalogue *Maine Women Pioneers III*, Roberge:

... explores impermanence and futility with her fragile seaweed boats, so delicate as to be transparent, and surely incapable of entering the water without returning immediately to their amorphous, osmotic state. Particularly for an artist like Roberge, who has created permanent, commissioned sculptures for collections from Maine to California, there is an irony in creating art that can so readily un-create itself.

The sea lace boats are the main feature of the wall piece *Marina* (Figs. 2 and 3), its backdrop of perforated, industrial sheet metal echoing the holes of the seaweed while providing a watery moiré effect as the viewer passes in front of the piece. Roberge has also rendered the boats themselves in metal in *Flotilla I* (Fig. 4), a floor piece in which the bronze boats rest upon sections of sheet metal shaped like fronds of sea lace. Pierced with holes just like their sea lace counterparts, these boats, too, can neither hold anything nor float—a paradoxical condition for a seafaring vessel.

A native of Biddeford, Maine, a former textile mill town on Maine's southern coast, Roberge grew up in a place where ideas about ocean and industry are intimately connected. Today she divides her time between Maine and Florida, where she teaches sculpture at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Though Gainesville is inland, Floridians are never psychically far from the ocean and its impact upon the fragile geography of their state, which is pockmarked with sinkholes and ominously blotted from maps that project the future effects of global warming. Grappling with similar concerns about the vanishing earth's surface is the work derived from Roberge's June 2007 residency in Iceland. Of her visit to Skaftafell National Park, where the glacier meets the open ocean, Roberge recently



Fig. 4: Flotilla I. 2011–2014, detail. Courtesy of the artist

Fig. 6: Ocean Floors II, 2010, detail. Courtesy of the artist. Photo Credit: Robert Diamante



recalled that there was a sense of the top of the world melting off, as if "everything was sloughing off and going down toward sea." She also discussed the phenomenon of glacial lakes, unmappable bodies of water that form on the surface and then suddenly disappear as a crack opens in the melting ice and the water shoots down to the bedrock below.

Poignantly evocative of such concerns, the floor piece *What I Saw on the Glacier* (Fig. 5) consists of hundreds of cut- and pressed-glass trinkets resting upon large-scale digital prints that feature the blues and whites of an Arctic summer. The colorless glass objects, their prismatic transparency suggesting ice, crowd for space in the blank areas around large, scallop-shaped forms meant to represent a polar world map projection. The glass pieces are gathered largely from flea markets and thrift stores (there are also a few pieces from her mother, who passed away in 2006). Once-prized relics of both domesticity and mass-market production, they are now neglected and overlooked by most, but still "beautiful as an accumulation," in Roberge's words. Salvaging them and eking out space for them on her flattened globe, she explores ideas of fragility, loss, and the possibility of restoration.

*What I Saw on the Glacier* was first exhibited in an experimental art space in Bremen, Germany (where much of the glass was originally acquired) in 2008, and then in a restored textile mill in Biddeford in 2010. Also on view in Biddeford were the *Ocean Floors* pieces, conceived as memorials to Roberge's parents, the title a conscious allusion to Atkins's "ocean flowers." The gilded, cast iron pots and pans of *Ocean Floors II* (Fig. 6), arranged on the floor in a grid formation, indicate not only wreckage, sunken treasure, and burial at sea, but also the importance of iron in the maritime industry: anchors, bell buoys, ballast. Cast iron became Roberge's next frontier in 2013 as she secured an Arts/Industry

Fig. 5: What I Saw on the Glacier, 2008. Courtesy of the artist



residency at the Kohler Arts Center in Wisconsin—the non-profit, fine arts affiliate of the company best known for faucets and bathtubs—with the intent of using their industrial facility to make cast-iron versions of her boats.

*Flotilla II* (Fig. 7), a series of cast iron and brass boats, was produced in Kohler's foundry. The smooth surfaces and rippling forms of these boats—each about five times the size of those in *Flotilla I* and weighing as much as seventy pounds—belie the strain and sweat inherent in manufacturing cast iron in this scale, a very different process from the small bronzes Roberge had produced in the past. After much trial and error, a mold was made, forms were cast, and then the completed forms were enameled in molten glass, another hot and intimidating process with a steep learning curve. The end result is a body of work that fuses together the concerns and the materials that have preoccupied Roberge for the last decade: seaweed, metal, glass, sand (the raw material of glass as well as a crucial ingredient in the process of casting iron), heat, boats, melting, floating. The fact that the iron boats can't actually float makes them analogous to the ice cap in *What I Saw on the Glacier*: in danger of sinking and disappearing, unlikely to be salvaged.

The colors of the boats in *Flotilla II* are not arbitrary. They are the green, brown, and red of seaweed; the bright gold of brass and sunlight; and the blue of water and polar ice. That icy blue is also a feature of *What I Saw on the Glacier* and, meaningfully, Roberge's cyanotypes (Fig. 8), in which the vegetal forms of a comparatively temperate ocean meet the austere palette of a frozen wilderness. Roberge's process, developed in collaboration with master printer Erica Schneider of Bleu Acier, is a modernized version of Anna Atkins's, incorporating an acetate positive to allow for the printing of multiples and experimentation with scale (though the seaweeds in this exhibition are printed at

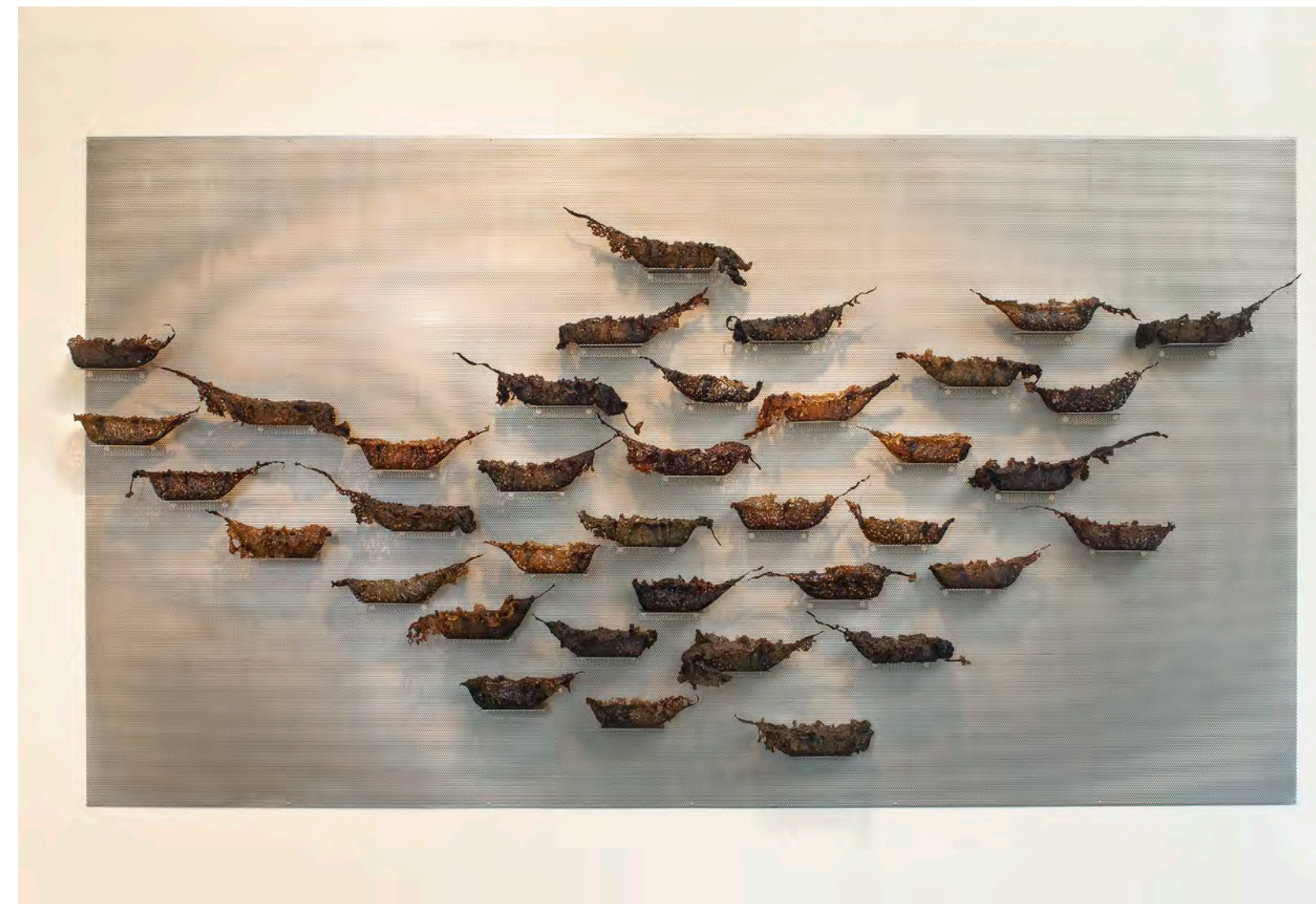


Fig. 2: Marina, 2012–2013. Courtesy of artist

actual size). The resulting images, conveying the remarkable diversity of North Atlantic seaweed, are cool but sensual, the methodology both remotely scientific and intimately hands-on. Portraits of objects that no longer exist, etched with light and viewed in the light, it seems possible that these elusive images might dissolve and vanish before our eyes.

The cyanotypes can seem mesmerizingly pictorial when viewed individually, suggesting forests, gardens, or even the elaborate illustrations and decorative motifs of the nineteenth-century Aesthetic movement. But Roberge says that to her they are purely abstract—seen in the aggregate—as in this exhibition, for instance—their abstract impact does indeed become apparent and more powerful. Like flea-market glass, a fleet of boats, a beach full of sea lace washed up after a storm, or pools of water on a glacier's surface, they are "beautiful as an accumulation." As a group, they touch upon our human impulse to gather, record, and try to salvage things that might someday disappear.



Fig. 7: Seaweed Boat, 2013, part of Flotilla II. Courtesy of the artist

JESSICA SKWIRE ROUTHIER is a writer, editor, and an independent museum professional in Maine who has held positions at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Portland Museum of Art, Maine; and the Saco Museum, Saco, Maine. She also serves as President of the board of Maine Archives and Museums, dedicated to supporting and promoting Maine's collecting institutions. Her book on the Moving Panorama of Pilgrim's Progress is forthcoming from the University Press of New England in 2015.

“ Though the sea lace is intriguing and beautiful in form and material, at first I could not think what I would do to transform it into a sculpture. After observing gatherers of seaweed along the shores of Baie Ste. Marie in their flat-bottomed boats laden with rockweed, I thought why not a boat, a seaweed boat, better yet, a seaweed boat that cannot float because it is riddled with holes, a boat that resembles a seaweed, a seaweed that resembles a boat. So now I am making seaweed boats in wax, in bronze, and in the seaweed itself. ”

CELESTE ROBERGE