Steven Siegel (2009)
Making Art Out of Newspaper
The piece we did here at the deCordova is made of newspaper, which is what I’m fairly well-known for. It’s a relatively easy medium for me because I’ve been doing it for so many years, but that particular medium grew out of an interest in landscape and geology. It’s of great interest to me…the one side of my brain that says, these are pre- or post-consumer industrial materials in very large quantities, and they are in some sense geological because of the enormous amounts of materials that we process and that we turn into various products and that we either recycle or dump in a landfill or whatever. And that’s all there and that’s all of interest still, but at some point, it’s the other side of my brain which is the interest in aesthetics which really takes over. So the materials for me are…there’s a fascination there because of the texture and the color and the quality and the work-ability and all of these things. And that, in many ways, takes precedence over the conceptual framework, which is the easy part. The ideas are always the easy part, and it’s the development of them and the really making them into something visual which is the hard part. And that’s where the challenge is.

Steven Siegel (2009)
His Interest in Geology
I was always a walker and a hiker, and when I was sixteen or seventeen years old, I went out West for the first time and just fell in love with climbing around those
mountains in Wyoming and Colorado, and I spent a lot of time there. This must have been in the early 80’s, 1981 or 1982 that I read a book by John McPhee called *Basin and Range*. I sort of tracked McPhee’s investigation into geology, and when you start to see things that way you understand that when you’re looking at any landscape, you’re just looking at a moment in time, and that the planet is four and a half billion years old. If you can project backwards a little bit and start to understand things, everything that happened to get us to where we are now, you have I think a richer and more profound understanding of the landscape, to say nothing of the culture that you live in, which is just a product of that, basically. So, that’s where the geology came from...it just came from the realization at some point that as I was walking through these landscapes, I was just seeing a moment in time and I had no idea how they got there. And so I thought it would be interesting to study that a little bit, and you know, as a layman. I’m not a scientist, I don’t understand most of it, but it’s somehow the grasping of these greater things which I can’t get on the left side of my brain but I try to get on the right side. They just serve as over-arching metaphors for all the physical process that I’m involved in.

Steven Siegel (2009)
**The Decomposition Process**
The paper pieces change as they decompose, and they integrate much more with the landscape. And over a period of a couple of years, these pieces really look like they’ve always been there. And in fact, for people who are not familiar with what they are coming across, if you’re approaching it from a couple hundred feet away, you will think it’s stone, until you get fairly close to it. And that’s nice. And it’s also nice that the paper obviously is generated from trees in the first place, and then it biodegrades and becomes compost and soil eventually, and new trees grow out of it, and so you’ve got a full cycle there.

Steven Siegel (2016)
**How Big, with rift was Engineered**
The piece can be designed to last anywhere from a week to maybe fifteen years or so, depending on how it’s built, and we agreed that we wanted it to last at least five years. With that in mind, the infrastructure was built in a way that it would last at least five years, so we used Douglas Fir for the framing, and we used, I think pressure-treated plywood for the deck, because that’s the most vulnerable part. And, as expected, the wood inside rotted away. And once the piece started to tip, that was a good indication that the framework inside was rotting, which surprises a lot of people because they expect that the paper will disappear before the framework does, but in fact, the paper lasts longer. The section that did start to collapse was more of a vertical piece. The larger part, because it’s so broad and long, actually has more of a footprint on the ground, and can essentially stand by itself for a while. The walls and paper themselves are strong enough because of the curve that they will hold themselves up even if the framework inside is gone. So the one thing to be looking for is for the plants on top and all of that to start to cave in, that’s probably the next thing that will happen on that one. We decided, seven years ago, that we wanted this piece to have the option of decaying in place but still
be safe so that it wouldn't fall on anybody. So one of the reasons why it’s relatively low and squat is exactly that, so that unlike a really tall one, that when it starts to lean over, you have to de-install it, this one was designed so that it really could just continue to biodegrade and cave in on itself in place. With the understanding, of course, that that museum had the option to do what they thought was appropriate when the time came.

Steven Siegel (2016)
The Evolution of **Big, with rift**
It falls very much within this notion that everything changes over time, that we’re working with a material that’s biodegradable essentially, and it evolves in its color and in its form as it slowly biodegrades, and microorganisms get invested in it and start eating it. I don’t know exactly what went on with this one, but I imagine there were a lot of insects in it, sometimes wasps and bees take the paper away. You know, it generally gets integrated back into the environment because it is essentially from the environment. Paper obviously is made from trees. So you could say that it’s kind of a natural material, even though it’s manufactured by us. It’s pretty much welcomed back into the landscape from which it came, and I think that that’s one of the primary meanings of this work if one is looking for meaning. I think that those who watched it over the years have been surprised by how long it’s held up, how much it’s changed, how the plants have thrived.... And I hope that now that part of it has fallen down, it actually has a stronger meaning, but sort of within the same realm that’s existed all this time.

Mystery Family Tour
You are looking at a sculpture by Steven Siegel, titled **Big, with rift**. Look and listen carefully to solve the mystery of how this sculpture will change over time. Walk around this sculpture and look at it from all sides. Don’t forget to walk through it, too! Can you figure out what the sculpture is made of? Right, paper! Or more specifically, newspapers. Do you think newspapers are an unusual material to create a sculpture with? Steven likes to create art with objects that people use everyday. To build this sculpture, Steven and a team of volunteers folded and stacked newspapers on top of each other and then put dirt and plants on top of the stacked newspapers. Why do you think the artist decided to include the dirt and plants on the top part of the sculpture? Steven created this sculpture especially for this site and used the dirt and plants from the ground right here to create the top of the sculpture. How do you think the rain, wind, and snow might change the sculpture? Do you think this sculpture will look the same a year from now? How might it look, smell, or feel different?