

*Notes on Reciprocity: Relating to the material*

As clichéd as it may be to reference the law of matter, *everything* is made of *something*. In other words, the artist can only make what is available to them with the material at hand. But to say more, whatever the artist makes is ultimately a response to the material, and to the world that produced them both.

In his seminal essay, ‘Notes on weaving a basket’ anthropologist Tim Ingold describes what is at work in the act of art making:

*First, the practitioner operates within a field of forces set up through his or her engagement with the material; secondly, the work does not merely involve the mechanical application of external force but calls for care, judgement and dexterity; and thirdly, the action has a narrative quality, in the sense that every movement, like every line in a story, grows rhythmically out of the one before and lays the groundwork for the next.*

Here, and in characterising craft practices as practices of ‘weaving,’ Ingold intends to contradict both the common understanding of ‘art’—in which the artist is a person of extraordinary creative genius who exacts this upon a given medium—and the common understanding of ‘making’—in which the maker exerts force until the medium complies.

*Notes on reciprocity* draws on Ingold’s premise that the artist or maker is in relationship with their medium and highlights the way in which the material world gives back to them. As much as the artist/maker/weaver must exercise care and judgement in responding to the conditions set by the material, they are also in a process of revelation. That is, the material reveals possibilities that they are then able to work into; to materialise.

In Chrystal Rimmer’s work, the dichotomy between the natural world and the manmade are complicated by the evidence of humanity’s creative and destructive impacts. Trash and recycled materials become the foundation for an exploration of nature in which junk is ‘a painterly medium,’ that destabilises narratives of human domination over the natural world.

Similarly working with narrative as though it is part of the material rather than something imposed upon it, Sibylla Robertson’s ceramics begin with the meaning imbued in the ceramic as it is built: in turn a sacred object or a functional form. The maker’s hand builds a world, not just an object. As with

narrative-making for Ingold, no matter the form (the artist cites videogames alongside ceramics) for Robertson, the process of making is one of world-building.

It is worth noting that these practices are not merely conceptual. In fleshing out the idea with the material, the process of making is bodily. Laura de Carteret's glass objects call our attention to this detail. The lifelike forms remind us of the act of glassblowing, the laborious process of producing; the reason that we refer to pieces of art as *works*.

Ingold makes it clear that it is not the basket's form as a three dimensional object that characterises weaving as a craft. The surface made through the act of weaving is integral to its process. Acting on the surface, like drawing on paper, is a process in which the work of the hand is made as present as it is in sculpting. In Tango Conway's drawings, this reality is made abundantly clear. Conway's practice is not a matter of representational or non-representational drawing, it is 'a celebration of drawing itself.'

As Ingold notes, there is no meaningful distinction between the weaver as a maker and the stone carver—the standard view of carving as an act of force upon the material narrows the narrative possibilities not only in the relationship of making, but also in the existence of the object. Hugh Crowley's *L'appel du Vide* responds to the myth of Narcissus in the creation of a stone mirror carved using traditional techniques. Through the act of making, and the *enaction* of the object through performance, Crowley's mirror demonstrates the two-way relationship between the object and the world around it. Literally and figuratively, it provides us with a point of reflection.

In the artists' practices, making is an extension of the hand and of the body, neither of which can be cut off from the material once the object is realised. And on the other side of the artist, the material is of the world it comes from, and cannot be reduced to a medium for ideas: it is as productive of these ideas as the artist themselves.