



No Thing Some Thing

Samuel. S. Kent

The Opening Gates

This project began with the notion of meditative making, using a certain headspace to produce fluid forms. At this point, I did not consider myself a sculpture artist, I was just a maker.

I had spent my summer reading philosophy, generally centered around Taoism and Zen, therefore my influences were heavily literature based.

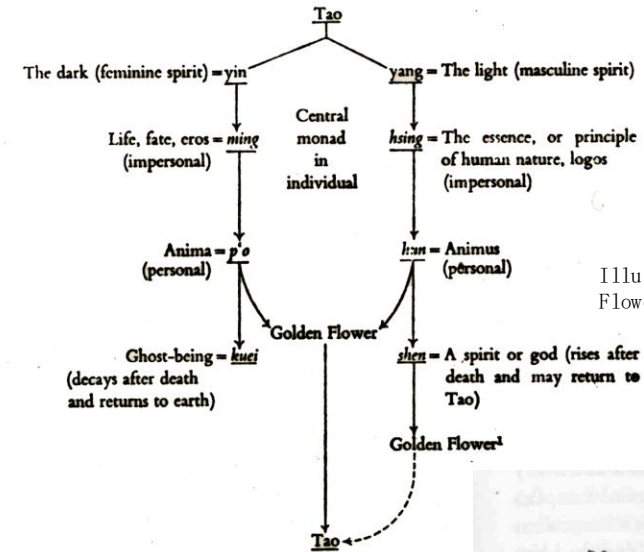
I knew these Eastern concepts would propel my work onwards, but I was adamant that I would move on from Eastern philosophy so as to not let that define my work.

To begin with I was stuck in a mindset, refusing to research artists to develop a body of visual research. I was fearful that I would find myself copying the styles of others. I believed my influences should arise naturally from my experiences. This viewpoint began to alter over time.

Some key titles I read:



Diagram of the Chinese concepts concerned with the development of the Golden Flower, or immortal spirit-body



Illustrations from 'The Secret of the Golden Flower - The Chinese book of Life'



Za-Zen

Sitting and Watching



Za-zen is a meditative Zen concept of ‘sitting and watching’ your internal self. Meditation is letting your mind be; thoughts will come and go; you cannot force judgement upon your feelings. Step outside of yourself and watch your mind think and flow as if they were clouds and you are lying on a grass verge watching them float by.

I aim to find a similar flowing state in making where not only do my thoughts do as they wish but so do my hands. A state of flow allows one to dissolve into the act of making, to find oneself in the sculpture. It is as if I do not make the decision of action but instead something else is acting through me. Each piece made is born from my internal landscape, like all these thoughts that cannot be put into words manage to flow out of my hands and into an abstract physical format. It’s a cathartic process that flows in all directions, I learn something from the metal and the metal has learnt its form from me; there was no tension in the flow state, only a sharing of energy.

Meditative Making – Tai Chi

Tai Chi is a movement meditation where the mind, body and 'spirit' are allowed to work in unison.

Focusing your energy and thoughts solely on the precise movements of your body, confines you to the present and releases energy causing a meditative effect.

Applying the concepts of Tai Chi to forging and sculpture could allow me to find a relaxed, possibly meditative, state where the creation of a form is caused equally by the material, the process, myself and all other surrounding energies.



Organic Order

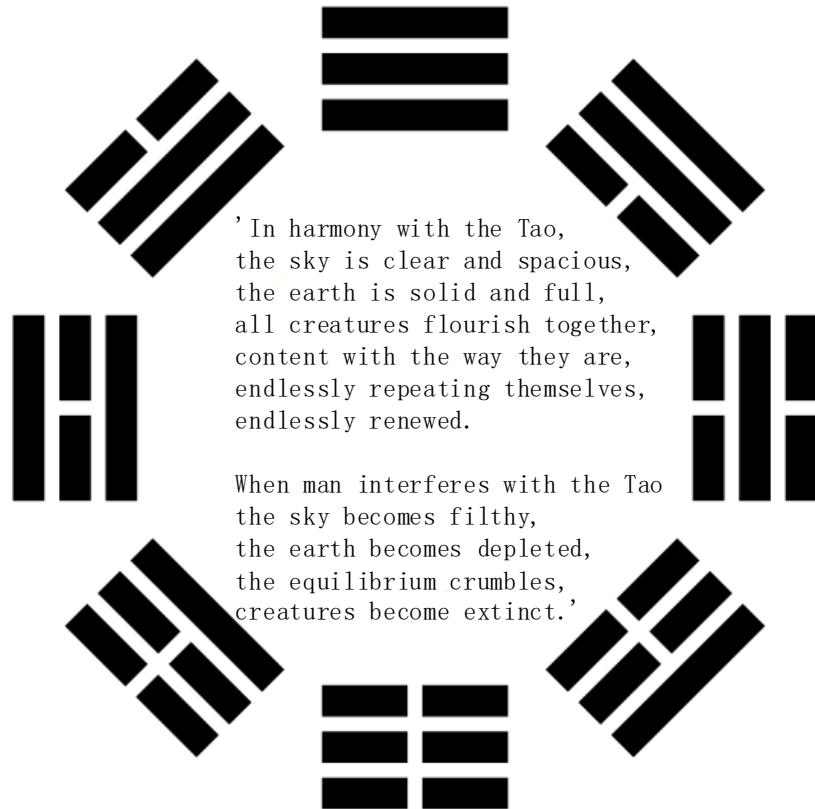
Organic Order; that which arises naturally because of its natural properties. Water makes no effort to reflect your image, smoke makes no decision to move with the fluidity that it does.

In the same respect, I aim to make no conscious decision, but for my mind and hands to discover form from material effortlessly. Thus, creating organic order.



Li

Li represents Fire and organic pattern; it is the pattern of behaviour which comes about when something is in accord with the Tao. For example, the way smoke rises, or the way water flows.



'In harmony with the Tao, the sky is clear and spacious, the earth is solid and full, all creatures flourish together, content with the way they are, endlessly repeating themselves, endlessly renewed.'

When man interferes with the Tao the sky becomes filthy, the earth becomes depleted, the equilibrium crumbles, creatures become extinct.'

Li and Kan are two of the eight trigrams from the Taoist text the I-Ching, meaning 'book of changes', an ancient text of Chinese divination.

Each of the eight trigrams is represented by three lines either solid or broken. The broken line represents Yin and solid, Yang.

Li and Kan are opposites, lying in harmony with each other.

Kan

Kan represents water and our basic trust. It is connected to the experiences that lie beyond our daily consciousness. It causes impulses, and inspirations emerge from Kan which may trigger decisions or initiate actions. Following this gut feeling causes our actions to have a special quality, it may feel truer to your inner self.



A pair of rings made in second year, these are the trigram symbols for Li and Kan.

Wu-wei

Wu-wei literally translates to 'No-Action' or 'without force'. The idea being that by letting things run their natural course, a universal harmony is established.

Wu-wei begins with a mental state; as a maker you find the freedom to act naturally by understanding decision and action as two parts of the same system, they arise mutually.

While I may forcefully bend mental into shape with my hands, the act remains natural to me, happening without hesitation. Therefore, this practice of Wu-wei helps the object continue as an extension of the I myself*.

*The I myself refers to more than just me, but as if I am gesturing to my entire being; mind, body, and whatever spirit you may or may not believe in.

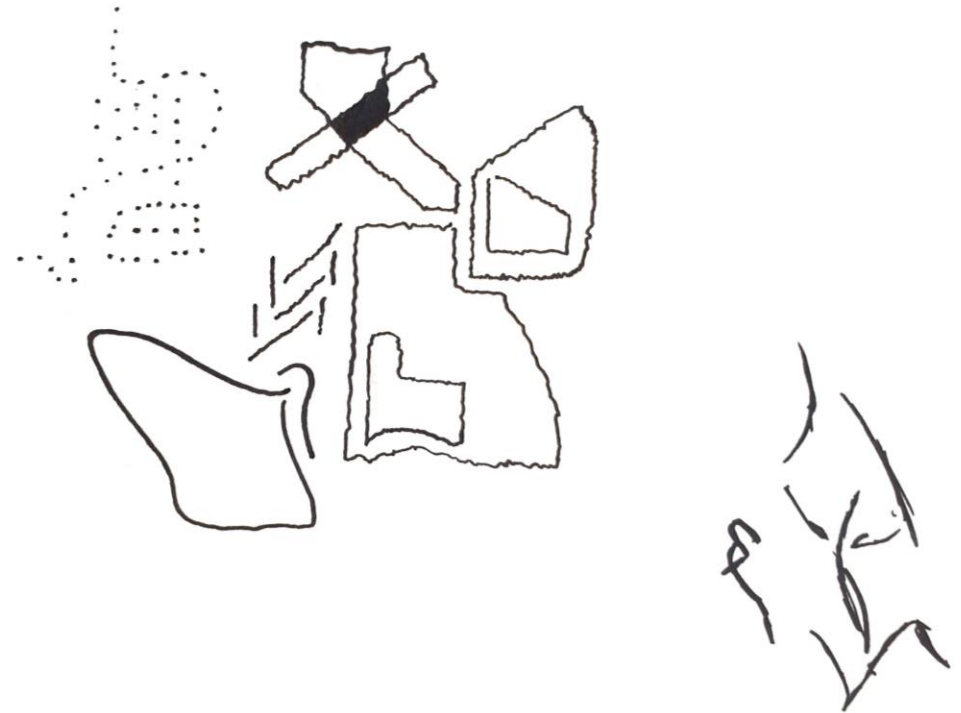


Intuition

'the ability to understand something instinctively, without the need for conscious reasoning'.

I use intuitive making as if all the factors taking part in the process predetermine the result. I just avoid complicating the process by questioning or judging my actions.

Like all this information that I have gathered and stored consciously or unconsciously finally has a medium of expression. My internal state, something which has been continuously developing throughout my life, was being given permission to find itself in steel.



Haiku

Wild geese do not intend
to cast their reflection upon the
water
no mind to receive image.

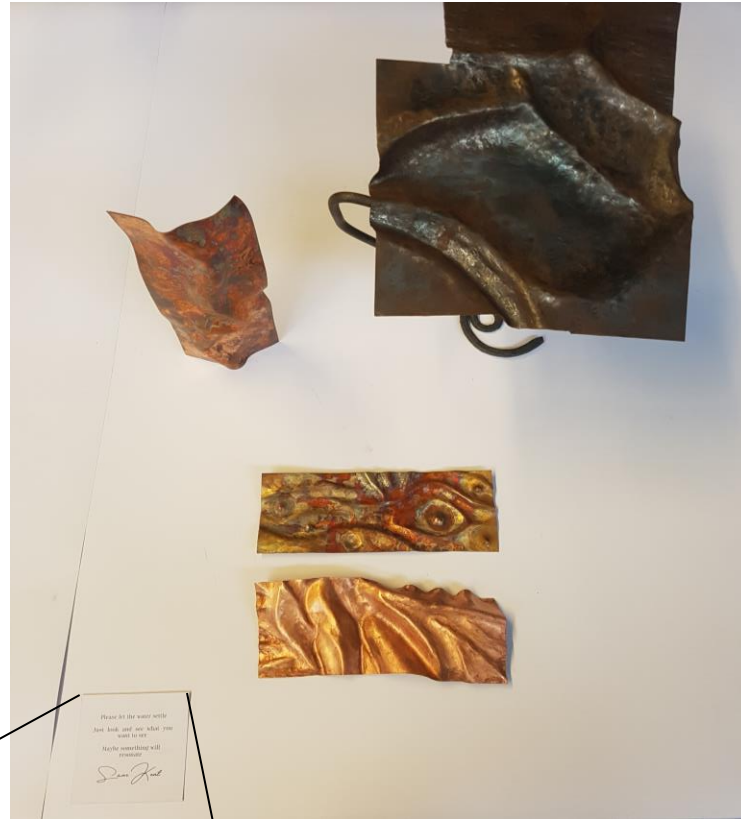
Adapted Haiku by Zenrin Kushu

It's said when reading a Haiku you must still your mind before reading it, with the aim of removing preconceptions. So to gain its full essence. It allows your mind to absorb what the poem is trying to convey without going about the academic route of linear deduction. In a way it makes you intuitively understand the poem.



Propositions

I care THAT you think
Not WHAT you think.



*'Please let the water settle
Just see what you want to see
Maybe something will resonate'*

I wrote my statement for the propositions set up in the style of a haiku.

I hoped for my pieces to be viewed in the same manner that a haiku is read. With a still mind.

My statements purpose is to let people know there is no positive definition of my work, it just *is*.



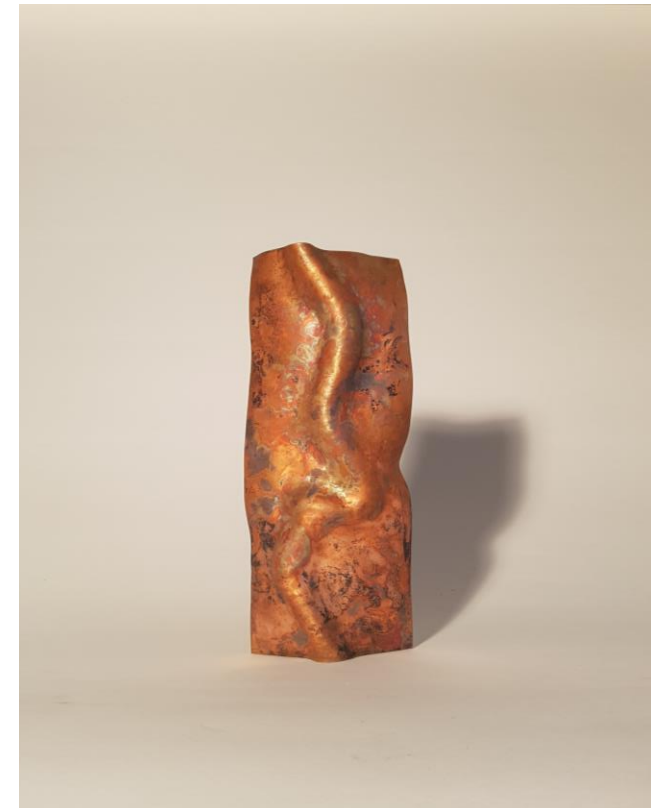
Developing my Style

My process of creation was very intuitive and because of this it caused my process of reflection to work similarly.

Seeing my work displayed in our proposition's exhibition made me quickly realise this large piece that took up hours of my time was over complicated and, in general I felt naturally disconnected from it.



My attention was drawn to this piece, causing me to reassess the beauty and the aesthetics of my work.

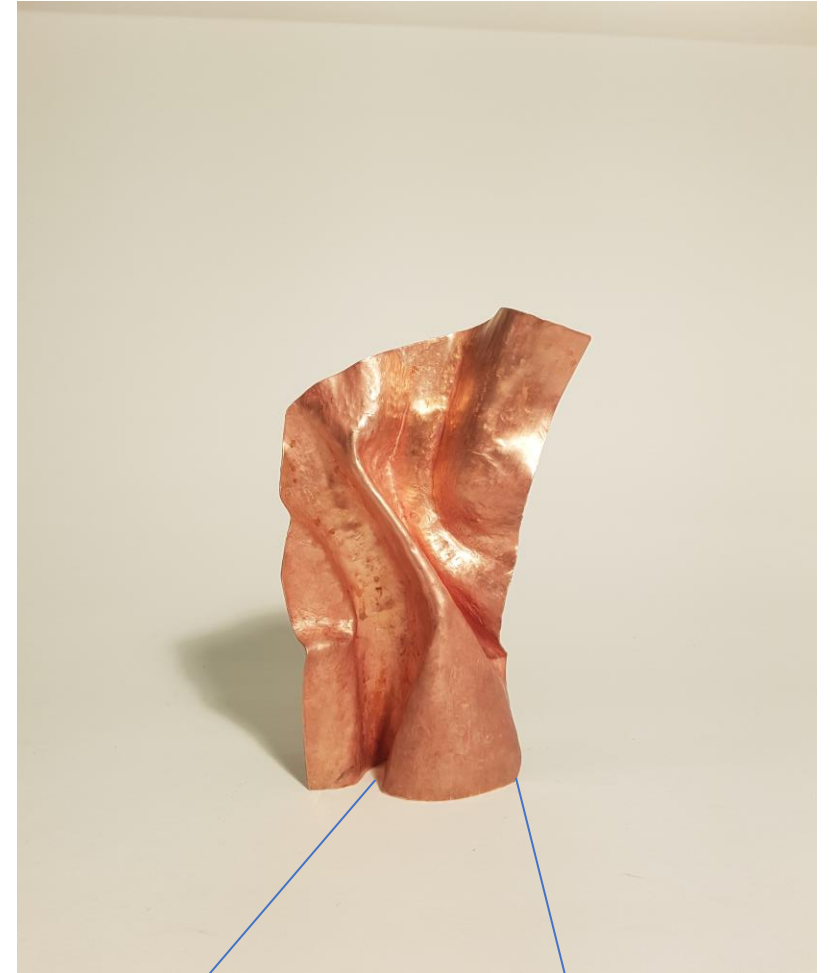


On the left is the first shape I felt a strong connection with. Occasionally, I will be at home or on a walk and I start to make something in my head, seeing form that morphs out of the fleeting lines and shapes in my mind. These are usually the most organic forms I create. I can't sketch them because that will blur the purity of the concept that's in my head. I wait until I can be in the workshop and then produce the form from memory.



This same piece then influenced Simplicity in my work. I realized the metal needed to feel effortless and weightless, like it's made from fabric.

These fabric-like forms began to feel monolithic, as if they could be towering over you. This caused me to experiment more with scale.



I became engrossed in this aspect of form, it seemed effeminate and alluring to the eye.

Simplicity and Scale

I began to forge larger shapes, trying to create these monolithic sculptures. I was limited by the tools I had and my ability to maneuver the metal by myself.



I also experimented with making simplistic forms. The two pieces above, I felt dissatisfied with, but I knew I wanted to continue to strive for simplicity.

Constantin Brâncuși

An excellent example of beautiful simplicity is 'Bird in Space'; one of Brâncuși's most famous sculptures that was originally created in 1923.

Brâncuși focused on the movement of a bird over the detail of its form. This sculpture is a distillation of a bird's essence as it prepares for flight.

I find form that's been inspired and refined to a point where the origin of its inspiration becomes almost unrecognisable, wonderfully alluring.

I believe by depicting a known form, preconceptions and judgements become tangled within the sculpture. Our minds try to make connections, so a sculpture of a man could be recognised as a friend or trigger a memory.

I prefer abstraction because a memory takes people into their mind and out of the room. I want people to remain present with the sculpture and see it for what it is without the fog of preconception.



Constantin Brâncuși -
Bird in Space, the Met Museum
(last accessed 10.05.20)

Sketchbook approach to making



Since I was making intuitively, I saw each piece I created as a sequential addition to my sketchbook. Everything was a test piece, an experiment, continuously building upon its predecessor.

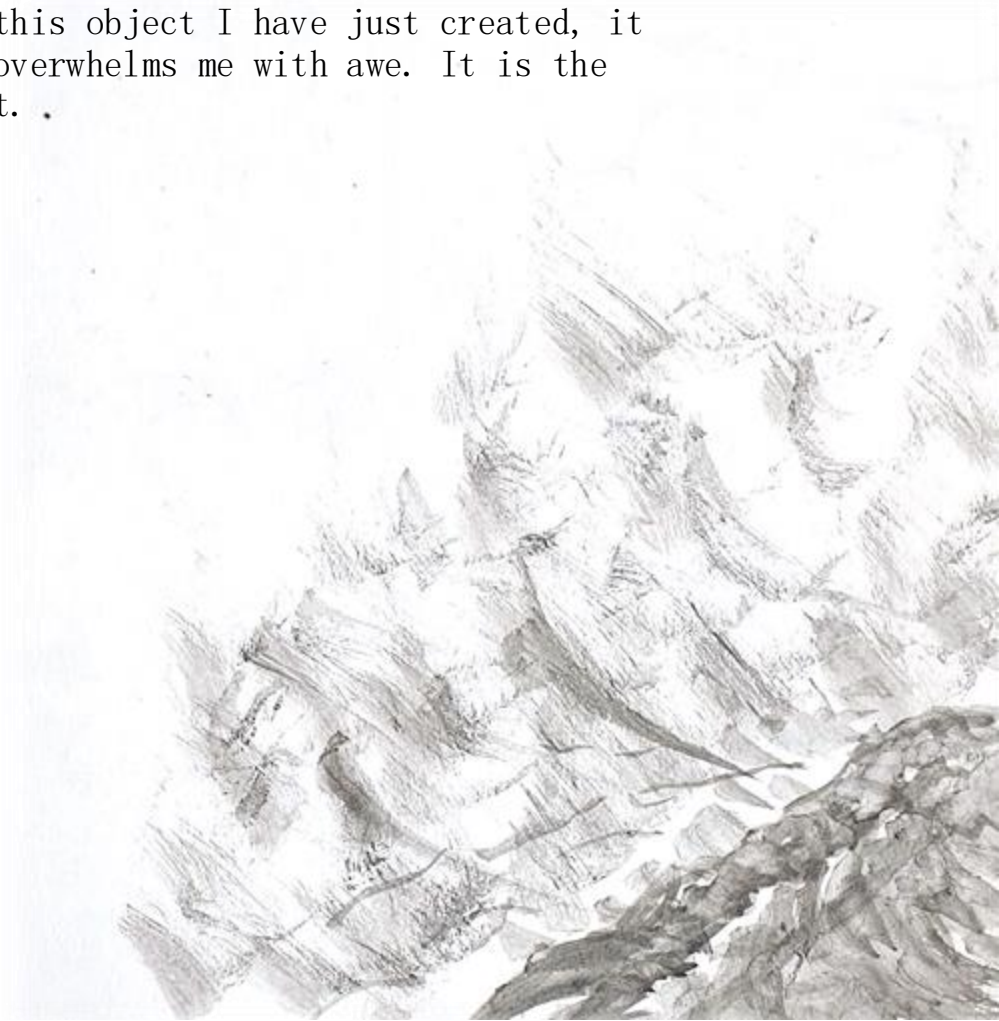
I wanted to chronologically number each piece to highlight this approach, but as the project progressed, I decided that although each piece was a part of a continual output, they all had their own identity. Therefore, some would remain nameless and some would have a name unique to itself.

This approach created a mindset of betterment, I found myself trying to *outdo* whatever piece was previously made. Focusing on the outcome was toxic and counterintuitive. Therefore, I aimed to connect with the process more viscerally, without placing any pressure on myself to create a finished piece, this began to lead me down the route of making in the 'flow state'. I also found this caused a distillation and refinement of my work.

The Flow State

To find a balance in creativity, so that decision and action arise mutually. This cultivates a state of flow. This flow state allows the maker to step outside of themselves and see their movements as if they are a medium, not the source. Like someone is pouring these thoughts into your being, wanting you to give them shape.

After all, to be lost in the act of making, to purge myself of emotion and to see myself in this object I have just created, it teaches me, it amazes me, it overwhelms me with awe. It is the reason I fell in love with Art.





Sesshū Tōyō – Haboku Landscape

This ink painting done in the style of *Haboku*, created in 1495 by the Zen Buddhist monk Sesshū Tōyō, is a rather elusive depiction of landscape.* I am yet to decide what landscape I believe Sesshū intended to depict but I believe this is the joy of Zen painting.

For the artist to employ the concept of *Wu-wei*, having a still mind during the process of creation allows shape to be suggestive and form to be romanticised. Zen painters construct form by painting the light and shadow that lies upon surface.

By painting in this manner, I believe Sesshū does not need to include vast amounts of detail, it leaves the deduction of a paintings' emotional qualities to the witness. Individuals are left to simply find pleasure in the beauty of an undefinable painting.

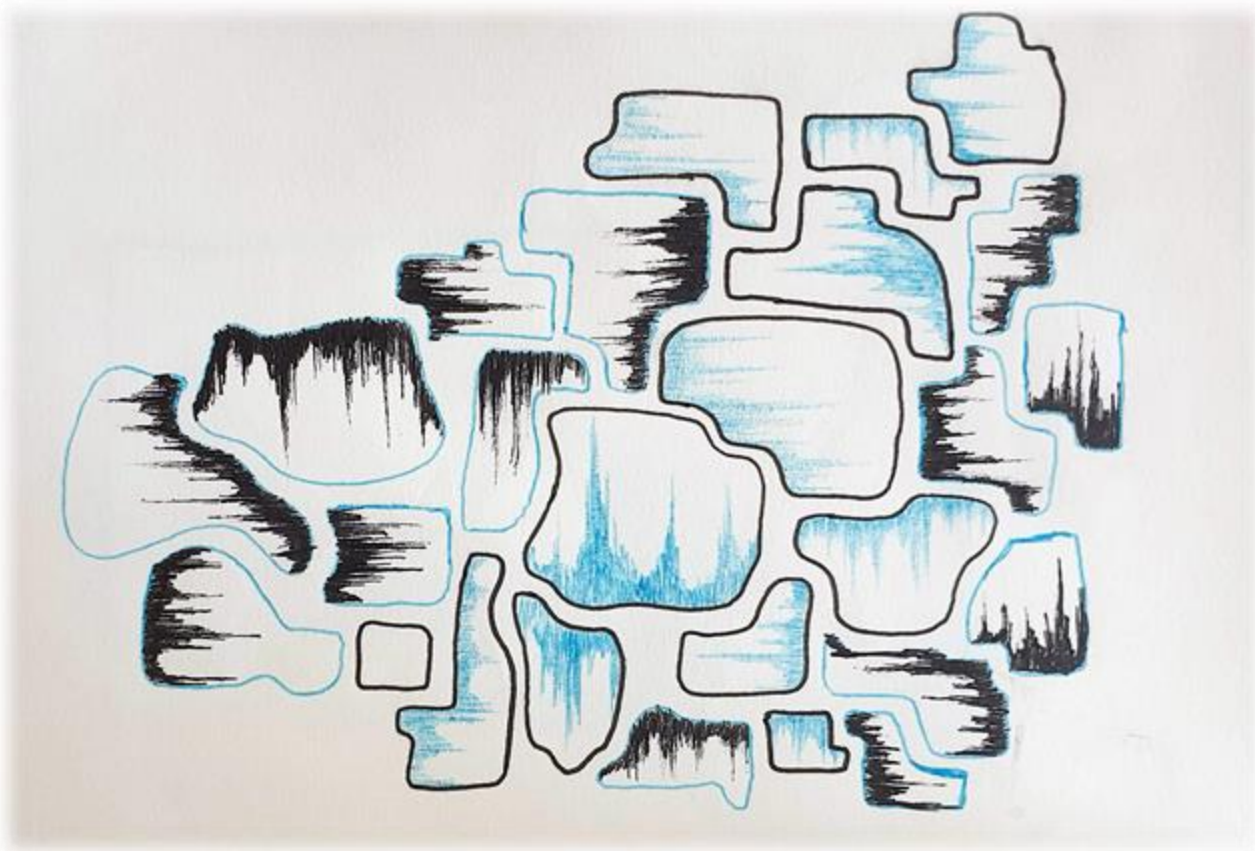
It is in this manner I wish for my work to be created as well as viewed. After all you could say 'it is the business of the eye to make form out of shimmering' – T. B. Watts.

(paraphrased from Maggie Nelson – *Bluets*)

*Sesshū also painted the masterpiece 'Landscape of Four Seasons', a ten-meter scroll that is often regarded as the greatest Japanese ink painting. But this Haboku landscape has a larger impact on my approach to making.

Open your Aperture

“We have lacked the proper self – respect of recognising that I, the individual organism, am a structure of such fabulous ingenuity that it calls the whole universe into being”



As my second year was coming to an end, a tutor of mine gave me the advice to 'take in as much information as possible'. She was suggesting it in terms of visual research: make a document, a scrap book, a folder, and fill it with anything and everything that interests me.

I took this advice and broadened it, producing an ethos of 'Open your Aperture'. Just like that of a camera, the aperture controls the amount of light being let in. It was like I wanted to open the aperture of all my senses. Letting in as much light and sensory information as possible.

After all, it is my senses that call the universe into action. If I subscribe to this ethos then I should aim to experience as much as possible.

Ensō

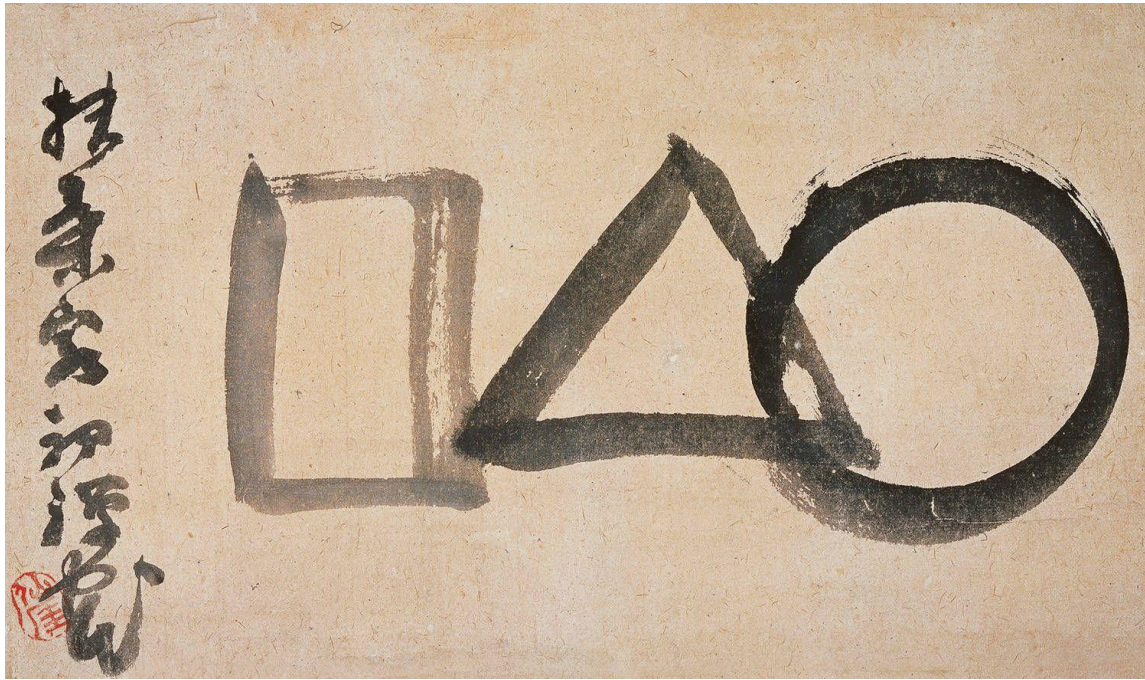
The art of Ensō is a form of Zen practice. A circle is painted in a single fluid stroke, this act is comparable to a creative pause. The circle drawn is meant to represent an isolated moment of the inner self. Preserving and depicting your mental state.

I find this similar to how I hope my inner self was preserved and depicted in the sculptures I create.



From Tyler Barnetts' exhibition titled 'Enso in Water'

'Ch' ui the artisan...His fingers seemed to accommodate themselves so naturally to the thing he was working at, that it was unnecessary to fix his attention. His mental faculties thus remained One (i.e. integrated) and suffered no hindrance. To be unconscious of one's feet implies the shoes are easy.' - Watts, Alan: The Way of Zen



Sengai's untitled work created in approximately 1820, taken from Terebass website, last accessed on 7.05.2020

Sengai's untitled work often referred to as 'Circle, Triangle, Square' or 'Sengai's Depiction of The Universe'

The Circle represents the infinite energy that flows through all things in the universe. It also holds similar aspects to that of the 'Ensō'

Secondly, in the painting we find the Triangle. Humans, endowed with senses and an intellect, crave the tangible and definable. The triangle is the beginning of all forms.

By doubling the Triangle we get a Square, this doubling goes on infinitely and so we get a multitude of things that Chinese philosophers call 'the ten thousand things'. This is the universe.

The complication with linguistically intelligent beings is that we take the description of things so literally. Language has become a truth used more so than what the circle represents.

Rinzai Zen Master Gibon
Sengai (1750-1837)

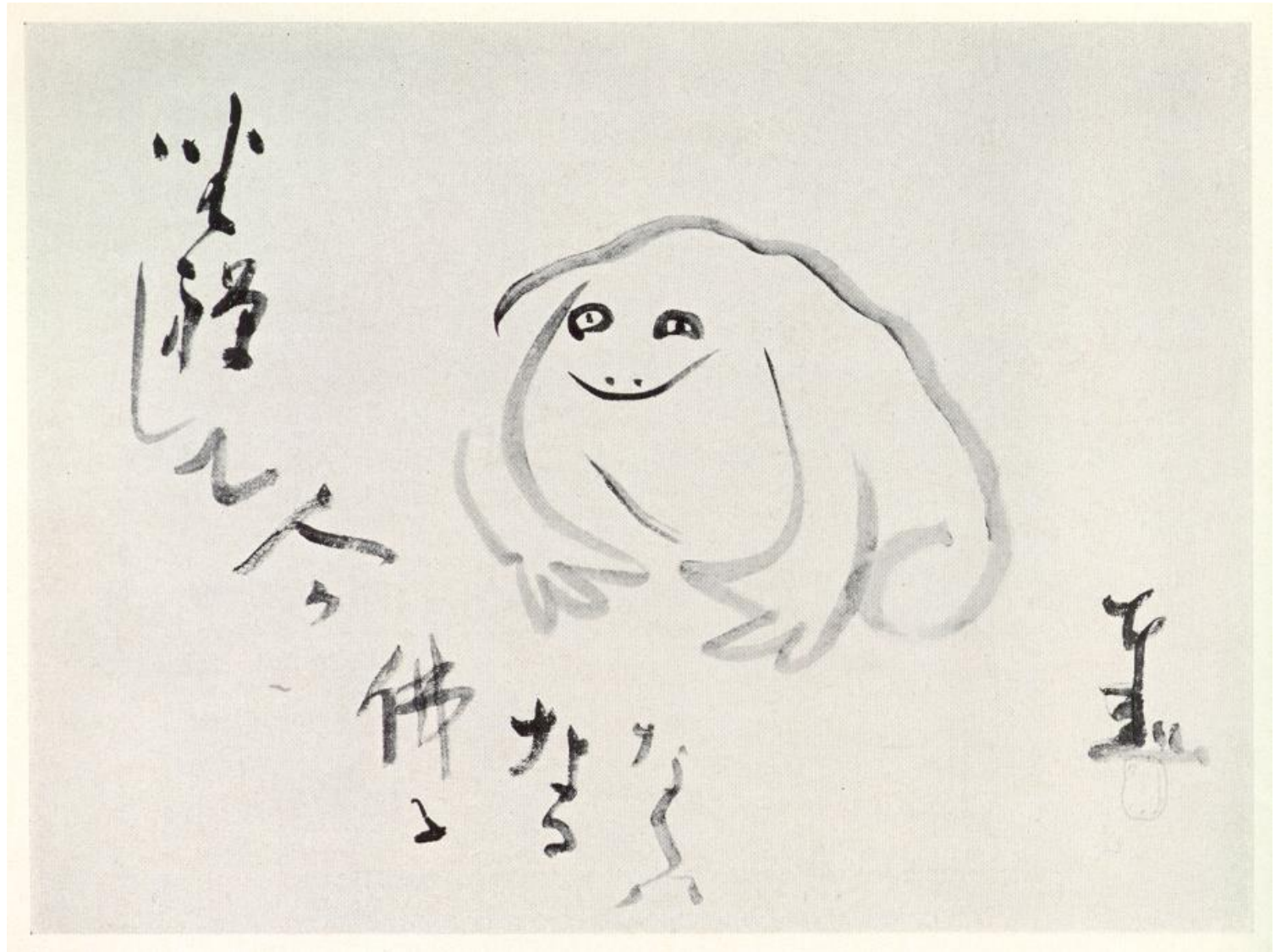
Our problem is that the power of thought enables us to construct symbols of things apart from the things themselves. This includes the ability to make a symbol, an idea of ourselves apart from ourselves. Because the idea is so much more comprehensible than the reality, the symbol so much more stable than the fact, we learn to identify ourselves with our idea of ourselves.' - Watts, Alan: The Way of Zen

Meditating Frog

Sengai was known for being light-hearted and humorous in his style of painting. He wanted to express Buddhist and Zen concepts playfully and simply to everyone.

"There are rules to painting in this world, but for my own painting, there are no rules!"

I believe there are no rules to art anymore, but this quote reminds me to experiment, to do things wrong, and to find new perspectives.



Calligraphy reads; 'If a man becomes a Buddha by practicing Za-Zen...'

Frog in Zen Meditation By Gibbon Sengai - Image and quote taken from Daruma Museum Gallery

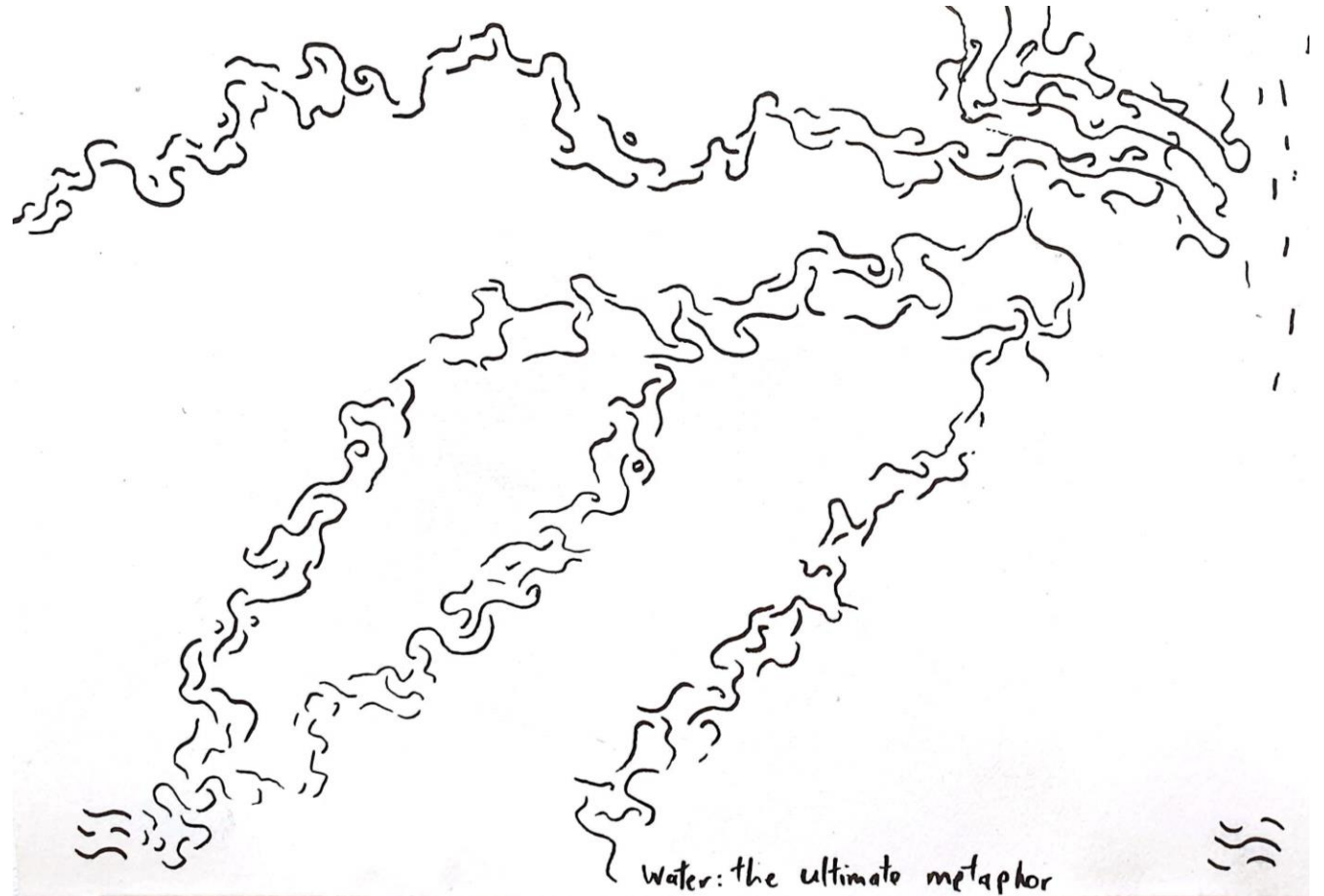
Water: the ultimate metaphor

Water nourishes all life asking for nothing in return. It naturally occupies the lowest position on earth taking the shape of its container.

Water can flow, water can crash. It shapes our shores and carves landscape.

Water does all this without having any mind to do it because of its natural properties.

I believe there is something to be learnt from water. By intuitively understanding the organic pattern and order of things, action can be made effortless and making can become a natural flow of creativity.



Balance in Making



By applying principles of Wu-wei and that of Yin & Yang to making, I aimed to find a balanced state for creativity. Where all aspects of the creative process were given the opportunity to effect the outcome.

'This does not mean that art forms of Zen are left to mere chance, as if one were to dip a snake in ink and let it wiggle around on a sheet of paper. The point is rather that for Zen there is no duality, no conflict between the natural element of chance and the human element of control. The constructive powers of the human mind are no more artificial than the formative actions of plants or bees.'

'For when you climb it is the mountain as much as your own legs which lifts you upwards' just as when I sculpt it is as much the hammer and the steel as my hands and my mind that create a sculpture.

Watts, Alan: The Way of Zen

The Creative Pause

I became more aware of myself using a creative pause while in the workshop. After forging for anywhere between 10 minutes to a couple hours, I would take the piece outside and sit with it for a while.

Much like the principles of Zen and Wu-wei, I do not force an end to a sculpture. But while *sitting and watching* it, all becomes painfully obvious to me and I see exactly what needs to be changed.

It was as if I could meditate on the sculpture and see it change itself.

In this case the central two spines needed to be parallel.

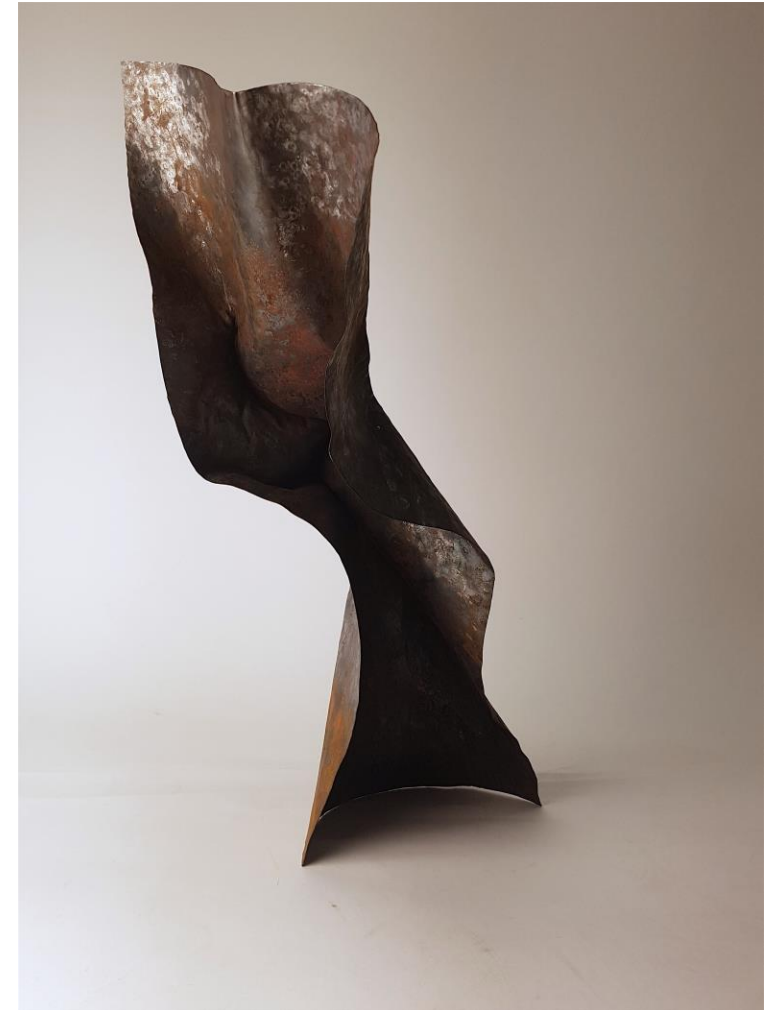


This alteration was done by hand, outside, in a moment of realisation.



‘No amount of working with the muscles of the mouth and tongue will enable us to taste our food more acutely’

Alan Watts



If I strain myself to critically analyse a piece I get caught in a loop, but this Wu-wei approach to the creative pause helped me to understand what aspects I like and dislike.

Beauty Proceeds Language

I spent a lot of my time
contemplating beauty. What makes a
'thing' of beauty?

I know *beauty proceeds language* but
cannot proceed emotion.

Beauty must be felt. Explanation
merely runs the risk of clouding it.

But to discern beauty is
worlds apart from creating
beauty, that's the complication.

I feel a need to mention I
do not believe I have made
anything of beauty, and it
seems like that is a
decision I cannot make about
my own work

I can't help but mention I
don't believe

'The key lies in the concepts of
the good, the true and the
beautiful.

The Good, what is it ?

Tricky , tricky ... tricky

The True, what is it ?

Trickier ... even trickier.

The Beautiful, what is it ?

The Beautiful, EASY to discern!'

Terrance Mckenna Paraphrases Plato



Plato - The Symposium (a book on
love and the beautiful)

The Grid



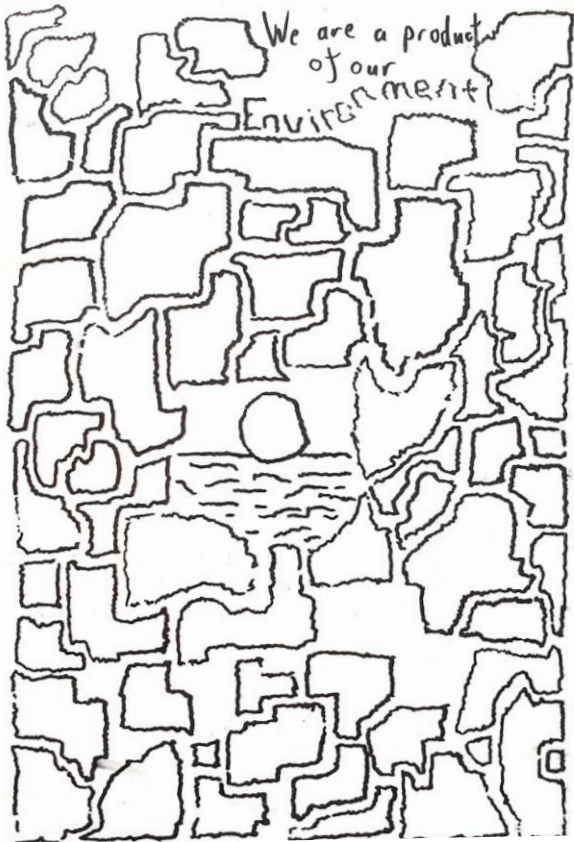
The idea for this piece came flooding in as I began to contemplate a human characteristic that is rigidly defining everything we experience. My thoughts were stemming from my ideas of 'beauty proceeds language'. I wanted to make a piece that was a more literal comment on my philosophies.

Humans are obsessed with defining the reality of the natural world. We cast a grid over mountains, jungles and oceans imposing rigidity upon a curvaceous and beautiful world. This rigidity makes our world palatable and quantifiable. But through these confining systems of communication, I fear we begin to forget the pure and beautiful reality that lies beneath. It is as if we have gone out for dinner and eaten the menu instead of the meal.

The grid maybe necessary, but be aware of its ability to distort and blur the clarity of a reality you live within. Eat the meal, not the words that describe it!



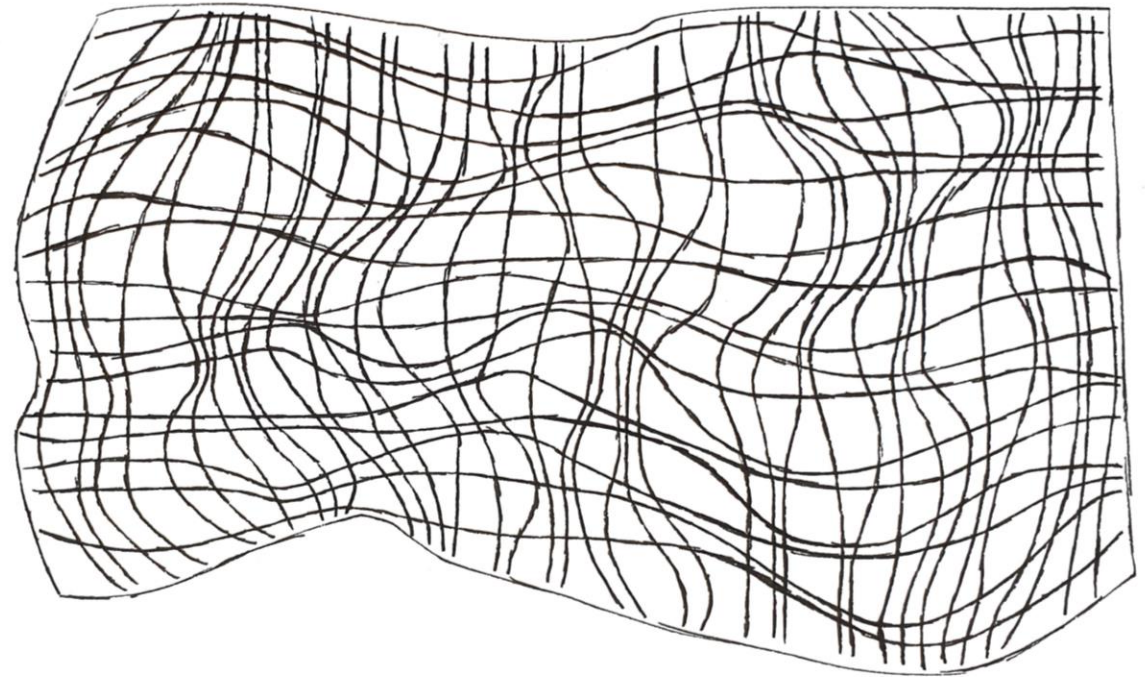
This piece is unfinished (7x5 squares), I planned for it to be approximately 14x10 squares. Each piece being directly mounted to a white wall so that it would float in space.



The Grid

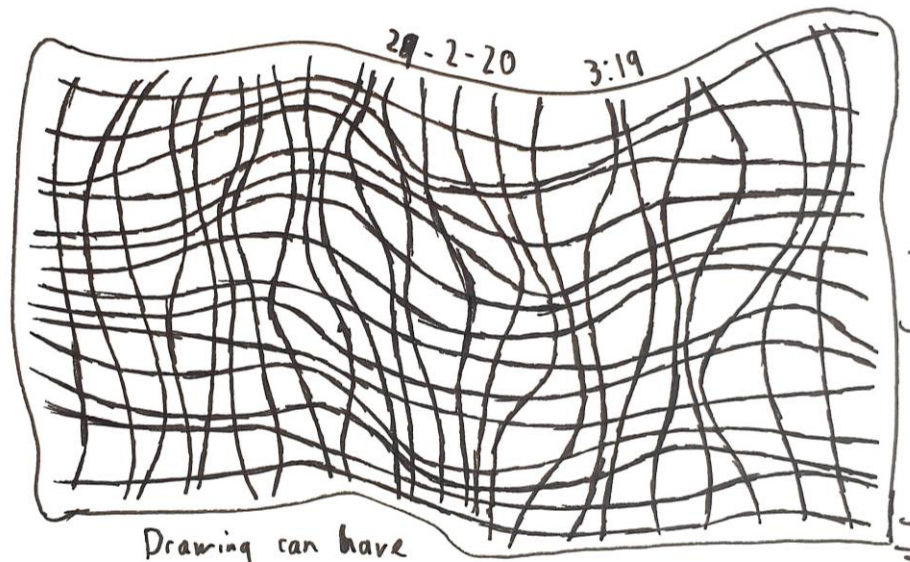
I was taking a piece of this grid, cutting off a rectangle and then searching for freedom and fluidity within the confines of The Grid.

You can see life rigidly, with rules and boundaries, or you can search for freedom and realise you have autonomy to act as you wish.



Making became an exercise of my free will!

This philosophy of The Grid became the most influential to the way I created and viewed my work.



Drawing can have similar flow state qualities as making/sculpting

Finding a 'rigid' style and exploring its limits of freedom



TENBō

I decided to name this piece 'TENBō' from the Chinese and Japanese terms, loosely translating as; *perspective* or to forecast; to predict; to look to the future.

Comically the internet can also inform you it means 'natural stupidity' or 'idiot'.

I find this fascinating because I am aware that my work could be dismissed by many, seen as random or unexecuted. I'm aware of all the time and thought that has been forged into these sculptures, I was there, and I find as much satisfaction from those who naturally disregard the work as scrap metal to those who see organic order or a piece of art.

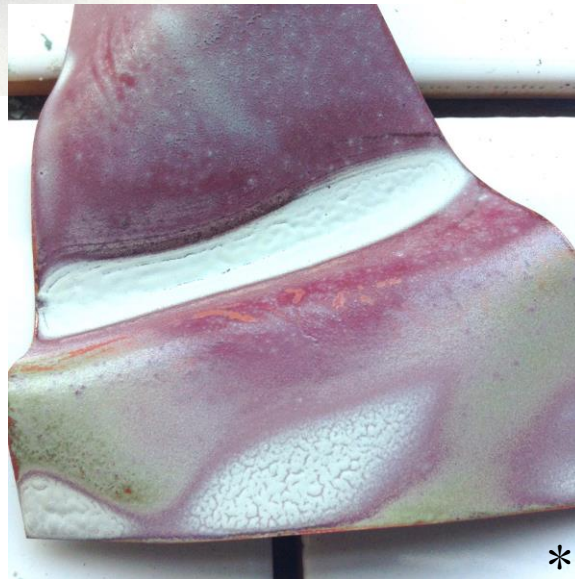
I want an honest reaction, No Thing more.

Enameling

Making the grid made me experiment with enamelling so that I could consider different surface finishes.

After a lot of experimentation with enamel I decided to let the oil from my fingertips naturally oxidise 'The Grid'.

Venturing into enamelling did however cause me to explore making new pieces where surface and colour became the focal point.



I specifically loved the copper ground coat*; it created a beautiful range of simple colours that accentuated coppers' natural properties.

It took me a long time to control the firing process to ensure the right outcome.

No. Twenty Four



This piece was enamelled with a wetprocess copper ground coat. I used strong brush strokes to create texture and then violently heated the copper quickly, burning the enamel. This created the golden red and green hues that compliment the copper.

Painting within Sculpture; Sculpture within Painting

In the workshops, I was using sheet metal and exploring the possibilities of movement and form.

Once the workshops were closed, I found myself looking for alternative ways to express the same creative exploration and so I decided to experiment with oil painting.

I saw the paper, card or canvas as another piece that I've stolen from 'The Grid'.

I could take this defined area and search for freedom within it, still using Wu-wei and the same principles as I would have done in the metal workshop.



I have zero experience with oil painting. But the transition from metal to paint seemed to happen quite naturally, especially since I had begun to experiment the possibilities of enamelling steel and copper.

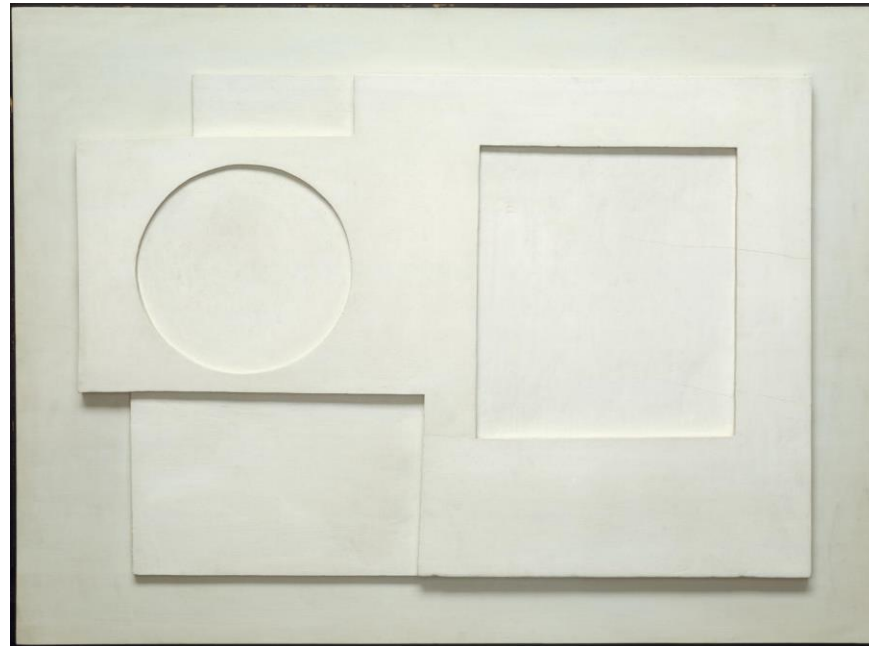


Feb 25 1953 (contrapunctual) - Artimage, accessed 10.05.20

Nicholson's Relief work of the 30's began to draw a small amount of depth into what was still considered a painting.

As Nicholson then explores sculpture the relief work has a way of seeming both flat and three-dimensional.

Ben Nicholson 1894-1982



1934 (relief) - Tate, accessed 10.05.20

Artworks by Ben Nicholson bridged a gap between two-dimensional painting and three-dimensional sculpture; Two once distinctly separate practices in my head are becoming two perspectives of the same creative activity.

I plan on exploring the language of painting and sculpture so that as I experiment more so with surface on metal and painting on canvas, they begin to speak with one another.



1936 (white relief sculpture - version I) - Tate, accessed 10.05.20

Bridget Riley

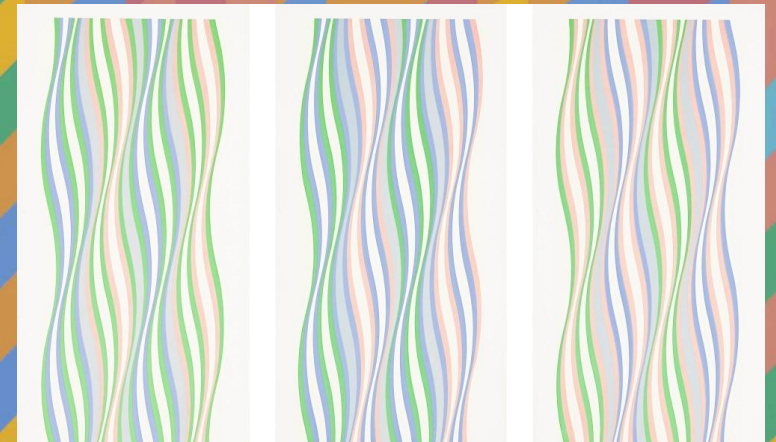


Red Movement 2005 - Art fund, accessed 10.05.20

‘Looking is a pleasure, a continual surprise. Sight, the condition of looking, helps us to be more truthfully aware of the condition of being alive.’

Riley’s systematic approach to simultaneously pleasing and fooling the eye captures my imagination; it reminds me of my desire to create elusiveness in form

My work floats of its own accord, hiding from your gaze. You struggle to grasp its form; perspective coaxes the viewer in to inspect further.

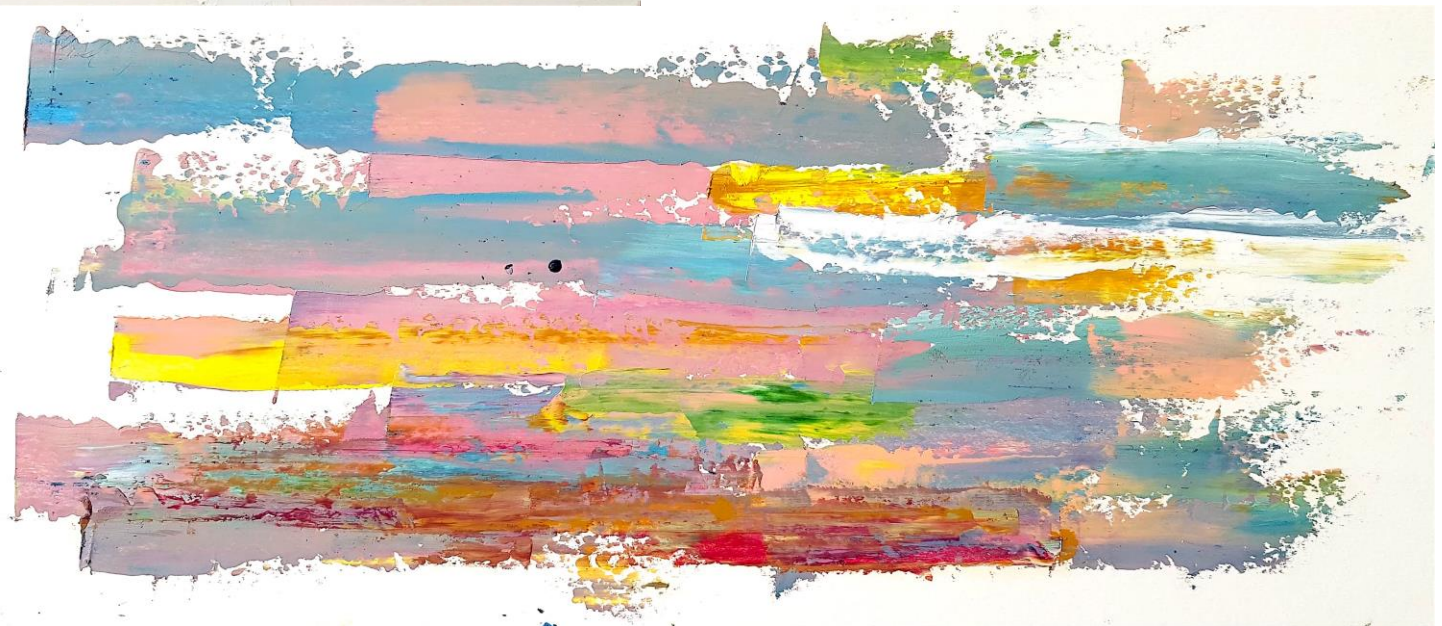


Blue Dominance, Red Dominance, Green Dominance 1977 - Sothebys, accessed 10.05.20

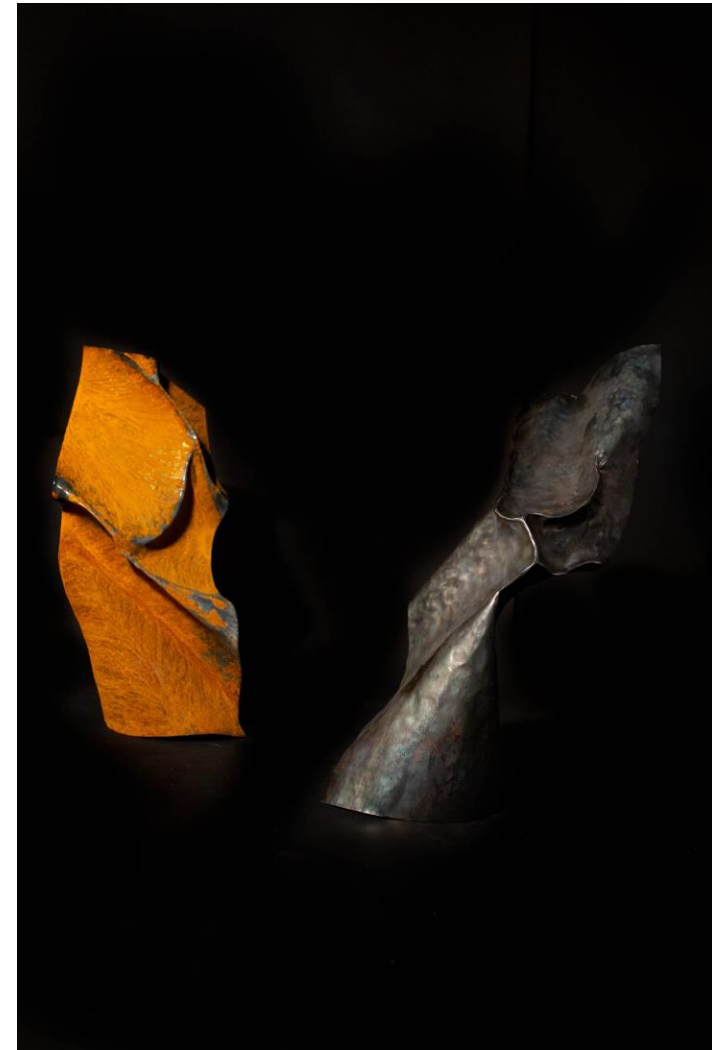
Examples of my Painting



I quickly found myself getting rid of my paintbrush and using the palet knife to block in the canvas with colour. It seemed to remind me of all of my thoughts surrounding The Grid, again I had given myself a defined boundary to work within as I wanted to continue representing the definition of a Grid. Using the mix of bright playful colours to contrast the rigidity of the blocked form.



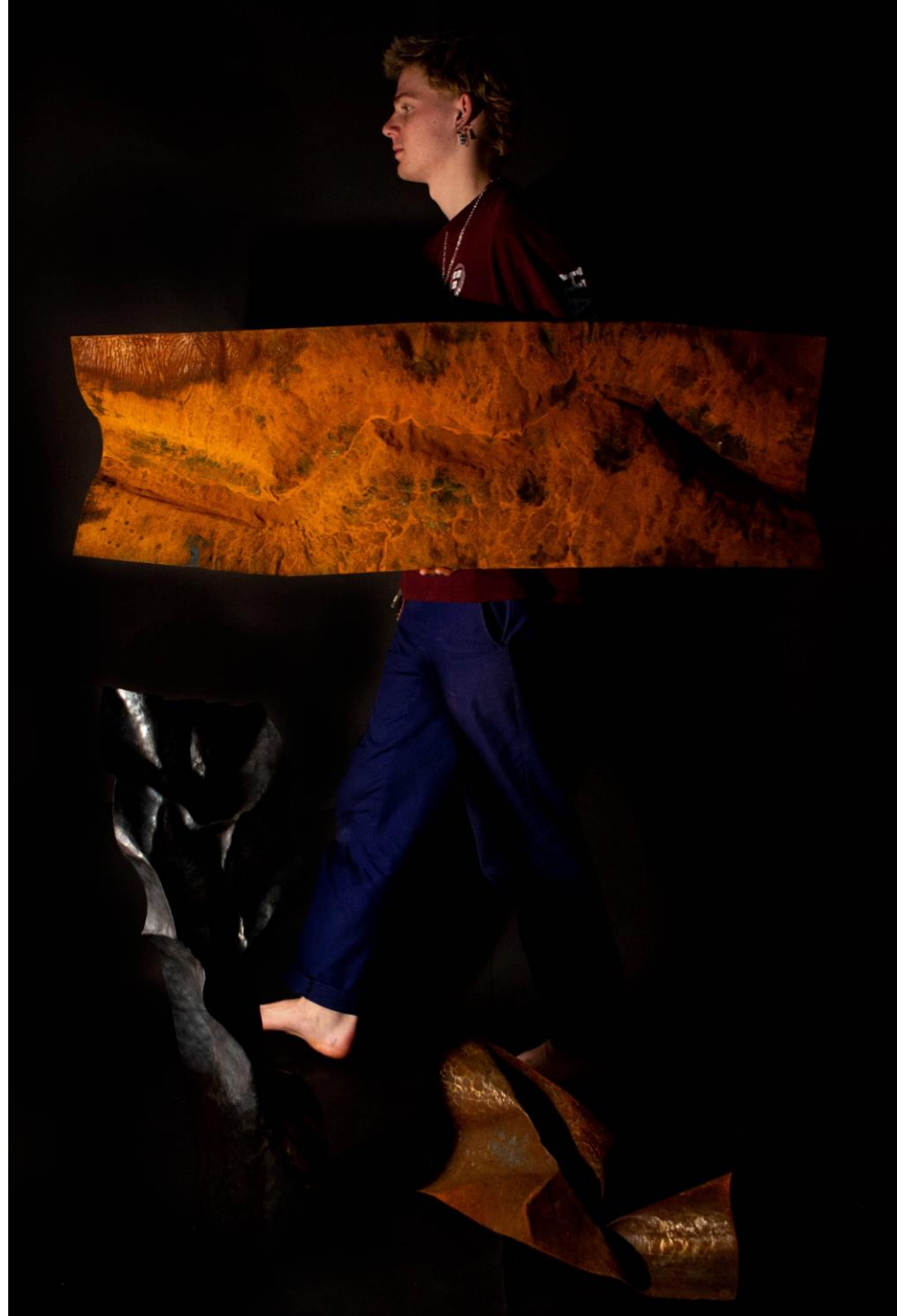
A large part of my journey to resolution for this project lies within the physical pieces I have made. Here are some of the pieces that I feel have been the most developed.



Throughout the entirety of this project both myself and my work underwent a huge amount of development.

I found my ideas on The Grid becoming the most predominant of all the philosophies that surrounded my work.

I do not see this as an isolated project that began at the beginning of the year and ends here. I've been making my way here for a long time, and I hope to continually develop my style of sculptural art for the rest of my life.



As I and my fellow course mates leave university,

The past is not for living in, it's a well of conclusions
to draw from in order to aid your present life.
There's much more excitement to come!

Thank you to all my tutors, technical demonstrators, friends
and family that have inspired me.

I've learnt and grown an astronomical amount from my three years in
Brighton, studying 3D Design and Craft.