

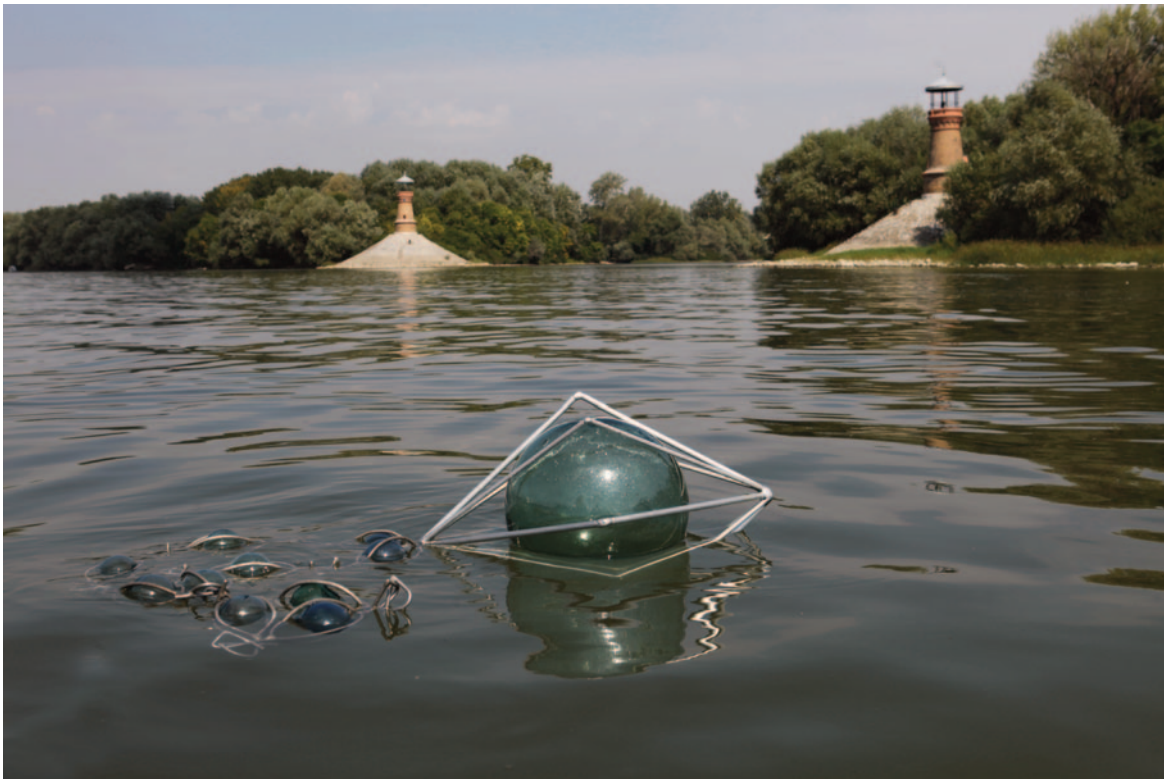
Daniel Rothbart and the Poetics of Confluence

An Interview by Silvia Assin

SA: This is a remote interview; you are currently in your studio in Brooklyn, NY, but you will soon be returning to the Galerie Depardieu, where you are practically a fixture. I believe this marks your tenth exhibition there.

I've had a sneak peek—for now, through photographs and video—of your upcoming solo exhibition at the Galerie Depardieu. Like its predecessors, it promises to be a new constellation—something entirely novel, deeply personal, and full of humor. In addition to the digital collages, there is a kinetic sculpture—something I hope you'll tell us a great deal about! The exhibition is titled *Confluences*. Did the title come first, or the selection of works? Is it a continuation of the installation of your sculpture at the confluence of the Danube and the Tamiš in Pančevo, Serbia?

DR: For that exhibition, I installed one of my sculptures at that very evocative confluence of the river Tamiš with the mighty Danube, which you see on the poster. By the way, Danube means "flow." I fondly remember our conversation while walking along that bank and your olfactory performance at the opening of my exhibition. Years ago, my mother brought me a phial of water from India, drawn from the confluence of the Ganges and Saraswati rivers. That gesture attuned me to the symbolic and spiritual resonance of places where rivers meet. Floating my sculpture at the confluence of the Tamiš and the Danube proved equally meaningful—and that experience inspired the title of my current exhibition.



Sculpture at the confluence of two rivers, 2025, photographed where the Tamiš flows into the Danube in Pančevo, Serbia.



Neapolitan Dreamwheel, 2026, video loop, 08:42.

Interestingly, my work with water really took form in Italy. I lived in Naples in the early '90s as a Fulbright scholar, where I met the art theorist and collector Enrico Pedrini. Later, in 2007, he invited me to take part in an outdoor sculpture exhibition at the Lido in Venice. That's where I made my first floating sculpture titled *Flotilla*.

That piece goes back even further, to my childhood in Oregon. I was fascinated by Japanese glass fishing floats that had slipped free of their nets and drifted across the Pacific, eventually washing up on American shores. For *Flotilla*, I incorporated Japanese floats as buoyant elements into welded aluminum structures, which also resonate with the long glassmaking tradition of Venice. Installed in the lagoon outside the Hotel Excelsior during the Venice Film Festival, the work moved with the tide and seemed to hover between arrival and departure. It became the starting point for an ongoing body of work shaped by water, movement, and confluence.

Enrico, who had a home in Cagnes-sur-Mer, introduced me to the gallerist Christian Depardieu, with whom I've had the good fortune to collaborate for more than twenty years, as well as to the La Napoule Art Foundation, where I held an artist's residency in 2002 and later exhibited in 2017. As two italophone expatriates working in France, Enrico and I shared lively conversations about how currents in contemporary art from our respective countries resonate with one another.

For me, the idea of confluence also extends into the digital collages presented in the exhibition. Images of my sculptures flow into aquatic environments and other terrains, traversing both real and imagined landscapes across diverse geographies and temporalities.

SA: Your kinetic sculpture is absolutely astonishing—somewhat like a "magic lantern" floating on water—evoking a thousand (and one) associations and references. What inspired the choice of *Neapolitan Dreamwheel*?

DR: *Neapolitan Dreamwheel* marks a departure for me, bringing together elements in welded aluminum, bronze, and fluorescent Plexiglas with colored light and movement. It draws on memories of Naples, a place that has become a wellspring for much of my creative work. The presence of Vesuvius, Castel dell'Ovo, the layered strata of antiquity, the exuberance of Baroque churches, and the seemingly endless, chaotic streams of traffic combined to create an intensity that was at once disorienting and generative. In response, I immediately began work on a series of bronze wall sculptures; in *Neapolitan Dreamwheel*, I return to and reimagine those earlier forms, setting them into motion.

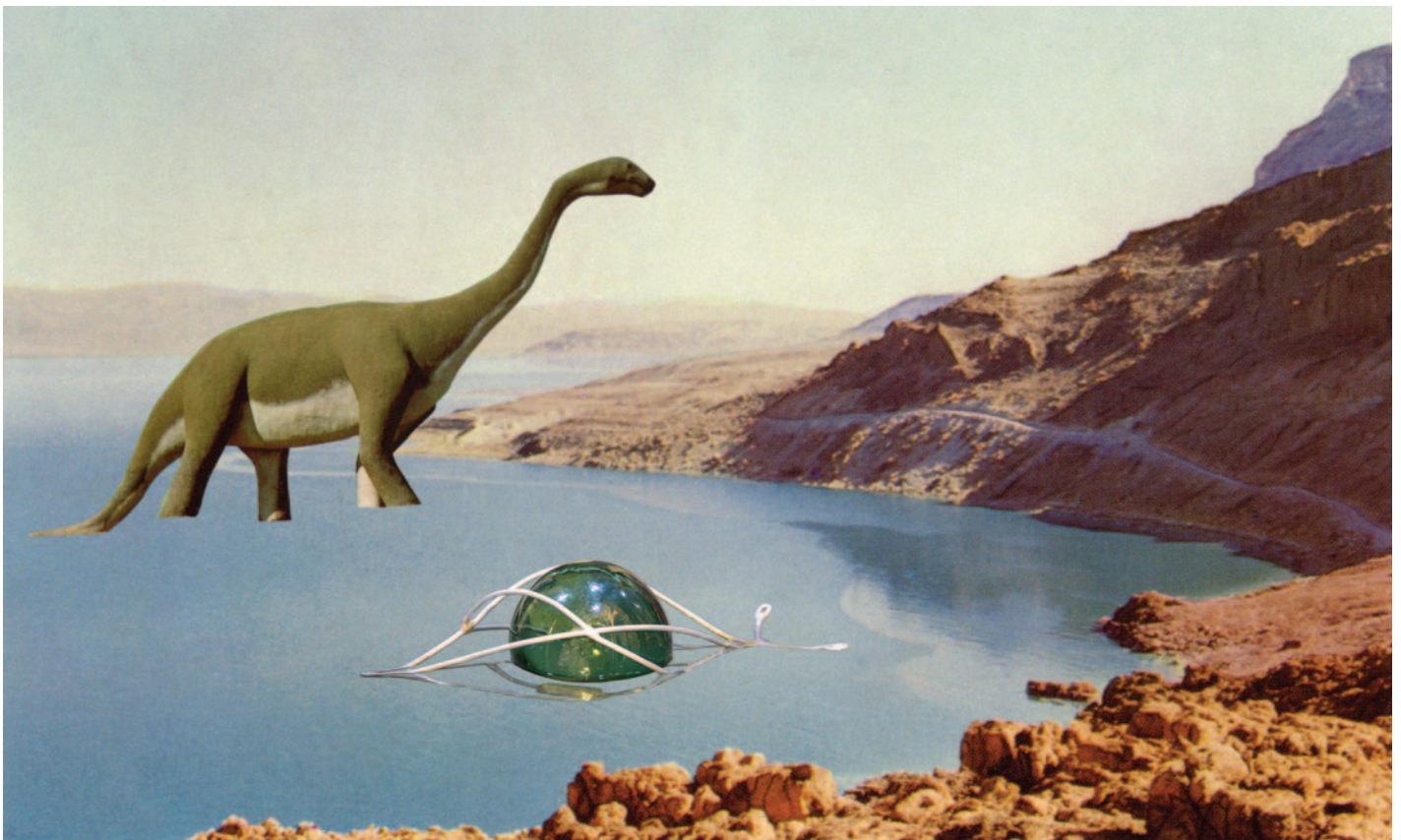
The projector is a disco lighting effect that simulates the soothing movement of water. Between the projection and a rear-view screen, a carousel of sculptural silhouettes—cut from fluorescent Plexiglas—rotates slowly. At its center hangs a polished bronze structure, branching like an organic form in nature. Light reflects off moving elements on one side of the screen, while on the other a shifting color narrative comes into view, drifting in and out of focus.

I filmed the sculpture from shifting vantage points and wove in literary quotations that reflect on water, rivers, and the merging of currents. One that especially moves me is Henry David Thoreau's statement: "Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in." In many ways, this embodies my working process for collage as I move through ideas, collecting sculptures and fragments of experience, and let them flow and merge into unlikely compositions.

SA: Regarding these recent digital collages of yours: each one certainly merits a comment from you, but what can you tell us specifically about these two? They strike me as being both labyrinthine and amusing at the same time.

DR: *Fossils of the Future* depicts my floating glass-and-aluminum sculpture at the lowest point on earth, the Dead Sea, bobbing in salt-filled water. Behind it, a Brontosaurus bathes in the briny liquid, making its way slowly to the desolate, rocky shore, but dreaming of an elusive vegetarian feast. Though sculpted from futuristic, industrial materials, my sculptures often evoke plants, animals, and insect life from the primordial past. They inhabit a temporal ambiguity that is at once ancient and speculative, suggesting forms that might have existed, or may yet come into being. In this sense, they gesture toward possible futures, contingent on how we choose to steward resources and respond to the urgencies of climate change. Set alongside a wading, herbivorous dinosaur, *Fossils of the Future* underscores the fragile continuity between past, present, and what lies ahead.

With dark humor, *Age of Discovery* also explores themes related to climate change. A dapper Antarctic explorer stands proudly in the foreground while behind him, unsteady on the pack ice and carrying a black-and-white television, an entrepreneur seeks to somehow monetize his surroundings. Ice is melting to uncover bronze biomorphic sculptures that I realized during my time in Naples. In the background, my floating sculptures glide



Fossils of the Future, 1966–2026, giclée print, 14.5 x 24 inches.



Age of Discovery, 1912–2026, giclée print, 15.25 x 24 inches.

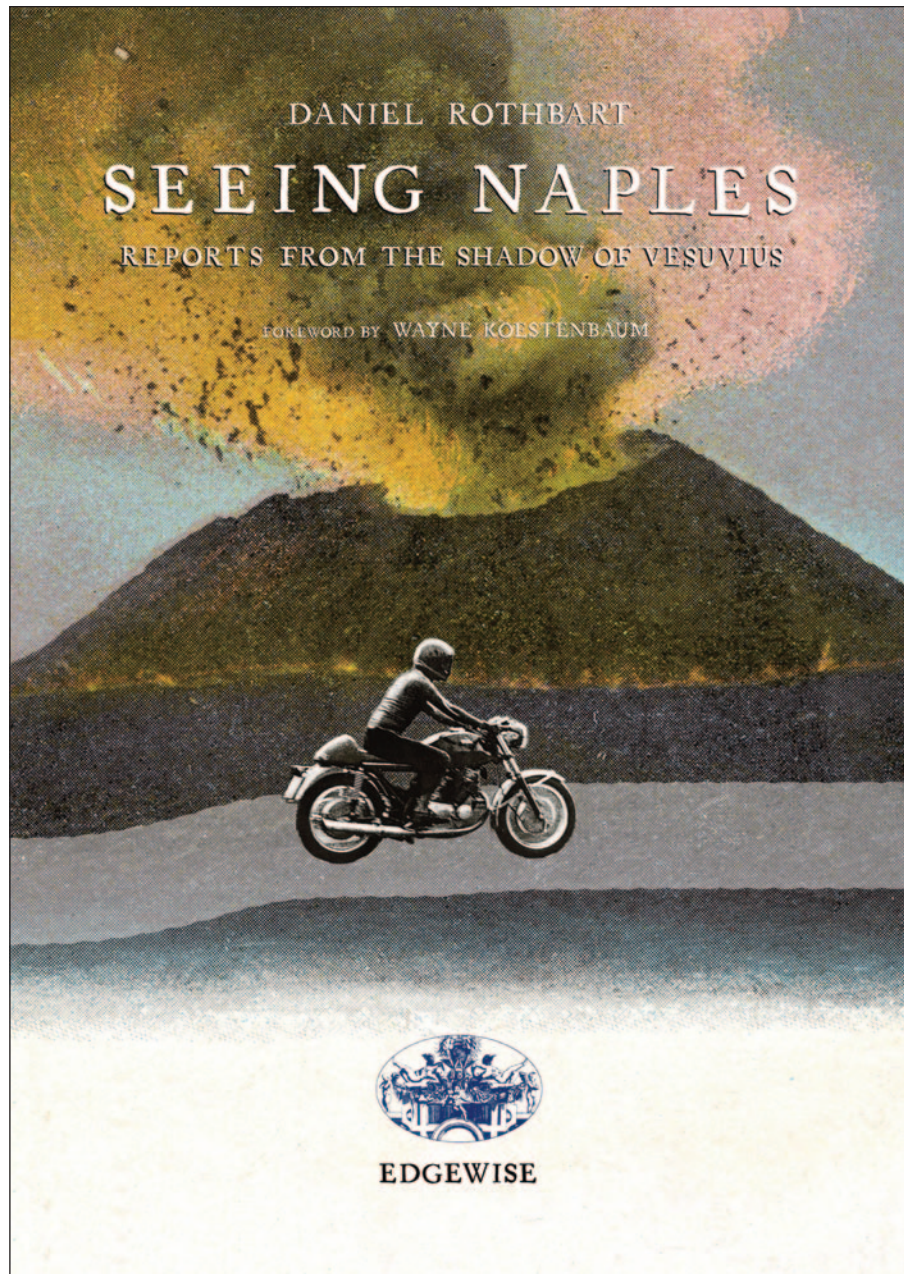
across the frigid water. In *Age of Discovery*, the hubris of early explorers thaws and vanishes along with the retreating polar ice.

SA: You are a sculptor and artist—working in digital collage, installations, video art, and more—with exhibitions in prestigious museums and galleries across the USA and Europe. Yet you are also a writer: the author of three art books (now held in the collection of MoMA in New York) and of this travelogue—a historical account of Naples—based on your three years there as a fellow. What, above all else, has stayed with you from your Neapolitan experience? Aside, that is, from your flawless spoken and written Italian—complete with that charming American accent?

DR: Thank you, Silvia! I’m grateful to retain some of my Italian.

That time allowed me to form a deep human and cultural connection to Naples, especially through friendships with people like Riccardo Notte and Francesco Lucrezi. Beyond those relationships, the experience imprinted itself in a more diffuse but lasting way. Naples became a kind of creative fountainhead. Its layered history, visual intensity, and charged atmosphere continues to shape my artistic imagination. Rather than a single defining moment, it was the cumulative richness of that place—its people, mythology, landscape, and contradictions that persist and keep resurfacing in my work.

Upon returning to New York City after three years in Naples, the English poet John Ash encouraged me to write about my experiences. I began composing short vignettes, which he later critiqued. Over the course of two decades, these reflections coalesced into a book titled *Seeing Naples: Reports from the Shadow of Vesuvius* that was published by Edgewise Press in 2018. It weaves together personal narrative, encounters with Neapolitans from diverse walks of life, cultural observations, and historical interpretation, tracing an interplay between past and present. Publisher Richard Milazzo greatly enhanced the visual appearance of *Seeing Naples* by adding images from my collection and together we digitally resurrected an eighteenth-century Neapolitan typeface for the layout. My brilliant friends Wayne Koestenbaum and Francine Hunter McGivern also made invaluable contributions—the former writing the foreword and the latter conceiving the cover collage. So, this



Seeing Naples: Reports from the Shadow of Vesuvius, 2018, cover concept by Francine Hunter McGivern.

book, more fully than any single artwork, gathers the breadth of my reflections, observations, and deep affection for Naples.

This interview was published by in Italian by *Montecarlo News* on April 15, 2026. Read it [here](#).

The exhibition *Daniel Rothbart: Confluences* will be on view at the Galerie Depardieu in Nice from May 7 – June 13, 2026. Opening Reception: Thursday, May 7 from 6 – 8 pm

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