



Detail, opposite page

**Beer Bottle Bouquet (Candelabros Recicladlos)**

2004, hand-blown recycled glass, 27 x 7 cm, 21 x 6.5 cm or 24 x 6 cm

Right

**Everything Has Been Recorded**

2000, offset-printed 3-colour booklet, 24 pages, 7.5 x 13 x 5 cm each

Below

**Royal Leerdam Crystal Beer Bottle Candle Holders**

2001, mouth-blown lead crystal, 6.5 x 20.5 cm each

Bottom

**Black Chimes**

2004, laser-cut 'euro-color' birch plywood, black anodized aluminium, monofilament, dimensions variable



Born in Woodland, California, USA, 1969. Lives and works in Los Angeles, USA and Berlin, Germany **Selected Solo Exhibitions:** 2000 Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles 2004 Bienal de Cuenca, Ecuador 2005 'New York, New York, New York, New York', John Connelly Presents, New York 2006 'John Connelly Presents at Art Basel Statements'; 'Negative Space Variations', Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Bergamo **Selected Group Exhibitions:** 2002 'Rock My World', CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco; 'ELEKTRA: Gabriel Orozco and Mungo Thomson', Transmission, Glasgow 2004 California Biennial, Orange County Museum of Art 2005 'PERFORMA05: First Biennial of Visual Art Performance', New York 2006 'Happiness', Gagosian Gallery, berlin biennial for contemporary art **Selected Bibliography:** 2000 Christopher Knight, 'Exploring Perception, Memory, and Imagination', *Los Angeles Times*, 27 October 2001 Margaret Morgan, 'Mungo Thomson: Don't Look Back', *Art/Text*, March; Brigitte Weingart, 'ENTRUCKUNG', *Texte Zur Kunst*, March 2004 Matthew Higgs, 'Mungo Thomson: An Introduction', *Easy Field Guide to Mungo Thomson*, US Cultural Affairs Department, May 2005 Megan Ratner, 'Mungo Thomson', *Frieze*, October

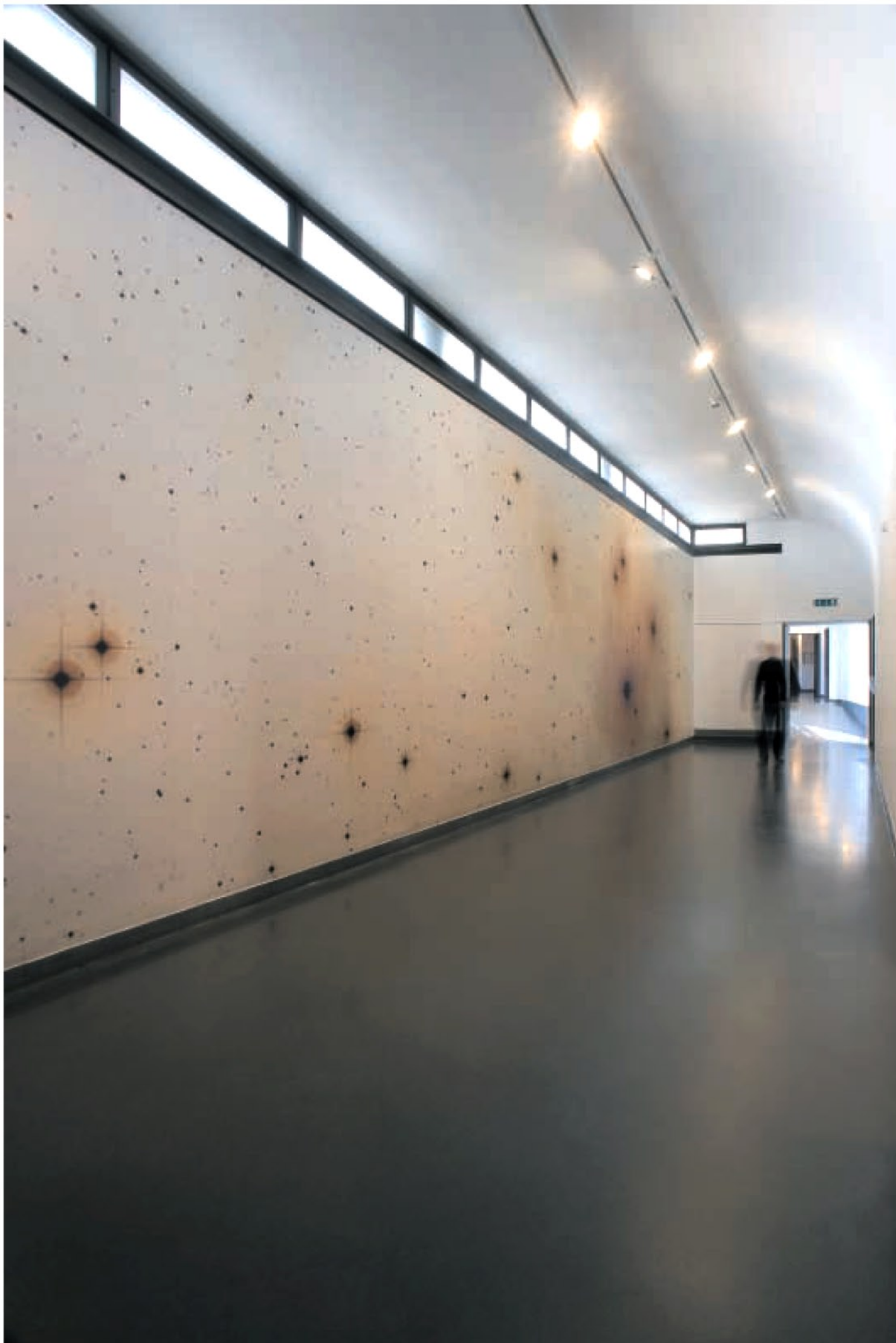
Mungo Thomson explores the space between two discrete systems – art gallery and public space, or cultural signs and traditional practices – through simple interventions that reveal the effects of the encounter between the two. His early work attempted to connect art and life by bringing quotidian objects into the gallery space, or disseminating artists' ideas in public spaces by appropriating popular communication. In *Wind Chime* (2000), a handmade wind chime was installed inside the gallery. Its sounds, made by the stirring of the air when the gallery door opened and by the activities of people inside, articulated the elapsed time of a visit to the gallery by marking the beginning and the end with ringing. In *Everything Has Been Recorded* (2000) Thomson's observations about art and life were presented in comic books placed in public areas for free distribution, in the manner of religious pamphlets.

Thomson often appropriates well-known cultural products to reflect on the history of their reception. In his treatment of existing films, the main action is frequently removed, leaving only the frame or the background. The single-channel video projection *The American Desert (for Chuck Jones)* (2002), for example, continuously shows the desert landscapes that form the backdrops in the *Roadrunner* cartoons. The pictures also evoke similar landscapes in Westerns, where the desert is the site of violent showdowns. The chain of associations triggered by these images suggests the power of mass culture to produce a collective symbol.

Thomson's treatment of kitsch as a reservoir for cultural memory references Robert Smithson, who observed that outmoded things like car advertisements or sci-fi B-movies reveal the failed utopian dream in a fractured form. Debased forms of kitsch become an allegory of great cultures descending into ruins. *Royal Leerdam Crystal Beer Bottle Candle Holders* (2001) is a melancholic reflection on the entropic process whereby previous sub- or counter-cultural practices have become kitsch. For this work, Thomson commissioned Holland's most renowned glass factory, which produces both one-of-a-kind artisan crystal and mass-produced beer bottles, to produce mouth-blown lead crystal beer bottles, into which he inserted candles. Thus the student habit of using beer bottles as candle holders was remade as a luxury, in an ironic comment on the reification of Bohemian style as a fashionable pose. Covered with candle wax, the unlabelled bottles still communicate a sense of ritual, however – just as Thomson's comic books convey a longing for truth hiding behind mass culture.

In *The Swordsman* (2004) Thomson rescues the symbolic capacity of an outmoded cultural sign. The film captures the graceful action of retired Hollywood sword master Bob Anderson performing one of his famous routines; his gestures recapitulate the familiar scene of a reclusive swordsman demonstrating his expertise to a young apprentice. His subdued expression and everyday clothes, however, reflect the outmoding of his special skill through the development of digitalized action.

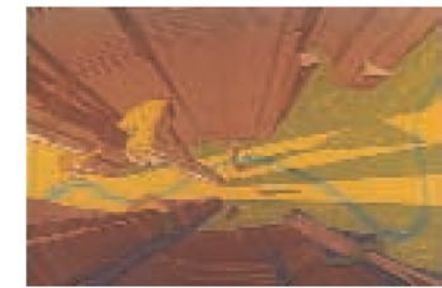
Thomson's appropriations reveal the melancholy of living in a culture driven by the rapid production and consumption of meaning. His precise selection of details, and his sensitivity to the physical effects and symbolic capacity of objects, points to a new sphere of perception concealed behind empty signs. \* **Midori Matsui**



Left and opposite page:

**Negative Space (STSci-PRC2004-20)**  
2006, photographic mural on vinyl  
Installation, GAMeC, Bergamo (2006)

**Negative Space**  
2006, Artists' publication with  
Christoph Keller Editions, 160 pages



Above  
**The American Desert (for Chuck Jones)**  
2002, video projection, colour, sound, 34 min

