

Pause and Reflect: The Art Object As Immersive Experience

By

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Abstract

My research has consisted of a series of artworks that are aimed at identifying effective methods of generating an immersive experience that gives pause for reflection. Art for me is a transformative process that increases awareness of self. Art transcends many boundaries making it a unique form of communication with an audience where words can often fall short.

Building on my history of work with the medium of stone, my artistic investigations have led me to examine how process, scale, material, craft and form can be effectively employed to create an immersive experience with the art object. My artistic creations have taken the form of sculpture and painting. Relevant to my practice are the artists Mark Rothko, Isamu Noguchi and Rachel Whiteread and theorists Clement Greenberg and Martin Heidegger.

My research explores the effects of an immediate experience with the art object as a technique to absorb the viewer. Precision of craft is employed as a method to elevate the significance of materials and form. Materials are understood in terms of their density, weight and psychological impact. Perspective distortions and defying the expectations of the viewer can serve to destabilize and lead them to re-establish their ground. Different processes are explored as a way to give living qualities to a static object.

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INTRODUCTION

The art object is the site of my research, where all my thoughts and energies are distilled. It is physical: materials and form align, charging the space it occupies. To encounter these objects is to engage in an immersive perceptual experience. The art objects are paintings and sculptures, where knowledge I acquire in one medium spills into the other. Precision of craft and efficiency of form are the focus of my own engagement with making. These are explorations that attempt to fully articulate space and transform the consciousness of the viewer.

In this thesis, I will discuss in detail three different art objects that I have created during my studies. These are critical works that represent the breadth of my practice, and are illustrative of the evolution of my methods and methodologies.

In Chapter 1, my trio of paintings *Untitled (black oak)*, 2013, will be discussed alongside Mark Rothko's paintings and touching on Clement Greenberg's *Modernist Painting*, written in 1960.

In Chapter 2, my Sculpture *Untitled (cut)*, 2013, will be discussed in relation to the work of Isamu Noguchi, in particular *End Piece*, created in 1970. In addition I will explore several points of connection to Martin Heidegger's *What is called thinking?* a series of lecture transcripts published in 1954.

In Chapter 3, my sculptural tables *Aside*, 2013, will be discussed in relation to the work of Rachel Whiteread, focusing on *Yellow Leaf*, a sculpture she created in 1989. I also will discuss Martin Heidegger's concept of Da-sein from his work *Being and Time* written in 1927.

As much as possible I have referenced artists through their own words. I have chosen their words to get closer to an understanding of the artist's own experience and

engagement in their individual practices. Sometimes conflicting and often profound, the words of the artist reflect the intense emotional investment that goes into all the work.

CHAPTER 1: Painting

In Chapter 1, my trio of paintings *Untitled (black oak)*, 2013, will be discussed alongside Mark Rothko's paintings and touching on Clement Greenberg's *Modernist Painting*, written in 1960.



Fig. 1: Amiel Logan, *Untitled (black Oak)*, 2013. Oak, Canvas and Oil paint, 120cm (H) x 550cm (L) x 5cm (W).



Fig. 2: Amiel Logan, *Untitled (black Oak)* (Detail), 2013. Oak, Canvas and Oil paint, 120cm (H) x 182cm (L) x 5cm (W).



Fig. 3: Amiel Logan, *Untitled (first painting)*, 2012. Oil on Canvas, 120cm (H) x 400cm (L) x 5cm (W).



Fig. 4: Mark Rothko, *Rothko Chapel*, 1971. Oil on Canvas, dimensions variable. Houston, Texas.

Process

I think of my pictures as dramas; the shapes in the pictures are the performers. They have been created from the need for a group of actors who are able to move dramatically without embarrassment and execute gestures without shame. Neither the actions nor the actors can be anticipated, or described in advance. They begin as an unknown adventure in an unknown space. It is at the moment of completion that in a flash of recognition, they are seen to have the quantity and function which was intended. Ideas and plans that existed in the mind at the start were simply the doorway through which one left the world in which they occur. (Rothko 58)

I feel a great affinity for this statement by Mark Rothko about his process. His words could almost be my own. All my work seems to unfold in this way, but especially the triptych, *Untitled (black Oak)* that represented my third serious attempt at creating a

painting. My goal of generating an immersive experience caused me to pay special attention to the effects of my process. What would I need to address to generate this experience? My early childhood encounters with Rothko's Seagram murals at the London Tate Gallery led me to realize it was possible to work at that level. There was a powerful current of energy pouring from the canvas that surrounded me, as I stood transfixed, lost in Rothko's great works. I was about ten years old at the time of this experience. I recognize now that Rothko had achieved in his own way the immersive experience that I sought to generate in my artwork. For Rothko "art [was] an anecdote of the spirit, and the only means of making concrete the purpose of its varied quickness and stillness" (45). I was highly consciousness throughout my sculptural studies of the multi-dimensional and complex relationships that exist in art. The art object, be it painting or sculpture, in my experience was as Rothko suggests, suited to address the spirit. As I began the work on my painting, I was conscious of my every move.

In much of my sculpture in my undergraduate studies, I was accustomed to starting with a very detailed plan. This plan usually involved a model of the finished product that I adhered to as best I could. The complexity of the processes involved in working in my medium of stone and bronze often demanded this sort of planning to realize my ideas. Essentially, the sculpture had a fixed end and all that remained was the work to achieve the likeness to the plans. I don't feel I was able to respond to the materials or tools in a meaningful way. The process of making a form was reduced to fabrication rather than art. There was a need to inject life back into my process as I began work on my first paintings. I resolved to reduce planning to a minimum and to leave any preconceived ideas at the "doorway" that Rothko referred to and that I now was passing through (58). I had entered new territory where my processes significantly influenced the shape of things to come.

Without detailed plans, I looked to find new ways to guide my project towards the intended purpose. In the hope of injecting new life into my practice, I followed my desire. Reasoning that if I wanted to explore it, then something good would result, or at least it would return pleasure to the act of making art. My extensive knowledge of materials made this an obvious starting point, and I selected several solid oak planks that would later

become the stretchers for my painting. Materials have always been an inspirational force in my work and more than ever I looked to respond to them. The oak, cotton canvas and oil paint all resonated with me and formed what I felt was a harmonious material relationship. This was the easier part, for materials have always been my domain. What concerned me now was what form the painting should take. There was a natural evolution that was occurring in my work. Successful visual elements from my previous painting attempts found their way into this new work. I selected a line, shape or element that had the makings of the feeling I was looking for. My emotional response began to guide my hand and mind. It seemed poignant that emotion should be the guide to create an equally emotional response in the viewer.

Immediate Experience

The progression of a painter's work, as it travels in time from point to point, will be towards clarity: towards the elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the idea, and between the idea and the observer. To achieve this clarity is, inevitably, to be understood. (Rothko 65)

In this statement, Rothko expresses the desire for the viewer to directly experience his work. There is a concern for immediacy in this experience, because Rothko "want[s] pure response in terms of human need" (78). I think this experience is best described as an embodied experience, one that evades the analytical mind and strikes at the core of one's being. Rothko explains that he "does not paint for design students or historians but for human beings, and the reaction in human terms" (75). This reaffirms that his desired experience was not an intellectual activity. Within my own work, I recognized that generating an experience that immerses the viewer is not a matter of engaging the mind directly, but actually indirectly through the body. I imagined that the feeling generated in the work would percolate through one's body and into the mind. Rothko's work had taught me that if I wanted to bypass the analytical mind and generate an embodied response in the viewer, my work needed to be transparent. Everything within my new painting needed to be evident and instantly perceivable at a glance.

In my first painting of this new body of work, I had left a visible trail of my materials and process. At one side of the painting the canvas was raw followed by bands painted with successive layers of gesso until the introduction of colored paint. This was as much an attempt to remain transparent in my process, as it was a deconstruction of the painting. It was becoming clear that my artistic intent had a relationship not only with Rothko but also with ideas of modernism. Especially relevant are the ideas related in Clement Greenberg's *Modernist Painting*, written in 1960. Greenberg writes "one sees a Modernist picture as a picture first" (87). In my attempt to generate an immediate experience, I too wanted the viewer to recognize the "picture as picture first" by making its construction plainly visible. In a way, it was not really necessary to show the raw canvas when it was common knowledge that paintings were comprised of canvas. As a further reduction from my painting *Untitled(first painting)* I chose to deal with the section that was painted, roughly extracting the shape to begin *Untitled(Black Oak)*. There would still be evidence of its construction, where each element that comprised the image was independently visible and recognizable from the whole. Oil paint, oil stick, and wax pencil would all be distinguishable in some space of the work.

Modernism used art to call attention to art. The limitations that constitute the medium of painting - the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of the pigment. (Greenberg 86)

What is interesting is that I was arriving at a predominantly modernist point not as in the nineteen fifties and sixties, "in order to entrench [painting] more firmly in its area of competence" as Greenberg suggests, but to serve my purpose of generating an immediate experience for the viewer in this contemporary time (86). I was concerned with the exposure of the material nature of the paint as a surface that communicated all its properties in an instantly perceivable moment.

Scale

I paint very large pictures. I realize that historically the function of painting large pictures is something very grandiose and pompous. The reason I paint them however - I think it applies to other painters I know - is precisely because I want to be intimate and human. To paint a small picture is to place yourself outside your experience, to look upon an experience as a stereopticon view or with a reducing glass. However you paint the large picture, you are in it. It isn't something you command. (Rothko 74)

Rothko recognized that if you immerse the viewer in the experience of the painting you can "create a State of intimacy - an immediate transaction" (128). In my own work, I was aware of the effects scale could have on the experience of the viewer. Many of my early stone sculptures suffered from issues pertaining to scale. It was always difficult to create large-scale stone works because they got too heavy. A stone that was close to half the volume of a body could easily weight close to four hundred pounds. Logistically it just wasn't possible to make a stone sculpture at human scale as a student. These first stone sculptures were smaller, never bigger than two square feet of stone. The scale in this case wasn't quite enough to take you "into" them but perhaps there was a still a sense of intimacy generated (74). Painting offered the chance to work on a much larger scale and create the immersive experience I hoped would take the viewer where I desired.

Rothko describes that if the viewer "commands" the work then they are not "in it." (74). It was true that with his large pictures the viewer really didn't command them. The scale Rothko desired was "human scale" and to him this meant quite large pictures, typically at least six feet wide and nine feet high. It wasn't unusual that fellow artists of Rothko's time would paint large. It was something that came to be a characteristic of many American modernist paintings. I felt that perhaps the single large format painting in my own time had become a cue for the immersive experience. Maybe we have become accustomed to large paintings and they can't be as effective because we are actually in command of it. If I was going to generate a truly immersive experience, I felt I needed to create a work that was less obvious. My solution was to create three canvases, each close to the body in size, but combined to equal the scale of Rothko's work. In this way, I could make the viewer feel like they were in "command" when in fact they were not (74). As the

viewer examines the central panel of my paintings, the other two flanking canvases extend beyond the periphery of the viewer's field of vision wrapping around them, and gently immersing them in the work. This subtle immersion seemed to extend my reach, slipping past the mental guard of the viewer and entering new territory.

Materials and Craft

This kind of design may look simple but it usually takes me many hours to get the proportions and colors just right. Everything has to lock together. I guess I am pretty much a plumber at heart. (Rothko 134)

Like Rothko, I put great emphasis on the material nature of my paintings. This concern goes well beyond the surface, to its support. I see the painting as a whole object where every detail needs special consideration even if it isn't visible. The very first stretchers that I built were the product of following a shop tutorial that was offered at the school. I followed the instructions carefully, making the best example I could. The end result was a functioning stretcher that I should have been happy with, but I wasn't. Even if the stretcher wasn't visible I felt it still affected the quality of the work on a whole. The use of materials like hardboard, finger-jointed pine and low-grade fir just didn't resonate well with me. Maybe it was my sculptural sensibility trespassing into painting but I decided to see if focusing some attention of the stretcher could make an impact. I chose oak to construct the three stretchers. The oak was dense, rich in color and had an appealing grain that I felt would lend a special quality to the finished work. The use of hardwood allowed me to construct it with thinner bars that had the same weight as the conventional stretchers and performed just as well. Adapting the original design from the tutorial, I came up with a more streamlined and unique plan for the stretchers. The result was a completely solid oak stretcher, fastened with brass nails and sanded to a satin smooth natural surface.

There is a dynamic tension in a well-stretched canvas. The optimal canvas for my paintings was a thicker cotton duck that had a nice tight weave but still retained some elasticity. The selected canvas provided a surface that absorbed plenty of gesso but didn't soak right through to the other side. The back of the canvas was as important as the front. Also I didn't want the paint to stain the oak stretchers. Once primed with several layers of a

high quality gesso, I had the makings of an exceptional “canvas”. There was a harmony between the materials, oak and canvas, that was very pleasing. The careful selection of materials, and time spent preparing them for paint, made the task ahead a little daunting. Selecting the best oil paints I could find, I started with a thin grey oil to create a smooth matte surface. This would be the base on top of which I would paint. Using a combination of wax pencil, oil stick and oil paint, I applied one black on top of the other. The large brush marks were clearly visible over the built up lines of the oil stick, creating visual depth to a surface that was still flat overall. There was a definite contrast between the grey and black surfaces.

All throughout this process, I felt a deep connection to the materials in my work. There was a great satisfaction in taking the time to get the material relationships just right. It was predominantly an intuitive process, where I was sensitive to my response to the material selections. This heightened sensitivity throughout the course of the work meant I was engaged with the materials and always “present” with them. I was aware of the subtle changes that occurred as each element came together as a whole. Even if the oak stretcher was not visible, its material contribution could be felt “through” the canvas. I couldn’t help but feel that the painting’s every surface and substance was here materially. This elicited a response that was aimed at grounding the viewer in the present moment and enticing us to engage at a deeper level.

I do not live [in the studio] the same as I do at home. I do not want to admire a chair as art when I sit on it. This is a question of meaning versus craft.
(Rothko 78)

I really wanted to combine “meaning” and “craft”. This was my rational behind spending several weeks meticulously crafting every detail of my oak stretchers. The stretchers were part of my concern for the work as a whole. Every aspect would contribute to the force of the finished painting. Intention was everything. I wanted every decision and element regardless of visibility to be focused on the goal. I think Rothko would have approved. After all he was also concerned with creating “a new kind of unity, a new method of achieving unity” (78). Every cut needed to be perfect to create consistent angles, crisp

lines and tight joinery. I knew from experience that most viewers had a keen eye capable of detecting the smallest errors. These types of inconsistencies would be distractions to the viewer, negatively impacting the experience so crucial to the work.

Form and Void

The picture took the shape of what I was involved in. People have asked me if I was involved with color. Yes, that's all there is, but I am not against line. I don't use it because it would detract from the clarity of what I had to say. The form follows the necessity of what we have to say. When you have a new view of the world, you will have to find new ways to say it. (Rothko 127)

Within my own work, line was proving to be very useful in establishing clarity. One of my first big discoveries in painting was that if I carried an uninterrupted straight line across the canvas it suggested a continuity of this line beyond the physical work. The line had a sense of extending from the painting into the viewers space. I found the most effective line ran from the top of the canvas out through a bottom corner at a slight angle. Getting the angle just right would produce a lean that seemed to pull at the viewer. I recognized in my first painting a real potential for generating a sense of movement, but the square canvas was holding everything steady. Selecting the central shape of the painting *Untitled(Black Oak)* was both a result of editing from the first painting, and an intuitive process. The geometry of this shape felt just right. Being released from the square it also generated movement. The flanking rhombus shaped canvases were extensions of the geometry of the central canvas. The rhombuses were oriented in the same direction creating an asymmetrical relationship within the work and increasing the feel of movement of the painting.

The painted surface with its energetic brushwork added to a sense of movement. The subtle lines of the oil stick were composed to generate a very simplistic suggestion of the extension of space beyond the surface of the canvas. It had occurred to me that it was often a push and pull that was being generated simultaneously. The paint was offering both an illusion of space and grounding in the materiality of its surface.

The orientation of the painting as a whole had some other unexpected results. In addition to the horizontal pull of the work there was also some play with perspective. The central canvas as a form felt like it was receding back into space, and the flanking canvases appeared stretched. The horizontal orientation of work, and the gaps between the canvases further illustrated a stretching of space. The most accurate description would be a perceptual distortion of space. The work also had a relation to time, where the stretched effect had a sense of pulling apart of time. Interestingly the larger gap on the left of the work looked like a tear that was opening up. I saw this opening as a void.

Therefore in the terms of the desire for the frontal, for the unveiled, for the experienced surface, I would say that my pictures have space. That is in the expression of making clear the remote in order to bring it into the order of my human and intimate understanding. (Rothko 112)

There were really two voids in *Untitled (black Oak)*, 2013. The painted surface with its deep black oils was one form of void. In this case, the layering of black paint pushed out most light. The expanse of darkness increased along the receding lines of the composition. It was my intent to generate a sense of standing in complete darkness, where physical matter becomes unified in the absence of light. In complete darkness we can find new ways of perceiving the things around us and ourselves. I wondered what constitutes the knowledge of self aside from the physical body that we regularly identify with? I didn't really have answers but I was interested in this contemplative state brought on by experiencing the void.

The second type of void was between the gaps of the individual canvases. These were highlighted by a sort of halo produced by the transitions of black to grey space on the inner edges of the canvases. There was a deceptive quality to the arrangement of the work in which the identical rhombus generated a difference of spacing in their relationship with the central shape. It was a generative relationship in which the composition seemed to open a new space. The opposing forces of the directional movement developed what I spoke of earlier as a tear. Newly generated as the result of a stretching of space and time, this void was outside of everything I know, and yet firmly rooted in the reality of the wall. In a flash of light brought on by the contrasting brightness of the white paint I find myself

having travelled through the work to the wall. In my experience with the work I felt totally grounded in the present moment. I instantly became aware of the reality of my surroundings.

“Pictures must be miraculous: the instant one is completed the intimacy between the creation and the creator ended. He is an outsider. The picture must be for him, as for anyone experiencing it later, a revelation, an unexpected and unprecedented resolution of an eternally familiar need. “
(Rothko 59)

CHAPTER 2: Stone Sculpture

In Chapter 2, my sculpture will be discussed in relation to the work of Isamu Noguchi, in particular *End Piece*, 1970. In addition I will explore several points of connection to Martin Heidegger's *What is called thinking?*, a series of lecture transcripts published in 1954.

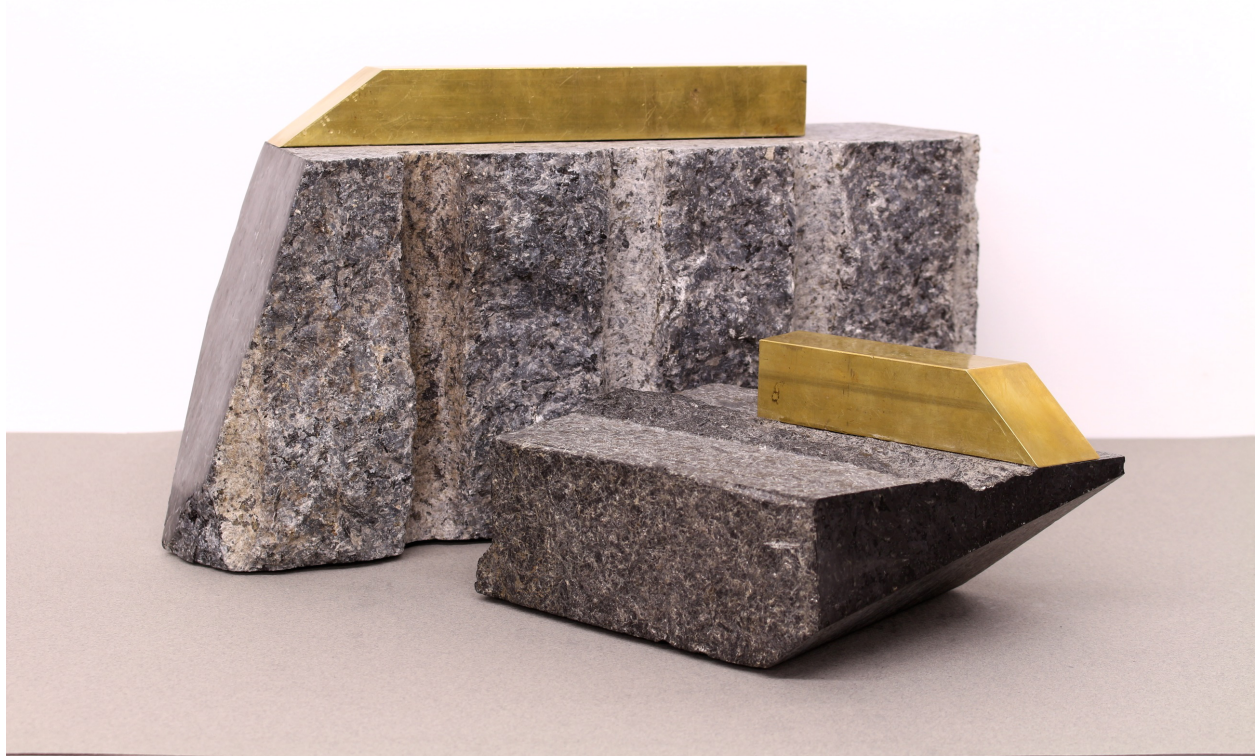


Fig. 5: Amiel Logan, *Untitled (Cut)*, 2013. Granite and Brass, Dimensions Variable.



Fig. 6: Amiel Logan, *Untitled (Cut)* (detail), 2013. Granite and Brass, 14cm (H) x 28cm (L) x 18cm (W).



Fig. 7: Amiel Logan, *Untitled (Cut)* (detail), 2013. Granite and Brass, 30cm (H) x 50cm (L) x 20cm (W).



Fig. 8: Isamu Noguchi, *End Piece*, 1970. Basalt and Corten steel, 170cm (H) x 150cm (L) x 52cm (W). Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York.

Process

There is only birth or no birth, and birth is that total thing that comes from within. To be totally oneself, creation must come totally from within; and that kind of consciousness is, I suppose, something we share in common, a mutual personality, so that when anyone creates something it is as if it were self-created by each and every one. " (Noguchi 95)

Isamu Noguchi recognizes that art can be an important site to reflect on what it means to be human. The experience of an artwork can be a recognition of self. It can reaffirm our common connections. The way to generate this experience is through a "consciousness" of the source of creation as generated "totally from within" (95). With respects to my own process, this statement supported the direction that I was beginning to take. I was becoming more sensitive to the impulses that were a driving force in my practice. There was a desire to take this notion of following my intuition to a higher level. This took the form of a total abandonment of advanced planning. I would simply follow my path as it unfolded in front of me, responding to my thoughts and environment. The

criticality that made me suspicious of what it meant to be “totally oneself” was abandoned in exchange for the trust that I was going to discover new territory.

I was conscious that the new direction my process was taking should not be considered an exercise. Noguchi related that Brancusi would say to “never make things as studies to be thrown away, never think you are going to be farther along than you are - because you’re as good as you will ever be at the moment” (131). This in mind, I resolved to accept all my artistic activities as important work. There was a freedom in this knowledge that allowed for the serious pursuit of any sculptural possibility. The simplest composition or relationship of materials could now become a primary focus of my work without being deemed an exercise. I was doing what needed to be done, without concern for necessarily creating a successful sculpture.

Martin Heidegger states “especially we moderns can learn only if we always unlearn at the same time” (*What Is Called Thinking?* 8). This seemed incredibly relevant to me in my practice, at this present time. I felt that in my process I needed to take several steps back to be able to move forward. I understood that generating an immersive experience was going to require extra sensitivity to my process. I didn’t really know how to achieve this end, but I felt something in the core of me did. Part of following my intuition, was to become more accepting of all thoughts as they arose. Heidegger writes that “what calls us to think, and thus command, that is, brings our essential being into the keeping of thought, needs thinking because what calls wants itself to be thought about according to its essence” (121). While Heidegger is speaking primarily to concerns around language, I felt it applied to my sculptural practice too. I was being enticed to re-investigate sculpture with more sensitivity. Heidegger feels language “let[s] our speech drift away into more obvious meanings of words” (118). In this same way, I felt it was important to examine all the possible ways my materials make meaning. I was conscious that I didn’t want to fall back into a more prescribed way of working.

Immediate Experience

I think of sculpture as something to be completely experienced, not just looked at. You're an integral part of it. Your environment is your sculpture, your world. It's the world, and the world then becomes a sculpture. So everything is sculpture. (Noguchi 149)

I understood that the viewer's total engagement in the work was the first step to generating an experience. I saw this engagement as needing to be immediate. I wanted the viewer to have a physical response, and not be caught up in thought. The multi-dimensional quality of sculpture presented a new challenge to the task of generating an immediate response to the work. The viewer could approach the object from all angles making it even more important that they be able to easily identify its composition. This visible clarity would facilitate a seamless transition into the experience of the work.

In order for stone to be recognizable, there needed to be evidence of its naturally occurring surfaces. Natural surfaces together with cut and polished areas would serve to give a sense of the total nature of the material. In these sculptures, I extended the notion of leaving a record of process, by selecting stone and metal that retained marks associated with its manufacturing or extraction. One side of the larger sculpture has the mark of the holes used when cutting the stone from the mountain. On the smaller sculpture is a cut surface made with a diamond water saw, normally used to cut a block of stone down to usable pieces. In a sense there was a complete record of all working processes that produced this work. Noguchi's sculpture, *End Piece* from 1970, illustrates his own concern for the retention of visible traces of his working process. Exposed drill holes from the splitting process become important visual element along side carefully carved depressions. There is a sense that all the marks are treated with equal value, whether made by a drill or a chisel. There is an inherent immediacy and unity in Noguchi's sculpture, where the elements that define its artistic surface also revealed the method of producing its form.

Within my own sculpture, there was an immediate and direct relationship of one material acting on another. The brass elements were cut from a stock gauge bar that clearly registered as metal. In each sculpture, the brass bar rests on the top surface of the stone.

This interaction focuses the attention on the forces at play in the materials, in an attempt to further engage the viewer.

Scale

I have taken another attitude in that, as I think everything is relative in size and it's all a question of relative scale. I have come to feel that sculpture can only be of significance to architecture and to the space of human environment as something conclusive in relation to that space. (Noguchi 50)

The scale of my work has always been in relation to the human body, the viewer. Painting had afforded me the possibility of working larger, finding a scale that effectively engaged the body. Working with stone, I still wasn't in a position to create large works due to weight and cost. Also, I was following a different process, one without blueprints and advanced planning. In this case, I didn't consciously choose the scale, it just evolved from an engagement with my materials. The brass element essentially determined its scale becoming the guide for the selection of the corresponding stone. The resulting sculpture was much more intimate in its relation to the body. The brass bar was of a size that appealed to the grasp of a hand, a relationship that was useful in connecting to a sense of the weight within the work. Looking at these sculptures, I felt they suggested that they would be more significant at a larger scale. They didn't quite have the feel of a model but just seemed to easily project into a new form, closer to that of a monument.

Material and Craft

The very materiality of sculpture is perhaps its most evocative aspect - the mystery at the base of matter. We feel its emanations in the best of sculpture, rising out of the intermingling of form and matter with the patina of time. (Noguchi 38)

Like Noguchi, I have a deep connection to material. Over the past six years, I engaged in an extensive study of stone, discovering important insights into its nature as a sculptural material. My work with stone has oriented me to concerns with gravity, weight, density, surface, space and time. The materials in my work compose one of the most significant elements. As an important carrier of my ideas, they are often placed at the forefront of the experience, as they are in Noguchi's sculpture.

Noguchi discusses Brancusi's work with materials, describing "out of the limitations of matter and the working of it came the essence of his sculpture" (115). Brancusi's concern for unity in his work extended into all aspects of his practice. Noguchi reflects that in Brancusi's sculpture the "concept [of unity] was not imposed but was inherent within the relationship of artist to his material" (115). In *End piece*, Noguchi's own concern for unity is at the forefront of his work. The relationship of artist and material is clearly visible becoming the subject of the sculpture itself. Noguchi describes that when he "worked with stone [he] wanted to find that stone, [he wasn't] using stone for some other reason" (142). He wanted to find the basis of his material.

Heidegger writes "to learn means to make everything we do answer to whatever essentials address themselves to us at a given time" (*What Is Called Thinking?* 14). What is "essential" for Heidegger in terms of thinking is the understanding that meaning in language has many manifestations. Applied to other practices, Heidegger uses the analogy that "to become a true cabinetmaker, he makes himself answer and respond above all to the different kinds of wood and to the shape slumbering within the wood" (15). At the heart of my own practice, I recognized the importance of engaging with my materials in a way that was sensitive to its nature. Responding to the materials was critical to my practice.

Much of my inspiration stems from a relationship between materials. Brass and stone have been a common pairing in my sculpture of the past few years. In my new sculpture, *Untitled (cut)*, this pairing is one that draws attention to the density and weight of the materials as they act upon each other. The presence of stone reinforces the understanding of the higher density nature of the bar of brass. In contrast, the brass appears almost heavier than the stone. The stone is raised slightly by brass shims that are not visible, providing a small gap all around the lower edge. The stone has the appearance of floating, accentuating the dynamic relationship with the brass bar perhaps placed on top to hold the stone down.

As a traditional sculptural material, stone is rich in history. The permanent nature of stone adds to its sense of timelessness. Stone is a natural material that accounts for a large part of our environment both natural and built. All people have an inherent relationship with stone. I am aware that my audience shares a potentially universal connection and knowledge of stone, and this informs the way I work. Defying the viewer's expectations of the material is an effective way to capture their attention.

Precision of craft is employed to cut the stone and create perfectly straight lines or flat surfaces. A straight line draws the eye and focuses the viewer's attention on this point. I understand this convergence on the line as a gathering of energy, a site contact and exchange with the viewer. A line carved with close attention to detail, adds to the experience of the sculpture. In untitled, the allure of the precision detail is heightened in contrast with the loosely carved surfaces and found marks.

Form and Void

The essence of sculpture is for me the perception of space, the continuum of our existence. All dimensions are but measures of it, as in the relative perspective of our vision lie volume, line, point, giving shape, distance, proportion. Movement, light and time itself are also qualities of space. Space is otherwise inconceivable. (Noguchi 24)

As Noguchi describes, space represents a complex relationship of parts. Sculpture as a "perception of space" is equally complex. Noguchi's sculpture, *End Piece*, 1970, is a great example of how he activates space in all its dimensions using minimal gestures and form. The simplified form of my own sculpture, serves to bring the material to the forefront of the viewers experience. The stone and brass surfaces gather the viewer's gaze and attention. The directional quality of the work comes from the planes and lines that are angled to converge at a single point. The site of this convergence is where the polished surface of the brass aligns with the polished surface of the stone. There is the sense that all surfaces lead to this focal point. The propulsion and compression instills a sense of urgency, charging this space. The alignment of these surfaces gives the appearance of the work being severed on this plane. Similarly in *End Piece*, the carved depression and drill

holes end with the break that constitutes the top surface. There is a suggestion that the sculpture might have continued beyond the break adding to a sense of absence in this space.

Interestingly, Heidegger employs a similar technique in his writing when he wants the reader to understand the shift needed to engage in thinking. Heidegger writes “in contrast to the steady progress, where we move unawares from one thing to the next and everything remains alike, the leap takes us abruptly to a place where everything is different, so different that it strikes us as strange” (*What Is Called Thinking?* 12). In my own work, the abruptness of the ending of the sculpture is an attempt to create a very different experience of space. In contrast to the intense materiality of the sculpture, the space after the cut “strikes” us as empty. This generates a void. Every aspect of the sculpture is organized to allow the viewer to experience this void. Once inhabited, the void offers the opportunity for the viewer to perceive space in a new way. It is a moment of pause and reflection. I find it useful to relate back to Heidegger’s writings, to a passage that runs parallel to this experience.

When man is drawing into what withdraws, he points into what withdraws.
As we are drawing that way we are a sign, a pointer. But we are pointing then
at something that has not, not yet, been transposed into language that we
speak. It remains un-comprehended. We are an uninterrupted sign.
(Heidegger 18)

CHAPTER 3: Sculptural Tables

In Chapter 3, my sculptural tables *Aside* will be discussed in relation to the work of Rachel Whiteread, focusing on *Yellow Leaf*, a sculpture she created in 1989. I also will discuss Martin Heidegger's concept of Da-sein from his work *Being and Time* written in 1927.



Fig. 9: Amiel Logan, *Aside*, 2013. Maple Wood, 80cm (H) x 150cm (L) x 60cm (W).



Fig. 10: Rachel Whiteread, *Yellow Leaf*, 1989. Plaster, Wood and Formica, 73.5cm (H) x 150cm (L) x 94cm (W). Centro de Arte Moderna, Portugal.

Process

I think a lot of the works that I've been making over the years have been part of a cyclical process. I could probably plot a family tree of these works. Things have happened, things branch off, things crop up that I haven't thought about, I often feel a cycle is incomplete and need to tread the same path again, that's just how I work. I've been teaching myself a language...and the utilization of that language can take on many forms. (Whiteread, Interview by Craig Houser)

In much the same way, I was returning to work with the table as the subject of my sculpture. In the past, I had created several versions of sculptural tables all dealing with the space in and around this object. There was a sense that I was picking up where I left off, but also approaching it differently. My recent investigations into painting and sculpture had changed my perspective. I found I had more sensitivity to the sculpture as a whole concept. In particular, the material concerns were becoming more effectively aligned with the conceptual basis of my work. The knowledge and skill developed in working with stone and

metal was no longer restricted to the medium. I was taking my knowledge, and applying it to other materials. My tables in the past had been constructed using stone and bronze. This unusual material translation came to dominate the focus of the work. I wanted to take a more subtle approach, where the sculpture looked more like the vernacular tables of our everyday experience. In my sculpture, *Aside*, this meant making it from wood, a typical material used in the construction of tables.

In my practice, drawing was becoming a way for me to explore possibilities quickly and easily. The drawings had their own unique perspective, which was not entirely accurate but described the general form. Unable to decide on a direction, I resolved to proceed intuitively without any definite plan. This like before kept my focus on my engagement with the materials and processes. My experience in woodworking was primarily limited to the work done with painting stretchers. In the woodshop where I worked, I was fortunate to have the advice of several experts. I was learning about the range of possibilities as I engaged with each process. I adapted as needed, finding a form in conversation with the tools and guided by my intuition. In this way, I was able to achieve both the refinement and responsiveness desired in the final form.

I became primarily concerned with the space underneath the table. Rachel Whiteread's sculpture *Yellow Leaf*, 1989, is an historical example of a sculpture with similar concerns. I found myself interested in addressing the space under the table, but taking a different approach. In *Aside*, the sculpture took the form of a table, carefully composed to draw the viewer's attention to the space beneath the surface. Whiteread describes that "with the first table piece that I made I wanted to give the space underneath the table some sort of authority." (Whiteread, Interview by Michael Archer) In casting the space underneath the table, Whiteread felt that it was "monumentalizing a space that is ignored" (Whiteread, Interview by Michael Archer). Her work evokes a complex range of responses and reflections. For Whiteread casts were also a way "to think about the properties that define what we know to be our objects of material culture" (Hornstein 58) In *Yellow Leaf*, the residues and imprints specific to this table become even more important with the knowledge that it is a cast of her grandmothers table. However, there is an emotional

content to Whiteread's work even when it is not specific to her personal history. Her casts tend to evoke a sense of loss communicated both in the surface traces, absence of the object and the "sarcophagus-like forms cast from architectural and household objects" (Gross 35).

Whiteread's work is further described as the "deliberate act to awaken our automatized perceptions, [through] highlight[ing] the pieces and parts of the whole that eventually contribute to how we perceive the content" (Horstein 67). I also felt the space beneath the table was a way to address what had become invisible in our everyday existence. Perhaps reflecting on this space would attune the viewer's awareness to the narrow focus of our engagement in the world. In *Aside*, there was an attempt to generate a transformative experience for the viewer that revealed this other dimension to the table. I had chosen to create a sculpture consisting of a pair of tables, where all elements were working to draw the viewer into the experience of the work. The subtlety of these adjustments I hoped challenged the viewer to examine the object carefully.

This deliberate attempt to direct the viewer into a re-examination of the knowledge of something as basic as a table, leads to a questioning of the fundamental basis of our knowledge itself. There is an interesting connection to Heidegger's notion of Da-sein as related in his work, *being and time*, written in 1927. In posing the question "what is being?" Heidegger concludes that "to work out the question of being means to make a being - one who questions- transparent in its being" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 6). Heidegger defines further that "this being which we ourselves in each case are and which includes inquiry among the possibilities of it being we formulate terminologically as Da-sein" (6). In a sense, I was attempting to evoke the viewer's own nature as "Da-sein" through the engagement with the sculpture.

Immediate Experience

All of my room pieces - or any architectural pieces I've made - really have to do with observing. There is a sense of puzzlement in just looking at them and thinking: "we live in that kind of place. How do we function physically within a place like that?" This is definitely what I do when I look at my works. I think about how they effect me physically. (Whiteread, Interview by Craig Houser)

I have come to understand that having an immediate experience with a work of art has everything to do with engaging the body. It could be described as a gut reaction to the object in front of you. I saw materials and weight as an important way to physically engaging the audience. Whiteread's work has been described as evoking "a visceral response to the tactility of the material; its presence and sheer imagined weight wholly engages our eye and sharpens our focus on the nature of materiality altogether" (Hornstein 67) This notion of "imagined weight" is the critical aspect of this process. It should be pointed out first that in most of Whiteread's plaster sculpture the actual weight is less than the "imagined weight." This is because the sculptures components, in *Yellow Leaf* for example, are hollow. The forms have the appearance of solidity, while still remaining manageable in this lighter form. Even so, imagining weight has a powerful effect on the body in which we as viewers engage all our senses in an attempt to gauge it. A viewer essentially lifts the object in their body, a feat they could never accomplish in reality, even if the gallery allowed it. The key to understanding the sculpture as solid is in its reduction to a homogeneous mass. The plaster needs to be outwardly unified in form and surface to be carried through and solidified in the imagination of the viewer.

In my work *Aside*, the outward surfaces of the sculpture are all visibly the same. The sculpture is completely constructed from wood with a consistent surface treatment throughout. This allows for an instant communication of its material composition and solidity. The sculptural weight is perceived in a much more subtle manner than that of Whiteread's sculpture. In *Aside*, the weight is distributed across the sculptural framework, understood as heaviest in the outer legs and progressively becoming lighter toward the centre of the work. There is an attempt to engage the body and also direct the viewer

through a transition of weight. This is quite different from the experience of Whitereads casts where “movement is limited [and] rare” (Hornstein 61).

The sculptural form in *Aside*, is based on a mirroring of the table and is positioned to achieve a total symmetry. My placement of the work several inches from the wall prevents the viewer from walking around it. This helps to establish a back and front, concentrating the focus on a single view. My idea behind this configuration was to reveal all critical dimensions of the form and draw the viewer into the experience of the work in a single glance.

Scale

I’m always looking for ways of representing the body but not actually putting it there. (Whiteread, Interview by John Tusa)

Whiteread represents the body, in *Yellow Leaf*, by taking a cast of the space underneath the table, a space normally occupied in part by the body, if one pulled up a chair for example. She is interested in casting the spaces beneath tables and chairs “for a number of reasons; one that they’re...quite architectural lumps once they’re made so, and they also stand for the absence of the body” (Whiteread, Interview by John Tusa). Interestingly, the solid nature of her castings forces out any possibility of projecting oneself into the space it now occupies. The cast becomes a place marker for the body and with its newly given mass has a direct relationship with the scale of the body.

Whiteread describes that she “see[s] furniture, especially the sort of furniture that’s kind of chucked out in the street, [as] almost like people.” (Whiteread, Interview by John Tusa) Within my own work I am well aware of the anthropomorphic qualities of the table. In fact, *Aside*, pushes, this relationship to the body a little further. The thick trunk of the outer table legs in contrast to the thin inner legs, has a closer relationship to human limbs. Also my adjusted table form with the extended inner leg, suggests movement or walking. This both adds to the directional quality of the work and also speaks directly to the scale of

the body. I see this particular scale as reinforcing the notion that this is meant to be a personal experience for the viewer.

Material and Craft

The different materials that I used to box things in became quite important. With the bath pieces I used shuttering, which is very rough plywood used when digging holes in the road. I like the idea of this space that you dig into, but I was kind of doing the opposite with it. I'm always very careful with those kind of details. They're not accidental. (Whiteread, Interview by Michael Archer)

The materiality of the sculpture and its craft was extremely important to Whiteread. In the bath pieces, like *Ether*, the materials that she used to frame the casting would be critical because of the imprint it would leave on the surface of the plaster. However minimal the texture, the outer surface was one of the primary locations of visual perception and communication. Whiteread speaks about her understanding of plaster as being a material that “picks up meticulous detail.” (Whiteread, Interview by Michael Archer) The surface of my own material, maple wood, had its own incredible detail in its unique grain patterns. Working with the tools and the material, required a special attention to the grain and its orientation. Achieving structural strength and reducing warping, required constantly considering the grain and aligning it with the forces at play in the structure. This method of working was concerned with the practical implications of creating form that would maintain its intended structure. In addition the wood grain was also the visual surface of the work, not only describing the material composition but also lending its own pattern. The directional quality of the grain pattern, had potential to add to the sense of movement in the work. Properly aligned, the grain emphasized the symmetry of the work, directing the viewer up through the centre of the sculpture.

The grain pattern of the maple wood also pointed to the living quality of this natural material. It shows the record of the trees growth, illustrating its transformation over time. The grain became a link to my purpose of creating a transformative experience for the viewer and perhaps a form of metaphor for personal growth. The material had a sense of still being alive, slowly shifting and twisting in the process of construction. Each component

needed to be cut and then re-cut after resting for several days. It was a process of working with the energy and forces still residing within the material. This technique allowed me to achieve consistent lines that added to the clarity of the form. The maple was incredibly dense. It is a hardwood, often used in furniture making for its strength and durability. Like certain granites, the maple could also be cut to hold these precise and strong edges. The process of working with this hardwood was very difficult. Special attention and care needed to be taken to not damage the tools when cutting and shaping this tough material. The end result is an intensity that is concentrated into every facet of the finished sculpture. The physical weight of the table is surprisingly heavy, adding to the sense of significance to its presence.

Whiteread makes things matter. She takes objects we think we know - a bed, a table - and makes them into something material that we no longer recognize. Not only is she after defamiliarizing the familiar, She heightens the materiality of the thing, making it seem to be more than what it is in its physical form. (Hornstein 51)

In many respects this is a close description of what I am doing. My own attempt to “heighten the materiality” is found through a detailed concern for the smallest aspect of its material form. Working with my tools, I imbue every surface, line and angle with consideration for the sculpture as a whole. The main difference in my work when compared to Whiteread’s, *Yellow Leaf*, is an inversion of the method to “defamiliarize the familiar.” In both cases, the focus is on the space underneath the table, but in my work the table is fully present.

“Da-sein understands itself in its being in some way and with some explicitness. It is proper to this being that it be disclosed to itself with and through its being. Understanding of being is itself a determination of being of Da-sein.” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 10)

I wanted to draw the viewer into a particular engagement with my sculpture. My attention to the material and craft was an attempt to immerse the viewer in the experience of the work and to bring awareness of the nature of our engagement with our surrounding. In close relation to Heidegger’s Da-sein, I was creating a situation in which the viewer’s “being [is] disclosed to itself with and through its being” (10). I was asking the viewer to

engage wholly with the physical in the world and to see what awareness could be generated. Heidegger describes that “the very being to which Da-sein can relate in one way or another, and somehow always does relate, existence” (10). Heidegger states clearly “we come to terms with the question of existence always through existence itself” (10).

For me, Heidegger’s discussion of Da-sein points to the important role of the “ontic” or physical nature of the world and our engagement with it. The intensity of focus on material and form within *Aside*, reflect my understanding that through the physical comes an understanding of being. Reflection on this being has the potential to reveal a deeper awareness of self.

“Da-sein accordingly takes priority in several ways over all other beings. The first priority is an ontic one: this being is defined in its being by existence. The second priority is an ontological one: on the basis of its determination as existence Da-sein is in itself “ontological.” But just as originally Da-sein therefore has its third priority as an ontic-ontological condition of all ontologies.” (Heidegger 11)

Form and Void

The works often are very sort of formal looking, but I think that was never an intention. You know it’s not that I’m trying to make the straightest line or the most beautiful curve, it really comes from the thing that I’m physically casting and have chosen to cast, so maybe the formalism comes from the actual spaces and the interpretation for me but not finally the sculpture. (Whiteread, Interview by John Tusa)

Whiteread’s casts are generally understood as the result of casting the spaces in and around found objects. She states, “I’ve always used found objects, things made for simple everyday usage” (Whiteread, Interview by Michael Archer). In *Yellow Leaf*, the casting of space underneath this typical dining room table, results in several plaster blocks with a simple shape. There is as she explains a “formal” quality to the shapes that result from the structure of the table. There is a definite relationship to architecture, in which the mold is comprised of support walls, the ceiling of the tabletop and the structural legs. Whiteread’s many other casting of the insides of buildings and various architectural spaces, points to her extension of this relationship.

I also recognized the formal quality of the space beneath the table. In *Aside*, my choice to construct the table instead of using a found object, afforded me the ability to become an architect of this space. This approach allowed me to use all the formal qualities inherent in the space underneath the table and orchestrate them in a way that contributed to the viewer experience. I was also interested in distorting the structure of the table. It had to be a subtle shift in the form to still remain recognizable. In this way, the table became a distortion of the familiar.

Every element in *Aside* is designed to draw the viewer into the experience of the artwork. The inward and upward movements direct us to the convergence point, the space between the inner most points of the tabletops. It is a progression, starting with the stable outer legs and accelerates along the ascending lines of the table. The taper on the legs serves to lighten the weight of the table, creating an upward momentum. Similarly, the angle of the skirting directs the viewer towards the central point in the work. The distribution of weight progresses from the heavier outer legs and becomes lighter at the centre. The shape of the tabletop involves a play on perspective, where the line suggests a receding into the convergence point. The carved bands on the legs are the transition point to the taper but also set up a rhythm, marking the progression through the work.

The sense of movement in the work I trust destabilizes the viewer. My intention is to sweep them up into the experience of the work, creating an embodied response. Drawn into the convergence point of the work, there is both a compression and then expansion opening up onto the surface of the table. This process is aimed at opening a space of pause and reflection.

Conclusion

While travelling in November of 2013, I encountered *Cilindro Costituito*, a sculpture created in 1983 by Italian Sculptor Arnaldo Pomodoro installed at the San Francisco Airport.

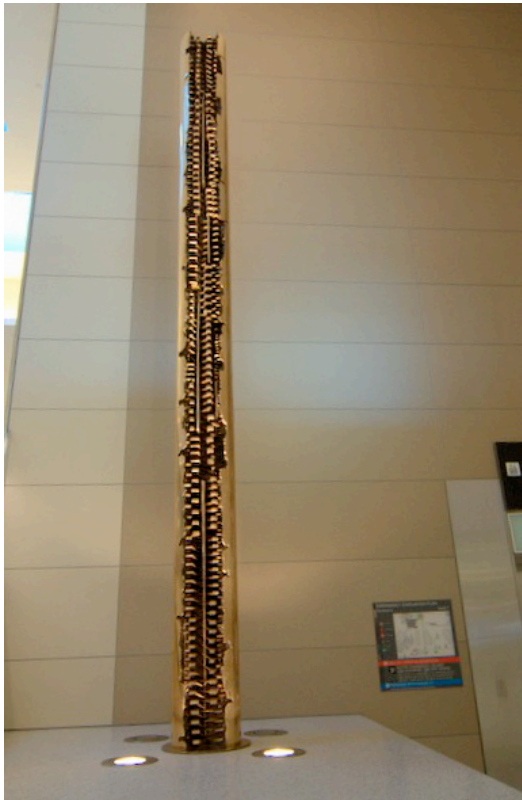


Fig. 11: Arnaldo Pomodoro, *Cilindro Costituito*, 1983. Cast Bronze, 487cm (H) x 45cm (W). San Francisco Airport.

I was deeply impacted by this work. The Solidity of Arnaldo Pomodoro's sculpture was truly immense. Its delicate interior was in contrast to the solidity of the bronze and seemed to heighten the impact of its materiality. Bronze is a heavy material; weight was a key factor in my experience. I identified weight as another critical element that I wanted to emphasize in my next sculpture. *Cilindro Costituito* is a sculpture from when Pomodoro was clearly at the pinnacle of his career. For me, I saw it as something to work towards.

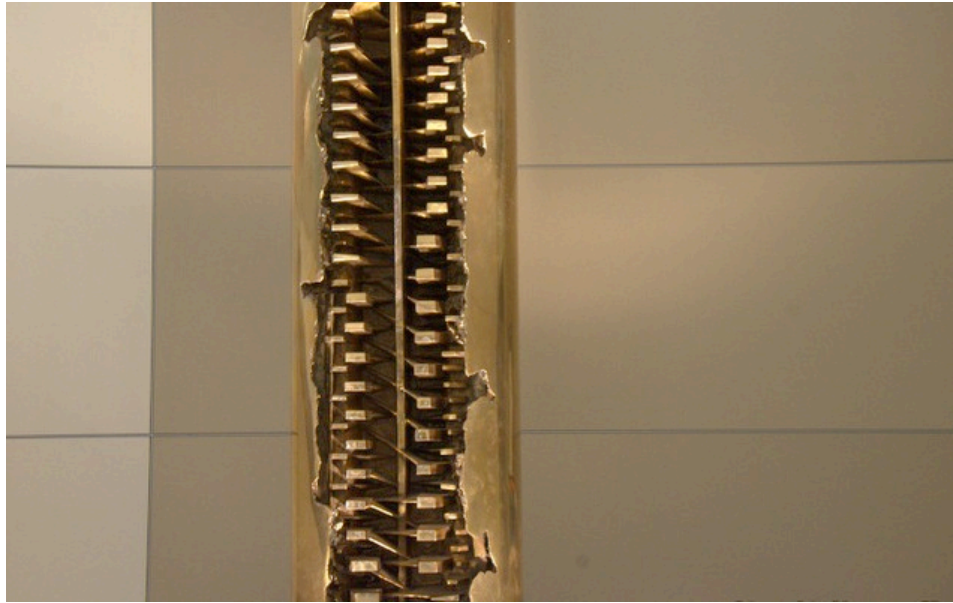


Fig. 12: Arnaldo Pomodoro, *Cilindro Construito* (Detail), 1983. Cast Bronze, 487cm (H) x 45cm (W). San Francisco Airport.

The heightened impact of the immense materiality of this sculpture resulted in me wondering what impact solidity has on the viewer? While I didn't have an answer, I sensed there were limits to the impact of suggested solidity in many of Whiteread's works. Unfortunately, I have not actually physically stood in the presence of any of her sculpture. I had only experienced them through reproduction. The knowledge that a sculpture was hollow seemed to empty it of the possibility of perceiving it as solid again. I was reminded of my need to make real oak stretcher bars for my paintings and I felt that implied solidity was false and only had limited effectiveness. I was beginning to realize that if solidity was truly important in my work, it needed to be there.

Through this research and my reflection on the artworks of Mark Rothko, Isamu Noguchi, and Rachael Whiteread, I am now much more conscious of the importance of my own engagement with materials, the importance of scale and the craft of making in my artworks. Through reading Heidegger's writings, I am beginning to see how being grounded in the present, could reveal knowledge of self. I try to remain present, responding to the physical medium and flexible in my process. I now understand that to immerse the

viewer in the experience of the object required my own immersion in craft. There is a unity in a sculpture that is created with attention to detail. My reductive approach is in the service of clarity, where simplicity of form focuses the attention on the critical ideas in the work.



Fig. 13: Amiel Logan, *Untitled (Black Walnut)*, 2014. Black Walnut Wood, 95cm (H) x 95cm (L) x 38cm (W).

My final project, *Untitled (Black Walnut)*, is a sculptural table that is the culmination of all my ideas into a single object. There is a close attention to the alignment and proportion within the form, where the space around the object is as important a consideration as its physical presence. The relationship of form and its composition is revealed, where each surface is a visual record of its construction and material properties. I

was interested in emphasizing the sense of unity within the work through building a stronger relationship between its parts. In this case, the top valance and lower shelf are cut from a piece identical to the upper surface.

The introduction of the curve in the shelf, valance and turned front legs is an attempt to create a more balanced work. There is a harmony in the symmetry where straight and curved lines gently pull the viewer into the experience of the sculpture. In previous work, my intent was to destabilize the viewer but in this new sculpture I wanted to try a more subtle approach, centering and settling the viewer. In addition, the surface of the wood was left raw. This new approach accentuates the absorbent quality of the surface, putting nothing between the viewer and the experience of the material. As a departure from my work in *Aside*, the edges of *Untitled (Black Walnut)* are all left sharp and not softened through sanding or routing. The sharp edges help to define and articulate the spaces occupied and created by the object. These spaces are charged becoming a void. In my experience, the void created between the top and the lower shelf seems to channel the air and energy of the room. It is my intention to create a feeling of both expansion and stillness in which time is perceived as having been stopped. This is not the slowed time of my previous work but a suspension of time aimed at providing a space for self-reflection. I was beginning to recognize the art objects I created over the time of my Masters studies were useful primarily as a spiritual tool. The experience generated in the presence of the object was the most important component of the artwork.

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