

STANTON HUNTER

A story in the *L.A. Times* about butterfly visual systems inspired Stanton Hunter to begin his *Migration Grids* series in 2005. The article highlighted a study coauthored by UC Irvine and UMass Medical School professors that examined how Monarch butterflies navigate during their annual migrations from the eastern United States south to the Sierra Madre mountain range in Mexico. Although invisible to humans, butterflies can see an immense three-dimensional grid made of ultraviolet (UV) light rays that emanates from the sun and serves as a map to guide their migratory flight. The grid moves along with the sun as it travels east to west across the sky. The butterflies compensate by using an internal clock that recalibrates the grid throughout the day so they can still travel in a straight line. As the researchers verified, if UV light is blocked, the insects are unable to fly normally. Fascinated by this view into the complex and uncharted neurobiological mechanisms that scientists are just beginning to understand, Hunter began incorporating grids into his sculptural work. He says he was floored by the hard science but "drop-dead poetics" of the study and started creating scaffolding and truss-like forms in response. The pale grids blend into the gallery walls, but the illumination creates intricate patterns in the shadows below that emphasize the relationships between light and space around the piece. Using clay, a terrestrial and simultaneously strong yet fragile material, he explores the contrasts between earth and sky, mass and weightlessness, permanence and ethereality in his aerial ceramic installations. Through the work, he attempts to materialize and represent those flashes of magic, glimpses of awe-inspiring beauty, and moments of discovery that allow a deeper understanding of our natural world, which delight both scientists and artists alike.

