>> From WXXI News, it's 1370 Connection. [Background music] I'm Bob Smith and my guest this hour, well, you might say she turns marble into miracles and she's even got a MacArthur Genius Grant to prove it. Elizabeth Turk turn stone into something light and intricate and seemingly impossible and she's going to tell how she does it, why she does it when she appears this evening at 8 at RIT's Webb Auditorium to wrap up this year's Caroline Werner Gannett Visionaries in Motion Series and she's joining me right now. Elizabeth, thank you very much for joining us today, we appreciate it. >> Always welcome. >> And I want to ask you first of all to describe verbally how you approach a big block of stone. I'm presuming it starts with a big block at least what would seem like us to be a big heavy block and then turning to something that seems as light as Faberge egg. I mean, how do you do that? >> It's a good question. They are big blocks. They probably range from about 50 to 600 pounds and I think, I am decidedly rational when I approach but when I look at the end result, it is obviously completely irrational. I think the process begins with a lot of passion. I love coming up against something that's bigger, older, stronger than I am and then I just attack it with grinders and all kind of old fashioned tooling. Never hammers, never that kind of violence and keep working until I have a very Zen moment. >> Yeah, I guess that's when you know you've got what you want or you've got the best that it's possible to get from your concept. But I mean, when you begin it, first of all, is there a design already planned out for the look and the structure or the finished work like architectural drawings or something similar to that, blueprints if you will and designs and dimensions and everything else or do you just look at the stone, start chipping away at it and then figuring up on the fly what's eventually going to look like? >> No. There is-- it's the conversation. It's the combination of those two things. They are the structural possibilities, they come out in more collage and then I'll draw a ribbon-like line around the stone just as a start. But there's always enough space to make deviations because the stone is organic and it will always push back and there'll be a hole or imperfection that I can't get around. So I'll have to slowly change the general structure. >> Well, what happens if the stone just decides to be a little bit disobedient and say, "I don't want to do that, I don't want to be that, I'm not going to let you make me into that." [Laughter] Does that kind of happen at times? >> It really-- I'm so slow. I work so slowly that you can kind of anticipate where that might be a problem. And change, it's kind of like walking into somebody's life with. Really heavy boots, you know, you're going to send fractures everywhere that you can count on being there when you get to another point. If I were to hit my stone with big hammer that's exactly what would happen, I'd find those fractures later on, so I use the dental tools essentially. >> Okay, so forget the jackhammer and the chisel or even forget the traditional sledgehammer and chisel like, oh I don't know, when Michelangelo might have used or even Rodin before they got into casting things out of bronze and all that. So the-- it's not that kind of sculpturing at all. It's-- >> No, it's not. It's more like drawing. It's more like drawing with Dremel tools. >> Drawing with a Dremel Moto-tool. [Laughter] Well you know-- >> This is where the insanity comes in. >> Yeah, I'm usually thinking about something like a Dremel Moto-tool to finish out then have them as a car model or finish out a piece of molding on the wall if you're doing a remake of a family room or something like that. Okay, I see it in that aspect, but dealing with that in a 500 pound block of stone that's a little bit of a paradigm shift. >> It is a paradigm shift but if I-- I sort of thought, if I could accomplish that you would feel a sense of time. I wouldn't have to explain a lot of the sculpture too. You would feel the passion. You would approach the work with a different sensibility than what I would find in words to tell you about the work-- >> Well-- >> -- and that was important. >> It's delicate. I've seen

pictures of it, but I haven't seen in the stone or in the flesh so to speak but I've seen pictures and it's really delicate. So I'm thinking to myself first of all how do you know what you're going to do and how far you can go without the whole thing just either collapsing or imploding? >> Good question. I started with a sphere, a sphere that would have no up or down sense of gravity to see if I could come up with a shape that wouldn't implode. >> And so you start with that but still, I mean this is a multidimensional thing. It's got open space, it's got structures that kind of look like bridge latticework and everything else as I've seen it. And this is something that you almost figure, how are you going to get that out of a single piece of anything? Don't you almost have to build it from pieces and build it up the way they build a bridge, the way they build a building or some kind of an intricate structure like that? Or failing that, make it two dimensional like an intricate piece of lace work. >> That's the challenge definitely. If you look at several of the boxes, I mean the challenge was to make one line, define three-dimensional space so they're like movie stripes. You have 800 inches of line in a box describing empty space, and then it sets on a polished stainless steel structure that kind of mirrors the emptiness of the interior of that space. >> In the middle of all that as you mentioned, sometimes the material won't let you do exactly what you originally thought you wanted to do. So how do you improvise when you run into a problem like that? Do you act kind of like a novelist who finds a character, taking on a life of its own and messes around with the plot until it starts to make sense? >> A little bit. I've added an extra loop so there are couples that are not one line but two lines. I've brought lines in further into this space. I've create a connections so they'll be added support. Because when I look at the structure of them although I want one line, at one point when I decide the orientation of a piece, I'll go through and start cutting, you know, girders, essentially like a building is built with all these steel support. And for me at first they are all attached, in the end they're not. >> And in the end of course when you talk about girders again they're built in construction one piece at a time and then welded together. This is totally 180 degrees opposite. This would be like taking a single solid block of stone. They are basically taking a mountain and carving a building out of it. >> Yup, yup. Exactly. >> And leaving enough room for all the windows, all the rooms, all the living space everything else, and oh by the way, you better make sure that what you've left after you've cut everything out it's got to be strong enough to support the whole thing top to bottom or else you have yourself a disaster. >> It's a challenge in reductive thought, that's for sure. >> I guess so. Are there times, you know, you don't have to tell me this if you don't want to, but are there times when you get so far into something and looks great and somehow or another because of some unseen or unanticipated flaw in the material itself, you end up finding the whole thing collapsing and the next thing you know you got chards of stone. >> The worst problems have come in shipping to tell you the truth, the problem of shifting and the intense vibration, crossing the country. >> How do you get around that when you want to send it from point A, the point of origin to point B, the place where somebody wants to put on an exhibition and show it? >> Yeah. [Laughter] >> I can imagine how you might do this but I would be curious to know how you do, do it? >> Well, up until recently, I do what I call my travel across America and it's just-- because they're practically uninsurable. And so, I just stick them in my car and try and find a passenger driver and do trips across America as safely as possible. >> Are there times when maybe you'll try to carry it on board of plane and then just buy an extra seat for it? >> [Laughs] I haven't gone that far yet. I'd be worried about TSA. >> Yes, perhaps. So although I think an intricate marble sculpture, I don't think they'd ever mistake that for anything other than what it is. >> [Laughs] Oh my God. >> But nonetheless, I'm

imagining it packed in not just very flexible foam but maybe even put a balloon on the inside of it that blow it up so that it won't implode from within [inaudible]. I am imagining you're doing something like that and it might even work, I don't know. >> I wish I could but for the most part now we've created sling, crates and-- and crates where there are very little-- there's very little structure touching the pieces so that they kind of float on a few structural points and that's it. >> Have you ever found when you got to the destination that you had an "Oh my God" moment? >> I haven't but my gallery has which-- >> Oh. >> I can't. I can't speak to that heartbreak-- >> But-- >> I just hear it on the other end of the phones, yeah. >> And hopefully after the check is cleared. >> [Laughs] No this is-- yeah, I'll tell you, it's a challenge to make, it's a challenge to own, it's a challenge to exhibit, but isn't that what art is supposed to be? It's taking scenes to an end degree, you know, just because-- just because is it possible. >> I would almost be afraid to own a piece like that if I live in an earthquake zone like Southern California. >> I can't imagine how I feel with all of them in the studio for the last decade. >> Yeah, I guess, I mean that's a base of operations for you, isn't it? >> Absolutely. >> On the West Coast. >> Absolutely. >> Well, 263-WXXI is our number. We are talking with Elizabeth Turk who is a McArthur Grant honoree and we'll be speaking this evening at Webb Auditorium at RIT, wrapping up this year's Caroline Warner Gannett Visionaries in Motion Series. I'm Bob Smith, it's 1370 Connection. We reach through phones at 263-WXXI and Bill welcome to the program. Good to have you with us. >> Thanks Bob. You guys had done such an exceptional job of intriguing me to go take a look at these sculptures. How can I view them or see them? >> At the moment there are two exhibits, one in News York City at Hirschl and Adler Modern and the other in Los Angeles. But come tonight, there will be slides. >> Okay. And is there a website that I can visit? >> Yes, Hirschl and Adler Modern and elizabethturksculptor.com. >> Okay, beautiful. Now, when you use Dremel tool, when I see my wife using them in her shop and she's working on jewelry or baskets. I mean I can't even begin to picture how you would use one of those in any length to tie them on a piece of stone. I mean it must wear off so quickly. >> You have a good point, we use them on the-- and a very small pencil grinders. Mostly now, I'm using carbide sort of double cut tile cutting bits. So a lot of the Dremel tools, there is a problem with adhesives and having them burned out-- burned through the bit part too fast. But-- >> Right. >> A lot of diamond bits there-- that work just fine. >> Okay, thank you. >> Thank you. >> Okay, thank you very much for calling in. We also have John on the line at 263WXXI. John welcome you're in the air. >> Hi, I'm interested in how do you select the stone, is there a different kinds of marble? Where do you get it? What are you looking for? And also, on the hitting it with the hammer and chisel, how did the old masters do it? Did they fracture the interior of the stone then have to work around it or were they hitting it softly or what was the difference? >> That's a good question. I-- there are two, two answers. First answer, I work in my studios in the middle of the working marble yard so I usually use stone that has a history. I love the idea of continuing a narrative that is pre-existing so the material is basically remnant material for another project with another story. And sometimes, there are imperfections in it that you can see. And I will take those to a conservation friend at the Getty [phonetic] and have the-- like a corner repaired or something before I start. As far as tooling, I'm not an expert in art history but you make a good point. I mean they were far better at hammer and chisel than I am I'm sure. I use grinders because I like the idea of cross hatching and sort of using my tools more like an etcher. Originally, I had to use air hammers and I found that they just went too far for me, too far, too fast. The grinding seemed to be a way I could marry contemporary technology and the potential of CNC machines and

perhaps designing with computer aided design possibilities. >> There you go, thank you very much for calling. Good question, I appreciate it 263WXXI, 263-9994. When you're talking about CNC machines and doing that kind of work, I'm imagining now the kind of thing that you see the Tool & Die Shops and we have a lot of it here in Rochester that cater to the national precision industry trade and I've-- I'm imagining something similar going on. You don't use a-- like a Bridgeport mail with the digital readout or anything like that, do you? >> I know, where I work, they do architectural framing in stone and so a lot of the designs are done on CAD programs that with, you know, a bed, twice the size of your table her where you can put, you can layout stone that is probably, 10 feet by 10 feet, 3 feet high and do moldings, that kind of thing so that, you have an X, Y, and Z axis, that then will slowly grind to 24/7-- >> Things like. >> They're molding. >> Things like what they'll put on the outer surface of the World Trade Center Tower as they're building it, it just tap down I guess at 1,350 feet structurally. But I guess-- is that the kind of thing that they're doing at building projects like that in New York? >> No, they're-- no, this is the studio in California they are mostly high-end homes. >> Oh so what they're doing is in other words, if you do it well enough, they will cut you a piece of marble that will fit in with whatever design you have and then after they've cut it away, you get to work with what they've cut away. >> Exactly, exactly. >> So, you're there while somebody else is creating an architectural frame for something or a decorative side panel or a stone wall or something like that and you get-- >> I get the remnants. >> You get the remnants. You get what's left and turn it into art. >> But some of it has a very cool story, they worked on a doorway. In fact, I'll speak about this tonight. They had renovation of a 1920s bank doorway in Dallas, Texas and what was amazing is that, even in the renovated projects, the blocks had to be solid and aminate a sense of permanence and security, and I found it an ideal working material, because of, I don't know, the symbol of the bank is anything but that today so I love the idea of hollowing out those big solid blocks. >> Yeah, a bank wants to convey that kind of image. But sometimes, there are folks here at Rochester who may remember this. Sometimes, it doesn't always work out. They put a marble facade on the Chase Bank Tower when it was built in the 1970s here in town. Originally for Lincoln First Bank, it's predecessor, but got gobbled up in the Chase Empire. Well, those particular panels didn't hold, it start falling up, they start falling in the main street or at the Clinton Avenue South, bad news obviously. >> Interesting. >> When something is falling off a 400 foot tall building. So they had to remove them all and replaced them with white Collared-- a white Collared essentially, aluminum paneling that would hold. So I don't know, do you ever end up getting material like that that started life as an architectural feature that somehow didn't work out? I wonder if you got either something of that or something of let's say the marble panels that they had to take off the Bank of Montreal Building in Toronto, when they started falling at the Young Street or-- yeah, this has happened a lot as you can tell. >> I have not had a piece of marble from that dramatic debris situation. That would be very interesting but I have had like banisters from buildings that they-- one of my favorites was a banister from building in Verona. That was absolutely beautiful marble. It probably had been quarried in the 1800s and it had perfume stains and sort of balustrade halls where the steel had rusted out and that was exceptional to me, it was the-- those were notations of a past that was longer than myself so it sort of like leaving a few of those notes. >> I'm kind of surprise that they pulled those away rather than trying to save them for whatever purpose they could find. >> It's true I am-- I'm surprise as well with the beauty of some of these pieces. But, you know, chunks of stone, you know, they're-- you can't-- it's surprising. They're heavy, they are hard to move and somebody is just glad

that you take it away off them. >> You wind up with the remnants of 19th century buildings that have been kind of thrown away and replaced with the new at times? >> Yeah, yeah. And you get-- on some of them, you can see the steel structures that have rusted off so. >> So, you get to see the remnants of the bolts that ate away? >> Exactly. >> Well, what do you do when there is a remnant like that? Do you just work around and you try to figure out a way to make it part of a whole structure and let the story be told that way? >> Originally, I worked a way. I worked around that so you couldn't tell and then I began to be more intrigued with adding just as slight notation of that story. If there is an interesting curve where the bolt still rusted, it's just enough that you could-- you could tell there is a mark that wasn't mine. >> That's an interesting choice and I'll talk a little bit in a moment but I have to take a short break. But we'll talk a little bit in a moment on how you make the choices as you're going along, as well as, more about the methods that you use which seemed to almost have more to do with the surgeon or the dentist than they do with the sculptor. We'll be talking with Elizabeth Turk and we'll continue our conversation in just a moment, I'm Bob Smith, back in a minute on 1370 connection from WXXI AM 1370. [Music] 1370 connection continues on WXXI, I'm Bob Smith, dial 263-WXXI, 263-9994. You're part of the conversation and this hour's conversation is with MacArthur Grant recipient Elizabeth Turk. A sculptor who turn stone into something light and intricate in a way that when you look at it, you'll probably wonder, "How did she possibly do it?" She's going to be talking and revealing some her secrets although I'm sure not all, this evening at 8 at RIT's Webb Auditorium as part of the Visionaries in Motion Series and let's go to the phones, 263 WXXI, and hear from Molly [phonetic] on the line. Hi, Molly you're on air. >> Hi, I was wondering how Ms. Turk feel about the division between fine art and craftsmanship and how they're often divided and she's obviously a great artist and a great craftsman. >> I love that question, thank you for asking it. Because for me, the conversation is about-- is not really about material as with material and like I' said earlier in this interview, I love the challenge of coming up again something that is stronger, older and will remain, you know, a part of the dialogue much longer than I will. And so, how can I diminish that? And over the last, I don't know, 10, 20 years working with stone, my respect for organic material has only increased and has sent me on another entirely new journey. So, I don't see a line as a result anymore. I think of fine art as a wonderful conversation with human ideas and art historical narrative. I think craftsmanship carries incredible weight in that dialogue, and personally, I just don't see a division. >> Thanks. >> Okay, thank you very much. Now, which comes first? The craft or the art, or do they all have to always come together? Our artists by definition, craftspeople and our crafts people by definition, artists. >> I think each person falls out on the, you know, individually on that line. And we're at the point I think where there's unbelievable division that I don't understand frankly because I think people are both, I think people fall out on both. >> That certainly makes sense. I know there are some of you who would probably make the distinction in that the artist is also a craftsperson but the artist is also a designer and a planner and not necessarily following a blue print of any kind. There's a lots of craftspeople who could be excellent in what they do but following somebody else's design or blue print. And the difference may be you're creating your own blue print. As you're going along, you're creating your own plan or changing plans or maybe even going without a plan. >> Yeah, as I speak, I guess maybe I come from a point of reference that is not functionality and there may be a strong line there. But I guess because of the dialogue-- the material dialogue, I get very defensive for material I want. I want matter to carry its own weight and of importance. I guess it's because I don't see-- I see ideas possibly as a matter. I mean, the whole

separation of mind and spirit from matter, I don't really see. I think we're all governed by the same physical laws. >> Now, one thing the effect, I'm sure a lot of people will wonder about, is why particularly the medium of stone and working stone which is a medium where you haven't always work, you've done things in metal and glass and other materials. And you've made this choice as opposed to some of the other things that you've already done in the past. What made you make this choice? >> I was seduced by it and it takes so long. I still work in different materials. I love the variety and Louise Bourgeois is a huge influence. She bounces around with materials and combines them in ways that are so interesting and I like to continue that way. But stone has taken a life of its own. And because the projects, though they began conceptually and it seemed like the most significant material to choose just to convey an idea. I underestimated the time it would take. >> Well, how long does it take? Because it strikes me that if you're going to be that precise and you're going to be working with that kind of tool and that type of space against that harder material, tough kind of material, it's got to take you forever to come up with, with some of the artwork that you've done. >> That's true. The first Collar that I did took about 4-1/2, 5 years because I went so slowly. I had no idea of the stress, the material it would take. Now, it's much faster. >> Well, 4 years, I mean well, that's a whole presidential term or a whole college degree in that kind of time. So-- >> That's true. That's true. >> These days, is it-- have you boiled it down to perhaps a year or does-- >> Yeah. >> Yes, you have? >> Yeah, it's a combination, you know. I'm not the only one working on all the pieces so there is a combination. But I think the beginning piece did not-- I did not think it would get so intricate. But I kept thinking, "What if I try this, what if I go there? Will it hold?" So,-- >> Well it did. >> Get pushed. >> It did. >> It did. >> Didn't it? So, was that more a better of luck or was that a better of just good design, the anticipating problem? >> It was a manner of anger. I was in my studio after 9/11 with an intense amount of energy and frustration and I kept stabbing at that Collar piece and then sort of erasing the-- that violence, and I never really slept and I didn't care if it broke or not. And it-- I found that the original design, the original idea of that body of work was a much more heavy handed piece. But after several months of working like that, I mean, nothing else was really going on. All of the studio visits had been canceled and I was highly emotional. And I wanted it channeled in something that was powerfully quiet, fragile, and needed others to survive the exact opposite of what we had all just experienced. >> So 9/11 in the sense got it started which is an interesting kind of causal link in a way. And yet, it reminds people a lot, I guess, of something that looks lacy and Elizabethan. >> It's true. >> Like they're seeing a Shakespeare performance going out in front of them or a portion of it. >> Absolutely, and then I went and titled it "Collars". So, I don't know. It wasn't originally the thought I'd like the name because of the paradox of a stone, heavy, you know, collar. But it really was the investigation of shape, you know. If you took a spiral two dimensionally, drew it down the front of the piece of stone and started to carve into it, you had a series of arches and then you had the series of vaulted cavities and those were such strong architectural elements that something clicked, it just made sense. >> You build a block into a latticework or a framework or an intricate structure, again, but it looks like it was assembled from a lot of little pieces according to a plan, but it wasn't and do people basically look at you and say, "That looks impossible." >> All the time. I-- and I don't look like a sculptor. I've had so many people argue with me about the material [laughs]. >> Oh, what does a sculptor look like? Is it-- does it look somebody who could win a body building competition or what? >> My studio mate in New York is from Macedonia. He looked like a sculptor, very strong Macedonian, yes, body builder type. >> He looks

like somebody who ought to be on the Giants Roster I guess. >> Exactly, exactly. And they'd start to converse with him. [Laughs] But in the end I think the finished product looks more like me. >> In the end as well, since you're not using something traditional in the way you've cut away the stone and subtract from what it used to be and make it into something else, I'm imagining that your studio looks more like a dentist's office or a surgeon's operating room [Laughter] Pretty good idea? >> There's a lot of dust at the beginning, a lot of dust. And then towards the end, it starts to be much more clean. >> Well, you don't want your doctor to have a lot of dust around. >> [Laughs] It's true. >> But I mean, I'm looking-- I'm thinking of the tools. I'm thinking of the precision. I'm thinking of everything else and saying, "Well, that's got to be something that you'd more expect if you were having a root canal done." >> It's true, it's true. A lot of diamond bits. I probably buy more diamonds than I ever imagined I would. >> Yeah, but they're not the kind that you're going to wear on your finger or wearing up in a necklace or anything like that. >> No, no, purely industrial. >> Exactly, that's a whole different animal entirely. Nonetheless, I can't believe that it's inexpensive to do and I can't believe that these works are going to be inexpensive to purchase given the craftsmanship, the thought, the time that go into them. I mean, they've got to be-- we got to be talking about something worth its wheat and gold, right? >> [Laughs] I'll have to figure out if that comes true. But they don't weigh much at the end, probably, 5 to 35 pound for again, from blocks of about 50 to 750 in this body of work [inaudible]. >> So you're chopping away between 90 and 95 percent of what's there? >> Absolutely, absolutely. >> All sculptors chop away a lot of the material that they're working with unless they're molding it or casting it in which is a whole other kind of thing. But all sculptors that take a solid piece and cut it into something and shape it into something, kind of weigh a lot of material, maybe more material than they leave if they've done it right? >> I don't know. I don't know. For me, it was very important to keep-- to maintain the parameter of the blocks that I had because of trying to tell a secondary story. And then the challenge, just the challenge of reductive thought was part of a personal challenge and also a parallel to how I thought-- I think of our own thought changing, the process is changing. Not or not additive necessarily. We need to edit, we need to learn how to edit. And it-- I don't know. It just made sense to me. >> It's addition by subtraction then? >> I don't-- I'm not sure if I ever see the addition actually. I see the existence by subtraction. >> It's taking a big block of something in doing that and turning it into an idea. So you've added the idea and you've gotten rid of material. >> That's a good point. That's a good point. >> You've gotten rid of the material but that kind of hides it and stabs in the way. >> I guess that's a good point. That's a good point. I think the-- in some ways, I think that the idea is there and I-- or maybe passing through. I'm just-- >> But you might be the only one who sees it until you've cut all the material away. Then everybody sees it afterward. >> Good point. >> So what I wonder, when you're the only one who sees the idea there and then in the end after you've done all of your work and taken away, carefully selected 90 to 95 percent of the material, the idea is still there, only now everybody can see it. What kind of reaction do you get a lot of times? When it goes beyond how did she do that? Which I imagine is probably one of the first things that people ask. What do you want them to come away with? >> The most important thing about these sculptures is what's no longer there, is what is discerned as you walk away. And that is that-- is that-- is the sense of freedom and emptiness. A sense of time that is intuitively felt, not described, a sense of marvel, magic. >> Your title of the talk is "Emptiness of Matter." And I can go a lot of different ways in interpreting that. But how do you want that interpreted as a theme for what you're going to discuss tonight? >> Exactly

that. I want that to be interpreted in a multitude of ways by starting with such a block and emptying that out. I started to look up the definition of emptiness. And I found it so ironic that for the Webster dictionary, emptiness is lacking in meaning. And the emptiness or vastness of space connoted something that lacked in essence right at the moment when in physics, there's so much information about what is actually in emptiness. And so, I like the paradox. I wanted to say, "The emptiness of matter, period, and the emptiness of matter, really?" And I also wanted to bring-- going back to Molly's [phonetic] question, bring attention to matter, matter and material, that matter matters as a source of material conversation. >> Well, in a way, you could get sort of Newtonian physics about it and talk about how everything that we see that looks solid is actually just a network of atoms and subatomic particles and there's an awful lot of empty space in between those subatomic particles we just can't see, because we don't look deeply enough, and most of it's empty space including this table. >> Absolutely, there's an element of that. But because I have to think about gravity so much, I think that there is an orientation towards physics and just matrices that that work. And if you look down into the polished stainless steel of these bases, you're looking through matter. You are looking through a solid rock or what once was a solid rock into a cavity that looks like a nest that is carving that empty space. And so, it was the juxtaposition of those two things, emptiness and solidity, that I wanted to bring in some attention to. >> And that in a sense is a very scientific way to look at things and of course what's not seen, I'm not going to get into the whole dark matter theory, which is supposedly the 90 some percent of the universe you can't see and maybe never will, but we kind of know it's there because of the way it affects what we can see. In a sense, is that empty space kind of like a dark matter of the mind and of the interpretation? >> In some ways, in some ways, but it's also you have, if you think about the sculptures, you have one line defining the sense of space in matter, in a rock on top of a pedestal that's essentially designed like the space time motif. And when you look down into the interior, you discover that those four planes are curved and they're polished stainless steel on the inside. So what you see is a two-dimensional description of that three-dimensional object that is sort of reflected into infinity. And it's a conversation between two-dimensional and three-dimensional descriptions actually. But this is where I go sort of full circle where my work is entirely rational, it comes from an entirely rational investigation of existence but obviously, completely irrational in execution. >> Yeah, but it does sort of comment on the structure of physical matter. No question about it. >> Absolutely. >> And maybe the paradox at the heart of it. What looks most solid, we know, is really just a network of things with a whole lot of empty space contained within it that you just can't see. But at the same time, of course, there's the question of well, what are the forces that are holding it together and keep it from imploding on itself or collapsing on itself the way you'd expect it to? But it doesn't. >> But it doesn't. The first time I suspended a piece over that vast, what seems like a vast space on those pedestals, I thought I would come back the next morning. I've really held my breath. It seemed like we had enough points of contact but I wasn't sure until it had existed like that for some time. So, and in fact, to stress, I go through the lines all the time of every piece, how they're carrying the weight, and did I accurately distribute it? >> So you have to be an architect and a structural engineer at all times? >> [Laughs] Maybe, it's all intuitively built though. >> Intuitively built. You think you have an inner architecture or an inner mathematician within you? 'Cause obviously, there are mathematical equations going on that make this thing work. >> I don't know because I can't seem to put words to it. I'm not a linear thinker at all. I can only speak. This is my vocabulary. These pieces are my vocabulary. And it's only

in moments like this, this conversation or this engagement tonight that I have the anxiety of trying to put words to what I find so desirable to create. >> So, you just almost know what you want it to look like in the end, know what you've got when you've got it, and then now, you've got to describe it sort of retroactively. >> Exact-- I would know the concepts I want to tackle. I want the challenge of seeing if this is possible. If I can speak to space time in a way that is more tangible, can I convey that idea. >> And can you defy the earth's gravitation at the same time? >> [Laughs] Maybe, time will tell. >> Well, you've chosen a very difficult material to work on. Did you just basically do it because by god, I'm going to do the most challenging thing and the most seemingly impossible thing I can think of that oh, by the way, just might work? >> I come from a family of geologists. I think we're contrarian by nature. So, I think if it was too soft, I'd probably rid off long ago, kind of found it too, I don't know, too sticky for me. >> So no metal, no glass for you at least to that cut. So, as I said, you have worked at it before. Could you see yourself continuing to work at other materials like that too even though they might not be so difficult to try to get to behave? >> Oh, absolutely, absolutely. I love the reductive thought of the challenge of that over the last couple decades with stone, but the material itself, glass, that's mesmerizing. It's absolutely another seductive material. >> What makes glass so intriguing? >> The strength. The brittle strength, I think. It's a beautiful paradox of fragility and strength. >> Yeah, of course, you could toss a lot of coloration into it too. >> There you go. I've been dealing with black and white for a long time. So, color would be fun, the prisms of that material would be exciting. >> So, is that where you might be headed next, in some respect, even though you may not ever leave stone as a material to work with? Might you be playing some more with glass in the future? >> If the opportunity arose, sure, yeah. >> Are there materials that don't interest you? For [simultaneous talking]. >> This is the problem, this is why I can't sleep. I think everything interests me [laughs] on some level. The problem is editing, the problem will be editing. >> If someone were to come to you and say, "I'd like you to design and build a car for me." Will that be something that would interest you at all, an actual practical object or does it have to be something that expresses an idea rather than a purpose? >> Oh cars, they're fantastic sculptures and they move. I mean, they are so easy to transport so I think that there would be, I don't know, there'd be an enticement there. >> But I know you haven't signed on the work with General Motors yet? >> No way. I'm too conceptual? I don't know if I could translate [laughs] how I think well enough. >> So, so what do you think might be the next challenge for you since you've already got one on your plate that's difficult and then probably a never ending source of challenge from one work to the next? >> I see going in a couple different directions. One, just the geometry of the interior of those bases and the geometry of kind of folding that sense of space would be interesting to investigate. But the introduction of more natural settings against the control and the obsessive focus and forced will that I use with my material, I love that contrast and I think moving in that direction is probably where I'll go. >> I'm almost imagining putting things outdoors and putting with a bigger scale. >> That would be great but in most of these pieces, you know, at the end or at some point, I put in back into a natural environment. There has to be that letting go. For instance, some of those original colors I put under the Huntington Pier in California and just watch the waves come washing over them. And it was an amazing experience after four years of intense carving. I thought the piece would break in the first waves. But in fact, surfers came out, thinking that they were shark's jaws or a strange calcium carbonate structure that rolled up on the beach and it was great. >> And nobody was tempted actually to just go in there and pull it up and

take it home? >> [Laughs] I was videotaping. My mother would, probably would've been too on the spot. >> Uh-huh. So they wouldn't have been able to get far with it. >> They wouldn't have been able to get far. >> But they must have been tempting that somebody is saying, "Hmm, that's interesting. I'd love to have that in my family room." >> What was cool was taking it off the pedestal. It read completely differently. It was an intriguing natural object once taken out of an art setting. And I love that change of context. >> Does it still exist in that setting or is it they moved back indoors? >> No, it's been moved back indoors but I have taken some of these cages and put them at the bottom of pool just to watch the sort of static material start to move or change in a different context under the video. >> Did the waves you rode that piece that you put under the pier by the way and change its shape? >> It did, they did a little bit. And there were a little. In some of the more weak areas, it popped some of the crystals. >> It's fascinating too and just imagine that process and imagine the results, and I want to thank you for sharing this all with us. We don't have, unfortunately, any more time except to say thank you Elizabeth Turk, a MacArthur Genius Grant recipient who has turned stone into something impossibly intricate. She's going to talk about it this evening at Webb Auditorium at RIT at 8 o'clock, and it's part of the Visionaries in Motion Series. Thank you for sharing this time and thank you for sharing your work with us today. I'm Bob Smith, this is 1370 Connection. There's more to come at a moment at WXXI AM and FM HD2 Rochester. See you after the news. [Music]