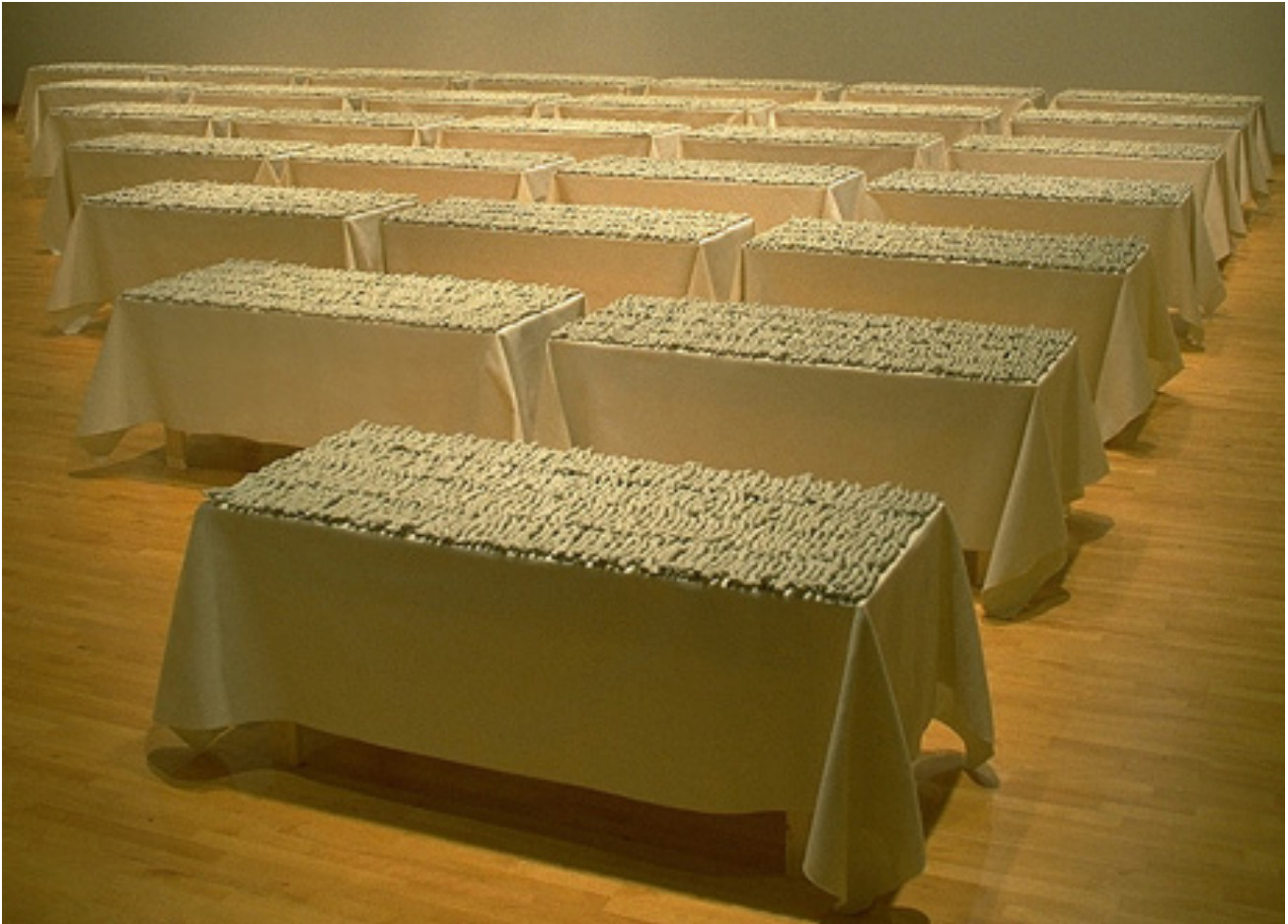


ALLAN MCCOLLUM
THE EVENT: PETRIFIED LIGHTNING FROM CENTRAL FLORIDA
(WITH SUPPLEMENTAL DIDACTICS)

October 23 - December 19, 1998
USF Contemporary Art Museum



Allan McCollum, *THE EVENT: Petrified Lightning from Central Florida (with Supplemental Didactics)*

THE EVENT: Petrified Lightning from Central Florida (with Supplemental Didactics) is the latest in a series of projects in which McCollum explores the ways in which treasured objects are created “in nature” and “in culture,” and how their meanings are constructed within the community that gives them value. He specifically explores the creation of objects by lightning as a way taking apart our common fantasies of “instant” production of objects (as described in myth and also industrial production), the popular metaphors we commonly use to describe the processes of “creativity,” (as with our fantasies of receiving “illumination” from above, being “struck” with an idea like a “bolt from the blue”, etc.), and he hopes to “reverse-engineer” these kinds of metaphors into an exploration of the way we all like to imagine human agency interacting with natural processes in general.

To produce the *Petrified Lightning* project, Allan McCollum collaborated with both a geologist and an electrical engineer from the University of Florida’s International Lightning Research Facility at Camp Blanding, near the small town of Starke, Florida. With the help of the team at the center, McCollum spent the summer of 1997 triggering lightning strikes by launching small rockets with hair-thin copper wires

trailing behind them directly into storm clouds as they passed overhead. The triggered lightning bolts were directed down the wires into various containers prepared by the artist that were filled with Central Florida minerals donated by a local sand mining operation. The bolts instantly liquefy a column of sand with temperatures up to 50,000 degrees Fahrenheit, which immediately re-congeals into a column of naturally created glass that exactly duplicates the path of the lightning bolt. These are then dug out by the artist in manner similar to the way a paleontologist might remove a fragile fossil from its matrix. These rootlike glass structures are called fulgurites, or sometimes, petrified lightning.

Paleontologist, Russel McCarty, prepared a selected fulgurite and made the mold from which 10,000 duplicates are being produced using a mixture of epoxy and the same mineral, zircon, from which the original was created. For this phase of the project McCollum collaborated with Sand Creations, a local souvenir factory in Sanford, Florida, where sand is regularly used to create souvenirs for tourists who visit local beaches.



Supplemental Didactics : Over Thirteen Thousand Booklets on Lightning and Fulgurites

As another element of the installation the artist is producing a series of 13,000 small booklets on over sixty subjects related to fulgurites and lightning. A display of the booklets will be presented alongside the fulgurite replicas in the Petrified Lightning exhibit at USF CAM in connection with an exhibit on lightning and fulgurites the artist has helped to create at MOSI, the Museum of Science and Industry in Tampa. The booklets will also be distributed to students at the local schools in Hillsborough County.

In producing the fulgurites McCollum collaborated with Dr. Martin Uman, well-known expert on lightning, author, and chair of the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department at the University of Florida; Dan Cordier, geologist; Russel McCarty, paleontological preparator at the Florida Museum of Natural History; I.E. Dupont Mining, and Sand Creations Manufacturing. The project is being coordinated by Jade Dellinger, independent curator, Margaret Miller, director of the University of South Florida Contemporary Art Museum, and Wit Ostrenko, Executive Director of the Museum of Science and Industry of Tampa and Hillsborough County.

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Allan McCollum's *Supplemental Didactics* available online, at:

http://www.usfcam.usf.edu/CAM/exhibitions/1998_12_McCollum/ditactics_mccollum.html