

EVER BAMBOO



COVER	FASHION	CULTURE	ARCHITECTURE	DESIGN	GARDENS	ART	FOOD	TIMELINE	BACK
BIG BAMBÚ	GUCCI, IFM, ALEXANDRA MARSHALL AND ZOE GHERTNER	LINDA GARLAND AND ARMAND LIMNANDER	SIMÓN VÉLEZ, GREGORY WESSNER, FELIX BURRICHTER, TOBY MCFARLAN POND AND CONFETTI SYSTEM	AMBRA MEDDA, ROBIN BROADBENT AND JO RATCLIFFE	EDWINA VON GAL AND ZOE GHERTNER	MIKE AND DOUG STARN AND ALIX BROWNE	CHRISTINE MUHLKE, TIEN HO, THIERRY MARX, ANDREA REUSING, ERIC RIPERT AND PHILLIPE JARRIGEON	LAIRD BORELLI AND PETE DEEVAKUL	ROB PRUITT AND JASON SCHMIDT
	2	14	18	24	32	38	42	46	

CREATING:

A POLE POSITION

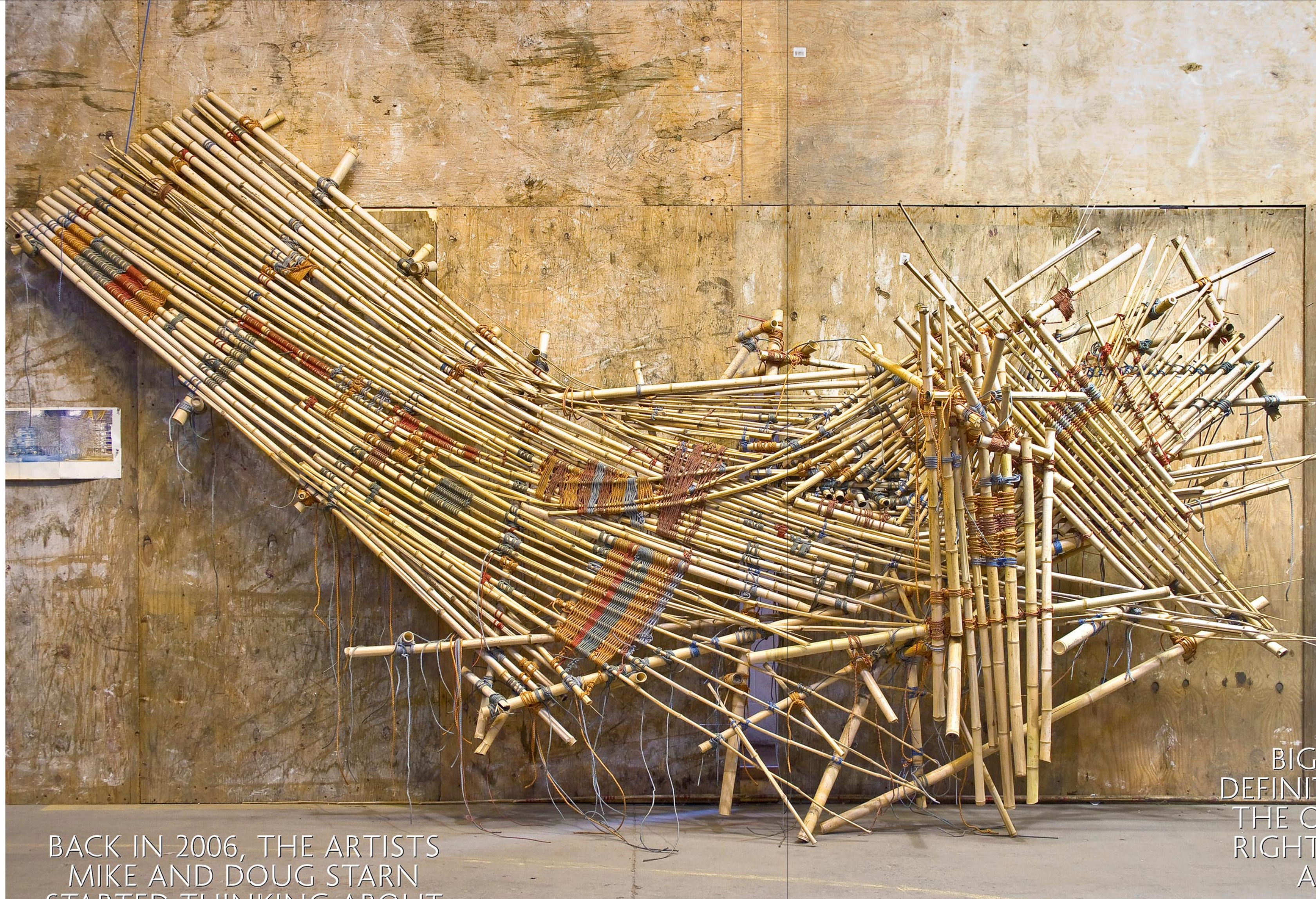
IN THE HANDS OF THE ARTISTS MIKE AND DOUG STARN, BAMBOO TAKES ON A LIFE OF ITS OWN.

PHOTOGRAPHY MIKE AND DOUG STARN TEXT ALIX BROWNE

ABOVE: BB_10.19.02.90642, OPPOSITE: BB_11.19.02.90649
FOLLOWING: BB0 JUJU PAINTING M#2



ARTWORKS COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS. SPECIAL THANKS LIZ ELLIOT, BRENDAN MCELIA, COLLEEN O'BRIEN, DAVE VEGTO, DERIN TARTOL, JOHN WILCKEY, KEVIN OROFINI, EDITH WILKES, STEPHEN WITCO, STEVE BROWN, & M. HANSEN



BACK IN 2006, THE ARTISTS MIKE AND DOUG STARN STARTED THINKING ABOUT A SCULPTURE THAT COULD SEEMINGLY REGENERATE ITSELF—"ALWAYS THE SAME THING AND ALWAYS BECOMING A NEW THING."

THE STARN TWINS ARE MOSTLY KNOWN FOR THEIR PHOTOGRAPHY, but they had worked with bracketed steel pipes on a fairly large scale before, using them to create the architectural framework for the photos in their pipe clamp series, and they assumed they would use them again here. But pipe has some built-in limitations. It's heavy, for one. And the brackets take considerable time and energy to manipulate and tighten. And, in retrospect, the name "Big Bracketed Steel Pipes" just doesn't have a catchy ring to it. The Starns ultimately settled on bamboo as their medium and the piece Big Bambú was born.

"Bamboo is absolutely wonderful material," the artists profess. "It's smooth, it fits in your hands nicely, it has

some give to it." It is also relatively lightweight, inexpensive and readily available. And as a plant with amazing capacity for growth (some types have been known to shoot up 100 centimeters—more than three feet—in a single day), bamboo also provides an elegant metaphor for a work that was conceived as a constantly evolving organism rather than a static sculpture with a beginning, a middle and an end. Or as the Starns like to put it: "Big Bambú is always finished and it's never finished."

Big Bambú's earliest incarnation was in 2009 in Beacon, New York, where the artists had taken over a cavernous, vertigo-inducing space with 50-foot ceilings that was part of the former Tallix foundry. The

piece, made from approximately 2000 bamboo poles lashed together with about 16 miles of nylon rope, was assembled under the artists' direction by a team of about a dozen rock climbers over a period of 10 weeks. It seemed to grow organically out of itself, without the support of external scaffolding, and with no obvious rhyme or reason. It was almost as if the piece had its own arcane internal logic. The Starns and their climbers built it as high as the ceilings allowed and as far out as was structurally viable and then proceeded to "walk" Big Bambú across the foundry floor, removing poles from the back of the mass and reattaching them at the front.

Now no one has ever accused the Starns of being perfectionists. In fact, much of their photographic work can be read as a revolt against the cult of the print and the sacrosanct surface in the '70s, when they were taking their first steps in the art world. "We hated that," they say point-blank. But Big Bambú offered a new level of creative freedom altogether. The artists stepped back and allowed the climbers to find their own style and the piece to find its own way. Even the bamboo was subject to a similarly laissez-faire attitude. "We don't strip it, polish it, dress it. It's all raw," they say, adding that their use of it is often so chaotic that much of the time they scarcely notice what's happening. "I remember sitting on top of it at the studio and suddenly laughing at the realization it had gotten so high," Mike recalls.

From Beacon, Big Bambú reappeared on the roof of the Metropolitan Museum, where its name (which comes from an album by Cheech and Chong) was expanded to include the Beastie Boys lyric "You Can't, You Don't, and You Won't Stop." The structure itself evolved too, adapted to the particulars of the new space and configured to include pathways that visitors would be able to navigate on strictly monitored guided tours. But even as Big Bambú grew before a blockbuster audience of more than 600,000 visitors (the eastern portion rose some 50 feet over the course of the five-month engagement)—it was a challenge, the artists say, to keep that initial feeling of freedom alive. The Met, after all, is an institution more accustomed to working with dead artists than living ones, let alone "living" works of art. At Beacon the Starns could improvise at will. Here, they were required to have an actual plan. They worked with architects and structural engineers and both the fire and Buildings departments weighed in. But if their style was at all cramped, you would hardly know it. The New York Times art critic Carol Vogel recalled walking in on a scene more akin to a circus than a museum installation, with men in T-shirts and women in bikini tops balancing on poles in their bare feet or shimmying up them like monkeys, propelled in their work by a soundtrack of Jimi Hendrix and Led Zeppelin.

Big Bambú's latest incarnation was in Venice this summer, in the courtyard of the former U.S. consulate on the Grand Canal right next to the Peggy Guggenheim museum. Some 1000 bamboo poles were cut from the Met installation and brought to Venice, where they acted almost like stem cells. About twice that many poles were brought in from France. Over the course of a month of 14-hour days, Big Bambú, which now looked something like a giant bird's nest, evolved into a habitat, with the artists and their crew of climbers even sleeping in it some nights. It surpassed its previous heights, spiraling skyward to almost 75 feet at its pinnacle, and offering postcard views of the Alps to the west of the city.

BIG BAMBÚ WILL DEFINITELY RISE AGAIN, THE ONLY QUESTION RIGHT NOW IS WHEN AND WHERE.

Already there are tentative plans for it to rise anew, including another major museum installation and a project in Vanuatu, an island nation in the South Pacific, where Paul Miller, aka DJ Spooky, has founded an artists' retreat. There, the artists would certainly be in their element. The Starns anticipate the opportunity to make not just a habitat but an entire village.

Few experiences, they say, have been so gratifying to them as artists. "There is so much anxiety before making something, fighting with the materials and with yourself, awaiting that moment when you feel satisfied and put it away," they say. Big Bambú, on the other hand, is a high like no other: physical, creative, loose, free and constant.