

Design Bureau Magazine, March/April 2014 “The Art of Crime” by Sharon Mchugh, 42.

At eye level, the *Bullet* and *Suspect* sculptures at the Denver Crime Lab allow the viewer to see through the pieces. But when looking up or down, depending on the viewer's angle, the plates compress, causing the sculptures to lose their transparency and unveil their full forms.



Sculpture Spotlight

The Art of Crime

Two arresting, illuminated sculptures for the Denver Crime Lab are inspired by matching evidence to suspects

BY SHARON MCHUGH

What might a crime-scene investigation look like as a work of art? For the answer, you'll want to visit the Denver Police Crime Laboratory in Denver, Colorado. Suspended from the ceiling of the building's soaring atrium are two enormous sculptures that speak to the work that happens in the lab's inner sanctum.

Aptly titled *Bullet* and *Suspect*, the dynamic works—designed by Cliff Garten of the eponymous studio based in Venice, California—take inspiration from the pairing of evidence to unsolved crimes. “Everything they do at the lab involves match-

ing,” Garten says, “from the matching of DNA in digital files to the matching of physical evidence like footprints to shoes.”

Made of hundreds of laser-cut brushed-aluminum plates, the visually arresting sculptures—*Bullet* references ballistics while *Suspect*, composed of two inverted strands of spiraling material, alludes to DNA strands—are among the latest in Garten's portfolio to utilize the visceral effects of light and color. Garten, now with 50-plus large-scale artworks to his name, has increasingly created public installations that involve the use of sunlight



and LEDs. (A similar piece called *Blue Eclipse* hangs in the rotunda entry in the Palo Alto VA Mental Health Center, where a suspended group of “elliptoids” reflect a soothing commixture of blue and green light, itself affected by skylights above.)

Because they're assembled out of so many individual layers, *Bullet* and *Suspect* appear differently depending on the viewer's location—either see-through at eye level or as full entities from above or below. Again, natural and LED light interact, this time creating a range of changing yet always complementary colors, be they red and

blue, yellow and violet, and so on. The 40-foot-long *Suspect*, in fact, is visible through the building's glass façade, making it available to views from the street.

For these pieces, Garten had unprecedented access to the lab. And in lab director Gregory Laberge, he had an enthusiastic supporter—who immediately saw the potential in Garten's work to address the buildings program with the sculpture. “He understood the relationship of the piece to the architecture and to the work they do at lab,” Garten says. In many ways, it was just like the lab's work: finding another perfect match. ■