

THE LIGHT KING

Ray King creates immense sculptures that channel sunlight through glass lenses to create shape-shifting refractions of color, rainbows, and designs—all conceived in his massive studio and barn in Stockton.

By PATTI ZIELINSKI

When you travel down the gravel drive leading to artist Ray King's Stockton home and studio, your jaw drops. Has a UFO landed in his roundabout?
"Welcome to our Shangri-La," King says, panning his arm from the 1750 stone farmhouse he shares with his wife, Debbie, to a newly constructed 12,800-square-foot timber frame studio and barn and the twenty-one acres beyond.

The UFO in question is, in fact, *Orbit*, a suspended prismatic sculpture, thirty feet in diameter, that King installed last December. To help finance *Orbit*'s construction, King last year received an \$18,000 grant from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. "The name for its geometric shape is a 'torus'—like a giant donut. If you stand inside, you can outstretch your hands like da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*," says King, stretching his. Above him, crisscrossing stainless-steel cables hold glass triangles laminated with holographic light diffraction film that splits the sunlight into colors, transforming the whole structure—stainless-steel tubes and balls welded together at the joints—into a giant prism.

But, really, you have to see *Orbit* to believe it.

"I wanted to install it vertically, like a Ferris wheel," King continues wistfully, "but it was too complicated to engineer to withstand the wind load."

Orbit is part of King's futuristic country-farmer landscape that includes other glass-punctuated sculptures, all catching—and dancing with—the sunlight, casting shape-shifting rainbows across the grounds, including two sheds that serve as home for King's six beloved goats, who peek out

inquisitively as we talk. "They are supposed to eat the poison ivy," he calls over to them, as if for their benefit. "But they are lazy."

King, who turned 74 last July 4, is renowned for his high-tech holographic and dichroic laminate films and coatings that split and reflect light wavelengths into a rainbow of brilliant colors—pieces that King calls "light experiences." Over nearly five decades, his work has won him many public and private commissions in the United States, Europe, and Asia, such as *Solar Wing* (1983), installed at the U.S. Courthouse and Federal Building in San Jose, California, and *Dancing Feathers* (2010), on display at the Luzhou train station in Taipei, Taiwan.

King grew up in Philadelphia, but he fell in love with the River Towns in his youth. "As soon as I could drive," he says, "I would roll around here. It's beautiful." He and Debbie bought the property, about a half-mile up a steep hill from the Delaware River, in 2012 as a long-weekend escape from their home in Philadelphia's Northern Liberties neighborhood. Two years ago, they relocated full-time to Stockton. "We are really close to where the water is flowing," King says. "We breathe the ions of the

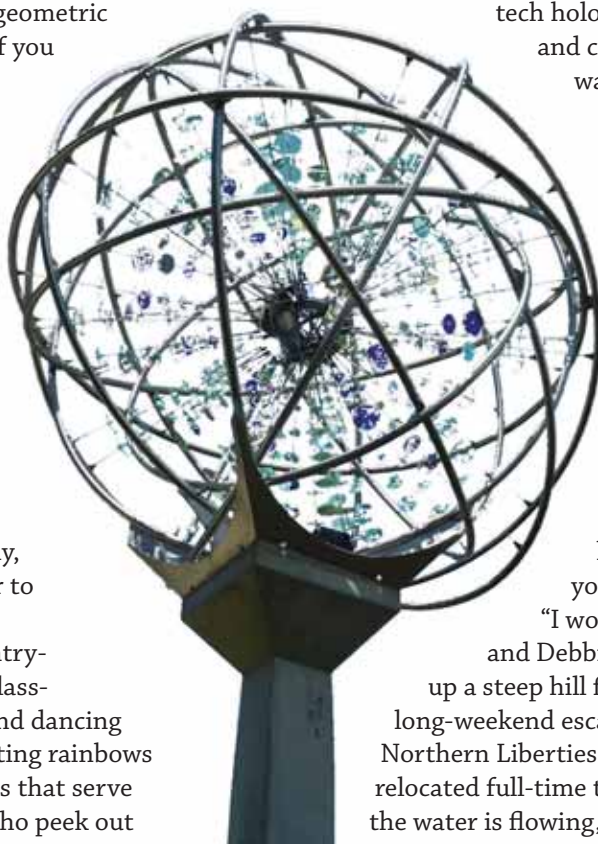




PHOTO BY DAVE NORTON

At his home in Stockton, Ray King stands before Stockton Star, part of the artist's futuristic country-farmer landscape. Made of dichroic glass, stainless steel, and concrete, the sculpture is 21 feet high and 12 feet in diameter.

Opposite: Tech/Rec Beacon, built in 2013 and installed at the Southern Regional Technology and Recreational Center, Fort Washington, Maryland.

The sculpture—20 feet high, 14 feet wide, and 11 feet deep—is made of dichroic glass, stainless steel, and concrete. PHOTO COURTESY OF RAY KING

river. We're immersed in it."

If you think *Orbit* is spectacular, spin around and take in King's adjacent dream studio and barn, which he completed last year. "I wanted a barn that could be used over the generations," he says. "It looks like the Bauhaus, with a 75-foot window wall that overlooks two-and-a-half acres of woods—and my goats. It's fun to watch the goats and the changing seasons out this giant window wall."

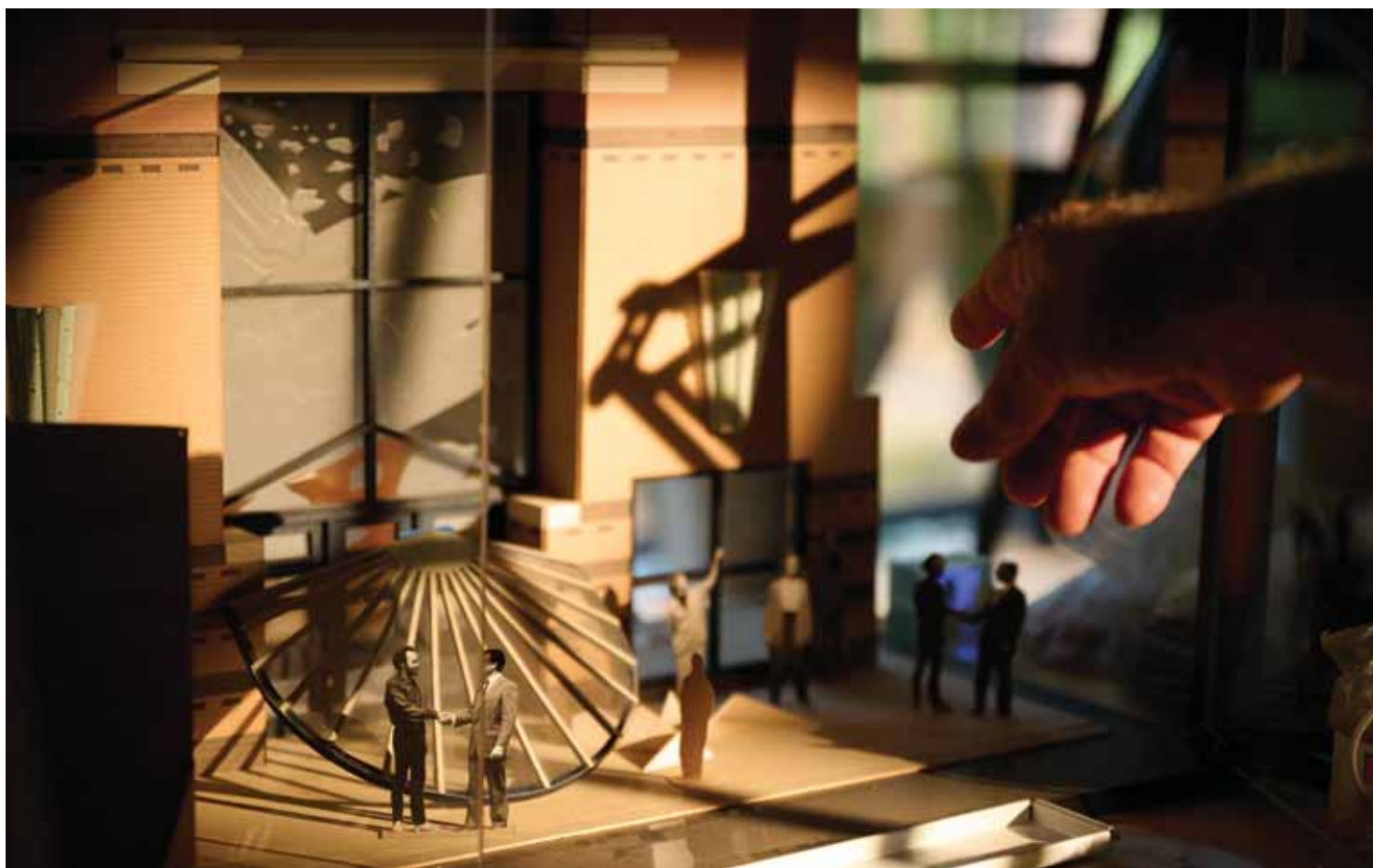
King followed a nontraditional path to his Stockton Shangri-La. Instead of attending art school, he answered a newspaper ad

New work by Ray King will be shown at Hobart Art Show, an exhibit on a farm in Kingwood (718 County Road 519), on September 28-29 and October 5-6.

for an apprenticeship with Marco Zubar, a Philadelphia stained-glass and metal sculpture artist, and spent the next five years restoring and repairing stained glass. He got his first big break in 1975, when he received a Louis C. Tiffany Fellowship to study with master stained-glass artist Patrick Reyntiens at Burleighfield House in Buckinghamshire, England. It was here that King first made armatures, from which stained glass could suspend.

The art world took notice.

Inspired, King returned to Philadelphia and set to work, driving his pickup truck to New York City to buy sheet glass.



PHOTOS (ABOVE AND BELOW) BY DAVE NORTON

Above: A maquette inside King's massive studio and barn. Below: Orbit, 30 feet in diameter, installed between King's home and his studio and barn. Its glass triangles, laminated with holographic light diffraction film, split sunlight into colors.



It was on one of those trips, in 1977, that he got his second big break. He learned of the Contemporary Art Glass Group, recently opened on Madison Avenue, and would stop in to chat with owners Josh Rosenblum and Doug Heller, who invited him to hang a piece in their window. Paul Smith, who was curating an exhibition on stained glass at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, saw the work from his taxi and jumped out to inquire about the artist. The work, not incidentally, sold within a week.

The five pieces that Smith included in the museum's 1978 exhibition—each made of blown glass and leaded stained glass on metal armature systems—launched King's career. *Time* and *Newsweek* wrote about his work, and soon he earned his first commission. "They caught a lot of attention," King says, "because it was out-of-the-box stuff that no one else was doing at the time."

King's sculptures are an amalgam of three crafts: metalwork, glass, and wire rope structures. The glass—dichroic glass (with a filter material that displays different colors depending on lighting conditions) and glass laminated with holographic films—is suspended on metal, such as stainless steel, stainless steel cable, and colored anodized aluminum. The intent is to split sunlight into color or project light into shadow.

King's designs are guided by sacred geometry—the shapes and proportions inherent in natural forms, such as atomic structures, planetary formations, and the nautilus shell. Those shapes and proportions dictate the size and dimension of each sculpture, so the elements are in harmony in terms of scale. "It is the secret tool that allows me to make proportions that are pleasant and beautiful," King says.

King's work can range from \$20,000 to seven figures and can sometimes take years to complete. He created six major works over a decade for the Taiwan government, a rare accomplishment for a foreign artist. His first commission—*Timespace*, a thirty-three-foot-high hourglass made of glass elements suspended in the niche of a high-



PHOTO COURTESY OF RAY KING

Dancing Feathers, built in 2010 and installed at the Luzhou Metro Station in Taipei, Taiwan, a commission of the Taipei Rapid Transit Corp. The sculpture—36 feet high, three feet wide, and five feet deep—is made of dichroic glass and stainless steel. The glass elements project and reflect light and colors into the surrounding space.

“We breathe the ions of the river. We’re immersed in it.”



King stands beneath StarGate, built in 2021 and installed outside the Department of Taxation in Trenton, a commission of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. Made of dichroic glass, stainless steel, and silicone, StarGate is 18 feet tall and 10 feet wide.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RAY KING

rise government building in Taipei—caused waves that kept King busy creating and shipping sculptures to Taiwan. “The cool thing about Taiwan is they selected the most futuristic projects,” he says, “the kinds of projects that I loved.”

Closer to home, on the summer solstice in June, King had installed his second permanent public sculpture in Summit, New Jersey: *Summit Star*, a dichroic glass star perched on a stainless steel base that is illuminated at night. His first permanent sculpture in Summit, *Pleiades*, consists of dichroic glass panels suspended above Promenade Fountain, a downtown landmark.

Of *Pleiades*, says Vivian Furman, a member of Summit Public Art, which commissioned the work: “We were looking for something unique and beautiful. What Ray King provided was even more than all that: He created a living work of art.”

In the River Towns, King’s *New Hope Star*, a ten-foot-tall, six-foot-wide dichroic glass sculpture on a stainless steel pedestal, on loan to New Hope Arts for a year, was installed on the 2024 summer solstice outside New Hope-Solebury High School. Like so many of King’s works, it dances with the light. And when night falls? “It will be illuminated,” King notes, “to serve as a beacon in the dark.”

Patti Zielinski, the River Towns department editor, is the former executive editor of Art & Antiques magazine.

A Public Sculpture Road Trip

A sampling of nearby Ray King sculptures in New Jersey and Philadelphia:

StarGate, 2020, New Jersey Department of Taxation, Trenton

State of the State, 2020, New Jersey Department of Health, Trenton

Quantum, 2001, Thomas Edison State College, the main entrance off State Street, Trenton

BioWaves, 2017, Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy, Rutgers University, Piscataway, New Jersey

PhiLux: Love of Light, 2019, 15th Street, City Hall Subway Station, Philadelphia

Hello David, 2008, 30-foot-high lens on the south-facing wall of King’s former studio, 835 North 3rd Street, Philadelphia

The Beacons, 1995–99, The Gateway for the Avenue of the Arts, Broad and Washington Streets, Philadelphia



PHOTO COURTESY OF RAY KING

Point of View, installed in 2014 at the Ministry of Culture in New Taipei City, Taiwan. Made of dichroic glass and stainless steel, it’s 26 feet high, 64 feet wide, and 40 feet in diameter.



PHOTO BY DAVE NORTON

Ray King, with a work in progress, inside his newly constructed 12,800-square-foot timber frame barn that also serves as his studio.