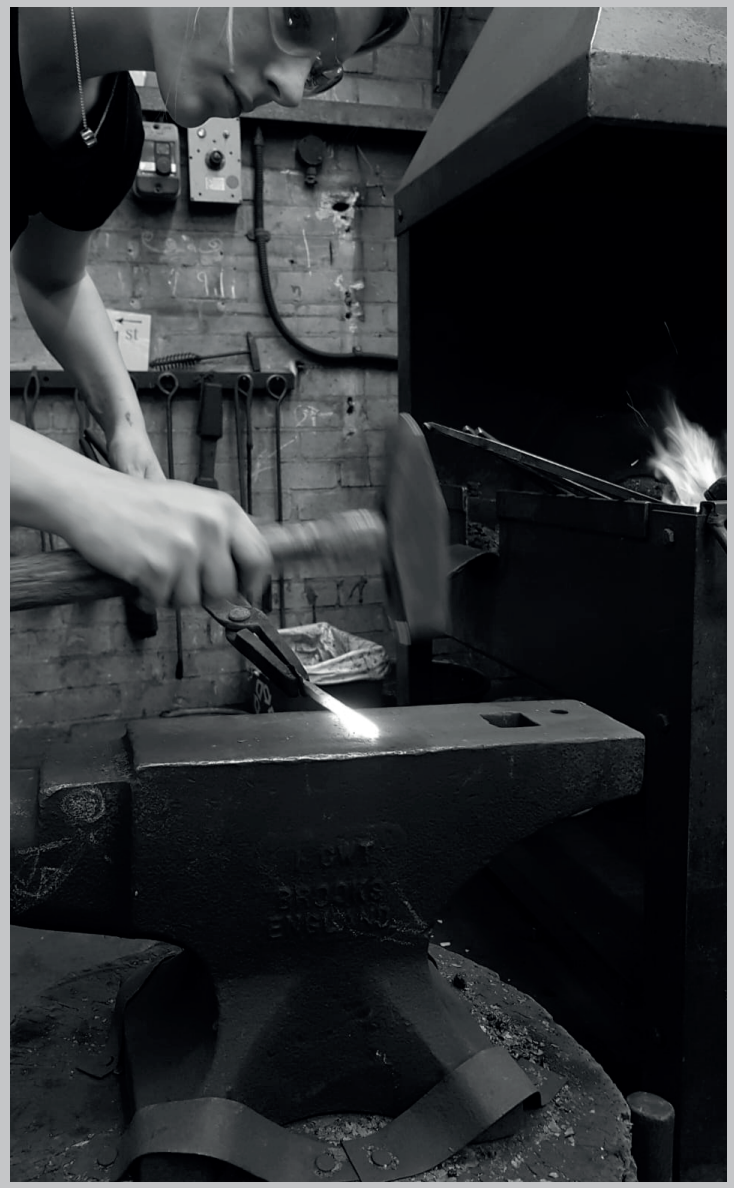
“My Eyes”

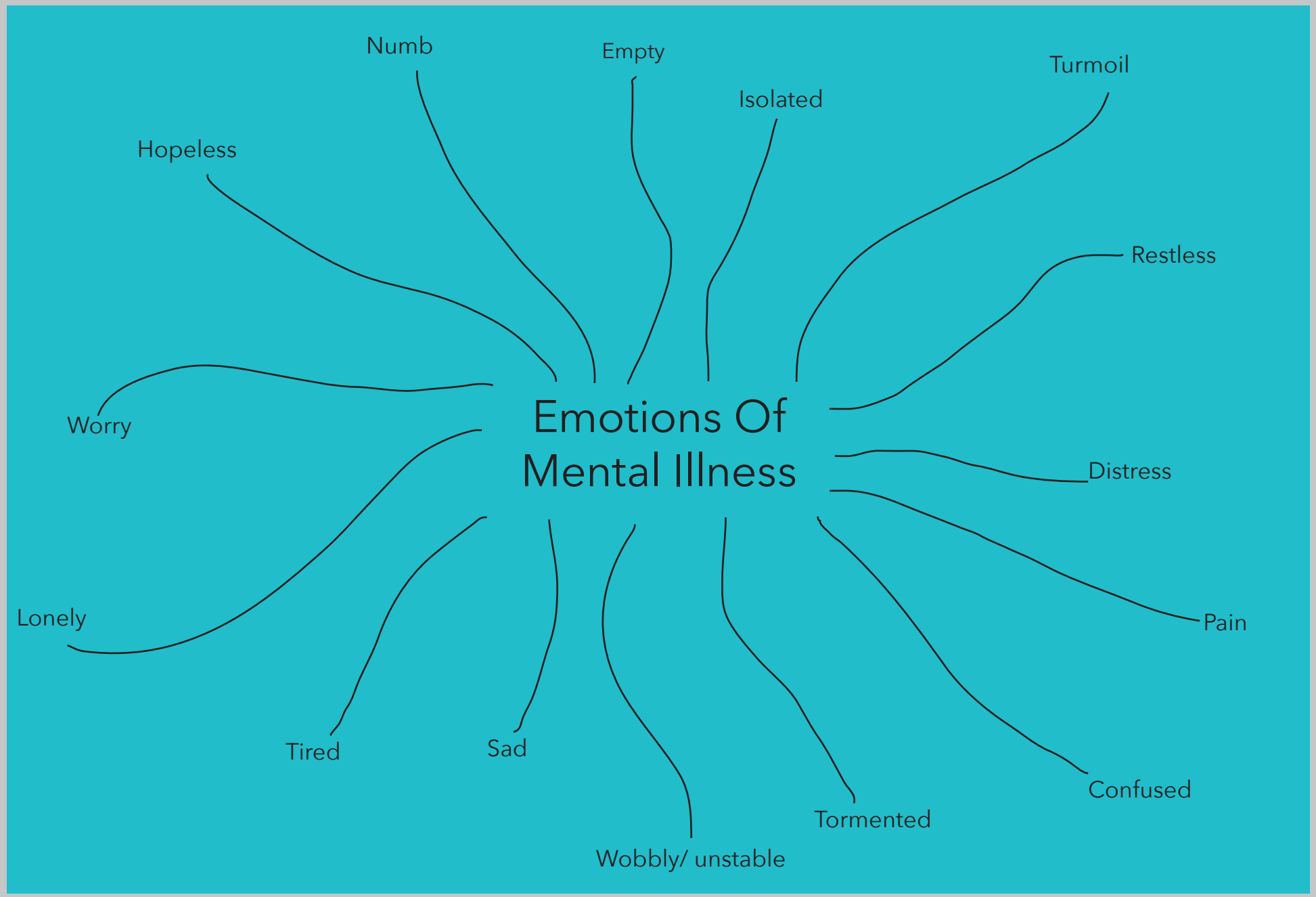
Hannah Hopkins

Contents Page



Presentation Statement

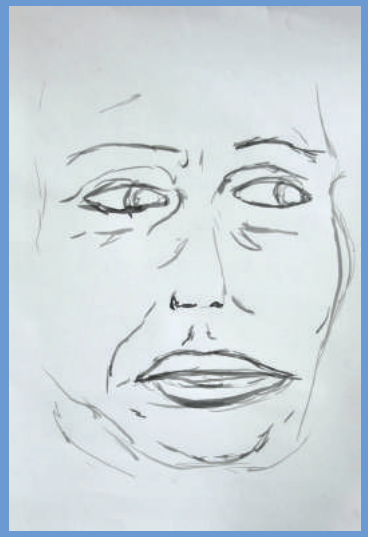
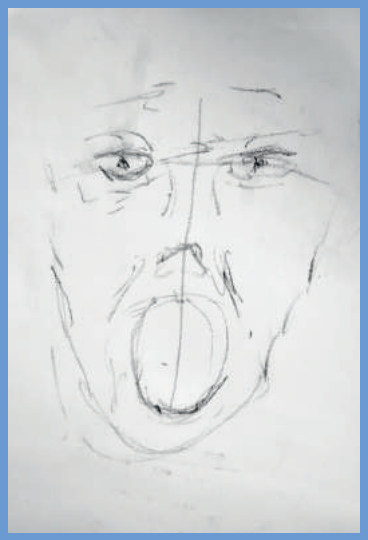
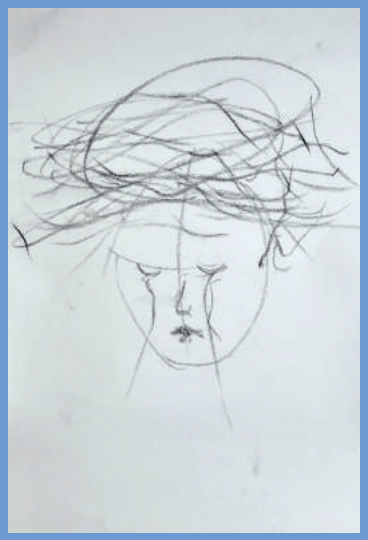
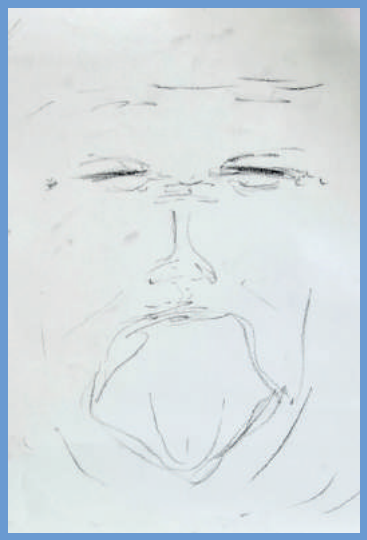
"My eyes"… In a world obsessed with social media and image, the percentage of those living with mental health problems is rising. How do those with depression and anxiety see themselves? How can these feelings be materialised? The frames of these mirrors bring those emotions into fruition, encouraging audiences to take a moment of reflection and try to understand how it may feel to be so troubled. Looking into the unconventional mirrors, the face of the viewer is reflected in a bright and clear surface, whilst being surrounded by dark emotion. This contrast suggests the inner turmoil that comes with putting on a brave face whilst feeling so very weak.


Emotions Of Mental Illness
Numb
Empty
Isolated
Turmoil
Hopeless
Restless
Worry
Distress
Lonely
Pain
Tired
Sad
Wobbly/ unstable
Tormented
Confused

Propositions




My plan at the beginning of the year was to create a sculpture from steel that was a direct response to the emotions of depression. It would have been made from steel rod, and formed into the shape of a face, or series of faces. I felt though that this was too simplistic, and I could utilise the qualities of forged steel much more effectively. Not being able to be in the heavy metal workshop at the time (due to a broken foot), forced me to explore other avenues, and I subsequently considered the language of metals (silver and steel). I took the words 'healthy' and 'unhealthy', and tried to get the metal to reflect them. This was done by filing and polishing the edges of the steel so that they were smooth, but leaving the centre rusted. For the silver, I stressed the edges until they tore, buckled and creased, then polished the middle to a mirror finish. It was this contrast that lead me to think about Damascus steel, and how I could convey emotions indirectly, through the qualities of metal.

Making Damascus Steel

I first found out about Damascus steel when I was looking at ways of combining two metals to achieve a contrast in colour and finish. I initially looked at Mokume Gane, a technique that joins soft metals such as silver, gold, platinum and copper, and is often used to make jewellery. Given that I wanted to spend this year in the forge developing my blacksmithing techniques, I decided to give myself the challenge of making a billet of damascus. This is done by fire welding two types of steel together so that when they become one solid piece that is etched, the contrast between the alloys in the steels produce a pattern . To make my billet, I used 15N20 (high nickel content and dark in colour) and 1070 (high carbon content and therefore lighter in colour). The first step was to cut and clean the stock so that the fire weld would be successful, and tac the pieces together in an alternating manner. This would give me a very basic, layered pattern in the billet. The process of forging the steel could then begin, by heating it up, adding a small amount of boric acid powder (keeps the welds clean) and giving it a light hammer to begin closing the gaps. Once the gaps had begun to fuse, the process was repeated but with much more heat. When the steel is 'white hot', it is on the verge of melting, which means that it can be fused together. After my first day, we discovered that one of my welds hadn't held, so after cleaning it up with an angle grinder, we went to Glynde Forge and used the power hammer to force the weld to take. The billet was then drawn out into workable stock.

Developing More Blacksmithing Skills


for MUM
Love
Hannah

Links to my Dissertation- Can Making Art have a Positive Impact on People's Mental Health?

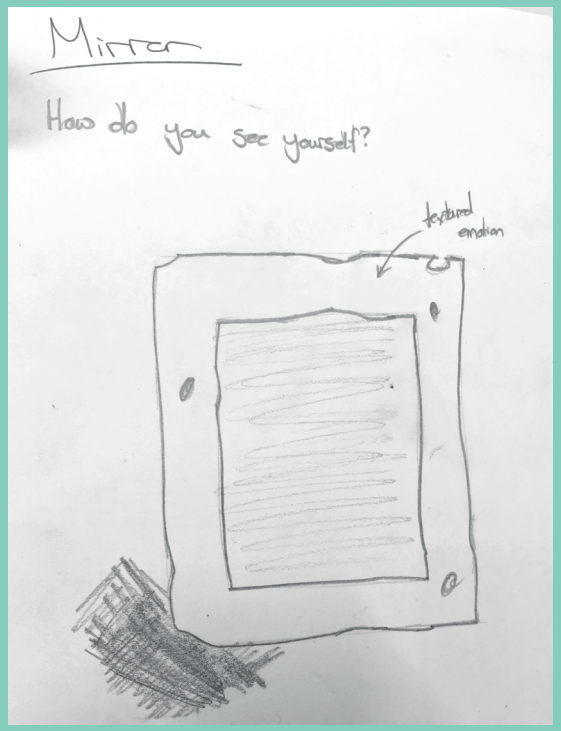
I already knew that making was linked to me maintaining a healthy state of mind, hence allowing myself the time to develop my blacksmithing skills through small, personal projects. My dissertation helped me to understand this, as I concluded that:

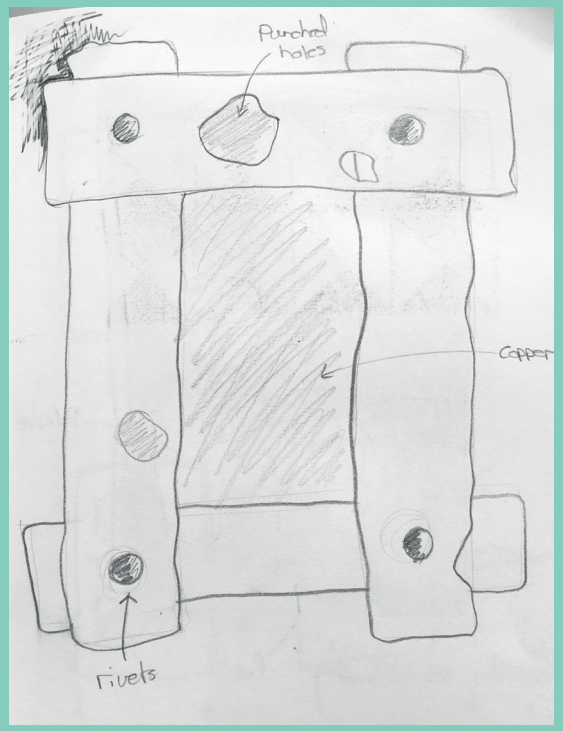
As an artist myself and someone who has, and still does, suffer from mental health problems, I understand the importance of creating as a way to express feelings. By making art, it is possible to pick up on themes and thoughts that otherwise would not have been noticeable. Some of this comes from the interpretation of others, whilst some of it stems from the artist themselves, what they see in an image and how they interpret the elements that are included. Some of this understanding comes from a basic knowledge of art therapy, not necessarily the scientific part of it, but knowing that there are common elements that appear in the art work of those with mental health conditions. There is also the therapeutic act of being creative, much like baking or gardening, where the mind is focused more on what the hands are doing and making, than on worries.

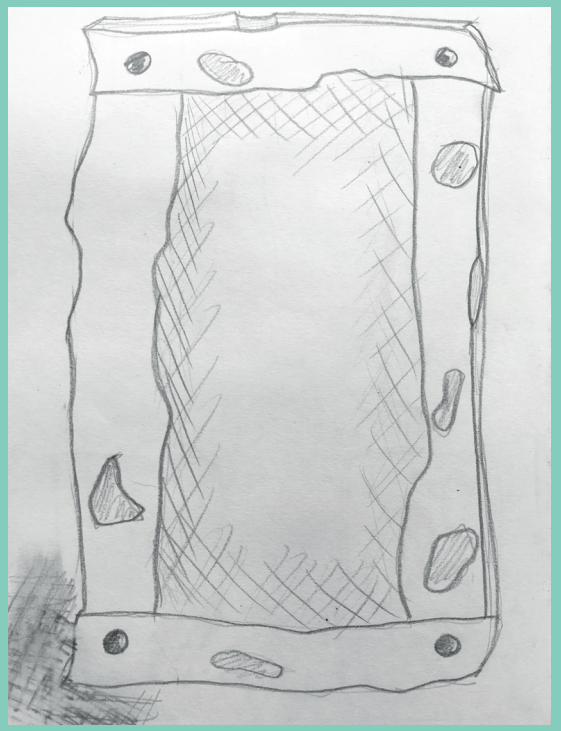
Initial Ideas- Emotions in Steel

Having established that I would take a more figurative approach, I started to explore how mental health could be translated into steel. I listed some emotions that are often associated with depression, and then considered how they could be represented through steel. Below are my first tests, where I didn't think about anything apart from the words that I had chosen. I used a variety of chisels and punches, and purposefully left the steel raw and with rough cut chiselled edges. This show the process, and also add to the emotion meaning behind the work, as it alludes to the fragmented state of the mind. This is a series that I hope to expand on, so that I have a large collection of pieces. I will continue to make them the same size, (as I feel this works well aesthetically), keep the chisel marks, and explore other ways of expressing emotions.

Broken	Burned and melted
Isolated	Small bit cut off from the whole
Unstable	
Irritable	MIG weld spikes
Empty	Large hollow/ hole
Angry	Cut, chisel
Tired	Rusted
Torn	Split and seperated
Out of Control	Over textured
Damaged	Hammered
New Start	Contrast, sprouting, rusted metal connected to clean metal
Contorted	Twisted
Fragile	Chiseled or punched so much that it barely holds together







Using My Test Samples

After making the pieces that I called 'Emotions in Steel', I considered how best to use them. My initial thought was to make frames from them, which would hold either a conventional mirror or mirror finished copper. This contrast would be indicative of the two sides of depression, with the rough, damaged frame encasing clean, highly polished metal. The polished nature of the metal would mean that audiences could look at themselves within the emotive frame, which would hopefully encourage them to see themselves surrounded by the darkness and depression, and consider the meaning behind the damage. After some consideration though, I thought that using the tiles to make a frame was too obvious as an approach. I instead began to explore how the tiles could become frames within their own right.

Artist Research- Richard Serra

Trip Hammer (1988)

Backdoor Pipeline (2010)

Between the Tours and the Sphere

Richard Serra

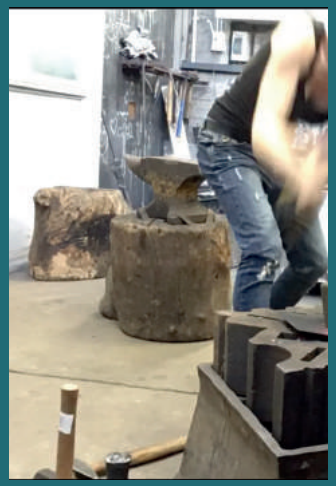
Every Which Way (2015)

Large steel sculptures that can be explored and walked around in. I like the rust and the balance in the pieces, and the threatening heights and shadows. I can imagine my work being this big, where the punched holes would be large enough to walk through. Having a sculpture that can be interacted with creates an experience, which could in my case be an emotional one. In order for this to work on a scale that I can work with, I will need to focus on how I can make objects that can be interacted with, explored, and perhaps ~~fit~~ displayed in a way that produces an immersive event.

Scaling Up



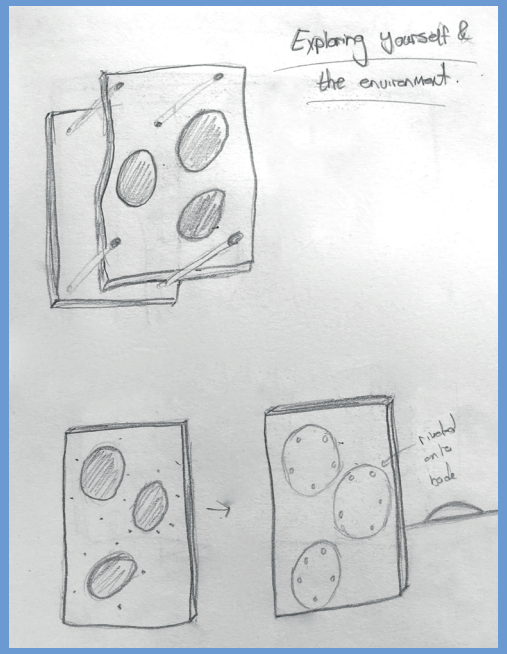


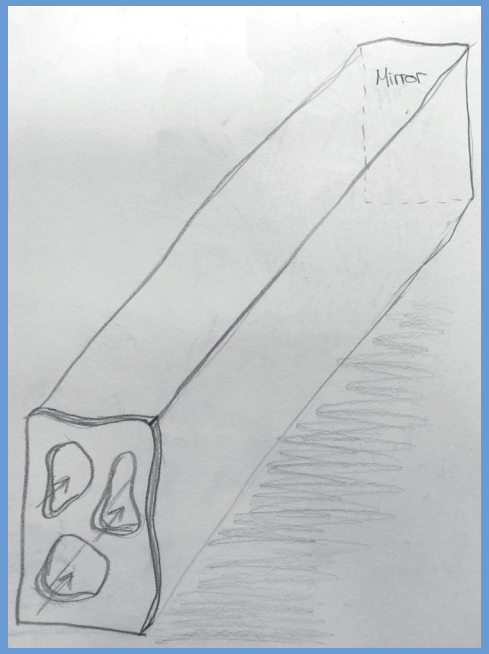



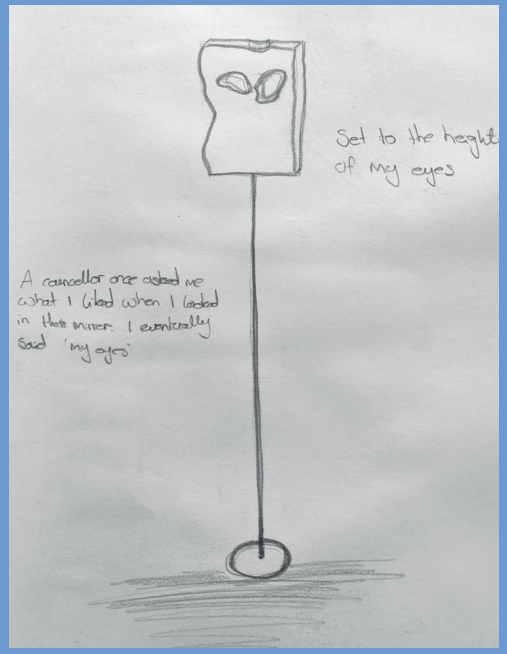


After making my small steel tiles, I began to wonder whether I could scale them up. The work of Richard Serra is so effective because of its size, but I wasn't sure that mine would be, especially when I started to attempt punching holes through the sheet metal. I knew that because I was using metal with over 6 times more surface area than the test pieces, the holes would have to increase in size. This proved to be quite a challenge, as I didn't have access to punches big enough. I tried using the oxy-propane torch to focus the heat and push the metal over a large mandrel. However, the directional force was wrong and the metal wouldn't split like I wanted it to. I soon realised that the splits came from a punch forcing the metal outwards and down into the swage block. After discovering this, I took to finding whatever I could around the workshop and sending it through the steel with minimal heats. This meant the metal was more brittle and prone to splitting.

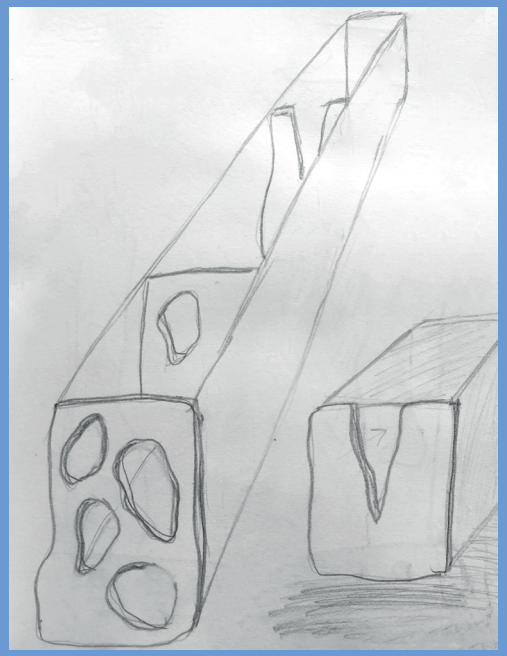

Reflective Surfaces/ How we look at ourselves
Hide behind it
Social Media
Phone Camera
Selfies
Gilding Metal
Silver
Water
Drinks
Alcohol (depression)
Glass
Mirror
Distorted (house of mirrors)
Steel
Photographs
Frame hides some of the image
Windows
Someone else looking out
Bronze
Copper
Acrylic

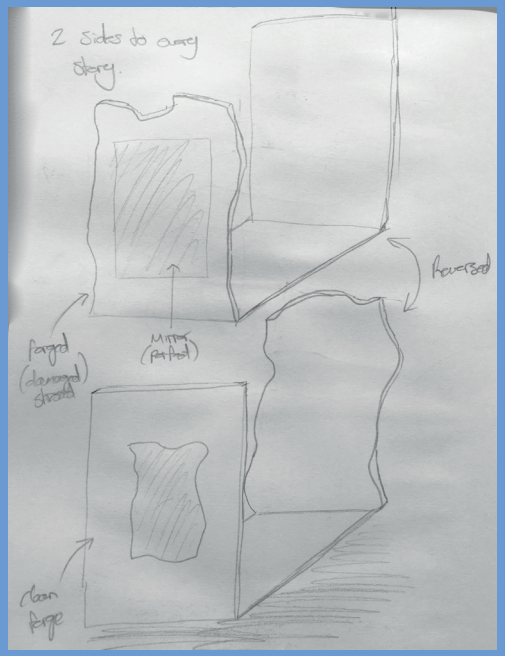






How else could my test samples be used?

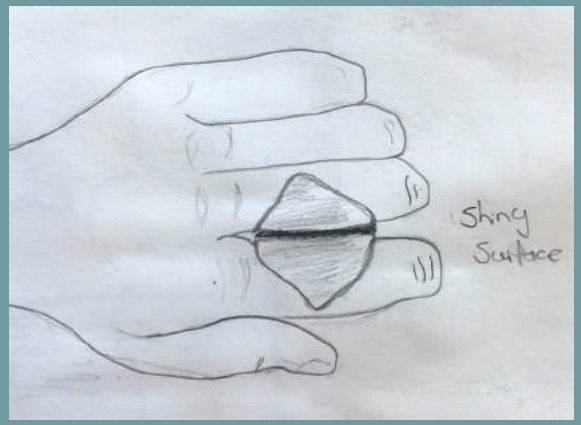




These are some ideas of how the tiles could be transformed into frames and mirrors.By fitting reflective surfaces behind the steel, a frame would be created. It would alter the image that is reflected back as only a small part would be visible through the holes and splits. Alternatively, the reflection could be distorted by rivetting small domes behind the holes. This was inspired by thinking about a House of Mirrors, and how it distorts our image. A similar thing can happen to people who suffer from mental health issues, as they don't see themselves in the same way that other people may.

Exploring Framing, Reflection, Layering, and Composition

Having made a collection of objects, I needed to work out what to do with them. Having established that I could explore reflection and framing, I found a some mirrored acrylic and a piece of copper that I polished until it was reflective. The concave shape and surface texture of the copper meant that it would create a distorted reflection, and would be most responsive to light. The acrylic on the otherhand would reflect perfectly. I experimented with different arrangements, playing with shapes, colour, views, and reflection. I also explored the idea of using the steel as a way of framing a view, and found that focusing the camera through the holes to the landscape created interesting shapes. This is something that I would try again in more refined photographs of the landscape and my work.



Interacting with the Pieces

How do people respond to and interact with the pieces?
How can they be held?

I asked my peers to select a few of the pieces that they most wanted to interact with, and photographed the ways that they held them. It was interesting to see that some fitted nicely into their hands or on their fingers, whilst some were held more delicately, as though they were precious objects. This lead me to think about how my test pieces could be developed into a collection of hand held mirrors.

Finding Frames- Creative Enquiry Research Trip

For this trip I wanted to focus on photographing the following things:

- A carefully chosen view
- Looking through objects to create frames
- Reflections in or of a landscape

I went on three research walks with the intention of photographing frames and reflections. These were from Burnsall to Linton Falls in the Yorkshire Dales, across Willow Tree Fen in Spalding, Lincolnshire, and around White Coppice in the Lancashire moors. The varying features of these very different landscapes meant that I could have different focuses. In Yorkshire, I was particularly interested in the gates and stys, and the contrast between the fields and sky. I was lucky enough to be out on a very sunny and clear day, so the colours were spectacular. In Lancashire, the nature of the moors meant there wasn't much to use as a frame. For this reason, I experimented with reflections, and used a mirror to alter the landscape by positioning it so that the view behind me would appear to be in front. I also explored how I could position this reflection, as I could eithertry to match the horizons up almost seamlessly, or purposefully misalign them.

Pre-Existing Frames

When walking across Willow Tree Fen just outside of Spalding, Lincolnshire, I found shed-like buildings with large panoramic windows. I took this as another approach to framing the landscape, because instead of me choosing a location to frame and then photographing it, the view had been pre-selected. I also used the knots in the wood of the sheds as a frame, to explore shapes and composition. The dark interior of the viewing areas allowed me to get a stark contrast between the landscape and the frame, and made the outdoors the sole focus. It was interesting to look through each window and see that the view changed quite dramatically, and how the dimensions of the windows were made to best capture the view. For example, in the top right photo, the less panoramic frame allows for a deeper view, making the varying layers of the landscape visable. The long panoramic frame of the bottom right photo shows the grassland remaining the same over a large span of land, and the vertical dimension suggests that this same geology continues right into the foreground and until the trees in the background.

Concepts gained from Research Trip

Perspective and Perception

There are two sides to every story

1 Frame, 2 Views

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder

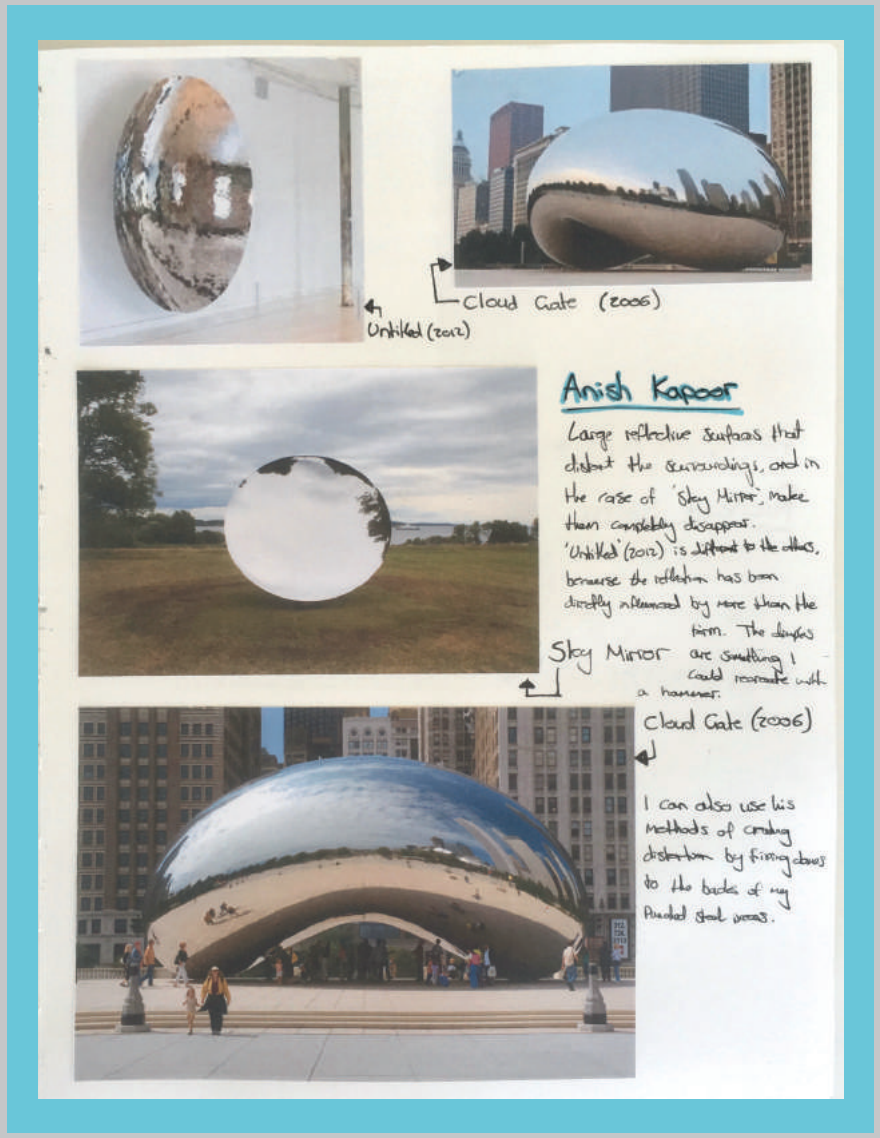
Altered Reality/ Identity

Forging new paths

Allowing the past to be part of the future

How do we see ourselves?

Artist research- Anish Kapoor



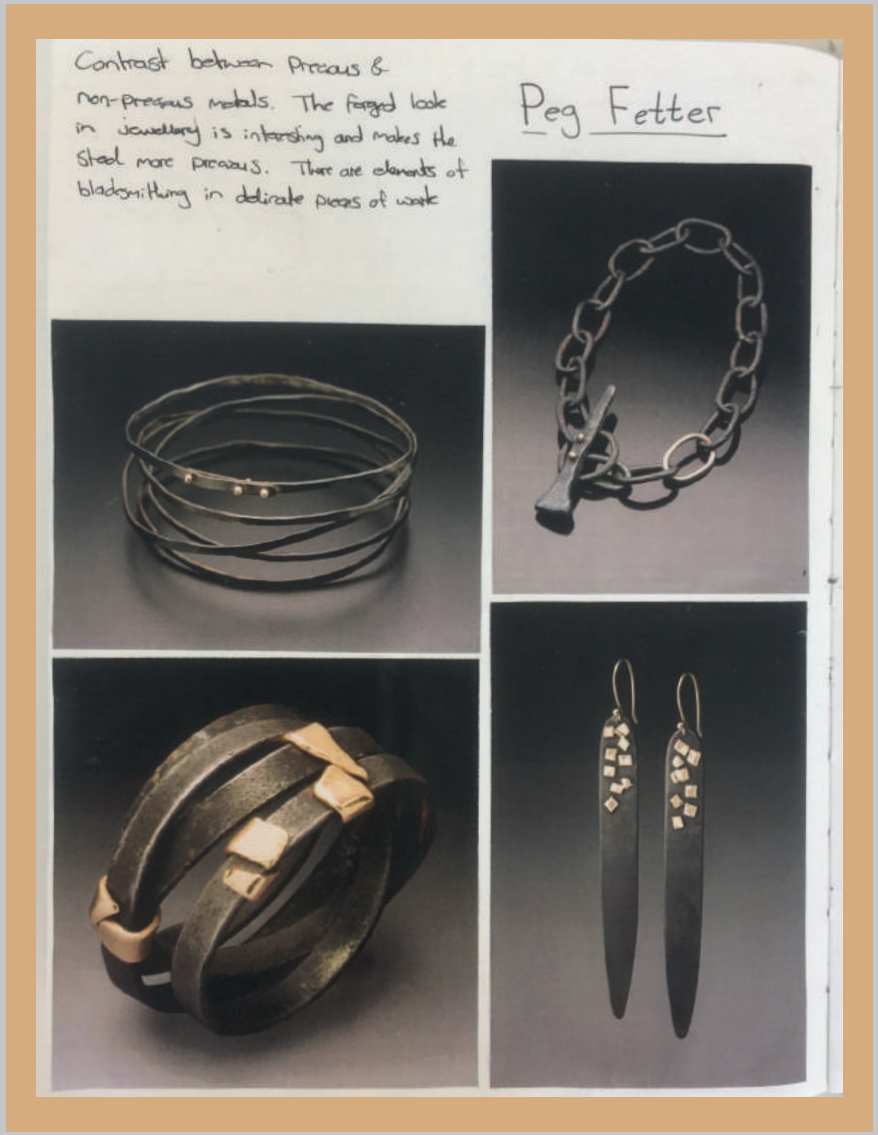
Distortion in Reflection

Anish Kapoor is known for his large scale public sculptures, which often play with mirroring, reflection, and distortion. He is of particaular intest to me because of the way in which he alters what is reflected, by using concave and convex stainless steel forms. The position that he installs his work in completely distorts the surroundings, or in the case of 'Sky Mirror' (2009) makes it disappear. This is something that I explored during my research trip walks through the Yorkshire and Lancashire countryside. My own work features a degree of distortion, either because of the shape of the areas that have been polished to a mirror finish, or because of the form of the added reflective metal.

Unconventional Mirrors- Mirror Finish

When thinking about making mirrors, I had initially been quite unimaginative. I took the literal approach of finding or making something like sheet material reflective, then using my work as a frame. I then considered making the work itself a mirror, and so filed, sanded and polished different areas until I could see my reflection. By working on small areas of my punched steel, I made reflective surfaces that require the viewer to be very focussed on finding the angle and distance that allows the reflection to be seen. By doing so, I hope to encourage them to really look at what they see, and hopefully grow to like the feature that is seen.

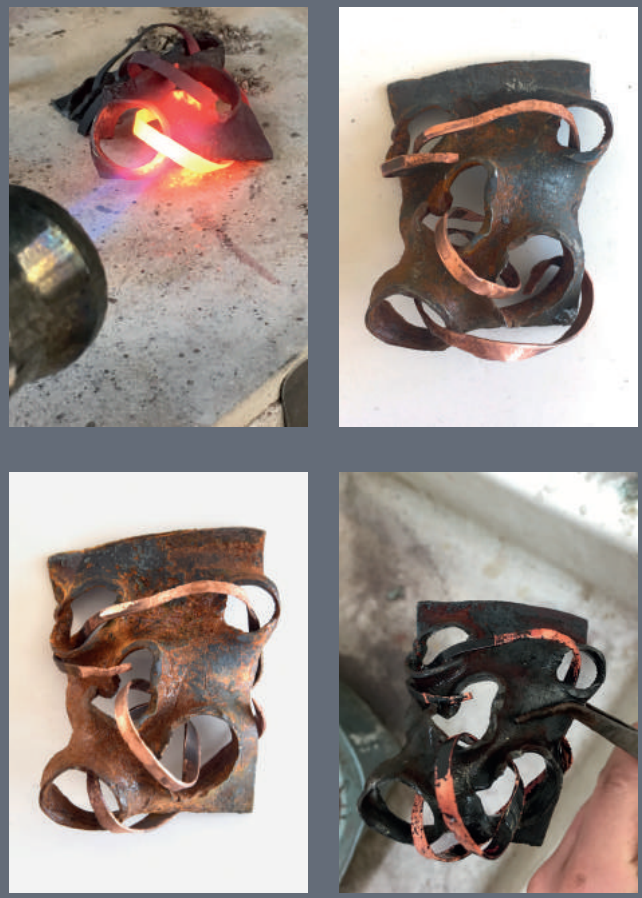
Artist research- Peg Fetter



Exploring the 'precious'

Peg Fetter adds small amounts of precious metals to steel jewellery, which gives greater value and delicacy to otherwise raw looking pieces. The contrast that is created has a similar effect to what I am doing, in that it adds an element that catches an audiences eye and asks them to question the intentions. Personally, the addition of a precious metal to raw steel creates the impression that there is something good and special even in seemingly unimportant or overlooked things. In terms of mental health, this is the positive and lightness in dark and testing times. Metaphorically, the light at the end of the tunnel, the calm before the storm, to be in the eye of the storm.

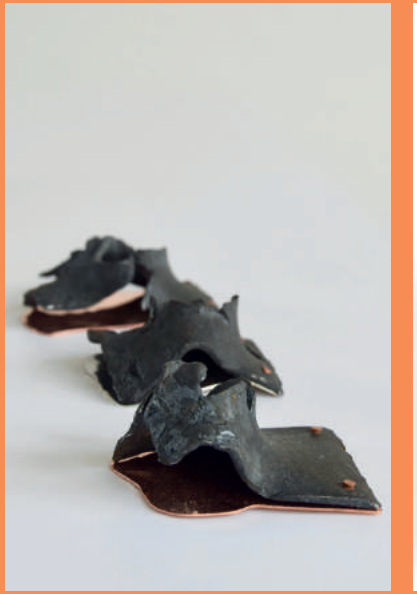
Unconventional Mirrors- Adding Reflective Materials



Threading the copper through the holes of my steel pieces was completely unplanned, as I found some scrap in the workshop and started playing with it. I decided that I quite liked the contrasting colours, and that the weaving lightness was suggestive of small glimmers of hope in an otherwise dark time. I intended to make resolved pieces with copper and silver, however, when I made a refined version, something about it wasn't working for me. After wondering whether it was because the copper was too neat (I filed and sanded the edges so it looked more finished), I melted the edges slightly to see if it would sit better within the steel. Even after I re-polished the copper, I wasn't happy with the outcome. For this reason I decided not to continue with the piece, and instead focused on developing and finishing up other elements of my body of work.

Hidden Mirrors

The backing idea came from when I was thinking about frames, and how I could alter the reflection that we see in mirrors. In order to see a reflection through the chiseled holes, the viewer must be quite close. Because of the size of the holes, it is only really possible to see a reflection of the eyes. This links back to a conversation that took place when I was seeing school counsellors. I was asked to identify one thing about me that I liked, and after much consideration, I eventually said 'my eyes'. I still think about this because I struggled for a long time before giving my answer, and even now I couldn't answer honestly. It is for this reason that I chose to make reflective objects that encourage the viewer to focus on a specific part of their face, so that they can see the positives in their image. The rivets, unlike those in my laminated pieces, are neat and well-formed. The backings themselves are cut and filed to the shsape and size of the steel that sits above them. Both of these factors give a refinement to the pieces, and also keeps the reflection contained within the punched holes. Developing this idea led me to include a silver backing, which adds to the preciousness of the object and the reflection looking back.

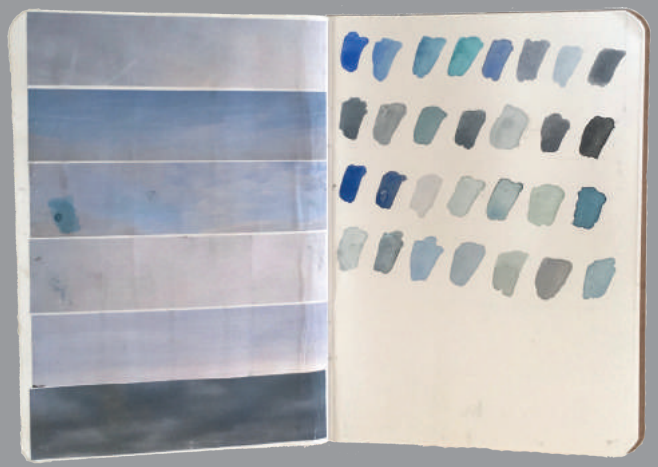


Using the Damascus

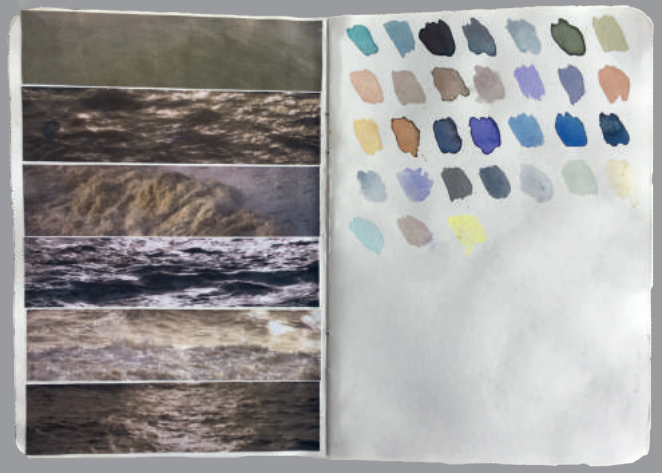
I made the damascus after thinking about how different metals could represent emotions, ie. light/dark, happy/sad, healthy/unhealthy. It took a while for me to decide on how best to use my billet to it's full potential, but I eventually chose to make a ring. Not only would this be hugely satisfying (I would have a piece of jewellery that I could wear and potentially sell), but it also allowed me to learn new techniques such as lathing, and doming the edges of the inner lining. The silver liner serves two purposes: making the steel ring wearable and less prone to rust and discolouration of the skin, and also adding a hidden reflection. This then links back to the other reflective items that I have made. Putting the ring in coffee (seen above) brought out the darker steel, increasing the contrast with the lighter, high carbon steel. I intend on making more of these rings from the same billet, with each one being unique because of the damascus pattern.

Photographing Colour and Texture in the Landscape

Because I tend to go for walks most weekends, I decided to use the opportunity to continue doing research that could influence my work. The colours in the sea and sky were of particular interest to me because I find them the most relaxing to watch. Below are some pages from a small sketchbook where I cropped photos to focus on colour.

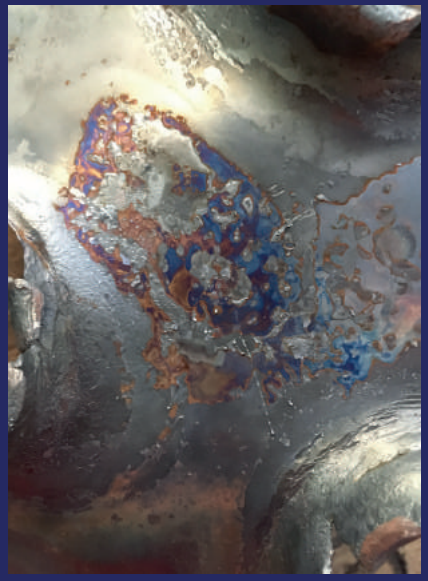


I then used watercolours to try to understand how the various colours could be made, and realised that there were many more colours present in the photographs that I hadn't initially seen. After doing this, I could then try to add some colour into my steel, either by using enamel, heat, or chemicals.



Exploring Colour and Texture

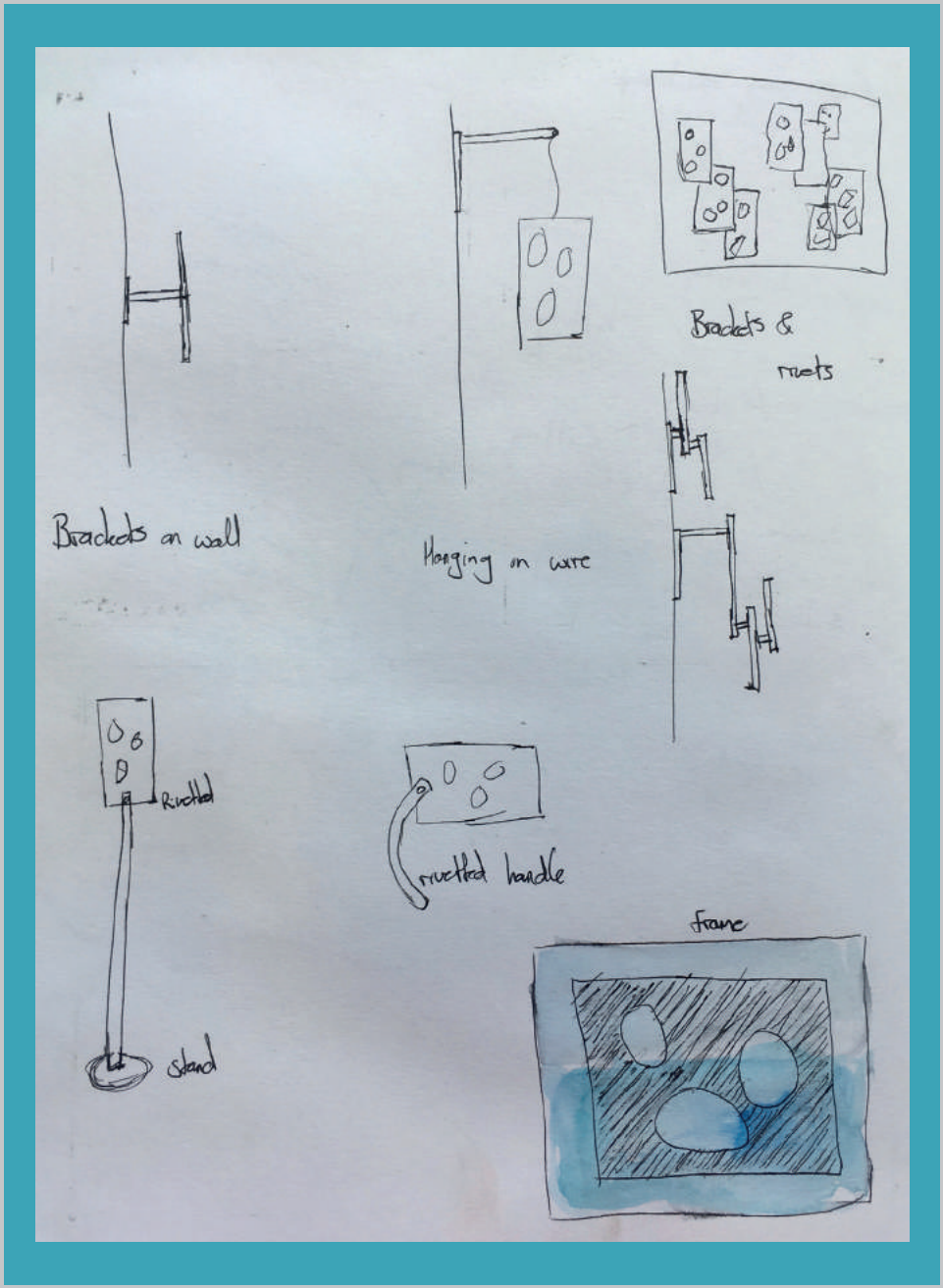


Enamel is often used on metals such as silver and copper, where the surface can be properly cleaned, which helps the enamel to adhere. Using forged steel created a whole host of problems, because it is very difficult to clean. I didn't really want a smooth and even coat of enamel, so I experimented with putting on lots of coats whilst the metal was hot, which caused the enamel to chip and spring off when the steel cooled. This created some interesting effects, especially when it bubbled and burned. However, it made the pieces very fragile, as a small knock lead to the colour breaking off. A better option would be to focus on a small area, clean it up properly and just have a hint of colour. I also experimented with other ways of adding colour and texture to my work, with heat, rust, and acid etching. Heat creates a variety of colours, from light straws, deep blues and purples, and can loosely be controlled. I struggled with the rust, even after shotblasting the surface so the rust could take hold more easily. I used a saline solution, but it didn't work as well as I had hoped. Using the acid also didn't work as well as I had hoped, and I think it was because there was too much suface area. In order to acieve the texture that I was hoping for, I might have been better to reduce this area with some resist, so that the etch would focus more on the bare surfaces

Putting my work in the landscape

Given that I find so much comfort in being outdoors, I decided to take some of my work out to see how it looked in the landscape. I found playing with focus very interesting, as I could alter how the metal acted as a frame. By focusing on the landscape, particularly through a punched hole, my work in the foreground blurred, creating unique forms that framed the hillside. The contrast between the serene landscape and the work, particularly the steel, is very effective. I am also intrigued by the way the blur becomes part of the Downs. When photographing my work in focus, it sits quite well in the East Sussex Downs. By altering my position, I could play with scale, making the small tiles look larger than they actually are.



Displaying My Work- Exhibition Ideas

My first thoughts with regards to displaying my work in the Degree Show were about how to mount my 'Emotions in Steel' series. At this time, I was still working with my large punched pieces that I had welded onto long rods, and I had experienced how unstable they were, and how they couldn't simply be stood or balanced against a wall. I therefore considered using brackets to mount them to the wall, which would not only be safe, but would allow me to create depth through layering. I also thought about combining this line of work with the landscape photography that I had done, by using the punched steel as frames. However, upon further consideration, I decided to discontinue this line of work in order to focus on the other three elements of my project. Having made this decision, I had to think about how the smaller pieces would be displayed. I knew that I wanted them to create an experience, and so I had to put some distance between the work and the audience. It is for this reason that I looked at Cornelia Parker, and the possibility of making an installation from them.

Artist Research- Cornelia Parker

Cornelia Parker

There is something quite eerie about her work, particularly the ways in which it hangs, suspended. There are deep meanings behind each piece, such as blowing up a 'safe space' in the form of a shed in 'Cold Dark Matter'. Many of the objects blown up with the shed had a personal significance, or were stored in there then forgotten about.

A Side of England, 1999 →

← Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View. 1991

The explosion was recreated by hanging the fragments on invisible wire, and which was then lit by a single lightbulb, creating large & haunting shadows. This is something I will consider and explore. Another of my favourite works by Parker is Hanging Fire, which takes charred wood from a case of suspected arson. The composition creates movement, not dissimilar to smoke, or something falling from the sky and breaking apart. The uniform construction provides a stark contrast with the chaotic fragments, and also gives it a stronger order. This order is a common theme in the exhibition of Parkers work, as no matter how unorderly the individual components, they are always arranged in geometric (often hanging) forms. I hope to be able to use elements of Parkers work in my own, particularly her use of chaos hidden meanings within the very fabric of the work and light / shadows.

Hanging Fire (suspected Arson), 1999

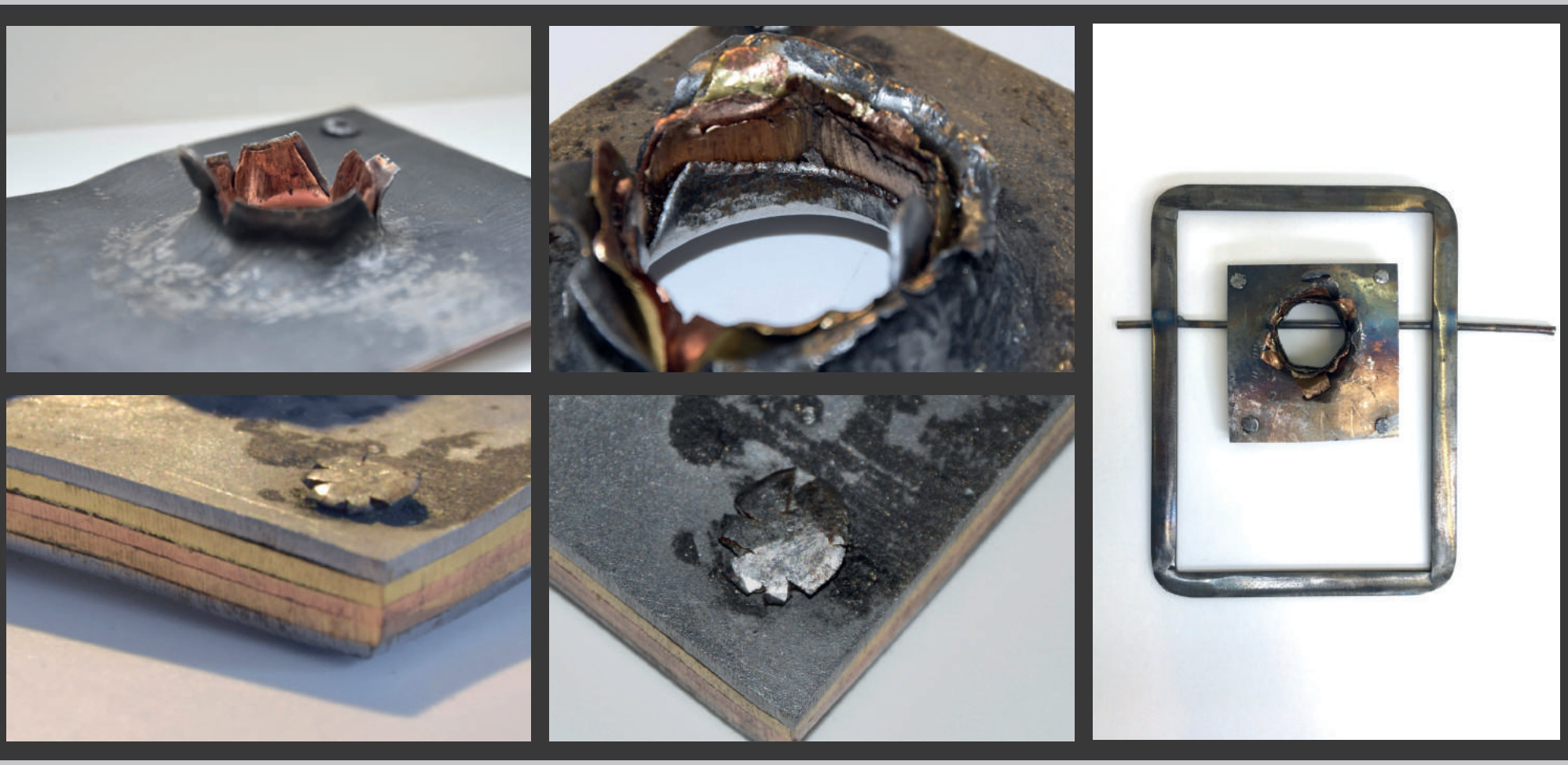
Neither From Nor Towards, 1992

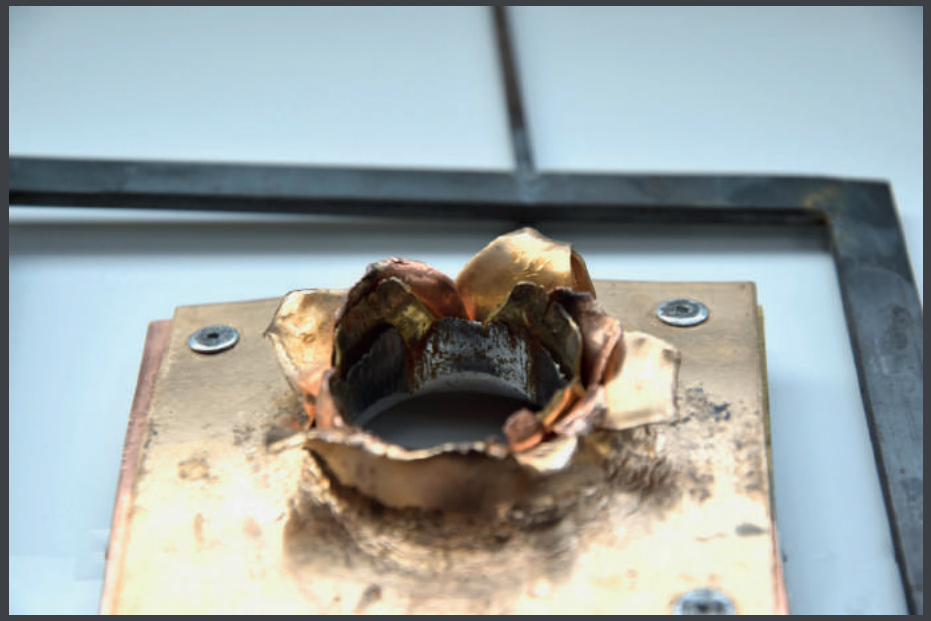
Installation

After seeing the work of Cornelia Parker, I began to think about how I could display my steel tiles as an installation. Not only would this be more practical for the Degree Show, I found that the shadows and movement created by the way in which they were hung complimented the work well. By hanging my punched tiles to the roof of a box with thin fishing wire, they looked suspended in mid-air and moved freely, which when a light was introduced, produced almost ghostly shadows. With the introduction of the copper piece, I hoped to convey light, clarity, hope and positivity amongst the chaos of the steel, and be representative of phrases such as 'a diamond amongst the rough' , 'light at the end of the tunnel' , and 'in the eye of the storm'. I think this works very well, and would be even more effective if I had a single spotlight shining onto the copper, simultaniously creating shadows across the steel. When setting up this installation, I can explore different ways of arranging the steel. I think it is more effective when there isnt any order, and when the space is full, as it fits with the overarching theme of depression and the confusion and chaos that often comes with it.

Laminated Pieces Tests

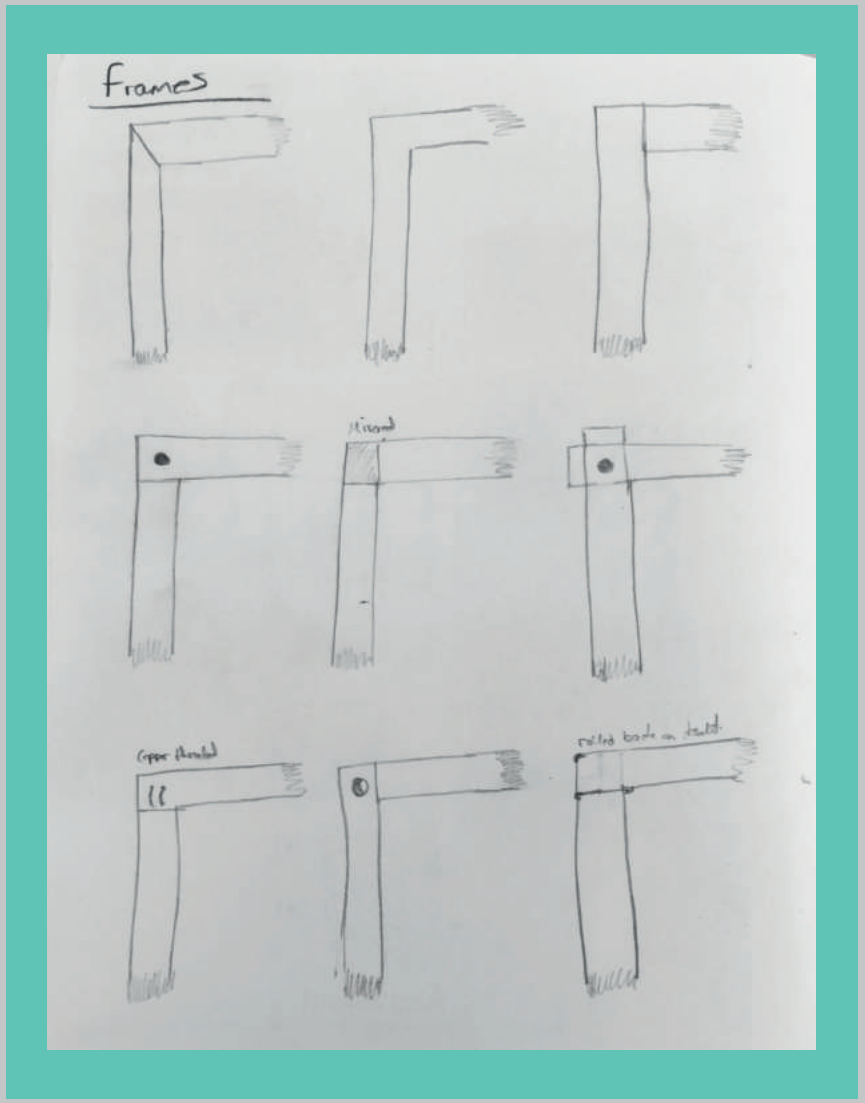
Given that I had already punched straight through copper sheet (as seen in the installation test), I knew that it stretched much more before splitting. I therefore wondered how it would look if the copper was punched at the same time as the steel, and whether it would stretch beyond the sheet steel. I layered the steel on top of the copper for an initial test to see how it look (top left photograph). The success of this test prompted me to think about how other metals would react, hence the introduction of brass and gilding metal. When all four are punched through at the same time and without heat, the colours of the metal are visible in the splits, and turn out slightly polished because of the friction of the steel punch. Using a variety of punches and chisels, I peeled some of the splits open more, revealing the layers to a greater degree. This gives me the opportunity to polish some of the surfaces if I wanted to.

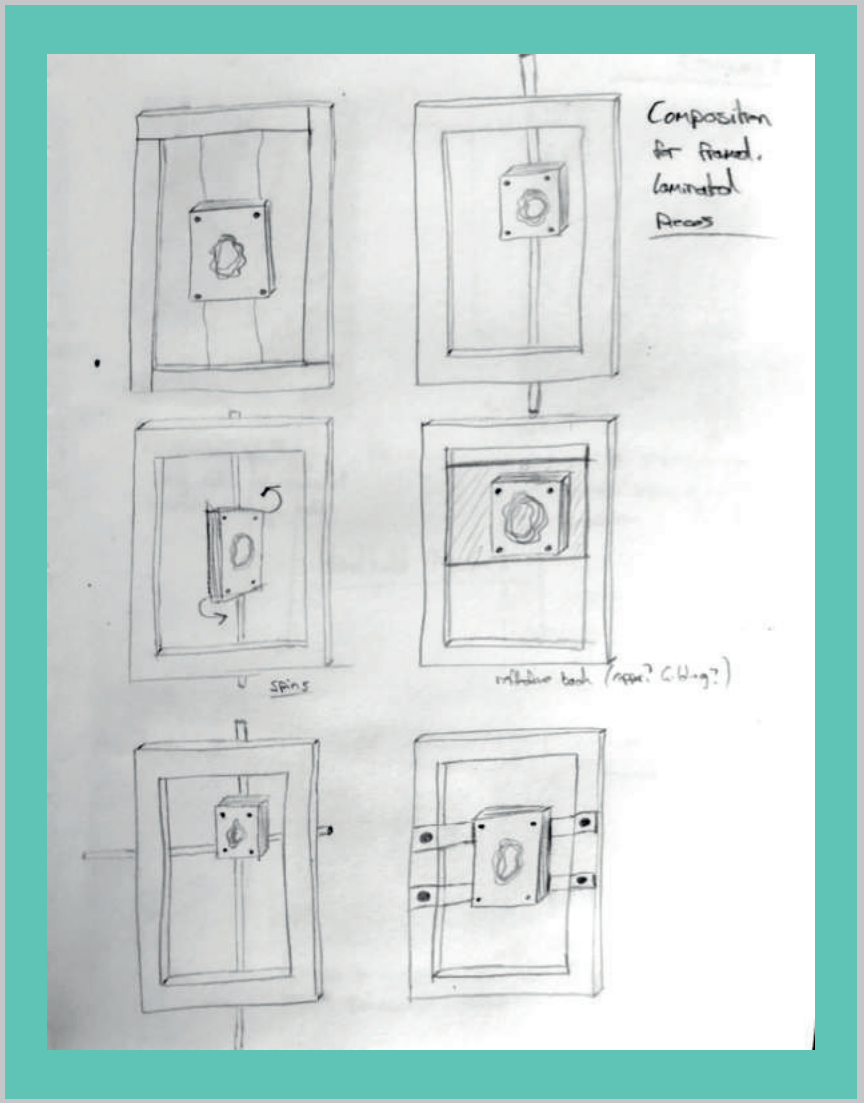




During the punching process, some of the layers buckled and shifted, meaning the edges were no longer square. In order to contain this and make them into pieces that look finished, I fabricated a simple mild steel frame, which is a polar opposite to the punch in the middle. On some of my tests (as seen in the previous slide) I ground the edges of the layers back so that they are flush and square, but this didn't work well with the frame. I think that this is probably because grinding them square creates a frame in itself, so the steel one is no longer necessary. The rod connecting the punched sheets to the frame has several functions. Not only is it structurally integral, but it provides an extra compositional element that is representative of something strong, constant and reliable amongst all of the emotion that is evident in the punch. Throughout this series, I will experiment with the positioning of this rod in relation to the frame and the laminated centre piece.

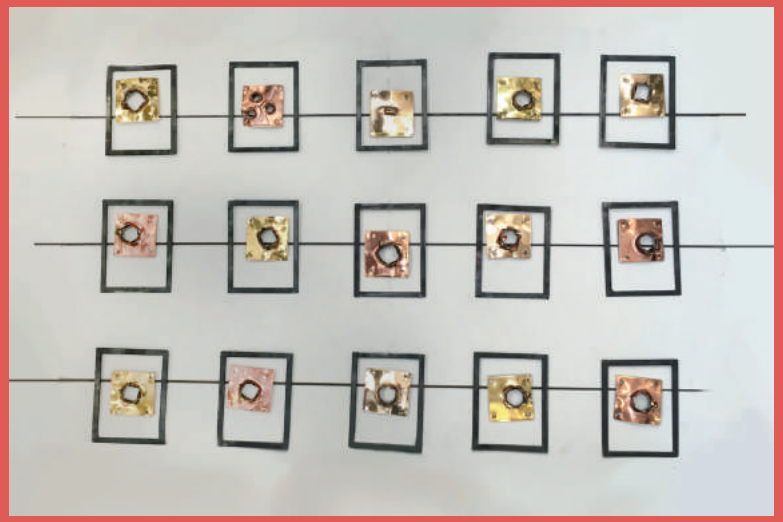
Frame and Composition Ideas





Making the Frames

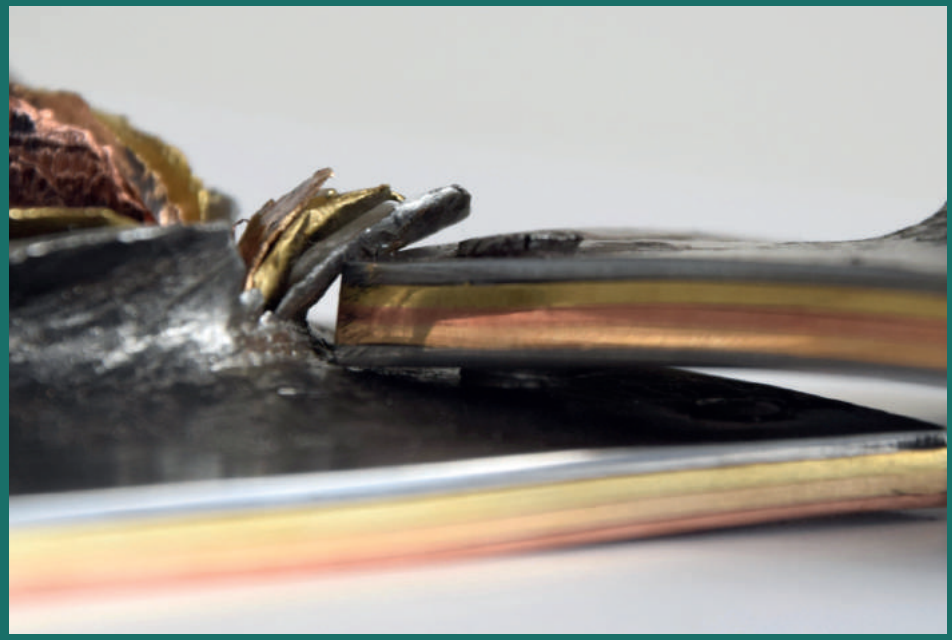
Degree Show Planning- Frames



When I started thinking about how I would display my frames, I was going to have each one hung seperately on the wall. However, I was struggling to think of how they would be installed. Welding a hook, loop or rods (that could be fitted into the wall) to the back would risk warping the frame, and I didn't really want to have to resort to simple nails that the frames could be hooked onto. I therefore laid them out on the workshop floor and discovered that the rods that connect the punched layers to the frames could run all the way through each row. This would make the piece work better as a whole, reduce the number of rods going in different directions as originally planned and make installation easier.

Using Spare Punched Layers as Mirrors

After making the piece that would go on the wall, I had a small collection of punched, laminated pieces left over. Some of them already had reflected surfaces on them as a result of the punching process (the action of the metal rubbing against either the punch or the other layers polishes it), and some I hand polished myself. These hidden mirrors act in the same way as those on the steel punches, as the audience must handle and explore the pieces in order to find their reflection. The different colours, hammer marks (marks of making) and the expressive punch make these pieces interesting, and I hope that audiences will enjoy interacting with them whilst also thinking about the meaning behind the punch and the subtle reflections.



Displayed together, these pieces are colourful, eyecatching, and engaging, a stark contrast to the steel pieces that will be shown nearby. Upon closer inspection, audiences will become aware of the small reflective areas, and will see themselves in perfectly square and polished edges, or slightly damaged surfaces of the punch.