At the Intersection of Art and Engineering

Artist Dario Robleto, Dean Julio M. Ottino, and Block Museum of Art executive director Lisa Graziose Corrin observe *American Seabed* (Robleto, 2014), a series of sculptures composed partially of fossilized prehistoric whale ear bones and various butterflies. The installation is part of Robleto's exhibition, *The Heart's Knowledge*, on display at the Block Museum, which urges visitors to remember the human meaning hidden within scientific discoveries. The exhibition culminates Robleto's five-year engagement as Northwestern Engineering's inaugural artist-at-large, where he explored conversations and collaborations with scientists and engineers around ethics and empathy in scientific fields. See more from "The Heart's Knowledge" on page 28.

Photography by Jason Brown

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The Heart's Knowledge

THE HEART'S KNOWLEDGE: SCIENCE AND EMPATHY IN THE ART OF DARIO ROBLETO, A 2023 EXHIBITION AT THE BLOCK MUSEUM OF ART, MARKED THE CULMINATION OF ROBLETO'S FIVE-YEAR ENGAGEMENT AS NORTHWESTERN ENGINEERING'S ARTIST-AT-LARGE.

This partnership between the Block Museum and the McCormick School of Engineering gave the artist an open "hall pass" to learn from, collaborate with, and question scientists, engineers, and experts from across the University.

For Robleto, artists and scientists share a common aspiration: to increase the sensitivity of their observations. Throughout the history of scientific invention, instruments like the cardiograph and telescope have extended the reach of perception from the tiniest stirrings of the human body to the farthest reaches of space. In his prints, sculptures, and video and sound installations, Robleto contemplates the emotional significance of these technologies, bringing us closer to the latent traces of life buried in the scientific record.

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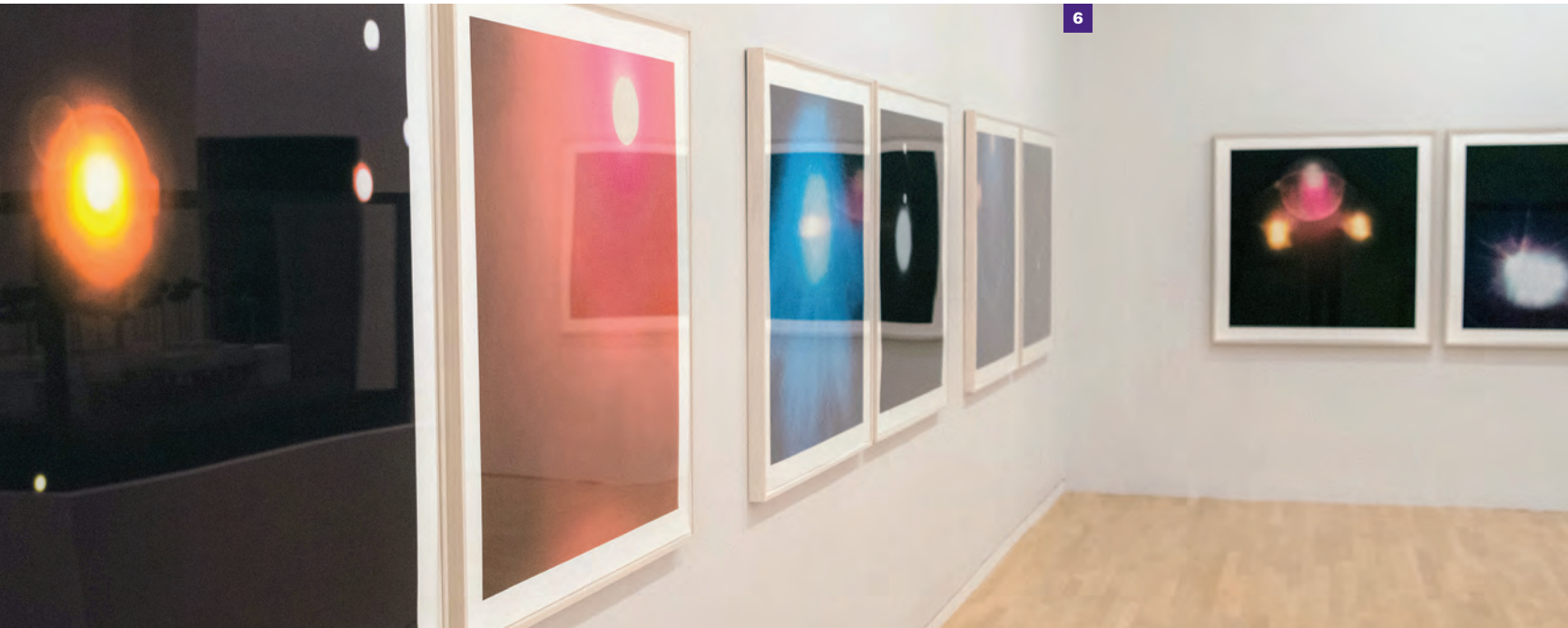

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1
Survival Does Not Lie in the Heavens, 2012. Digital inkjet print mounted on Sintra, a collection of stage lights taken from the album covers of live performances of now-deceased gospel, blues, and jazz musicians.

2
Small Crafts on Sisyphean Seas, 2018. Intricate sculptures made from polished nautilus shells and other sea life give shape to the speculative search for intelligent life in the universe.

3
Dario Robleto, *right*, and Dean Julio M. Ottino view *Sparrows Sing to an Indifferent Sea*, 2019. Earliest waveform recordings of inhalation and blood flowing from the heart during various auditory experiences (1876–96), rendered and 3D printed in brass-plated stainless steel.

4
American Seabed, 2014. Made from fossilized prehistoric whale ear bones salvaged from the sea, various butterflies, and butterfly antennae made from stretched and pulled audiotape recordings of Bob Dylan's "Desolation Row," among other materials.

5
The Pulse Armed with a Pen (*An Unknown History of the Human Heartbeat*), 2014. Robleto collaborated with sound historian Patrick Feaster to digitally resurrect heartbeats in audio form, allowing visitors to listen to pulses of life recorded before the invention of sound playback.

6
The Sky, Once Choked with Stars, Will Slowly Darken, 2011. Suite of eight archival digital prints.

7
Sisyphus' Archivists, 2018.

8
The Computer of Jupiter, 2019.

9
The Boundary of Life Is Quietly Crossed, 2019. Two-channel 4K video.

10
The First Time, the Heart (*A Portrait of Life 1854–1913*), portfolio 2017. Robleto transformed early measurements of heartbeats made by 19th-century pioneers of cardiography into exquisite photolithographs on paper hand-sooted with candle flames.

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