

stories: art, travel, and art and travel, all with skateboarding at some point

First, in Paving Space, Raphaël Zarka combines geometric shapes he found in science history with the movements of skateboarding and lets us decide if it's sculpture. Second, Lovenskate pushes the tea/skateboarding dialogue further with a trip to India and the tea plantations of Kerala. Third, Mauro Caruso lets us in on his seven-year mission to skateboard in Gibellina, Sicily (pp. 53, 73, 89).

paving space



walking, thinking, resting, laughing



They could fit in the palm of one’s hand, these strange structures. They look like cairns, construction sets for children, or architectural remains. They are white, geometric, mysterious. Some surfaces have numbers written on them in red. Or a capital letter, perhaps a C or an S, printed in black ink. Sometimes a cross. The scene is from a museum in Göttingen where the white polyhedral structures are displayed. They were made in 1891 by a certain **Arthur Schoenflies**, a mathematician and crystallographer by trade.

A man, his zigzag body tiptoeing on a tilted skateboard, arms almost horizontally outstretched on either side of the body. The nose of the skateboard rests on another body, this one geometric, a block of wood, or rather several blocks, combined to form a whole. The wood is unpolished, alternating slats shifting from brown to blond. Light cuts through the **polyhedron** and immobilizes it as the man launches himself.

Raphaël Zarka works with **found forms**, not unlike other artists work with found objects. Artificial reefs shaped like rhombicuboctahedra, abandoned rails, crystalline polyhedra dozing in the display cases of a museum... In these shapes, Zarka sees something other than what our ordinary gaze has taught us to see; he imagines other uses—exactly in the same way that skaters, looking at the all-too-well-known gentle curves of an empty swimming pool, no longer see a recipient for heavy, stagnant water, but a surface to hurtle down and to tame. What does Zarka see in these objects? Potential sculptures. Thus, all similarities with the skaters’ vision seem to end here, because skating is all about putting forms to use, putting them into motion, whereas sculpture is thought of as the art of motionless objects, placed on pedestals and out of reach. But this would be to disregard the fact that, for Zarka, sculpture is closer to a form of life than a work of art.



Arthur Schoenflies’ **crystallography** is of a particular kind: known as geometric crystallography, it was developed by René Just Haüy at the end of the 18th century. Rather than study crystals as individual natural specimens with mass, chemical composition, and irregularities, Haüy only considered their form. By idealizing this form for the purpose of his research, he reduced nature to a series of perfect geometric shapes, a succession of octahedrons, tetrahedrons, dodecahedrons, etc., and sought to identify all possible arrangements. Schoenflies set out to catalogue all the different crystal structures and the way that these could be organized into different spatial groups—starting with 11 basic modules, Schoenflies came up with 230 possible groups.

Composed of alternating triangles, isolated or encased polyhedra, Raphaël Zarka’s sculptures are geometric. They seem to draw their inspiration from the American minimalism of the 1960s, which was obsessed with all kinds of parallelepipeds. The works of Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Carl Andre, Tony Smith, and Sol LeWitt borrowed their forms from common geometric terminology. Like Zarka, they preferred to use existing forms rather than invent new ones. But this was coupled with another concern: to find forms devoid of meaning. And what better way to neutralize meaning and thereby achieve the purest form of **abstraction** than through geometry? Explaining why he chose to base his works on cubes and squares, LeWitt stated: “The best that can be said for either the square

or the cube is that they are relatively uninteresting in themselves. [...] [T]hey lack the expressive force of other more interesting forms and shapes. They are standard and universally recognized.” Simple forms, without expression or meaning, nothing but forms.

For Zarka, however, despite the formal concern guiding his search for sculptural objects, form is not enough. He calls himself a “frustrated formalist.” There must be a story between the lines of a form in order for him to wish to seize it. Contrary to the minimalists, Zarka wants his forms to mean something. He notes that his sculptures are documentary in nature. When he, for example, discovered the rhombicuboctahedron, he was not content to see it merely as a semi-regular 26-sided polyhedron. He investigated its history dating as far back as Archimedes, who was the first to conceptualize this bizarre object. He then followed the rhombus. Tracking it through art history and the sciences, he listed every occurrence in his Catalogue Raisonné des Rhombicuboctaèdres. With the discovery of Schoenflies’ geometric crystallography, Zarka found a geometry that did not place itself outside this world, but instead tried to express it—**document** it, as it were. A geometry that is not abstraction, but extraction; a geometry whose rhythm is of this world. In geometric crystallography, one can still hear the echo of Platonism, which assigned a regular polyhedron to each of the four elements. Geometric crystallography and the study of polyhedrons are intertwined, animated by the desire to reduce the troubling diversity of the world to a small number of regular forms, and it is no surprise that Zarka, lover of Archimedes’ rhombicuboctahedron, should be captivated by the work of Schoenflies, who sought to deduce from crystals the forms of space itself.

Schoenflies devised 12 modules. Zarka only uses one of these, a truncated half pyramid. He scales it up and reproduces multiple copies in oak. Like Schoenflies, he then arranges them into metastructures. The somewhat crude Göttingen forms, destined only to serve as illustrations of a theory, thus come into their own. These miniatures have become sculptures. Schoenflies’ modules attracted hands and made the spectator want to grab them. Zarka’s sculptures summon entire **bodies**.

Construction through repetition of a basic unit was also a principle embraced by minimalist sculpture. Carl Andre made his sculptures by lining up identical bricks, copper plates, and blocks of wood, each unit forming one of many particles making up the work. “In a sense,” he wrote, “my work has always been a matter of taking sets of particles and then combining these particles according to rules which were a property of one particle.” In accordance with prevailing art terminology, Andre’s works were declared **serial**; they could also have been called crystalline.

But minimalism and crystallography are all about systems and pre-determination. In his book Krystalsysteme und Krystallstruktur, Schoenflies described 230 possible spatial groups, no more. In his Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes, Sol LeWitt identified all the possible configurations of an incomplete cube (which is to say containing fewer than 12 edges), no less. The scientist and the artist do not invent new possible orders; they replicate existing orders. Zarka, on the other hand, creates structures that are not governed by any rules or realities. A single question concerns him: is it **sculpture**?



There are those who varnish their paintings. Zarka waits for a patina to be bestowed on his works by skaters. The sculptures of Paving Space are not finished until they have been skated. Found forms, generated forms, **forms put to use**: this is the rhythm of Zarka’s work.

The board strikes, slams, and scratches. The wood of the sculptures receives the accumulated impact of its weight and speed; long black streaks are formed; the smooth surfaces are **ravaged** by splinters. Skateboards do not glide, and what finishes and completes the work also consumes it.

These sculptures only consist of flat surfaces and angles. No curves, none of the other telltale signs of infrastructure or sculpture made for skating—the Red Bull Skate Park (see A Skateboarding Annual 2, p. 156), for example, is saturated with signs of having been made for skating (curves), while also having been made for art (red lacquer). As for Zarka, he is more interested in that which is not-made-for. Too bad if the 45-degree angles of his crystal structures are too sharp to be easily skated: he refuses to adapt the form to suit the demands of skating. After all, those California swimming pools weren’t constructed for skaters to explore either. It is more exciting **to appropriate found forms** than to use certified authentic ramps.

Not-made-for is one of the modalities of what, through a twist of fate, has come to be known as readymades. Duchamp’s urinal and bicycle wheel are objects that were found by the artist, readymade objects to be sure, but not made to be exhibited in a museum. There is a typology of readymades, invented by Duchamp—rectified readymades, assisted readymades, reciprocal readymades. In each case an object is removed from a continuum in which it aspired to be forgotten and introduced into a space in which it is exposed to practices that should have forever remained foreign to it. A urinal enters the museum; a bicycle wheel is mounted on a stool and will never serve its purpose again; a Rembrandt could be used as an ironing board.

By working with found forms, which he subjects to spaces and practices without adaptation, Raphaël Zarka continues the readymade tradition of not-made-for. The forms of crystallography are simply given over to the museum and to skating. Skaters have to adapt to the rough forms of the wooden modules and to the space of the museum, with its narrow galleries, which cut right through their trajectories. The museum, a space defined by its protection from the hustle and bustle of the outside world, has to integrate the disruptive figure of the skater. This incompatibility is the active principle of Paving Space: practices are tested and transformed by objects; objects are reinvented by novel gestures; space is renewed by unexpected flows. The not-made-for is a remedy for inertia.

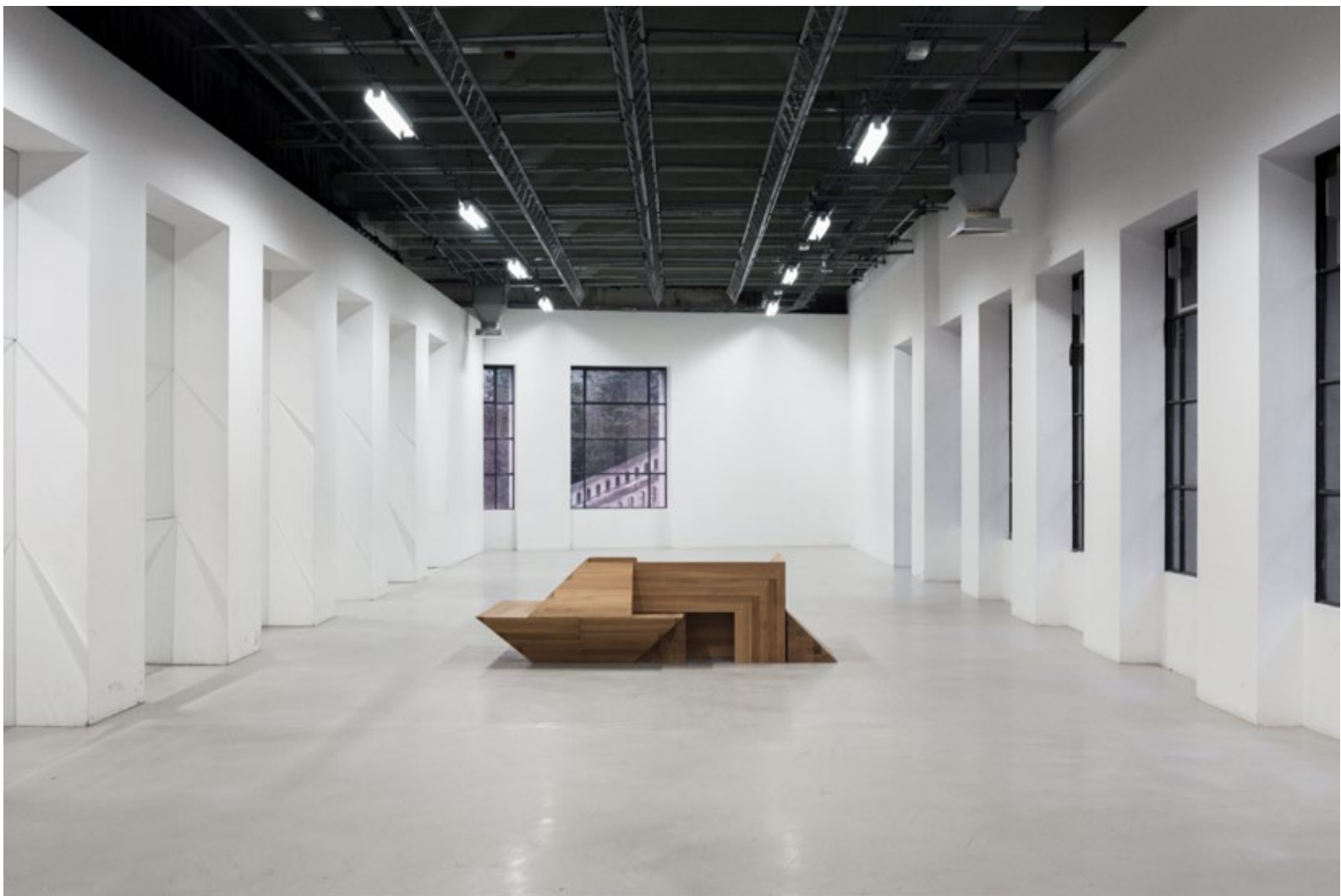








josh pall, bs tailslide, institute of contemporary art, singapore

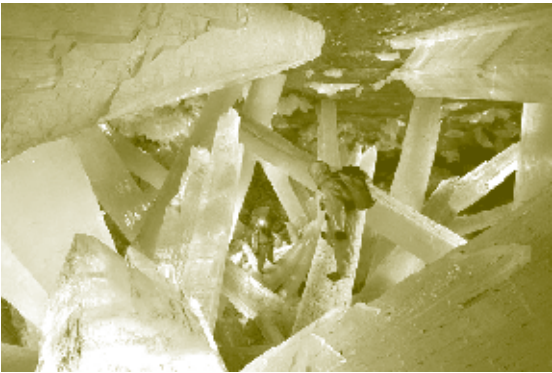


nick jensen, fs bluntslide into bank, palais de tokyo, paris





armand vaucher, bs powerslide, musée sainte-croix, poitiers



Meet Arthur Moritz Schoenflies, 1853-1928. He was a mathematician known for his contribution to the application of group theory to crystallography (look it up if you’re into mathematics, but it’s complicated). He devised the elementary shape used by Raphaël Zarka in *Paving Space*.

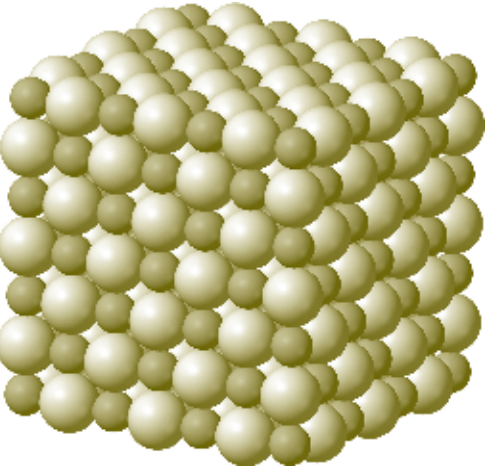


Crystal Pepsi was sold briefly in the early Nineties. In 2015, after enough people apparently signed an online petition, Pepsi re-released the drink in the U.S. and Canada. Not sure we understand this either, but in the process of looking up Crystal Pepsi, we serendipitously discovered so-called “competitive eating.”

A crystal is a solid material whose constituents (such as atoms, molecules, or ions) are arranged in a highly ordered microscopic structure, forming a crystal lattice that extends in all directions. That’s the definition, and, yes, it’s rather abstract. The “highly ordered microscopic structure” usually translates to a geometric shape when the said material is visible to the eye; it consists of flat faces with specific characteristic orientations. The crystals you know are the ones found in nature—like salt, basalt columns, snowflakes, or diamonds. But while researching this article, we figured there were many more fascinating things to be found when googling “crystal.” Here we present our findings, most of which we don’t really understand.



That’s probably what comes to mind when people think of crystal—something that would look great somewhere in the living room. It collects dust, though, and is a pain to keep clean.



This is what a “highly ordered microscopic structure” looks like. This one’s found in Potassium-thiocyanate, a chemical compound occasionally used for moderately realistic blood effects in film and theater. We found that out on Wikipedia.