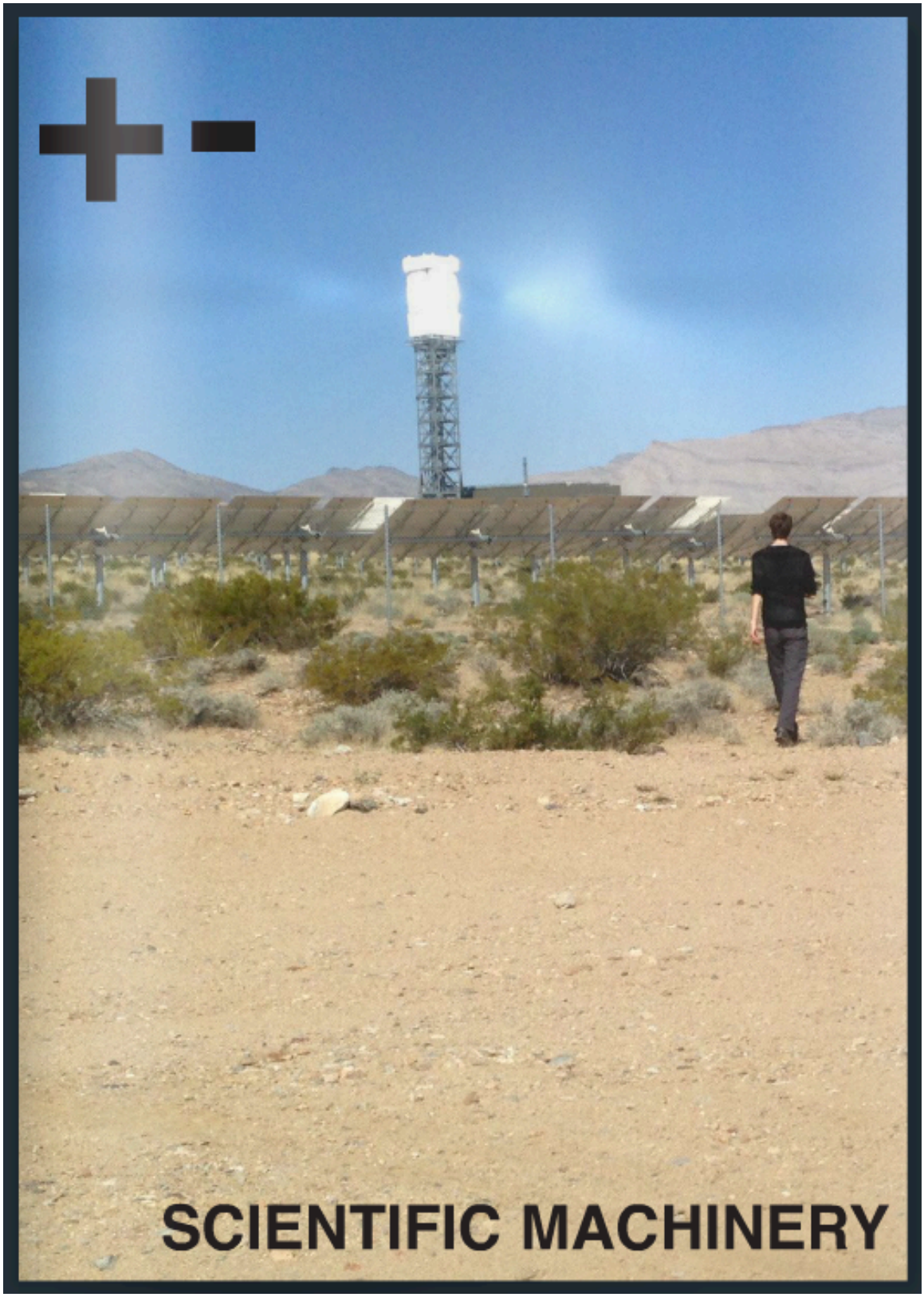

SCIENTIFIC MACHINERY

An Interview with Travis LeRoy Southworth

Travis LeRoy Southworth is a Brooklyn-based interdisciplinary artist whose work is inspired by cosmological forces. His works have been displayed at the Hessel Museum of Art, New York, Martha Otero Gallery, Los Angeles, and Thomas Robertello Gallery, Chicago. Travis was recently the 2013 artist in residence with AIR Switzerland where he had the opportunity to explore the Large Hadron Collider. We took the opportunity to ask him some questions about how Scientific Machinery influences his work.

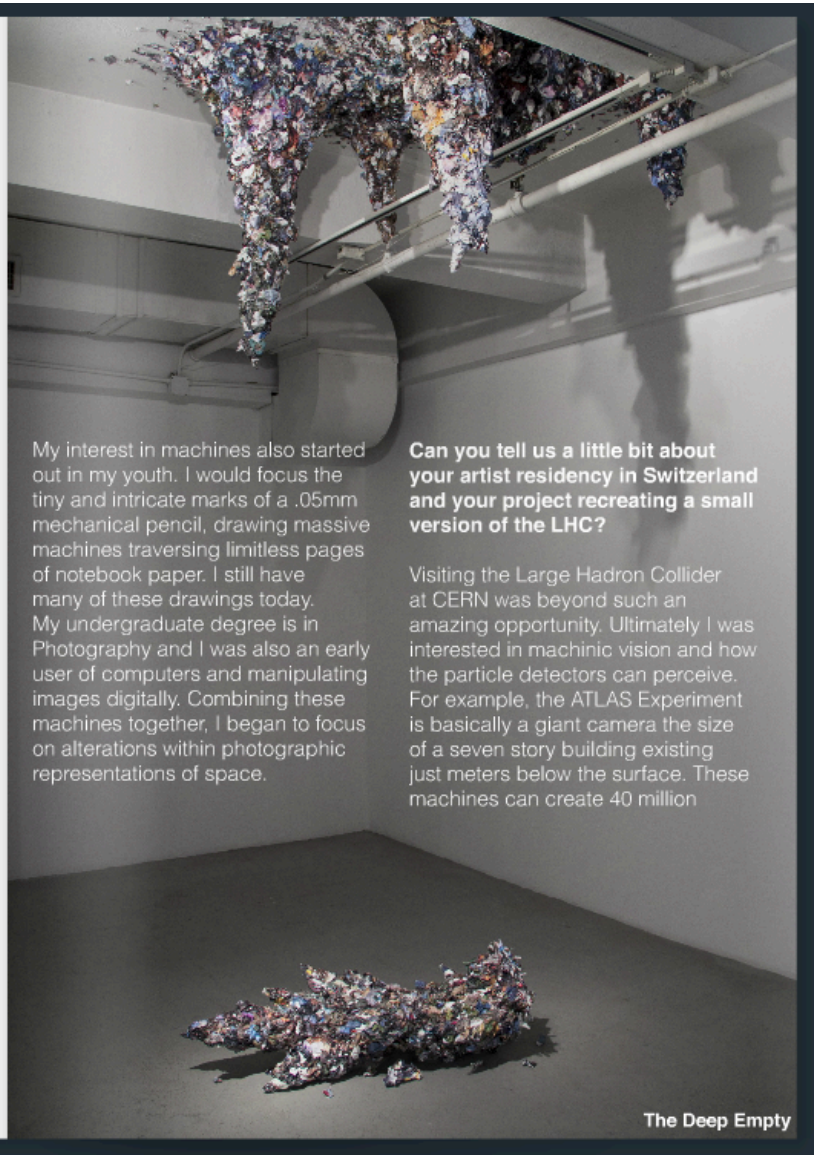
Your work seems to touch on a number of philosophical and scientific themes. How would you say science has influenced you and can you explain how you choose to communicate that in your pieces?

Growing up in a military family and moving every couple of years, my background itself is rooted in change, a sort of unknowing directional path with invisible forces beyond one's control. I thought a lot about the stars of the night sky, which were shapeless and without borders but could also be used as a system of navigation. I liked that one could use such a faint point so far away to calculate where one was. I was also drawn to the many philosophical and scientific ideas throughout history of one's relationship to these celestial bodies. It is still one of humankind's greatest pursuits, the attempt to understand and 'map' the heavens.

My work fluctuates between Cosmology and Cosmetology, one being the study and evolution of the Universe and the other regarding one's everyday concerns of appearance. I want to slow down the ever-increasing pace of life and attentively observe what is hidden in the indefinite yet to come. I tend to work more abstractly, teasing out ideas and letting the viewer make connections.

Your work involves using a number of multidisciplinary methods to create your pieces. Do you specifically find yourself seeking out particular machines or mechanisms scientific or otherwise?

My practice has a conceptual base. Projects tend to start out with a particular idea and I find the most appropriate medium for that work. Lately I have been working with collage, specifically with magazine imagery, as I like to construct physical objects from two-dimensional representations.



The Deep Empty

My interest in machines also started out in my youth. I would focus the tiny and intricate marks of a .05mm mechanical pencil, drawing massive machines traversing limitless pages of notebook paper. I still have many of these drawings today. My undergraduate degree is in Photography and I was also an early user of computers and manipulating images digitally. Combining these machines together, I began to focus on alterations within photographic representations of space.

Can you tell us a little bit about your artist residency in Switzerland and your project recreating a small version of the LHC?

Visiting the Large Hadron Collider at CERN was beyond such an amazing opportunity. Ultimately I was interested in machinic vision and how the particle detectors can perceive. For example, the ATLAS Experiment is basically a giant camera the size of a seven story building existing just meters below the surface. These machines can create 40 million

images per second of the particles colliding there.

I spent six months in Switzerland, the majority of it in the studio near Basel and then traveling to the LHC for visits. During my time there, I was able to visit three of the main detectors, ATLAS, CMS and ALICE. While there I noticed that it is impossible to really see the detectors in their entirety. The machines are so large and space so compact that hundreds of photographs have to be stitched together to form the epic images of the Large Hadron Collider that most of us have seen.

This led me to make my own collider of sorts. The piece A Fancy Machine is the Perfect Centerpiece is a miniature collider, although its actual size is deceptive. One can only see the machine through an eyehole in a locked door. The installation is not accessible and is intentionally unfinished. Part of the machine disappears behind a demolished wall, leaving further questions about its size and purpose unanswered.

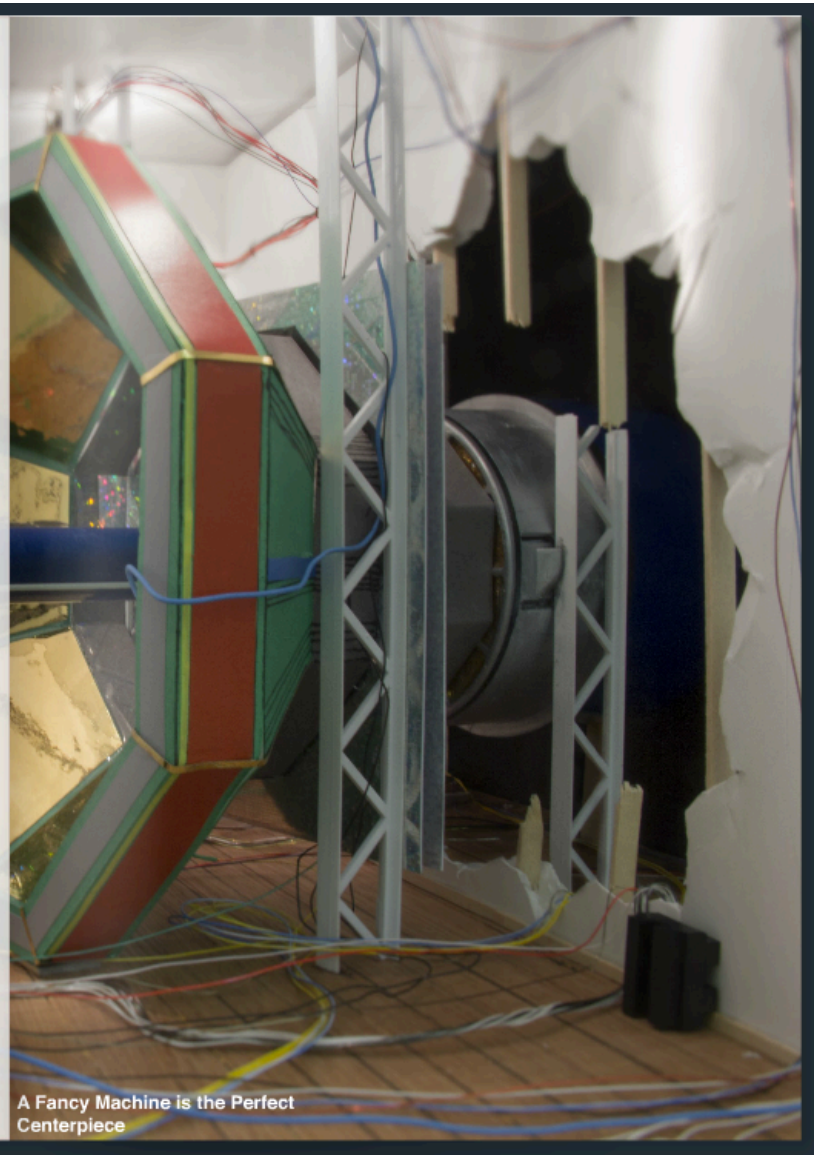
Where do you see your work going in future? Is art-science something you are interested to keep on pursuing?

I just finished a new work for an exhibition Distant Images, Local Positions at EFA Project Space in NYC. The group show focused on the relationship of control over geography in photographs. My installation The Deep Empty, consists of paper stalactites made of mashed pages of landscape imagery from National Geographic Magazine. While much of my past work involves cosmological relationships I see future projects moving towards objects that are closer to a humans scale such as boulders, stalactites, collapsed trees and other geological growths. I am interested in these types of formations as they make one aware of the massive amounts of time that has passed but are also entities one has been in contact with.

What advice would you give to an artist just starting out who would like to begin incorporating science/ scientific machinery into their artistic practice?

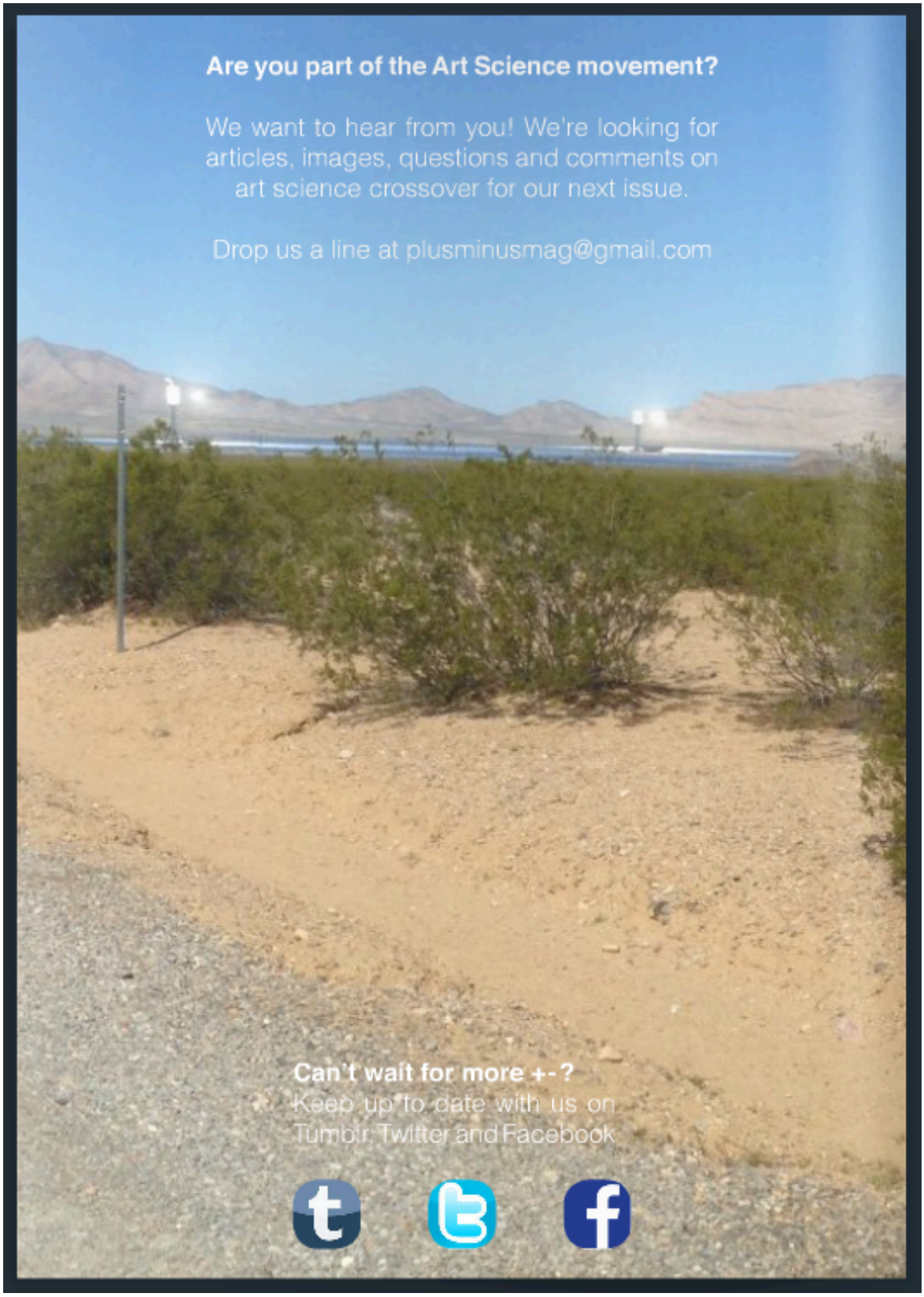
I would say the best advice for any artist starting out is to really dive into it. Try not to get hung up on specific details, be willing to experiment and open to the end result. As a young artist one will spend a lot of time making, thinking about and refining projects. Science can also have a similar process but typically has a specific goal in mind, which can be constraining. Don't let that bind you. Allow yourself the freedom to move around the facts and data.

The Deep Emtpy, A fancy Machine is the Perfect Centerpiece, Exist - Image Credits: Travis LeRoy Southworth



A Fancy Machine is the Perfect Centerpiece

Exist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