GREAT HALL
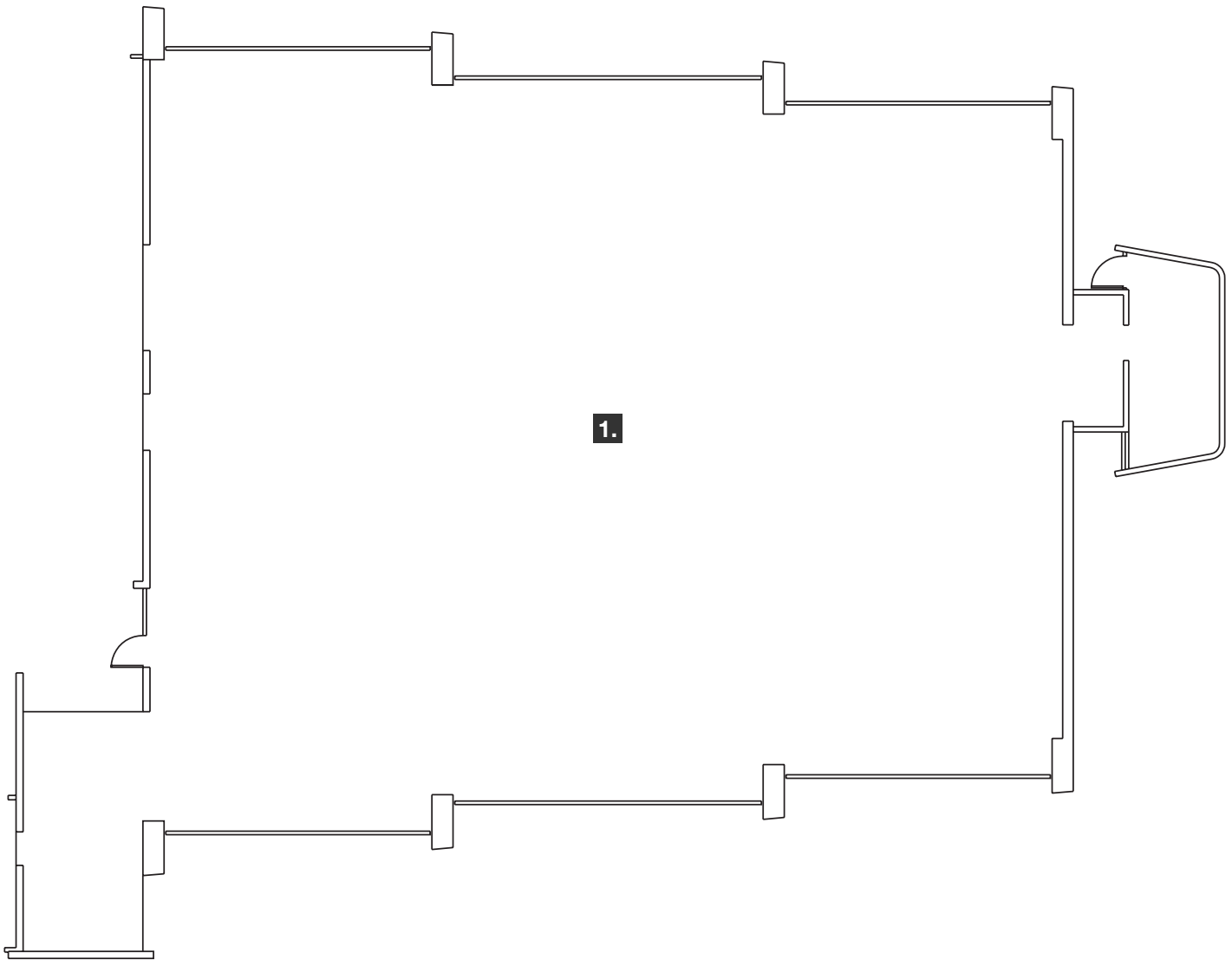
MachineHistories *TUCSON 3 WAYS: A Foray into Digital Alchemy*

1. TUCSON 3 WAYS: A Foray into Digital Alchemy (2016)

Wood, expanded polystyrene foam, medium-density fiberboard, SolidSurface (marble dust, bauxite, acrylic, epoxy and pigments), laser galvometer, and miscellaneous screens.

Steven Joyner (b. Waycross, Georgia, 1972) graduated with a degree in Environmental Design from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena in 2005 and has exhibited at the Neoteric Conjunctive, ACADIA (The Association for the Advancement of Computer Aided Design in Architecture), and the A+D Museum in Los Angeles. **Jason Pilarski** (b. 1971, Pennsylvania) received his BFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York and his MFA from Art Center College of Design, where he is currently an instructor. He started Machine Histories in 2006 as a design/build studio focusing on involving technology to produce meaningful one-offs. His work has been published in *Art News, Art In America, ArtForum, Newsweek, Los Angeles Times, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Vogue Living, Metropolis, ID,* and *New York Magazine*.

Curator's Essay

GREAT HALL

MachineHistories *TUCSON 3 WAYS: A Foray into Digital Alchemy*
18 June – 25 September 2016

Los Angeles-based Steven Joyner and Jason Pilarski of MachineHistories are extremely well regarded and active in the field of fabricating artwork, products, and experiments for an esteemed and notable list of clients. This exhibition in MOCA's Great Hall is undoubtedly informed by their endeavors as a design research laboratory, but is on some level entirely divergent: a pure manifestation of their own practice unconnected to any commercial concerns. Continuing their use of custom algorithms as a way to process data into three-dimensional form, Tucson GIS (geographical information system) data sets generate an unusual geographical and sociological portrait on two floor-to-ceiling, sixteen-foot wide doors, through which the viewer will see an enigmatic obelisk and a twelve-by-twelve-foot square map relief through the cracked-open divide. Unique Sonoran landforms, indigenous plant life, the Santa Cruz riverbed, barrio gentrification, and local political moments are transformed into an "image" containing copious amounts of information not exactly readable as cartography or a picture. Instead, it will be an anecdotal relief, a mesh, more akin to synthetic bark, freshly and unorthodoxly describing Tucson's distinctiveness, futuristically embossed on the corporeal inorganic forms MachineHistories so inventively and skillfully creates.

"What if Rodin had a CNC machine and big data was forcing his hand while Kubrick provided stage direction and they used a Tony Smith-like piece on set," is an applicable MachineHistories quote on this project's origins. The objects listed above, as well as the projections of animated graphics onto the "doors," the postage-stamp monitors displaying related details embedded in the monolith-slash-obelisk, and the more typical relief map-like ridges and edges on the "plane" certainly do conjure up a collision of personages from different disciplines and time periods, co-mingling through the prism of MachineHistories' digitally alchemical activities. Sorting out unimaginable reams of material and converting those elements into three-dimensional things is an exercise in digital recycling and high order mesh manipulation with trillions of 0s and 1s transfigured into volumetric form. Multivalency, i.e. "having or susceptible to many applications, interpretations, meanings, or values," is the operative word in both *TUCSON 3 WAYS: A Foray into Digital Alchemy* and all of MachineHistories' investigations and explorations of facts, figures, shapes, and configurations. Joyner and Pilarski's conceptual explanation is worth citing: "Component (A) relies heavily on maximum pattern usage to intensely generate a baroque condition to transmit information via relief or carving. Component (B) is more austere and depends on positional descriptors to yield form and represent content. (A) and (B) will be custom manufactured by using contemporary technologies and manipulating industrial means. Component (C) uses a laser galvanometer to display animated vector graphics on the objects." As a function of the synthesis technology meeting art can provide, the projections on the doors are more "decorative" while the monitors on the obelisk feature specifically utilitarian selections. On the standup planar surface, particulars become emergent in a truly topographical sense.

In these works, figuration's inherent tendency towards signification is simultaneously embraced and perverted, with compositional techniques trumping semantic content and at the same time providing a compelling "picture" by way of genuinely up-to-the-minute methods. As they did with their *Down the Rabbit Hole: Adventures in Quantum Modeling* at Woodbury University's Wedge Gallery in 2015, a digital distortion of Greg Turk and Marc Levoy's notorious (in the arena of computer graphics 3D test modeling) 1994 Stanford Bunny, with *TUCSON 3 Ways* depiction segues into distortion, arcing from the literal to abstract, making Tucson unrecognizable via an overall, minutely observed aggregation of city, terrain, and inhabitants' behaviors. Existing in several states simultaneously, this is a "true" illustration of a complicated and multi-faceted place in space, time, and social context, bringing in the myriad variables that make up "reality" into the museum. So the unequalled Frenchman and his imagined CNC machine and the unparalleled filmmaker stage-directing and the American giant of large-scale minimal sculpture do come together in a fantasy this twosome orchestrate into an imposing large-scale minimalist (at first glance) though maximal suite of pieces imbued with codes, cryptograms, and schemas, "knowledge" at its most useful and contradictorily incompressible and even mysterious. Combined, this embodies MachineHistories' use of statistics to achieve an almost frightening totality, intellectually and aesthetically, and even a topical and experimental visual poetry.