DAVID WALLACE HASKINS
LANDSCAPE + LIGHT

Exhibition Overview
Over the past decade, American interdisciplinary artist and Edith Farnsworth House current artist-in-residence David Wallace Haskins (b. 1975) has been creating experiential sculptures and architectural interventions in response to various works by Chicago-based mid-century architect Mies van der Rohe. One of the few midwestern artists working in the tradition of the Light & Space movement, Haskins considers Mies to be one of the earliest pioneers of the movement since he was creating minimalist works of light and space thirty years before the movement took hold in Southern California in the 1960s.

Mies’s influence has been formative to Haskins, having been surrounded by his buildings filling the Chicago skyline and growing up down the street from one of the architect’s first glass homes: the McCormick House in the Chicago suburb of Elmhurst, IL. Haskins says he continues to find opportunities for inspiration and concern in Mies’s legacy: “Modernism left us with as many problems as it did solutions, and I’m interested in thinking critically and carefully about both.”

Haskins’s experiential works are known for challenging expectations and perceptions that in turn help others see themselves and the world around them more fully situated in what he calls “the interrelational nature of reality.” Haskins further describes the nature of his work by stating that “I am interested in leading us away from the common subject/object hierarchy that fosters such social, political, and ecological upheaval, and invite us into a more dynamic subject-to-subject dialogue, where we become both the viewer and the viewed. To me, this small shift has tremendous potential to transform our interior and exterior world in surprising ways.”

In LANDSCAPE + LIGHT, Haskins has created a series of experiences that speak to these efforts. He started spending time on the Farnsworth 60-acre property during the lockdown of 2020, soaking up the quiet, noting that “I came to realize how much the drive out has to do with the experience of being there, the way the landscape and sky opens up and become more legible, it slows down the mind in a very meaningful way.” These encounters made Haskins want to create a series of opportunities that offered a slower pace and encouraged a widening of the senses to hopefully allow visitors to be affected in the ways he was during his visits.

Of these encounters Haskins further articulates that “I have come to realize that when we witness the sky and the earth unfolding around us in quiet and ever-changing ways, it inevitably encourages us to join in and learn from their unhurried pace, and to rest back into our own unfolding. The Japanese also found this to be true during the tech boom of the 80s, when their government encouraged the healing practice of Shinrin-yoku or ‘taking in the forest atmosphere,’ which has been shown to have far-reaching positive physiological and psychological effects, such as lowering one’s blood pressure, boosting autonomic and immune functions, improving overall mental health, and even alleviating depression. I’m very interested in how the landscape and light around us greatly affects the landscape and light within us.”
The first work the artist installed that reflects these interests is a new sculptural masterwork from his *Skycube* series, entitled *Image Continuous*. The work is created from 1 ton of mirrored skyscraper glass, or 75 linear feet, which is half the glass used to glaze Edith’s home. The sculpture sits in an open glade adjacent to the home, inviting visitors to leave the path and move further into the landscape to experience the nearly invisible large-scale site-responsive sculpture. Viewers find themselves shifting from spectator to participant as they witness their position in space dramatically changing the sculpture’s composition until they come face to face with the three-dimensional presence of the sky wrapped in the earth.

Speaking about this presence, Haskins reminds us that “the sky is all around us, the troposphere starts at the ground and rises 10 miles high, we live in it and breathe it every day. In fact, there is no part of the natural world we could be more intimately connected to—here we get to experience this presence in a truly personal, embodied, and relational way.”

Leaving *Image Continuous* and moving towards the house, visitors encounter *The Memory of Glass*, the artist's immersive architectural intervention in the house itself. Building on the recent scientific discovery that glass retains memory, Haskins’s work envisions the glass walls of the house as hearing and remembering the varied soundscape that has filled and surrounded it over the last 70+ years across the 60 acres of woods and farmland that it sits on.

Haskins has engineered a way for these memories to emanate from the house itself, allowing the 12 large windows of the house to become 12 glass speakers sending sonic imagery both outward into the terrain and inward into the home. As visitors walk towards the house they will hear this storied soundscape swirling with the one already in their midst, merging the past with the present and the interior with exterior.

Walking into the home will immerse the listener in 12 unique channels of sound that the artist gathered through archives as well as his field recordings across the property over the last few years, such as birdsong, crickets, owls, bald eagles, coyotes, people enjoying an evening party in the house, a violinist (presumably Edith) practicing her favorite piece of music during a thunderstorm, Mies conversing about his work, Lord Palumbo telling a story, and even a flood gurgling up the side of the house. The work allows the adage “if these walls could speak” to be realized, enabling the house to tell its own story.

As an architect, Mies was interested in visually blurring the line between the indoors and outdoors, which he most effectively realized with the Edith Farnsworth House. With *The Memory of Glass* Haskins pushes the idea further—the soundscape moves right through the house, from the outside in and the inside out, allowing the architecture to finally become fully transparent—aurally as well as visually, further dissolving the boundary between the interior and exterior world.
Walking to the other end of the property, visitors find themselves at **Stone Landing**, a new installation and sound work that draws visitors off the main path and onto one Haskins added that leads to a new and expansive view of Fox River diverging around an easterly island. This picturesque location was one of the artist’s favorite places to spend time watching the crane and great egret do their fishing during his residency. Here, Haskins placed his largest meditative monolith from his new **Stone Kōan** series. The sculpture was created from the original travertine landing stone that sat on the final step to the upper terrace of the Edith Farnsworth House from 1951-2021. (*see Note below) Haskins also crafted a wooden bench out of sapele wood, to afford visitors a place to rest and take in the quiet view while listening to matched sets of deep-resonating hand-tuned tubular bells which he hung in the trees on each side of the bench. As the breeze comes in off the river, it activates the bells, creating a harmonious stereo hum that encourages all to linger.

*Note: Last year the travertine stone that had been part of the house’s lower terrace for 70 years was removed and replaced due to severe cracking and ice damage. Haskins was able to use this original stone, which Mies personally selected for the house, to create a new sculpture series—which will be on view and for sale in the visitor center to help support future renovations.*

**DAVID WALLACE HASKINS: LANDSCAPE + LIGHT** will remain on view through December 2022.