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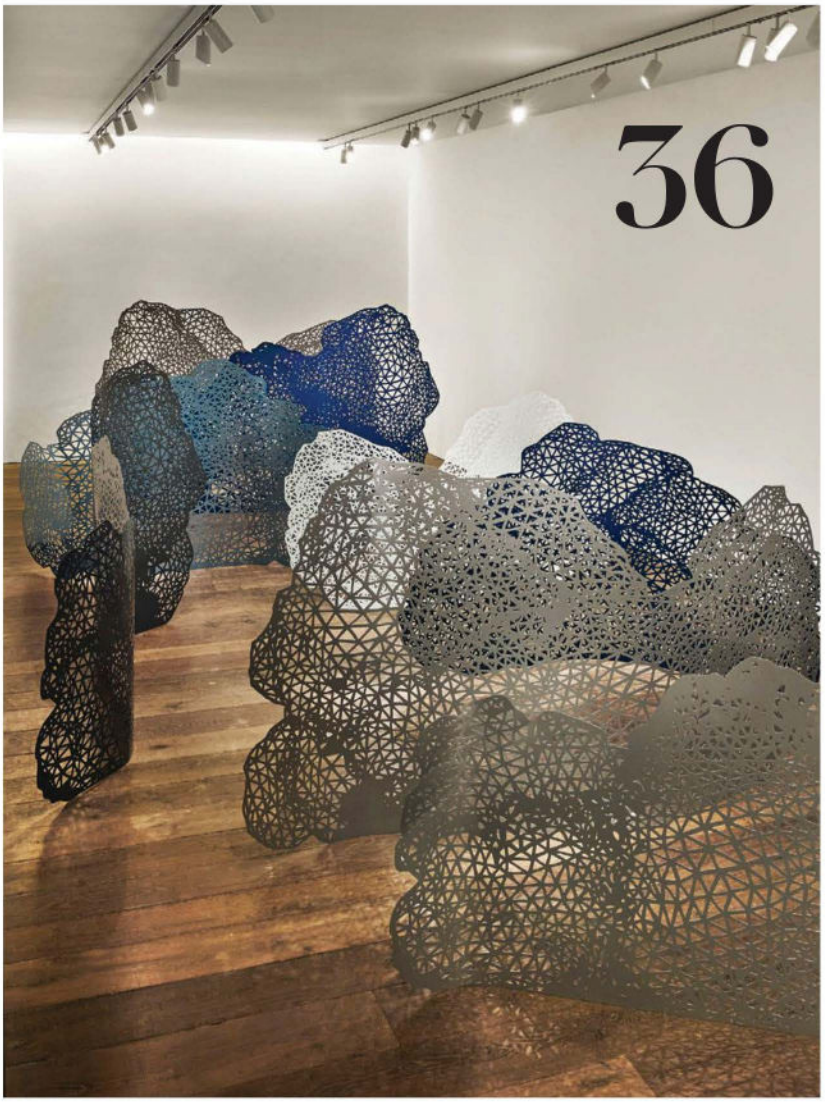
STATE OF THE ARTS:
THE VISIONARIES LEADING THE CULTURAL CONVERSATION

PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST

Creative Force Lucy Liu

TABLE OF CONTENTS



12
LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

16
LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

30
THE LIST

INSIDER.

33
SPOTLIGHT
There's only one place to toast 2026 above the clouds: Jean-Georges at the Four Seasons.

34
AGENDA
Get in the holiday spirit with Philadelphia's top events, from music to markets and more.

36
GUIDE
From abstract paintings to multimedia masterpieces, Philadelphia's top galleries showcase the full range of artistic expression.

39
ART
Woodmere unveils a second location: Frances M. Maguire Hall.

40
GUIDE
An evening on the town beckons—check out our 10 favorite bars in Philly for bevs and revelry.

42
DINING BUZZ
Philly's biggest night in food returns with even more ambition and appetite.

44
ARBITER
The iconic Joan Shepp boutique debuts a bold new space on Walnut Street as Ellen Shepp shares her curated edit of art-driven, holiday fashion.

FROM TOP; PHOTOS: COURTESY OF BRAND; BY JASON VARNEY

has helped put the Philadelphia arts scene on the map. From Douglas Martenson to Christine Lafuente, Gross McCleaf's contemporary artists shine a light on the creative spirit that permeates our city and the Mid-Atlantic region. *123 Leverington Ave., grossmccleaf.com*

LARRY BECKER CONTEMPORARY ART

Featuring Radical Painting Group figures such as Joseph Marioni and Marcia Hafif, Larry Becker is a treasure trove of minimalist, monochrome and abstract art. This winter, explore Steve Riedell's exhibit, *I Want the West*, on view through Dec. 20. *43 N. Second St., artnet.com*

LOCKS GALLERY

In an industry historically dominated by men, Locks Gallery puts the spotlight on innovative female artists. Prominent modern and contemporary creatives like Louise Nevelson and Alice Neel are presented in a museum-quality setting, with attention to scholarship, contextualization and artist input. *600 Washington Square South, locksgallery.com*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP, PHOTOS: COURTESY OF BRAND; COURTESY OF BRAND; COURTESY OF ARTIST; BY CHRISTIAN GIANNELLI

MERRITT GALLERY

With 40 years of visionary curation, this family-led gallery is a must-visit. Their December exhibition, *The Art of Delight*, highlights the joy and whimsy of Hunt Slonem's color-infused creations. *385 Lancaster Ave., Haverford, merrittgallery.com*

MODERNE GALLERY

Discover warm wooden designs and boundary-breaking forms that blur the line between art and furniture at Moderne Gallery. This local mainstay is a leading authority on the Studio Craft Movement, especially with works by George Nakashima and Wharton Esherick. *1705 N. American St., modernegallery.com*

MORTON CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY

Morton Contemporary combines a strong aesthetic vision with a commitment to inclusion—especially women and artists of color. Their December exhibition features Guy de Potesta, a contemporary artist from Belgium whose whimsical use of hyper-realism depicts the impact of climate change on various animal species. *115 S. 13th St., mortoncontemporary.com*

Left: Wexler Gallery features works like the "Archaic" bench by Tom Palmer and "HLX-1" by Marcus Vinicius De Paula.

PROCESSION GALLERY

Step inside Procession Gallery to see the next generation of emerging local talent. Recent exhibits have featured paintings, drawings and ceramics by inventive Philadelphia-based artists like Sofie Sierra, Elissa DeFranceschi and Hannah Pacitti. *30 S. 2nd St., processiongallery.com*

WEXLER GALLERY

Since 2000, Wexler Gallery has been a home for artists who defy expectations. For interior designers and architects who seek to redefine creative boundaries, there's no better inspiration. Wexler's current exhibit, *re·form*, celebrates the gallery's 25th anniversary through Dec. 19. *1811 Frankford Ave., wexlergallery.com*

Clockwise from top: Explore Procession Gallery's works like "New Surroundings" by Hannah Pacitti; inside Merritt Gallery; at Bridgette Mayer, see works like Rebecca Rutstein's "Flow," featuring nickel-plated steel and biodegradable monofilament.

STATE OF THE ARTS

Now more than ever, the dialogues of the day play out through the visual arts.

Here, the artists who lead the cultural conversation and ask the important questions that push us all forward.

REBECCA RUTSTEIN

For Philadelphia-based artist Rebecca Rutstein (rebeccarutstein.com), the natural world is both muse and collaborator. A multidisciplinary talent whose work spans painting, sculpture, video and monumental public art, Rutstein translates scientific data and elemental phenomena into immersive visual poetry. Through her collaborations with scientists across the globe, she invites viewers to see—and feel—the invisible systems that sustain life on Earth.

"It comes down to a genuine curiosity about the world," she says. "The more I learn about the natural world, the more I'm struck by how interconnected it all is." Over the past decade, Rutstein has joined oceanographers, microbiologists and geochemists on expeditions at sea—descending more than a mile below the surface in the submersible Alvin. Her 64-foot installation, "Shimmer," permanently housed at the Georgia Museum of Art, was inspired by the bioluminescent dance she witnessed in the deep. "Most people will never see the deep ocean with their own eyes," she explains. "I wanted to share that moment of awe—the dancing lights in complete darkness, like stars underwater."

Rutstein's works reside in more than 50 public and corporate collections, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Yale University and the National Academy of Sciences. Her solo exhibitions—such as *All the Stars in the Sea* at Philadelphia's Bridgette Mayer Gallery and *Blue Dreams* at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C.—underscore her standing as an artist whose practice bridges disciplines and continents. Up next: a large-scale mural commissioned for Harvard University, set to begin in March, and a major solo exhibition at the Berman Museum of Art, opening in 2026. Both projects continue Rutstein's mission to connect viewers to the natural world through the lens of wonder and responsibility.

From top: An installation view from Rutstein's *Deep Rift* solo exhibition (2013) at Bridgette Mayer Gallery, Philadelphia; a portrait of Rutstein while working on her *Nexus (2022)* exhibition.

FROM TOP, PHOTOS BY: KAREN MAUCH; REBECCA MCALPIN