

(RE)MODELLING FORM: SCULPTURE IN FLUX

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DECLARATION

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A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, flowing letters. To the right of the signature is a horizontal line, likely a placeholder for a printed name or a formal signature line.

Desmond Brett

2 May 2023

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ABSTRACT

This practice-based PhD explores sensations of flux and instability created through the 'monumental' sculptural object. The text acknowledges the legacy of Rosalind Krauss's concept of sculpture's 'Expanded Field' (1978) but moves to affirm a legacy for the monument, thereby circumventing the dialectical logic of her argument. Drawing on the sculptural tradition of the monument, the works produced steer away from minimalism's objecthood in order to explore a material 'hapticity'. Modelling is a point of departure for a series of replications produced through diverse modes of casting. By escaping Krauss's positioning of sculpture as 'not-architecture' and 'not-landscape', works made within this project engage critically with the idea of the monument (defined through its separation from environment and its traditional verticality) through wall-oriented projection into architectural space. Intermediate sculptures produced within the project are initially manufactured from clay and grease, whose malleability remains as sensation to counter the tendency to identify the object as fixed. Interconnected chapters follow the principles and practices of sculptural production and associated temporalities. Behaviours of matter (such as clay) under certain types of pressures and material conditions, including haptic forming, and the upkeep of material conditions in the service of sculptural production will be examined. Certain unorthodox forms of writing in the main body of the thesis seek to articulate these material conditions and encounters within the process. Material behaviours will be linked to methods of realising sculptural *archetypes* employing traditional methods of modelling, mould making and casting to produce condensed, singular sculptural

forms that eschew representation evident within the legacy of the monument, instead, operating at the limits of recognition.

To further problematise association with the canon, the orientation of sculptures will work against the dominant verticality of the monument. Replication and simulation are brought into focus as cast sculptures mimic archetypes of forms without previous existence. The mould and its association with certain trajectories of sculptural production is understood as a site of material movement capture, a container to arrest sensations of flux embedded into the cast sculptural object. The work of Lynda Benglis, William Tucker, Medardo Rosso and Alina Szapocznikow will form the contextual basis for proposing the existence of sculptural instability, being examples that promulgate sensations of flux enfolded into sculpture and that offer a critique of the monument through approaches to material handling and objecthood. Tucker's attempt to build sculpture bearing 'familiarity that resists recognition'¹ is especially important to this project, where modelling operates at the threshold of formal legibility and works against fixing specific, quotidian identity to the sculptural object. This project argues for a different lineage to the trajectory of the 'Expanded Field' through the manifestation of sculptures that draw upon close bodily connection and intimate haptic contact with material. The monumental sculptures of Tucker and intrusive anti-monumental works of Benglis produced during and beyond the emergence of Krauss's essay offer a divergent route for new sculptural thinking, one that problematises the dominant presence of the 'Expanded Field' and instead proposes the sculptural object as something fixed intellectually, yet through the intensification of material behaviours

¹ A phrase applied to Tucker's sculpture by Christian Salvesen and attributed to Phillip King (Ashton, 2001, p. 11).

enfolded into the work, operating intuitively as something in flux. Despite being infused with qualities of bodily intimacy and close-at-hand working, sculpture is, paradoxically, referred to as both monument and not monument.

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INTRODUCTION

The project is defined as a method of intuitively modelling sculptures by hand, choosing clay as the primary medium for the way it privileges hapticity, embedding memory impression and gesture into the surface of the sculptures. The thesis uses the anticipation, formation and realisation of the sculpture as the organising principle to understand the properties and potential of material, the role of the mould and the siting of the sculptural object.

The project questions the status of the monument and its operation within the contemporary field of sculpture. The project asks how a sculptural object can perform the paradoxical operations of being intellectually fixed and anchored while at the same time possessing sensations of flux and movement. It also asks how sculpture can claim to be both monumental and not monumental.

Through my practice, I have been grappling with how the sensation of flux might be embedded within the sculptural form via the repositioning of haptic modelling as a valid method and primary mode of manufacture. The presence of touch within the surface of the works I have produced complicates the visual/tactile reading of them, suggesting this as one way for sculpture to escape fixity.

The project proposes a route around the 'Expanded Field', modernism and postmodernism by committing to a form of sculptural production associated with the monument that negotiates the legacy of modernism by applying historical modes of

sculptural haptic modelling in the production of sculpture. The resulting sculptures are singularities, formed out of materials with previous art historical antecedents. They are resolved structurally yet deliberately slippery in association with the world around them. They operate within architectural locations while remaining nomadic, unfixed in their location specificity and working against the expected upward orientation of the monumental.

Seeking to reposition sculpture as something operating concurrently as a 'monument' and 'not monument' means accepting the sculptural object as something singular, enclosed and formed out of a process of haptic modelling aligned with a lineage of sculptural monoliths formed in this way (such as Rodin's *Balzac* for example). To not be a monument, the sculpture is placed at odds with the statue and the plinth, to be reconfigured at a different attitude and possess a certain statelessness by resisting location specificity. A new position for sculpture can be situated away from the 'Expanded Field' to integrate the intimate, hand-formed haptic method of manufacture, a dependence upon architecture, yet a resistance of image specificity for the sculpture itself.

It is important to define what is meant by 'monument' / 'not monument' within this thesis, as the project seeks to locate my sculptural output between these two conditions. In his essay 'The Monument and the Amulet', Herbert Read (1956) addresses the way sculpture originally depended upon architecture but breaks away from architectural sculpture towards something self-contained and 'in the round'. He situates the origins of the monument as an entity that is 'neither architecture nor sculpture as a distinct art, but an integral form that we should rather call the monument'

(Read, 1956, p. 5). This definition grounds the idea of something operating at an immense scale beyond human touch, elevated and awe-inspiring. To further emphasise the relationship to architecture, the monument maintained is evident in Herbert Read's description of the origins of the monument as something 'originally a solid sculptured object' (ibid., p. 6). He also defines early forms of the monument as essentially phallic and upright, as something to gaze upon in awe and wonder, something essentially beyond our reach. Over time the sculpture detaches from its architectural home, existing as something independent from architecture, and as late modernism progresses, sculpture steps down from the plinth or pedestal and, to use a term defined by Rosalind Krauss, becomes 'siteless'. Writing in *Artforum*, Nancy Foote says Krauss ascribes this homelessness to 'the self-referential character of modernist sculpture' (Foote, 1979, p. 35), uncoupling it from its sculptural forebears. Foote usefully frames the condition of sculpture in the late seventies as proposed by Krauss in *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* as follows:

minimal and postminimal works of the last two decades, including Earthworks, are in fact not sculpture, but that they exist in an 'expanded field,' operating in an arena between 'not-landscape' and 'not-architecture.'

(Foote, 1979, p. 35)

This is an important description of works that were being made that eschewed certain traits typified throughout the history of sculpture, such as the figure, narrative or the presence of the imprint of the hand or tool, that come off the pedestal and lose any 'commemorative subject matter' (ibid., 1979, p. 35), arguably the identifying feature of the *monument*, moving instead towards the rise of massive earthworks and landforms, which Krauss describes in her essay as becoming *monumental*. Such works, although

in the landscape, are not bound by the historical definition of sculpture. Instead, she places them in a new definition of 'not landscape', and without being tethered to architecture, 'not architecture', so that the differentiation between monument and monumental can be understood, through Krauss, to be the move away from figuration and architectural dependence into more self-contained landscape interventions via Rodin and modernism. For example, the massive steel sculptures of Anthony Caro possess a self-contained quality without recourse to external references, referring instead to their own intrinsic sculptural qualities; the land works of Robert Smithson possess a monumentality of scale and scope within the landscape that isn't bound by figuration. In both instances, the viewer engages with the work phenomenologically, navigating around the work to comprehend its scale and unfolding presence in a way that a singular viewpoint could not satisfactorily offer.

An important feature of such works is the turn away from phallogentricity and attendant verticality towards a more open, horizontal orientation that can be bound up in our spatial encounter with the works: off a plinth we are grounded with the works on an equal footing, so to speak.

I define 'not monument' as an approach to manufacturing sculpture that emphasises a close physical method of working with material through handling and modelling. This method depends upon a certain intimacy bound up in my relationship with material and the work being created through haptic formation and close bodily contact with the work resulting in the impress of the hand becoming written into the surface of the sculpture. This works against the detached production of modernist sculpture (Caro, Smithson, minimalism, etc.) and promotes the role of touch. These opposing

definitions are further complicated through the process of casting and replication and production line methods of production as hand-formed, touched and pressed forms are subsequently recast as multiples which then receive a glaze that suppresses any evidence of touch.

The threshold between the 'monument' and 'not monument' is a contradictory condition and one that the sculptures I have made seek to position themselves within. It is the ungraspable paradox of being within both states while remaining singular, sculptural objects.

The project's main research question asks how the dominance of ocularcentricism can be challenged through the concept of hapticity in sculptural discourse. 'Haptic' in the context of sculptural production can be understood as being of the hand, handleable and reachable by hand and bodily proprioception. The works I make during this project owe their surface quality to the operation of my hands over them and to the variable conditions of clay as the primary material used to build a series of archetypes.

The role of clay to the project is as something changeable and in flux, a never-ending, always yielding materiality possessing infinite possibilities. Such base material, capable of responding to pressure, is bound up in the term 'modelling', just as clay and self are bound up in a personal act of transferring intentions from my mind and body into material form in a haptic process: memory, sensibility, attitude, intent, desire, dreaming, fantasy is transmitted into the surface.

The 'archetype' can be understood as something from which all my sculptures are derived. The archetype is the germ from which each drawing and sculpture has emerged, and to which each refers and folds back into. It is a restless form that is never defined yet possesses characteristics and features that can be traced through the work I have made. The archetype has no fixed origin and exists as a mass of thought forms, illustrations, handled shapes and cast forms.

This desire to privilege the haptic rests in my intention throughout this project, to reverse the dominant hierarchy of the senses by placing the haptic over ocularcentricity. To support this, I will refer to Herbert Read's W.W. Mellon Lectures of 1952, in which he espoused the importance of what he called the 'touchspace' (Read, 1956, p. 48) as a critical condition of sculptural encounter. I would also add my own lack of binocular vision as an important consideration to my rationale for placing importance upon handling: the difficulty judging distances between objects in space leads to a heightened appreciation of touch as an anchor, a reassurance of my bodily position in relation to things and a way of preventing injury and harm.

Through my work I am thinking about sculpture as something abstract, as being nothing but instead existing as a virtual entity, an idea of 'sculpture', absolute like a spore or bacterium without a fixed identity but a set of features. All the manifestations of drawings and objects produced within this project are operations of assembling an archetypal sculpture that is never found but, rather, clustered as a mass of possibilities. There is no home for these sculptures; they are deliberately unidentified and unidentifiable and untouchable.

The sculptures I am making come from imaginings of forms that can be understood as possessing bulk and stoutness (they are not streamlined), where the surface treatment pushes back against the refinement of minimalism's untouched surfaces while aspiring to possess something objective and self-referencing. Unlike the descriptive figuration of Impressionism, they aim to be self-governing and abstracted from real life representation.

My sculpture is situated within contemporary practice as a resistance to the virtual; it stands up to the overwhelmingly visual field and stakes a claim for tactility, real matter, handling, and physical, bodily connections with matter. In a time of AI/VFX and virtual 'modelling', when sculpture can be rendered, shaped and 3D printed, it makes the qualities of actual, physical touch seem more important than ever. Innovative technology means the touch of the hand can be imitated and represented without the attendant physical labour, the advantage being the removal of mess, space, smell, sweat and laboriousness that traditional and haptic modes of manual sculptural production employ.

The tool of the sculptor becomes the digital interface that 'models' form in digital space, where imperfections are ironed out and smoothed away, and the space of sculpture through digitally rendered processes is one of logical clarity and relative perfection, modelling being an untouched touch encoded, printed and CNC'd into physical form. This project therefore seeks to assert a place for hapticity as a dynamic component to the formation of sculpture through modelling by handling and apprehending real 'stuff'.

I use traditional methods of sculptural production that employ modelling, mould making and casting, in a turn-away from minimalism or postmodernism's outsourced production systems. Using those processes liberates me from the freighted associations of *objet-trouvé* or assemblage to allow sculptural form to emerge *through* the modelling.

I believe it is important to address the need to encounter material haptically, to handle stuff, to remind ourselves of our phenomenological existence in the world of things. The sculptures I have made within this project operate as physical intrusions into space as a response to the mediation of the flat screen. These are sculptures formed and edited by hand without recourse to digital processes of post-production.

The work made within this project is positioned in relation (and against) certain practitioners and discourses of sculpture, including modernist and postmodernist sculpture, Impressionism and the 'Expanded Field'. The project also makes a recuperative reading of sculptural practice as it emerged from the immediate post-war period associated with civic space.

Anthony Caro's *Midday* (1960) offers an acme of modernist sculpture through a rejection of previous traditions of figuration, narrative and representation. Michael Fried (1969) reinforces this point by explaining how Caro's abstract sculptural language is 'resistant to images of any kind' (Fried, 1969, p. 12) so that, in the example of *Midday*, the language of depiction has been jettisoned in favour of a sculpture referencing its own assemblage. Revealing the constituent parts and methods of assembly, its material make-up is firmly rooted in the industrial age, being made up

from pieces of bolted and welded steel and assembled into a composition that presents itself with three upright motifs placed along a descending axis supported at each end by two more steel parts.

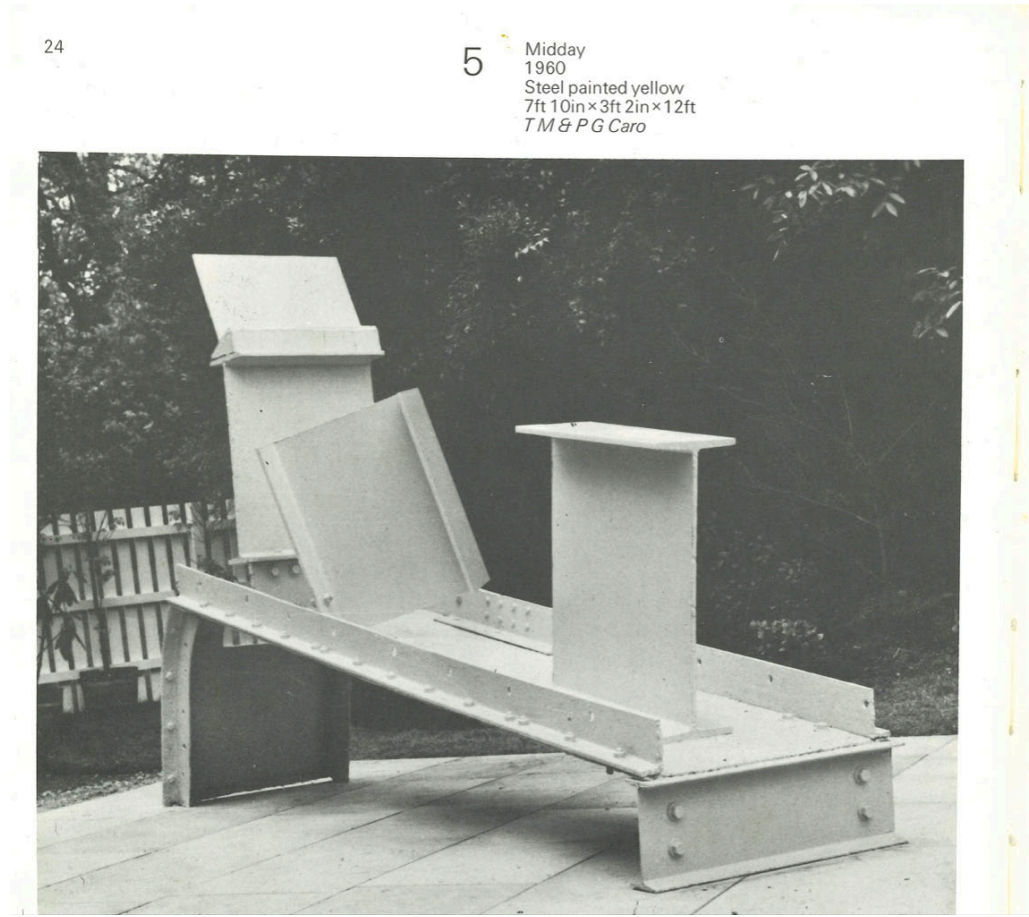


Figure 1. Anthony Caro, *Midday*, 1960, steel painted yellow, 235.6 x 96.2 x 378.5cm.

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A further break with tradition lies in the total covering of the sculpture with a (yellow) transformative paint finish that denies the colour of raw steel, proposing the sculpture is read as something much lighter while being nothing other than itself. It isn't 'about' anything else: there is no mystery of its genesis, no enclosed form hiding secrets. Taking such a radical position is fascinating considering Caro's earlier commitment to

handling and modelling, such as *Woman Waking Up* which, although ultimately replicated as a bronze cast, was originally made in clay.



Figure 2. Anthony Caro, *Woman Waking Up*, 1955, clay (for bronze), length 66cm.

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In that earlier piece, Caro's fingermarks embedded into the legs evidence a manual handling of the material in a manner suggesting an urgency to render the figure with immediacy and brevity, one that is at odds with the lineage of clay statuary through history that privileged skill and grace of representation in the desire for realism. *Woman Waking Up* demonstrates what Fried describes as Caro's attempts to 'project the livedness of the body, to find plastic correlatives for its possession within', going on to say, 'the finished sculpture was experienced as a solid, somewhat massive object' (ibid., p. 6). Here Fried reinforces Caro's attempts to intensify the sensations of effort required to undertake a physical action so that the external attitude of the sculpture depicts something felt within.

With *Woman Waking Up*, Caro appears to be trying to find in the figure an innate weightiness of bodily mass that describes the physicality of efforts to emerge from repose, to rouse the body into a vertical orientation. Instead, the figure is emphatically horizontal, lying in an awkward attitude, its hands and feet proportionally reduced compared to the thickness of the thighs and torso, indicating the relative demands of musculature and flesh activated, embodying the effort required, to undertake such an ordinary bodily function.

The photograph of the clay *Woman Waking Up* (Caro, 1959) prior to bronze casting is especially compelling in its contingency of presentation and in its immediacy, the sculpture nestled in newspaper in an attempt to differentiate it in all its lumpen texture from the stony surface of tarmac visible through the gaps behind in a connection between earthen matter. I can feel the leathery clay still damp and cold; I can feel the

grasping hands roughly modelling the features and urgent lumps of clay pressed in to fill gaps or add bulk.

Ultimately, Caro's radical break with his orthodox figural language of modelling proved necessary if he was to realise a language released from the associations of figuration. The move from the explicitly haptic clay to bronze figures to his steel arrangements demanded a more phenomenological encounter to comprehend the evolving aspects of Caro's sculptures. Works like *Midday* represent a tabula rasa of new sculptural thinking to effect change in the way sculpture was to evolve when removed from the plinth, which Caro felt 'reinforced its apartness' (ibid., p. 6).

My fixation with the wall as a site for sculptural intrusion comes from an ambition to upturn the weighty history of the verticality of sculptural forms deriving from what can be understood as the monumental. Instead, the sculpture pushing into space horizontally forces an altogether different encounter, demanding of the viewer a more pressing need to circumnavigate an object instead of an upright motif 'escaping' out into the void of the space above. Robert Gober's sink sculptures are a striking example of postmodern sculpture, overtly referencing what Matthew Weinstein (1990) describes as 'Gober's quizzical relationship to the readymade'. Weinstein goes on to point out that Gober's 'ambivalent attitude to a historical model is typical of much work termed post-Modern or appropriative' (Weinstein, 1990, p. 129). Here Gober is comfortable drawing upon multiple points of reference, including the readymade and the minimalist object. The sink presents itself as more of a 'handmade readymade', a rejection of the 'over the counter' appropriation of sculptural forebears such as Duchamp. Instead what we have is the application of intense manual labour

embedded into the sculptural object as Gober sculpts a plaster form over wire, covered by a series of sanded layers of industrial paint as a surface finish. Gober's references to the language of everyday objects, production line units and industrial materials aligns itself with minimalism. Although the handmade aspect of Gober's sink sculptures resists the Juddian aesthetic of strict geometry, pristine surfaces and impersonal industrially fabricated objects, nevertheless, the overall finish of Gober's *Untitled* (1984) can be aligned to minimalism's constructed and untouched surfaces, as each sanded and painted layer is accrued with a great deal of pragmatism and laboriousness to leave a look of something manufactured rather than hand formed.



Figure 3. Robert Gober, *Untitled*, 1984, plaster, wire lath, wood, semi-gloss enamel paint, 18.5 x 30.25 x 26.5in.

© Robert Gober, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, all rights reserved.

Gober's *Sink* could be seen as an archetype, holding the essential form of a type of sink, but remaining sink-like. As Weinstein goes on to say, 'These are reduced, repeated shapes, and their variance depends on the modification of a single template rather than on a true reinvention of form' (ibid., p. 130). My attraction to Gober's sink sculptures is this exploration of the idea of a sink through manifold variations of production: small sinks, sinks with holes, rounded sinks, elevated sinks, etc.

That sort of affinity is there with my sculptures, in that they maintain a certain tactile and formal connectivity with each other, possessing shared characteristics due to their particular mode of manufacture, as well as emerging through a process of casting. Further connections can be made between the ceramic sculptures I have made at Armitage Shanks, which literally use the material of the sink and the production line of the factory. Gober's sinks, hitched onto architecture with their semi-functional reference, are nevertheless devoid of accoutrements that connote use-value, such as taps, pipes and water stains, existing instead as blanks that offer an uncanny proposition as facsimiles of mass-produced utilitarian readymades, yet formed by the labour of the hands.

It is important to define the term 'Impressionist sculpture' for the purpose of this project. Impressionism can be understood in sculptural terms as the way fleeting moments are captured through material handling (generally modelled), as seen in the works of artists such as Rodin and Medardo Rosso (as well as in the series of small studies of dancers modelled in wax and clay by Degas). To capture movement in a static sculptural object could be regarded as a futile act, but the sensation of movement can be read in the way the material has been handled with a rapidity, animation suggested

through surface agitation. Rainer Maria Rilke (1907) describes the sense of movement in the surfaces of Rodin's sculpture as:

the kind of movement which light has been made to impart by means of the peculiar treatment of the surfaces, the inclines of which are so manifoldly varied that light flows from them now slowly, now in a cascade

(Rilke, 1907, quoted in Wood, Hulks and Potts, 2007, p. 19)

This emphasis on the play of light upon surface articulates a dialectical condition of movement activated by a material which, though static, has nevertheless been hand formed and carries the actions of that process embedded into the surface. Rodin's project can be appreciated for the movement of light across the surfaces of his figures appearing to be the antithesis of smoothed, refined and often unrealistically idealised bodies reaching back to Hellenistic sculpture. But I would argue that in Rodin's work there is more of the *ponderability* that Herbert Read describes as one of the key tenets of sculpture. By this, I mean a weightiness and acknowledgement of gravity but also an acceptance of gravity's pull. Similarly, Medardo Rosso's sculptures seem to be slipping groundwards but are also far less defined than Rodin's more detailed figuration. The surfaces of Medardo Rosso's sculptures seem to operate between almost-there features and an inchoate blur, as if witnessed in a fleeting moment. For me, this is the truest condition of Impressionist sculpture: a moment half articulated, an encounter grasped but not conquered. It is the potential slippage into chaotic incomprehension that is so absorbing in Rosso's work, as if no single sculpture ever comprehensively achieves his ultimate vision; instead, his is an oeuvre that needs to be understood as a whole, as something restlessly searching to fix a moment passed,

a sense of an encounter or a half-formed memory. This resonates so much with my approach to sculpture.

Impressionism precipitated a new energy given to the way material articulated momentary encounters, valuing that over accuracy of proportions. It was a way of grasping something fleeting. Medardo Rosso (1907) helpfully defined it in his essay 'Impressionism in Sculpture: An Explanation' with the following question:

Is not the truth of the first impression, charged as it is with poetry and suggestiveness, infinitely more significant than that other truth, which is based on our accumulated knowledge of dry facts?

(Rosso, 1907, quoted in Wood, Hulks and Potts, 2007, p. 24)

Rosso is arguably eschewing the need to know too much, preferring to place his faith in his hands to render in material form the first impression, the moment of recognition and response, at the expense of realism or accurate, proportional representation. It would seem brevity and quick responses are more important than measured, calculated sculpting of life, instead drawing the sensation of the encounter from life. In his essay, Rosso reveals the paradox of making something solid and sculptural that describes the fleeting encounter as a way of 'recovering its suggestive momentary life' (ibid., p. 23). This helps to understand the way he operated with such restless fervour, often reworking casts, renaming sculptures and continually photographing his sculptures not, I would argue, simply to document them per se, but to attempt to reposition the sculptures in an architectural setting. The more blurred and grainy the photos become, the more they seem like passing, fluid and fleeting encounters. A further paradox is Rosso's call for his sculptures to function 'for the eye, not the hand'

(ibid., p. 23), running counter-intuitively to Read's argument for the haptic to be placed centrally in the encounter and appreciation of sculpture. But there is logic to Rosso's claim, because he sees sculpture as a way of capturing 'the first moment of looking spontaneously' (ibid., p. 23). In view of this, it could be argued that Medardo Rosso was a sculptor out of time, who wasn't content with fixing these 'fleeting moments' in sculptural matter, but who sought to produce a series of continual attempts that never found conclusion.

I would propose that it was in his photographs that the sculptures found their rightful place as things that could only be speculated upon, untouched and ungraspable in the fixed second of the shutter release. The fact that his commissioned sculpture of Joseph Fles was made for and in the oculist's house and destroyed with the sale of the house adds a greater resonance for a sculpture that only exists in one surviving photograph that Medardo Rosso exposed. Laura Mattioli (2021) states that, 'unfortunately, from a documentary standpoint, the image is insufficient and vague' (Mattioli, 2021, no pagination). But it is these qualities of insufficiency and vagueness that I contend are the most important elements to the photographic encounter with Medardo Rosso's sculptures and entirely appropriate to the objects exposed. In this way, the sculptures continue to blur, to shift, as I imagine them in a speculative, transitional space, as opposed to the physical encounter with his sculptures anchored and unmoving on a plinth.

The sculptures of William Tucker deliver forms that privilege the embodied methodology of their formation, where the gestures of the hand that forms them are embedded in the surface of the material. Tucker's connection to materiality is

evidenced in the register of dents, impressions or imprints of the hand and fingers that shape the clay or plaster used to evolve each form as a protean entity. To part echo Herder's privileging of the hand, Tucker conceives of the sculptural form with his hands and eye rather than conceptualising the form in his imagination first (Sleeman, 2007, p. 15) so that what emerges is grafted and grappled haptically instead of a strategised sculpture.

It lurches and slumps in a way that seems the antithesis of Degas's *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*. This is a more chthonic, earthbound sculpture that fights the pull of gravity, which it cannot resist, with a heavy, undeniable materiality. The corpus of work including *Study for Dancer* has a grounded quality, rooted to the floor, a bodily, almost excrescent quality of surface and shape while suggesting lumpen, heaving masses. They are dynamic in their acknowledgement of gravity, which, when considering their chunky rather than lithe forms, is what informs the project's investigation into mass and physical elevation from the ground.

An important aspect of William Tucker's (1987) practice that exerts an influence over the project is his writing around the image on its evasiveness in fixing down to a specific 'thing'. Tucker acknowledges the danger of limitlessness, the overworking and underworking of a sculpture so that it moves beyond the point of being easily identified with something externally real. Other than Tucker's writing on working towards things that are 'unthinkable' or 'perhaps no nameable image at all' (Tucker, 1987, no pagination), the project needs to locate and integrate more around these concerns to strengthen the area practice that is involved with attempting to eschew recognisable external forms.

This eschewing of recognisability is also echoed in *Prayer*, an early sculpture which offers a form suggestive of a vessel yet enclosed and sealed off. The use of fibreglass connects to some of the sculptures made during this project. Fibreglass is a material much favoured in the 1960s by sculptors seeking to move away from the more traditional material baggage of bronze, etc. Fibreglass enables a form to be produced that can evade the orthodoxies of structural engineering and produce a continuous surface without the need for assembling separate elements. Resin and fibreglass were materials used by Alina Szapocznikow, allowing a certain bodily, skin-like quality and an ability to form almost any shape when cast or laminated as a liquid, setting into a flexible solid.

William Tucker is useful to this project as he enables me to sculpt in a way that embraces a traditional approach rooted in modelling while allowing sculpture to be furtive, untethered, fugitive and unspecific in form. My work diverges from Tucker's in its rejection of figuration and its greater specificity in surface features, such as connecting linear patterns, as opposed to Tucker's more inchoate forms.

The sculptural essays of Alina Szapocznikow demonstrate the privilege of the artist's touch embedded into the forms with an impression of rawness like archaic personages. Her varied figurative work presents different taxonomies of touch and a suggestion that they might twist or fold in an ever-moving series of flexed poses. Vulnerable and unavoidably corporeal Szapocznikow offers taxonomies of movement and animation that emit pent-up energy set within the literal stasis of the sculpture. Szapocznikow's sculptures propose sculpture as innately bodily but unencumbered by

the legacy of the upright sculptural motif of so much statuary. These works seethe and writhe in Baconesque attitudes or in fragments from another time.

A significant point of reference for sculpture that works both intrusively into space and possesses a sense of flux is *Wing* by Lynda Benglis. It provides an example of a sculpture dependent upon the wall as a site for projection. The encroachment of a fluid mass held in suspension both literally and metaphorically is a compelling vision of an 'organic intrusion ... frozen in their gravitational fall' (Hickey, 2009, p. 14). Like *Quartered Meteor*, this work demonstrates the point of rest for the liquid material that formed the 'original' sculpture in polyurethane foam as each layer slowly cured atop the previous in a stratigraphy that speaks of formations of lava, mudslides, bodily expulsions or even ectoplasmic B-movie goo slowly creeping towards horrified onlookers.

The positioning of *Wing* on, and out, from the wall is a significant move away from the plinth-bound monumentality of much sculpture. Its protrusion along a mainly horizontal axis works against the priapic tradition of statuary and presents sculpture accepting gravity instead of fighting against its pull. Removing the supports that held the foam of the original pour in place leaves the cast metal pile hung up and seemingly gravity bound. The literal casting of this heap into aluminium allows a greasy, slippery reading of the piece despite its stopped presence. The sculptural object reaches out and extends before risking seeming collapse or failure.

Material 'creep' is made explicit in *Quartered Meteor* by Lynda Benglis, where a settled heap of material appears to have come to rest of its own accord without influence of

the hand or body to model its form. Just as the heaps of thixotropic sludge of Speeton Clay arrive at a point of rest (albeit temporarily, as opposed to the permanent state of stasis with Benglis's sculptures), work such as *Quartered Meteor* presents a weighty slumped mass of matter akin to the heaps at Speeton's cliffs. Despite its metallic rigidity fixed in cast lead, its bodily presence announced in folds suggestive of flabby softness counters this hard metallic denseness.

Smithson's concerns with dialectics and entropic processes can be seen in works such as *Glue Pour* (1970), which offers a relevant critical source for this project by placing a gesture – the pour – in the present while simulating a flow that could refer to archaic geologies. The tensions between present and past, solid and fluid, bound up within the work signify a state of continuum calling upon deep time, present flow dynamics and future stratification (the latter acknowledging Smithson as embedded and set within a particular canon of land art).

An awareness of the (deep) past while making work *in situ* in the present can be understood within the legacy of *Spiral Jetty*, which has undergone successive phases of disappearance and emergence as the water level of the Great Salt Lake in Utah has receded. The work has been subject to continual fluid dynamics, erosive processes and accumulative sedimentation over a substantial period, affecting its visibility and presence. It speaks of glyphs and geological traces or structural landforms yet is also without time, as if it has always been there or is entirely current.

Certain unorthodox forms of writing are positioned within the main body of the thesis operating as an analogous activity to the material actions, processes, qualities and

possibilities of sculptural materials. These include an inventory of the properties of clay (in Chapter 1); the description of an imaginary archetypal sculptural form (Chapter 2); and, in Chapter 3, the use of the bracket as a grammatical device to contain statements, observations and reflections as a syntactic equivalent to the mould: where the material of sculpture is held within the mould, so the materiality of words are contained within the bracket. Furthermore, references to science fiction enable sculpture to be understood in relation to fantasy. The purpose of these alternative forms of writing are to serve as a way of articulating closer encounters with material behaviours so as to bring the reader into the studio with the work undergoing formation.

CHAPTER 1: CLAY

ENCOUNTERS AND SENSATIONS

This chapter establishes an understanding of the properties and behaviours of clay when placed under pressure within certain conditions and how it is shaped. It describes the route from my original encounters with clay from unformed matter through developing sculptural identities to the resulting sculpted forms. The choice of clay as a primary material is to acknowledge its place within the tradition of sculpture and to re-examine its material properties. The project and associated corpus of work attempts to create sculpture acknowledging a history associated with monumentality embedded within the medium of clay while speaking of something more expanded and 'in process' through inference, association, intention, manufacture and location. The formation of sculpture within this project is through an encounter with materials that possess plasticity, malleability and thixotropy and are shaped by forces and pressures.

The materials employed within the sculptural output of this project prioritise clay but also include wax, plaster and lithium grease. Critical to my choice of materials are their ability to be formed into manifold iterations, between liquid and solid conditions, and their responsiveness to modelling and the force of touch. Clay especially allows me to make direct outputs from immediate contact by filtering lived experience into sculptures.

The processes being explored within the project promote hapticity, handling and forming as intentions imprint themselves upon the clay's soft, plastic, morphologically mutable condition. There is an ongoing process of building, deforming and reshaping at work within the practice that calls upon sculpture to be considered as a continuum of processes that assemble, form and disintegrate.

The possibilities of clay to be any-thing materially is dependent upon the forces exerted upon it, how clay is compacted, stretched, thinned, saturated, dried and so forth. The force of physical contact the hands make upon material isn't the sole author of the sculptural object. The matter-energy bound up within the materials are loaded with potential so that viscosity, thixotropy and gravity offer dynamic forces to bear upon the sculpture that meet my own imposed haptic pressures.

In *Clay – A Manifesto*, P.R. Henning (1917) promoted the potentialities of clay, calling for it to be elevated to a status equal to the more heroic bronze or elegant marble of much sculpture of the time. Within his treatise, Henning articulates the 'inexhaustible possibilities' of clay (Henning, quoted in Barron, 1983, p. 4) as a sculptural medium to model and a material to feel.

The potential of clay spans solidity to liquidity and every dimension between. Clay's softness is dependent upon the level of saturation within the matrix of the clay body, having a bearing upon its stability or its ability to flow. Clay can also demonstrate qualities of thixotropy which offer possibilities dependent upon its viscosity derived from relative thickness and saturation. Thixotropy comes from the Greek *thixis*, 'touch', and *tropus*, 'to turn' or 'change', embedding within this word meaning that is in flux.

Heraclitus's assertion that 'everything flows' (*Panta rhei*) further describes the deformation of all things including solids.² This is a compelling paradoxical proposition, investing solid, fixed and static objects with the potential to flow.

The inherent properties of clay are the same in this instant as in its archaic formation. The offcuts saturated in tubs on my studio floor are gradually transforming from hard, leathery shavings to soft mulch dissolving into a thick mass of slip. By slabbing, batting and wedging, it is reborn and imminent. The effect of the hand upon clay is a transmission of thought into action, receiving instructions that are written into its morphology.

THE TOUCH OF CLAY

In *Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream*, Johann Gottfried Herder's (1778) treatise on touch, the author elevates the importance of the tactile encounter in relation to appreciating sculpture. By critiquing the dominance of vision in the appreciation of art, Herder brings forth an emphatic case for touch, asserting that 'sculpture is created for the hand not for the eye' (Herder, 1778, quoted in Gaiger, 2002, p. 50). In considering the difference between sculpture and painting, Herder presents the way sculpture exists as 'truth', while the realm of painting is 'a dream', establishing his fundamental demand that sculpture requires touch to comprehend its reality in the world, while painting can operate as something

² The famous aphorism attributed to Heraclitus (c. 540–480 BCE), *Panta rhei*, translates as 'everything flows', which can be applied to how everything in the universe is in a condition of becoming, continuum and in a state of flux. Heraclitus uses the analogy of a stream flowing to articulate the constancy of movement: '[It is not possible to step twice into the same river] ...It scatters and again comes together, and approaches and recedes' (Heraclitus quoted by Plutarch in Marc Cohen, Curd and Reeve, 1995, p. 30).

dependent upon sight.³ Herder presents his most persuasive argument for the importance of touch through embodied experience:

alongside reason we possess a hand that can feel and grasp. If we did not have this, if we had no means by which we could confirm our own bodily feeling, we could only infer and guess and dream and fabricate, and we would know nothing for certain.

(Herder, 1778, quoted in Gaiger, 2002, p. 36)

Here, the sense of touch and the potency of the bodily relationship to sculpture are presented as critical to understanding the world of matter and things. Feeling and grasping are fundamental approaches to using clay and other soft sculptural materials (wet plaster, warm wax, pliant fabric, etc.) into which we transfer and ‘confirm our own bodily feeling’ (ibid.). The opportunity to articulate the encounter of the hand and the malleability of clay as a way of charging inert materiality with the impress of embodied physical intentions is emphasised in Elizabeth Manchester’s (2013) reference to clay’s potential as a material that can ‘receive the imprint of a gesture’ (Manchester, 2013). This comment is significant in addressing a body of matter that is receptive to touch, gesture, holding, folding and erasure. The ‘fixing’ of the imprint into clay at the point of gesture warrants further consideration, along with the role of touch and gesture as a generative process of continuity and whether this provokes sensations of movement embedded within the sculptural object.

³ Herder continues: ‘A sculpture before which I kneel can embrace me, it can become my friend and companion: *it is present, it is there*. The most beautiful painting is a magnificent story, the dream of a dream.’ Here Herder can be understood to promote sculpture as something tangible and felt, while painting is something seen as a story or fantasy.

In *From the Museum of Touch*, Susan Stewart (1999) presents the position of touch as a lower sense within a hierarchy that placed sight at a higher level of valorisation. In an age of image saturation, it is perhaps understandable that ocularcentrism is such a dominant way to encounter the world, but it demands to be challenged through this project. I would contend that this hierarchy exacerbates and denudes sensations of touch and material contact, especially now physical matter can be diverted via the virtual realm for our consumption. Stewart refers to Aristotle's claim that touch was a sense which existed at the bottom of the order of senses.⁴

From Aristotle touch (and thereby taste) was found in all animals and so became the lowliest sense. He contended that touch was the sense needed for being, whereas the other senses were necessary for well-being

(Stewart, 1999, p. 21)

Thus, touch is rooted to the bottom of this order below sight, as something sensual rather than pleasurable due to the immediacy of this sensation being 'in direct contact with the world' (ibid. 21). For Aristotle it was also the lowliest sense because all animals possessed touch, rather than being a sense generating sophisticated thinking, desire and ambition. Because of its directness, touch can be understood as a sense rooted in physical contact, of earthen sensation and physical experience in ponderable matter such as clay. Stewart reminds us how Aristotle aligns the sense of touch with the earth, making my use of clay significant as, regardless of its wetness, clay offers a weightiness that is unrefutably both mass and impenetrable barrier. Clay is the reason saturated porous cliffs slip and slump and liquid plaster can set atop a defiant clay

⁴ Aristotle formed a hierarchical order of senses, from highest value to lowest, as follows: vision – hearing – smell – taste – touch (cited in Stewart, p. 21).

surface. Stewart mounts a persuasive case for elevating touch as a vital and complex sense by stating that 'of all the senses, touch is the most linked to emotion and feeling' (Stewart, 1999, p. 31) and therefore something direct and potently wired to our interiors. She reinforces this point by stating that 'all touch traverses the boundary between interiority and externality' (ibid., p. 35). When I am in the studio making sculpture (or even fantasising about making sculpture when drawing), I almost forget my body is present and instead my actions are forced by thinking-contact at the point of touch-contact with clay. There is a two-way flow in and out of material (clay) and in and out of body which Stewart develops:

Yet the body as agent of sense impression also becomes the body as object of sense impression

(ibid., p. 31)

Stewart is describing the relationship between the internal and externality of the body through sense impression. Touch impresses upon the body of material and material impresses upon the body through touch. To reinforce the forces at play in the relationship between matter and mind and body, Stewart also acknowledges the way pressure operates both ways in an exchange between object/thing and body through touch:

To be in contact with an object meant to be moved by it – to have the pressure of its existence brought into a relation with the pressure of our own bodily existence. And this pressure perceived by touch involves an actual change; we are changed and so is the object.

(ibid., p. 32)

As my hands shape form by modelling and handling clay through relative variations in force, so I am changed. It is as if nothing is ever the same again, however slight the change might be, and the material gives me something back, as if the gesture I have made and the change I have forced generates new thinking and stimulates new understandings of what is possible that could never have been known before that temporal encounter, as if clay is telling me new things about itself and what it wants through touching and feeling.

Significantly, Stewart describes differing qualities of wetness, dampness and dryness that are 'all discerned in the domain of tactility' (ibid., p. 32). Working with clay demands sensitivity to its properties, properties that are almost living, as moisture absorption and dehydration are critical factors in shaping the outcome of a sculpture. To understand these qualities necessitates feeling the clay to ascertain its condition. Stewart continues to promote touch because of the way objects store our (manual) labour so that 'our maintenance of them is a stay against the erosion of time' (ibid., p. 28). I am drawn to the sense of an object holding labour locked up within its possession, as my sculptures are the result of time and bodily and mental effort. Of course, Stewart is describing the museum object, but it also highlights the ongoing denudation of a sculpture from inception to realisation as something eminently friable: my clay archetypes need maintaining in their unfired and vulnerable condition, yet I am mindful of *all* sculptures' gradual – or sudden – dissolution through such processes as toppling and smashing (as a political act of sacrilege), worrying (through handling), weathering (exposure to the elements), obsolescence (losing meaning or relevance) or ignominy (through forgetting). Finally, Stewart – echoing Read – differentiates between visual and tactile senses or perceptions in relationship to motility or the ability

to move, so that 'to understand an object [sculpture] we must move/turn/take time' (ibid., p. 32). In other words, the encounter with sculptural manufacture through modelling and hand forming is not an immediate realisation but a gradual, built, accumulated experience in time and place. Critical to this argument is Stewart's assertion that tactility requires 'temporal comparison' (ibid., p. 32), which involves tracking around the sculpture, processing size, proportions, surfaces, etc. Where visual perception can immediately organise a field, tactility is an unfolding over time.

An important exponent for the value of touch in relation to understanding sculpture is Herbert Read. His promotion of the hand's value to counter the dominance of ocularcentrism within sculpture supports the project's emphasis upon modelling and haptic articulation of matter. Read's treatise on the importance of touch in *The Art of Sculpture* (Read, 1956) promotes the merits of hand forming sculpture as an equally legitimate approach to that of ocularcentrism and its attendant prioritising of the visual when apprehending the artwork. Read places great value in the ability to imagine weightiness, volume and mass as a critical way to engage with tactile qualities of sculptural imagination. Read espouses the act of touching and understanding someone or something by touch:

Sculpture is an art of palpation – an art that gives satisfaction to the touching and handling of objects.

(Read, 1956, p. 49)

The role of palpation is pertinent to my studio practice. Modelling through touch is my primary method of making sculpture, as is imagining modelling the sculpture through drawing, growing the form on the page in two dimensions but thinking of three,

fantasising about bulk and ponderability. To emphasise the importance of touch, Read further defines the differences between two and three dimensions in painting and sculpture in terms of the visual or tactile encounter as ways of approaching the artwork:

sculpture is primarily an art of “touch-space” ... whereas painting is primarily an art of “sight-space”

(Read, 1956, p. 48)

The ‘touch-space’ is the zone of engagement between body and matter, where the sculptural imagination becomes tangible and real. This idea is supported by Dore Ashton (1987) when describing William Tucker’s sculpture:

He (the viewer) must, as Tucker has said, feel with his own body, for everything he builds is a relation between the body – his or the spectator’s – and the sculpture.

(Ashton, 1987, p. 13)

The ‘touch-space’ is therefore the charged zone of felt encounter operating like a corporeal sonar between living material (body) and inert material (clay), so that the latter becomes charged.

Within the context of this project, my ambition is to undo the dominance of vision and, instead, elevate the status of hapticity as a valid method of apprehending the sculptural object. I am seeking to complicate the high status of ocularcentrism (and its relationship to the modernist art object) and navigate a route for replacing distance vision for haptic vision, which doesn’t overthrow ‘sight-space’ or separate the two sensations but brings touch into equal status of importance through the act of making

sculpture. Read claims the two senses are not exclusive but demands recognition of the way palpability can be a valued sensation:

To confine sculpture to the field of visual sensation is to neglect the possibilities of the field of palpable sensation.

(Read, 1956, p. 86)

Furthermore:

If sculpture has any such particularity, it is to be distinguished from painting as the plastic art that gives preference to tactile sensations as against visual sensations.

(ibid., p. 70)

Read identifies different reactions between sight and touch according to how strong these sensations are engaged and whether 'we give priority to touch (or imagined touch and haptic sensations generally) and prefer the palpable image' (ibid., p. 85) over the visual image. Read claims art to be the 'sensuous apprehension or plastic cognition of the world' (ibid., p. 85) which, through the sensation of manually coercing material such as clay into being, is a firmly ponderable activity, promoting tactile perception.

There is, in the full scale of plastic sensibility, a power attaching to ponderability and mass, to the gestated and palpable volume of a solid creation, that cannot be experienced in any other manner, by any other means.

(ibid., p. 86)

Read is making a claim for the potency of the sculptural encounter with a rich tactile language of weightiness and presence. Here is a description of all the fundamental ingredients of making sculpture that I find so enthralling, especially when building works in clay, developing objects that press out into the space, that 'gestate' through drawings and the temporal action of modelling as they slowly emerge into form. The quality of 'ponderability' that Read describes means the way sculpture is apprehended and understood through bodily encounter, stalking and navigating the sculptural object in the round. Yet I also find this word useful as a way to describe a quality in my sculptures that compels me – that of something weighty. There is weight to the material I use (a cold, leaden weight in my hands) and a weight in the appearance of the sculptures I make that interests me as a way of working against the delicacy of the bipedal statue or the sleek manifestation of the modernist object. There is a weightiness in the way the modelling presents itself in the surface of the sculpture, handful over handful of clay spread and pushed in a gestational process of building and held hostage in the cast sculpture.

Another quality of sculpture that must be addressed is bulk. For Read (1956), the quality of sculptural bulk means the 'quality of volume' (Read, 1956, p. 46) an object possesses, while mass relates to the 'quantity of matter an object contains' (ibid., p. 46). Referring to my own sculptural production, the cast sculptures have been designed to suggest mass in terms of their appearance, which is betrayed by their actual nominal thickness suggesting a weightier material presence. This is especially manifest at the clay stage, where the thin but visually impenetrable skin of clay could invoke a reading of the sculpture as solid.

Bulk is inferred by their scale and projection into space, pressing into our visual and bodily field when encountering them on a wall. To me, bulk is an integral quality of my sculptures, for its antagonism to sleek, slender sculpture that tricks the eye by connoting structural lightness, skipping and dancing in reverie. Instead, bulk is thickness and ponderability, it is slowly unfolding and weighty, like my own body hauling bags of clay and plaster up to the studio, sweating from the physical exertion of making a sculpture that demands the extent of my physical ability. I am reminded of William Tucker's efforts to press, hold and model his sculptures at the extent of his own physical, haptic reach, resisting mechanical assistance.

The tactile concerns of modelling and hand forming the sensuous, softness, hardness and slipperiness of clay firmly relate to an apprehension and awareness of the bodily.

Stewart (1999) asserts that:

To be in contact with an object means to be moved by it – to have the pressure of its existence brought into a relation with the pressure of our own bodily existence.

(Stewart, 1999, p. 32)

I think about differing sensations of change between muscles working antagonistically in the physical exertion I put myself through to extend or move clay over and around the sculpture, the resulting ripples of clay echoing my own compressed skin and folds as I contort and stretch, two masses working with and against each other in space. I am aware of our shared vulnerability to bruising and injury.

Despite possessing the same clay in the same studio and using the same tools and actions of kneading, rolling, cutting, pressing, stretching, pushing and smoothing, each haptic action is compellingly different despite operating from the same general functions. Pressure and time vie with differences in temperature and plasticity – invisible properties only understood when in contact with my skin and muscle memory.

New behaviours reveal themselves through my outward actions that are processed internally through the information gathered at my fingertips in response to material properties perceived strongly through touch. The movements of my hands are influenced by perceptions outside of my body. I am also conscious of the disparity between my own corporeal temporality and the deeper, open time of clay, reaching into archaic time and the infinitesimally slow change of aeons.

Corinna Dean (2021) describes in *Clay Matter* her encounter with the London Clay of Sheppey: ‘With touch we can handle compressed time, reminding us of our fleeting presence’ (Dean, 2021, p. 67). Mindful of this, I think about the ball of clay grasped in my hand representing decades, centuries or a millennia of accumulated particles outwashed and transported through time. The ground matrix of clay possesses the ability to shapeshift infinite times, while our presence upon the clay is limited in impact. Yet here in my hand is a material that can perform my will; it can be influenced and maintained to an extent so that my presence is recorded, however briefly.

My hands are labourers. They work the clay, tracking routes across surfaces; they dig and claw away at the material at hand, working out and articulating my intentions. The affordance of clay is its potential for activation in the hand through compressing,

pushing and stretching. If it can be accepted that clay possesses plasticity, enabling it to take whatever form the maker intends within the hand, then Georges Didi-Huberman's (1999) description of plasticity in relation to wax is especially relevant. 'Plastic art' means plasticity of material, which in turn means that matter doesn't resist form – that it is ductile, malleable and can be put to work at will.

When Didi-Huberman is describing the properties of wax as a 'fixed instability' (Didi-Huberman, 1999, p. 43), he is arguably describing the condition between hardness and fluidity as a liminal condition. Its responsiveness when worked in the hand for modelling is at once warm and pliable, vulnerable to deformation and flux; yet when cooled, it hardens and stabilises. Consequently, wax can be seen to be in possession of manifold properties for change and transformation. Its instability is arguably a vulnerability until fixed in perpetuity in resistant materials such as bronze.

Although differing in certain ways, wax and clay both possess the potential to express multiple forms. Like wax, the plasticity of clay allows forms to be made that are directly authored by the transmission of intentions through the hands and into the body of material. Sensation is articulated through holding and manipulating clay as it receives pressure transmitted through the hands and fingers via physical gesture, leaving traces of touch as an imprint.

Clay (like wax) has a particular association with certain kinds of additive modelling techniques observed in much of the nineteenth-century 'salon' sculpture and still in use today. This can be described as the application of small pellets of material, held between the thumb and forefinger, which are added to the body of the sculptural form.

Each small piece of material is broken off a 'parent' lump held in the other hand of the sculptor, keeping it warm, accessible and pliable to ease application and shaping.

I am interested in a less prescriptive and more immediate approach to modelling. Instead of small pellets, I apply swathes of soft clay pressed onto a surface, as if using a loaded brush thickened with paint, or large lumps of clay pressed with a degree of rapidity into a form.

Clay, wax, wet plaster, grease, etc. offer changeability and shapeshifting possibilities in and out of form, assimilating that which goes before so that what is present is neither sedimented nor fixed. Bound up in a matrix of forces, gestures, pressures and haptic phrases, the matter in my hand is re-memorised and forged into being. Memory is unfixed and fixated. The material expression of embodied gesture is both expunged from internal impulses (brain) and transmitted physically through gestures (body) into external images (sculpture). Through embodied and kinaesthetic practice, clay precipitates emergence and becoming. The issue of how the material agency of clay is negotiated within the context of modelling and moulding is dependent upon its material properties in terms of plasticity, viscosity and thixotropy.

In the studio, clay shapes evolve over armatures; they are broken open, punctured, punched and scraped into adaptations of previously intended forms. Sculptural and, therefore, material plasticity can be understood as a metamorphic becoming of form according to forces placed upon its formation or reconfiguration which might be additive or destructive: modelling is, after all, as much about building up as scraping away. The word 'plastic' comes from the Greek *plassein*, 'to mould'. It is a word offering

the potentiality of change and flux of material form – for example, we mould material in our hands or material moulds itself around or within. Thus, the ability for clay (or identity or history or memory) to change materially into multiple iterations can be defined as plasticity.

Clay's plastic capacity for forming affords the opportunity to make a form from 'scratch', allowing a sculpture to be directly forced into being by pressing and moulding. Clay offers a way to *respond* to demands (or urges) but behaves as a thick entity that must be negotiated physically. Clay allows drawn images or physical encounters to be made into plastic realisation. The qualities of clay enable the sculpture to be an enclosed whole without the imposition of material designations such as bolt heads, steel sections or the art historical baggage of an *objet trouvé* to assign it a relationship to the world of functionality. Clay can be challenged to behave in ways that allow its emergent properties to inform the sculpture – that allow its mutability to evolve new shapes and previously unseen forms, as if extracting a new fossil out of a nodule. Critically, the material memory of clay is a force to be negotiated through cheirotic methods of matter making. Its inertness is animated by human force into a new identity. Clay possesses a mutability, open to change through remodelling and overlaying its morphology into new forms. It affords the ability to invent a form that can be teased out or handled into being as a direct communion with matter. The surface of the clay is a register of intent through touch and experiential making. Clay allows touch and gesture to be embedded in the material. The forms can only be made as a bodily encounter with matter *in hand*, in a condition located somewhere between dust and liquid and understood through a tactile encountering with their material qualities.

My relationship with the potential locked within material becomes more of a partnership of forces between body and matter in a temporal encounter. The allowance of material to operate more participatorily might offer a better definition of the sculptural object as differing from 'an' object. The sculptural object might be something possessing potential that is bound up within its materiality, which proposes something evasive. Where other objects might be formed with clear intent, as rational structures designating an authentication of function or serving purposes of labour for example, the sculptural object could be understood as something emerging out of the friction between intent forced upon its form by the sculptor and the results occurring from unpredictable behaviours of materials during this encounter. This zone of potential means that it is not simply a person imposing their will upon an accepting material but a more dynamic exchange, with matter responding to touch, modelling, rolling, dropping and fusing, etc., so that it offers something back.

Within these processes brought into physical conversation in the studio, it is the memory of clay that excites me: the imprint of a Mesolithic footprint or the landslip, the thixotropic glacial moraine, the prototypes of burghers, horses and vessels, how it holds the shapes of the heteromorph ⁵

These deep and shallow histories are bound up in the matrix of molecules within the body of clay, the effort of force enabling new forms to emerge through making that are in possession of the memories of prior ontologies. However, it is not a matter of 'finding' the form within the clay as if it is there already. This is no 'truth to materials' dogma where the artist 'reveals' the figure locked within the lump of matter. The

⁵ Heteromorph ammonites possessed uncoiled shells as opposed to the more orthodox homomorphs.

sculpture emerges through friction and disagreement, fighting and wrestling, as intent and forethought meet the actuality of material potential through my hands and fingers flexing in haptic gestures.

I think of clay as material deep time and as a carrier of histories that are continually and literally folded into it. Clay accepts the imprint and the impression, and my hands influence its material appearance. When making prototypes, I am thinking about how the lump of clay in my hand could be infinitely graspable, and that the outcome of my labour is only one position to take, one 'type' of sculptural formation drawn from my efforts that can give way to many more variations.

Writing about the gesture of making, Vilém Flusser (1991) asserts that, beyond our hand's movements, 'an "inner" motive – we don't know where it comes from – affects, changes the gesture' (Flusser, 1991, p. 37) – which can be applied to the process of (in my case) modelling sculpture rather than just holding existing objects. This 'inner motive' could be considered as something that is activated from within as I navigate the forming sculpture, like a pulse or current conducted by the gestures of the hands.

When writing of both hands gesturing, Flusser proposes the gesture as something anticipating the 'final' form. He refers to theory and practice working together so that idea and outcome are modelled by the hand controlled by the body and mind respectively. Through a process of gesticulation, pressing the object from both sides in a congruent action involving opposite hands, something is formed in the 'here and now' while encasing history within its shape and form. Flusser's significance to this

project relates to gestures of the hand valued in equitable relation to the eyes in anticipating the sculptural form.

Modelling clay involves a certain circumnavigation and ‘prowling’ – the hand tracking the eye as it detects areas in need of attention due to surface anomalies such as cracks, exposed plaster or too-thin clay. By tracking, I refer to a coordination of hand and eye over the form as it is built and shaped in a collaboration between sight and touch. My arm and hand are ‘operated’ by my intentions, and the external topography of the sculpture is understood through the fingers and hand picking up information about shape, texture, etc. This process can be comprehended by Helmuth Plessner’s (1970) description of perception as a ‘hand-eye field’ and the assertion that ‘the hand leads the eye, and the hand confirms the eye’ (Plessner, 1970, quoted in Suhrkamp, 2003). So while I scan the form and prompt the hand to shape by developing the material into a three-dimensional shape, the hand is also ‘searching’ the surface of the proto sculpture, whereby the sense receptors of the hand and fingers ‘read’ the surface and report back to the eyes.

Plessner’s statement places importance on the hand working in conjunction with seeing and thinking, the hand and fingers operating as a pickup, like a corporeal pantograph, that upon contact with whatever material it is communing with, connects material to force – that is, the force of intent as well as the force of muscular and bodily pressure brought to bear upon material. My sculptures are generated within the body, comprehended by touch and articulated through a process of embodied modelling that William Tucker describes ‘at its purest is the direct transmission of energy from the human body into matter’ (Tucker, 1987, no pagination), as soft clay gives form to ideas

or two-dimensional images worked out in a cheirotic encounter that is both intimately tactile and beyond my grasp. Tucker's later working method of hand forming sculpture out of wet plaster or clay leads to sculptures that propose something instinctive and suggestive of the body, yet elusive, arresting any further identification.

Matter communes with deep time as a *materia prima*.⁶ When touching clay, I am also touching the cliffs and the fossil, I'm tracking protean imprints of forms that have yet to exist. I imagine my hands are meeting a past and future that is outcropped in front of me. I imagine the cliffs at Speeton becoming fused into the body of the sculpture, that every particle of clay I am forcing into being was previously imprinted into the surface of a heteromorph or carried by the shallow Cretaceous seas or worn away from the surface of a statue to be transported and reconstituted elsewhere.

Beyond the time of the sculpture's formation, beyond my tending to the material in my grip, the clay will dissolve and atomise to be redeposited and sedimented into a new stratigraphy to be excavated and refined again into a new morphology. Clay is the history of sculpture that I accept – the clay of the artisan, the clay of the sculptor working the statue. I'm mindful of the legacy of the studio, the sulphuric stink of unoxygenated clay and the damp pungencies of wet cloth over clay torso wrapped in plastic sheeting awaiting exposure and reworking. The studio clay is all these things embedded within its own body – the possibility of realisation as eye coaxes hand, of slow unpicking and rewetting and reuse. I'm haunted by the images of sculptors at honest toil, the cliché of labouring in the sculptors' studio. It is the clay of the statue

⁶ *Materia prima* can be understood as the initiating material for alchemy or the formless base matter of everything.

punched back into a lump to be stretched out again, rolled, wedged and rebagged, poised for a new deployment.

Flusser describes the gesture of making as both hands converging upon 'an obstacle, a problem, or an object ... to bring forth' (Flusser, 1991, p. 32), enabling our comprehension of its meaning in the world as we put pressure on material to articulate abstract thought and shape it into a tangible 'thing'. Through the gesture of making comes a certain means of understanding that which is touched, especially relevant to the activity of forcing the sculptures into being in the studio as, to understand what I am making, I must keep gesturing, gaining a better knowledge of the thing I am building with each incremental application of clay or the necessary removal of surplus material or ill-formed shapes.

Both hands operate in a choreography that is at once deliberating and improvisatory. Lumps of clay are sheared off into the hands and deposited onto the rump of the sculpture, roughly shaping the image in my mind. Both hands offer particular values, the left often following on from the initial work the right has done or roughing out the shape for the right to finesse or simply holding a lump in reserve while the right is operating. Sometimes the hands converge and manoeuvre around or behind each other, following a series of routes that push, smooth and deploy forces of bodily weight and pressure upon the material. Each piece of clay is applied with force of intent in a gesture that is physical yet prompted by theoretical designs. Past experiences, proto-drawings and prior works inform what grows in front of my hands.

Flusser denotes a difference between left and right hands by describing one as being grounded in theory and the other in practice, where both support each other to meet and understand the object at hand by instilling a comprehension of form and value into it through touch. He describes this metaphorical process with the left hand being that of 'practice' and the right as that of 'theory' *at work together to 'ground the theory into practice and to support practice theoretically'* (ibid., p. 38), which seems an apt way to describe the fusion of both within the formation of the sculptural object. Nevertheless, it is possible that, despite the sculpture being resolved or at a point of accomplishment, there remain vibrations within its body between theoretical intention and practical realisation that cannot be resolved equitably.

Flusser continues to describe the practical and theoretical hands at work in the formation of an object through a gesture of fabricating whereby the object is:

raw material suited to the hands and held firmly by the practical hand while the theoretical hand holds the value, presses on the object to in-form it.

(ibid., p. 42)

This describes theory forced upon material held by the 'practical' hand to elevate its value. This coming together of the hands creates something that is perhaps energised by this action of material-reception, differentiating the object from the sculptural object. Arguably, sculpture differs from the object of function and form for at-hand purposes in the way that it forces more problematic questions of capabilities carried beyond its inception that remain unresolved and blurred.

Material memory absorbs all that has been inputted, soaking up gestures and intentions from the operation of the hands as they track previous changes and amendments to the form's surface. It is beguiling to consider material possessing the ability to absorb and memorialise the events and actions invested in authoring the sculpture. It is here that the processes invested within the material of sculpture continue to resonate beyond the 'completion' of the work, so that its material histories and gestures of making are emitted from within the sculpture.

William Tucker's modelled sculptures from the early 1980s to the present deliver essays in form that privilege the embodied methodology of their formation, where the gestures of the hand that forms are embedded in the surface of material. Tucker's connection to materiality is evidenced in the register of dents, impressions and imprints made by shaping the clay or wet plaster to evolve each form as a protean entity emerging grafted and grappled, haptically and bodily. Critically, Tucker's oeuvre is typified by his resistance to any reference to the world (Sleeman, 2007, p. 13), so that the resultant sculptures suggest but don't specify. Certainly, though, they are objects of mass that are rendered as lumpen, emergent forms, inferring something either taking shape or dissolving into formlessness.⁷

⁷ When considering the work of Tucker, it is important to note the contribution of Herbert Read and his enthusiastic championing of the sculpture of Henry Moore (a sculptor to whom Tucker worked as an assistant). Important to this project is Read's espousal of sculpture as something to be encountered physically and felt, as evidenced in his treatise *The Art of Sculpture* (Read, 1956), in which he states that the sculptor is 'continually passing his hands over the work in progress, not to test its surface quality ... but simply to realize and assess the shape and volume of the object' (Read, 1956, p. 50). Read calls for touch and materiality to be valorised with the visual in terms of how sculpture is to be encountered. The 'ponderability' that Read also speaks of as a feature of sculpture can be understood as an advocacy of the monolithic physicality of Moore's work, and this is, arguably, present in much of Tucker's later work, which is characterised by a particular weightiness and lumpen, singular presence.

Study for Dancer (Fig. 4) typically presents a thickened form that implies movement while being firmly, weightily anchored to the ground. This is a chthonic, earthbound sculpture fighting the irresistible pull of gravity with a heavy, undeniable materiality. The corpus of Tucker's work from the early eighties onwards can be related to Krauss and Bois's project around formlessness (*Formless: A User's Guide*, 1997) and, by extension, the grounded quality defined by Georges Bataille (*l'informe*). Tucker's sculptures offer a bodily, possibly excrescent suggestion while inferring lumpen, heaving masses. They are dynamic in their acknowledgement of gravity, which, when considering their lunking forms, is what informs the project's investigation into mass and physical elevation from the ground.

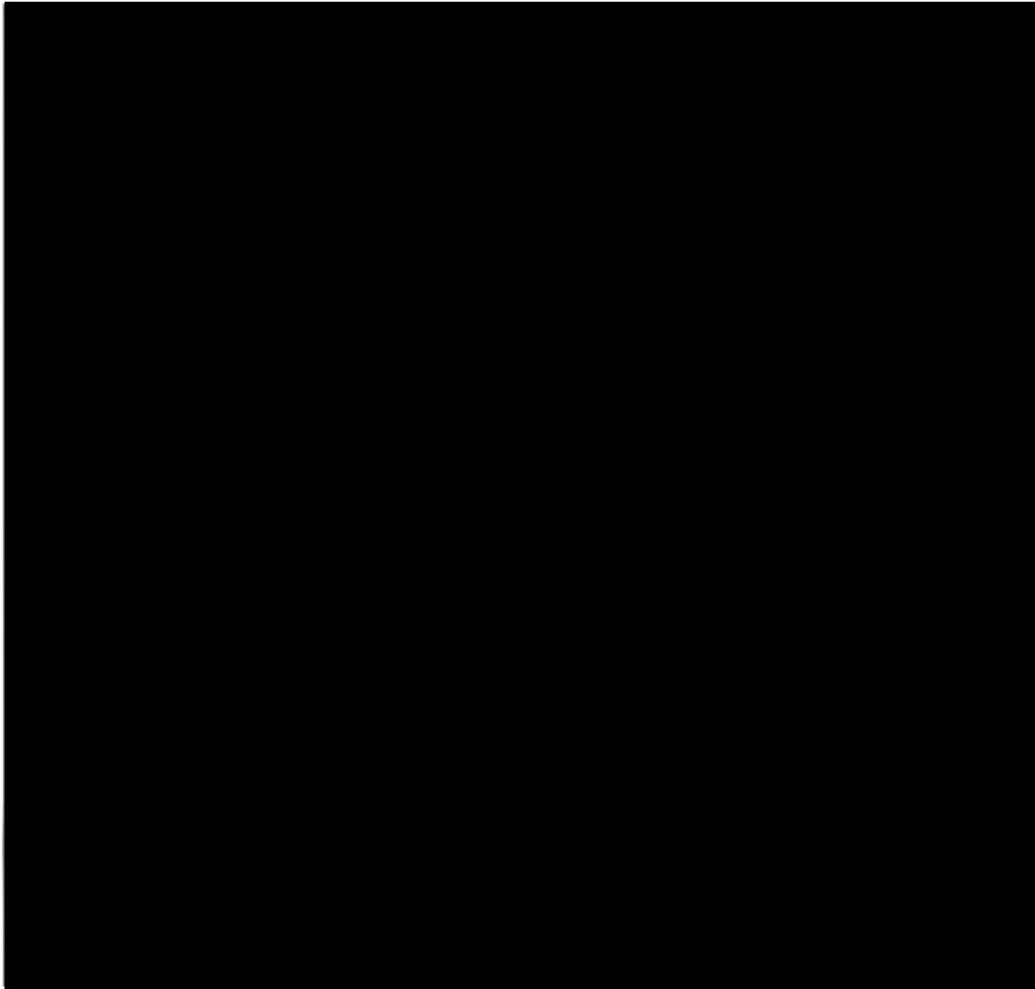


Figure 4. William Tucker, *Study for Dancer*, 2014, terracotta, 17 x 14 x 15cm.

A critical element of Tucker's oeuvre rests in his commitment to modelling to realise form. Julia Kelly (2016) describes how his sculpture in the late 1970s began to become 'increasingly concerned with modelled surfaces' (Kelly, 2016, p. 38) that clearly evidenced their haptic authoring as he worked a pliable material (plaster) in a limited timeframe before it set. The subsequent topography of his sculptures possesses an inherent agitation resulting from the process of haptic modelling (as opposed to engineered or smoothly machined surfaces), thus the surfaces of his sculptures:

maintain an incalculant roughness which works against their apperception, a conceptual resistance to fixity of form and meaning.

(Kelly, 2016, p. 41)

Here, Kelly proposes that through surfaces agitated by the hand modelling wet material into shape, Tucker is creating sculpture that carries the knowledge of predecessors such as Matisse's *Backs*, and other Impressionist sculptures, into his own approach to the body, with a stubbornness that won't be set with clear delineation of surface. This antagonism towards conceptually fixing the sculpture with an absolute definition is evidenced in *The Language of Sculpture*, where Tucker supports the idea of sculpture having qualities of un-fixity when modelling is employed:

The process of modelling clay, the realization of volume in soft, self-adhesive material, implies an additive mode, with no natural end-form or distinctive outer limit.

(Tucker, 1974, p. 43)

Tucker articulates his own method of making sculpture through a process of building up wet plaster, in dialectical opposition to the reductive process of carving. With an amorphousness without an 'end-form', his modelled sculpture arguably exists in a condition of unresolvedness, offering the implication of further growth beyond that which is encountered, as if we are witnessing it in a frozen moment of stasis before it grows again. Dore Ashton (1987), describing Tucker's *Gods* series, relates these outcomes to the method with which the sculptures are modelled in wet plaster:

This protean quality in all five sculptures almost certainly derives from Tucker's choice of material and his method of working

(Ashton, 1987, p. 16)

By working with wet plaster to build his forms, Tucker inevitably places pressure upon himself to reach a point (limit) before the material has set and 'fixed', resulting in the energy and effort involved in building the sculpture being absorbed and locked into each sculpture's surface and revealing lumpen, thickened plaster frozen in time like a fossil.

A different material outcome is found in *Study for Dancer*, which, like much of Tucker's later output, maintains a surface quality that is resolutely *handled*, reminding the viewer that these are sculptures *ld* through building up and applying by hand. *Study for Dancer* differs in that this work has been made from soft clay that has been kiln-fired. As a result, instead of a bronze taken from a mould, *Study for Dancer* hasn't been replicated but exists as the 'original'.

Ashton (2001) describes Tucker's sculptural practice working directly with volumes as he tried to prevent himself:

from anticipating what would happen, sensing the form of the sculpture through the hand enforcing a haptic phenomenological modelling practice

(Ashton, 2001, p. 35)

By 'sensing the form' via the hands, it is perhaps no surprise that the echo of the body is found in Tucker's work from this period onwards as, without mechanical processes of production, the shaping is left to the artist and his own hands as 'great hulking

lumpish lurching weighty things that inevitably carry the memory of bodies' (Ashton, 1987, p. 8) through bodily transmission into matter.

Writing about the clay sculptures of Kate Cuddon, Elizabeth Manchester (2013) articulates the haptic encounter with clay through the actions of manipulating soft matter. She expresses the growth of form through successive accretions and blended pieces melding into one another in the service of the totality. With *This Something* (Fig. 5), the object is suggestive of a limb, its very detachment from a body leaving a fragmentary object marooned on the floor. Its title deliberately evades exact designation and allows the sculpture to remain open for interpretation, leaving the thing itself unspecified. Its pitted and agitated surface is complicated by paint and glaze in opposition to a smoothness that might be attributed to turned ceramic vessels, bronze statuary or classical figuration. Its pallor, texture and glazed sheen suggests a limb yet to be fully formed, with skin yet to be hardened and protective of its fleshy musculature, like an alien form groping for stability as it tentatively slides upright.



Figure 5. Katie Cuddon, *This Something*, 2011, painted ceramic and plaster

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Manchester points to the surface qualities of clay as a way for the expression of inner bodily intent and memory in terms that are not filtered but direct and raw. This is also true of the practice of drawings Cuddon makes around and towards her sculptures:

they travel from the intimate receptibility of the artist's skin transmitted by numerous neurons through her nervous system ... they are chewed, digested, processed to produce an image in her mind's eye.

(Manchester, 2013, p. 83)

Such an astute description of the internal impulses manifest outward into the material are innately relevant to this project, as the manipulation of matter into form are

consequences of bodily intentions and haptic sensations.

Juhani Pallasmaa (2009) describes the relationship between 'intention, perception and the work of the hand' (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 84) as entities having to work in unison. His repositioning of the hand as a critical part of the creative process creates a fusion that is exerted bodily into the artwork. Pallasmaa helps to reinforce the importance of the hand in the making process which is integral to the way sculpture is made in this project. The engagement between maker, intention, perception and material is dynamic and physical. Within the studio the assembled elements are influenced, shaped and conducted by the maker.

This relationship is endorsed by Richard Sennett (2008), who describes the relationship between craftsperson and material as something bodily, where skill is drawn out and put into making something tangible. Sennett further describes the studio (or in his case, the workshop) as a place that fixes the thing that is being created in 'tangible reality' (Sennett, 2008, p. 21). The sculptures made within this project are firmly studio productions and the result of labour and haptic articulation.

CLAY KNOWLEDGES

Clay is saturated. Each bucket and tub maintains a skim of water atop fragments of raw clay dwelling in wet pools. Slowly the cold leathery slivers and older fragments begin to assimilate the water and incrementally dissolve. They transform from rinds of clay shavings into slimy mulch. They will soon be ready to slather over the plaster cores I have made that form nodal points to work out from. Plunging the hand into the

bucket to begin mixing feels the same as it did reaching into the blue grey marl of the Speeton Clay, I can grip my hand tightly without fear of snagging my flesh on a flint fragment.

Clay is impressed. Responsive to touch, smoothing and bruising. It registers my tracing and the texture of my skin. It witnesses actions and soaks up energy. It accepts and responds – a certain gauge or fold might beget a new identity, like a trace fossil or a wound.

Clay is lump. The lumpen thickness of ball clay sits plump on the floor. It is inert and placid, dense and still. Its weightiness sits heavy on my mind – how can this be animated? How will it live? Its chunkiness, its heft, needs to be challenged. Memories of boulders falling down the failed slopes of Speeton without echo as clay on clay absorbed any resonance. The lump hits the bench with a loud slap. Prising it open, I begin to force change.

Clay is cut. Cutting the lump or slab, it grips tightly so the blade or wire has to fight its way through to the other side. It sheers in two and falls open, freshly exposed and ready for being tasked with shaping and becoming form. Used clay that has become hardened is cut into pieces to enable greater surface area for soaking. Cutting is denuding and dismantling what came before, taking down the material into fractions of a whole.

Clay is timeless. Here in the studio, I am haunted by memories of the Speeton cliffs offering fragments of ammonites that have been scoured and worn down towards

something more protean. Prehistory in my hands forming new images that – in turn – will be redissolved and reformed in another time. Timeless clay doesn't have a date: each fragment or particle has been worried off other bodies and washed or blown. The capacity of clay to travel in time to my hands is gripping – the shapes I make can begin to speak to the morphologies of the Speeton trace fossils, the *Willendorf Venus* or the *Conversation in the Garden*.

Clay is handled. Each batch of clay possesses differing, subtle degrees of plasticity that require certain levels of pressure to inform change upon it. The quality of malleability in each ball is assessed and considered by the hands – how will it stick? Can it be spread? Can I be confident it will do as my will intends it?

Clay is resistant. Slip is painted on the edges and seams of plaster piece moulds to enable them to be separated. It prevents wet plaster applied to the successive corresponding mould fusing to the prior piece. Its resistance causes the overlying sands and gravel formations to slide over the Speeton Clay as water percolating through cannot penetrate the clay bed below.

Clay is formed. Shapes worked around a core, building up and outwards, becoming forms but without sharpness and clarity. The forms are translated from drawings, improvisations, changes of direction and amendments to what was intended. These sculptures are an embodiment of thought forms that are hauntings of post-war precincts, Rosso's studio photographs, 'excoriated flesh' (Read, 1952, no pagination⁸),

⁸ Herbert Read's (1952) essay accompanying the British entries to the XXVI 1952 Venice Biennale used the term 'geometry of fear' to characterise the work of several young British sculptors working primarily within a tradition of welded and constructed sculpture with overtly figurative morphologies. Within the catalogue text, Read describes the sculptures thus:

the fragments of Speeton ammonites, drawings of uncertain objects. Sculptures are reformed time and again: *reformare* – to form again, to remould. Heraclitus's assertion that nothing remains the same is manifest in the encounter with clay. The slightest change of tactile pressure and the shape is changed and lost.

Clay is colour. Grey, white, black, red. The blue grey cliffs at Speeton, the delicate lightness of porcelain and the red stains of terracotta like dried blood. Colour shifts and changes according to light – it is picked up and absorbed.

Clay is moulded. I imagine these forms emerging out of sludge or growing out from the floor or wall as if being given up and presented as architectural appendages or adornments.

Clay is reformed. Previous iterations are folded and compacted back into baseness to be drawn out again. Initial designs are roughed out and remade – cutting and transplanting appendages and extensions into the sculpture's initial image. The shape of the thing is obtained through manual handling and labour.

These new images belong to the iconography of despair, or of defiance; and the more innocent the artist, the more effectively he transmits the collective guilt. Here are images of flight, or ragged claws 'scuttling across floors of silent seas', of excoriated flesh, frustrated sex, the geometry of fear.

(Clark, Hendy and Read, 1952, unpaginated)

This passage has come to describe the acme of British sculpture of the immediate post-war period, but also serves to caricature much of this work as spiky, gnarled, and pessimistic in form and attitude.

Although Read initially championed this generation of sculptors, it was Clement Greenberg who championed the linear, forged sculpture of David Smith at around the same time. When Read pledged allegiance to Henry Moore's carved, cast monumental forms, as evidenced in his Mellon lectures at Harvard University in 1954, it signified a volte-face from the work of Chadwick, Butler et al.

Clay is punched. Hito Steyerl (2010) speaks of bruises impacting upon a ‘thing’ as ‘the marks of history’s impact’ (Steyerl, 2010, no pagination), which compels thoughts of how the bruise arrives, connecting from history into the present. Making sculpture becomes a wrestling bout – hauling and sweating something into shape. Steyerl continues, ‘Things are made to speak – often by subjecting them to additional violence’ (ibid., no pagination). As I pound and slap the rump of clay into animation, I am conscious of my own violence towards the object, yet something begins to happen as, over time, the thing ‘speaks’ back to tell me how it should look, how it should exist, how much it should withhold.

Clay is skin. Elastic properties allow mass to move and expand laterally and longitudinally. Pushed against substructure, it stretches over to envelope the former, to re-cover and deny what lies underneath. Like Andre’s *Statue of Liberty* metaphor, the skin hides the superstructure that supports the external surface. Stretching raises questions though: How much will clay give me? How far will it allow elasticity until failure?

Clay is slip. Fluid and able to ingress within the cracks, its insidious creep and qualities of slipperiness allow the sculptures to be prised away from their parent moulds with ease. Slippery too, requiring effort to author sculptures that resist easy quotidian references. Giving me the slip. Evading my comprehension, sculptures are escaping my grasp as the work becomes some ‘thing’ attempting not to be ‘that’ thing already known.

Clay is dried. As it dries it cracks and reveals its interiority, exposing its innards, becoming vulnerable to influx and further damage. The outer shell breaks and splits as fissures appear to allow space to enter between the crust.

Clay is dust. Eroded, broken down to the lowest form of component. Blown, suspended, deposited, uplifted and eroded in a state of constant becoming as it is transported, redistributed and reformed into film, lump or bedrock. Sheared into pieces, it is dehydrated or leathery. It is exfoliated and breaks up like scales that bloom upon contact with water. Moved around for eternity, clay is migrant particles arriving for a new life or to escape capture.

Clay is archaic. Taking prior forms and embedding and reprinting them. Deathbeds are overlain and sealed for millennia until exposed again. Our hands touch them for the first time. The fossil's form is assumed by being consumed by clay. Emerging into the present from the deep past to be revealed in the first light for aeons. I am conscious of making sculptures that might be quasi mechanical or anthropomorphic, that could be something from another time, like a rusted mechanism thick with clag, the hulk of a structure dug out of the Cretaceous ooze or the fragment from a long-obiterated structure leeching out of the Teufelsberg slag pile.

Clay is outwash. Fans of broken-down particles. Worn away at the face, the leaching of material pools and fans at the foot of the mass. The sponge runs along the surface and picks up outcrops of finings. Squeezed into the bucket, it settles again as a fine slip. The slip is reapplied and reinvested as a final wash onto the sculpture to enable an even coating to the surface.

Clay is unstable. A body above slips and upends saturated clay. Unfired, its integrity is compromised. Knocked, a dull dent or silent fracture or landslip. Thixotropic qualities of sheer force move from fluid to fixed in an instant. Hands and limbs embedded and bodies saturated set within a clayey mass.

Clay is time. Its history embedded into matter, the mountain is eroded down and denuded into pulp. The transformations of gradual uplift and erosion, worn into discs that rub and jostle in clayey viscosity. The lifespan of a sculpture set against that of river silt or adobe dwellings is fleeting and transient by comparison.

Clay is memory. The registration marks bear witness to its formation. Infinitesimally minute or great slathers of soft clay are thrown on or clawed off. During the process of making the work, it is knocked or scratched by a stray arm or the imprint of plastic sheeting or damp towels. These are sudden and clumsy scarifications – the studio floor is a swamp of fragments dissolving in pools of slush below the table. Each cut piece of ball clay I carry is possessed of mountains and deoxygenated silt and long-extinct petrifications. It remembers the crush and rapid retreat of the glaciers and the plume of Mount St Helens. It recalls the long waiting in Rodin's atelier as the master snuck around the Salon's stifling demands for virtuosity.

Clay is thing. It assimilates form, moving between states of being thingness. The shape can grow as ideas and intentions and gestures are pushed into it and swallowed hungrily. Heidegger's jug, its function stable and known, made by the potter who has formed the void, yet the thing can be the nodule or lode that is solid and unmoveable

mass. Clay can ensconce forms between void and solid, liquid and solid, and collapse in on itself, trapping air or squeezing it out.

Clay is cheirotic. To not lose touch is to remain connected, to keep a hand in is to maintain input, and to lose track of something is to no longer be in touch. Working cheirotically is to build by hand⁹ – to keep contact with the materials I am using and to maintain dialogue between eye and hand and material. Hands tracking over surfaces, changing form and shaping the work in single acts of brutality or slow, caressing articulations.

Clay is aniconic. It is able to eschew material representations in its own sludgy, juicy liquidity. Or it can be wilfully obdurate in evading recognition. Its own properties of imminent change can be manifest through forces of compression, expansion, drying or saturating. In an instant I can obliterate the thing I am crafting into something else the moment it begins to look like something other than the thing I am trying to fashion.

Clay is imprint. Mesolithic footprints on a Norfolk beach, restless combing on a surface. My body is imprinted into the body of the sculpture. Hands seize and hold in check any further movement or slippage. Fingerprints, palms and wrists are collected in the surface as palpable evidence of its own creation. Thoughts of wattle and daub walls tamped into shape.

⁹ From the Greek *cheiro* for 'hand'.

Clay is vitrified. Fixed and metamorphosed from dull form to hardened and transformed. Form is fixated and intention is fused into brittle being. The gesture is captured and kept in check.

Clay is atavistic. The thing I am making struggles to resist something that I have seen before and with every piece of clay shaped and added to the parent form, it perhaps also speaks to things that have existed in deep time before my knowledge. Our meeting engages a bout with the emergence of something that might be bound up in clay's memory. Moore and Nash's found flints and minerals were dormant until activated by the artists' discovery through a process of investing in these mute natural forms an energy that was not previously identified. Through the creative act of encountering such objects, a response is triggered that digs deep into the core of the material and its past provenance and origins.

Clay is glazed. Sealed. Reflected and repellent. A sheen of defence picking up light. Implying finishing off but in fact opening the object up to its environment. Each ceramic sculpture that I have glazed records the ambient light and reflections that surround it to deny an even reading of its surface. Reflections interfere with the modelled shape.

Clay is animated. Promulgating an inner movement that is somewhere between impulsive and premeditated. The actualisation of material capacities through recognised actions towards something other than the material form. The implication of hands grappling soft matter and bullying it into shape. The marks combed into terracotta by Canova's hands, making his cartoons shift and vibrate.

Clay is heavy. Hefty and hauled between locations. Despite a thin skin of clay over the preceding, the weight of each sculpture demands a superstructure to support it. Clay continues to remind me that I am pushing it up and out of the ground for a limited period before it is subsumed again.

Clay is pregnant. Holding potential for morphogenesis that transcends the elements used, that somehow the actions between elements – gesture versus material, for example – create something greater than the sum of its parts through a partnership between material, the maker and the forces between them.

Clay is stuck. Relegated to infantile pottering and knowingly slapdash neocrafting. Clay provides me with the means to articulate my designs into form with directness and little mediation. Perhaps the associations of nineteenth-century statuary keep ceramics fixed within the figurative tradition and the overly deterministic sculpture of the salon.

Clay is cast. Fixed and ensconced within a shell of plaster that holds the surface to account. For a time, it is safely locked and set, its details held for revealing at a future point in time.

Clay is potential. Forms emerge wet, roughly handled, thick from the surface and become intrusive (and extruded). Locked up within the material is the genesis of formation that is both deep in time and of the immediate present. Somehow the sculptures are charged by matter that is locked within and activated once history is

opened and material properties emerge that offer back their own potential to the maker.

Clay is plastic. It is gestured into being, held in stasis, hanging suspended and inert. Its mutability is immanent. Becoming form at the slightest touch or the embodied flex, clay can absorb the shock of weight and wrenched matter. Its immediacy is alive and responsive to clawing and pulling about. Clay's *plassein* can be subtle shifts in emphasis or radical transformations; it is able to be destroyed but also instantly repaired. Its plasticity is responsive to forces moulding or modelling it to impose upon it a languid state of being or subject it to implosion.

Clay is thickness. A metre equals a million years. Also, thin – its density prevents easy reading of how thick clay might be. My sculptures employ a layer of clay that 'seals' off the internal form. It looks massive and solid.

Clay is soaked. Stripped, pulled away and excavated, clay is screened for any erratic particles of other materials and then submerged again into the bins of water ready to be renegotiated and reformed. The cycle continues.

CHAPTER 2: ARCHETYPE

DEFINING THE ARCHETYPE

*Proto-
Protozoic
Protoplasm
Prototype*

Initially I had defined the clay sculptures as prototypes, envisaging them in a 'holding' position for the sculptural form I had yet to arrive at until it was captured in a mould. 'Prototype' suggested a test piece, a trial version and something initiating a form. Nonetheless, it felt limiting as a term, implying a 'standard' type, model or first version rather than an articulation of a possibility. The clay sculptures are not the first in a line of work or an early version but rather a continuing enquiry, whereby each successive clay is another member of an unfolding group.

*Arche-
Archaeology
Architectonic
Archetype*

A more fitting term to describe these pieces is 'archetype', as it encompasses that sense of the first (and only) form of each sculpture while operating as a 'model' for something unidentifiable.

Archetype comes from the Greek *arkhetypon* meaning 'pattern' or 'model', the adjective of which, 'arkhetypos'. Means 'first moulded'. It proposes something from which other versions emerge as a 'type' or family. Mindful of the versions of heteromorph ammonites that demonstrate a particular habit of unorthodox formation, so the series of clay sculptures possess certain features linking them without being identical. *Archetype* suggests something other types refer to and evolve from. The archetype operates as a literal sculptural model to be first moulded and cast but also as a *figure* of a quality of flux, renewal and changing seriality that represents one of or all the work I have made in this project that employ the same methods of production and manufacturing principles. The archetype figures a condition of fixed elusiveness: although literally realised, no singular sculpture or drawing captures an 'original' but instead operates as an ongoing body of imaginings.

The role of archetype to me is to find a sculptural possibility of something that has familial connections to the world but doesn't replicate existing things in the world. The act of making sculpture is an exploration of the archetype as a set of limits of legibility that confine the sculptural form to guide it away or back from imitating something existing. Thus, the archetype is defined by what it *isn't*. The compulsion to make sculpture is to reveal in inert material that which has not been seen.

The definition of archetype attracts me in as a term to describe sculptural forms that operate as an originator, a pattern or model from which things can be copied or represented thereof. Clay is the perfect archetypical matter, and it contains the possibility of form and invites us to discover it. Meanwhile, form organises amorphous matter, setting limits on it. Archetype is a simulation of a sculptural something.

The following words emerge from thinking of the archetype – they are words for the handmade shapes I have made. They articulate a sculptural form, finding a route that is both monumental with figuration embedded within the surface in close bodily contact at the point of creation:

lunking

hulking

bulky

chunky

fulsome

thickset

paunchy

foursquare

DESCRIPTION OF AN IMAGINED ARCHETYPE

This could be a description about any of my sculptures. It is a sculptural phantasm:

The sculpture occupies the span of my outstretched arms. The general form occupies a horizontal orientation with the suggestion of a crumpled rectangular box form, compressed at one end and pinched in the middle, enough to allow a bulge to project from this central area. The entire object sits against the wall with a slight droop to the other side of the compressed end. Flush against the wall, the underside presents itself

as a jutting jaw-like shape underneath the boxy main body. Crisscrossing the underside and front elevation of the object are a series of raised, rounded lines transecting over the surface in a pattern broken at one lower point by an angular shard-like appendage that seems to have been embedded into the surface. This 'shard' disrupts the hatched lines and breaks the pattern abruptly while extending outwards at an oblique angle to the main trunk of the object. Along the top, a succession of ever-increasing steps rises diagonally from the centre-right of the object, reminiscent of smoothed, footworn treads but operating in reverse, so that it cantilevers away into space in an ascending fashion, providing an overly top-heavy form. Across the entire object, between the smoothed diamond-patterned 'ribs', the surface is in places pitted and roughly rendered as suggestions of the under-structure are hinted at – a piece of scrim here and a thumb mark there? Imprints of hands and fingers are registered across the object, intensifying the surface with bodily energy.

I have been haunted by a thing from long ago. It was a darkened, tumbledown presence, possessing a massiveness that could be attributed to something architectonic. Seemingly slumped to the floor, as if its lungs had ceased to exhale, rendering its midriff a bucked, indented shell, its rounded core slowly decayed in the open air. It was unfathomable in its appearance, neither machinery nor vehicle lying silently in repose. Since those formative encounters, its identity remains uncertain as, with time, it has disappeared, slowly dissolving in memory. Its ponderability, though, is tangible – like a belly-landed fuselage. Further images and sensations emerge, the bow section of the upturned *Eleni V*, helpless within the sun-hot slick of thick, tacky oily ooze, the heat of a Henry Moore sculpture on my infantile hands, the thickness of concrete defensive blocks on the coast, the aggregate grazing my clambering knees,

my father's thick, pudgy fingers (unable to change a plug or filter paper, handwriting with a ruler for guidance), from a stopped train observing unspecific animal fragments ejected from an abattoir chute and heaped in an unsorted pile of bone rubble (unlike Eli Lotar's photographs of carefully rolled skins or orderly arranged sawn-off trotters).¹⁰ Shapes emerge out of my body and into matter, transmuted through the haptic methodology of modelling from deep memories and encounters stored inside me.

Possessing a fixed idea of a monument with attendant solidity, assuredness and stoicism, these sculptures' behaviours associated with monumentality include singularity, bodily association written into their surfaces and an enclosed form. Yet these sculptures are confounded by material sensations of movement and instability within the handling of materials forced to conform to an idea of sculpture. Intuition is petrified within the stopped object to remain perpetually frozen. The sculptures operate against a claim for their likenesses to other things – they operate without a real world example to lead them to. Their converse, unmonumental status resides in their engagement with non-representation, non-statuary.

Clay is the starter. The artist Anna Maria Maiolino describes the action of working with soft, pliant clay as a connectivity to potential forms that emerge through handling:

When we lay our hands on that wet mass of clay, a whole cosmic vision appears with all the archetypes of creation.

(Maiolino, quoted in Tatay, 2011, p. 54)

¹⁰ Eli Lotar, *Aux Abattoirs de la Villette*, 1929.

Maiolino's use of 'archetype' refers to the possibilities locked up in clay. Clay can behave in certain ways; there are certain limitations despite its manifold taxonomies. It demands to be cared for, doted on, in order to keep it stable, content, willing, pliant.

The haptic connection with what Maiolino calls 'that wet mass of clay' plugs me into a history and a future of possible forms before it hardens, cracks and dissipates. The archetype exists at the liminal moment between a shapeless proposition and a set, fused realisation.

Moving out from the archetype and the sculpture becomes something visibly specific to worldly forms; shift in the other direction and the object melds into a formless puddle of slime. The archetypes I have made, despite their relative unspecificity, display particular characteristics that demarcate them. They are a certain type of sculpture exhibiting certain distinguishing features: semi-organic shape; modelled surfaces; distinct ribs, struts and sutures and bulky form. It is not a statue; it is not exhibited vertically; it is not kinetic; it is not virtual; it does not faithfully represent something else in the world. The sculptural archetype demonstrates features designating a certain form of object that can be situated in the fuzzy edges between specific categories such as 'head' or 'torso' and abstraction, as its worked surface complicates a clear reading of the form. During this project each piece can be connected though its familial resemblances – but the modelling of the sculptures is a form of resistance as well. They resist the pull of history, resist the draw of the explicit figure and a certain tradition steeped in a method rooted in academic modelling (the balls of clay between the finger and thumb, the shaped tool to press each lump).



Figure 6. Desmond Brett, working clay form in the studio, 2021,
clay over wood and plaster structure.

© Desmond Brett

In the studio the archetype exists as a speculation, its skin not yet sealed, its form not set. Drawn from drawings that extend out as interconnected struts follow imagined desire lines in expanding geometries. Archetypes mock up like a stand-in to carry the sculptural idea into real space and fixed matter. The archetype describes something new, anticipating form, emerging out into space as something inexistent before now.

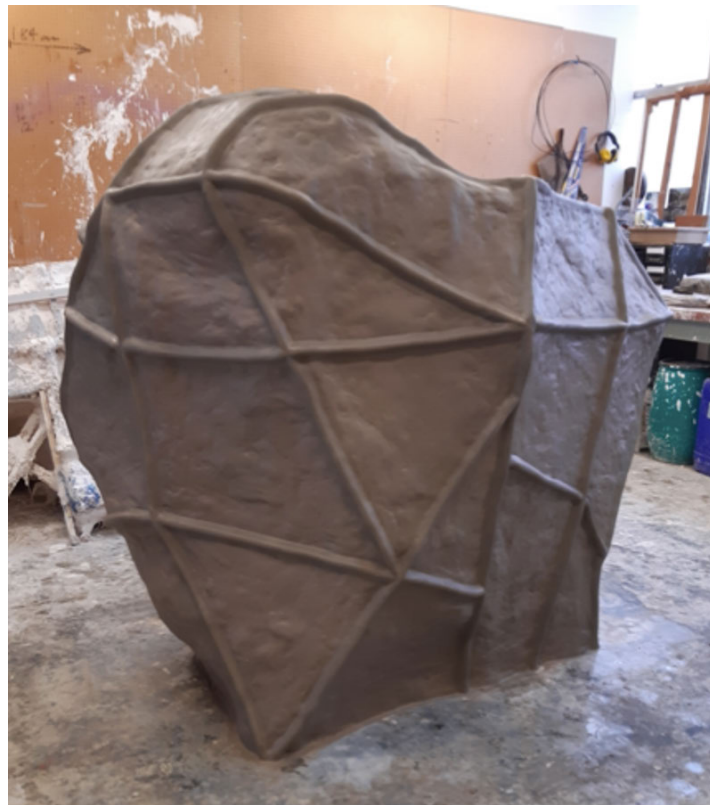


Figure 7. Desmond Brett, working clay form in the studio, 2021,
clay over wood and plaster structure.

© Desmond Brett

Making archetypes doesn't resolve sculptural forms but paradoxically intensifies the 'search' for the next object, as if the realisation of a particular sculpture confirms the

need to keep searching. The archetype tells of surface wranglings, of a thinness separating an interior intent pushing out into space as a body against the body. It is activated by hands and fingers and the engineering of folds and rises over a superstructure. Somewhere the compulsion to connect beams, wiring lattices and contours, evolves into a shape occupying space.

Covering these structures seals off space, enclosing an air pocket held by a thin yet impermeable membrane of clay like a leaden cloak: heavy, matted and dark. The surface is an enclosure – soft, slippery and pliant clay smeared over a matrix of plaster and scrim, taut across the underlying network of trusses and ribs. Like a Moore-ish flint worried by the continuing swash and backwash of tidal habits incessantly rounding its hard edges towards a more acceptable, handleable shape, or perhaps a fragment of a heteromorph plucked out of the wet Speeton Clay, or a tumescent growth stretching outwardly under the skin of its host in a terrible geometry, as in Szapocznikow's drawings and sculptures.

P.R. Henning, talking about the 'plastic possibilities' of clay (Henning, 1917, quoted in Barron, 1983, p. 1), describes how this most haptic of materials is worked into a form as 'it becomes the shape, the model, for an "original" work of art' (ibid., p. 1) to operate in lieu of being recast in another medium such as bronze. Although this project argues for the status of the clay archetype as having interstitial value, fixing a fleeting presence, Henning is more concerned with the potential in terracotta and less interested in the raw, unvitrified clay.

My use of soft unfired clay or slip is unfixed and held in temporal limbo until such time as the mould can claim its identity. For Henning, the 'true original' (ibid.) lies in the fired clay sculpture rather than the unfired stand-in. Nevertheless, he places emphasis on clay as the carrier of 'unprecedented freedom' (ibid.), which can be understood as the infinite shaped possibilities bound up in this most pliant of recyclable materials. Henning acknowledges the cyclical nature of clay, that its potential for reincarnation in other sculptural forms enables endless possibilities:

it is cut to pieces, destroyed to the point of unrecognizability, thrown back into the clay box to be later resurrected in another model for another 'original'

(ibid. p. 1)

Here, clay's status is as an intermediary material, allowing form to emerge and take hold but remaining a temporary carrier of sculptural form until it is imprinted into a mould then dematerialised for reuse again. The clay must be kept under wraps, ensconced in a damp, moist microclimate to prevent dryness, splitting and deformation.

The archetype is the orientation of archaic memories, encounters, phantasms, future imaginings and fantasies in the present – a greasy, wet figuring out of a sculpture as yet undecided upon. I am trying to make forms that extend themselves until the point of collapse, drawing back from chaos or indecision to exist at a margin of safety from being found out, discovered as something already known to reveal something not before seen or known. It is a sensation of a thing rather than the absolute thing itself; it is raw and unrefined by hands helping a coalescing body into physical presence, pushing out against the unrelenting pull of gravity, finding out how forces impinge upon what can or cannot be revealed to discern how much weight the armature really takes.

These are models of representation held in check by weight and mass and my own ability to grasp and hold them in place.

The limits of the known object are felt around the edges of the archetype, drawing speculative sculptural forms continually, cutting and lashing the struts that cobweb out, claiming a skeletal hold into space, handling clay and feeling edges and returns, having dug into thought and excavated sculptures from within my body. The archetype is not to be depended upon as a final claim. Its status is a fleeting grasp of ideas, of restless thoughts about sculpture.

The archetype is almost figuring something, some vague body, hands and fingerprints caught up in a surface unfired and prone, its material antecedents haunting the clay – Medardo Rosso's busy hands clawing rough personages held in uncertain, unstable exposures. Raw clay wants to deny the statue and eschew all it stands for, how it cannot speak to everyone, a sculptural false claimant standing in for the thing itself, an anti-monument with the fallacy of a skin of bronze to fix a place in history marking events attributed to one person (man), seldom acknowledging the real story of other people in brackets.

The archetype is a sensation. Existing beyond recognition ensures the archetype works against the narrative of modernism (and even postmodernism), embracing the formed, clarified sculptural object. My sculptures' intent is to privilege the fleshiness of clay, the meaty, sweaty labour of the modeller handling and pawing, to problematise the cool production line repetition of the modernist object devoid of hands and human touch.

Thinking of the archetype is to think of an unfinished brother. The brother who was begun but couldn't go the distance, an unresolved body never fully formed and never reaching a limit of identifiability. His body is out of reach and unfound. I cannot imagine the person he might have become: his gait; build; the timbre of his voice; how he felt to hold; his weight, his mass of sinew and musculature; his breathing, pulsing life force. He is without memory, withheld as an unheld body, unremembered and ungraspable. I wonder what I carry of him inside me and how much of a version of him I am. He exists as a phantasm, an unbuilt version who couldn't be delivered.

SCULPTURE AS SPECULATION

Henry Moore's corpus of drawings reflects his ongoing practice of imaginary visualisations prompted by observations of natural phenomena and fed by his own existing sculptural work. His constellations of drawings, such as *Ideas for Sculpture: Transformation Drawings* (Fig. 8), exist in tension to promulgate emergent sculptural thinking in a continuous cycle of imagining, speculating, visualising and making.

Moore's drawings suggest a restless speculation of new sculptural ideas as if turned round in his hand to offer up new aspects.¹¹ *Ideas for Sculpture: Transformation Drawings* (1932) presents a sheet of possibilities for sculptures out of which the object

¹¹ Connecting the tactile senses in relation to what Herbert Read describes as the sense of 'palpability', where sculpture is to be encountered physically as mass, bulk and volume, he quotes Henry Moore talking about the particular challenge facing the sculptor:

The sculptor 'gets the solid shape, as it were, inside his head – he thinks of it, whatever its size, as if he were holding it completely in the hollow of his hand. He mentally visualises a complex form *from all round itself*; he knows while he looks at one side what the other is like; he identifies himself with its centre of gravity, its mass, its weight; he realizes its volume, as the space that the shape displaces in the air'.

(Moore, 1946, quoted in Read, 1956)

might emerge. The transformation can be seen as the natural form assimilating with imaginative inventions and fusing together into sculptural proposals, remaining in a shifting, turning state of uncertainty rather than predetermined instructions.

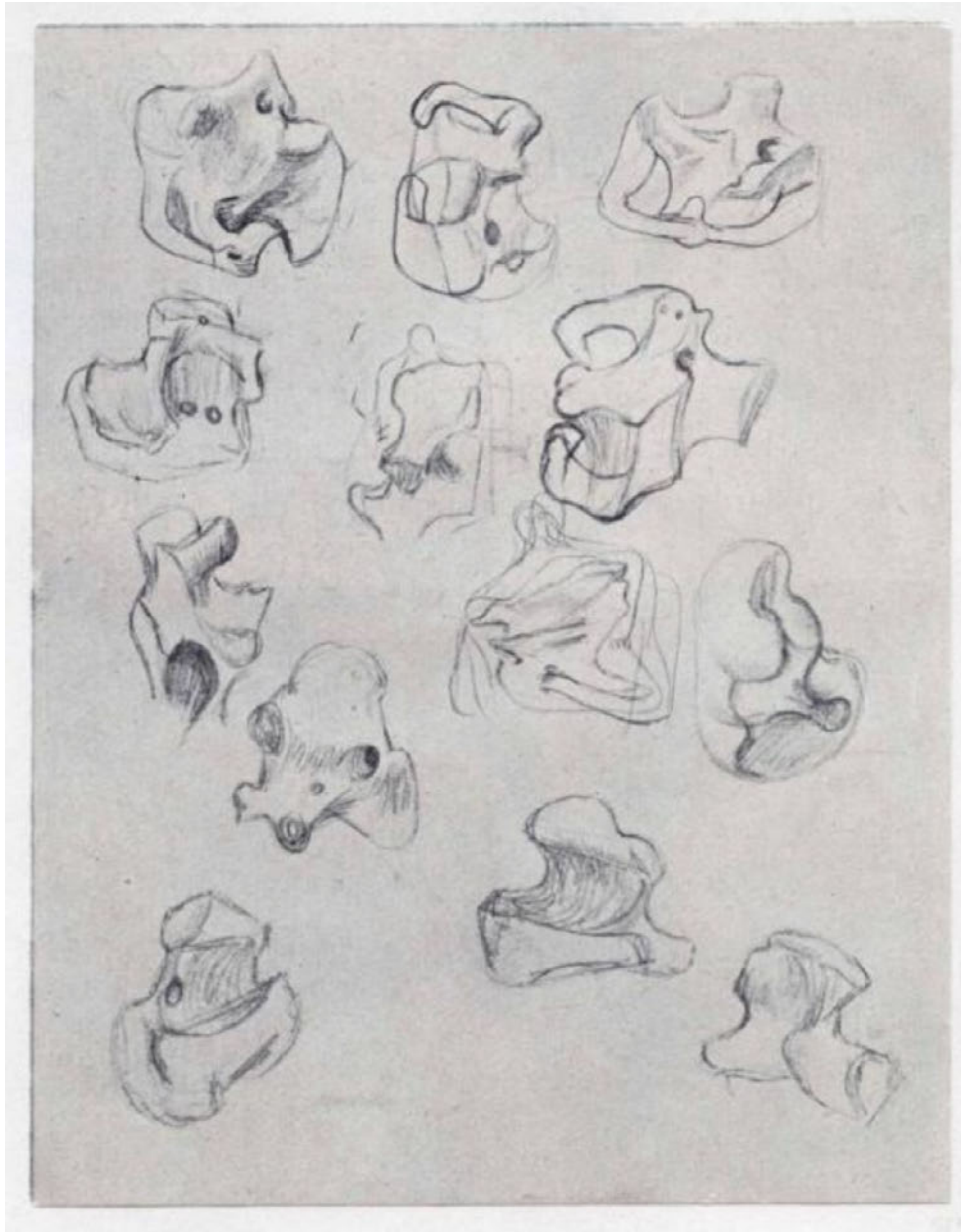


Figure 8. Henry Moore, *Ideas for Sculpture: Transformation Drawings*, 1932, pencil on paper (cat. no. HMF952).

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My ongoing series of sculpture drawings (Fig. 9) operate in a speculative space, each design intended as an aide-memoir for new sculptural forms, lifting features from previous drawings and developing new topographies for, as yet, unrealised objects.



Figure 9. Desmond Brett, drawings for sculptures, 2021–2022, digital drawings

© Desmond Brett

They exist as exercises in designing sculptures at the threshold of familiarity or recognisability. Anne Tronche (2013) describes how, through drawing, Szapocznikow resisted depicting the familiar:

The more the artist progresses within her world, the more she also distances herself in her graphic expression from any external resemblance to a model. Her ambition is the intensity of the incarnation of thought.

(Tronche, 2013, p. 32)

This description is appropriate to me as a way of bringing out new sculptural thinking that denies association with recognisable 'external resemblances' and instead is generated out of inner impulses. Tronche goes on to describe Szapocznikow's drawings as connoting the body without specificity:

Yet nothing describes the recognisable forms of a body – only rounded interlocking masses are visible, dissociating themselves in a sensual manner; lines causing energetic breaks, or even erotic explosions.

(ibid. p. 34)

In all instances, Tronche is emphasising Szapocznikow's intention to evade drawings resembling known things or specific body parts. Tronche states that the impulsive and expressive nature of Szapocznikow's drawings enabled her to:

access original images, in the farthest reaches of memory, in a space whose scope gradually develops as the composition develops. Figuring and disfiguring, celebrating and fragmenting: these are two-fold movements that animate her style.

(Tronche, p. 32)

This description provides a way to understand Szapocznikow's drawings as speculative rather than specific. They are forms in flux as lines create images that, in a paradoxical to-ing and fro-ing between finding form and losing it, Szapocznikow seems to be imagining modelling into being. Such 'farthest reaches of memory' are fuzzy and indistinct, hard to capture and untrustworthy. Attempting to articulate them through drawing is as futile as it is liberating by finding something that previously didn't exist. Tronche goes on to state:

The artist seems very often to be admitting her distrust of representation, and uses light lines or the materiality of a few dark splotches to reveal the mute, tense presence of a headless element, with no anatomical accuracy, and yet very often comprising flesh, which is simultaneously hidden and revealed.

(ibid., p. 28)

Rather than operating as blueprints for sculptures to be exactly replicated, Tronche reinforces the role of drawing as a speculative, unresolved activity of finding form *towards* sculpture. Tronche identifies a seriality in Szapocznikow's drawings that can be aligned to Moore's *Transformation Drawings*. These drawings in ink, pencil, etc., work to 'envisage a sculpture to come' (ibid., p. 8), as they articulate 'themselves in their morphological precision as studies of form' (ibid., p. 8). Firmly corporeal intimations are at play in these drawings, yet the body is only semi-revealed (or semi-obscured?) as they visualise a form of sculpture connecting to the body yet holding back from wholly depicting the figure:

The semi-abstract language of some of the drawings that strive to partially erase the body, give rise to the memory of a form of humanity that lives outside of the world ... far removed from the seductions of mimetic representation.

(ibid., 2013, p. 30)

Significant in the resistance to mimetic is finding a form of representation that is human but not as we know it. The description of somehow existing beyond the illustration of the known world is a compelling position for the drawings to be in. As identifications of forms that are hard to quantify or designate easily, their ability to suspend disbelief and present possibilities unencumbered by material fact give them a fantastical

advantage. In this way, Moore's *Transformation Drawings* and Szapocznikow's graphic works can be seen as fantasies existing as outpourings of sculptural imaginings. These examples offer a way to dream up new forms of sculpture in the infinite space of drawing while importantly operating as aide-memoirs for new sculptural existences.

The drawings I have made (Fig. 9) serve as prompts to stimulate sculptural possibilities in material form. On the page I imagine building them in three dimensions without the jeopardy of structural concerns or the limitations of gravity. Importantly, in the same approach to making sculptures, these are attempts to build a new taxonomy of sculptural forms that stop short of legibility, that is, working to a limit of nearness to specific objects, as if the turn towards being 'like' something recognisable renders them void.

RESISTANCE TO RECOGNITION

Tucker's oeuvre is extremely useful to me as a way of approaching sculpture using traditional methods and materials which, rather than being freighted by history, open up the possibilities of finding new forms of sculpture. By removing the problem of the found object (for example), I am not bounded by association. By using clay, the plastic possibilities expand out of a core material rather than contract. Importantly, the potential is in my hands instead of depending upon other agencies to realise the work by outsourcing or intermediaries.

To work in this way requires certain approaches to enable the sculptures to operate at a 'threshold of legibility' (Kelly, 2014, p. 7)., that is, legible as distinctive, palpable forms

without collapsing into blobs of inchoate illegibility as described in Philip K. Dick (1969) in *Pay for the Printer* and considered in Chapter 3. The significance of adopting this position is to reign the sculpture-in-forming back from the brink of recognition, taking evasive action to alter it or reshape it should it approach a point where it can be associated with other worldly objects or phenomena. This involves a paradoxical method of working *towards* a form while trying to work *away* from others to find my own sculptural language.

This position is especially pertinent to the pieces Tucker made in the early sixties which seem to evade referencing familiar things 'derived from objective sources in the world' (Sleeman, 2007, p.13) but instead maintain a self-contained autonomy:

Moreover, he wanted the work to resist being recognised as having any particular referent to the world.

(Sleeman, 2007, p. 12)

Herein is the quality of Tucker's work that I place such importance on when thinking about my own approach to sculpture. I am not interested in copying things or representing what already exists. I am intent upon searching for something undiscovered. Appropriately, Dore Ashton (2001) states that Tucker, describing his work to his poet friend Christopher Salveson, aimed for 'familiarity that resists recognition' (Ashton, 2001, p. 11). This statement acts as an operational principle for the sculptures I have been making, instructing my thinking around forms that attempt to remain in a liminal state of definition as archetypes occupying a condition of uncertainty.

Tucker's relevance to my project is tied up with my ambition to create sculptures that elude recognisable references to specific things already in existence, employing self referentiality, while also employing materials and processes associated with the history of modelling and casting, with all its attendant associations to the statue and the monument.

Ashton describes how Tucker evolves his later sculptures from the eighties onwards by 'wringing from earth-like materials a semblance of life itself, of thing-like shapes struggling from a chthonic realm' (Ashton, 2001, p. 33). She infers that these sculptural forms can't quite be designated and known, but rather their 'thingness' implies an unresolved or even unrecognisable formal language at work: Tucker's evasiveness in fixing down to a specific 'thing' in evidence again.¹² Tucker acknowledges there is a danger in limitlessness, overworking or underworking a sculpture so that it moves beyond the point of being easily identified with something externally real, here at a 'threshold of legibility' This eschewing of recognisability is evident in early sculptures, like *Prayer* (Fig. 26), a sculpture suggestive of a vessel yet enclosed and sealed off. Fibreglass was a material much favoured in the 1960s by sculptors seeking to move away from freighted traditional materials such as bronze. Fibreglass enables a hollow form to be cast as a continuous shape without the need for assembling separate elements or major internal structural engineering. The use of fibreglass therefore

¹² The possibility for sculpture to exist in a state of indeterminacy *resisting recognition* is echoed by David Cohen (2010) in his article *William Tucker: From the Formal to the Primeval*, describing how Tucker's forms 'meander in and out of legibility. Some are lumpen masses that defy efforts to pin them down, though their general shape and the wealth of surface betoken bodiliness, even if a given part cannot be named' (Cohen, 2010, no pagination). This description of the palpable sensation of unnameability written into these thickened, haptic, handled forms define Tucker's sculptures as defiantly recalcitrant objects pushing against an easy reading. It can also be argued that the 'bodiliness' is evident in the way the surface has been treated. As Tucker paws and slaps wet plaster into shape while it steadily solidifies, there is no time for refining, sharpening and clarifying – directness is critical in fashioning these lunking presences.

connects to sculptures I have made during this project for the same reason. Resin fibreglass was also used by Alina Szapocznikow, allowing a certain bodily, skin-like quality and an ability to form almost any shape when cast or laminated.

The resistance to recognition is the zone where the sculptural object operates between the threshold of appearing like a real, quotidian thing while being unspecific, emergent and fuzzy in its existence. My ambition is to make sculpture that sheds the burden of expectation to be 'of' *something* or representative of an earthbound phenomena. When making the archetypes, my approach is very deliberately to *recognise recognition*. When the form begins to manifest itself as something other than itself – then the hands quickly erase and reform the shape, steering the clay into new directions, scraping and reaccumulating compactions as quickly as possible to prevent the shape from 'sticking' as a recognisable thing. The archetype could be an *anticipation* instead of a resolution, becoming a contained sculptural presence without full realisation. The archetype is the shape of something that didn't exist before. Describing his *Gods* series, Ashton shows how Tucker places emphasis on intuition and an almost there-ness that I can identify with in my approach to making sculpture:

The shapes that move out from the impenetrable centre of each of these sculptures hover on the edge of amorphousness. They are nearly, but never absolutely, extinguished by the intuitive hand that gropes its way along the large curving surfaces. There is something immensely exciting about this nearly, but not, shapelessness.

(Ashton, 1987, pp. 13–17)

The condition of being 'nearly' something leaves the *Gods* in a fascinating liminal zone between entropy and clarity, where the sculpture occupies a form of becoming where the whole cannot be comprehended without what Herbert Read calls *ponderability*.

Tucker's sculptures resist tidy comprehension as specific 'things' but behave rather as emergent forms in transitional states of flux. This appearance of forms emerging and not-quite-there is informed by the wet plaster Tucker uses to model his sculptures. As a generally accepted transitional material in sculptural production, associated with mould making and impermanence, plaster requires a certain rapidity of handling before it sets. In this narrow timespan, Tucker's sculptures emerge neither as a sloppy lump nor in sharply defined geometry. The sense of something unformed in Tucker's sculptures is described by Andrew Forge (1988), who sees *Ouranos* (Fig. 10) as a 'lump, a mass of material, something rudimentary, inchoate, but not inert' (Forge, 1988, p. 1), further emphasising the sense of flux within Tucker's forms.



Figure 10. William Tucker, *Ouranos*, 1985, bronze, 196 x 211 x 120cm

Courtesy: William Tucker and Buchmann Galerie; photo: Michael Schultze

Certainly, *Ouranos* possesses suggestiveness of many things, preventing it from being a chaotic mass. There is tension in the surface treatment, as Tucker has worked the wet plaster into shape prior to bronze casting. The bronze patination suggests something unearthed, aged and archaic, an upthrust that infers something monumental. *Ouranos* seems to operate in a space of almost cohering into something 'like' a foot, a bone or a stump, but resists such associations. Forge claims a work such as *Ouranos* possesses duality of movement and stasis, a pulsing between different conditions in what he describes as 'its energy, its stillness and its unending plasticity' (Forge, 1988, no pagination) in a state of flux that is unsettled, continuous and timeless, like clay.

Ashton (1987) discusses the inherent movement within Tucker's sculptures and their 'substance' (Ashton, 1987, p. 13): they refer to the body in the way 'they express movement, but they are visibly immovable' (ibid., p. 13). This paradoxical condition of sculpture being concurrently static, immovable and potentially monumental, yet expressing movement, flexing in torsion or unfolding as one encounters them, forms an important dialectical condition of sculpture that I have also sought to explore. Ashton describing Tucker's desire to work from the early eighties with 'the thinglike mass that the art of the modeller creates' (ibid., p. 12), applies to my sculptures as the initial approximation of shape becomes more discerned through modelling.

To continue a discussion of what the 'threshold of legibility' is or where it might be situated, it is useful to consider the following three sculptures, each demonstrating how out of the seemingly inchoate modelled surface of the sculpture a figuration emerges, enough to be defined and recognised. *Sleeping Musician* by William Tucker,

Tumors Personified by Alina Szapocznikow and *Maternité* by Medardo Rosso move beyond the threshold of abstraction into recognition: they are undoubtedly figurative, and we are required to discern bodily features. They can be argued to operate in what Ashton (referring to *Ouranos*) describes as 'between a downright object and a gesture' (Ashton, 1987, p. 8). Each sculpture appears to be in state of transformation or mutation while the modelling is present in the fixed surface of the sculptures.

Tucker's *Sleeping Musician* (Fig. 11), a self-contained object, suggests something ancient like a long-buried deity, the surface detailing eaten away by weathering or distorted through the accumulation of dust and particles. A slippery object with a surface that is fugitive, it possesses enough characteristics to be recognisable as a head, with protrusions and indentations for the eyes, nose and ears.

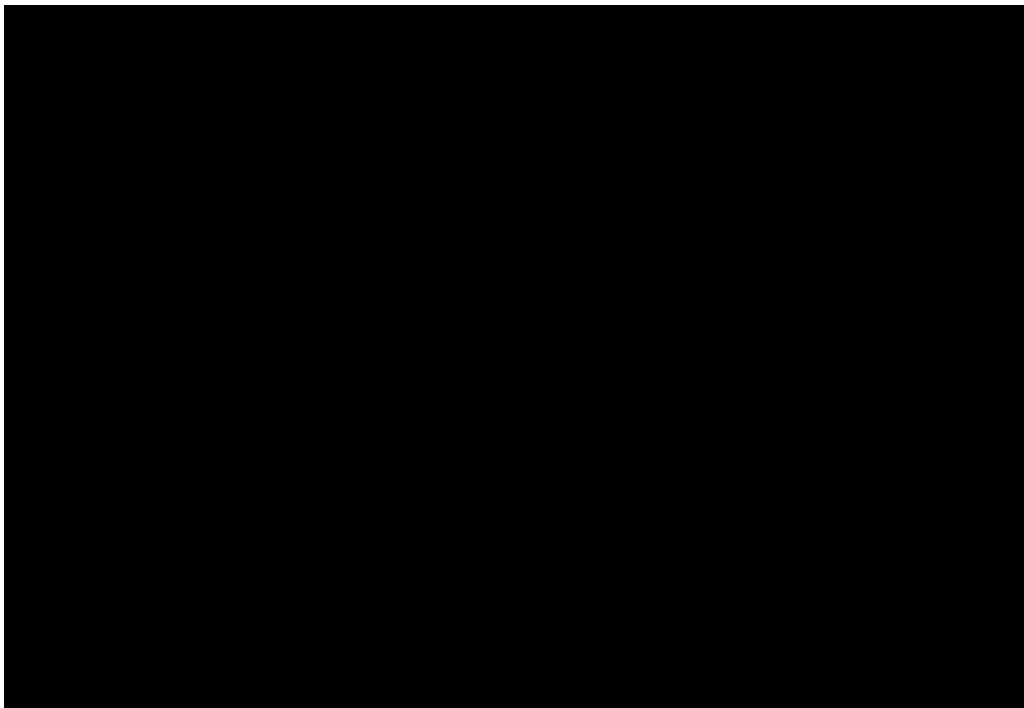


Figure 11. William Tucker, *Sleeping Musician*, 1998, bronze, T07821, 29.2 x 43.2 x 33cm
Tate Gallery

Tumors Personified by Alina Szapocznikow (Fig. 12) is a singular sculptural object demonstrating a fascinating quality of fusion, as if caught in a state of change. The sculpture presents a tumescent growth developing out from a figure which cannot be subdued, threatening to take over the entire body. Its 'host' is lying obliquely and disarmingly in repose, as if accepting her fate and allowing the tumour – already the size of the head it adjoins – to expand unstoppably and invasively. Although recognisable, the head seems fated to be transformed and swallowed into the mass.



Figure 12. Alina Szapocznikow, *Tumors Personified* (detail), 1971, polyester resin, fibreglass, paper and gauze, 5 15/16–13 inches high

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Medardo Rosso's *Maternité* (Fig. 13) emerges from lumpen and seemingly unformed material, yet slowly the figures can be discerned out of a chaotic miasma of modelled surface, as if Rosso was attempting to capture the writhing playfulness of the scene from memory. It seems to be a lump of unsorted clastic matter until the vague head of

an infant emerges. Typifying much of Rosso's modelling technique – hasty, energetic, restless – it is as if there is no 'final' outcome, rather a frozen moment mid transformation from inchoate to suggestive. The waxed and patinated surface breaks light up to deny an even comprehension of the sculpture, which is complicated by fissures, imprints and overhangs.

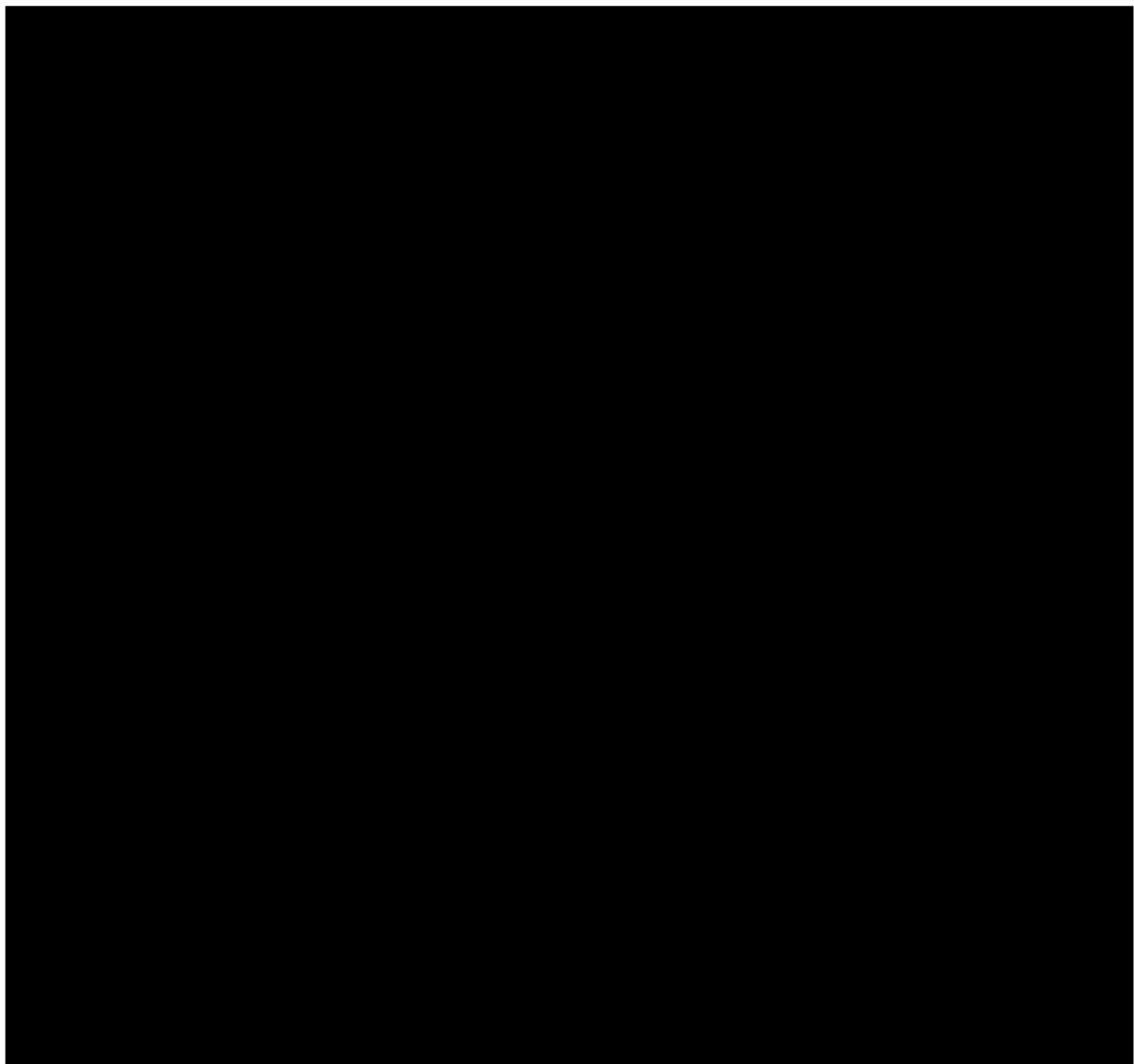


Figure 13. Medardo Rosso, *Maternité*, 1889, wax on plaster, 44.7 x 57.6 x 21cm.

The ceramic sculpture (Fig. 14) I made at the Armitage Shanks Factory formed part of a series based on forms made by chewing gum. The mouth becomes the author of

complex masticated heads – an internal, hidden, utterly intimate bodily process. (I was interested in the way Szapocznikow had used gum to stretch and form shapes by hand in her *Photosculptures* series, using a pliant, responsive material to evoke figurative connotations.)

The chewed shapes displayed imprints of teeth and gums combined with smoothed and rounded elements formed by the tongue. Once spat out, their forms revealed complex, contorted shapes inferring the body, as if minute figures. Observing these chewed shapes, I developed a series of clay sculptures modelled on these masticated forms: not a verbatim copy but evolved from considering these shapes. The overall scale, although 'hand-sized', was a great deal larger than the chewed gum forms themselves. Although not explicitly or intentionally figurative, the ceramic outcomes offered a possible implied figuration.

The aspiration for these ceramic sculptures was to make a sculptural object that was fugitive, evasive and hard to pin down with clarity yet in possession of sculptural qualities of mass, ponderability and a certain bulkiness to their form. The intention for these works was to suggest something but to draw back from explicit reference to, for example, teeth or the mouth in relation to their genesis. Through modelling and subsequent glazing, my aim was to evoke the chewed wetness of freshly masticated gum – the glaze enabling the sculptures to maintain a moist surface effect along with colours designed to evoke the flavours of gum.



Figure 14. Desmond Brett, *untitled (spearmint)* [first version], 2017, glazed vitreous china sculpture made at the Armitage Shanks factory

© Desmond Brett



Figure 15. Desmond Brett, untitled (ice white fresh) [second version], 2017, glazed vitreous china sculpture made at the Armitage Shanks factory

© Desmond Brett

The use of glaze (along with dispensing with a pedestal or base) evokes a sensation of lightness counter to the relative weightiness of the fired ceramic object itself (echoing Caro's decision to paint steel to offset its inherent weight). On the pitted, worked surface, the glaze deflects light to complicate a 'smooth' reading of the form, also interfering with reading the sculptures as weighty. Mounting the sculptures on the wall moved the works away from the interconnected bases of ceramic statuary while acknowledging architecture reconnected them with the mass-produced cast ceramicware in the factory they were made in.

ENGINEERING LIMITS

When building the clay archetypes, the limits of bodily reach are a factor in the dimensions of the works. Anything beyond my own bodily extent projecting out from the vertical requires structural engineering to continue and keep the work from collapse as it reaches out into space from the wall. The sculptural structures (Fig. 44) are constructed instinctively from knowledge of the drawings I have made with the tacit awareness of supporting the clay 'skin' and how it 'hangs' on to the structure. The condition of clay dictates how the form will evolve and how it can be applied dependent upon relative qualities of weight, malleability and thixotropy of clay. Thus, the engineering of struts and cross members inside the external form prevent collapse; they keep the work together and the clay surface skin held in place (in similar ways to the internal structure of the *Statue of Liberty* holding the copper skin). Consequently, the clay sculpture (such as Fig. 45) built on to the wall of the studio defies the illusion of heaviness inherent in clay by appearing to cling to the wall, its density palpable, its thinness impossible to detect from the surface. Engineering enables the sculpture to dispense with the pedestal and defy gravity to project outwards.

The relationship to architecture could be described as an 'engineered dependence', where the wall enables me to operate against the logic of the monument and its verticality. Instead, architecture provides the sculptures with a point of connection with which to antagonise space by physical encroachment. It further helps to draw attention to the surface qualities of the sculptures by offering a contrast between the modelled, handled forms and the wall architecture, highlighting the difference between *architectonic* and *archetype*, or constructed versus modelled.

CHAPTER 3: MOULD

SURFACE

The mould holds its subject in an airless clinch. Inescapably, the mould captures everything in its grasp. The history of sculpture depends upon the mould to replicate notions of idealised figuration or the perfected icon. The mould is a protecting shell incubating the cast until its release into the world. The mould is an interiority, an inward facing register turning away from the world while the cast it has held, incubated, and delivered is diametrically opposite. The surface of my casts are the register of my touch, the way I have imprinted myself into clay. The relationship between the handling of clay and the mould that has received my imprints is one of dependence: the clay depends upon the mould to capture its behaviour.

The mould itself introduces a sense of displacement by making the temporary, fleeting, impulsive and considered gestures of the handmade process of modelling in soft clay permanently locked in and encoded into plaster. The surface of sculpture is territory for deceit. The subsequent cast of the mould presents a surface as an illusion of the hollow interior. In set resin (or ceramic), the exterior surface of the replicant reads as something solid and massed.

The fibreglass cast therefore operates as a figure of clay, as a seemingly heavy material; the clay's identity has transferred into the new object, itself a shell inferring solidity yet hollow and thin. It stands in for the handling, labouring and modelling enfolded into the worked clay of the archetype. The surface of the cast is an illusion of

the precursor that occupied the mould space, an illusion of heavy solidity. A hollow gesture.

MAKING THE MOULD

Thirsty powder slaked by cold water. Handfuls of dry dust fall between my fingers emitting gentle blooms of powdery clouds. Slowly, as it falls into the bucket of water, it builds up a mass within, an ever-increasing mass that appears and punctures the surface of the water, forming an island – like an underwater volcano accruing enough earthen matter to emerge out of a broiling sea. Shelves of saturated plaster granules split and calve into the water as the whitened mass turns to a pinkish pallor in its soaked condition. Here is time to dwell – for too early, the mix will become lumpen. Time is needed to allow total saturation, to prevent any chunks of dry plaster to form and sabotage the smooth concoction.

The hand plunges in and scours the bottom of the container, feeling for rogue adhesions of thickened plaster. The fingers squeeze and search, turning, folding and pushing the thickened slimy liquid, allowing liquid plaster to become homogenised. The plaster takes on a thick, creamy consistency. It adheres to my hand, clinging to the creases and contours of my skin. Holding my hand upside down, small drips congeal at the tips of my fingers. Time is now limited. The plaster is activated and live – an organism that continues to change. The balance now favours setting – there is finite working time to use the plaster before it is too far gone, too set to reverse the process. While creamy and luscious it can be flicked, splashed, poured or brushed. In its fluid state it can then run into fissures and scars on the surface of the clay, occupying textured and worked territories.

A sweaty thickness rapidly gives way to a hardened unyielding membrane fixing anything in its grasp. Exothermic heat rises from setting plaster in vague, vaporous feathers of steam. Over days, the mould's complexion changes from pinkness to light white as locked in moisture slowly evaporates, as the mould cures, ready to be separated.

Once opened, the mould is ready for casting. Stained by its former cargo, cleaned and bare, each piece presents as a reverse of the original clay archetype, ready to receive liquid clay slip. In the Armitage factory, tanks of VC (vitreous china) – a silky, thick liquor of fine particles of silica, alumina and magnesia suspended in water – hold the potential to imprint itself within my moulds. Reassembled, strapped together and sealed along the seams, the liquid clay is poured to the brim of the mould.

Filled and left overnight, the following day the mould is drilled and tapped to drain remaining liquid VC. A thick shell of leather-hard clay remains fused together against the interior of the mould, sucking itself against the dry, thirsty surface (Fig. 16). After drying, the clay loses its sheen, indicating its readiness for demoulding. Tapping the piece-mould open, the clay cast is released, ready for first firing and vitrifying.



Figure 16. Desmond Brett, plaster mould containing drained vitreous china cast, 2017, photographed at the Armitage Shanks factory.

© Desmond Brett

Glazed and gleaming, the objects emerge curiously vulnerable after second glaze firing, their restless surfaces deflect light in different directions. Here are resolutely physical sculptural things, present in the hands, intuitively modelled and bruised through wresting. Their resistance to association seems ever more acute languishing among cisterns, sinks, toilets, bidets and urinals, imposters lurking within a factory production line of readymades (Fig. 17). They are NOT any of these things yet share their material origins. Their material affinity with sharply defined, factory-produced, slickly formed bathroom wares is countered by such contorted, lumpen shapes.



Figure 17. Desmond Brett, glazed white ceramic sculptures, 2017, photographed at the Armitage Shanks factory.

© Desmond Brett

BRACKETING



Figure 18. plaster piece/waste moulds excavated of clay, studio, 2021.

© Desmond Brett

(the hands, my hands, are brackets containing thoughts and physical intent. Each sculpture is within reach to an extent, within my grasp, pressed within my palms)

(here, words press up against brackets and cannot leak out. The cupped hands enclosing contents that would otherwise spread or accumulate in heaps or collapse under their own weight. Held in check, the mould sticks fast, a bulkhead holding fast to fix shut and stay put)

(limit setting. Setting boundaries that are not breached. Contained within these walls are the surfaces of imprints pressed against the mould like a face pressed against a window)

(herein sits the *shape*. The thing that is wedged between my fingers, the thing that is pressed against your walls. Cold, hard boundaries that don't yield. A fracture is filled and voided with liquid attempting to flee, going only so far before freezing solid)

(the *shape* forged by hand, brawny and lunking, set betwixt. Within the enclosed shell of plaster. The mould fixes gestures, entrapped and still. Knuckles held in check, eyes shut)

(the waste mould cracks open, unshelling its promise within. Tapped open like a fossil in a nodule, each blow of the hammer is another fraction unearthed. Chisel and jemmy forcing its way between two plates prized apart. Each piece resisting until it cannot hold out, falling away and revealing its prize. Pieces fracture, split, smash and snap. I have worked from the surface back, laminating layer by layer, inwardly building an epidermis. Its skin is revealed to light for the first time, raw and exposed)

(in parenthesis, claiming territory for a limited period of time and space. Territory gained and influenced only to be subsumed or reordered under a new regime. Tactical thinking urges the hands to push towards new visions, as eyes tell hands to wrest control or give it up, overwhelmed and buried)

(brackets are condensers, pillars between which actions and accumulations are compressed and held. An encasement of plaster, scrim and batten reinforcing its position, strengthening the shell that holds its contents hostage. Bound and impressed (repressed?), bitten by steel dogs that squeeze the seams even tighter in their jaws, each hammer blow another fraction closer to shutting closed the gaps to prevent escape in sprung tension. Ratchet by ratchet, the whole jigsaw of tectonic plates jam and shunt until they force themselves against each other's faces. When no more slack can be summoned and the webbing thrums to the touch, the moulds are firm and ready)

(laminating the mould, painting each resinous layer stratigraphically. Thin layers accrue into a stiff matrix of gelcoat and fibres, starting from the face of the mould inwards. The formation of flint can be seen to have built up in a similar way as percolations settle and occupy the void space within the chalky beds until the nodule forms)

(Henry Moore continuously picked up flints on his walks, scrutinising these nodular forms in his hands, running his fingers over their bulges and apertures until he was satisfied enough to collect and pore over them in his studio. A figurative suggestion, a limb, torso or organ clasped and pondered. Transformed into cretaceous secretion into drawing into sculpture)

(due to clay's vulnerability in its unfired state, P.R. Henning [1917] describes the plaster mould as the 'only durable bearer of the work' [Henning, 1917, quoted in Barron, 1983, p. 1] as it carries the impressions bestowed upon the clay prototype.

Clasped in a firm grip, the plaster mould brackets the temporary form in a protective shell. It operates as both oubliette and liberator as, once cleaned and reassembled, the mould can release the cast for deployment)

(condensed space where matter is pressed against an internal face of resistance. The denseness of soft clay gradually setting into a tough hide-like layer, wet cheeked with a cool, dank plaster carapace)

(limits are set within the confines of the bracket. Words are moulded to fit within these curved holders, pressed in and checked tightly as packed-in textual matter. Words push up against but cannot escape by stealth or bludgeon their way out from within. Words are clay, shapeable and pliant in the hands. At either end of these terminal barriers, words are held in check)

(the mould is a facade of a facade, a face to the outside concealing an imprint on the inside. It enables a cast to form, hidden inside only to be released upon breaking open. An occupant, the cast is itself a hollow shell concealing an interior space)

(void space. Occupied with emptiness. Unfulfilled potential. Filled with potential. Potentially infilled)

(a layer of clay slip painted at the face of each interlocking cast plaster piece mould. Without its resistant properties, the plaster would fuse together, entrapping the contained sculpture. Clay slip has the same impermeable properties that causes cliffs

to slump as water-saturated strata rotate and slip over underlying clay beds. Clay has tectonic properties)

(mud envelopes a dead ammonite, sealing it off and fossilising it. Aeons later it is cracked open and exposed to Anthropocene daylight)

(the use of clay to form a mould in the casting process of ancient Chinese vessels is described by Herbert Read in *The Art of Sculpture*. Clay forms the shell made from subsequent layers of liquid clay which is allowed to dry. Wax is poured into the clay mould and, through firing, escapes, 'leaving its impress inside the hollow coat of clay' [Read, 1956, p. 76]. Once poured, bronze fills the void left by the disappeared wax: 'The resulting vessel, cast in bronze, is therefore a replica of a sculpted object' [ibid., p. 26]. This essential process of casting has not changed in principle; the shell or mould holds the impress of the 'original' object to be cast)

(the span of my hands grasping at the sculpture)

CASTING

Just as Medardo Rosso used the camera to reconsider and remodel his sculptures, Robert Smithson used it to capture his material actions. There is also documentation of Lynda Benglis making her poured sculptures, catching material in process. Photographs capture fleeting moments within a continuum of sculptural production and siting. They don't operate as copies of the works but indexically capture ephemeral and transient sculptural events. Elena Filipovic, in reference to Szapocznikow's use of the camera to record her work in varying conditions of process and resolution, says

she was 'motivated by the desire to register the ephemeral existence of things' (Filipovic, 2011, p. 68) which could aptly describe the way material becomes form as quickly as it can be destroyed and reformed in a cycle of reconstruction and loss in the studio. Szapocznikow's prolific collection of photographs of her working suggests the act of capturing that which is fleeting couldn't be undertaken in one single image but rather as an ongoing process of documentation.

Tellingly, in a photograph of Szapocznikow in her Paris studio, the sculpture *Crab* she is working on is an emergent form featuring eccentric limbs and internal steelwork breaking through the body of the creature in a tangle of bodily tension. Its plinth is stained, suggesting the sculpture requires regular soaking to keep the plaster or clay from cracking.

To the right of the image, the floor is discoloured from further saturation, as several proximal buckets, bowls and plastic sheeting evidence the necessity for material processing, soaking, mixing and protecting sculptures made from typically friable and vulnerable matter. To move towards the photographic documentation of the sculpture, Filipovic (2011) connects the cinema theorist Andre Bazin's argument about the photograph being like the model it records, where he says the image 'shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model' (Bazin, quoted in Filipovic, 2011, p. 20). This reinforces the indexicality of the photograph *and* the mould, that they are an imprint of the thing they record.



Figure 19. Alina Szapocznikow, photograph of the artist in her Paris studio, 1963

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With both Szapocznikow and Medardo Rosso, photographic documentation can be aligned to the role of the plaster mould, as moments *between* unformed, inert matter becoming articulated leave an indexical body of recording that fix any further changes to the sculptures. Filipovic develops this argument further:

The cast is similarly indexical. Like the photograph, it testifies undeniably that the thing from which it is cast *has been*. Made from the contact imprint of mold (sic) meeting matter, a cast is a direct registration of the real, such that Bazin's argument about the specificity of photography can be effectively extended to casting: it, too, *is* the model of what it reproduces.

(Filipovic, 2011, p. 70)

The direct registration unflinchingly and unemotionally records the surface form of clay that has been mauled, contested, pored over and folded in a melee of gestures like the cold pragmatism of setting plaster. Like the photographic negative capturing light, the mould holds embedded information and intentions within its surface, ready to imprint it upon the new cast version.



Figure 20. Alina Szapocznikow, *Fotorzeźby (Photosculpture)* [detail], 1971.

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The example of the *Photosculpture* (Fig. 20) is especially interesting for the quality of the photograph – a sculpture formed rapidly out of masticated chewing gum (inferring restlessness or cogitation: ‘chewing it over’) that is provisionally formed and stuck to the ledge. Elena Filipovic (2011) describes these highly tactile forms as:

Sticky drooping specimens stretched and distended like the most malleable of sculptural materials

(Filipovic, 2011, p. 64)

The gum softened and impressed mid chew heightens the sense of flux within the work – the gum being ‘modelled’ with the mouth and teeth, then further imprinted by the fingers. These photographs of stretched and shaped chewed gum paradoxically reinforce the temporal nature of these ‘poses’ of gum hanging in precarious suspension, by holding them in perpetuity. Furthermore, they are enlarged to emphasise a monumental quality, as if proposals for gigantic public sculptures:

She [Szapocznikow] called the work *Fotorzeźby* (*Photosculptures*) and accompanied it with a text that suggested the tension between a result both immanent (in a sculptural sense) and impermanent: ‘One has only to photograph and enlarge my masticated creations in order to achieve sculptural presence’

(Filipovic, 2011, p. 64)

This quality of immanence and impermanence suggests sculpture as something for Szapocznikow that is unstable, vulnerable and ready to collapse or fail.

The glazed ceramic sculptures I produced at Armitage Shanks were my response to Szapocznikow’s masticated *Fotorzeźby* gestures. After much chewing and spitting out intensely distorted figurations of gum, orally imprinted and cast in eccentric contortions, I modelled enlarged clay shapes based on my own gum sculptures. The final, critical step was to have them glazed to suggest the flavour of gum, such as spearmint (see Fig. 14) or fresh mint.

Medardo Rosso's photograph of his sculpture of Joseph Fles (Fig. 21), taken in his patron's home, possesses a blurred, murky quality, reinforcing the image of a sculpture existing in a condition of transposition, where material is caught mid-transformation from formlessness into a fully realised personage. Light exposure bleeds into the image, obscuring the sculpture, dissolving its edges and forming unformed topographies.

The photograph of Rosso's sculpture of Fles refers unequivocally to the thing it records, casting with light, fixed onto photographic paper. Its condition is analogous to the surface treatment of the sculpture. It has a pitted, worn, fuzzy and semi-occluded quality, echoing Rosso's treatment of the sculpture itself as he strived to capture an Impressionistic encounter with the subject. It is as if Rosso is using the image as he does clay – roughly handled and with a sense of rapidity to capture a fleeting moment in time, grasping for a form that materialises the liminal condition between stasis and animation. Its indistinctiveness is compelling. Fles looms into view as a partially discernible phantasm caught in daylight but also claimed by the shadows. It could be that the figure is emerging into view or conversely dissolving into entropy to be atomised into fragments. The figure emerges out of the gloom of the photograph – its scratchy quality echoing the modelled surface of the sculpture – further reinforcing the sensation of a sculpture not entirely set in perpetuity.



Figure 21. The last life-size sculpture that Rosso ever created was a portrait of renowned occultist Joseph Alexander Fles (father of Etha Fles), photographed within his Utrecht home, where Rosso was received as a guest in 1901.

In some parts of the photograph, due to the relative graininess of the image and over exposure, it is not entirely clear where sculpture finishes and architecture begins, so that the body is both present and partly dissolved into its surroundings. The sharpness of the corner wall receiving light and casting a darkness offers a stark contrast to the agitated modelled surface of the sculpture. The distinct line where shadow and light meet is subsumed by the urgent scraping and scouring embedded in the sculpture's surface. The figure seems to slide out from the top of the picture towards the floor. It emerges as a scarified, marked object that suggests the seated figure of Fles without explicitly describing discernible features. Instead, limbs and torso are suggested by swathes of clay massed and hewn in an implied figuration. Rosso's sculpture of Fles is both monumental, through its scale, figuration and presence as a statuesque personage, and yet unmonumental, by eroding the sculpture as if he's clawed its resolution away, describing a sensation of flux, a figure retreating into murk. Perhaps this is the perfect sculpture, as something neither stable nor unravelled by time (it only existed for a short while in an 'unfinished' state). Fles dwells in an interzone: not robustly heroic in pose but a corpulent blur of half-formed matter. A semi-suggestive depiction.

Portrait of Fles works against the then prevailing trajectory of the upright motif. Instead, Rosso's Impressionist sculpture proposes a way to occupy an emergent space and form. It is interesting to consider this sculpture alongside Benglis's *Quartered Meteor* (Fig. 22), the two works being situated against – albeit diametrically opposite – corner walls. Both works employ architecture as a counterpoint to their inherently unstable or unstructured formal character.

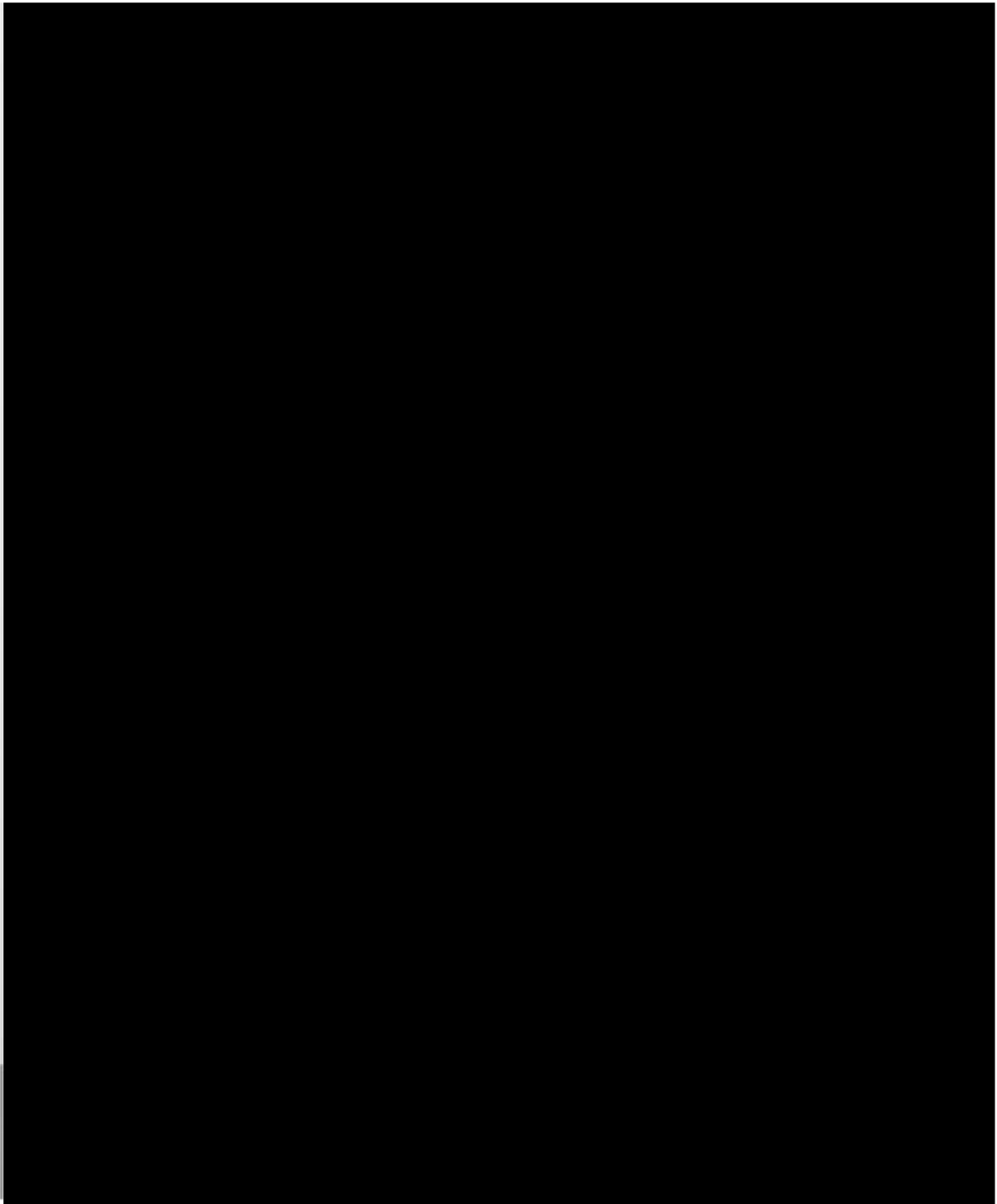


Figure 22. Lynda Benglis, *Quartered Meteor*, 1969, lead and steel, 150 x 168 x 158cm, T13353, Tate Gallery.

Concerned with dialectics and entropic processes, Robert Smithson's *Glue Pour* (1970, Fig. 23) offers a relevance to this project by situating the liquid pour in the present while simulating a flow referring to eternal archaic geologies. The tensions between movement and stasis, are bound up within the work, signifying a state of continuum that calls upon deep time, flow dynamics and future stratification. *Glue Pour* and *Asphalt Rundown* (Fig.33) operate as more fluid propositions without necessary conclusion or material stasis.¹³

The transient, flowing nature of works like *Glue Pour* depends upon the photograph and therefore the importance of the visual sense to fix the work and imagine the event. Like *Portrait of Fles* and the legions of photographic material Szapocznikow produced, the photograph acts like a cast of the event, whether poured, chewed or slumped. The indexicality of the photograph operates much the same as the mould capturing and holding the surface of its subject.

¹³ In this context, it is interesting to note Lawrence Alloway, writing in *Artforum* in 1972, referring to Robert Smithson's shift towards making earthworks (as Krauss locates within her 'Expanded Field' diagram) that articulated qualities inherent within material flow behaviours under certain conditions. A work such as *Asphalt Rundown* demonstrates these behaviours as inchoate material spills and slides downhill, as a tautological diagram of its own behaviour specific to the method of deposition of the work.

Alloway describes Smithson's intentions for working with more fluid material 'to subject an existing hill to the pressure of a mud flow, but sub-zero temperatures defeated the plan' (Alloway, 1972). Nevertheless, this interest in how matter exerts pressure and finds its own material limits is significant to this project. The point of rest for Smithson's deployment of material depends upon its inherent properties (or conditions) and the forces of gravity, weight, momentum and friction.

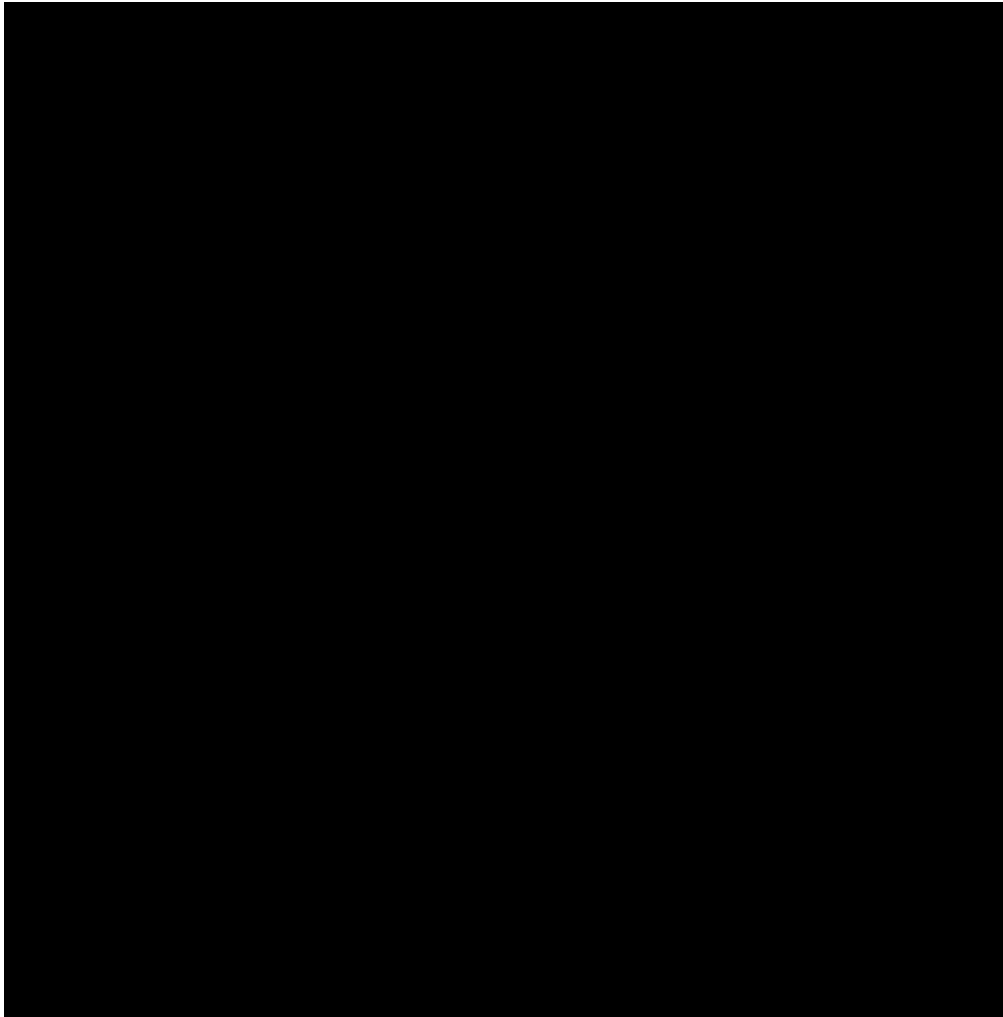


Figure 23. Robert Smithson, *Glue Pour*, 1970, collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery

REPETITION

Sculpture can be understood as a continuous condition of flux in the work of the Medardo Rosso, who continuously remade, adapted and recast work in clay, wax, plaster and bronze. In his last twenty-two years of productivity, from 1906 to 1928, Rosso made no new sculpture, instead concentrating on casting and recasting his sculptures in an ongoing process of reworking. In these later works, Rosso's

fascination with the casting process was bound into each new cast as slight shifts in registration or inclusions of gelatine, wax or plaster from mould or cast retold the story of their making. Within this period of intense casting, the moulds inevitably bore the marks of fatigue, resulting in changes to the casts. His revisioning of existing works position Rosso as an artist restless with his own sculptural legacy. Significantly, Rosso's reinventiveness is evidenced by the volume of photographs he continuously shot of his sculptures.

Sharon Hecker (2003) proposes that Rosso's working method of continual recasting, reworking, unmaking and photographing was a way to refuse categorisation and containment. Rosso's approach to making and unmaking sculpture can be seen as possessing vulnerability through his attempts to capture the 'liminal moment of a concept taking form' (Hecker, 2003, in Cooper and Hecker, 2003, p. 56). Importantly, Rosso's oeuvre offers something unresolved, continuous and restless, as work is made in response to more work in 'echo-like acts of sculptural repetition' (ibid., p. 56), which neatly describes the condition of making out of work and back in to work. Hecker reinforces the role of repetition by referring to Patricia Berry's (1974) argument that repetition can be interpreted as 'an attempt at continuity through recurrence' (Berry, 1974, quoted in Cooper and Hecker, 2003), and thus Rosso's practice can be seen as one of continuous reflection through praxis.

Continuation is facilitated by Rosso's choice of materials. Their inherent plasticity and vulnerability emphasise qualities of liminality as the images merge out of definition to evoke movement and change. Wax, plaster and bronze allow the artist to 'preserve the malleable, the fluid, something of an organic pre-eminence' (Mola, 2007, p. 17),

so that the impression is of change being caught in material form that is in itself fluid. Radically, Rosso made wax casts from moulds as finished sculptures in themselves, running counter to the accepted traditions of lost-wax casting, whereby the wax existed 'as the fugitive, penultimate stage' (Pullen, 2003, in Cooper and Hecker, 2003, p. 95) of this process. Recasting and remoulding move further away from the 'original' towards the copy of a copy or the photograph of the copy. Within his output of experimental photographs depicting sculptures in various stages of development and attitude, Rosso creates work out of work, an ongoing register of surface impressions, moulding, casting and exposures, undermining the assuredness of much statuary of the time, instead proposing a restless approach to making sculpture, where no single sculpture is resolved, each one a different adaptation.

A typical example of Rosso's multiple casts is the sculpture *Enfant Malade* (Fig. 24), made around 1893–95 and cast in bronze. Rosso's fascination with the casting process precipitated many differing features emerging from the same mould. In *Enfant Malade*, a pronounced flange remains in place where liquid bronze leaked between the two moulds, leaving a 'halo' around the head and shoulders. Secondly, a distinct ridge can be seen running diagonally across the left eye and nose – a result of a hairline fracture in the mould exploited by the liquid bronze during investment. Finally, there are several fragments of the plaster mould embedded into the surface of the bronze upon removal of the cast. Such leftover features serve as a reminder of the casting process with the associated flaws, flashings and residues petrified within the cast.

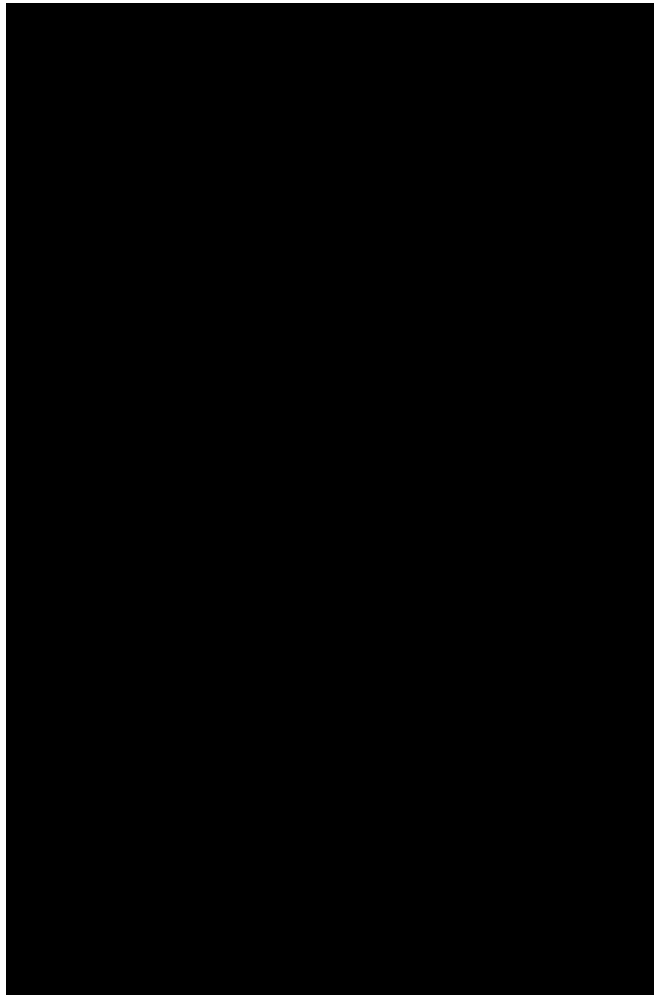


Figure 24. Medardo Rosso, *Enfant Malade*, 1893–95, bronze, 25.5 x 14.5 x 16.5cm, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Milan, photo courtesy of Henry Lie, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge MA.

Considering the way later casts held the process of their own production within their surfaces, it could be argued that Rosso was attempting to undermine the authority of the monument by casting a sculpture that resists the resolved and enclosed finish of much bronze sculpture of the period. Furthermore, the dominant, robust verticality of the monumental is called into question by the way the head leans and tilts over the shoulder.



Figure 25. Desmond Brett, *Bulwark*, 2022, cast unpigmented fibreglass.

© Desmond Brett

With the sculpture *Bulwark* (Fig. 25), I was mindful of the way Rosso wilfully left the marks of casting visible. Deciding to cast the sculpture without pigment, leaving the 'raw' colour of the GRP (glass reinforced plastic) fibreglass resin it was formed from, the resulting cast object held fragments of plaster and shellac stains picked up from the prepared waste mould, as well as veins of resin that leaked through tiny fissures in the plaster mould. These inclusions, stains and burrs evidence the 'host' mould – its traces embedded within the 'skin' of the cast. Without colouration, the resulting object appears raw, rough and without 'dressing' to refine the sculptural object as a resolved entity, calling into question the validity of the finished, fettled and patinated sculpture.

REPLICATION

Anne Tronche, describing how Szapocznikow alluded to the body using materials such as resins and fibreglass for her 'artistic investigations, particularly as regards materials that are still little used in the field of art' (Tronche, 2013, p. 36), marks her corpus of work out as distinctive compared to bronze, stone, photography or film of the time. Unpigmented fibreglass resin offers a suggestion of skin in its clammy opacity (as I discovered in the sculpture in Fig. 26), but what also might have attracted Szapocznikow is its ability to move from liquid to solid state, fixing anything in its grip, grabbing the texture of a mould or layering like the epidermis. Fibreglass furthers the artificiality of the object removed from its clay origins. The fibreglass cast apes the progenitor, the resinous shell a synthetic carapace imitating the shape it copies, presenting itself as an artifice suggesting solidity but, in reality, only a few millimetres thick. The method of casting in fibreglass is a systematic process of laminations, working from the surface of the mould inwards, effectively working backwards from initial contact with the mould's surface, like calcium building up in the empty carapace of a dissolved ammonite encased in clay.

To make a replica in resin, a gelcoat is painted onto the surface of the plaster piece mould, which has itself been coated with successive layers of shellac and subsequent applications of wax to seal the porousness of the plaster and stop resin permeating the shell, preventing demoulding. At this stage, the mould is vulnerable and held in tight check by steel 'dogs' hammered onto the joins to pinch them tightly under pressure. Further ratchet straps provide an extra layer of security against movement and widening of the gaps in the joints. After the initial two layers of gelcoat (the most important layer that picks up surface details), next comes two to three layers of

fibreglass matting to back up the gelcoat and provide the necessary tensile strength the cast requires. Any flex is accommodated in this lamination, giving the fibreglass cast incredible durability to withstand pressure and deformation when demoulded, handled and installed. Fibreglass is a material stand-in, an artifice for an object itself made up – not false but something without roots, something restless and indeterminately not quite ‘there’ but not trying to be anything other than itself.

The example of *Prayer*, by William Tucker from 1961, demonstrates the potency of using a material such as fibreglass to perform a role identical to bronze in the way it can occupy a void and register a replica within a host mould; it possesses a strength, enabling any possible shape. With *Prayer*, Tucker has created a sculpture that is hard to fathom. It is not easy to find a worldly likeness to this thing, which intrigues me so much: the way it resists understanding, the way it is enclosed and ‘sealed’ off without revealing a core interior, the lack of discernible surface details to connote functionality and its material neutrality. This sculpture is positioned in a place of uncertainty.

I am gripped by its unwillingness to yield further information, as if from another, possibly archaic, possibly futuristic, realm. *Prayer* is elusive and slippery despite its static objecthood, its skin a smooth surface meeting corrugations, repelling repeated attempts to define it beyond formal qualities. Instead of replicating something in the world of things, it forms something that has not existed before, without the need to imitate the world around it. This is a liberating position for a sculpture to be in – unencumbered by the demands of likeness to nature or the dogma of truth to materials or the litany of figuration.

Fibreglass enables rapid and accurate replication of surface details held in the mould's surface. It is a material enabling assimilation, replication and imitation to stand in for the 'original' thing. Liquid is solidified as resin and glass fibres flux into new forms. Fibreglass imitates the 'original' clay, assimilating its gestures, surface topography and memories by operating as a superficial shell. The replica is the simulacra of the clay form it imitates. The plastic shell surface hides the interior void: seemingly solid, it is merely a front. It can provide the fantastical in a film set or theme park – it can be the fake boulder or the phantasm that exaggerates reality or stands in for the real.

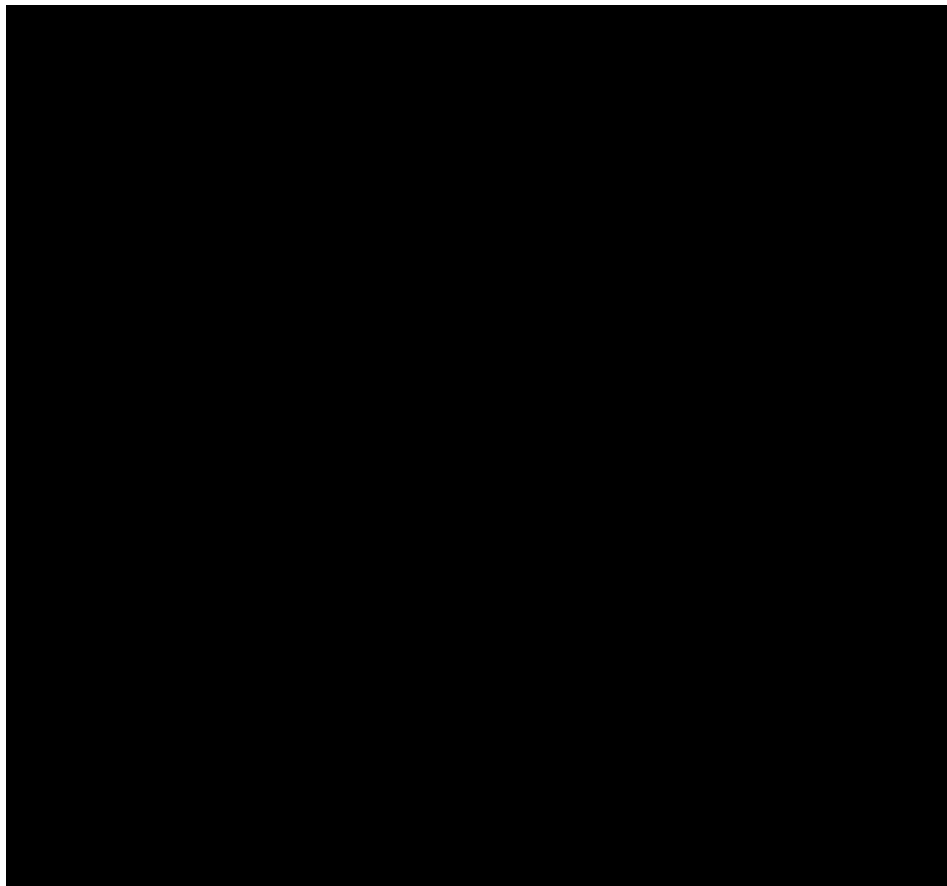


Figure 26. William Tucker, *Prayer*, 1962, fibreglass, private collection.

IMITATION

'If I was an imitation, a perfect imitation, how would you know if it was really me?'

(Childs to MacReady, *The Thing* [film], directed by J. Carpenter, 1982)

In *Pay for the Printer*, Philip K. Dick (1969) develops the simulacrum as something flawed and collapsing. In a post-nuclear world, the inhabitants of Earth depend entirely upon copies or 'prints' produced by alien creatures called Biltongs that possess the ability to print copies of earthly things. It is clear from the outset that Earth is now a place of desecration and dissolution:

a corroded planet of debris, wind-whipped black particles of bone and steel
and concrete mixed together in an aimless mortar

(Dick, 1969, p. 391)

There is an inescapable presence of dust as Dick emphasises the reduction and return of everything manufactured to ground-down particles in an ashen post-nuclear landscape of atomised structures and objects. The 'aimless mortar' of degraded particles blowing around ravaged Earth invokes thoughts of restless, blown fragments compacting and combining into unnatural toxic clay.

Dick describes the Biltong as an organism of indeterminate taxonomy, 'a lump of ancient yellow protoplasm, thick, gummy, opaque' (ibid., p. 404) possessing the ability to print accurately anything people bring to it for replication. People offer originals such as toasters, bottles, cars, etc., but sometimes no originals exist, forcing people to have

prints produced from previous prints made by the Biltong. As a result, each copy becomes successively more degraded and removed from the original object.

In an increasingly desperate demand for practical, luxury things, people leave originals for the exhausted Biltong to replicate:

On the concrete platform, in front of the dying Biltong, lay a heap of originals to be duplicated. Beside them, a few prints had been commenced, unformed balls of black ash mixed with the moisture of the Biltong's body, the juice from which it laboriously constructed its prints.

(ibid., p. 404)

The Biltong's ability to form accurate copies from objects is finite. Through age and exhaustion, its powers wane as it gradually dies. In a state of decrepitude, its ailing energy renders everything it produces with progressively inferior quality. Inferior replicas of originals quickly crumble to dust, 'puddinged' or horridly malformed.

A significant scene takes place in a settlement park where a Biltong resides. Here, people bring objects to the Biltong for printing but, as the creature continues to decline in power, so the prints decline in quality and detail. Although accurate in appearance, some prints fragment and crumble when touched, such as a superficially convincing copy of a Swiss watch that reveals itself as a mass of conjoined components, its surface a deception. The Biltong's inability to produce convincing and functioning replicas from existing prints escalates the problem:

'What did he have to go on?' the man in black asked. 'An original?'

‘A print – but a good print. One he did thirty-five years ago –’

(ibid., p. 394)

The creeping horror of *Pay for the Printer* is the growing inability to find true ‘originals’ and an ever-increasing dependence upon replicas that are doomed to failure. The prints convince at a surface reading, but their interiors are ill-formed empty promises. What is understood as a good print quickly reveals itself as a poor substitute. Worse still, as the Biltong loses its powers, prints become unrecognisable from the things they were meant to be replicating – existing as false claimants.¹⁴ The inability to identify the prints in relation to original things increases the sense of doom as desperation grips the assembled people waiting for their prints. Untermeyer (a central character of the plot) observes something on the ground near to the ailing Biltong that had been brought to the creature by another man:

‘What the hell is this?’ Untermeyer squatted down in front of a vague shape discarded under a tree. He ran his fingers over the indistinct blur of metal. The object seemed melted together like wax – nothing was distinguishable. ‘I can’t identify it.’

(ibid., p. 403)

By presenting this encounter with something unidentifiable, Dick appeals to a sense of horror at the inability to discern some ‘thing’. This unfathomable object is perhaps an example of the *threshold of recognition* attributed to William Tucker: a condition of

¹⁴ False claimant in the Platonic sense, from Deleuze: ‘Copies are second-hand possessors, well-grounded claimants, authorized by resemblance. Simulacra are like false claimants’ (Deleuze, translated by Krauss, 1983, pp. 45–56).

melded, ontological indeterminacy. The 'blur of metal' in the story suggests something mercurial, slipped and ungraspable emerging into the world as a freak birthed by the Biltong. As Michael Camille (1992) states, 'The horror in the story is that these objects – toasters, cars and clothes - are of course not the "real thing" but simulacra' (Camille 1992. P.42) that the populous rely upon what Dick calls "defective duplicates" formed from previous prints.'¹⁵ The shattering of what is thought of as original and dependable increases. Flaws carried into the next copy increase distortion until prints become unrecognisable from the original models from which they are drafted. Their function corrupts until they cannot operate in their original capacity. The idea of the 'original' becomes untenable.

¹⁵ The idea of degraded copies and the gradual distortion and misshapeness of printed copies of copies described in *Pay for the Printer* resonates in *Fleeting Monument* by Cornelia Parker from 1985 (Fig. 61, Appendix). The monument, in the context of this sculpture, can be understood as something iconic, upstanding and upwardly oriented. But Parker treats it, through repetition, as something gradually losing potency. Describing the status of monuments as depicted in souvenirs, Parker states:

Souvenirs are bought as monuments, reminders, relics of something extraordinary. Through miniaturisation and reproduction, a famous cathedral becomes a crude abstraction, a useless ruin of the original.

(<https://artscouncilcollection.org.uk/artwork/fleeting-monument>)

As a cast of a handle resembling Big Ben from a typical London tourist souvenir, the 'original' has itself become lost – the souvenir is itself not an original but a copy of a resemblance of a copy of an iconic monument. Here, repetition forms an integral part of the work through continued casting from the same mould – the sculpture uses a single mould from which Parker exhaustively took casts. Over time, the mould began to wear out (like the Biltong) and so the quality of the casts began to decline:

Because she cast hundreds of Big Bens from only one mould, the clock towers gradually become faceless.

(ibid.)

The sculpture reveals these incremental changes in definition as each cast is arranged so that the array of casts fan away from the centre in ever decreasing legibility. Repetition forces the loss of originality, whereby the defined starting point from which the casts radiate out signifies the progenitor and the outer objects recall the 'indistinct blur of metal' that describe the failed efforts made by the Biltong in *Pay for the Printer*. Here is an interesting proposition of the idea of something imagined existing perfectly formed yet the material reality falls short of that ideal. The reality of repetition is that – as Parker proves – the perfect replica is impossible. A mould by definition is registering something prior, and its cast is an imitation or replica of the original. This is also true of the moulds made at the Armitage Shanks factory – they have to be replaced after a certain period of time as their definition is lost after multiple casts are taken. The replica could be understood to be an imposter taking the place of the prototype.

Relating to the production of the cast replica of the clay sculpture, it is compelling to consider the outcome of a cast of a cast of a cast ad nauseam through the application of a mould. How might the status of each successive cast sculptural object operate once removed from its predecessor? Each consequent replication becomes less accurate at the surface, more unfaithful to the previous edition, until eventually there is nothing original left. Through Dick's story, the sensation of decomposition and flux is precipitating the idea of the original becoming ever more impossible to attain as time consigns it to history, so that, in this sense, the prints operate as simulacra because there is nothing left of a progenitor in existence. Significantly, the distorting and crumbling of the prints in Dick's story can be related to the decomposition of clay and its subsequent revival when rehydrated and moistened, like the Biltong's bodily fluid trying to form specific objects. The prints exist in a state of flux, neither ash nor resolved replicas, but instead existing in a liminal state of indeterminacy, much to the chagrin of the assembled onlookers.

The Thing, John Carpenter's horror film set in a desolate Antarctic research station, offers a profound exploration of catastrophe, isolation and simulacrum. Claustrophobic paranoia is elevated as, one by one, the American personnel of Outpost 31 are murdered by a malevolent extra-terrestrial 'Thing' without original form. The film is arguably a study of continuation, as the formless entity infects and assimilates living bodies, imitating them perfectly to survive. Defined by the body it inhabits, its ontology is fugitive and plastic, its materiality and surface appearance dependent upon its host.

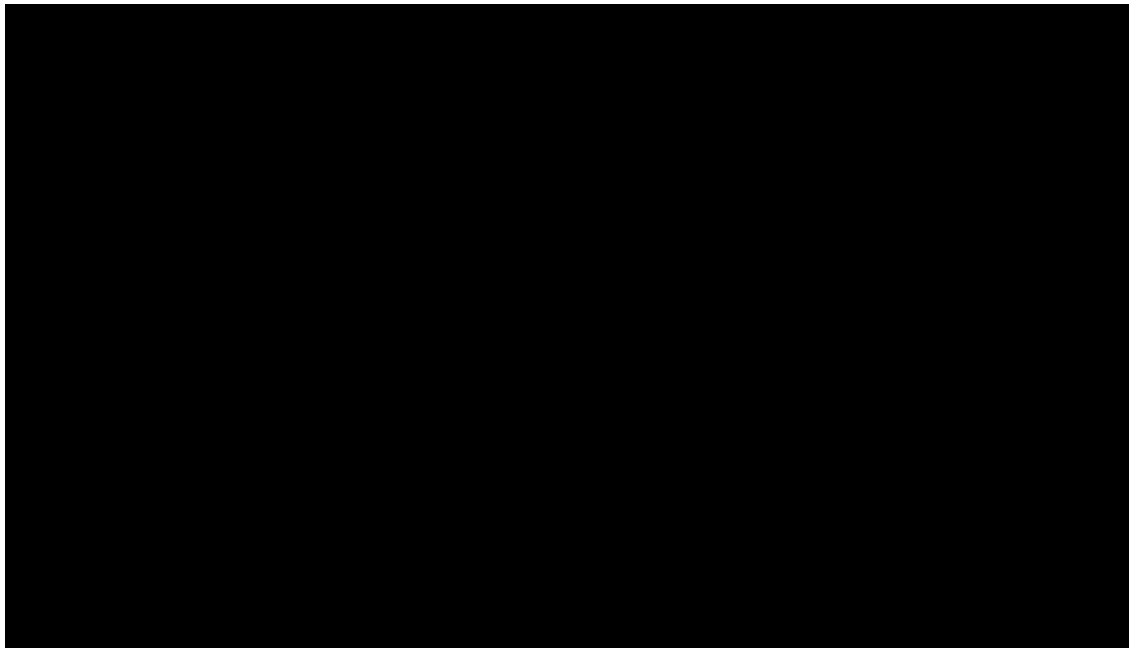


Figure 27. Bennings death scene, *The Thing* [film], directed by J. Carpenter, 1982, Universal Pictures.

The Thing-monster is recovered from a crashed spaceship that has remained frozen and preserved like a fossil under thick ice for thousands of years. The excavation and subsequent emergence of the alien effectively continues an existence predating civilisation. When threatened, it reacts in gory manifestations of deformed hybridity as beings across space and time bound up within its cellular materiality emerge.

Dylan Trigg (2014) positions the phenomenology of *The Thing* as being out of time, existing beyond subjectivity as unhuman and uncanny. It comes from deep fossil time, beyond the comprehension of subjectivity into matter/form by assimilating itself into subjectivity. When excavating heteromorph ammonites from Speeton Clay exposures, I have found the time span between their living existence and petrified presence in my hands overwhelmingly incomprehensible, the bleached calcitic ghost of a former living body, its cellular activity deactivated and replaced. Referring to Merleau-Ponty (2003), Trigg refers to the fossil ammonite as 'a spectral materiality' (Trigg, 2014, p. 130), a

negative of something living, a form that lived but through fossilisation becomes a trace marking the disappearance of the subject that, through its disappearance, the fossil exists to mark the existence of the original animal.¹⁶

The deep time of the fossil is also the time of the clay preserving the fossil as a hostage, much like the Antarctic ice holding Carpenter's monster captive, the difference between alien and fossil being that the Thing possessed life paused in hiatus. Once animated, its matter continued to live in the present, unlike the inert uncovered Speeton ammonite. Trigg places Carpenter's thing between states of being, emergent and yet to become something tangible and resolved.

Pay for the Printer and *The Thing* consider how form is obscured, corrupted and overwhelmed, either through ill-printed 'puddinged' replicas or, in the case of *The Thing*, horribly distorted configurations when caught mid-assimilation (e.g. when the Bennings-Thing is discovered) or not quite completed replicas. Somewhere within these gruesome, overwhelmed forms, there is something recognisable.

A sense of a bodily takeover can be found in the drawings of Alina Szapocznikow describing a build-up of forms upon a discernible figure, resulting in visualisations of a distorted, abject figuration that Anne Tronche describes as:

¹⁶ I have been especially interested in the presence of fossil ammonites within the Speeton Clay formation of outcrops in Yorkshire. Like *The Thing*, I have to extract the creature entombed in ancient strata. A specific variety of ammonite called *Aegocrioceras* can be found here. It fascinates me for its otherness, the way it formed uncoiled against the typical coiled morphology of much of the ammonite species, its fragmentary presence making it almost impossible to extract a whole specimen. Palaeontologically, *Aegocrioceras* is one of a group of ammonoids known as 'heteromorphs' that evolved an irregular shell configuration. The word translates as 'something that differs from the standard form', as opposed to the regular morphology of homomorphs, which all have spiralled shells.

The unexpected reaction to a relatively objective representation of the body reformulated its degradation and vulnerability, through the savage movements of cells that amassed together and sourced their vitality from the organisms under attack.

(Tronche, 2013, p. 38)

Growths on a Leg (Fig. 28), features lumpen forms clustered on the limb suggesting the body 'under attack', slowly being consumed by an unstoppable tumescent parasitic invader overwhelming its host. There is an almost comic quality to the single foot trying to keep the consumed body upright as the tumours expand, to the extent that the body is entirely hidden under these swollen lumps of aggressive matter.

Tronche says 'these irregular forms seem to grow en masse' (ibid., p. 38), and this image of cells amassing and overtaking the helpless body echoes the savage way the Thing overtakes the American scientists with relentless speed, invading and occupying each body as a means to survival. Szapocznikow renders the body down into a lumpen, protean form, existing significantly further from recognition as a human except for the foot emerging from beneath the thickening growths, threatening to collapse under their tumescent weight.¹⁷

¹⁷ The partial or complete overwhelming of a figure as depicted in Szapocznikow's drawing can be aligned in 'Robert Smithson's Development' by Laurence Alloway, with reference to the tipping and piling of materials to form his earthworks. As with *Growths on a Leg* or *The Thing*, we understand the implications of a foreign body, alien hijacker or tumescent invader overwhelming its host, depicted within science fiction tropes as something *other*, indeterminate, inchoate and hard to define. Its resistance to verbal description keeps it at a distance from quotidian language, which in turn ramps up the horror which, apart from terror of the invader, is a fear of the inarticulable. Furthermore, it is the deformation or corruption of existing frameworks, such as the body or architecture or society, that holds the greatest fear inherent in such growths. Works such as Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970) or *Glue Pour* (1969) demonstrate such an act of pressurising and radical alteration of a framework by material intervention. In the former, the structure of the woodshed is placed under enormous pressure as piles of earth are incrementally built up until the structure fails under the weight of the overlying material.



Figure 28. Alina Szapocznikow, *Sketch of Growths on a Leg 1*, 1970, felt-tip pen on paper perforated along left edge, 33.9 x 26.7cm.

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Alloway refers to Smithson's awareness of such tropes as he made *Partially Buried Woodshed*. He says, 'In Smithson's mind, among other things, as he set up this piece, were those science fiction movies in which amorphous beings inundate known structures and incorporate people, such as *The Blob*'. It is hard to see Szapocznikow's *Sketch of Growths on a Leg 1* without recalling the way *The Blob* unrelentingly consumes its victims into its heaving amorphous mass. Here the interactions between the corporeal and the inchoate provide the tension for how the body can exist when placed under extreme conditions or – as Alloway states – a 'stress situation'. This term could be seen as a way to describe a limit threshold where one state of being is threatened by another, ultimately creating a new condition of being that is unrecognisable from the original.

Szapocznikow seems to capture the overtaking of the body as it is happening, as the leg remains upright while the body tenuously possesses the ability to stand. Just as Bennings is caught mid assimilation in *The Thing* (Fig. 27), the drawing suggests the heaving cluster of thickening growths will eventually consume the helpless host.

A further resonance between Carpenter's film and *Sketch of Growth on a Leg 1* can be found in the computer visualisation of the relentless advance, attack and assimilation of a host cell by the Thing, until it replicates the incumbent (Fig. 29). The host cell becomes swamped by Thing cells as they cluster around it in a crude pixelated demonstration of how the alien takes over the host, like Szapocznikow's obscured and overwhelmed body in her drawing.

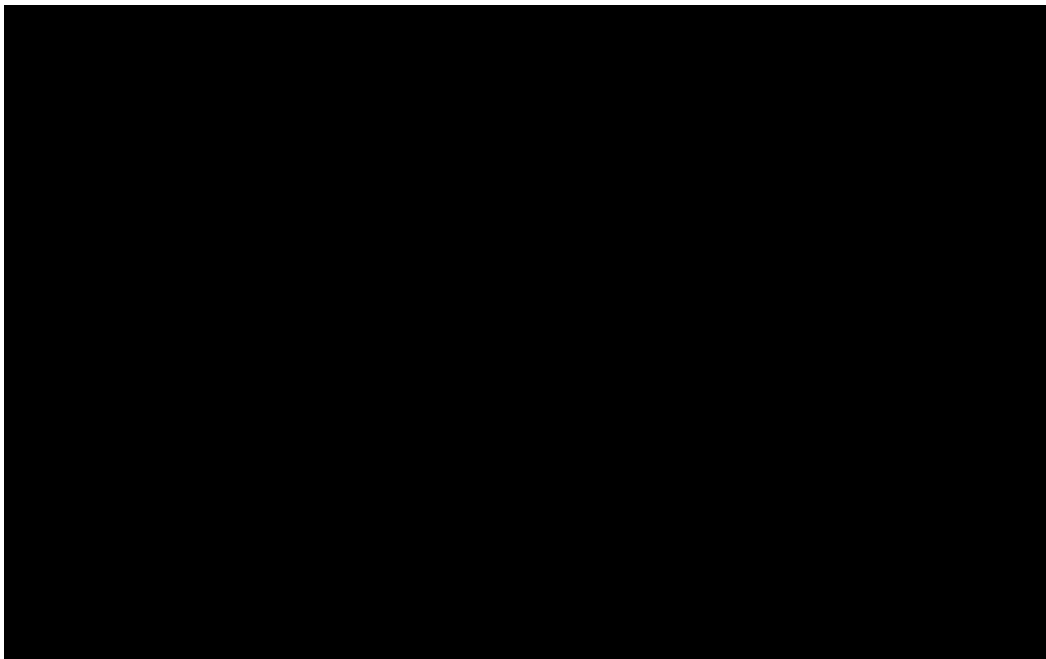


Figure 29. Computer projections of assimilation, *The Thing* [film], directed by John Carpenter, 1982, Universal Pictures.

If simulation, according to Baudrillard, is the imitation of a system or process over time,¹⁸ the assimilation of the Thing into the bodies of the Americans can be considered metonymically in relation to the world's population eventually becoming infected by the Thing-organism. The excavated monster, once activated, is a continuum that is destined to re-form itself infinitely, unless destroyed.

The Thing moves from host to host in an endless cuckooing of body matter, re-forming by stealth or violence in its mission to exist at all costs. Carpenter's creature is simply trying to survive. Like the alien, clay arguably possesses properties of reincarnation, assimilation and repose as a material capable of lying dormant within deep time or reanimated into new forms of becoming. Hidden in the Speeton cliffs, the fossil *Aegocrioceras* awaits discovery to offer its fragmented archaic design, its heteromorphicity a demonstration of evolutionary adaptations and unusual divergence based upon environmental pressures to survive and adapt.

The possibilities of material in continuum is seen through the narrative arc of *The Thing* as an essence taking form, becoming animated without stopping and moving to its next iteration. The significance of such continuum within the context of this project lies with the possibility of sculpture changing and deforming according to new encounters and stimuli feeding the work. The implications of fluid materials as changeable and stable or unstable brings about the possibility of sculpture emerging as something fugitive or unfixed, its formation subject to change through the exertion of exterior forces. Through evolving sculptures emerging from drawings and previous sculptures, no 'original' sculpture exists but instead something grows out of a continuing process

¹⁸ <https://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/simulationsimulacrum.htm>

of realisation. Like *The Thing*, sculpture changes and enfolds its own making into itself. Clay assimilates thought forms and occupies objectivity imposed by the subject into being; it is modelled into something original without prior existence.



Figure 30. Desmond Brett, demoulding fibreglass cast of *Bulwark* from plaster mould, 2022.

© Desmond Brett

The alien, by assimilating its host, is a 'stand-in'. Trigg describes an autopsy scene on the monster at Outpost 31 where the station doctor explains how the alien assimilates the host it has infected, saying that 'it imitates them perfectly' (Trigg, 2014, p. 138) so that what looks like a dog, or a colleague, is not. The stray Norwegian husky dog homed by the Americans at the beginning of the film is a faithful copy of a husky in behaviour (simulation) and appearance, becoming a simulacrum of the dog.

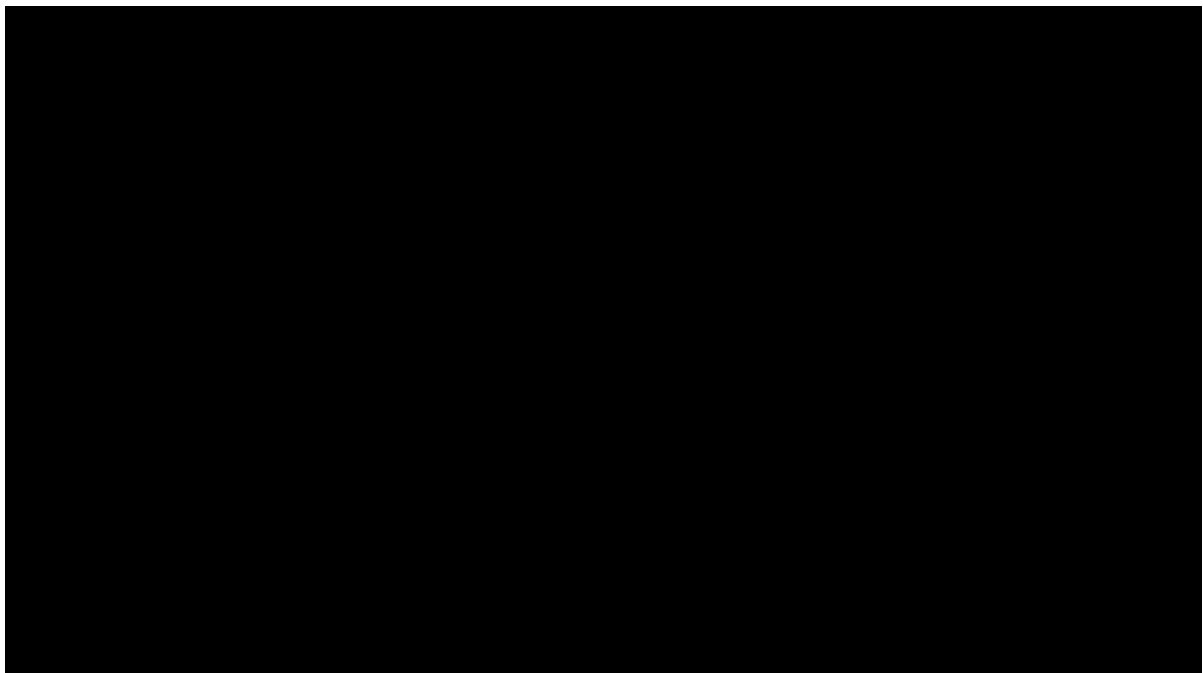


Figure 31. Dog transformation scene, *The Thing* [film], directed by John Carpenter, 1982, Universal Pictures.

When I was smashing open the waste mould to reveal *Bulwark* (Fig. 30), the necessary force required to crack and remove the clinging plaster sections brought me back to the dog transformation scene (Fig. 31), where the husky imitator begins to split apart, revealing the thing inside, having served its purpose as a 'cast' of a real husky to convince the Americans to home it. In a triangulation. Dick's printed objects and Carpenter's creature operate as replicants as my own fibreglass sculptures take on the form of the previous clay archetype. Arguably the fibreglass sculptures are a stand-

in for the 'real thing' (the archetype clay forms). The fibreglass imitates the thing which itself is something unseen before, a copy of something that no longer has an original.

Perfecting a convincing replica at the stage of casting is challenging, as expansion of the plaster mould widens the joins, allowing a seam to appear in the cast that prevents a true 1:1 replica. The cast is superficially a doppelgänger: at surface level there exist variations to deform it. Clay allows me to model suggestive forms without specificity, enabling the moving hand to leave a worked surface resistant to smooth, calibrated resolution. This can be considered with Merleau-Ponty's description of a 'primordial Being which is not yet the subject being nor the object being' (Merleau-Ponty, 1970, pp. 65–66). There is something compelling here about how Merleau-Ponty calls upon grasping what's happening around oneself and connecting between body and environment: a condition of being somehow indeterminate and unseparated. The body becomes located at an optimal position with which to perceive and encounter the sculpture which is in a state of emergence until I can make sense of it physically and bodily through the studio encounter. The sculpture thus becomes a way for my body to express itself and to imprint experience upon pliable clay shaped into something transitional and evolving.

Wet, unfired clay can be seen, therefore, as the 'not yet', having an existence in between liquid and dust, wet and dry. I maintain the clay model in damp and ultimately pliable transitional form in the studio awaiting further changes until it is held in check by the mould. An arresting state of transition held by the changing *thing*, be it Carpenter's fleshy, gooey organism or my soft clayey shape, could be described by Trigg as:

the body as we find it in its ugly emergence, caught between states, as an interstitial corporeality where language lacks the means to organise materiality into a whole.

(Trigg, 2014, p. 139)



Figure 32. Alina Szapocznikow, *Untitled (Fetish VIII)*, 1971, polyester resin, nylon tights, wool (photo: Simon Vogel).

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Fetish VIII by Alina Szapocznikow seems to take on some of the manifestations of a Carpenter horror scene as the fragmentary mouth and jaw emerge forcefully from the fleshy pod-like form that has been seemingly rent apart in a violent bodily expulsion. A face-thing protuberance connects to the host by a twisting umbilical-cord-like appendage, echoing Trigg (2014) as something existing in between states, neither singularly determined nor certain of what it is splitting into being.

Although one fragment is recognisably human, the remaining parts of this body resist definitive corporeal nomenclature. This sculpture resists orientating itself vertically to align its figuration with the statue and its status – as if caught mid-transformation – challenging the certainty of the sculptural object. This condition of unrealisation is salient to the project in relation to material being stopped in a state of formation or continuing beyond a point of emergence back into crumbled, fluid formlessness. Through modelling and remodelling, material offers new forms *ad infinitum*.

Simulacrum, in the context of the project, are forms that define things that have not (knowingly) existed before and, as such, can be understood as sculptures without antecedents or original predecessors. Without intended relation to the 'real' world, they aim to assert themselves as objects in and of themselves.

The sense of life locked up in the work is a compelling thought as I make the sculptures: that life is about change and sculpture cannot arrest change. This idea holds imaginative possibilities, as, while fixed and formal, the work holds sensations and ideas about change locked up within its own history, which is evident in the surface. Enfolded in these sculptures is the reality of holding something fixed and static against the imaginary object that is held in the mind, the idea that the mind can wander and migrate beyond the fixed reality of the object.

Consideration of the process of building and casting sculptures necessitates a consideration of the role of the simulacrum when faced with the destruction of the original clay object to enable a mould to be registered. The simulacrum is positioned

within the project as the things that replace the originator, which is no longer extant, the imposter excavated from within the mould.

There is no 'original' sculpture to copy. It never existed – no original monument recast or remodelled or remembered or encountered. It never happened. I am not compelled to cull the backstory of twentieth century statuary or the monumental turn to dwell within an exhausted figuration.

This can be considered via Baudrillard's idea of a copy without an original which thus becomes the sole representative of the archetype operating as a material stand-in. This destabilises the idea of the original sculptural form because the 'original' in this context is the clay sculpture existing at the mid-point of the process as a delicate and vulnerable carrier of the form. Simulacra diverge materially but remain faithful to the originator's formal and textural features because they have imprinted themselves into the 'parent mould' that captured the encoded surface information present in the clay archetype. Baudrillard's description of simulacra as 'hyperreal' uses the example of Disneyland as an encounter removed from reality, as something more realistic than reality itself. The history of Disneyland and probably every other attraction offering fantasy encounters is also a history of fibreglass. Fibreglass can form the ghouls on a ghost train, oversized characters, loaded ice-cream cones or architectural facades situated within such an arena, offering an ultra-perfection that is better than the real thing. The simulacrum within sculptural production stands in for that which has been lost by replacement, so that the replicated sculptural form operates as an accurate depiction of the sculptural progenitor that went before. Baudrillard describes Disneyland as the acme of the hyperreal simulacra of American society, where the

encounter becomes more real than the real and society is experienced through a fabricated world of stand-ins and copies of copies.

Using fibreglass to make sculpture connects to the simulacra via association to Disneyland and the theme park fantasy and a certain period of post-war sculptural activity where GRP (fibreglass) allowed sculpture to be made expansively, colourfully and in more eccentric forms. Through the New Generation artists (including Tucker) and the overt corporeal associations in Szapocznikow's work, fibreglass created opportunities for sculptural form to occupy radically abstract taxonomies or allude to the body. It could be argued that the fibreglass sculptures emerging from this project operate somewhere in between these positions.

Fibreglass takes, imitates and exaggerates reality, offering a glossy, super sleek, shiny world of the simulacrum according to Baudrillard's definition of Disneyland being more real than life. The fakery of the cast surface can stand in for an exaggerated reality as fibreglass surfaces can be replaced, recast and repainted without recourse to notions of permanence. It occupies territory vacated by former occupants.

The prospect of a cast made from a cast ad infinitum intrigues me. A copy of a copy of a copy of a clay pattern, model, archetype. I ask myself whether the clay form I have made is a copy or the 'original' despite it copying nothing specific. This project takes an anti-Platonic position because I have not made a copy of a model as there was no 'ideal' form to model from directly. Although the project acknowledges Plato's model/copy relationship it takes issue with the denigration of the simulacra within his diagram. Instead, it is to the Deleuzian promotion of the simulacrum to an elevated

position that this project allies. Here the simulacrum does not attempt to faithfully copy something already in existence but eschews imitation in favour of operating on its own terms as an image without resemblance to anything else.

The clay archetypes made within this project evolved without specific reference to a fixed idea or design problematising Platonism because there is nothing the archetype is representing beyond itself – it is not claiming to be something already in existence. Plato argues for the ‘thing’ to be a copy of a model or ‘ideal form’, yet it could be argued that the form of the archetype isn’t an ideal standard form (such as an acme fossil typifying its species). Taking the Platonic dialectic, the clay archetype operates as a copy from that form which exists as an idea(I) with no specific model or drawing of a model. Acknowledging Plato’s ‘rules’ of the copy and position of the simulacra as secondary to the copy, the cast fibreglass sculpture operates as a second copy that can be ascribed the status of simulacra especially because there is no extant ‘original’ or first copy. Where Plato attempts to suppress the simulacra to keep it from interfering with his dialectical model/copy argument, by doing so, its existence is paradoxically acknowledged.

This project calls for the simulacra to be elevated to a status whereby its function is as a re-enactment of the thing previously wrought. Because there is an ‘ideal’ to which the model ascribes rather than a fixed geometry, the clay copy is a form emerging from a temporal encounter in material terms with imagination – a moving, shapeshifting fantasy. Deleuze calls for the simulacra to be valued, revealed and elevated as an entity possessing authority, positioning the simulacra against the Platonic dialectic.

Despite the concept of the mould inferring high production and repetition, the process of casting a fibreglass simulacrum in the context of this project involves making waste-moulds which, by definition, are destroyed (wasted) in the process. Here, destruction necessitates creation.

Each time I break a fibreglass cast out of a mould to reveal a fresh sculpture, I am reminded of each Thing-organism of John Carpenter's breaking out and revealing itself as an assimilation of previous existences, corrupting the ideal of the originator into something altogether more absurd and horrifying than the 'real' thing. Considering *The Thing* or *Pay for the Printer* in relation to the assimilated form or attempted copy, is also to acknowledge that making ceramic sculptures in the Ideal Standard factory (Fig. 17) brings another reading of these works as existing at odds with the mass-produced forms of the factory production line: connected in materiality but formally 'puddinged' in relation to the taxonomy of the ceramicware.

Practically, a fibreglass stand-in enables the bulky sculpture to protrude from the wall into space due to its inherent strength and relative lightness. In doing so, the paradoxical condition of the cast fibreglass copy is that it becomes fixed in perpetuity as a static thing, whereas the vulnerable clay archetype demonstrates its own making, continually evidencing bodily engagement through haptic forming enfolded into its surface and substrate, against the resinous petrified second copy (the simulacra). Petrification is an apt description of this process of hardening a gesture into something resistant. Wet clay remains prone to change at the slightest touch, but fibreglass offers a skin that is set and preserved like a fossil.

Fibreglass is an imitator par excellence, providing a shallow, laminated, thin membrane to convince the viewer that they are encountering an elevated, embellished, solid reality. Fibreglass cannot claim the depth of historical status endowed upon bronze but possesses a rather more recent appearance in the geological record of sculpture and within the fantasy world of special effects, film prop-making, the seafront funfair and theme park.

With the two examples of alien occupation and assimilation, the sensation of flux is to be found in the ever-changing status of the Biltong's printed objects towards decay or in the restless and aggressive shapeshifting Thing. In both instances, simulacrum of objects serve as desperate attempts to replicate reality and the desperate need to survive by assuming new forms. Flux is enfolded into the thick description of the Biltong's failing prints and the violent transformations of things into other things at Outpost 31 in a way that seems relevant to making sculpture and the difficulty in specifying where forms come from as my hands 'print' forms out via the assimilation of experiences and encounters. The description of something turning, changing and emerging aptly describes the experience of modelling the clay in the studio. Every press or pull of clay is a change to the form, traces become a palimpsest of gestures, emerging and eradicating prior appearances. It is the position of something held between and temporarily claimed that offers me the most compelling form of sculpture, physically present but inferring something unfixed.

I have primal encounters with specific objects and memories that stimulate my sculpture thoughts. My idea of a sculpture exists in a fugitive state, drawing new forms of sculptural object by producing agglomerated forms within a continuum of

manufacture and material recycling. The 'ultimate' sculpture cannot be grasped and identified with specificity; it keeps moving away from my hands as I try to grasp at its rump or hold its body. It slips from my fingers, sliding greasily beyond my ability to fix it in stasis. Sculptural forms are drawn out from within, shaped into material form. All I can do is continue to excavate for new object-ness, new forms of thinking and new thinking forms.

ORIGINS

Casting and demoulding is a process of literal and imaginative shattering, where the cast takes the form of the 'original' as a type of sculptural imposter. The origin of the work is subsequently detached through the replica that operates as a simulacrum: the physical mould is shattered to extract the fibreglass cast which has become untethered to its essence (that of the impetus that drove the clay form into being) with its attendant gestures and modelled intentions.

The connection to the essence of the archetype is lost as, by making the thing, it in turn shatters the illusion of the archetype. The process begins and ends at the very moment the object is revealed, as it ceases to exist as an archetype – somehow in that moment of fixing and setting, the vulnerability and temporality of the idea of an archetype is embedded into the mould and cast. The action of making the sculptural archetype is paradoxically a shattering of it once it has materialised.

Somehow the thing I imagine and build as an 'idea' of an archetype, when realised in full form, becomes a deceit. Like the dog-Thing being an 'idea' of a dog or the Swiss watch in *Pay for the Printer* initially being believable as a functioning watch on the

surface, the reality of the thing's existence destroys what it is thought to be. Seeing the sculptural replica is not to see the idea of the sculpture I intended to make. The 'original' sculpture has been lost.

A desolate realisation but an interesting sculptural position to occupy – that of the necessity to encounter the physical thing which, once formed, shatters the idea of the thing through its presence as a false claimant, being detached from its origin. The condition of flux is heightened in the act of breaking open the mould, releasing the object but shattering connections to memory (or memories of encounters or memories of ideas of sculptures) and the fixed hold of intellect where the idea of the archetype resides. The object resists recognition and so, at the threshold of being recognised, exists in a state of flux.

CHAPTER 4: PLACE

AGAINST VERTICALITY

Through the sculptures I have been making, my aim has been to promote the turn towards the horizontal. This position doesn't reject verticality and the attendant historical position it occupies but makes a claim for counter-orientation of the sculptural object in relation to the lineage of the monument. The location of sculpture emphasising the horizontal brings forth the monument/not-monument paradox in my work. The implications of verticality versus horizontality are explored by Rosalind Krauss (1997) using the example of Jackson Pollock's paintings to describe the effect of the Gestalt:

. . . with its drive to verticalize everything as image, to align everything in accordance with the viewer's upright body

(Krauss, quoted in Bois & Krauss, 1997, p. 94)

Here, Krauss emphasises the struggle to resist the vertical and its relationship to the upright axis of the human body and therefore culture. By placing his painting on the floor, in the horizontal, Pollock could undermine the pre-eminence of the vertical, of culture, of form and 'visual formation of the Gestalt' (ibid., p. 97) itself. It's significant that Krauss describes this potent act because it challenges the dominance of the vertical reading of the world and how the image is ordered through the vertical. Krauss describes the horizontal axis as being 'below form' and 'below culture' (ibid., p. 95) to emphasise the position verticality plays.

To move this logic along, it could be argued that the figure standing in a vertical orientation speaks to the monument, while the horizontal axis becomes unmonumental: of the figure in repose, of the body on all fours, of the orientation of the animal, of base matter (acknowledging Krauss and Bois). The monument can be understood as the representation of sentient stability, ever fixed within the public consciousness, and depended upon to be stoic and upright in the face of civil unrest or societal disruption. By orientating itself against the dominant verticality of the monument, my sculptural work interferes with the generally accepted upright motif of the statue.

In *The Monument and the Amulet*, Herbert Read describes the origins of the monument as something 'originally a solid sculptured object' (Read, 1956, p. 6). He defines early forms of the monument as essentially phallic and upright as something to gaze upon in awe and wonder, something essentially beyond our reach. The very foundations of the monument can be understood as the horizontal base or plinth elevating the statue and placing it at a raised aspect – all seeing and all powerful. From this place of authority, the pedestal enables the monument to occupy territory above and beyond the grasp of the viewer. The work I have made within this project seeks to displace this orientation and (literally) reposition the very foundations of this monumental certainty.

The difference between the monument (or the monumental) and sculpture eschewing such terms depends upon qualities of bulk, gravity, ponderability and stasis – which the following examples address. In his introduction to *The Condition of Sculpture*,

William Tucker describes the fundamental way 'gravity governs sculpture's existence in itself' (Tucker, 1976, p. 7). Working with or against gravity differentiates the monument and the non-monument. Smithson's *Glue Pour* (1970, Fig. 23) and *Asphalt Rundown* (1969, Fig. 33) and Benglis's *Floor Murr* (1970, Fig. 34) all possess bodily connotations that could be associated with flesh, blood, mucus and excretion, and in these works, gravity's inexorable force is placed upon the oozing liquidity of the materials chosen: glue, tar, and latex. Acknowledging gravity's pull counters the very nature of the monument, which reaches defiantly and boldly upwards. The connection to my work lies in the use of transitional material operating in a state of flux and held for enough time to be imprinted by moulding and capturing in the cast.

With Smithson's pieces, photographs exist as documents of work no longer extant; images capture a moment of movement as gravity exerts itself upon material gestures or evidence the formation of the pieces. The work is compelling in its 'return' back to the land, that every particle will be subsumed back into the geological matrix from which it emerged refined and processed into asphalt or glue. Smithson's volume of matter is cast groundward in an inextricable downhill slide. The literal material of *Asphalt Rundown* is no longer *in situ* but instead scattered, eroded, buried and displaced to its entropic fate.

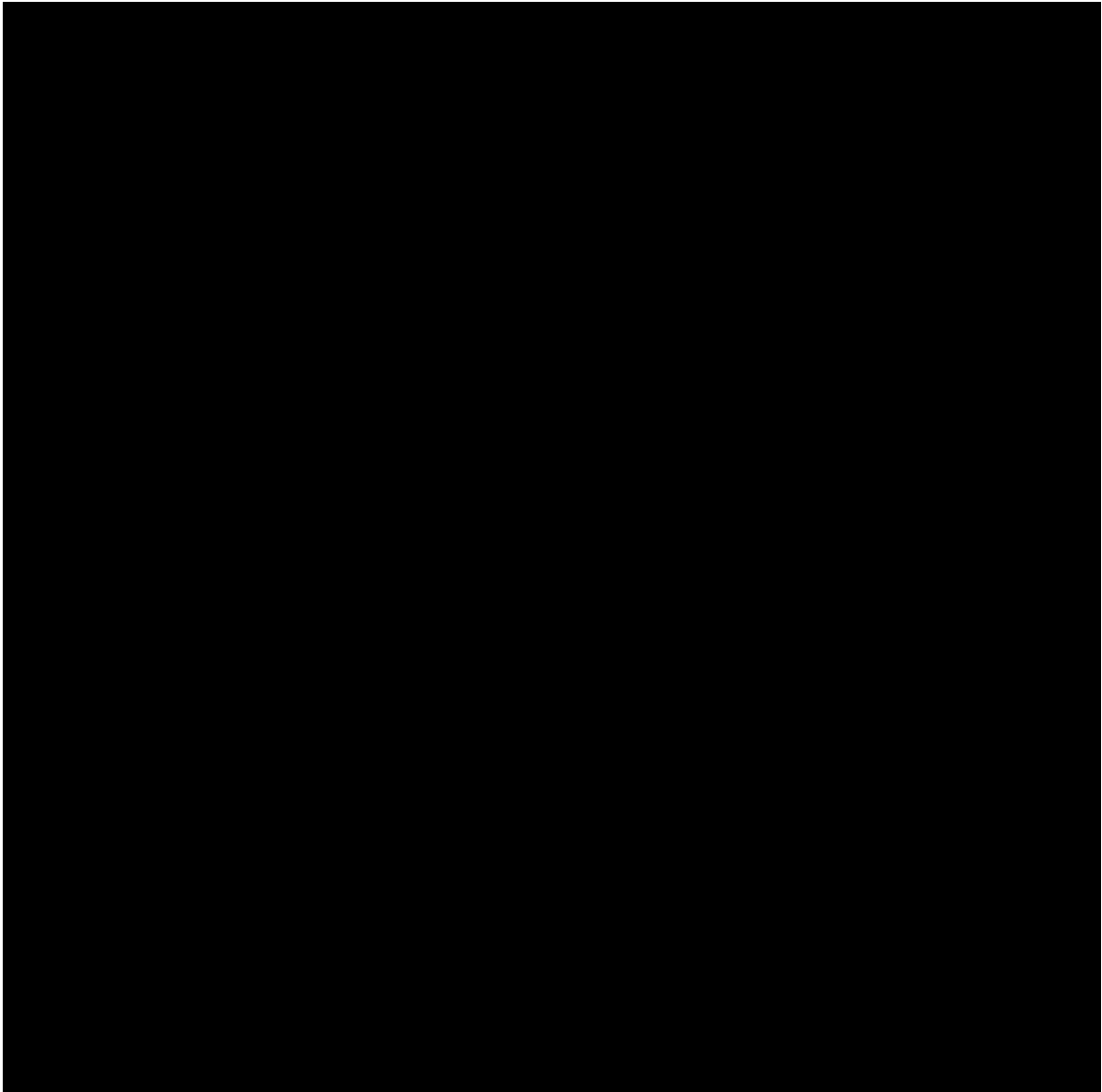


Figure 33. Robert Smithson, *Asphalt Rundown*, 1969, Cava dei Selce, Rome, Italy, asphalt and earth (© Holt/Smithson Foundation, licensed by VAGA at ARS, New York).

Similarly, *Floor Murr* (1970) by Lynda Benglis suggests a geological feature by implying folds and flows of lava or saturated mud and clay outwash layered atop previous layers, setting in a sequence of strata heading to the floor. The flows of polyurethane orientate downwards and fan out at the bottom.

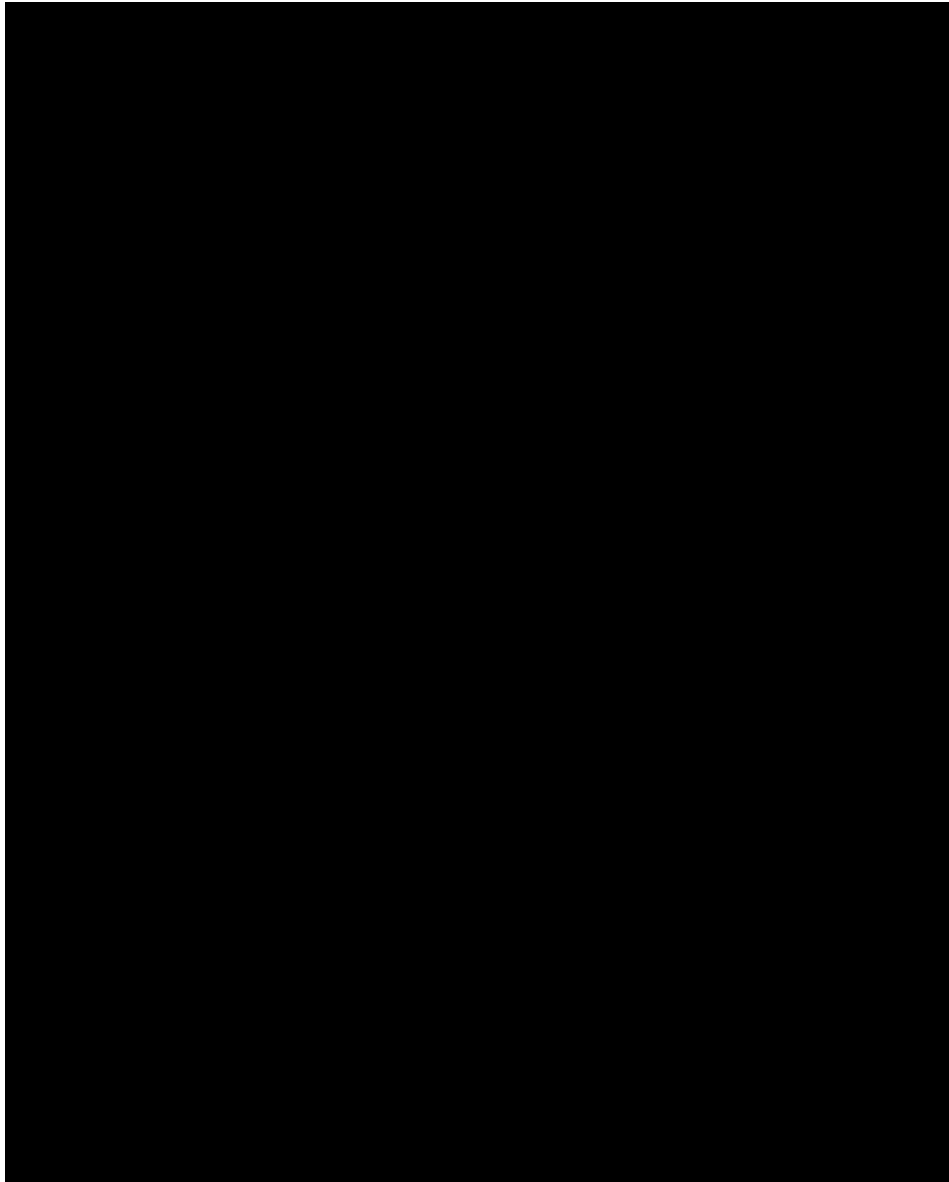


Figure 34. Lynda Benglis, *Floor Murr*, 1970, polyurethane foam and phosphorous.

AGAINST THE MONUMENT

Acknowledging the operation of the monument pushing primarily vertically against gravity and through history, Rosalind Krauss uses Rodin's *Balzac* (1889, Fig. 36) as a point of departure to situate sculpture within her 'Expanded Field' paradigm (Fig. 35).

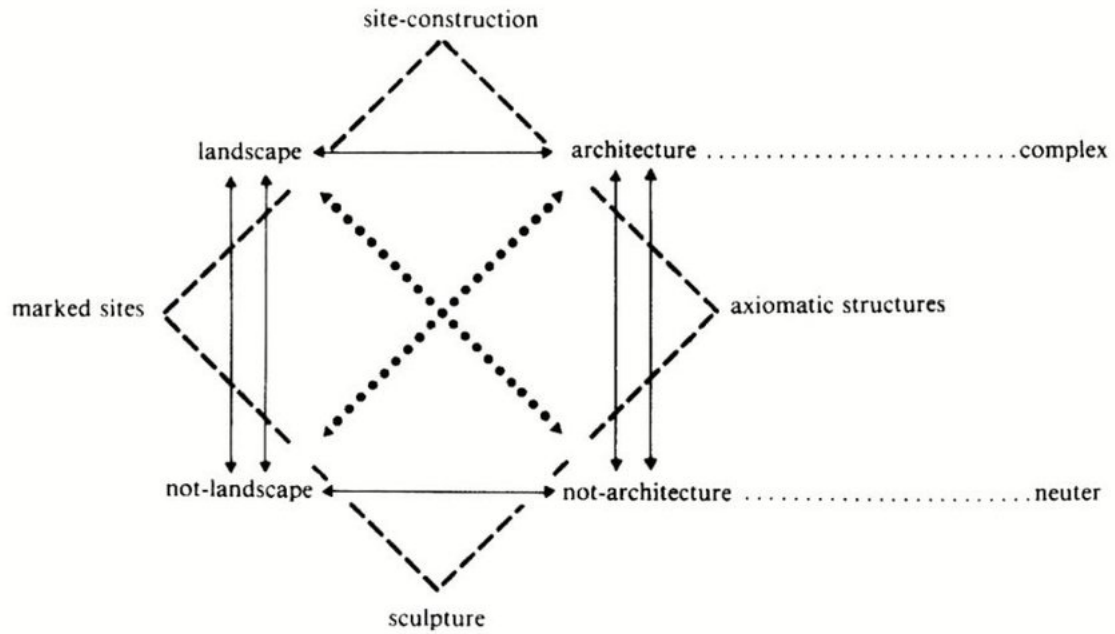


Figure 35. Rosalind Krauss, *Sculpture in the Expanded Field diagram*, 1979.

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Robert Smithson's *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey* (1967) offers another kind of monument, one decoupled from its history and instead proposing an encounter with an altogether more horizontal emphasis.

With *The Fountain Monument: (Bird's Eye View)* (1967, Fig. 37), Smithson designates the monument as something earthbound, sprawling or penetrating the earth with a horizontal orientation instead of the bold swagger possessed by *Balzac* or any number of celebratory statues. It operates against the orthodoxy of the idea of a fountain shooting water up into the air, as one might expect to find in a civic space. Smithson instead subverts this idea by identifying something emerging parallel to the horizon, as waste pipes spew effluent into the river. Smithson describes this encounter thus:

Nearby, on the riverbank ... protruded six large pipes that gushed the water of the pond into the river. This constituted a monumental fountain that suggested six horizontal smokestacks that seemed to be flooding the river with liquid smoke. The great pipe was in some enigmatic way connected to the infernal fountain.

(Smithson, 1967, quoted in Flam [ed], 1996, p. 71)



Figure 36. Rodin, *Balzac*, bronze, Paris, 270 x 120.5 x 128cm

© Musée Rodin, all rights reserved; photo: Agence
photographique du musée Rodin / Jérôme Manoukian.

Smithson offers *The Fountain Monument* as a less heroic proposition, without a pedestal, gallery or civic plaza, but rather a structure found by the artist flâneuring through Passaic. The fountain as a physical presence within the built environment is a phenomenon closely coupled with the monumental statuary that Smithson seeks to reposition against its own upright tradition. Despite their seemingly non-figurative associations, Smithson anthropomorphises some of these phenomena: for example, he develops, by his own admission, a rather clumsy sexual analogy as he describes the pipes entering the earth in orgasmic reverie. This, however, further suggests recognition of the fountain as a priapic urban investiture claiming vertical space.

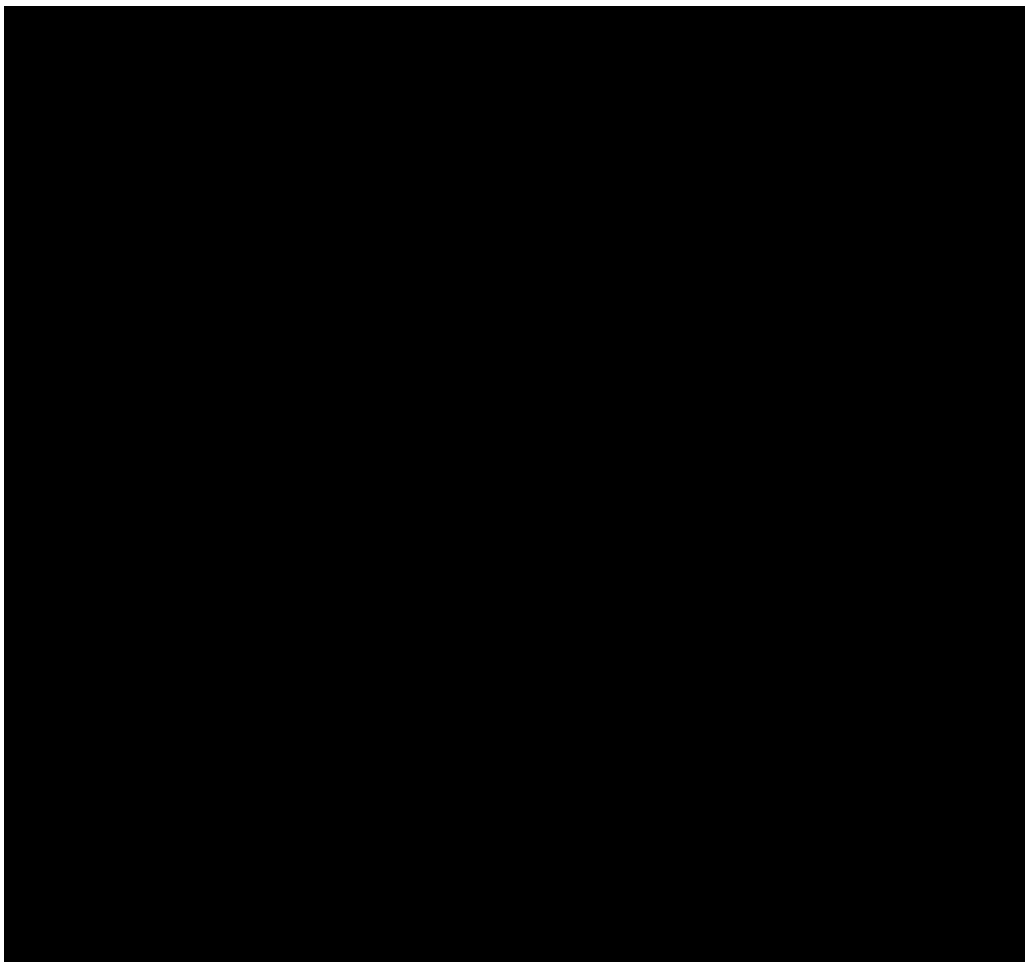


Figure 37. Robert Smithson, *Fountain Monument (Bird's Eye View)*, 1967.

Despite Krauss positioning Smithson's oeuvre within her diagram at the 'marked site' and 'site construction', based upon works such as *Spiral Jetty* (1970) and *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970) as landscape/not landscape and landscape/architecture respectively, the *Monuments of Passaic* series evidences Smithson's monumental thinking, suggesting his acknowledgement of the sculptural legacy of the monument that isn't rooted entirely in the historic earthworks of archaic history but also through human (and industrial) intervention associated with the bronze foundry and the quarry.

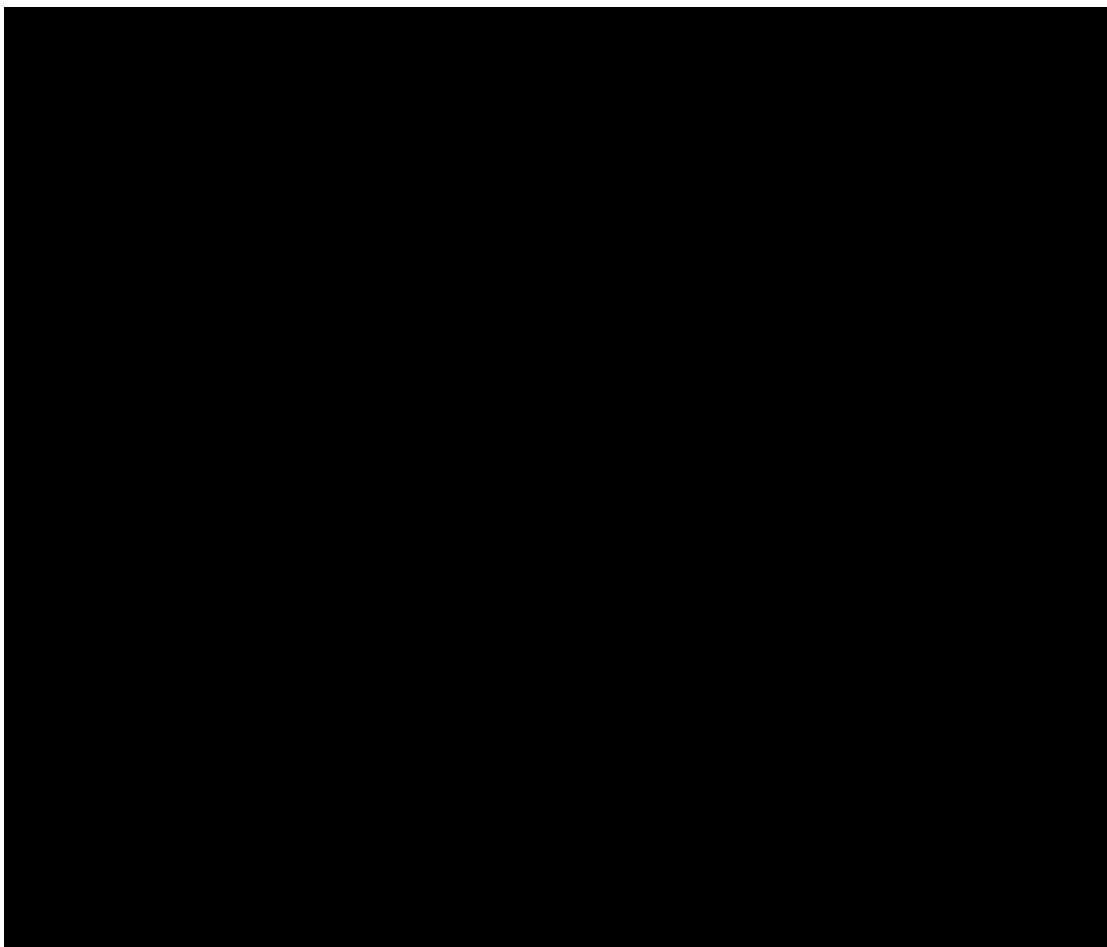


Figure 38. Lynda Benglis, *Wing*, 1970, cast aluminium, 170.2 x 150.5 x 152.4cm.

Wing (1970) by Linda Benglis (Fig. 38) problematises the dominant emphasis on verticality promoted by the monument with a resolutely slumped attitude. Although not

strictly at ninety degrees to the wall, the solidified flow reaches out into space, drooling in a disquieting, creeping mass, to intrude upon the zone of the viewer. The suspended flow of material extends into space, appearing to defy gravity without a plinth or pedestal to support it, instead depending upon the vertical wall for anchoring. *Wing* draws attention to the wall as a site for the work to emerge from presenting itself as a pronounced overhanging form. This sculpture possesses a strong sensation of flow and creep, echoing Smithson's *Glue Pour*, as if set in perpetuity.

Wing has been created from pouring and fluid actions of layering, emphasising flow, yet the literal object is fixed and static in its cast state. Benglis allows the sculpture to hover and overhang, demonstrating the move away from implied monumentality and the dependence upon the pedestal. Regarding the pedestal, Spyros Papapetros articulates a shift in sculpture from the Renaissance to modernism that is:

Such a paradigmatic shift is marked by a horizontal plane – or rather by its *disappearance*...The pedestal both accentuates and segments the statue's primal verticality

(Papapetros, 2007, quoted in Papapetros and Rose, 2014, p. 78)

The pedestal (or plinth) is seen as a method of asserting the status of the monument and with the loss of the pedestal as sculpture expands into new forms, the monumental status of sculpture as an upright motif pushing up into space is challenged. Irene Small (2014) locates sculpture as 'a historically bounded category delineated by the logic of the monument on one hand and, on the other, by this monumentality's inversion in the form of modernist sculpture' (Small, 2014, quoted in Papapetros and Rose, 2014, p. 195) by camouflaging itself as architecture and (not) landscape within the 'Expanded

Field'. It could be seen here that modernist sculpture swallows the plinth/pedestal in and of itself so that the two boundaries exist as 'siteless vs symbolic and placebound' (ibid., p. 195). By doing this, sculpture becomes plinthless/stateless and homeless, in Krauss's definition: something inherently unfixed.

Krauss argues a move away from the singular, vertical, plinthbound, site-located representational sculpture. Her reference to Rodin is significant within the trajectory of this project through his contemporaneous relationship with Medardo Rosso and their shared commitment to modelling to produce sculpture. Within the project, touch and hapticity are bound up in a sculpture that, unlike Balzac (Fig. 36), eschews representation and the historical statuary that Krauss marginalises, aligning instead with the non-representational sculpture typified by the objecthood of minimalism, while rejecting its ambition to remove the hand. Modernism's sculptural object turns away from its own history to prick the noble tradition of artist-as-author with its attendant surface registrations of touch. Here, the labouring body in the studio is rejected in favour of the outsourced fabricator and mechanical production line.

It is between these two conditions that I situate my own sculptural practice. The project works to problematise the logic of Krauss's argument through the haptic methods and malleable materials associated with traditional sculptural production marginalised within the 'Expanded Field'. Furthermore, the association with the placing of sculpture in or attached to architecture creates a position that isn't accounted for by Krauss because, despite being formed within a traditional means of modelling, the sculptures I have produced operate non-representationally, or at least attempt to evade 'capture' by their association with 'specific objects'. Instead, they operate as a studio practice

working against approaches to sculptural production favouring hand-less manufacture, such as the 3D print.

AGAINST ARCHITECTURE

In his essay *The Monument and the Amulet*, Herbert Read addresses the way sculpture originally depended upon architecture but broke away from architectural sculpture towards something self-contained and 'in the round'. He situates the origins of the monument as an entity that is 'neither architecture nor sculpture as a distinct art, but an integral form that we should rather call the monument' (Read, 1956, p. 5). This definition grounds the idea of something operating at an immense scale beyond human touch, elevated and awe-inspiring. Over time, the sculpture detached from its architectural 'home', existing as something independent from architecture, and as late modernism progressed, sculpture stepped down from the plinth or pedestal and, to use a term defined by Rosalind Krauss, became 'siteless'. This is further emphasised by the way sculpture becomes, as Nancy Foote writing in *Artforum* describes, 'self-referential' (Foote, 1979, p. 33). Foote usefully frames the condition of sculpture in the late seventies as proposed by Krauss in *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* as follows:

minimal and postminimal works of the last two decades, including Earthworks, are in fact not sculpture, but that they exist in an 'expanded field,' operating in an arena between 'not-landscape' and 'not-architecture.'

(ibid., p. 33)

This is an important description of works that eschewed certain traits typified throughout the history of sculpture, including the figure, narrative, the imprint of the

hand or tool, the pedestal and 'commemorative subject matter' (ibid., p. 33), which, arguably, were features of the monument. Instead, artists exploring earthworks and landforms are, as Krauss describes in her essay, becoming *monumental*. Such works in the landscape are not bound by the historical definition of sculpture. Instead, Krauss situates them as 'not landscape', and without being tethered to architecture, 'not architecture'.

The differentiation between monument and monumental can be understood, through Krauss, to be the move away from figuration and architectural dependence into more self-contained landscape interventions via Rodin and modernism. For example, the massive steel sculptures of Anthony Caro possess a self-contained quality without recourse to external references, referring instead to their own intrinsic sculptural qualities; the land works of Robert Smithson possess a monumentality of scale and scope within the landscape that isn't bound by figuration. In both instances, the viewer engages with the work phenomenologically, navigating around the work to comprehend its scale and unfolding presence in a way that a singular viewpoint cannot satisfactorily offer. An important feature of such work is the turn away from phallogentricity (as Read describes) and attendant verticality towards a more open, horizontal orientation that can be bound up in our spatial encounter with the works: off a plinth we are grounded with the works on an equal footing.

Julian Rose (2014) proposes that Krauss's 'entire exegesis' is launched from the initial insight that another way of understanding sculpture is to see it as that which is 'not architecture' and that sculpture's survival may in fact depend upon an opposition to architecture. The project proposes a way to work as something 'not architecture' yet

understood as sculptural objects that depend upon architecture for location and the built environment as a site of antagonism for the sculptural object to project into space.

Krauss's insight, Rose says, is to propose an understanding of sculpture being 'not architecture' and defined alternatively as 'what is in the room but is not really the room' (Krauss, quoted by Rose in Papapetros and Rose, 2014, p. 55). In talking about architecture's role, he says that it:

may be only that of a neutral support but is crucial nonetheless; we can infer from Krauss's phrasing that without a room against which to read it, we might be in danger of failing to recognise sculpture altogether.

(Rose, 2014, p. 55)

So rather than architecture negating sculpture, the presence of architecture enables sculpture to be defined. Architecture enables sculptures like Lynda Benglis's to exist without the necessity of the pedestal. Thus, the break from architecture in Read's account circles back to the need for architecture to locate and valorise the sculptural object. From these definitions, the difference between architecture as sculptural host and architecture as sculpture can be understood.

For example, the former can be discreet sculptural works dependent upon architecture to 'hang' on or project from, as discussed with Lynda Benglis's *Wing* (1970) and other sculptures she cast or built *in situ* that are fused into the fabric of the buildings. An example of architecture as sculpture can be seen in the cast concrete *Wall Relief* (1959, Fig. 39) by Robert Adams for the Gelsenkirchen Musiktheater, operating as a flank to the front of the building. Employing the architectural method of casting liquid

concrete poured into moulded shuttering, sculpture and architecture assimilate each other.



Figure 39. Robert Adams, *Wall Relief*, 1957–59, reinforced concrete, Gelsenkirchen Municipal Theatre, Germany.

Photo: © Desmond Brett

I am particularly interested in the status of *Wall Relief* within its civic location, how it 'lives' within the municipal environment of Gelsenkirchen. Its formal qualities are typical of his oeuvre; however, as a poured concrete work in relief, the work's scale is suggestive of a cliff or geological outcrop. Within the context of the project, Adam's Gelsenkirchen work is relevant because it is somewhere between architecture and sculpture, 'deposited' in formless liquid into (cast) concrete form. Importantly, its emergence from the catastrophic wartime destruction of Germany's Ruhr valley seems charged with the formal language of concrete bunkers and fortifications. Its qualities

of relief jutting into space present an encounter with sculptural matter that is bodily and physical.

I visited Gelsenkirchen to experience *Wall Relief* first-hand. Observing the sculpture, touching it, standing against it, circumnavigating it and standing from afar, the overwhelming encounter was one of *massiveness* and a great awareness of physical weight, bulk and mass. These concrete projections recalled the coastal concrete barricades I grew up walking along, weaving around and lying atop; its heft was enhanced by the knowledge of many tons of poured concrete that filled the voids to form the work.



Figure 40. Henry Moore, *Wall Relief*, 1955, brick, LH375, Bouwcentrum, Rotterdam.

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Another example of post-war reconstruction architecture fusing with sculpture can be found in Henry Moore's *Wall Relief* (1955, Fig. 40), which projects into space in low relief. Significantly, this work is the amalgamation of fragmentary elements, as thousands of bricks form a sculptural relief work. Materially, the excavation and firing of bricks into individual units of construction differs from the poured shuttered concrete of Adam's Gelsenkirchen *Wall Relief*. But both operate at a scale that can be aligned to the vastness of a cliff face or geological outcrop. This works against what Tucker asserts as the need to not blur sculpture and architecture, to assert a distinction so that 'the autonomy of the object remains in place' (Sleeman, 2007, p. 16).

The two examples by Moore and Adams also complicate the Kraussian binary separation of the terms 'sculpture' and 'architecture' within her diagram (Fig. 35). Adams and Moore's examples operate in a zone of proximity with and from architecture, where the two are conjoined or the boundaries blurred. Both works by Adams and Moore possess architectonic sculptural qualities of relief and projection in material unison with architecture. Krauss seems to assume the monument – and many of her other examples within the 'Expanded Field' – to be static and fixed, such as the statue that can be depended upon in its material and symbolic robustness. Resisting the categories that Krauss assigns to sculpture, the pieces that I have modelled work against Krauss's definitions in her diagram.

Herein, I have sought to destabilise the monument so that its assurance as a fixed or symbolic point of reference is threatened. This has occurred in several ways: through resistance to figuration or association with specific 'things' or objects occurring in the world, through manually handling material and through exploration of the horizontal axis in conjunction with the wall instead of working vertically with a pedestal or plinth.

UNSTABLE SCULPTURE



Figure 41. Carl Andre, *Statue of Liberty*, 1970.

Sculpture's authority is shaken in Carl Andre's three-way diagram for the *Statue of Liberty* (1970, Fig. 41) that works as an 'analysis of the development of modern sculpture' (Sleeman, 2007, p. 17). Andre offers a way of understanding the turn from the sculptural monument towards sculpture as structure and sculpture as place. Andre

expresses the *Statue of Liberty* as three intersecting concerns, one of which, 'sculpture as form', is understood by the thin 2.5mm modelled copper skin of the figure that creates the surface shape of the statue.

As this skin encloses the form wholly, it can be read formally without concern for *how* it is held together: it is a form that possesses visual solidity. Yet behind this surface is an intricate structure of supporting members that Andre ascribes as 'sculpture as structure' – the internal girders that support the copper form, without which the sculpture would collapse.¹⁹

The final element, according to Andre, is the move towards sculptors being more concerned about 'sculpture as place'. Bedloe's Island, where the statue is situated, highlights the location of the sculpture as being of greater concern than the previous two elements.

The significance of this diagram rests in understanding shifting values of the sculptural object over time in terms of visibility, presence or status. From the literal form of the sculpture as a thing in space to the dependence upon the structure supporting its external appearance to the site where the work resides, Andre proposes the development of twentieth century sculpture as a move through these factors to the present (at the time he proposed this diagram), when site became the most important sculptural concern. It could be argued that this shift represents the instability of the monument by moving the emphasis away from the previously assured sculptural

¹⁹ The full description can be found in *Artforum*, 8(10) Summer 1970: <https://www.artforum.com/print/197006/an-interview-with-carl-andre-36395>

object towards the ground and, by doing so, undermining its status: the form becomes tertiary to structure and place.²⁰

The positionality of the *Statue of Liberty* is spectacularly undermined in the denouement of *Planet of the Apes* (1968, Fig. 42), becoming a symbol of instability and collapse. As the protagonist Taylor encounters the fallen figure on a beach, we witness its verticality compromised as it partially protrudes from the horizon, plinthless, half buried in a millennium of sedimentation like a semi-exposed fossil at the base of the cliffs. Taylor then realises his time-travelling mission deep into the future has returned him to an Earth he no longer recognises. This scene offers a shocking vision of a future where the *Statue of Liberty*'s representation of the assuredness of society and its associated tenets of structure and good living are eroded and fallen like the rusted and washed-up sculpture in this final scene.

Understood as an analogy of any sculptural monument, the way its status becomes compromised over time so that its potency as a carrier of import is reduced or eradicated could happen for various reasons: the shift away from the formal concerns that Andre refers to; slow erosion and subsequent decay, rapid destruction (often the most memorable symbol of a political regime's end or civil action) or the reconstruction of civic spaces rendering the statue neutered.

²⁰ Hal Foster (2014) in 'The Expanded Field *Then*: A Roundtable Discussion' (in *Retracing the Expanded Field*), referring to Andre's version of the history of sculpture through the *Statue of Liberty* diagram, includes the time when 'sculptors were interested in the skin' (Foster, 2014, p. 22). Foster refers to this concern as representative of 'the academic model of sculpture: a skin wrapped around an armature counted as sculpture'. It could be argued that my project acknowledges this model through making a surface skin of clay to envelop a structure so that it appears as a whole, enclosed form.

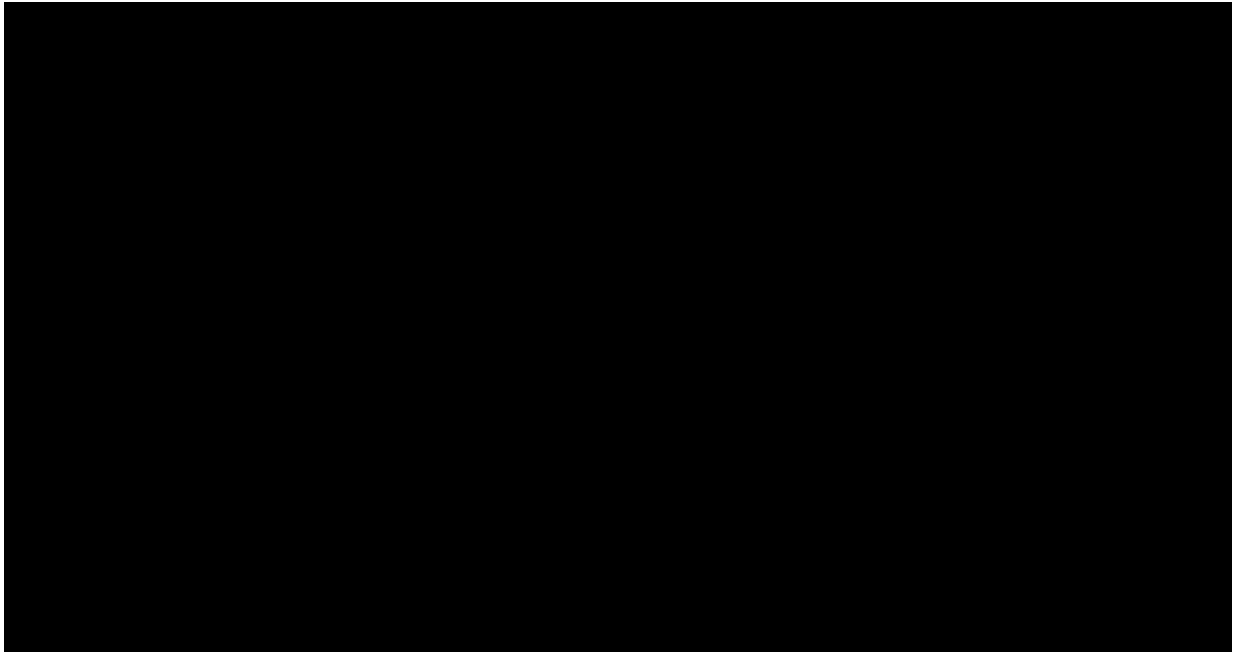


Figure 42. Final scene of *Planet of the Apes* [film], directed by F. J. Schaffner, 1968, 20th Century Fox.

The legacy of Robert Smithson's exploration of sculpture as something *grounded* and held by gravity could be considered in the context of Andre's acknowledgement of the site of sculpture. Works such as *Glue Pour* (Fig. 23) are rooted to an earthbound behaviour as gravity and site are brought sharply into focus. Conversely, Lynda Benglis's wall-mounted sculptures work against the groundedness of sculpture and delight in hovering above the horizon, seemingly resisting the pull of the earth while paradoxically drawing attention to the ground in their antagonism of the horizontal. In a work such as *Quartered Meteor* (1969, Fig. 22), Benglis has foregrounded form as a critical factor of the sculpture as mass. Its 'thingness' is immensely present, its materiality inescapable and its protean appearance suggestive of forms without skeletons or armatures but flowing articulations of matter.

ORIENTATION

Modelling affords my work the opportunity to engage in a closer bodily encounter with sculpture and antagonise architectural space by engaging with horizontality, extending out from the upright axis to disarm the assumption of the verticality of statuary. In *The Language of Sculpture*, William Tucker describes how 'the direction of Rodin's art, and of modelling itself, is outwards into the spectator's space' (Tucker, 1974, p. 43), so that instead of reductivity, it implies sculptures' expansion into space as if fighting to push out against external pressure to reduce it. This upright direction was reappraised by William Tucker, perhaps acknowledging that the very act of modelling in soft material connected to the history of the statue and therefore its orientation upwards.

My work aligns with Rodin in its commitment to modelling but differs by seeking to push into space by making sculptures that expand from the horizontal rather than vertical (Figs. 59 and 60).

In an intriguing turn, Dore Ashton explains how Tucker's works from the 1980s 'had the courage to restore respectability to the idea of the statue' (Ashton, 2001, p. 26) and 'carve out their place, their space, with the emphatic uprightness Tucker considers essential' (ibid., p. 26). Tucker embraces the qualities and associations of the statue (and therefore the monumental) in works such as *Horse IX* (1986, Fig. 43), with its tendency for verticality with which, as he states himself, the statue is a thing set upright: it stands against gravity. Here is Tucker perceptually accepting the upright motive of the statue working against gravity's pull. As Ashton states: 'He wanted to take a lump of matter and shape it, pull it, so that it rose and stood in the world, a thing' (Ashton, 1987, p. 12).

Ashton here describes the *thingness* of matter, something pliable and responsive to haptic pressures while capable of having ‘all the implications of monumental sculpture’ (ibid., p. 12) in the way it projects into space. It is also suggestive, not quite of a horse but possibly something more ambiguous, suggesting a thickened, earthen, excavated form or a rusted, inchoate lump of otherworldly extra-terrestrial matter even.

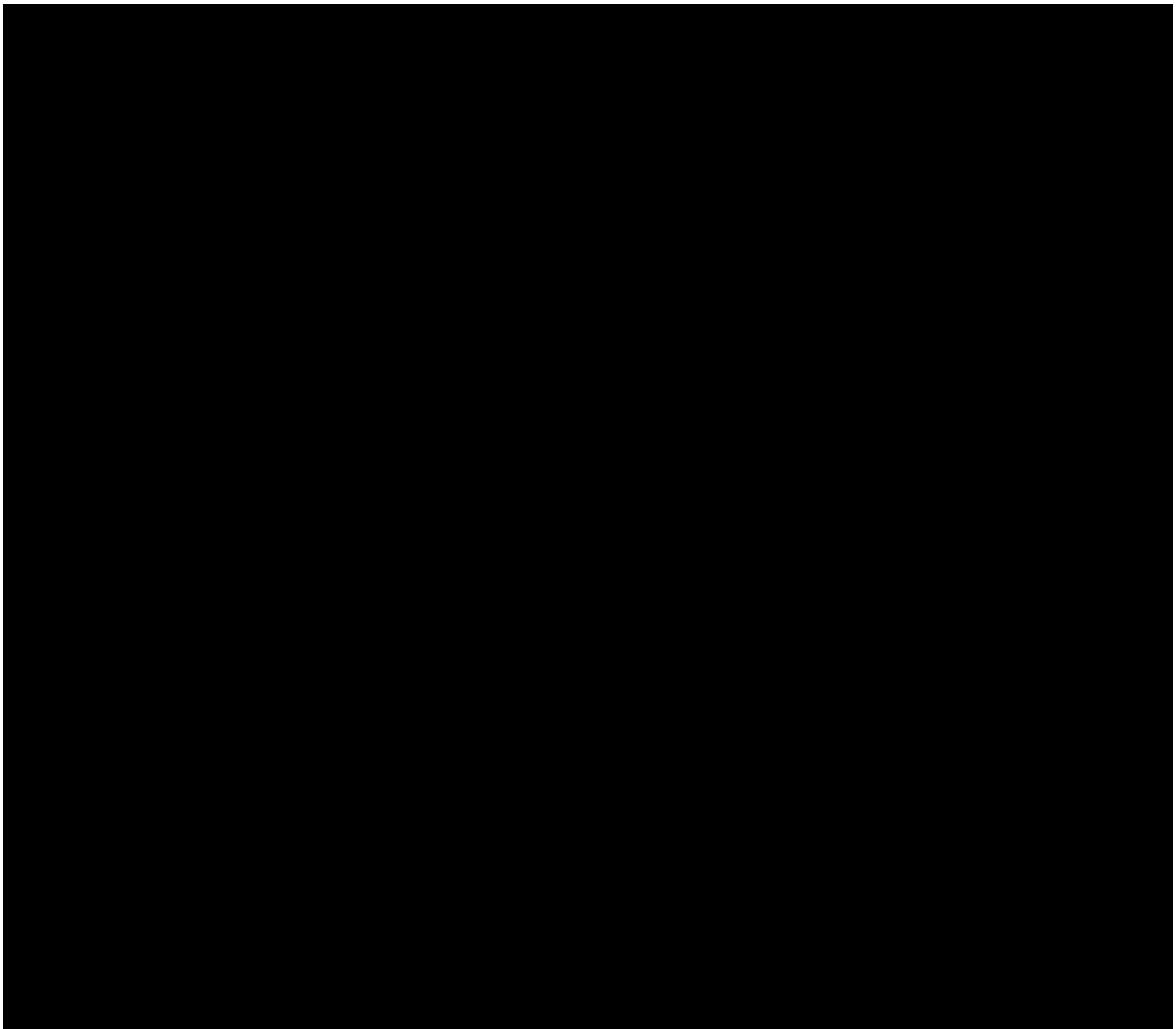


Figure 43. William Tucker, *Horse IX*, 1986, bronze, 76.2 x 88.9 x 47cm
(image: Cavalier Galleries).



Figure 44. Desmond Brett, wall sculpture initial structure, 2021, wood and scrim.

© Desmond Brett

Andre's three-way diagram can be considered against the wall-oriented sculptures I have made during the project. Firstly, the internal skeletal armature is built out to support and articulate the provisional shape of the sculpture's surface. The struts and cross members create a structure on which to 'hang' a surface skin (Fig. 44). Once constructed, the skin is applied with a thin layer of scrim and plaster coated with clay (Fig. 45). Each of the underlying wooden lathes defines an edge to the sculpture, creating a composition of creases, angles and returns.

These are accentuated by the addition of clay 'ribs' aligning themselves along these edges and forming a series of spars. The whole form is thus enclosed and sealed off, much like the *Statue of Liberty's* copper-sheeted membrane containing the internal structure that supports it.



Figure 45. Desmond Brett, wall sculpture with clay skin applied to understructure of wood and plaster, 2021.

© Desmond Brett

The siting of the work is the wall: it hangs on the vertical plane and intrudes into space. The wall is of great importance operating against the floor to increase the sensation of handled weight existing off the support. The completed work (Fig. 46) was reorientated ninety degrees to the 'original' clay form that hung low against the ground without touching it, the lower 'chin' jutting out towards the floor. The dependency upon architecture elevates the sense of tension and weight protruding from something that is clearly 'not architecture' by being a discreet sculptural object; it is also 'not monument' in its placement against the wall and off the floor, plinthless and siteless without attachment to a specific place or historical setting and yet 'monument' in the

singular cast 'shell' that speaks to the history of cast sculpture with its own formation dependent upon the process of modelling to author the form.



Figure 46. Desmond Brett, *no title*, 2022, finished fibreglass cast sculpture, orientated at ninety degrees from the original clay wall sculpture (see Fig. 45).

© Desmond Brett

To illustrate the relationship between sculpture and architecture, *Scree* (1984, Fig. 47) by Alison Wilding is a particularly resonant example of the artist's wall-based sculptures protruding into space. The copper vessel contains a slope formed from pigmented sand that – as the title references – presents material settled at a point of rest like scree. Greg Hilty (1991) describes *Scree* as 'not an image but an equivalent' (Hilty, 1991, p. 9) which is a useful description of the work's operation as a sculptural articulation of the principles of slope behaviour on a geological scale. The material potential is held tangibly in stasis as the particles have found an angle of rest in surface tension while remaining vulnerable to movement and slippage.

Contrary to Krauss, Hilty offers this work as an 'imploded field of sculpture' (ibid., p. 9), holding energy within the boundary of the steel perimeter in actual material stasis while concurrently implying movement bound within the material associations of the sculpture. Thus, qualities of fixedness and instability are contained within this modest sculptural work that speak of active geological processes beyond the scale of the sculpture towards monumentality and massiveness.

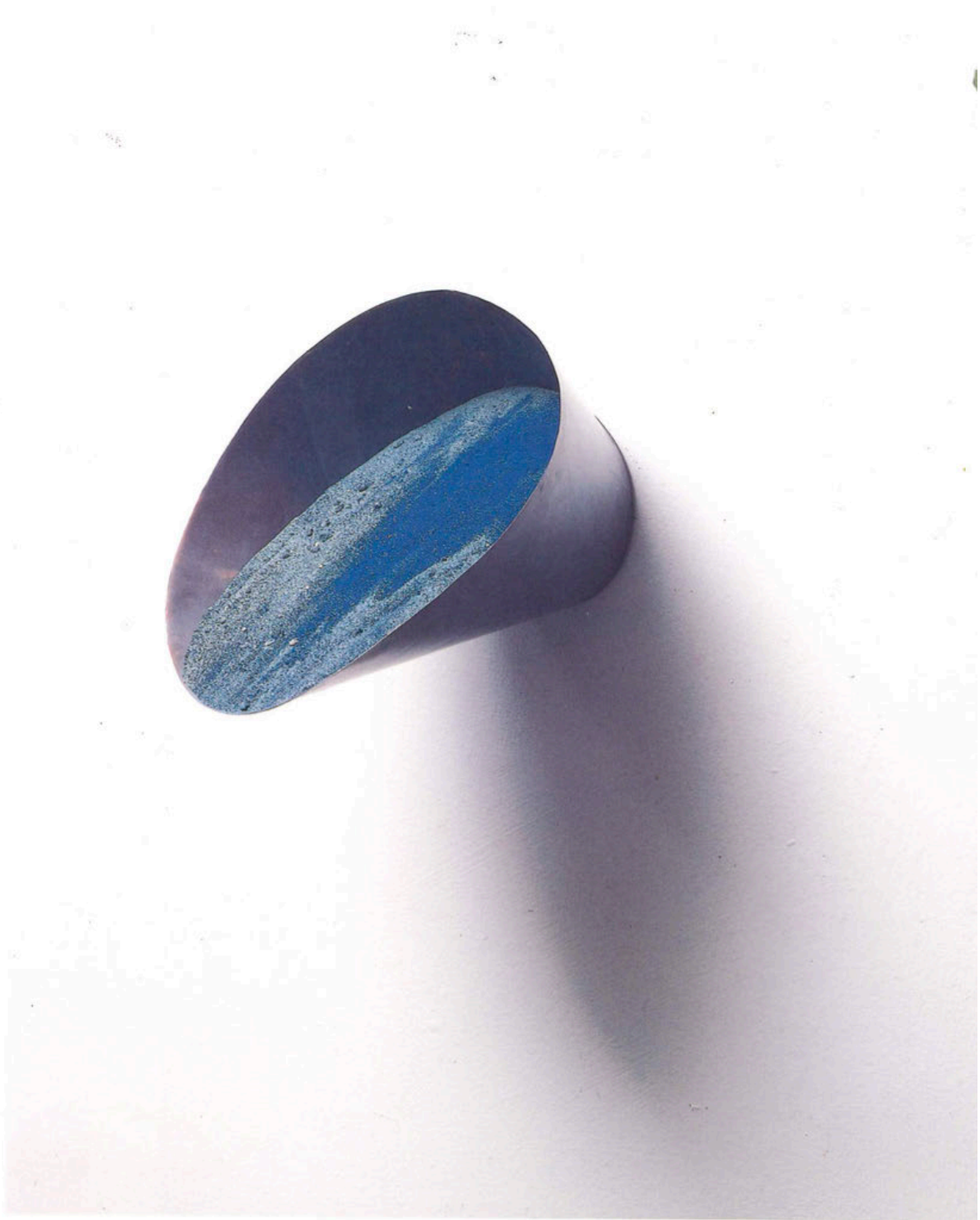


Figure 47. Alison Wilding, *Scree*, 1984, coloured copper, brass, sand and pigment, 20.5 x 23 x 27cm.

© Alison Wilding, all rights reserved; Photo: A.C. Webb

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The contradictory nature of the sculptural object is its ability to take form and become some-*thing* – to materialise into tangible form through haptic modelling – yet remain between states, in flux, always unsettled, the movement and preserved traces of the sculpture's manufacture, the qualities of its materiality – slippery, thixotropic, eroding – dissolving in plain sight.

I have used this thesis as a way of articulating conditions of flux enfolded into the sculptural object that counter the assumption of the sculpture, statue or monument as something locked into being. This contradiction presents a fascinating problem for sculpture as something imagined to be in stasis and fixed in perpetuity but consistently under pressure to be denuded. Through this thesis I have pursued a condition of sculpture as something existing in a state of resistance to recognition as a position of antagonism towards representation of existing things. William Tucker's work has offered me a way to approach sculpture via wholly traditional means of manufacture to enable the formation of a new taxonomy of sculptural objects operating at a threshold of legibility, the sculptural shape being without specificity – elusive and ungraspable. Through my accounts of the modelling process in the studio and the formation of clay 'archetypes', I have built a series of sculptures deliberately evasive in their designation but authored by my hand as archetypes of non-specificity.

They are things anchored to material reality yet dodging a claim for a fixed place within the lexicon of specific things in the world by operating on their own terms as

autonomous sculptural things. The essence of their thingness is a clayey, lumpen, fulsome shape, unstreamlined and unslender and instead, clunky and thickened in space. The very nature of a sculpture without specific appearance 'like' something is an attempt to resist association unlike the very foundations of the monument with historically signified commemorative or historicised iconography.

Flux resides in this sculptural midway state of being – clay is a position of transition and realisation while protected and maintained, yet vulnerable to decay and dissolution. As Anna Maria Maiolino (2011) succinctly expresses:

When we lay our hands on that wet mass of clay, a whole cosmic vision appears with all the archetypes of creation. Clay is the perfect prototype of matter, and it contains the possibility of form and invites us to look for it. Meanwhile, form organises amorphous matter, it sets limits on it.

(Maiolino, quoted in Tatay, 2011, p. 54)

The idea of the archetype has become an important position of possibility enabled by the infinitely formless yet formative process of modelling in clay. The *finish* has been dependent upon the haptic as much (if not more than) the visual: folding, pressing, scraping, pushing, building, pinching, squeezing clay requires the hand.

The writing has reinforced my position on the importance of the haptic relationship to sculpture, to the necessity of elevating touch as a positive accompaniment to the visual sense. The directness of pressure to force material change without mediation has been liberating. The resulting encounters with clay have reinforced my belief in the necessity of reconnecting with haptic materiality as a counter to the prevalence of

visual consumption through the mediation of the screen and the growing presence of virtual materialisation and digital printing.

The works I have made are haunted by a certain tradition of civic sculpture situated in reconstructed spaces, a form of sculpture modelled in the post-war European studio. Here, the sculptor could claim civic spaces as realms into which sculpture could offer societal stability with its own assured fixed position central to the reconstruction. Of lumps of clay coalescing into iconic figuration or architectural sculptures redeployed in bronze to patinate with the ages – it is a sculpture I seek to problematise, operating as static nodal points that have decayed and transformed over time. I propose sculpture to be something slippery, changeable and in flux: sculpture that can be reconsidered as under risk of dissolving into insignificance, increasingly invisible and eroded by familiarity and historical indifference or violently torn down in a politically charged act. At different rates of decay, I have grown conscious of the pressure placed upon matter as it rises from the horizontal stratum of the ever-changing city of ruination and reconstruction, the eternal transition of sculptural movements and the vulnerability of the vertical sculptural object. I imagine all matter within this stratum, punctured temporarily by architecture, sculpture, the body, mountain building – within linear time this layer is pushed up, expands, rising only to be forced back to its horizontal axis. No material is immune to this pressure, whether concrete, bronze or flesh.

Clay is no different; it is equally fallible and, as Maiolino states: ‘any unfired clay object, however subtle its modulations, returns to its original state once dehydrated and can return to the earth’ (Maiolino, 2016, quoted in Wagner, 2017). I have consequently developed a scepticism for the authority of the sculpture as monument, as icon, as

statuary and instead consider the formation of directly modelled clay 'working' sculptures the closest to the idea of the archetype as something speculative and imaginative but unfixed and fluid, articulating the liminal moment of a concept taking form.

The work made within this project accepts its place within a certain sculptural tradition but seeks to reposition the work literally and conceptually. Firstly, the sculptures' stated reorientation into space along a horizontal axis from the wall in counterpoint to the orthodoxy of the vertical monument. This addresses an area of sculptural space extended beyond the realm of low relief or architectural adornment by pushing out towards the spectator using architecture as willing host. Taking my cue from Benglis, working off the wall has opened my sculptural thinking towards a positive relationship with architecture as a site for intervention. I am drawn towards making sculpture that is distinct from but is dependent upon architecture. Removing the problem of the statue, the base and the pedestal and its heavyweight associations with history, I have sought to articulate the condition of sculpture in flux as a method of critiquing the legacy of the monument.

Secondly, a position can be found for my work within the 'Expanded Field' around the narrow scope of the works Krauss identified within her diagram. I have brought to this field the position of sculpture as 'monument/not monument' because of the inherent antagonism sculptures such as *Bulwark* or the ceramic pieces offer towards the monumental by being sited off the pedestal, at a counter orientation to verticality, and away from figuration. Yet they are borne out of a method of sculptural manufacture entirely within the tradition of modelling, moulding and casting as indicated by the

chapter themes. It's useful to acknowledge Krauss's decision to find a location for a set of sculptural co-ordinates with which to position the narrative of the relationship between body, architecture, material and space which I have been dealing with.

Finally, the replicated casts, pulled out of the shattered moulds, amid the rubble of broken plaster waste and the sour tang of curing resin, shatter several conditions from which they were created: the shattering of memory – both material memory firstly embedded in clay then into the mould; the shattering of the archetype once realised in 'solid form' – which in turn shatters the moment of what is recognisable as the hollow cast shell or the replica that stands instead of the 'original' clay, whose information has now been petrified in resin in perpetuity. The moment of flux is captured at the beginning as the process of building the archetype of no fixed identity becomes a simulacrum at the end, with its realisation precipitating the shattering of the original form.

APPENDICES



Figure 48. *Aegocrioceras* ammonite (c.100ma), Speeton Clay, Yorkshire, found 2016.

Photo: © Desmond Brett



Figure 49. Slumped cliffs at Speeton, 2016.

Photo: © Desmond Brett



Figure 50. Desmond Brett, *no title*, 2022, clay slip over plaster and wood structure.

Photo: © Desmond Brett



Figure 51. Mould making at Armitage Shanks: assembling and sealing plaster piece mould prior to slip casting, 2017.

Photo: © Desmond Brett



Figure 52. Pouring vitreous china slip into plaster piece mould, 2017.

Photo: © Desmond Brett



Figure 53. Pouring vitreous china slip into plaster piece mould, 2017.

Photo: © Desmond Brett



Figure 54. Draining excess vitreous china slip from piece mould, 2017.

Photo: © Desmond Brett



Figure 55. Demoulding; Photo: © Desmond Brett



Figure 56. Unfired slip casts; Photo: © Desmond Brett



Figure 57. Assembled plaster, wood and scrim piece/waste mould with completed resin fibreglass cast awaiting demoulding, 2022.

Photo: © Desmond Brett



Figure 58. Assembled plaster, wood and scrim piece/waste mould with completed resin fibreglass cast awaiting demoulding, 2022.

Photo: © Desmond Brett

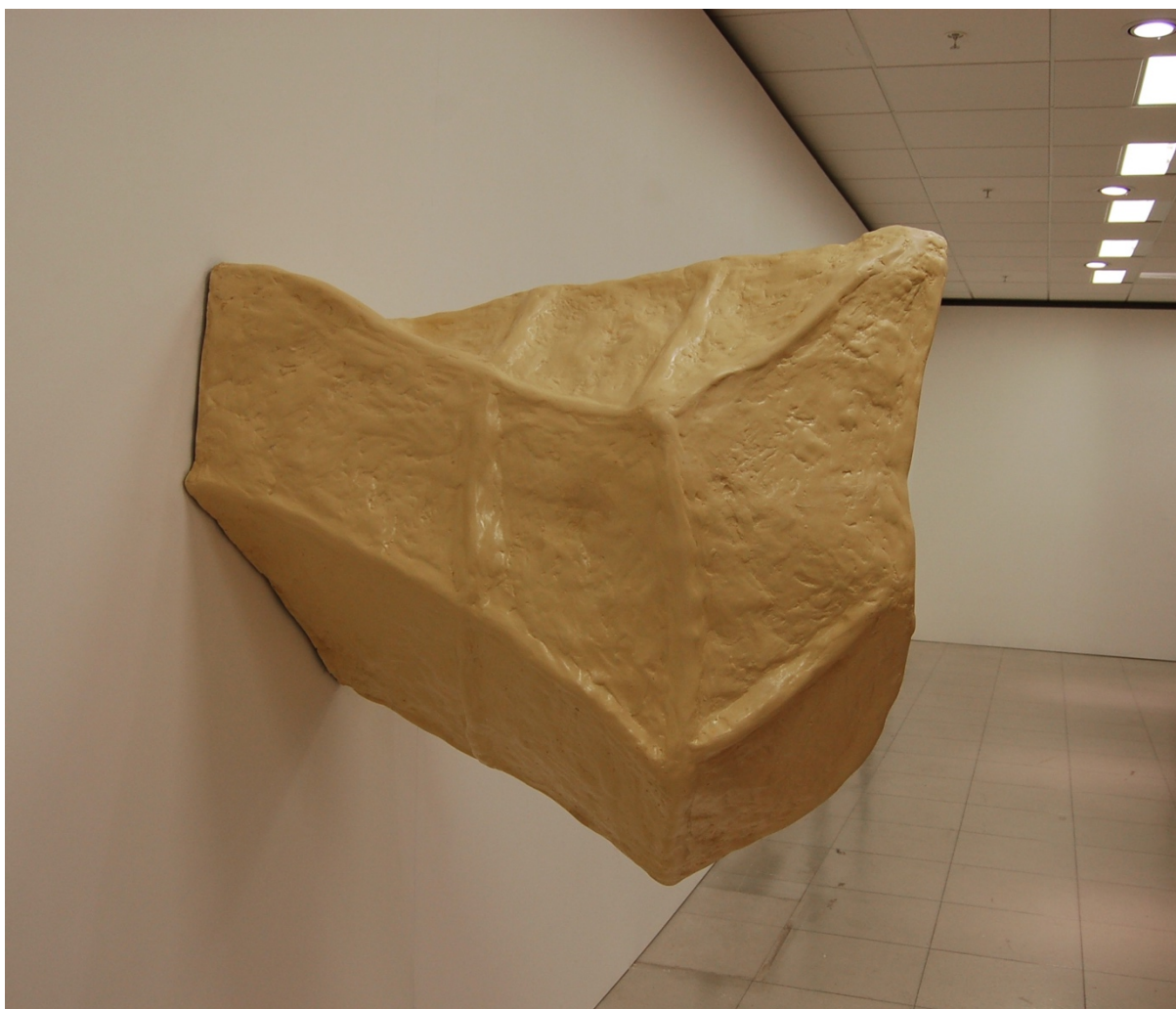


Figure 59. Desmond Brett, *Untitled*, 2021, cast pigmented resin and laminated fibreglass.

Photo: © Desmond Brett



Figure 60. Desmond Brett, *Untitled (second view)*, 2021, cast pigmented resin and laminated fibreglass.

Photo: © Desmond Brett

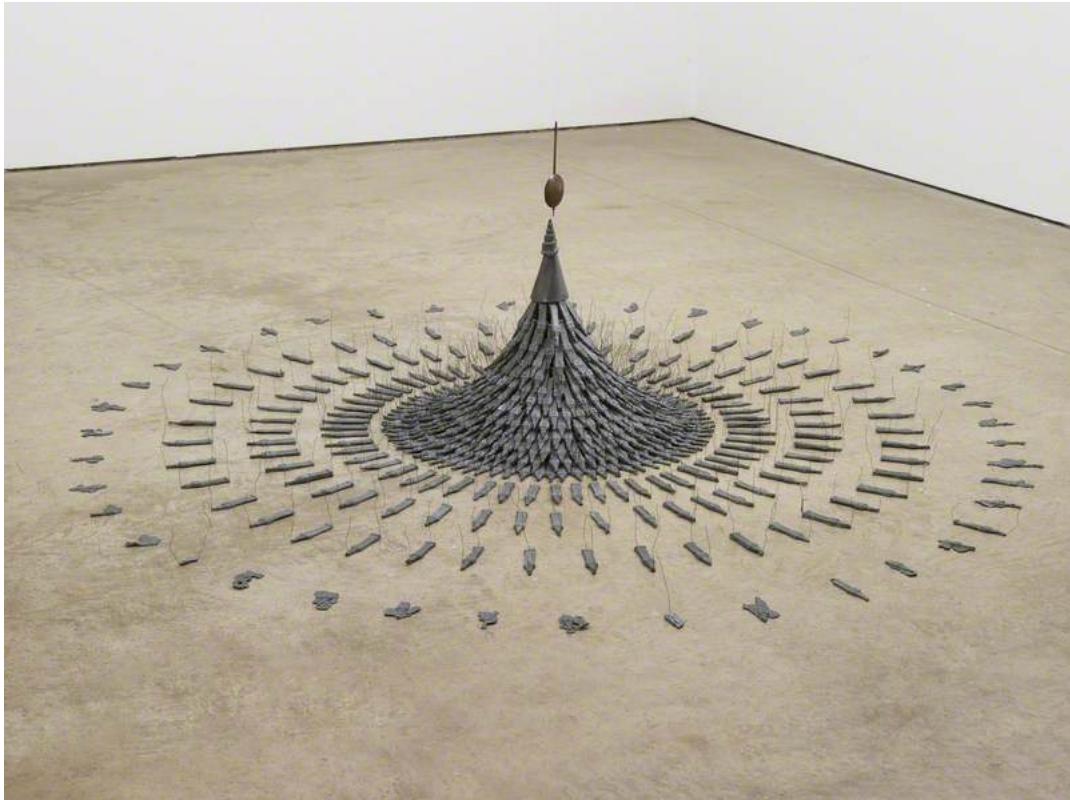


Figure 61. Cornelia Parker, *Fleeting Monument*, 1985, lead, wire and brass.

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ANNEXE

The project makes a recuperative reading of sculptural practice emerging from the immediate post-war period that demands reappraising as a time of uncertainty and doubt especially in relation to the shifts in public spaces leaving many post-war civic sculptures marooned and eroded.

The historical 'problem' of the statue demands consideration as, for example, the dismantling of the Colston monument and subsequent 3D-printed intervention by Marc Quinn raises questions over the validity of the statue (and its problematic historical associations) and by extension, the monumental turn. My studio overlooks a typically moribund post-war civic square destined for regeneration after years of neglect, its intended vision rendered obsolete.

The sculptures and written component recognise the importance of, and navigates a route between, the Kraussian 'Expanded Field', the monumental (or not) and the relationship to time – whether deep material time or the condition of 'fixed' time held in check by the mould and the possibility of sculpture being evasive, slippery and unfixed.

The project has currency now because of debates around the role of materiality in relation to the production of contemporary sculpture and responses to the turn towards material and craft processes (most notably evidenced in the 'Strange Clay' exhibition

at the Hayward Gallery) indicating a great deal of interest in haptic/touch as a way to engage with the physical properties of materials such as clay.

The use of 'archetype' within the thesis is as an idea in my imagination relating to, and drawn from, the way clay materialises in nature and the role it plays in holding and shaping formations. This consideration comes from my first-hand experience of extracting heteromorph fossils from the Speeton Clay formation in Yorkshire and witnessing the range of conditions and behaviours of clay from primordial sludge to hard protective mould. The encounter with such raw materiality was incredibly pertinent and sculptural, and stimulated thoughts about clay as a continually iterative material. I use the term 'archetype' rather than 'prototype' as a way to describe models of forms connected to clay which, as a material can continually move from inchoate, primordial matter to inherit and occupy forms through time and back again. It is a material of, and for, modelling, shaping and reforming repeatedly. I have appropriated the term to refer to the way I am modelling, through the forces of my own body, the forces that nature exerts upon clay to give it shape, formal identity and repetitive iterations.

The work I have produced can be positioned within the contemporary field of sculpture sharing concerns with several selected practitioners but also with respect to how it *doesn't* align itself with their work and how I differentiate my work from theirs. By placing modelling at the heart of my output, the sculptures I have made possess very definite haptic qualities of surface.

This connects with the work of **Rebecca Warren** in her use of clay to develop sculptures with evidence of the hand in forming. which present in the wrenched and clawed surfaces where unfired clay is piled and pressed into deliberately clunky or unheroic forms. I am interested in how the monument and the statue is dealt with in relation to the history of sculpture: with Warren, the statuesque is given a reboot as female figures stand sentinel or stride Crumb-like, thumbing a nose at the monumental. Her work differs in that it refers directly and explicitly to the human body in figurations that stand and loll in attitudes that refer knowingly to the legacy of figuration but through a critical lens that upends the priapic history of the statue, whereas work made throughout my project does not address the figure in explicit terms but the presence of my bodily contact is impressed into the material I use to sculpt.

The monument has been addressed in the work of the late **Phyllida Barlow**, whose sculptures I acknowledge admiration for in the way the dogma of the monument has been consistently upturned as her sculptures slide and stack on seemingly ad-hoc accumulations – the problematic narratives of so many civic heroes debugged by Barlow's arrays of reused timbers and fulsome, thickly painted lumps.

Nevertheless, the work I have been producing within this project is firmly led by, and in thrall to, the tradition of modelling as opposed to assemblage. Where Barlow has constructed vast structures that seemingly invade or transgress the built environment, my approach to addressing the monument is centred upon densely worked singularities that impinge upon architectural space.

I most associate my work with the sculptures of **Ron Nagle**. The exquisitely modelled forms excite me most for their qualities of being *deliberately uncategorisable*, which is a sculptural principle that I hold most regard for (and relates to my reference to William Tucker). Their associations with West Coast surf and hot rod aesthetics connects with my enduring obsession with the seductive, seemingly untouched high minimalist surfaces of **John McCracken's** planks. The way his work turns away from something recognisable – an almost-but-not-quite-ness – is compelling and a source of envy to me. Nevertheless, the sculptures I have been making turn away from Nagle's almost insistent use of the pedestal with which to structure each of his luscious essays in colour and form. As such, Nagle's works could be argued to fall into the tradition of plinth-based sculpture and its associations with the orientation of the monument. This brings me to the other important difference, that of scale. I have been addressing a very bodily relationship to sculptural form – a ponderability (as Read states) and physical-scale relationship to my body as I make the works, as opposed to Nagle's almost miniature scaled sculptures.

It should be noted that, through Nagle's association with the California Clay Movement, I am conscious of the contribution of – although not contemporaneous – **Peter Voulkous**, who dared to expand the potential for sculptural ceramics by approaching clay in more expressionist terms, building forms that offered new possibilities for the medium with regards to scaling up to bodily, physical terms. But with Voulkous, the language remained rooted in the vessel as a form. Whether upturned and split open or huge slab-built structures, the essence of the vessel remained.

I have been fixated by the work of **Anna-Bella Papp**, through her measured and crisply shaped sculptural reliefs in unfired clay. The affinity I share with her is the way her sculptures are almost exclusively orientated at the horizontal plane – their relative flatness more associated with image making than sculpture in the round. Yet they operate as low-relief sculpture. Papp's perspectival operations or reductive abstractions diverge from the sculptures I have made as there is no evidence of the hand modelling these forms, instead presenting a strict geometry of clean lines and incised detailing, whereas I have been preoccupied with a method of modelling and gesturing, slathering soft wet clay and slip by hand, resulting in lumpen, textured forms.

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