Collin and I looked at each other and thought, 'Wow, it’s working just like that model!' And, then somehow, not that long ago, I kind of graduated to making these models [points to the scale models inside the studio]. I had never really understood the use of models before because always the physical space that you go in is going to be a little bit different than that model you think out. It wasn’t anything that I really needed; it was something to make a presentation to someone else and get them inside. Me and the guy I work with, Collin Cook—he’s worked with me forever—we’ve used all of these different materials and methods of working. But then, somehow, not that long ago, I kind of graduated to making these models. I think that’s where all the sudden, the model and the tininess made sense to me. There’s a certain point where the model and the tininess made sense to me. There’s a certain point where the model and the tininess made sense to me. There’s a certain point where the model and the tininess made sense to me. There’s a certain point where the model and the tininess made sense to me.

Then, somehow, not that long ago, I kind of graduated to making these models [points to the scale models inside the studio]. I had never really understood the use of models before because always the physical space that you go in is going to be a little bit different than that model you think out. It wasn’t anything that I really needed; it was something to make a presentation to someone else and get them inside. Me and the guy I work with, Collin Cook—he’s worked with me forever—we’ve used all of these different materials and methods of working. But then, somehow, not that long ago, I kind of graduated to making these models. I think that’s where all the sudden, the model and the tininess made sense to me. There’s a certain point where the model and the tininess made sense to me. There’s a certain point where the model and the tininess made sense to me. There’s a certain point where the model and the tininess made sense to me. There’s a certain point where the model and the tininess made sense to me.

So, now you’re working on a big installation for Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills?

NR: We have the model for it here. We’re going to drill into the concrete and pour piers because you don’t want things to shake. This will be like a stainless steel armature and these boats are all monochrome. I have hundreds of them in the desert in storage. They’re really ‘used,’ stripped down. They have a lot of marks on them.

JM: What drew you to the boats in the first place? Was it the forms?

NR: Yeah, they’re nice. They are just beautiful. They recall the figure and the womb and they are everywhere and forever; a universal, ancient thing that crosses boundaries.

JM: So, at Gagosian, you’re going to keep it monochromatic?

NR: Yeah. [Pointing to the model] This sculpture will be about forty-feet long. This one is about forty-six feet long and is thirty-something feet high, and this space is a little smaller. They have a curved ceiling with rafters, so some of the boats are going to have to fit through holes in there.

JM: How long do you think it’s going to take to build?

NR: Ten days.

JM: Ten days? That’s it? That’s impressive.

NR: Then on the other side, I’m going to have drawings on the first floor, and then on the second floor, collages. Let’s go over and take a look at the drawings. [Walking downhill to drawing studio.]
NR: I think there’s something important about seeing that structural part. Formally, you’re right—it’s very painterly that way. But the really structural, visceral part of it that you see; it’s really staying together like that.

[New film begins showing installation of Big Edge in Las Vegas.]

NR: This is from Las Vegas. We just finished this.

JM: This is even larger than the one you did in Lincoln Center?

NR: This one took six weeks, but we had a restricted amount of time between 5:30 in the morning and 12:30 in the afternoon to work on it because of the heat.

JM: It’s amazing. Are the connection points on the boats predetermined?

NR: You mean where you’re attaching the wires? You kind of know; there are these repetitive spaces and then the crew has drills up there if they need to drill more. They drill around the ribs, around the structural places—they know where the boats are strong. Do you want to go down the hill and look at the collage studio?

[We hike downhill and arrive at the collage studio. The room is filled with large tables covered with collages.]

NR: I used to use this as a drawing studio and then I started making these photo-collages. They are just made with pictures from old sculptures and old models and I have a photographer who prints them to any scale. So you can really experiment with scale and mix images of toys [used in three-dimensional models] with images of real boats. Everything I do in sculpture is so labor intensive; this is a kind of pleasure.

JM: You can tell which of the cutouts came from finished works because they have the chains on them.

NR: Yeah. The wires are still there. [Looking carefully at the collages...] These are toys; that’s a toy.

JM: Such great light in all of these spaces.

NR: It’s a beautiful space; I really like working down here. And, people have to really want to find you to come get you here.