

The Story of How It Was Made

An Investigation of Anisotropic Practice

By Jessica Staple

Est. 1975

**The story of how it was made:
An investigation of artistic practice**

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Visual Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at
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DECLARATION

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Jessica Staple

March 2018

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SUMMARY

This book is centred on the very act of artistic creation, in other words making. I aim to demonstrate that art making is a meaningful, generative and transformative activity. Specifically, I will argue that making is an independent and continuous process and that this activity is also the very substance of a work of art. This is not just a mechanical form of production but a creative and formative one that undergoes repeated adjustment and leads to a unique kind of knowledge and understanding. I will also investigate the process of transformation both inherent to the activity and motivated by external influences, and how this process comes to impact on the resultant artworks thereafter. The thesis thus takes the form of an artist's book wherein the activity of the artist comes to the fore as well as the formative role played by the viewer as she or he follows in the creative act. Sitting alongside the artworks, studio journal entries and the broader theoretical framework of the thesis are various myths, folk tales and fairy stories, collectively titled 'Stories of the Underworld-Otherworld'. While providing an important source of inspiration towards my own art making, they also provide a creative means, *in words*, to express certain aspects of artistic practice (a visual and material productive space) that cannot be confined to literal or descriptive terms.

OPSOMMING

Die kern van hierdie boek is die aktiewe uitvoering van artistieke skepping, met ander woorde die maakproses. Ek poog om te demonstreer dat die skeppingsproses van kuns 'n betekenisvolle, generatiewe en transformerende aktiwiteit is. Ek argumenteer spesifiek dat die skeppingsproses 'n onafhanklike en deurlopende proses is en dat hierdie aktiwiteit ook die absolute essensie van 'n kunswerk is. Dit is nie net 'n meganiese vorm van produksie nie, maar 'n kreatiewe en formatiewe een wat deurlopende aanpassing ondergaan en lei tot 'n unieke tipe kennis en begrip. Ek sal ook die proses van transformasie ondersoek, inherent aan die aktiwiteit, asook gemotiveer deur eksterne invloede, en probeer vasstel hoe hierdie proses gevolglik 'n invloed het op die kunswerke wat daardeur geskep word. Die tesis neem die vorm van 'n kunstenaarsboek aan, waarin die kunstenaar se skeppingsproses na vore kom, so ook die formatiewe rol wat die aanskouer speel as sy of hy begin deelneem aan die kreatiewe skeppingsproses. Die kunswerke, ateljee-joernaalinskrywings en die breër teoretiese raamwerk van die tesis, verskyn saam met verskeie mites, volksverhale en sprokieverhale, gesamentlik getiteld 'Stories of the Underworld-Otherworld'. Hulle bied 'n belangrike bron van inspirasie vir my eie kunsskepping, maar bied ook, in die vorm van woorde, 'n kreatiewe manier om sekere aspekte van die kunsskeppingsproses ('n visuele en materiële skeppingsruimte) uit te druk - iets wat nie vasgevang kan word met bloot letterlike of beskrywende terminologie nie.

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INTRODUCTION

Carborundum #200
+
Titanium White Acrylic
Paynes Grey "
Ivory Black "
Prussian Blue "
+
Textile Medium
+
Methylated Spirits

1. BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

Making an artwork is a complex and layered activity. From its very inception, a work of art undergoes a rigorous progression that is both internally and externally motivated. These shifts do not end with the production phases. Beyond the immediacy and force of creation, changes ensue with time, place and the viewer, who brings along her or his own subjective experience. But an artwork is not merely a passive receiver, and the artist and viewer are likewise affected through their engagement.

This book is centred on the very act of artistic creation, in other words making. I aim to demonstrate that art making is a meaningful, generative and transformative activity. Specifically, I will argue that making is an ongoing and self-driven process and that this activity is also the very substance of a work of art. This is not just a mechanical form of production, however, but a creative and formative one that is under constant revision. Indeed, it is a practice that has the ability to lead to a singular kind of knowledge and understanding. Due to this potential, I will also investigate the process of transformation both inherent to the activity and compelled by external influences, and how this process comes to bear on the life of the artwork thereafter. Finally, I will consider works of art from the position of the viewer and the formative role that she or he plays as she or he follows in the creative act.

My research has been largely directed by my own artistic practice. Specifically, it is an area of interest that has developed over the past three years in the departmental screen printing, lithographic and intaglio studios where I also tutor and work as the studio technician. These spaces, the materials and machinery with which I work as well as the role that I play there have greatly impacted on my practice wherein the very activity of making is reflected in the resulting works of art. Questions around how to convey this activity have also played a substantial role in my research process. As the artist, I am in the position of knowing exactly what went into the making of my work. Yet, there is always difficulty in communicating this activity to others, especially when removed from the studio environment. For myself, these conversations necessarily entail discussions around the materials and equipment used as well as other artworks. This is, the story of how it was made.

Due to the complexities that lie behind the artworks themselves (particularly the process of making), at times only I am privy to the impact of the choices that I have made. This is especially the case where, even here in this written portion of my research, some of the terms and descriptions used likewise originate from a language of my own making.

Making art is a deeply personal, self-reflexive activity, and there is no universal vocabulary to address this world of singularities. Even in an ideal setting, there remains a sharp distinction between the experience of making and how this activity is verbally communicated and related in writing: a necessary translation takes place between each of these different 'viewpoints' and modes of expression. This is because artistic creation is not the product of a knowledge mediated by words but, to quote the sculptor Adolph Hildebrand, "the result, rather, of a refined instinct" that draws from a vast terrain of sources (1907:20). To arrange a series of descriptive views in a logical fashion is completely opposed to the very nature of the activity. Even an extremely thorough account would be little more than a report which, however accurate, tells us little about an artwork or art in general. Then again, more theoretical or art historical understandings tend to miss the mark as well. Although theoretically illuminating, it is often the case that they are too broad and do not follow enough the activity of the artist. In short, my research has also been motivated by the question of how I could talk about the experience of making an artwork without distorting its essential character or completely undermining the personality of artistic creation.

Thus, it is important that the information gathered be presented in a way that is appropriate to the focus of my topic, my own practice and the nature of the field in which I am working. The artworks, therefore, take a central position in my thesis – a document that takes the form of an artist's book in which the material contained within does not only explain or illustrate but is completely integrated with the artistic practice that it supports. Towards this end, original artworks have been included and the overall design and layout of the contents have been given much consideration. Comparable to a series of printed works, the pages of the thesis are not bound but sit loosely in a Solander box. Almost all of the written content has been screen printed by hand using a range of printing inks into which have been mixed various

ground materials from the artist's studio space. The particular format allows the reader to play an active role and practically engage with the thesis itself, and thus contribute to the fundamental 'making' of the text. In addition, this timely and tactile process of paging both demands and offers necessary pauses for reflection and connections to be made with the thesis as a material object in and of itself.

Ultimately, with this book, I hope to make a contribution towards a deeper understanding of artistic practice, not only through the kind of knowledge gleaned by engaging with works of art but also through the physical process of making, the very substance of the thing that is often hidden from view.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: IDEAS FOLLOW ACTIVITY

My thesis principally results from a practice-based approach towards research, an emergent methodology wherein knowledge grows out of material processes (Barrett, 2007:6). In other words, this approach utilises a 'praxical' form of knowledge production in which ideas and theory are the result of practice (Heidegger cited in Barrett, 2007:6). For myself, practice is seldom *led* by ideas or adapted according to inferences drawn in theory as, to cite Hildebrand again, "the idea which informs the artist's creation is one thing, the process of creation is another" (1907:15).

My research has undergone several permutations in terms of content and focus as this practice-based method presented certain challenges to outlining an area of study or predetermining any 'outcomes'. This re-evaluation, however, was completely necessary as it was this very process of investigation and revision that finally led me to my research question. For one, it has enabled me to make use of the accumulated research as a means to establish my own subject position, that is, how I understand and articulate my practice at this point in time in relation to the broader context of the art space. It was imperative that I as the researcher be subjected to the same degree of examination and adjustment as the thing being researched (Bourdieu cited in Barrett, 2007:6). Michel de Montaigne describes this continual process of revision with great lucidity, stating, "I have no more made

my book than my book has made me – a book consubstantial with its author” (cited in Ancell, 2014:210). Drawing from Montaigne, Matthew Ancell writes with equal force, “[T]he self is shaped by its own figuration” (2014:210).

This degree of investigative freedom has been essential to allow for variation in the research material. While this research did not *direct* my practice, it did inspire, an important “double articulation” that added enormous value to my practice and opened up whole other avenues of research in turn (Bolt, 2007:29). This included sources from the fields of visual arts, history, anthropology, poetry and mythology. Each source has its own ‘language’ that speaks to different aspects of artistic activity. As a collective, these voices are not taken to substitute the action, but each in its own way reveals something about it.¹

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND EXPOSITION OF CONTENTS

The book is comprised of three chapters. Chapter 1 is centred on a woodcut and screen print produced in 2015, titled *Of Lift II*, that I engage with in relation to the writings of Conrad Fiedler and his conception of ‘artistic activity’. Here I use his theory as a means to articulate my own assertions that making is a meaningful, generative and transformative activity. This section is also framed according to the ‘artistic perspective’ advocated by Fiedler, who argues that the only productive method of engagement is one that mimics the artistic act itself. At this point, I consider works of art from the standpoint of the viewer, namely the formative role played by the viewer as well as the transformative potential of works of art. I focus on two aspects of Fiedler’s methodology in particular: these are, to use my own descriptive terms, ‘personal and objective’ and ‘relational’ – concepts that I will comprehensively unpack in the chapter itself. To bring this chapter to a close, this relational approach is expanded to investigate various *external* influences that come to bear on the making of an artwork. This will be demonstrated in relation to another printed work titled *Onion Skin*.

¹ Despite the scope of the research, my findings generally apply to works of art and practices in the visual arts space. Of course, ‘visual arts’ has become an increasingly inclusive term that represents a vast range of creative practices not necessarily confined to what is apparently ‘visual’. I believe that the act of making a work of art is implicated in much more besides than what is registered through the visual faculty. That being said, the ‘products’ of this activity and this investigation are focused on what mostly appeals to this faculty and should be read within that framework.

Chapter 2 opens with a series of images and a short description of the making of a collection of prints and drawings titled *The Glass Industry*. Here the media with which I work are brought into focus. Building on the relational approach discussed in Chapter 1, I engage with Heinrich Wölfflin's *Principles of Art History* (1915). Specifically, I will look at his concepts of the development of vision and 'ways of seeing' (Berger, 1972) and how this progression impacts on the making of a work of art. While Wölfflin himself states that his text is by no means universally applicable, his theories lay a foundation from which to consider the relationship between drawing and printmaking. In addition, the concepts of Wölfflin provide a way to unpack how a 'thoroughness of seeing' and a 'thoroughness of process' respectively practised in these media enable a transformation in vision and thus in the viewing experience.²

Key to this study are various histories, mythologies, folk tales and fairy stories. These trail throughout the book but take on a more prominent standing in Chapter 3. The reason for their inclusion is two-fold.

Firstly, the most inspirational material for my practice often comes in the form of literature and stories. In some instances, they are directly referenced while in others the connections are more subliminal. Secondly, I make use of the "language of myth" to help articulate what cannot be uttered in literal, theoretical or otherwise descriptive terms (Parker & Stanton, 2003:10). Specifically, the stories embody, on various levels, the nature of artistic practice. They offer a vocabulary *in words* that talks to the process of artistic creation without diminishing its character. By reading the tales, it becomes possible to similarly read the artworks that they inspired. In short, I am using these stories to tell my own.

² The application of these older aesthetic theories hailing from Europe to a practice-based research paper located in contemporary South Africa may seem irreconcilable. Broadly speaking, it goes without saying that certain arguments cannot possess the same cogency for a present-day audience, especially in an African country. While Fiedler and Wölfflin themselves acknowledge the relative nature of their ideas, I contend that certain concepts included in their treatises have resonance beyond their specific time frame and milieu. Thus, as far as artistic practice is concerned, Fiedler's and Wölfflin's work proves helpful when approached with some critical distance as I have attempted in this thesis.

The selected stories have been drawn from a range of historical and cultural settings, including African, Nordic, Arabic, Greek and Chinese. Some stories are literary in origin, but most belong to the oral tradition and have been 'fixed' into written words. I am investigating those broadly defined as 'Stories of the Underworld-Otherworld',³ in which characters journey across physical or metaphorical thresholds, often through a process of descent. At times, the transgression of boundaries generates some kind of transformation: in some cases, entry follows a natural progression (such as death), whereas in others, it is only made possible by performing various rites of passage or undertaking a series of tasks. At certain points, the history of the story or the compendium in which it was found has also been detailed as this contextual information played an important role in the formation of the artworks and also talks to some or other aspect of artistic practice.

I have thus exercised the storyteller's freedom to shape each tale according to the needs of this book. Save for the poetic extracts, most stories have been given almost in their entirety, and while they have been reworded to fit my needs, they have not been reimagined or supplemented with 'outside' material.⁴ Interspersed between these narratives are some of my own, taking the form of short journal entries that document specific moments during the making of an artwork. These personal remarks have been included to reveal something about artistic creation as well as the specific artworks to which they relate. They also represent the figure of the 'journeyman' – a term used to describe a printmaker occupying a transitional space in her or his trade.⁵ Symbolically, this figure represents me as a student and technician, the reader making her or his way through the book as well as the various characters presented in it.

³ These spaces go by many different names in the tales themselves.

⁴ Although this book is structured around the concept of transformation (and translation is, of course, unavoidable), I have endeavoured, as far as possible, to maintain the stories' integrity.

⁵ This is a printmaker who is not yet recognised or qualified as a 'master'.

1 | OF LIFT II

Charcoal
+
Ivory Blade Acrylic
Paynes' Grey Acrylic
+
Textile Medium
+
Methylated Spirits

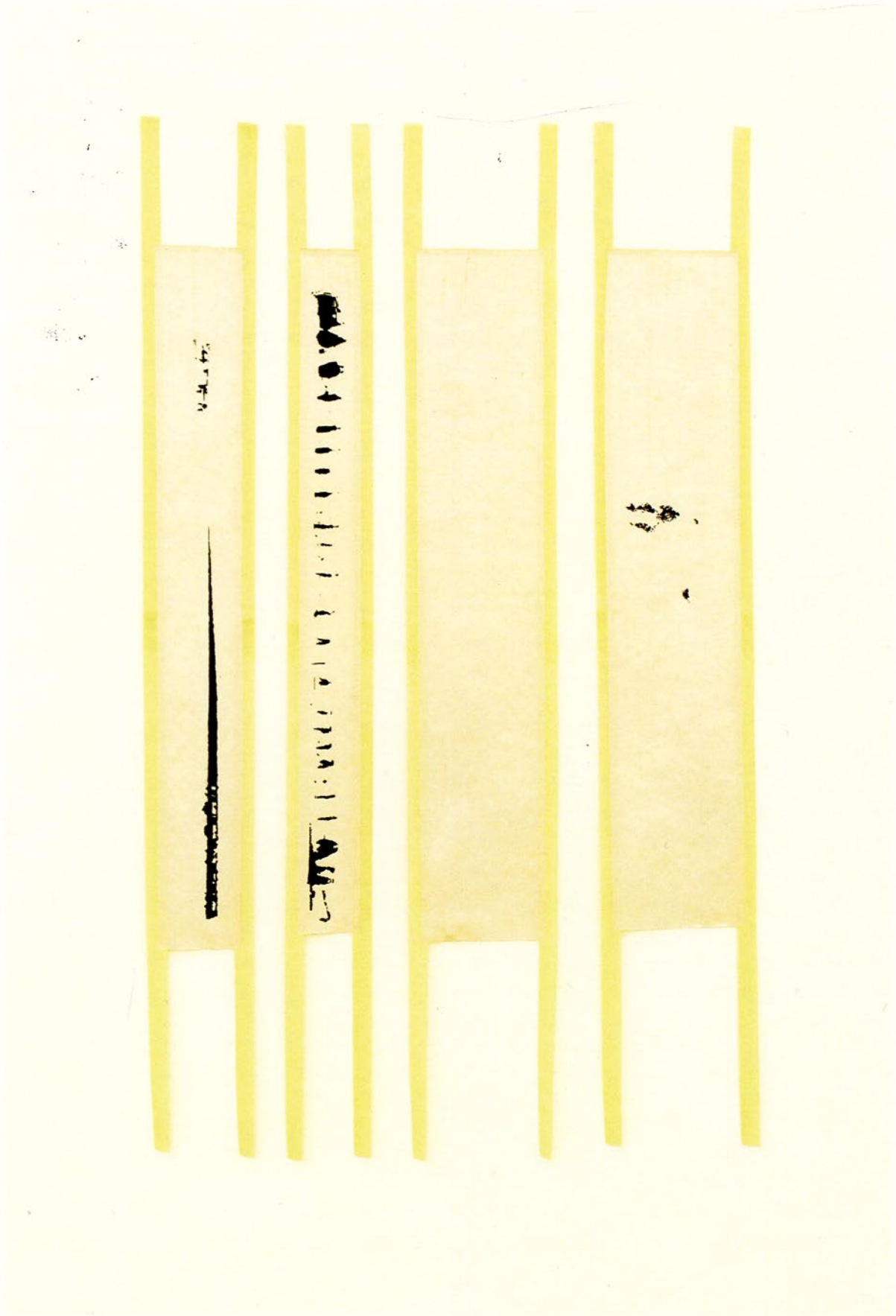


Figure 1. Jessica Staple, *Of Lift II*. 2015. Woodcut on silk and screen print on cotton fabric, size variable. Edition of 2.

27 AUGUST 2014

Flood, print, flood, print: the sound of hard rubber passing over nylon mesh. Only two prints pulled in all. It was a fast run today. The noise of the vacuum dies down, and the metal arm of the press creaks as it is slowly lifted up to release the paper beneath. A flat square of slate grey sits before me while another lies drying on the rack. I gather up the rest of the dark ink and loosen the grips clinging to the screen. Hastening to the washroom, I rip off the protective layer of newsprint and tape. The deposits of ink on the paper draw my attention. Instead of discarding the strips, I carefully lay them to one side before placing the screen into the bath. I turn on the tap, and the compressor shudders to life.

ARTISTIC ACTIVITY

Of Liff II (Figure 1) is a refabrication of scrap pieces of newsprint originally used to protect both the paper and press bed from the ink that was passed through a screen during the printing of an earlier work. Usually these inky newsprint pieces would be discarded as a waste product of the printing process, but I decided to keep this particular set along with the strips of masking tape that affixed them to the screen. Rather than merely saving and exhibiting them as an artwork, I used a combination of woodcut and screen printing techniques to literally remake the scraps into printed works on cotton and silk fabric. Finally, these prints were installed in such a way to make them appear self-adhesive. While I begin by introducing Conrad Fiedler's theory of 'artistic activity', it is the story of *Of Liff II* that trails throughout the chapter and provides a pivot point to unpack art making as a meaningful, generative and transformative activity.⁶

At the core of his text *On Judging Works of Visual Art*⁷ (1876), Fiedler argues that art is an essential instrument in the development of human consciousness. Its significance resides in the fact that artistic activity is the very way in which human beings bring the visible world into consciousness (1957:43-44). Rather than an arbitrary endeavour, Fiedler states that it is a wholly necessary one; its products are not secondary or superfluous but are essential to the human mind (1957:44). It is this understanding of artistic activity that I wish to outline in order to unpack how the very making of an artwork is the meaning of the action.

⁶ To provide some context to Fiedler and his work, he was born in 1841 in Öderan, a town in the former Kingdom of Saxony, and moved to Leipzig with his family in 1848 (Shaefer-Simmern in Fiedler, 1957:ix). After obtaining a doctoral degree in law, he travelled extensively, during which time he met the painter Hans von Marées in Rome (Shaefer-Simmern in Fiedler, 1957:ix). Henry Shaefer-Simmern, a specialist on Fiedler's work, describes this meeting as a defining moment in Fiedler's life, from which point on he actively sought to extend his understanding of artistic experience and processes, thereby directing his philosophical tendencies towards the theory of art (1957:x). In 1874 in Florence, Italy, Marées and Fiedler established living quarters with the sculptor Adolph Hildebrand (Shaefer-Simmern in Fiedler, 1957:x). This environment afforded Fiedler the opportunity to closely observe their artistic practices and engage in an exchange of ideas with the two artists, who shared similar views on art and art making (Shaefer-Simmern in Fiedler, 1957:xi-xii). Few of Fiedler's written works have been translated. In fact, relative to other German aestheticians and art historians, his theory is still little known in the English-speaking world. Despite this omission, many of Fiedler's ideas were adopted by or influenced the works of other theorists well known outside of Germany, such as Gustav Britsch and Heinrich Wölfflin (Andersen, 1962:395; Mundt, 1959:305).

⁷ The original German title of this publication is *Ueber die Beurteilung von Werken der bildenden Kunst*.

According to Fiedler, artistic activity is an independent and self-governed activity that develops out of the artistic consciousness (1957:61). This consciousness, he states, is the realisation of the world in the human mind as it relates to visual appearances. It emerges when visual experience is of exclusive importance – a moment in which all other senses step back as it moves into this position of primacy.⁸ By *necessity*, writes Fiedler, the artist constantly produces a consciousness that induces artistic activity and leads to the creation of artworks (1957:51). To put it another way, what Fiedler suggests is that for the artist, the world is but a thing of appearances, conveyed through visual perception, that must be approached, grasped and finally transformed through artistic activity (1957:35).

It is the activity of the artist, argues Fiedler, and not the production of artworks that is significant. The artistic act is a result in itself (Fiedler, 1957:52); it is not a mere pastime designed to produce artworks. While the end result (the artwork) is also meaningful, I would like to argue that the product of artistic activity has a different kind of value than the act of making itself.⁹ Thus, according to Fiedler, it is only through the artistic consciousness that humankind can fully comprehend the visible world in all its abundance and complexity (1957:54). To various degrees, he states, everyone possesses this consciousness, but it is only through the presence and development of a “powerful imagination with its indefatigable and sharp activity” that the inexhaustibility and changefulness of appearances can be accessed (Fiedler, 1957:27-28, 47).¹⁰ Thus, while many take for granted this seemingly simple and

⁸ According to Fiedler, only the independent and free development of visual perception can bring about this artistic consciousness and its effects (1957:27). In particular, he distinguishes it from other kinds of pictorial processes that are directed by conceptual thinking and mechanical, calculated rules. Such processes, he writes, exclude actual perceptual experience and impede the development of an individual's own “visual knowledge” (Fiedler, 1957:39), often resulting in pictorial mannerisms and sometimes even creative sterility (Shaefer-Simmern in Fiedler, 1957:xv-xvii). It is an essential characteristic of the artist's nature to be talented in this first mode of comprehension. Artistic activity is thus the free use of this ability – an ability through which one can approach infinite possibilities towards the visual comprehension of the world (Fiedler, 1957:41).

⁹ This will be considered in the following section where I look at the transformative power of works of art as well as the viewer.

¹⁰ Fiedler proposes that artistic activity enables artists to grasp or feel things as visual wholes rather than as a collection of separate qualities (such as ‘beautiful’, ‘hard’ or ‘reflective’, for example). Their relation to what is being perceived is both immediate and general, after which they can distinguish and extract its individual properties (Fiedler, 1957:28). Fiedler refers to this formative aspect of the artist's activity as ‘Gestalt-formation’, a term that is likewise used in the description of artworks that visually realise the conceptual Gestalt-forming process (1957:76).

unclear visual realm, for Fiedler it is in the very struggle to comprehend this “twisted mass” of the visible and give it creative form that the will to create lies (1957:48).

Drawing on Fiedler’s writings, artistic activity may be understood as a method by which an artist is able to comprehend the chaos of raw ‘information’ in and around her or him and then piece it together in such a way that it ‘makes sense’. Shifting the focus of Fiedler’s theory slightly, I seek to argue that regardless of the source of the inspiration – visual, audible or corporeal, for instance – or the form that the resulting artwork might take, artists make *by necessity*, the meaning found in this very action. By this I mean that artistic activity operates ‘in totality’. It entails a relational engagement with the various components that comprise the artwork. It is a visual realisation that is clear in all its parts – something with a “complete, necessary existence” (Fiedler, 1957:58). In other words, all parts only receive their artistic meaning in accordance with their interfunctional relationship to the whole (Shaefer-Simmern in Fiedler, 1957:vii, xvi). Through the act of making a work of art, it is thus a particular kind of knowledge and understanding that is afforded to the artist. However, this is not to imply that art making is a rational or logical process, nor that the artwork itself (the ‘what is made’) is the outcome of a series of similarly strategic decisions. Rather, it is a wholly personal endeavour in which the subjectivity of the artist is implicated as much as the external world from which her or his materials and inspiration are drawn.

As this artistic knowledge develops and expands through the process of making, artists are enabled to make more. To put it another way, art making is also generative and transformative. According to Fiedler, the “realm of appearance” (1957:54) develops infinitely before the artist because it grows out of activity. And this activity is “ceaseless” because the more the artist gives creative form to the “shapeless mass” of the visible, the more the limits of the visible world diminish, exciting an even greater profusion of appearances and further activity (Fiedler, 1957:54, 57). However, while this activity is ongoing, it is also only momentary and fleeting. Fiedler states that the “clarity” – in other words understanding – afforded through making cannot be fixed but must be recreated over and over again, not in the same way but completely anew (1957:52-53). This is because the process of making an artwork is not a mechanical form of production but is completely creative,

demanding a constant process of reflection and re-evaluation. In a later section, I will look more closely at *Of Lift II* and consider how a reflexive look at the making process generates its own momentum. At this point, I shall leave this introductory concern with artistic production to explore the finer details of *viewing* a work of art.

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With black ink and a soft-bristled brush, I observe the ink deposits on the newsprint and transfer these onto wooden blocks. With sharpened tools, I cut away the negative space. Shavings of wood collect on the table surface, and a fine dust hovers in the air. I gather up the debris. The table is cleaned and the silk cut. I prepare the ink for the roll-up. Each wood block is adjoined with runners to stop the ink from bleeding into the more delicately carved areas. Strips of cotton paper are placed on the back of the silk sheets to stop the ink from bleeding onto the press blankets. A ghost image is pulled between each print to stop the ink from bleeding.

AN ARTISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Of course, only the artist is aware of what takes place during the act of making and even then only in part. If for the artist the 'value' of a work of art lies in its making, how can the activity be accessed outside of this privileged position? In this and following sections, I will consider the kind of knowledge that artworks afford to the viewer rather than the maker of an artwork. However, the kind of viewing addressed here is one reined in by particular 'parameters' as outlined by Fiedler. In particular, Fiedler suggests that artworks must be viewed in terms of the specific interests of the artist (cited in Abrahamson, 1991:22). "An understanding of art", Fiedler writes, "can be grasped in no other way than in terms of art" (1957:27). It is this approach to viewing art that Fiedler unambiguously refers to as the "artistic point of view"¹¹ (1957:23) – a concept that will be examined and adapted to reflect on the transformative power of works of art as well as the viewer.

Before I draw on Fiedler's methodology, I would first like to address how he himself assesses its efficacy and the apparent difficulties behind what it actually means to fully 'understand' a work of art. Challenges to this objective begin with his conception of the artistic consciousness itself. According to Fiedler, this consciousness can never find complete outward expression. An artwork does not reveal the sum of an artist's creative activity; it is only a fragmented visible manifestation in a certain state of something that cannot be totally expressed (Fiedler, 1957:64). Similarly, although artworks operate as visual records of artistic cognition, they too diminish as they succumb to the "accidents of time and place" (Fiedler, 1957:65). While some deteriorate faster than others, essentially "[m]an's works follow him into the grave" (Fiedler, 1957:65). Even at the height of their existence, artworks are only shadows of what they were to the artist during their creation. As a result, an artwork can only be considered to be really 'alive' when wrought in the beating energy of artist activity (Fiedler, 1957:65). Only for the artist does the artwork (or rather its making) have its highest meaning – a meaning that is, further still, only momentary (Fiedler, 1957:57).

¹¹ Hildebrand also writes of the "artistic viewpoint" (1907:19) in his own work *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture* (1907).

Thus, Fiedler admits, a work of art is fundamentally “unfathomable” because no one, not even the artist, can recall to it that essentially fragmented and transient ‘life’ (1957:66).

It may be argued that Fiedler’s methodology is untenable because it endeavours to permeate the essentially impermeable. However, Fiedler does not pretend to this degree of acumen. What he is suggesting is something far broader. These inflections have been included to address, firstly, the intuitive and multilateral nature of artistic practice and, secondly, how the word ‘understanding’ is not being implied. While attempts to make sense of artworks have often asked the simple question of ‘what does it mean?’, Fiedler’s approach underscores the subtle inflections and even incomprehensible attributes of a work of art that exist outside any kind of rational method of analysis. To cite Joseph Beuys, “Art is not there simply to be understood, or we would have no need of art. It could then be just logical sentences in the form of a text, for instance” (cited in Tisdall, 1979:141).

Following these insights into the difficulty in describing, translating and generally making sense of artistic production and its products, I thus attempt to relate my own process of making in my own terms and via concepts of a ‘personal and objective’ and ‘relational’ approach.

A PERSONAL AND OBJECTIVE APPROACH

In his writings, Fiedler argues first and foremost for an approach to works of art that is completely and utterly personal. To illustrate this, he suggests that “[e]very acquired insight becomes an obstacle to understanding as soon as it assumes the character of finality and is hardened in some rule or regulation” (Fiedler, 1957:73). A “real understanding” of a work of art can thus, in Fiedler's view, only be gained by engaging with it in and of itself rather than via any kind of fixed methodological analysis (1957:1, 25).

Since the late 19th century, the term ‘art’ has been increasingly recognised as very broad. Today it would be incredible to imagine that any single mode of engagement can be set as the general measure – the be all and end all of viewing and making sense of artistic outcomes. Wilhelm Worringer articulates this view in his dissertation *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908):

[E]veryone accustomed to pay heed to his inner experiences... will be inclined to regret the attempt to link together things of such diverse kinds with the great, nebulous word art, and the habit of approaching them all with the same apparatus of artistic terms and epithets of value. As though each one of these utterly disparate forms of artistic expression did not demand its own terminology, which leads to absurdities when applied to the others. Upon any man who possesses a feeling for purity in these questions of inner experience, such conduct on the part of believers in art must seem almost like dishonesty, and it will confirm his suspicion that a great deal of mischief is wrought with the group of letters that spell ‘art’ (1953:30).

In a similar vein to Fiedler, Worringer thus indicates how the means to engage with works of art are almost as innumerable as there are artworks and interpretations of the word itself. For Fiedler, this means that engagement must follow the actual activity of the artist and not precede it (1957:73). It is in this way that Fiedler's proposed methodology may be understood as ‘objective’ in the sense that the method that he suggests does not divert attention away from the “artistic data” – in other words, everything that comprises the work of art itself (Fiedler, 1957:16, 18).¹² He distinguishes this approach from others that are only concerned with very specific aspects that constitute works of art or external conditions or interests related to them (for example, questions of aesthetics, historical or cultural studies, philosophical

¹² Fiedler himself designates his method as an ‘objective’ one (1957:69).

inquests or technical proficiency). Of course, it goes without saying that the kind of knowledge produced through more traditional modes of enquiry is significant and meaningful. The material point that Fiedler is trying to make is that these perspectives essentially serve different ends to his own. They should not be used to further the development of "artistic insight" or an appreciation of "artistic values" (Fiedler, 1957:14, 22) because they are only able to fulfil their respective interests according to predetermined criteria.

Alternatively, to consider an artwork from an artistic standpoint is to focus only on the activity of the artist and the artistic 'facts' as they are found in the work at hand. It is a form of engagement that distinguishes an artwork as the product of a very specific type of activity that represents a particular achievement of cognition (Fiedler, 1957:35). By adopting a perspective that is attuned to the perspective of the artist, it becomes possible to access the artist's activity – what Fiedler identifies as the very essence of a work of art. In effect, by donning a simultaneously personal and objective approach to an artwork (the product of artistic activity), the viewer is able to 'recreate' the critical moment and force of the act of making. Although this is not a literal recreation, it does enable the viewer to come closer to it and, by doing so, attain 'real understanding' of the artwork and the artistic process. That is, a kind of creative empathy with the artist.

According to Fiedler, the kind of engagement outlined above is instrumental in our education as it enables us to develop our own cognitive facilities in a way that nothing else but art can (1957:67). Beuys similarly states that art cannot and should not be understood in the purely "intellectual sense" (i.e. what does it mean?) but rather through a kind of 'placing' or 'standing in' where "art enters into the person and the person enters into the work of art" (Club 2, 1983). Art enables an advancement in our creative faculties (such as intuition, inspiration and imagination) by way of the senses, wherein they become "sharper, better, richer and much more potent" (Club 2, 1983).

Ultimately, what Fiedler endeavours to do is make art an autonomous activity that is able to function on its own terms and "found in no other way than [from] out of its own [self]" (Betzler cited in Abrahamson, 1991:27). Yet, any claims to objectivity are

difficult (if not impossible) to ratify. Today, it is generally understood that to regard an artwork objectively is an incredible notion because each viewer brings with her or his own subjective experience and knowledge. As a result, both the viewer *and* the artwork are transformed through the engagement. Fiedler's treatise does not give enough agency to the viewer, who by this time was already acknowledged not only as an interpreter but as an active agent in the life of a work of art. Beuys' statement already hints at this more formative role. Duchamp likewise talks about a kind of "aesthetic osmosis", stating that the creative act is not performed by the artist alone but is transmuted to the viewer who brings the work into contact with the external world through the act of interpretation (cited in Schwarz, 1969:195-196).

Thus, while Fiedler's approach does not wholly embrace the active role of the viewer, I believe that the immediacy and lucidity of his arguments surrounding the 'personal and objective' viewing of artworks still hold weight. He endeavours to bring the activity of the artist to the fore for the viewer through a mode of enquiry that focuses solely on the work at hand. His methodology appraises works of art just as *such* rather than intellectualising or arrogating them into obscurity or insignificance in the service of academic, commercial or philosophical interests, for instance. Nor are individual properties regarded in isolation, ultimately rendering an artwork meaningless or masking its inconsistencies and giving intellectual competence to what is otherwise an essentially 'bad', thoughtless or 'hollow' work. The amount of information that we acquire as viewers is wholly dependent on the productive power of our own minds, through which we can realise our own creative potential.

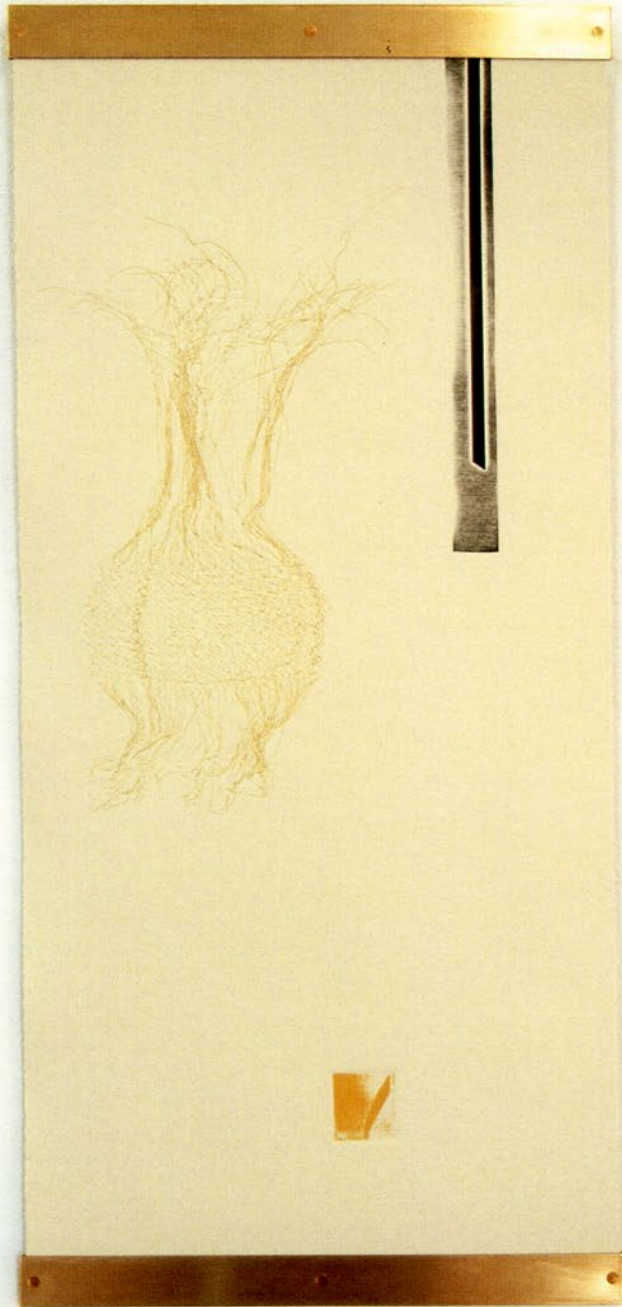


Figure 2. Jessica Staple, *Onion Skin*. 2016. Brass relief print on Fabriano paper and brass hanging apparatus, 73 x 33 cm. Monoprint.

A RELATIONAL APPROACH

Alongside the personal and objective standpoint towards a work of art outlined by Fiedler, there should likewise be one that is 'relational'. As stated above, an essential feature of the artist's activity is the production of an artwork that is complete and in which all of its parts play a necessary role, the significance of each only attained through its interfunctional relationship to the whole (Fiedler, 1957:58). But Fiedler argues that by adopting an artistic point of view, the viewer perceives an artwork with a similar relational attitude in turn. What he proposes is an objective, holistic approach to works of art that considers the overall artistic form and how it has been wrought through the creative power of the artist (Abrahamson, 1980:15; Abrahamson, 1991:23) – in other words, empathetic to the activity of the artist. In short, as viewers we should engage only with what we draw out of the artwork itself and engage with all the present elements in relation to one another.¹³

However, an artwork can never be made nor engaged with within such narrow limits. Art making also entails a relational process that extends beyond its immediate constituents. More specifically, a work of art is also produced in relation to the character of the media and environment in which it is created, the works that preceded it, the space(s) in which it is or will be experienced as well as the broader context of time and place, not to mention the subjectivity of the artist and the viewer, who also plays a productive role in meaning making. Although this outlook may seem quite broad and thus appears to contradict the more narrow approaches established in the previous sections, there remains an internal 'logic' or internal 'structure' that I feel is inherent to the making process and the resultant artworks. It is this that the viewer should *primarily* respond to. However, many other elements factor into the engagement as well, regarding which I will venture a few remarks.

¹³ Fiedler does not explicitly name or define all of the so-called 'data'. Instead, he refers to the various components that make up the work of art in general, including 'form', 'content' and 'media'. Similarly, for this book, it seems impractical to put forward a fixed list of terminology as these concepts are highly subjective and can only be appreciated in relation to the theories or artworks that they comprise. As a result, it is impossible for them to be taken up unanimously or to be universally understood. Any method of engaging with an artwork must, in my view and in the view of this study, be flexible and relative. Thus, I defer from offering up a toolkit towards a formalist method of analysis – a decision I believe that Fiedler also would have felt to be prescriptive and thus contrary to the nature of his argument.

Concerning *Of Lift II*, the original scrap materials that inspired the artwork are literally a by-product of the act of making. In this work, the artist's activity becomes the content as it is the remaking of necessary albeit standard 'scraps' of the printing procedure that is amplified. However, while the work is representational in that it directly re-presents these throwaway pieces of printmaking, the work is not about facsimile. Inasmuch as *Of Lift II* tells the story of its own making, it is informed by other narratives as well. I will specifically look at the means of production (i.e. the 'stories' of the media used to create the artwork), explain the greater practice of which it forms a part and introduce the stories that influence this practice and what they represent.¹⁴

The media chosen to produce *Of Lift II* were specifically guided by the history and traditions of printmaking. Redolent of the calligraphic brush marks found in Japanese artworks and textiles, the ink marks on the newsprint had a rather text-like quality. It was these characteristic marks on otherwise throwaway and discarded elements of the printing process to which I responded. These associations became a catalyst to essentially refabricate these 'scraps' in a manner partly determined by the historical techniques and materials evoked.

Both woodcut and stencilling (the earliest form of screen printing) have diverse and ancient origins, but both were significantly developed in China and Japan (Salter, 2001:9; Schwalbach & Schwalbach, 1981:9-10). The earliest relief prints were first made on silk and other valuable fabrics before the invention of paper in China in the second century (D'Arcy Hughes & Vernon-Morris, 2008:166; Eichenberg, 1976:34). The first cutting of actual images and characters into wood blocks took place during the T'ang Dynasty between the seventh and tenth centuries (Eichenberg, 1976:35). Stencilling processes were practised in China and Japan between 500 and 1000 AD. While many other rudimentary forms of stencilling existed long before, it was in these countries that it was developed to a high level of technical vigour (Schwalbach & Schwalbach, 1981:9). The Japanese cut elaborate stencils with floating parts, suspended in place with fine hairs or silk threads called 'bridges'. In the 18th century, stencilling developed into what is widely recognised as the forerunner of screen

¹⁴ The impact of time and place will be taken up at a later stage in relation to another body of work, namely that titled *The Glass Industry*.

printing today as Japanese artisans were able to create more durable stencils that took the shape of a complex grid system that eventually developed as the precursor to modern silkscreen printing (Schwalbach & Schwalbach, 1981:11). Only at the beginning of the 20th century, however, was silkscreen printing taken up in Western countries and rapidly developed into a commercial industry (Schwalbach & Schwalbach, 1981:11). As late as the 1950s it was acclaimed and accepted by the avant-garde, due to popular art movements and technological developments in the medium (Eichenberg, 1976:485). Eventually, the silk mesh was replaced with various synthetic options, such as nylon, and thus the technique took on the more inclusive title of 'screen printing'.

While drawing on this heritage, *Of Lift II* does not attempt to simulate the original newsprint scraps or the mark quality of the art forms that inspired it. Instead, the particular characteristics of the printmaking disciplines and materials used to produce the various components (such as the grain of the wood, the coarseness of the silk and the mis-registration during printing) were all attended to and thus played a formative role in the artwork's realisation. Of course, as with all printmaking processes, transformation accompanies the act of transference, and so these shifts were unavoidable.¹⁵

For myself, an artwork is never produced in isolation. Instead, each work that I produce follows various processes of thinking, experiencing and making that came before. With *Of Lift II*, this is most evident in the pieces that immediately preceded it, *Lift I* and *Lift II*, of which the latter is the final printed work from which the newsprint scraps were made. Unlike these causative connections to *Of Lift II*, other prior works likewise influenced or were subsequently informed by this work, either conceptually or in the physical processing.¹⁶ In order to explore these points of connection, I have selected a few works most akin to *Of Lift II* to substantiate my claim of the interrelated nature of producing artworks – a series of drawings and prints titled *The Graining Station* and, more particularly, a print titled *Onion Skin* (Figure 2).

¹⁵ While these attributes will not be discussed in any more detail here, they will be looked at more closely in a later section where I consider the relationship between drawing and printmaking.

¹⁶ It would be somewhat impossible (not to mention counterintuitive to the organic process of art making) to try and map out all the artworks, processes and other connection points not directly linked to *Of Lift II*.

Regarding *The Graining Station*, it was during the early phases of the series that some of the artworks included an onion-like form. While conducting research, I came across the term 'onion skin' that refers to a very fine, smooth and translucent kind of paper. I remembered this term again in 2016 while investigating ways to make paper. Although I never got round to producing this particular 'onion skin' paper, the actual pieces of onion skin as well as various pieces of plastic netting became the reference material for the artwork.

In terms of the actual making of the work, *Onion Skin* may be understood as the outcome of thinking about and physically processing the materials explored in *Of Lift II*. As with *Of Lift II*, the character and history of the media used to produce *Onion Skin* impressed themselves quite strongly, in this instance, etching and woodcut. What began as a simple exercise to find more durable materials with which to reproduce the plastic netting ultimately became an investigation of these media and the relationship between them. Following a few trial attempts, I selected a fine brass wire with which to make the netting. Around the same time, I discovered some old commercial relief print blocks comprised of plastic plates attached to wooden bases. Using various print techniques, I chose to remake some of the plates in brass as this material closely resembled the colour and metallic lustre of the plastic. During printing, however, the brass plates were not treated as intaglio plates but were inked up in the same way the relief blocks might have been.¹⁷ While the brass netting and plates were not intended to be part of the same final artwork, this material investigation drove the various elements to eventually come together. Once the connection between the media and the processes of making had become definite, I finally ran the brass mesh through the press to flatten and subsequently treat it as a relief plate. Everything down to the hanging mechanism for the concluding print was carefully considered: a hacksaw, various files and ferric chloride (the same tools used to fashion the plates from which it was made) were harnessed to finally display the work.

¹⁷ In other words, the ink was applied to the surface area of the plate using a roller instead of being forced into the grooves with a dabber tool or squeegee.

From the perspective of the viewer, most artworks are better 'understood' in relation to other works in an artist's practice as the accumulated meaning of the materials helps to uncover her or his system of thought (Tisdall, 1979:21). Joseph Beuys takes this idea even further, suggesting that not only artistic practice but the entirety of an artist's lived experience comes to bear on every artwork. Regarding one of his most well-known performances, *How to explain pictures to a dead hare*, he states,

[It] is the result of a life's long work, and the performance with the 'hare' is of course incomprehensible without counting the data from the beginning of my life on, so from my childhood on, which led to a point that at a certain place something appeared which looked very spontaneous (Club 2, 1983).

Of course, such detailed information is beyond comprehension. Not even the artist is aware of the myriad of influences that impress themselves during the making of an artwork. Nor can she or he afford to be too self-conscious about them. Even if one were to narrow down the scope of artistic influence to its most observable and direct factors, only some of these fragments could ever reach the viewer, who in addition brings with her or his own impressions. Generally speaking, most works of art will be considered 'in isolation' rather than in relation to other works created by the artist or any kind of biographical or contextual information - a life that is subject to change depending on the nature of the work (i.e. the durability of the materials that make it up) or where it is made resident (what it is exposed to). As stated by Fiedler, an artwork is, at bottom, unfathomable (1957:64), a complex and layered thing that cannot be unpacked and laid out as a series of distinctive or quantifiable elements.

While Fiedler's understanding of art speaks to the artwork as an unfathomable 'whole' that cannot be separated into singular or easily definable elements (1957:64), the details outlined with respect to *Of Lift II* are by no means superfluous. Nor is the question of whether or not the undercurrents of the work (or rather the investigative and material processes of its making) are something that should be ignored. Generally speaking, I feel that the 'external' material of an artwork should enhance but not 'make' it. By necessity, the viewer must narrow down her or his vantage point and focus first and foremost on the internal makeup of an artwork in order to see its substance. In other words, it is vital that the viewer attempt to follow the activity of the artist and look holistically at the available 'information' or 'data' (to use Fiedler's term) presented within the artwork.

In the case of *Of Lift II*, the work reflects the act of making, and the boundary between what is 'internal' and 'external' to the artwork becomes difficult to distinguish. Inasmuch as the artwork is intended to be 'autonomous' or 'self-sufficient', it is primarily shaped by and dependent on the narrative of the broader practice of which it forms a part – a narrative that is largely known only to the artist. It goes without saying that a work of this kind is best seen in relation to others that follow similar 'principles' and that an accompanying text would be necessary to sensitise viewers to these connections. This, however, is an ideal setting, and it is inevitable that during its lifetime, the artwork will lose this fundamental context, as it is often the case with many works of art.

Acknowledging then that certain works of art are significantly constituted by this ever-changing and impermanent external material, what then can be said of the approach of Fiedler and Beuys advocated thus far? In what way does it still stand? Can we engage with the various elements of an artwork if we do not even know what they are or if they are implicated in so much else beyond our reckoning? Is it even possible to consider an artwork out of the context in which it was produced or the purpose for which it was intended? Of course, there are no simple answers to these questions, if answers are to be found at all.

Despite the sometimes inaccessible nature of art, it is my belief that artworks – even those that are perceived as somewhat 'obscure' – should not simply be deemed as inaccessible or their meaning non-negotiable. Art is not there to be understood in the purely intellectual, rational sense of the word (Club 2, 1983), nor does it merely restate what is known or given. Rather, art questions and incites questioning, and it enables a type of engagement that may result in the growth of our other creative faculties (Club 2, 1983). I argue that if we follow the internal structure of an artwork (regardless of the names that we give to its various elements), this engagement is productive without being prescriptive.

As far as possible, a viewer should be prompted to look at the work, really look, so that the impressions drawn are based on, to use an old adage, what we see and not what we know. Only in that way can knowledge grow and not merely reproduce itself. Similarly, the contextual specificity of works of art means that many artworks cannot

exist without the environment for or in which they were created. Outside of this realm of production, they may appear quite artificial and fundamentally lose their meaning. Although this displacement may be a quite forceful product of an act of appropriation (rather than, for instance, an outcome of the mere passing of time), the question remains how we can engage with a work of art under such circumstances.

To conclude this array of questioning, perhaps it is best to say that to engage with any work of art is to be 'mindful'. While the viewer will always have a productive role to play in the life of an artwork, this engagement should never be premeditated. Instead, the open-endedness should be appreciated as a necessary characteristic of art; an artwork cannot and should not be made quantifiable or become too didactic but should remain flexible and relative. Thus, despite the necessary spatial and timely framing of the viewing engagement, as a viewer one should endeavour, as far as possible, to keep in mind that the work one considers is but a fragment of a larger whole and thus merely a part of a much bigger picture.

THE LANGUAGE OF MYTH

At this point, I shall introduce the stories that influence my practice that I have broadly titled as 'Stories of the Underworld-Otherworld'. Specifically, I look at the language of myth and how it is characterised by themes of creation and transformation. To reiterate, this language cannot be a substitute for the act of artistic activity, nor do the artworks serve to illustrate the stories included in this book. However, the creative language of storytelling speaks to the process of artistic creation in a way that I find fitting and meaningful, like a poetic glass through which certain things become visible and may be made known.

Myths speak to people's longing for meaning. They permeate every culture, giving insight into the mysteries of life, from the origin of consciousness to the end of the world as well as our own human nature (Parker & Stanton, 2003:10, 12). The language of myth, according to Janet Parker and Julie Stanton, enables us to grapple with those questions that cannot be dealt with via a theoretical framework or through empirical study (2003:10). Likewise, it is impossible to explain myths in purely rational terms. They do not limit our engagement with the world to statistically quantifiable facts and figures, nor do they limit us to even one single world or reality. Rather, they allow different worlds and worldviews to intersect – be these human, godly, animal or object (Parker & Stanton, 2003:12). As a result, myths cannot be measured along lines of linear time nor located in a particular place. The mythic space collapses and merges the real with the imaginary, the ordinary with the spectacular and the contemporary with the ancient. These qualities are inherent not only to myths but also folklore and fairy tales. In fact, most fictional tales of this kind possess certain mythic qualities that likewise keep them versatile and fluid, and thus durable.

With mythology, some cultures treat the words as sacred and memorise them fastidiously (Parker & Stanton, 2003:11). Yet, as it is with all stories, 'correct' versions rarely exist. Changes effected through time and location are inevitable, and most storytellers enjoy varying elements of the stories that they tell as their listeners likewise enjoy variations as part of the listening experience. But the variability of stories does not solely lie in this wish to alter and amend. The variability of a single

tale also largely occurs because myths and other forms of ancient stories existed long before the invention of writing. Indeed, it was only with the induction of the printing press that stories could be written down and dispersed to a wider audience in any single form (Parker & Stanton, 2003:11). The advent of radio, television, film and video brought even more "fixed-form stories" (Parker & Stanton, 2003:13) that discouraged the art of retelling and thus remaking stories over and over again. Thus, as far as mythology is concerned, the creation of new myths declined as a result of this 'fixing' (Parker & Stanton, 2003:13). Yet, words are not the only medium for transmitting myths, and these technological developments do not imply the end of myth making. Myths still provide endless creative source material for a 21st century audience and contemporary forms of storytelling and can thus live again as fresh reimaginings (Parker & Stanton, 2003:10, 11). While the oral and textual form may be widely understood as the traditional vehicle for storytelling, I contend that various other art forms can capture and perhaps even better express the 'feeling' of the myth – whether the artist is operating in her or his own cultural setting or from 'a distance'.

This process of retelling and thus refabricating is essentially a kind of transformation – one that helps keep stories alive. Yet, from a different vantage point, this process can also be viewed as detrimental. Looking at stories from the African oral tradition in particular, one sees that there is such a dramatic shift from the performance of storytelling to the written word that these stories arguably lose their very essence.¹⁸ Even with the advantages of modern-day communication and recording technologies, Harold Scheub suggests that collecting stories from the oral tradition remains a challenge due to the complexity of the storytelling performance (2005:xiii). It is not only the words that are important; they are merely a script (Scheub, 2005:xiii).

Any gifted storyteller and appreciative listener can attest to the fact that great storytelling is a creative act, a complex arrangement of many different elements. The best storytellers are not those who only have good memories but those who are able

¹⁸ African tales belong to the oral tradition, meaning that they are verbally passed down from generation to generation. There is no unified African mythology (Duane, 1998:8), which is not surprising given the vastness of the continent, the diversity of its people and its radical history of war, migration, slavery and colonialism. Most written accounts, intended for Western readers, only came into existence at the beginning of the 20th century when missionaries, anthropologists and colonial officials began to make records of what they had seen and heard (Duane, 1998:8).

to use their memory as a creative source while bringing new life and originality to the stories. All storytellers begin with the mere skeletal structure – the bones of the tale – to which they add the flesh and, if particularly skilled, the spirit of their creativity and contemporaneity (Scheub, 2005:xv-xvi). Thus, there is never one version of the tale, nor can each particular account ever be created in the same way again. Following this understanding of the complexities that underwrite storytelling, both the actual body and the voice of the storyteller play a crucial role in the delivery of the story. So too does the relationship between the storyteller and her or his audience. Here, like with the viewers of an artwork, the audience plays an active role in the making of a tale and thus the very process of storytelling (Scheub, 2005:xiii, xiv).

To complicate the act further, there is the problem of translation. This does not only refer to the difficulties that come with translating a tale from one language to another. A major issue is transforming what is essentially a verbal and visual performance into the written word (Scheub, 2005:xv). The stillness and linear structure of a written piece effects a profound loss of fluidity in the story, which is characteristic of the oral tradition (Scheub, 2005:xv). Characteristic also is what Scheub describes as the 'musicality' of the performance (2005:xvii), whereby the setting likewise brings its own ambience in the way of local sounds. As a literary piece, a story becomes completely removed from its historical and cultural context (Scheub, 2005:xiv), arguably taking with it its very soul.

Inasmuch as works of art might depend on their context for their meaning, so too do stories. Like artworks, stories should not be looked at in isolation but as a part of a much bigger whole, one made up of many others. While the loss of context and connectedness with other tales needs to be kept in mind, each story undeniably retains its own personality and can still be appreciated by a sensitive and receptive reader. It is here where I would like to introduce the following Ashanti creation myth, "How Abosom, the Lesser Gods, Came into the World", as it impressed itself on the making of several works, most notably *Of Lift II* and *Onion Skin* discussed above. While neither of the artworks aims to illustrate this particular tale, they express something of its character better than the above theoretical account can do alone.

HOW ABOSOM, THE LESSER GODS, CAME INTO THE WORLD¹⁹

There once was a woman who had eleven children. Every day when she prepared food the children ate it all and she did not get any of it. She pondered over the matter and decided to go and speak with the silk-cotton tree. She said to the tree, "I shall send my eleven children to come beneath you here to pluck pumpkins; and when they come, pluck off eleven of your branches and kill them."

To which the tree replied, "I have heard, and I shall do it for you."

The woman went home and said to her children, "You must go to the plantation beneath the silk-cotton tree; there are pumpkins there. Go pick them and come back." The children set off. When they reached the silk-cotton tree, Number Eleven said, "Number One, stand still; Number Two, stand still; Number Three, stand still; Number Four, stand still; Number Five, stand still; Number Six, stand still; Number Seven, stand still; Number Eight, stand still; Number Nine, stand still; Number Ten, stand still; and I myself, Number Eleven, I have stood still."

Number Eleven then said, "Do you know why Mother said we must go and pick pumpkins?"

"No", answered his brothers.

"She has told the silk-cotton tree to pluck off his branches and beat us. All of you, cut sticks and throw them against the tree."

They all threw sticks at the tree. Pim! pen! pim! pen! was the sound they made. The silk-cotton tree supposed that the children had come, and he took off eleven of his branches and let them fall to the ground.

"You see?" said Number Eleven. "If we had gone there the silk-cotton tree would have killed us."

The children picked up the pumpkins and took them to their mother. She cooked them, and at once the children ate everything.

"Ah!" she said. "I cannot bear this any longer. I shall give these children to the sky-god."

¹⁹ This version of "How Abosom, the Lesser Gods, Came into the World" has been cited from Paul Radin's *African Folktales* (1970:36-40).

The next morning, when things became visible, the woman went and told the sky-god about her troubles, saying, "My children eat so fast and so much that when I wish to eat, I cannot get anything. Hunger is killing me. Therefore, I implore you, let the children be brought and killed, so that I may get something to eat."

The sky-god agreed to her request. He ordered his messengers to go and dig a large pit and put broken bottles inside it. The sky-god himself put a snake and a leopard in the pit and covered it. The messengers went to call the children.

When they reached the place where the pit lay, Number Eleven said to his brothers, "You may pass here, but you must not pass there."

"Why?" they asked. "Why must we pass through the bush, when a wide path lies there?"

As they walked, Number Eleven said, "Throw one of your clubs upon the path."

They threw a club onto the path, and it fell through into the pit. Yiridi! was the sound of its fall.

"There you are!" said Number Eleven. "Had we passed there, we would have died." So they took a bypath and went off to meet the sky-god.

The sky-god had arranged for holes to be dug, covered over and stools placed upon them so that when the children came to sit on them, they would fall into the holes. Soon the children stood before the sky-god.

He said: "Stools are set there. You may go and be seated upon them."

To which Number Eleven replied, "Who are we that we should be able to sit upon such very beautiful stools? So, sire, we are going to sit aside here."

The sky-god thought to himself, "I shall send these children to Death's village."

The next morning, when things became visible, the sky-god called the children and said,

"You must go to Death who lives yonder and receive from her a golden pipe, a golden chewing-stick, a golden snuffbox, a golden whetstone, and a golden fly-switch."

So the children set out for Death's village.

When they arrived there, Death said, "Why, when no one must ever come here, have you come here?"

"We were roaming about and came here quite by chance", they replied.

Death had ten children. When things began to disappear, Death gave each of her own children one of the visiting children, while she herself and Number Eleven went to rest. When it was dark, Death lit up her teeth until they shone red so that she might seize Number Eleven with them.

Number Eleven said, "Death, I am not yet asleep."

"When will you be asleep?" she asked.

"If you were to give me a golden pipe to smoke for a while, I might fall asleep."

And so Death fetched it for him. A little while later, Death again lit up her teeth, but again Number Eleven said, "Death, I am not yet asleep."

"When will you be asleep?" she asked.

"If you were to bring me a golden snuffbox, I might go to sleep."

And so Death brought it to him.

Soon afterwards, Death tried yet again to seize Number Eleven, but he was still not yet asleep. "When will you be asleep?" she asked.

"If you were to fetch a golden chewing-stick for me, I might fall asleep."

And so Death fetched it for him.

A short time passed, and Death was about to seize Number Eleven, when he said, "Grandmother, I am not yet asleep."

"Then when will you be asleep?" she asked.

"Grandmother, if you were to bring me a golden whetstone, I might sleep."

And so Death went and brought it. Again Death rose up to eat the child, but again Number Eleven said that he was not yet asleep. "And when will be the day you sleep?" she said.

"If you were to go and take a calabash full of holes and go and splash water in it and boil some food for me to eat, then I might sleep."

And so Death lifted up a strainer and went off to the stream. When she splashed the water into it, the holes in the strainer let it pass through.

Number Eleven said to his brothers, "Get up and run away!"

They rose up and fled, and Number Eleven placed plantain stems where they had lain and covered them over with cloths. While Death was at the stream, Male Death called out to her, saying, "Ho there, Death!"

"Adwo", she replied.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Alas, is it not some small child I have got! When I am about to catch him, he says, 'I am not yet asleep'. He has taken all my things, and now he says I must take a strainer and splash water."

"Are you a small child?" said Male Death. "If you pluck leaves and line the inside of the strainer and then splash water, would it not be all right?"

"Oh, how true!" she cried. So Death plucked leaves, placed them inside, splashed the water and then went off.

Number Eleven said, "Death, you have come already? Boil the food."

Death cooked the food and then lit up her teeth to kill Number Eleven's brothers. But Death did not examine the sleepers carefully, and she herself killed all her own children.

Early the next day, when things became visible, Death rose up and sat by the fire.

Number Eleven said, "Grandmother, a tsetse fly is sitting on your breast."

"Fetch the fly-switch which is lying there and kill it for me", she said.

"Good gracious me!" said Number Eleven. "A person of your consequence? When a tsetse fly settles on you a golden fly-switch must be used, not this old thing! Let me fetch the golden fly-switch and come and kill it."

And so Number Eleven went and brought the golden fly-switch, but he purposely did not kill the fly. He then went to fetch his bag in which lay all the golden things.

"Grandmother Death", he said, "I will not be satisfied until I have caught that tsetse fly, put it in this bag, and brought it to you."

He set off, and when he reached the end of the town, he said, "Ho, there, Grandmother Death! Pardon my saying so, but are you not a perfect fool. I have relieved you of all your things, helped my brothers to escape, and I have made you kill all your children."

"You, a child like this!" shouted Death. "Wherever you rest, there I shall rest!"

Number Eleven leaped, shouting "yiridi! yiridi! yiridi!", and Death chased him. Number Eleven soon overtook his brothers, who were sitting on the path building a bird-trap.

"Have you not gone yet?" said Number Eleven. "Death is coming, so let us find some way to escape."

Number Eleven took medicine and poured it on his brothers, and then they hid in the branches of a silk-cotton tree. Death had caught up with them and stood at the foot of the tree. She said, "I saw those children only a moment ago, but where have they gone?"

Number Eleven said to his brothers, "I am going to make water on her", and proceeded to urinate all over Death.

"Ah, there you are!" she cried. "Today you have seen trouble. You, child sitting up there, Kyere-he-ne, Kyere-he-ne!" and one of the children fell down. "Kyere-he-ne!" a second one fell down. Soon there remained only Number Eleven. Death said, "Child, Kyere-he-ne!", and Number Eleven leaped and descended onto the ground while Death climbed to the top of the silk-cotton tree.

Number Eleven said, "You, great big woman, you too, Kyere-he-ne!" Tum! She was dead.

Number Eleven then plucked medicine, rolled it between his palms and sprinkled it on his brothers. One by one they rose up. As Number Eleven threw the medicine away, some of it dropped onto Death and she too awoke and gave chase. Before them lay a big river in flood. Ten of the children swam across, but Number Eleven did not know how to swim. Instead, he turned himself into a stone. The other children cried and cried until their mouths became swollen up.

When Death reached the river, she said, "Oh, these children! Let me get a stone so that I can hit your swollen mouths!" She picked up a stone lying at her feet and threw it.

"Winds take me and set me on the other side", said the stone. It alighted on the other side and reappeared as Number Eleven.

"Ah, that child!" said Death. "All I have to say to you is this: Go home and change into one of the lesser gods. If anyone I wish to take comes to where you are, you must inform me. If I so desire, I will leave him and make you a present of him. But if I wish for something in exchange, you must receive it for me."

That is how the Abosom, the lesser gods, came into the world. They are the descendants of Number Eleven.

2 | THE GLASS INDUSTRY

Graphite

+

Ivory Black Acrylic
Titanium White "

Payne's Grey "

Burnt Umber "

Yellow Ochre "

Crimson "

Silver Ink

+

Textile Medium

+

Methylated Spirits

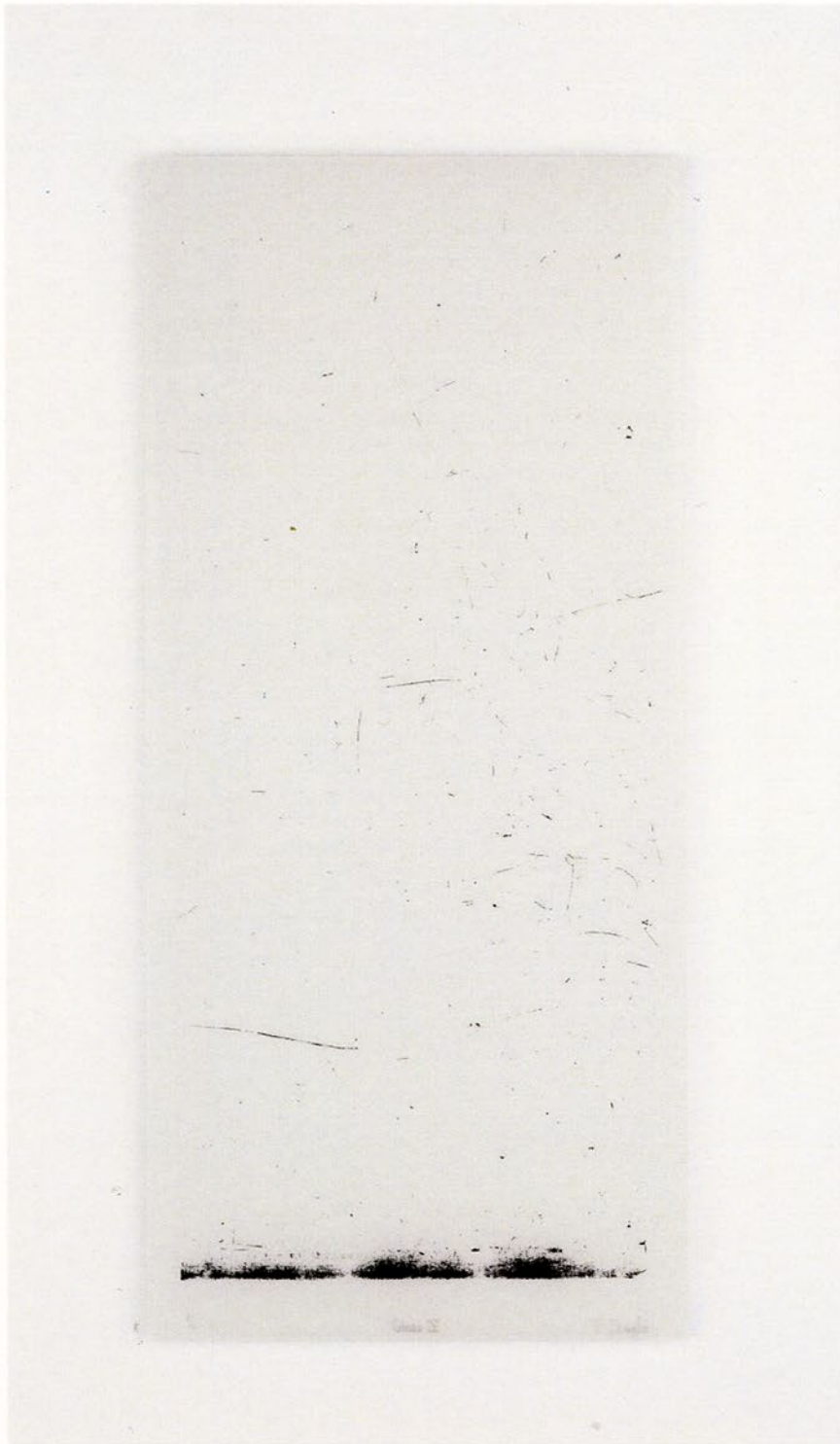


Figure 3. Jessica Staple, *The Glass Industry: Glass IV*. 2015. One-colour screen print on sandblasted glass, 42 x 19.2 cm. Monoprint.

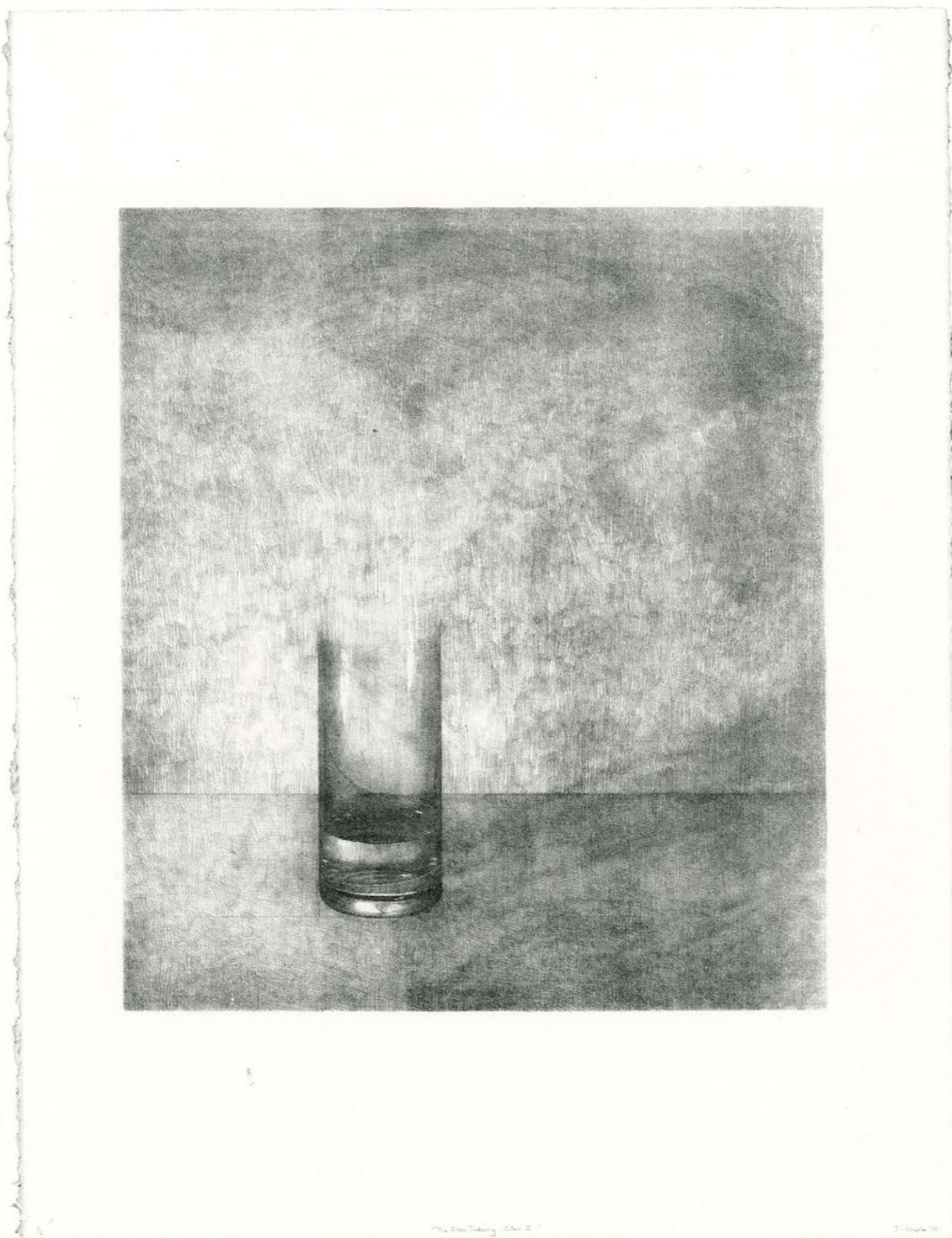


Figure 4. Jessica Staple, *The Glass Industry: Glass V*. 2015. One-colour stone lithograph on Arches paper, 76.5 x 57 cm. Edition of 2.

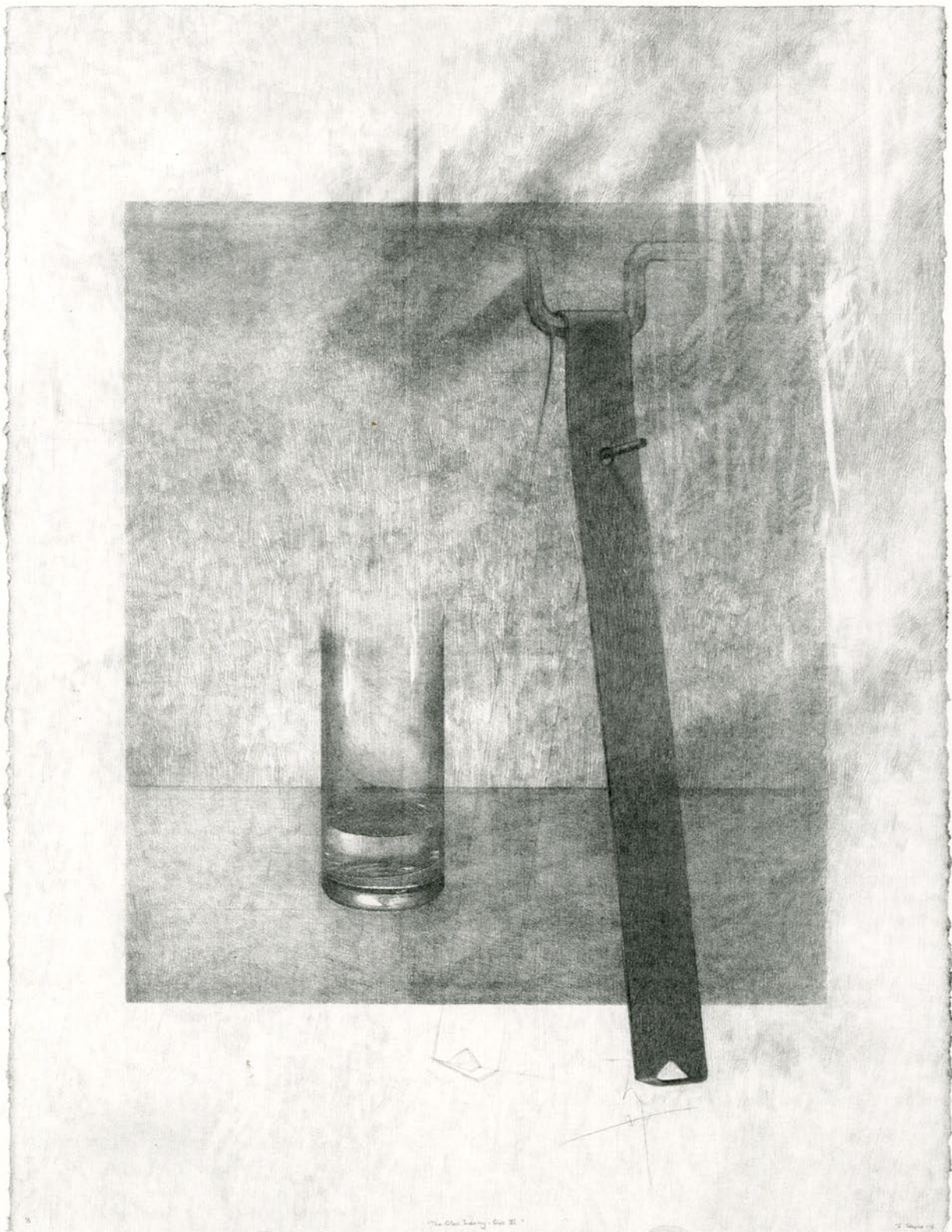


Figure 5. Jessica Staple, *The Glass Industry: Glass VI*. 2015. One-colour stone lithograph and graphite on Arches paper, 76.5 x 57 cm. Monoprint.

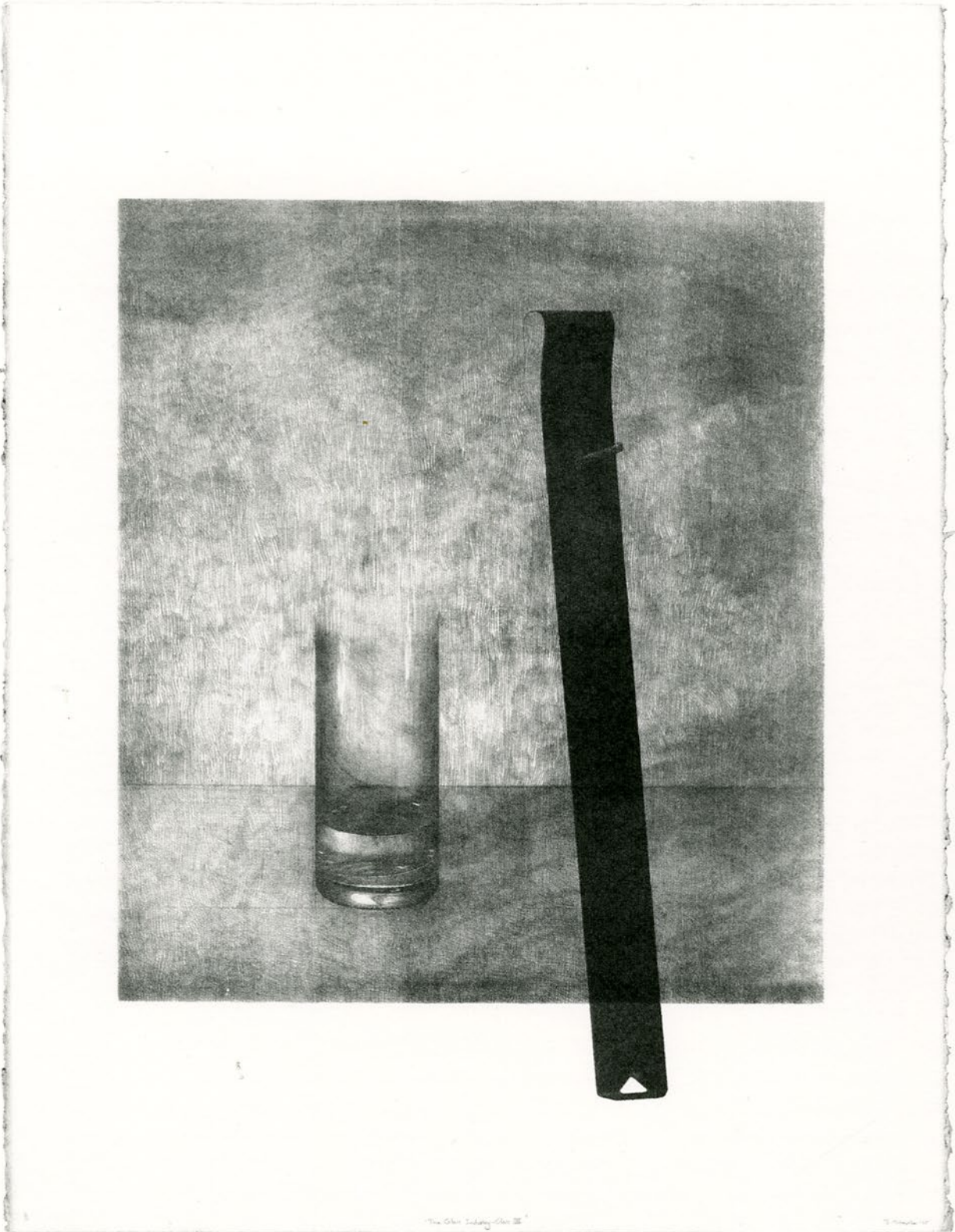


Figure 6. Jessica Staple, *The Glass Industry: Glass VII*. 2015. One-colour stone lithograph on Arches paper, 76.5 x 57 cm. Monoprint.

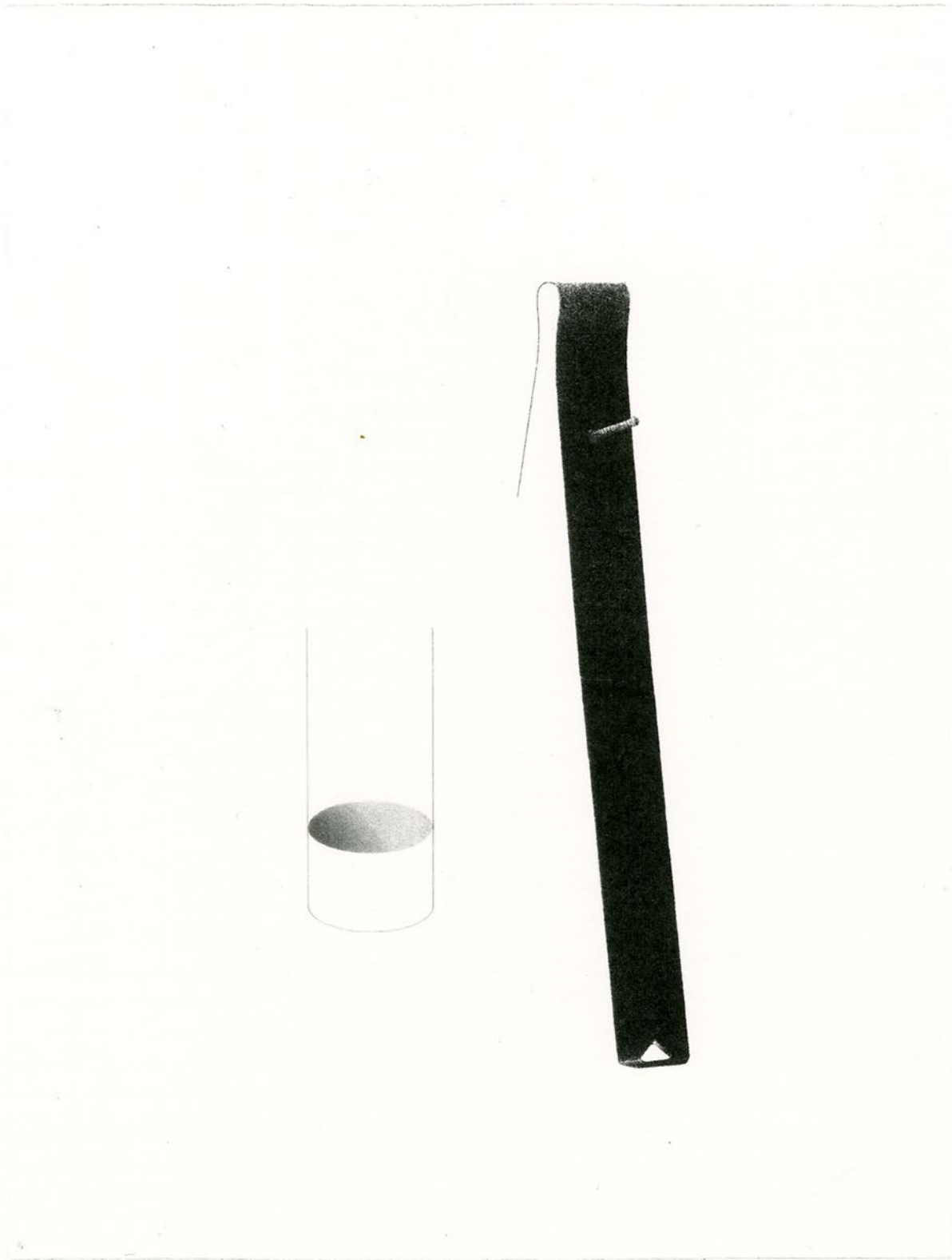


Figure 7. Jessica Staple. *The Glass Industry: Glass VIII*. 2015. One-colour stone lithograph and two-colour screen print on Arches paper, 76.5 x 57 cm. Edition of 3.

THE GLASS INDUSTRY

The Glass Industry is a series of drawings and prints that depicts a water glass and a jig in the intaglio studio.²⁰ The name derives in part from an earlier series of screen prints produced in 2013, *Glass I, II and III*. As with *Of Lift II*, *The Glass Industry* series grew out of a piece of scrap material that was the by-product in the making of another work. Specifically, this piece of scrap was a tracing paper offcut from a larger positive image used in the production of a screen print titled *14 January 2013*. The first work in the series, *Glass IV* (Figure 3), was created by screen printing an oil-based medium onto a sheet of sandblasted glass to suggest the semitransparent quality of the tracing paper. *Glass IV* subsequently led to *Glass V–VIII* (Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7), also using the tracing paper object as a starting point.

On further observing the offcut, a particular image of a water glass came to mind, and I drew this item out in graphite. *Glass V* thus began as series of drawings before it was resolved as a lithographic print. Responding to the graphite-like quality of the Senefelder's Crayon Black ink used to finally print *Glass V*, I selected one of the *Glass V* proof prints onto which I drew the jig, creating *Glass VI*. Before reaching this point in what was to be *The Glass Industry* series, I had produced additional observational studies of the jig in tandem with my exploration of the glass form. Taking the series back into print, I then printed the jig lithographically onto one of the other *Glass V* proof prints, thereby producing *Glass VII*.

It was only after engaging with the two forms of the glass and the jig over this period of time that I came to understand the qualities to which I had been drawn, namely the grim austerity of the steel jig and the stillness and fluidity of the glass. After coming to this realisation, I used a combination of lithographic and screen printing techniques to pare down both the glass and the jig to these characteristics,

²⁰ The jig is no longer in operation, but it was most likely used to hold an etching plate in place when the hard or soft grounds had to be darkened with smoke or heated in order to fix rosin powder to the surface for aquatinting.

culminating in *Glass VIII*. All lithographic prints were pulled from the same 50 x 60 cm light-grey stone²¹ that, unwittingly, came to bear quite strongly on the series. It is *The Glass Industry* that serves to frame the discussions that follow in this chapter.

²¹ Lithographic stones are graded according to their colour as the colour is an index of hardness. Dark-blue and blue-grey stones are the oldest and most compact whereas yellow or buff stones are soft and have an uneven density due to a higher proportion of various minerals. The light-blue or greyish stones in-between are the most desirable for hand lithography as they are hard enough to withstand strong etches but are also light enough in colour to reveal all the tonal values when creating an image (Devon, 2008:125).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF VISION AND WAYS OF SEEING

In the previous chapter, I looked at the relational form of engagement inherent to the artist's activity and how it is taken up by the viewer who follows this activity. I would like to expand on the various external materials that come to bear on the making of an artwork. In order to achieve this aim, I here consider Heinrich Wölfflin's theory of the development of vision and "ways of seeing" (1972), to borrow the phrase from John Berger, in his *Principles of Art History* (1915). More specifically, I engage with Wölfflin's notion that transformations in the artistic form are conditioned both externally and internally. In the following section, these ideas will be adapted to investigate the relationship between drawing and printmaking – the very processes used in the making of *The Glass Industry*. It is through these media that I argue that vision (and its development) is effected through a 'thoroughness of seeing' and a 'thoroughness of process'.

In the *Principles*, Wölfflin examines what he describes as the 'most general' or 'universal' forms of representation. He argues that the individual 'style' of an artist is intimately connected with that of the nation and the epoch in which she or he lives. Every artist, he states, finds certain "visual possibilities" before her or him to which she or he is bound. Not even the most original talent can proceed beyond these given limitations (Wölfflin, 1932:ix, 11). This is because some ideas and perspectives can only be realised at certain stages of development, including those that pertain to the visual appearance assumed by a work of art (Wölfflin, 1932:ix). Indeed, Wölfflin contends that vision itself has a history that can be mapped out as a timeline of "visual strata" (1932:11) that he aims to reduce to abstract principles or what he calls the "imaginative beholding" (1932:vii). This mode of perception, he argues, can be used to define the various periods in art history.

Wölfflin's method takes the shape of a formal analysis, conducted according to five opposing pairs that he terms the 'universal forms of representation'.²² These binaries

²² For Wölfflin, these limited divisions and contrasting pairs have been imposed for the sake of simplicity (1932:14). Thus, although his intent is classificatory, Wölfflin acknowledges that clear-cut definitions are essentially unproductive, if not impossible, as history is not linear but gradual, intersecting and cyclical (1932:vii, 14, 158, 235). Indeed, Wölfflin even regards period divisions as somewhat artificial.

include visual concepts of linear and painterly, plane and recession, closed and open form, multiplicity and unity, and clearness and unclearness.

Wölfflin does not enter into an inquiry of the changing subject matter of works of art, only the changes in form through which the content is realised (1932:16). He does not regard these changes as progressive but rather stresses that the distinctions of one era do not surpass those that follow (Wölfflin, 1932:16).²³ By outlining the formal shifts between periods, Wölfflin aims to demonstrate that people do not only see different things but also see differently. In other words, different epochs harbour different 'ways of seeing' that are (at least in part) affected by a change in worldview. As Wölfflin states,

[T]he content of the world does not crystallize for the beholder into an unchanging form. Or ... beholding is not just a mirror which always remains the same, but a living power of apprehension which has its own inward history and has passed through many stages (1932:226).

In other words, Wölfflin suggests that as our understanding of reality shifts, so too must the vessel through which it is made manifest (1932:229).²⁴ As a result, the personal temperament of the individual artist is bound up with the "tonality" of place and time (Wölfflin, 1932:6). Thus, while the forms characterising various periods display different conceptions of the world, this shift by no means represents a decline in 'quality' but rather shifts in the conception of form. Each perceptive mode should, following this, be regarded as a different 'type' and as capable of giving a "perfect picture of visible things" (Wölfflin, 1932:18).

Wölfflin's analysis deals specifically with the shifting visual form of actual artworks rather than the particular conditions that inspired these forms and changes. Of course, writes Wölfflin, no one would argue that the "'eye' passes through developments on its own account" or that a new visual perceptive mode would ever be selected at random (1932:17). Instead, the eye is both "[c]onditioned and conditioning, it always impinges on other spiritual spheres" (Wölfflin, 1932:17).

²³ Wölfflin focuses his analysis on the representative arts belonging to the 16th and 17th centuries, visually articulating their differences in over 100 drawings, paintings, sculptures and architectural structures. While Wölfflin's discussion considers art making practices of these bygone eras, his theories still prove useful for my investigation.

²⁴ The transition from Renaissance to Baroque, he argues, is just a particularly clear example of how a new zeitgeist compels a new form (Wölfflin, 1932:9).

For Wölfflin, it is clear that certain visual laws persist throughout nations and periods and that these laws and their adaptations are intelligible and decipherable.²⁵ Yet, while this statement on its own might impress a kind of absolutism, Wölfflin likewise leaves room for more subtle inflections. He stresses that the individual artist's unique understanding and development against the pervasive visual backdrop of her or his time are infinitely more important than anything that she or he takes from direct observation (1932:230). In addition, while the transformations in form that he describes suggest that an epoch's 'way of seeing' is externally conditioned, Wölfflin argues that shifts in how reality is seen are also driven by an *inward* necessity. The shift from tactile to visual or rigid to fluid, for instance, represents a rational psychological process – a natural logic that cannot be reversed (Wölfflin, 1932:17).

Taking up the crux of Wölfflin's argument, I think it goes without saying that an artist's practice is significantly impacted on by the space and time in which she or he is living, not to mention the artistic endeavours of her or his predecessors and peers. Yet, this influence is but one of a multitude that impact on the visual form that a work of art takes. By slightly narrowing down the concepts surrounding the development of vision and ways of seeing, the following section aims to investigate the relationship between drawing and printmaking. Specifically, I look at how a transformation in vision is achieved through a 'thoroughness of seeing' and a 'thoroughness of process' respectively prompted in drawing and printmaking.

²⁵ Wölfflin's theory would quite possibly be most objectionable to artists themselves who, as Wölfflin himself acknowledges, are hardly interested in questions of 'style' (1932:10). While the very term 'style' is considered to be "highly elastic" (Worringer, 1953:33), Hans von Marées, for instance, states that he was "learning to attach less and less value to schools and personalities in order only to keep in view the solution of the artistic problem" (cited in Wölfflin, 1932:10-11). In line with Fiedler's claims, the sculptor Hildebrand also argues that the historic viewpoint completely ignores real artistic content, stating that "it is as though a gardener were to let his plants grow under glass vases of different shapes and then ask our attention wholly to the strange forms thus produced, expecting us to forget entirely that the really important thing is the plant itself and its inner mode of life, concerning which these artificial effects of shape and size can give us no true information whatsoever" (1907:123). In opposition to such claims, Wölfflin contends that it is dilettantish to think that any artist could ever isolate her- or himself from her or his contemporaries and predecessors or remove her- or himself from those conditions that constitute the time in which she or he lives (1932:11, 230).

A THOROUGHNESS OF SEEING

According to Ernst K Mundt, thoroughness in the “exercise of seeing” was first championed by Fiedler and his contemporaries, who gave eminence to the visual sensibility (1959:302). I would like to expand on this theory to mean more a ‘thoroughness of engagement’ whereby ‘seeing’ is not connected with the visual faculty alone but is implicated in all our senses as well as thoughts and feelings.

Drawing enables an artist to understand and spatially make sense of those objects that she or he observes. This is because with drawing, it is fundamentally a ‘thoroughness of seeing’ that is practised. Before elaborating on this claim, I wish to unpack a broader comprehension of seeing as addressed in Kimon Nicolaïdes’ seminal text on drawing, *The Natural Way to Draw* (1972). Our understanding of an object, he writes, “is far from being identical with the projection of that object upon the retina of the eye” (Nicolaïdes, 1979:212). The subjectivity of the artist significantly and necessarily impresses itself on the object during the drawing process:

[D]rawing depends on seeing. Seeing depends on knowing. Knowing comes from a constant effort to encompass reality with all of your senses, all that is you. You are never to be concerned with appearances to an extent which prevents reality of content. It is necessary to rid yourself of the tyranny of the object as it appears. The quality of absoluteness, the note of authority, that the artist seeks depends upon a more complete understanding than the eyes alone can give. To what the eye can see the artists adds feeling and thought (Nicolaïdes, 1979:221).

It is only through this more comprehensive notion of ‘feeling’ and ‘thinking’ in relation to what the eye sees that it becomes possible to discover the less tangible qualities of an object’s form – in other words, what lies behind the appearance.

In addition to what we transpose through feeling and perceive through the senses, it is also “by the aid of [our] ideas that we see” (Hildebrand, 1907:44). Nicolaïdes states that forms do not have to be taken from the visible world only; they can also be expressions of our ideas and are thus borrowed from an invisible, internal realm (1979:212). Thus, the type of ‘felt’ engagement described by Nicolaïdes includes what he terms ‘gesture’. According to him, gesture is imperative as it is from gesture that all other aspects of a drawing proceed and through which it becomes possible to create form with meaning and life (Nicolaïdes, 1979:26, 29). In order to capture

gesture, a physical response is necessary (Nicolaïdes, 1979:24). That is, one must draw not what the thing looks like but what it is *doing* (Nicolaïdes, 1979:15). This is not to say that to create gesture is to give movement or action. Stationary things also have gesture. Rather, it is the character of that action (Nicolaïdes, 1979:29). As an example, Nicolaïdes writes that “[a] fish looks like a fish because of its capability for a certain kind of gesture or a certain kind of life” (1979:209). The challenge is to abstract from the fish that quality that is most ‘fish-like’ – its gesture (Nicolaïdes, 1979:209).

For myself, I find that it is chiefly through drawing that my ideas about what I study become known to me. This is not to imply that one must self-consciously ignore the visible reality of the world in favour of a wholly internal realm. Even a subjective study, Nicolaïdes writes, may bear a physical resemblance to the ‘model’ as it is informed by sensory experience and skilled observation (1979:212). But it is likewise impossible to deny subjective content completely as residual knowledge from past experiences always informs what we observe in the present moment (Nicolaïdes, 1979:72).

A ‘thoroughness of seeing’ in short implies a deeper knowledge of what is being observed and, through this, a greater self-knowledge or personal ways of seeing. In my own practice, I find that this thoroughness is most effectively realised through drawing. For one, the immediacy and speed of the autographic mark are highly responsive to the rapid and complex process of seeing. Seeing is not a methodical procedure in which the world is realised as a fixed and finished collection of shapes. As Fiedler states, what may initially appear as a composite whole becomes vague and incomplete – a collection of fleeting and disjointed fragments that must be pieced together as soon as we try to bring them closer (1887:51, 70, own translation). A drawing may thus be understood as a visual record of what is “always the result of an unrepeatable, momentary encounter” (Berger, 2003:419). For me, drawing best unpacks and makes sense of the convoluted process of observation and cognition as it has the ability to follow the rapid shifts in our understanding of

what we perceive and also, in its directness, to convey the subjectivity of the artist as she or he moves through the engagement.²⁶

Second, by fully engaging with a form through drawing, I better see and understand not only this form but others as well. Berger states that drawing affords a specific type of learning whereby “a line, an area of tone, is not really important because it records what you have seen, but because of what it will lead you on to see” (2003:10). Each mark made is a ‘stepping-stone’ to the next, and once the drawing is ‘complete’, we take this knowledge with us and simply begin from where we left off (Berger, 2003:10, 14). Thus, drawing does not function in isolation but increases the knowledge with which we observe the world around us (Nicolaiides, 1979:2).

Apart from what is learnt through the *act* of drawing, the tangible results of this action are also important. A drawing is a unique expression of our experience (Berger, 2003:14). It affords us a critical and clear ‘measure’ of the development of our understanding from which we can develop still further. This is because drawings reveal the structure of appearances and the process of their own making, the “experience of looking” (Berger, 2003:421-422). As a collection of glances coming together to form a totality, “it slowly questions an event’s appearance and in doing so reminds us that appearances are always a construction with a history” (Berger, 2003:421).²⁷ When seen as a series, drawings visualise our train of thought and may thus be understood to serve as a kind of autobiographical record of a visual engagement that enables a charting of the creative process. In this way, drawings also facilitate a development of vision on the part of the viewer. The structural, searching lines left by the artist invite the viewer to identify more with the artist and

²⁶ It should be noted that not all drawing enables this kind of seeing. According to Nicolaiides, to see in a way that is prescribed by a code of rules or a mechanical system stifles our impulses and creative development, and the resultant drawings become little more than diagrams (1979:99, 151). Focussing his argument on technique, he states that craftsmanship is mere virtuosity, a skill that hides a lack of real perception. Technique, therefore, should be taught only as a means to support individual expression and not as an end in itself (1979:99).

²⁷ As an example, Berger states that a drawing of a tree does not show us a tree per se but shows a tree *being looked at* (2003:422).

her or his way of seeing than with the work itself (Berger, 2003:11). This affords greater insight into artistic practice and a new vantage point of the thing observed, an exposition that, generally speaking, is hidden from view. It is in relation to this view that I wish to move on to explore the process of printmaking.

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Two proofs pulled so far. The image seems to be building nicely. Proof three. What is that? Strange marks begin to appear in the stone, growing increasingly darker as I continue to roll ink. Proof four: no, it is not my rolling or my etch. Proof five: suddenly they look familiar. The ghost ... Yes, I have seen these marks before. They momentarily appeared at the graining station when the stone was doused with hot water. Grease sat there for a long time. It must be quite deep in the stone, who knows how deep. "A happy accident", I think, and printing continues.

A THOROUGHNESS OF PROCESS

So far, drawing has taken precedence in the discussion because of the fundamental role that I have experienced it play in the advancement of my vision and practice. Yet, this transformation is also predicated on an engagement through printmaking. This engagement is of a different kind, however, and entails a thoroughness of process that produces knowledge not only through 'familiarity' but also through 'distance'.

Firstly, what do I mean by 'distance'? I use this term to express the gap between what is conceived by the artist versus what is realised in print. Whether I am processing a drawing, objects or the bits of scrap material generated through my activity, the act of printing itself determines what is made. However, rather than being obstructive, I experience this distance as fundamentally creative. To reference Nicolaïdes, "Results are the best when they come from the right kind of un-selfconscious effort" (1979:18). Relating this statement to my own practice, I find that if I have too much control over the making process, I am set on a fast track to predictable outcomes, stunted impulses and lost interest. The fundamental process of transference, the diversity of techniques and materials and the rigorous processing characteristic of printmaking enrich and advance my practice.

Beginning with the first of these, or transference, this 'distancing' is essentially inescapable. The mark made in print is always a mediated one. This is because a surface or material must be worked before an image can be drawn from it (Coldwell, 2010:65). To put it another way, there is always a translation between the mark made and the mark realised as a printed image (Coldwell, 2010:65). While it may be argued that this mediation undermines the autographic mark and the personality of the artist, it can also be asserted that the moment of transfer is what keeps printmaking exciting, versatile and innovative (Fishpool, 2009:40).

As it relates to my own practice, drawing and printmaking are always practised in close dialogue. Although I believe that it is necessary to comprehend through drawing, it is as important for me to expose myself to new and unpredictable interpretations via the printing process. This is because the translated 'image'

supplies me with significant departure points from what I have come to understand or 'see' within my field of reference. Sometimes what is created in print becomes the subject matter for new drawings, allowing the artistic process to continue through discoveries that would otherwise never have been made.

It is also the sheer diversity, adaptivity and interconnectedness of the tools and techniques of printmaking that drive my practice. Whether relief based, intaglio, planographic, serigraphic or monotypical, each form can be further divided into a multitude of specialised techniques, combined with others or merged with different art forms altogether. Many of these methods incorporate various photographic processes or have been fully digitised, both within the field of fine arts and commercial spheres of production. In contemporary printmaking, it is even possible to do away with the material product altogether and choose a purely digital production space and creative 'output'. This has led some artists to question the very definition of 'printmaking' and even what constitutes a 'print'.

Simply put, 'printmaking' has become a highly elastic term, shifting between strict codes of medium-specificity to roving experiments in medium plurality. While this rupture of classification does not pertain to printmaking alone, it does, however, occupy the creative arts in a singular way. As argued by Philippa Hobbs and Elizabeth Rankin, the principle of 'expansion' is not new to printmaking but is in fact characteristic of its history (1997:114). Past techniques exist very comfortably alongside technological innovations and digital media, including those printing processes that have been fully industrialised to perform in a more commercial arena. Since its inception, printmaking has been adaptive while remaining additive, its earliest forms (including woodcut and stencilling) still as relevant within the art world as its contemporary successors (for instance, linocut and screen printing).

While not all practices and conceptions of printmaking are relevant to my practice, aspects of its history and evolution undeniably inform my work, as seen in *Of Lift II*, for instance. My own long exposure to the variability and flexibility of printing techniques has not only provided me with a diverse set of tools with which to make work but also shaped the very subject matter of my work. This is most evident in *The Glass Industry* with the introduction of the jig and a selection of drawings titled

The Graining Station, to be discussed in the following chapter.²⁸ This sensitivity towards the means of production in turn affects what is generated through it. Due to the intensive processing that comes with most print media, a large body of offcuts, scraps and other secondary print-related materials is continuously produced and, as with *Of Lift II*, some of these have the potential to become subject matter or departure points for new works of art.

Ultimately, it is the thoroughness of process and the unpredictability of printmaking that enable me to move beyond what may just be my own aesthetic or more predetermined (even formulaic) choices. To reference Wölfflin again, “[W]e only see what we look for, but we only look for what we can see” (1932:230). With printmaking, I am afforded the means to unwittingly generate and expose myself to new materials and conceptual triggers for my work – elements through which I am afforded the opportunity to develop my own ‘way of seeing’ and thus my artistic practice.

²⁸ To briefly note, ‘the graining station’ refers to a particular work area in the lithographic studio.



Figure 8. Jessica Staple, *The Story of the Glass-seller I*. 2016. Six-colour screen print on Lanaquarelle paper, 67 x 47 cm. Edition of 4.



Figure 9. Jessica Staple, *The Story of the Glass-seller II*. 2016. Four-colour screen print on glass and steel frame, 67 x 53.6 cm. Monoprint.

TALES OF THE MARVELLOUS AND NEWS OF THE STRANGE

“The Story of the Glass-seller” is one of many of tales that make up *Tales of the Marvellous and News of the Strange*, a collection of medieval Arab stories. The incomplete manuscript was discovered by the German Arabist Hellmut Ritter in a library in Istanbul in 1933, but the first English translation was only published in 2014 (Irwin, 2014:xii).²⁹ While the origin of the manuscript has been attributed to 14th century Egypt or Syria, it has been deduced that the collection of tales was first assembled in the 10th century (Irwin, 2014:xii).³⁰ It is the oldest of all Arab story collections thus far discovered, and it is the oldest surviving compilation of tales that has material in common with *The Thousand and One Nights* (Irwin, 2014:xv). As with the *Nights*, *Tales of the Marvellous and News of the Strange* is filled with wondrous events, fantastic beings, marvellous treasures and puzzling mysteries. Themes of love, profound anguish, ‘relief after grief’, magic and wonder, treasure hunting, prophesy, fate versus coincidence and transformation are all features that the two literary works have in common. Also shared by these collections is the presence of racism, misogyny and discrimination against those who are ugly or handicapped as well as the destruction of tyranny and the arrogance and futility of earthly wealth and power.³¹ Thus, like many stories, these reflect and even heighten the political tonality and prejudices of the time.

The compendium demonstrates transformation in and through stories in a singular way. According to Chris N van der Merwe and Hein Viljoen, literary works do not only “describe and represent liminal states, persons and transformations” (2007:11). The space of the text itself is a “symbolically demarcated liminal zone where transformations are allowed to happen – imaginary transformations that model and possibly bring into being new ways of thinking and being” (Van der Merwe & Viljoen, 2007:11).

²⁹ The author of the manuscript is unknown and the title page is missing, substituted with a phrase taken from the table of contents. The entire second half of the text is also missing, leaving only 18 stories of the original compendium of 42 (Irwin, 2014:xii).

³⁰ While this date has been contested (Irwin, 2014:xii), the *Tales* appears to have originated in written form and thus (should be) classed as literature (Irwin 2014:xxxviii).

³¹ In an interview with Alaa Al Aswany, Robert Irwin, Rose Issa and Marina Warner, there was much discussion around the extreme views of the premodern text and the feelings of discomfort and repulsion that they excite (BBC Radio 4, 2014).

Because of their peculiar narrative style, the stories in the *Tales* have a particular transformative potential. According to Irwin, there is a fair amount of linguistic error and narrative incompetence in the text and several of the stories lack internal logic or plausible motivation (2014:xiii). However, these inconsistencies and unpredictability only heighten the wonder and strangeness (Irwin, 2014:xiv). They should be regarded not as 'faults' but as necessary eccentricities that serve to further colour the reader's vision of the world as it was conceived in a different space and time. It is in this way that I identify in the *Tales* something in common with my own printmaking, in which the idiosyncrasies and 'errors' in the printing process emerge as constructive and productive characteristics.

Tales of the Marvellous and News of the Strange speaks to the reflexive nature of artistic practice that I have attempted to engage with until this point. As one of six tales told to a king who actively collects and uses stories to improve his mood, "The Story of the Glass-seller" is particularly allied with my work – a story within stories. "The Story of the Glass-seller" has thus been included in this book for several reasons, but most importantly, it is the very first story that I consciously chose to respond to in my practice and thus provided an important catalyst for me towards a different 'way of seeing' my work.

As a collection itself, this book (in keeping with compendiums such as the *Tales*) aims to express the reflexive act of storytelling and, in doing so, of art making.

THE STORY OF THE GLASS-SELLER³²

There was once a great and powerful king who ruled over all the land and the sea. It happened that the king was very fond of stories and anything remarkable, and so he asked his gatekeepers to let no one into the city without telling something about themselves, what they wanted or from where they came. His agents in the city likewise reported anything interesting they picked up in the way of news. One day, the king found himself in a most distressed mood, and he asked his housekeeper to find someone who could entertain him with conversation and rid him of his worry. He sent her to the lodgings of the strangers where, on addressing its tenants, she was approached by six men: a blind man, a one-eyed man, a hunchback, a paralytic, a man whose lips had been cut off and a seller of glassware.

“We want to go to the king”, they told her, “and each one of us has a fine and remarkable story of the misfortunes that we have suffered.”

Five men told their story to the king, each amazing him in their turn. Finally, the glass-seller was asked to step forward. Like his comrades, he too showed the marks of a beating and one of his ears had been severed off. At the king's request, the glass-seller began his story, informing the king that he was a poor man who had gained whatever he could by begging. On his father's death, his inheritance had amounted to nothing more than 100 dirhams. In an attempt to improve his fortunes, he used his meagre inheritance to buy various sorts of glassware, hoping that if he sold them he could make a profit. He placed the glass items on a large tray and found a spot from which to commence his trade. The glass-seller soon began to daydream about all the things he could do with the money made from selling the glass and other items as his stock and capital increased. He fantasised about fine houses, glorious feasts, magnificent animals, singing girls and a host of servants attending to all his wishes. Once his wealth reached 100 000 dinars, he would find himself a beautiful wife amongst the princesses and the daughters of the viziers.

³² This version of “The Story of the Glass-Seller” has been cited from Robert Irwin's *Tales of the Marvellous and News of the Strange* (2014:41-69).

When his dream reached a dramatic point, his fist accidentally came down upon the tray, and all the glass objects fell and shattered. The glass-seller was overcome by grief and anger, chastising himself for his idiocy. Just then, as people were on their way to Friday prayer, a beautiful woman of means passed by and took pity on him. She spoke to one of her servants, who gave the glass-seller his purse of monies – no less than 500 dinars! After calling down many blessings upon her, the glass-seller rushed home to consider his great fortune. No sooner had he arrived when an old woman knocked on his door.

“Little son”, she said, “it is time for prayer but I am not ritually clean and I would like you to let me use your house to get ready to pray.”

The glass-seller did so willingly and gave her two dinars as an act of charity, thinking it would save him from some trouble. The old woman immediately declined this offer, saying that she was not a beggar and that he should keep the money for another in greater need of his benevolence. This gave the glass-seller a good opinion of her. The old woman told him of her rich and beautiful daughter, who was looking to marry but had not accepted any of the suitors her mother had presented her with. She flattered the glass-seller, telling him that he might just be the pleasant, handsome and rich man her daughter was seeking, and together they might enjoy a most happy and prosperous life. The glass-seller immediately felt a strong attraction towards the girl and agreed to the old woman’s plan, telling himself that God might help him obtain what he had failed to do with his glass. The old woman told him her daughter liked a man who was well-off and that he should take with him all that he had and be as pleasing as possible.

They went to a large house, spacious and handsome. Inside, the old woman took him to a big room furnished with carpets and hanging curtains. A beautiful woman appeared, exquisitely dressed and perfumed. For some time, she spoke with the glass-seller in an amiable manner and he was delighted with her. She then got up to leave the room, instructing the glass-seller not to leave before she returned. No sooner had she left when a huge, savage-looking black slave came in, his sword drawn.

“Damn you,” he said, “what are you doing here? Get up!”

He then stripped the glass-seller of his clothing and his money and struck him with the sword until he was convinced that the glass-seller was dead. He then called for

the girl with the salt, who bore a silver tray of salt grains, and proceeded to push it into the glass-seller's wounds. All the while, the glass-seller stayed motionless, knowing that if he moved he would surely be killed. The slave then called for the cellar keeper, the old woman. She dragged the glass-seller by the feet and threw him into an underground cellar where he landed on the bodies of those who had suffered the same terrible fate. The glass-seller remained in the cellar for three days, saved by the salt that prevented him from losing too much blood. Once the glass-seller was capable of movement, he pulled himself up the mound of corpses and lifted up the cellar door. After remaining hidden in the house for another day, he eventually managed to escape.

For a month after, the glass-seller tended to his wounds and kept a vigilant watch for the old woman who had deceived him and the many others since. Once he had recovered most of his strength, he disguised himself as a Persian and made a new purse, this time filling it with glass. He approached the old woman, enquiring whether or not she owned a scale with which he might weigh his coins so that he could purchase a slave girl. The old woman told him she knew of someone who could assist him, and they set off for the same house. He was met with the same beautiful woman, who took him to the same room in which she entertained him with the same gay conversation, and again she left with instruction not to leave until she returned. As she left, the black slave again appeared and cursed him. The glass-seller then revealed a sword he had carried in secret and severed the legs and head of his assailant before casting him into the dark cellar. He then tortured and killed the old woman. To the girl, he showed some mercy. She told him that she too had been trapped by the old woman, and then she took him to the rooms where all the stolen money was kept. Realising that he would need assistance to carry it all, he left the house to hire 10 mules. On his return, he found that the girl had gone, along with most of the purses of money. He took what little money remained and all the furniture, clothes and materials back to his home.

The next day, the glass-seller was confronted by 10 men who took him to the chief of police. At the chief's orders, the glass-seller was relieved of most of what had been taken from the house and then exiled from the city, until the affair had been forgotten. During his journey, he was attacked by robbers and left completely destitute, until his meeting with the other five men, all united by tales of misfortune. The king was astonished by the stories of the six men, and each of them was rewarded and given fine clothes to wear.

3 | STORIES OF THE
UNDERWORLD-OTHERWORLD

Ash

+

Ivory Blade Acrylic

Titanium White "

Payne's Grey "

Yellow Ochre "

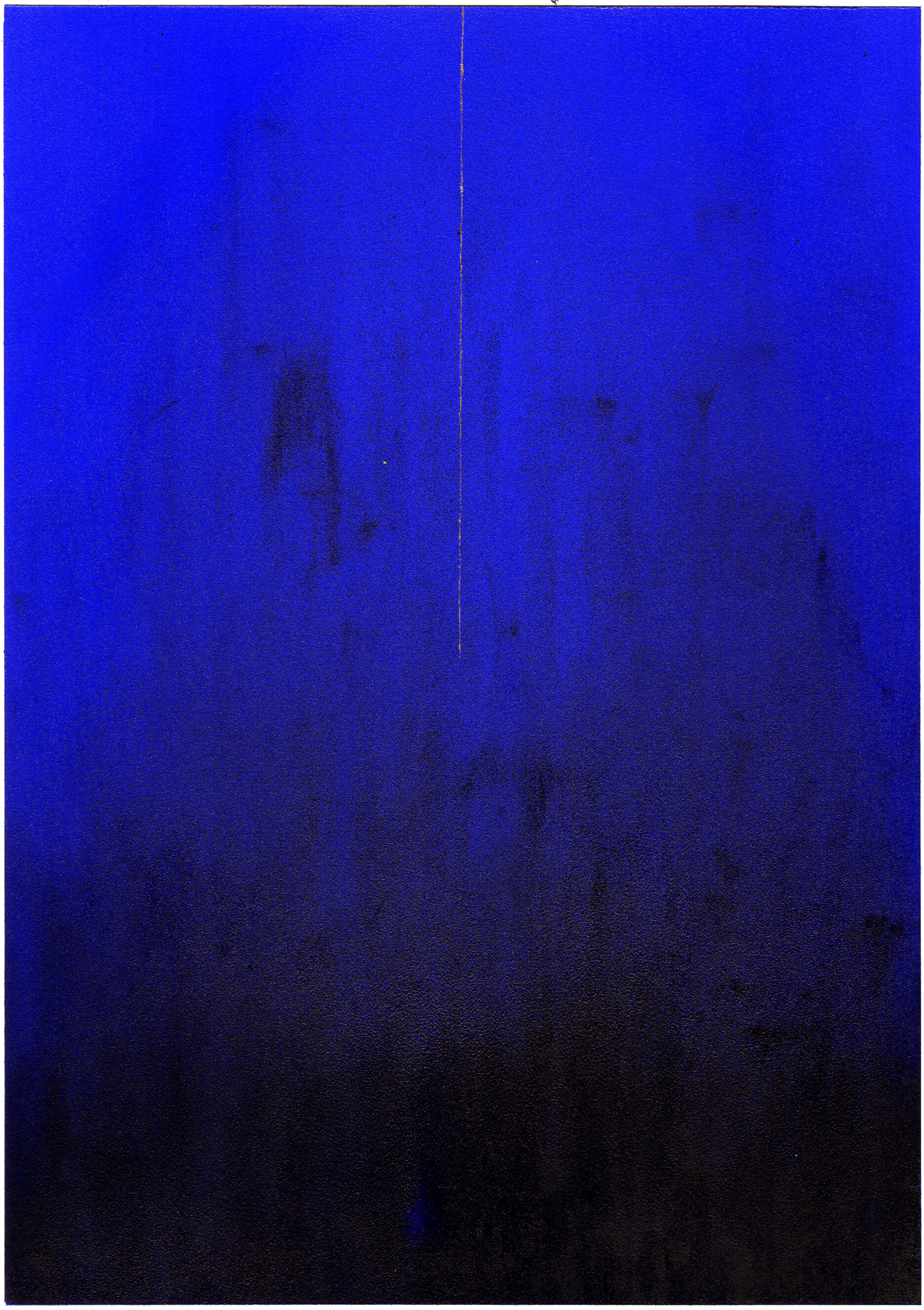
Raw Sienna "

+

Textile Medium

+

Methylated Spirits



O goddess-born of great Anchises' line,
The gates of hell are open night and day;
Smooth the descent, and easy is the way:
But to return, and view the cheerful skies,
In this the task and mighty labour lies.³³

³³ This excerpt has been cited from Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid* (1909:6:191-195).

HADES

"Facilis descensus Averno": the way to hell is easy (Virgil, 1909:6:193). So said the Sybil to Aeneas at the beginning of his journey to Hades.³⁴ In many stories connected with the Underworld, transformation often accompanies the practice of various rites of passage. In his well-known text on the subject, Arnold van Gennep argues that such rites generally consist of three stages: the 'preliminal', the 'liminal' and the 'postliminal' (1960:11). Building on Van Gennep's theory, Victor Turner states that the 'liminal' or 'liminality' refers to what is "on-a-threshold", a state or process that is "betwixt-and-between" the normal day-to-day cultural and social states (1979:465). In the preliminary phases, the initiate is separated from ordinary social life and sent to the margins where she or he falls into a limbo-like state. It is here that the transformation of the individual is set to take place (Turner, 1979:467). Looking now at Greek mythology, I seek to investigate how transformation is effected and represented in these stories through rites of passage. Specifically, the following discussion focuses on two hallmarks of this literary genre: Hades as a transitory space and the figure of Persephone as the embodiment of transformation.

According to Van Gennep, the incompatibility between the 'profane'³⁵ and the 'sacred' is so great that one cannot pass from one to the other without going through an intermediate stage of transformation (1960:1). Within this liminal zone, however, there exists a strong transformative power (Van der Merwe & Viljoen, 2007:3). Situated between two or more boundaries, this transitory space belongs to neither the secular nor the sacred; instead, it is ambiguous and unpredictable (Van der Merwe & Viljoen, 2007:10). Thus, while the liminal phase is only temporary, once the initiate has passed through it, she or he is reincorporated into society but with an increased status or an altered state of mind (Turner, 1979:467).

In the in-between space of transition, the initiate can enter different worlds or states of being (Van der Merwe & Viljoen 2007:10). As Van der Merwe and Viljoen

³⁴ Hades is the name given to both the Greek God of the Dead and his domain. In the Roman retellings, Hades is called 'Pluto', which refers to *ploutos* (wealth) and so represents his more benign role as the custodian of the mineral wealth hidden in the earth (Mirto, 2012:22). Hades seldom makes an appearance, which might be because he was dissatisfied with his share of the dominion of earth (Parker & Stanton, 2003:22). He mainly dwells in Tartarus, one of the many regions of the Underworld (Paget, 1967:42).

³⁵ Turner alternatively describes this state as 'secular' or 'mundane' (1979:468).

describe, this transitional space is one so different from all other familiar zones that it cannot be expressed in ordinary language (2007:11). It is thus necessarily portrayed in metaphors that engage with the states of the in-between, such as death, going underground or going underwater (Van der Merwe & Viljoen, 2007:11). With its regular fixtures of darkness, descent, rivers, gates and the divine guide, Hades itself can be regarded as a liminal space – a necessary transition point in the rites of passage (Mackie, 1999:491). However, it is often the case that particular rites are required to enter Hades or, once there, to proceed further. These rites change depending on 'who' is making the journey, in other words the living or the dead.

It is in Hades that the souls of the dead come to dwell. For the soul, entry is almost immediate and nonnegotiable. The perception of the soul is tied closely to the moment of death, when it separates itself from the body in its very last breath (Mirto, 2012:10). When Dido, the Queen of Carthage, takes her own life, her sister clambers up the funeral pyre to rest her mouth near to hers in an attempt to "catch the flying breath" (Virgil, 1909:4:984). After a protracted death, the goddess Iris finally descends to ease her parting by cutting "the fatal hair", whereupon "the struggling soul was loos'd, and life dissolv'd in air" (Virgil, 1909:4:1009-1010).

According to Greek mythology, it is with the aid of Hermes that the soul is guided down to Hades. Here it retains the individual's physical features, but it is a weaker copy, an image, totally deprived of all feeling and mental faculties (Mirto, 2012:10). It is like a shadow or memory and only when called up during extraordinary encounters with the living can it recall some measure of vitality and consciousness (Mirto, 2012:10-11).³⁶ In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus attempts to embrace his mother, Anticlea, but she evades his grasp, saying,

We no longer have sinews keeping the bones and flesh together, but once the life-force has departed from our white bones, all is consumed by the fierce heat of the blazing fire, and the soul slips away like a dream and flutters on the air (Homer, 1946:177).

³⁶ This occurs, for instance, in the *Odyssey* when Odysseus is sent to Hades to consult with the soul of Teiresias, the blind Theban prophet, who was the only soul that Persephone allowed to retain his mental faculties (Homer, 1946:168).

While death plays a powerful transformative role in mythic tales of this kind, it is not only at the moment of death when transformation occurs. Although the soul's admittance to Hades is a surety, certain rites are expected to be performed by the living to guarantee its journey 'onwards'.

In addition to the fire as described by Anticlea, "Water in its various forms... has played a major role in human tales since our earliest myths were recorded in Egypt and Mesopotamia some five thousand years ago" (Witzel, 2015:18). Creation myths often begin with a watery expanse, a vast abyss from which the world is eventually formed (Witzel, 2015:18, 19). As a symbol, it represents fertility, healing, purification and cleansing and is often a site of miracles and ritual (Witzel, 2015:20, 22, 24). According to Christopher J Mackie, "[T]he presence of a river, or a prominent body of water, characterises the typography of the Underworld in many traditions" (1999:485). In Hades, it is water that divides (or bridges) the world of the living from the dead (Mackie, 1999:491). Equally pertinent is the presence of ships, boats and other watercraft that enable passage through or across the water body.³⁷ An important stage in the transformation of the soul is the voyage across the Styx,³⁸ one of the six infernal rivers of the Underworld.³⁹ Charon, the ancient demon, ferries the souls of the dead across the river in his boat. However, not all souls are granted passage. Only those who have been buried in the 'proper' manner may cross; otherwise, they must linger on the banks of the Styx for at least 100 years (Virgil, 1909:6:441-452).

While the exact number and descriptions of the infernal rivers tend to vary, Mackie states that the names of the rivers appear to be connected with the pain and suffering associated with death, funeral rites and the process of cremation (1999:487). Thus, in some instances the rivers also symbolise the transition from life to death (Mackie, 1999:487) as it is ritualised by the living in the form of religious ceremonies and burial practices.

³⁷ The 'vessel' will be looked more closely at a later stage in connection with a Viking myth.

³⁸ In some sources, it is the Acheron that must be crossed.

³⁹ The other rivers include the Acheron, Cocytus, Lethe, Phlegethon and Aornis (Parker & Stanton, 2003:112), but this listing tends to vary.



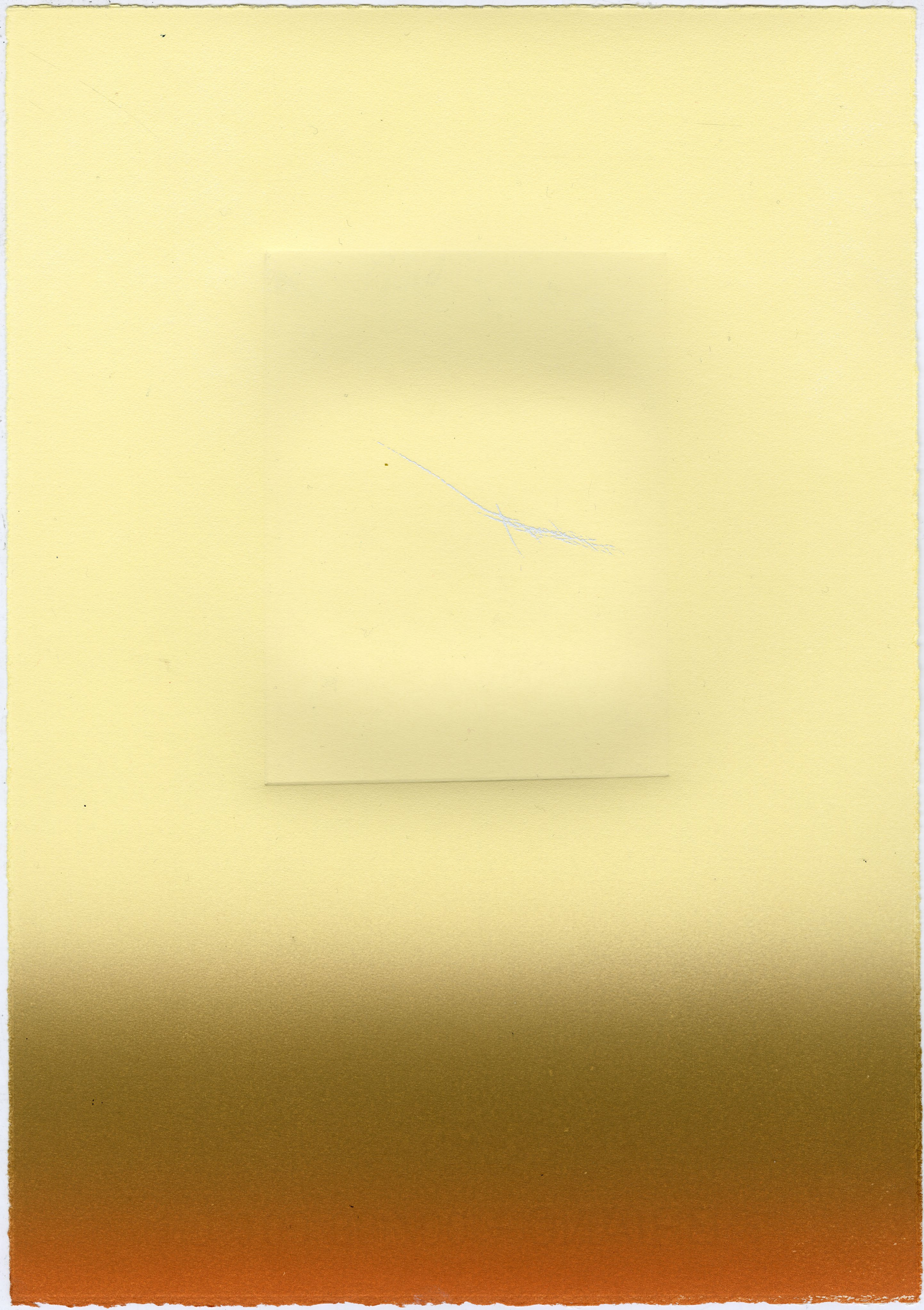
Figure 11. Jessica Staple, *The Graining Station I*. 2016. Graphite and charcoal on Arches paper, 76 x 58 cm.



Figure 12. Jessica Staple, *The Graining Station II*. 2016. Graphite and charcoal on Arches paper, 76 x 58 cm.

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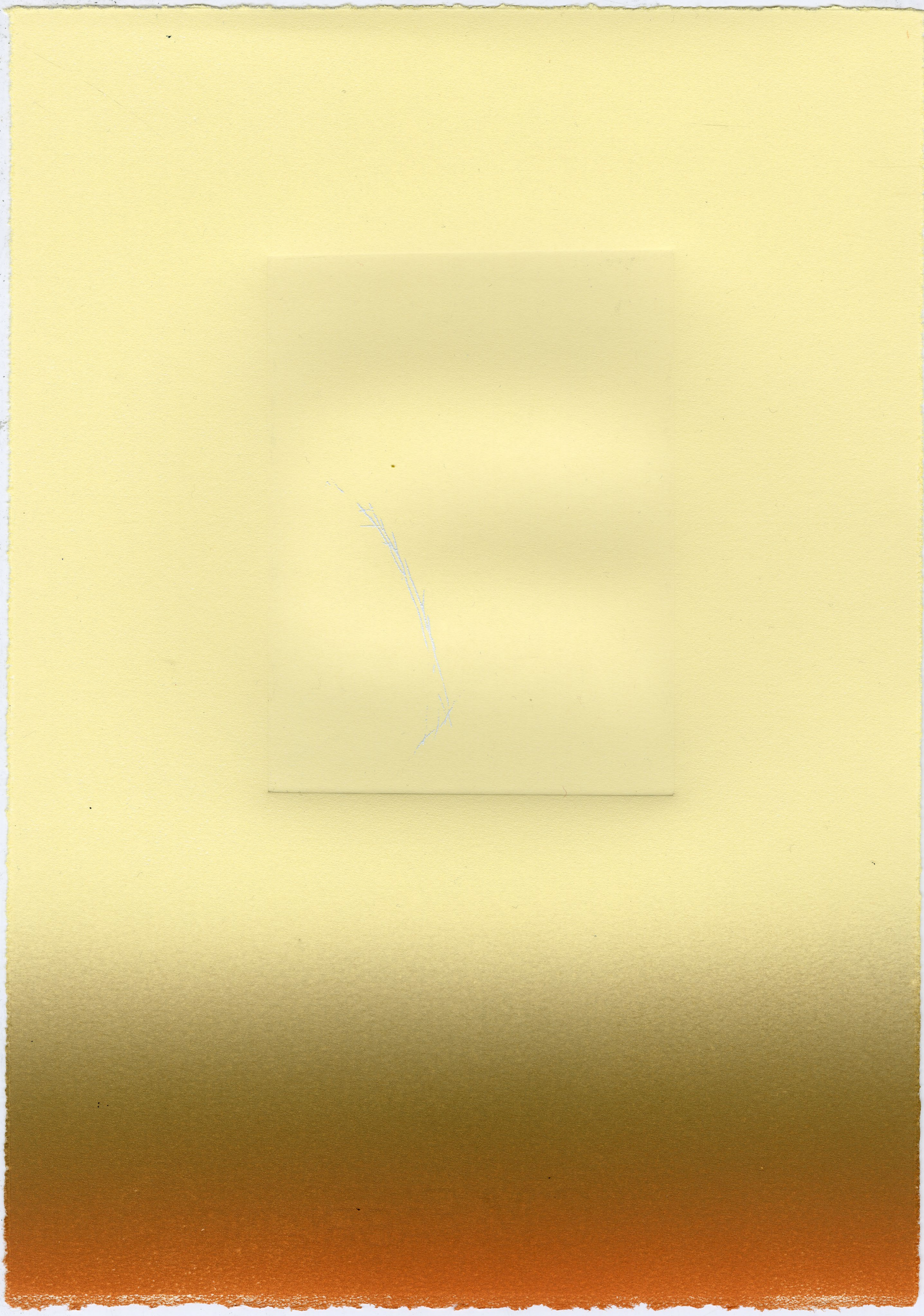
Turning on the hose, I wash away the cement-like paste. I pick up the punctured glass jar marked '220' and shake it over the stone, dropping a fine layer of grit over the surface. A smell of gum arabic and sulphur permeates the room. I lift up the levigator and carefully place it onto the stone. I begin slowly, passing over the edges first and then falling into a figure of eight. The steel disc spins effortlessly, pulled along by the small counter-lever. I cease to pay much attention to my movements and listen only to the sound of grit, water and steel on stone. The mix starts to thicken; my pace slows down. Again, I rinse off the grey mud. The edges filed, I fill a large dish with boiling water and slowly pour it over the stone. Hot vapour rises and the stone breathes. I do it again, this time soaking up the excess water with a sponge. As it evaporates, a ghost appears, a trace of a previous image drawn on the stone but not the one that was there until barely an hour ago. It vanishes with the steam, leaving behind a perfect, untouched layer of fossilised marine life. After safeguarding the edges with gum, I take up my usual spot in the lithographic studio and begin to draw.

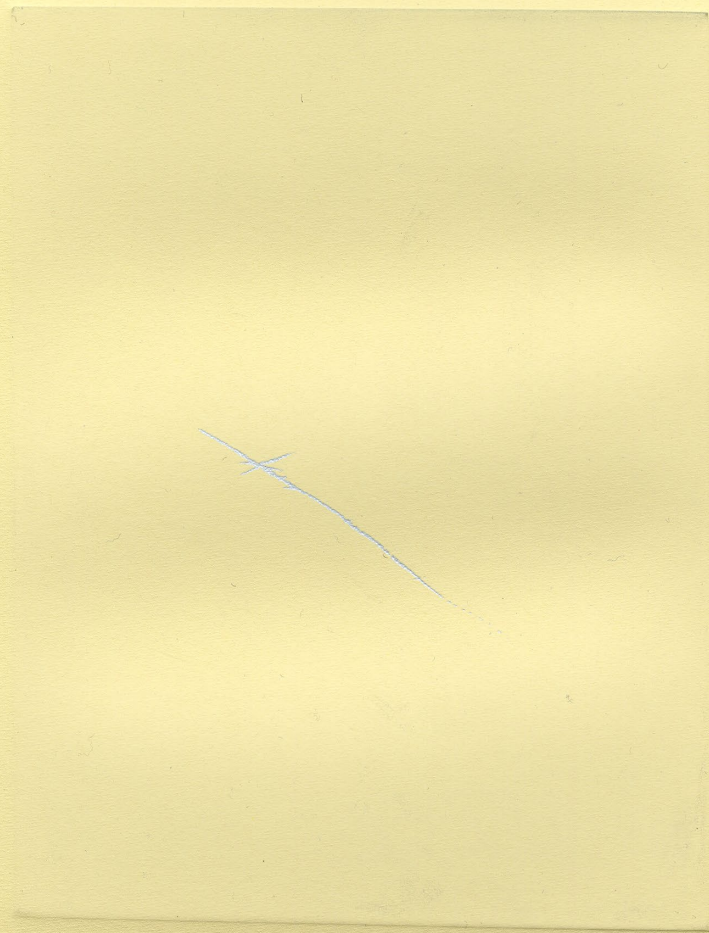












These rites perform'd, the prince, without delay,
Hastes to the nether world his destin'd way.
Deep was the cave; and, downward as it went
From the wide mouth, a rocky rough descent;
And here th' access a gloomy grove defends,
And there th' unnavigable lake extends,
O'er whose unhappy waters, void of light,
No bird presumes to steer his airy flight;
Such deadly stenches from the depths arise,
And steaming sulphur, that infects the skies.
From hence the Grecian bards their legends make,
And give the name Avernus to the lake.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ This excerpt has been cited from Book VI of Virgil's *Æneid* (1909:6:336-347).

RITUAL IN THE ORACLE

The road to Hades is very different for the living than it is for the dead. Widely known stories including those of Orpheus, Odysseus, Aeneas, Psyche, Heracles, Persephone, Theseus and Peirithous all trace these living figures' travels to the Underworld. According to Mackie, heroes are frequently portrayed as "boundary crossers", with the journey to Hades being the ultimate heroic quest because it is the most dangerous (1999:490). While these figures have been ascribed to the world of poetic fantasy, it is important to keep in mind that to the ancient Greeks, the Underworld was in fact very real. Although not only heroes were permitted to visit there, access was generally only granted to those who performed a series of sacred rites.

The anthropologist Robert F Paget describes a physical place where such rites might have actually taken place. In 1962, Paget and Keith Jones located and identified the Great Antrum at Baiae near the crater of Avernus.⁴¹ Concealed underground lies the Oracle of the Dead,⁴² where it is believed that initiation took place into the Cult of the Gods of the Infernal Regions (Paget, 1967:15, 16).

Paget attempts to reconstruct the ancient event as it happened in about 300 BC.⁴³ He invites the reader to imagine a chieftain visiting the Oracle to consult with his dead mother. Such visits were something of a sensational and costly event. A herd of cattle, comprising bulls, cows and oxen, and a flock of sheep, was the standard fee demanded by the priests, along with gifts of olive oil, wine, barley cakes and a

⁴¹ Avernus resides in the Phlegrean Fields, or 'Campi Flegrei', an area that has long known volcanic activity. The Fields lie west of Naples. As it is today, this wide caldera spans some 13 km, containing innumerable pyroclastic cones, tuff rings and lava domes (Smithsonian Institution global volcanism program: Campi flegrei, 2013).

⁴² The term 'oracle' generally refers to both what the gods say and where it is said. It is a sacred place where visitors would go and ask the gods for advice (Parker & Stanton, 2003:45). Apart from its more spectacular services, there were many other day-to-day duties. The oracles also operated as medical clinics and manufacturers of love potions, spells and counter-spells, and they provided omens to those at the start of a journey (Paget, 1967:168). Originally, the oracles belonged to the Great Goddess of the Earth, but with the coming of the Olympic Gods, many of them were taken over by Apollo, including the one at Baiae (Paget, 1967:32).

⁴³ Paget's impression is based on his research around the Oracle at Baiae and other notable examples as well as the writings of Homer, Virgil, Ephorus and Strabo (1967:16, 162). The find is narrated in his book *In the Footsteps of Orpheus* (1967). While it is generally accepted that the tunnel complex was used for the purposes of ritual (Dash, 2012), Paget's claims have been contested. The validity of the find, however, is not the focus of this section. Rather, what is useful about Paget's work for this book is the outstanding descriptions of the site and the stories connected with it.

bronze tripod for the Sybil. Accompanied by the Sybil, the chieftain is first taken to the Sacred Area and instructed in how to perform the preliminary rituals. The next three days serve to instil in him a heightened feeling of spirituality and awe. Each night, he sleeps alone in the Painted Room, a chamber adorned with many horrific paintings detailing the sufferings and fates of humankind. Just before dawn, he is summoned and taken to the forecourt. Here he sacrifices a black ewe lamb and then returns to the Painted Room. After each sacrifice, the entrails of the sacrificial animal are examined on a marble table. On the third day, the chieftain sacrifices a black ram. The omens continue to be favourable. He is then taken to a bath in the forecourt at sunrise and bathed in the Water of Forgetfulness. The rest of the morning is spent fasting and in prayer. At noon, he bathes in the Water of Memory. During the afternoon, more sacrifices are offered up to Hecate and Persephone and at sunset a black ram is given to Night. Thus begin the nocturnal sacrifices to the Gods of the Nether Regions. The chieftain is dressed in white, and a bronze sword is tied to his waist. He is soon joined by the Sybil, and together they make their way to the Great Antrum. There are three entrances to the Antrum. The Sudatorium entrance is used by the chieftain and the Sybil, whereas the priests enter from the temple and the sacrifice is brought in via the Original Entrance. In this way, the procession is formed with everyone in her or his proper place. The priests, chanting monotonously, lead the procession. They are dressed in black overalls with pointed headdresses and only slits for the eyes. In their hands are branches of black cypress. Following the priests are the Sybil and chieftain and, finally, the wretched sacrifice pulled along by his executioners. Because of the narrowness of the tunnel, the chieftain cannot turn around and see the sacrifice, bleating (or screaming) frantically. Oil lamps illuminate the dusty tunnel every few feet. A cold wind blows around the chieftain's legs while overhead rolling clouds of warm smoke indicate that he is approaching the Underworld. They have arrived at a split in the tunnel, the Dividing of Ways. One of the passages has been closed off; the other leads down towards the River Styx. As soon as the chieftain enters this tunnel, a door closes behind him, allowing the sacrifice and its escort to pass directly to the Inner Sanctuary via a secret passageway. The glow of hundreds of lamps fills the tunnel, and the air is thick with smoke and sulphur. On reaching the water of the Styx, they meet Charon in his leaky coracle to ferry them to the other side. The air at this point is barely breathable, both foul and hot. There they find a steep stair that leads them

to the Inner Sanctuary. Outside the Sanctuary entrance, the chieftain is instructed to leave an offering of mistletoe to Persephone in one of the niches. The sacrifice is already bound and lying on the altar, and the chieftain is almost overcome with both fear and wonderment.

The priests seat him at the altar and say, "Draw your sword and be ready to prevent any unwanted Shade from approaching."

At this moment, he hears a shrill cry behind and above him as the High Priest cuts the throat of the sacrifice. The blood pours down into a trench. A dreadful moaning commences, and shadowy faces appear on the wall.

The priest calls out, "Be ready the next Shade to appear will be your mother." In his present state of mind, the chieftain verily believes it, but before he can gather his thoughts, his 'mother' disappears. The priests rush him to his feet and the procession leaves the Inner Sanctuary, taking an alternate passage back to the Dividing of Ways. A door opens to let the procession pass, simultaneously closing off the tunnel down to the Styx, leaving no indication that they were back at the point from which they have come. Back in the Room of Memory, the chieftain is interrogated to ensure that he believes all he has seen and heard. Concluding the story on a rather harrowing note, Paget states that it is doubtful that the chieftain will leave the Room of Memory should his report reveal the contrary.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ This excerpt has been cited from Robert F Paget's *In the Footsteps of Orpheus* (1967:162-166).

PERSEPHONE

There are several figures in Greek mythology whose journeys to the Underworld are still told today. During their epic quests, Aeneas and Odysseus are sent to Hades to receive prophecies from the souls of the dead (Homer, 1946:168; Virgil, 1909:6:543-548). Heracles finds himself there while performing the last of 12 labours set before him by King Eurystheus (Parker & Stanton, 2003:131). Before being granted her immortality, Psyche is likewise sent to Hades to perform an incredible task for the goddess Aphrodite, who is enraged by the comparisons made between Psyche's beauty and her own (Parker & Stanton, 2003:49-50). Unlike Heracles and Psyche, Orpheus does not meet with success but experiences even greater tragedy in Hades' realm when he fails to fetch back his wife Eurydice (Ovid, 1999:10:11-12, 55-57). In each of these tales, Hades functions as a liminal space where transformation is set to take place. Taking the dreaded journey underground and over water, these mythic figures all pass through a series of thresholds and transitory spaces and each one comes out different from the way that she or he was before venturing in.

The goddess Persephone finds herself in Hades for very different reasons. Without consulting her mother, Demeter,⁴⁵ Zeus consents to his brother Hades' request and allows Hades to take Persephone for his wife. While she is out gathering flowers, Hades emerges from the ground in his chariot and takes Persephone down to the Underworld with him. She calls out in vain to her father Zeus for help. Demeter is stricken by the loss of her daughter and searches the land, sea and sky for her. In her anger and pain, the world becomes sterile and the crops wither. Only when earth is on the brink of destruction does Zeus finally send Hermes, the messenger of the gods, to tell his wife what has become of their daughter (Parker & Stanton, 2003:69). Zeus enters into a bargain that allows Persephone to be reunited with her mother for part of the year, but for the remainder she must return to the Underworld to rule with her husband.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Demeter is the Greek goddess of the crops and the harvest.

⁴⁶ Persephone had to return to Hades for as many months as she had eaten pomegranate seeds as anyone who ate the food of the Underworld was bound to remain there for all eternity. The exact number of seeds she is said to have eaten differs depending on the region in which the story is told (Parker & Stanton, 2003:70).

The myth of Persephone and her dual existence between the worlds of the living and the dead is predominantly used to explain the changing of the seasons and the harvest (Mirto, 2012:22). Her marriage to Hades is also a common metaphor for the premature death of young women, and she is often referred to as the "eternal maiden" (Mirto, 2012:23, 97).⁴⁷ Thus, Persephone not only occupies and presides over a liminal space but can also be regarded as something of a liminal figure herself. Continuously cycling from daughter to queen, maiden to wife, goddess of the world above to ruler of the dead below, she experiences state change as much as the worlds between which she moves.

⁴⁷ In most instances, Persephone is portrayed as something of a victim, raped and dragged down to Hades against her will. In other myths, Persephone appears confident in her sovereignty as the queen of the dead. When the two mortal heroes Theseus and his friend Peirithous dare each other to go down to the Underworld and bring back Persephone as a prize, she tricks them by laying out a table covered with food, wine and two golden thrones. When the friends sit down to feast, they immediately become stuck to their seats. Theseus is wrenched off the chair with the help of Heracles during his quest for Cerberus but is left badly mutilated while Peirithous remains trapped for all eternity. In another myth, Persephone was the daughter of Zeus and a nymph of the River Styx, suggesting that she had always been queen of the Underworld (Parker & Stanton, 2003:72).

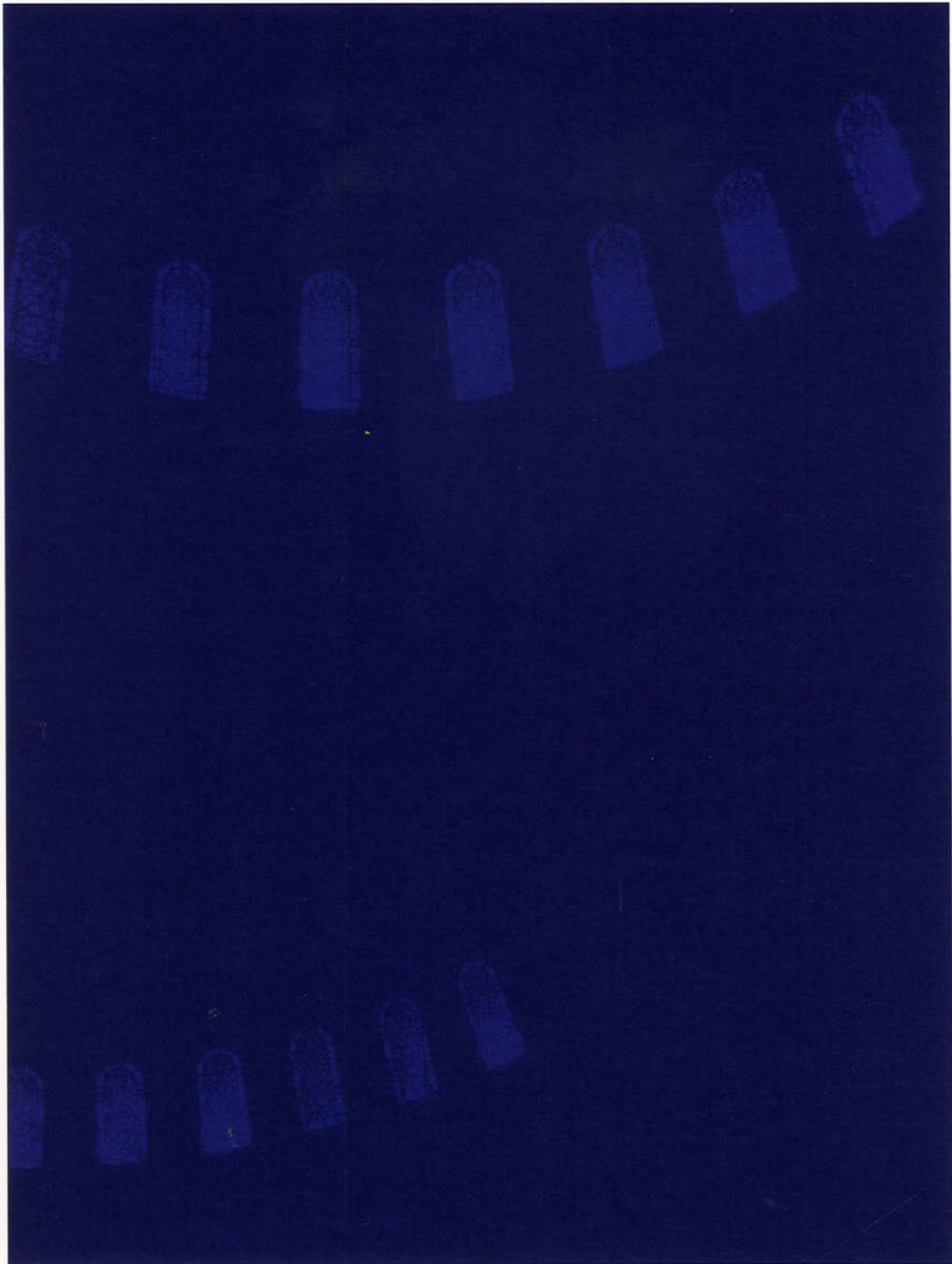


Figure 19. Jessica Staple, *Indigo*. 2015. Screen print on Arches paper, 66 x 49 cm. Edition of 3.

INDIGO

Around April 2015, I read the book *Colour* (2002) by Victoria Finlay that details her exploration into the history of pigments and dyes around the world. The stories in her chapters pertaining to the colours 'blue' and 'indigo' were, for me, particularly exciting. In "Blue", Finlay recounts her trip to Afghanistan to visit the lapis lazuli mines, lapis lazuli being the stone from which the colour 'ultramarine' is produced.⁴⁸ During her visit to the mines, Finlay was informed that there are various types and grades of lapis lazuli, each one a different shade of blue depending on the mineral content. Some stones appear almost grey in colour, but others, like the 'surpar' stones, possess a violet tinge that enriches the blue, making it more brilliant and thus described as "the colour of the deepest moment of the fire" (Finlay, 2002:321-322; S.n. cited in Finlay 2002:341).

Finlay's description of indigo as a liminal colour existing on the edge of blue and violet brought to my mind very particular colours (2002:375-377). By screen printing several semitranslucent layers on top of each other, I attempted to capture something of these wavering shades. Apart from the various coloured inks used, the printed outcome that is *Indigo* (Figure 19) was also finished with a glaze medium to enhance the shifting layers. As the work that I wished to produce was intended to display these printed colours, I selected a photograph that I had taken some years ago of the Blue Mosque to serve as the visual starting point to carry out my exploration. Thus, the subject matter of *Indigo* is the merging strata of colour rather than a representational rendering of a particular place.

⁴⁸ Ultramarine derives from 'oltramarino', meaning 'from beyond the seas'. The name thus refers to its geographical locations rather than the sea-like imagery that the colour may bring to mind (Finlay, 2002:311).

THE STORY OF QUEEN ÁSA AND THE OSEBERG

The symbolic power of water takes on a similar significance in certain burial practices in Viking culture as it does in Greek mythology. It is particularly in relation to Viking ship graves and dealings between the living and the dead that water features as a powerful symbolic conduit. In this section, I thus specifically look at the formation and history of the Oseberg ship – a vessel into which the bodies of the dead were placed – and the story of Queen Ása connected with it.

Many Viking boat and ship graves have been found scattered about Norway and Sweden (Brøgger, 1953:69, 70). The Oseberg ship grave is a remnant of the Westfold, the ancient realm of the Ynglinge kings (Brøgger, 1953:82).⁴⁹ Excavated in 1904 and dated between 815 and 820 AD, it is the oldest known sailing vessel in Scandinavia (Brøgger, 1953:81; Gardiner & Christensen, 1996:79, 80). The ship was found in Oseberg-Ødegården on the west coast of the Oslo Fjord in the parish of Slagen, halfway between Tønsberg and Åsgårdsstarnd (Brøgger, 1953:86, 88; Gardiner & Christensen, 1996:79). The site now lies about two and a half miles from the sea and about 15 meters above sea-level, but Brøgger notes that in Viking times the distance was probably less (1953:86; 88). As with other similar ships, the Oseberg lay with its prow facing south towards the sea (Brøgger, 1953:88).

The ship was excellently preserved inside the mound that was largely made from peat and covered with stones, forming an airtight layer over the grave. The bottom of the grave consisted of blue clay that (in combination with the peat) helped to preserve the woodwork of both the ship and the wooden artefacts inside (Brøgger, 1953:88).⁵⁰ Behind the mast of the ship was a burial chamber inside which lay the skeletons of two women believed to be a queen and her bondswoman (Brøgger, 1953:88).⁵¹ The burial chamber was richly furnished with beds, quilts, blankets,

⁴⁹ The Oseberg is one among two others, the Gokstad and Tune, that offer some of the finest examples of these ship graves. While little is known about the Tune ship and similar grave mounds connected with the Østfold chieftains, the Oseberg and Gokstad ships are both remnants of the same ancient realm of the Ynglinge kings about whom a great deal more is known (Brøgger, 1953:82).

⁵⁰ Despite the well-preserved nature of the ship and its cargo, shifts in the mound meant that much of the ship and its contents were damaged. As a result, the ancient vessel had to be removed in fragments and restored later (Brøgger, 1953:88).

⁵¹ An examination of the bones revealed that the women were aged 25-30 and 60-70 respectively.

pillows, clothing, tapestries, looms and several chests (Brøgger, 1953:88-89). The damaged prow ornament and four intricately carved animal-head posts were also found in the chamber. Located in the stern, bow and the rest of the mound were various kitchen utensils, building materials, shipping equipment as well as animal and plant remains, such as woad, a plant dye that was used to make blue before the use of indigo (Brøgger, 1953:89, 90).⁵²

Like similar mounds, the Oseberg was broken into in ancient times. While it may be assumed that the break-ins were the work of grave robbers, the meticulous excavation and examination of the ship's remains contradict this notion. Firstly, of the skeletons found, very little of the queen's remained in the mound. Indeed, it appears that the bones of the two women in the grave chamber were removed and scattered about in the upper layer of the ship (Brøgger, 1953:98). Despite the disturbance and scattering of both the queen's and her bondswoman's bones, it is evident that whoever broke into the burial chamber meant to remove the queen in particular – they intended to 'steal' the queen from the grave (Brøgger, 1953:100).

For the men and women of the Viking age, the dead were not wholly separate from the living, nor were they completely 'dead' in the sense familiar to modern readers. According to Brøgger, the grave was perceived not as the end of life but as its continuation (1953:101). The dead person was understood to 'live' in the mound in which she or he was buried, becoming a "mound-dweller" or a "mound-farmer" (Brøgger, 1953:100). Given its significance, the gravesite would have been protected not only by the dead person but also by living family members whose job it was to make this new home secure (Brøgger, 1953:101). The significance of this understanding becomes evident in the further treatment of the mound. In addition to 'stealing' the queen by scattering her bones, the beds in the burial chamber were also hacked to pieces, effectively 'killing' the queen's state bed, as Brøgger puts it (1953:100). As the queen does not appear to have had either gold or silver in her chamber, it is assumed that the objective of the break-ins and damage was to "annihilate the deceased and render the grave uninhabitable" (Brøgger, 1953:100).

⁵² By analysing the peat and plant remains, it can be deduced that the burial took place around late summer (Brøgger, 1953:90). Analysis of the ornamentation of the grave indicates that the ship was buried or 'sacrificed' in the latter half of the ninth century, but the ship itself is much older (Brøgger, 1953:90-91, 165; Gardiner & Christensen, 1996:78).

Inasmuch as the dead had the power to bring good luck to those with whom they maintained good relationships, they could also bring misfortune. Thus, relations between the dead and the living were always a mixture of joy and dread (Brøgger, 1953:101). The powers used to protect graves and ensure the well-being of the dead were simultaneously used to prevent "walking" (Brøgger, 1953:101). A heavy price was paid by those who disturbed this peace because they were understood to have ruined 'life' not only for the dead but for the living too (Brøgger, 1953:101). And against the weapons of the dead, the living were helpless (Brøgger, 1953:101).

Following the significance of the ship graves, the motive for mound-breakings cannot be assigned to a mere pilfering of goods. The stakes for robbers were high, and thus an undertaking of this magnitude would have been coupled with a far weightier purpose. Such break-ins were, at worst, an attack against the "departed mighty" or revenants at odds with life in the grave who had the power to inflict misfortune on the living (Brøgger, 1953:102). Similar to the significance of the skeletons located in the burial chamber, some of the objects buried in the site were also understood as sources of power. It might thus have been necessary to acquire some of the magical treasures residing in the grave to be used for ceremonial purposes (Brøgger, 1953:103).

The serpent prow ornament of the Oseberg bears testimony to this belief. According to Shetelig, the 'head' on the ship indicates a belief that the ship was a 'living' thing. Thus, along with the practice of naming one's vessel, the ornament gave a face to something that seemed to possess its own vitality (Shetelig, 1953:162, 163). In the queen's burial chamber of the Oseberg, this once proud ornament was hacked to pieces by intruders. Thus, inasmuch as the queen and her state bed had been 'killed', so too was the serpent⁵³ and the protective power that it carried.⁵⁴

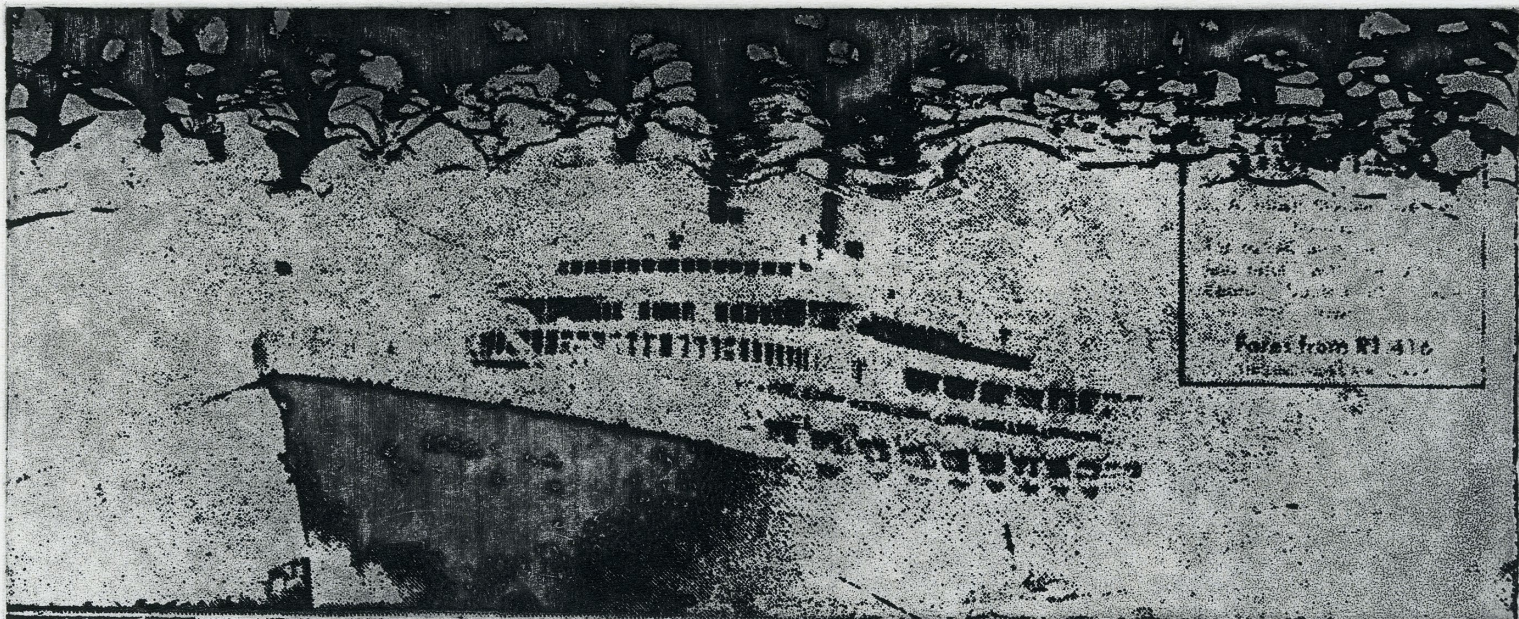
⁵³ The serpent is often recognised or referred to as a 'dragon', but the dragon was not known in Norway in the early Viking era and was only introduced later with the spread of Christianity (Shetelig, 1953:160-161). However, the serpent was always perceived as something of a menacing and mythical creature (Shetelig, 1953:160), and even before the dragon became familiar, the serpent had taken on the likeness of the winged creature (Brøgger, 1953:216). The serpent or dragon was "a visionary shape" that grew out of the fertile and fantastic landscape of the Nordic psyche (Brøgger, 1953:216-217). It was "a magic dream-figure from the Underworld... the world which we call unreal, but which to them was far more real than reality" (Brøgger, 1953:216-217).

Ship graves such as the Oseberg are evidently concerned with people of means and importance (Shetelig, 1953:166).⁵⁵ According to Shetelig, it is highly probable that the Oseberg is the grave of Queen Ása who is said to have murdered her husband Guthröth the Hunting-King (1953:166, 170).⁵⁶ Ása was the daughter of Harald the Redbeard, King of Agthir. As the tale goes, when Guthröth's first wife died, he asked Harald for his daughter's hand in marriage but he was refused. Guthröth later returned in force, killed Harald and his son, and took Ása for his bride. They were married and Ása gave birth to Guthröth's son, Hálfdan, later known as Hálfdan the Black. About one year after Hálfdan's birth, Guthröth and his ship were anchored in the Stiflu Sound. After much merriment and drinking on board, Guthröth left the ship to go ashore, at which point a man rushed at him and stabbed him with a spear. The man was immediately killed and was later identified as the queen's page. In the Saga of Hálfdan the Black, Ása is said to have later returned to Agthir with her son Hálfdan. When he turned 18, he ascended the throne and went to the Westfold to take over his share in that kingdom from his half-brother Óláf Geirstatha-Álf, Guthröth's son by his first wife (Sturluson, 2009:48-49, 51). That is all that is known of Ása, a proud and determined woman who killed her husband to avenge the murder of her family and pay back in full the brutality of her ordeal (Shetelig, 1953:168). From the ship grave Oseberg, it appears that at the time of her death Ása was esteemed enough to be buried in the manner accorded to a person of royal heritage, lodged in the familiar vessel that was believed to have carried her over still waters to the next world.

⁵⁴ According to Brøgger, a serpent was the dominant figurehead for the ships of both Norway and Denmark in the Viking era and the Middle Ages (1953:218). Its primary function was that of protection or to serve as a threat to enemies (Shetelig, 1953:160; Brøgger, 1953:216). Thus, the intention of the intruders was to ensure that it could neither protect nor threaten anymore (Brøgger, 1953:216).

⁵⁵ It should be noted that the ships in the mounds were not intended for the purpose of burial only but were all once in use (Brøgger, 1953:105). Nothing was spared on graves, and the ships themselves bear witness to their lives as once fully functioning water-faring vessels (Brøgger, 1953:105).

⁵⁶ Relatively little is known about Ása, but her existence is certain. She is briefly mentioned in Tjóðolv of Kvin's poem the *Ynglingatal* (c. 900) that enumerates the Yngling Kings (Shetelig, 1953:167; Sturluson, 2009:xix). The history behind the murder is detailed in the *Heimskringla* (translated as *The History of the Kings of Norway*) (c. 1230), a medieval text attributed to Snorri Sturluson, the Icelandic historian, poet and politician (Hollander in Sturluson, 2009:ix, xv).



RECORD OF THINGS STRANGE IN A MAKESHIFT STUDIO

The last tale included in this book, called "Three Former Lives", is one of 400 tales included in master storyteller P'u Sung-ling's magnum opus *Record of Things Strange in a Makeshift Studio*. This collection of tales chronicles centuries of the Chinese short-story tradition during the transition period from the Chinese Ming (1368-1644) to the Manchu Ch'ing (1644-1911) dynasty (Chang & Chang, 1998:1).⁵⁷ Most tales in *Record of Things Strange in a Makeshift Studio* are about ghosts, spirits and fantasies, but its scope extends far beyond the realm of the supernatural (Chang & Chang, 1998:73). It is also a portrait of early Ch'ing China, an impressive collection of stories that reveal the beliefs, values, customs, ideas, rituals and daily activities of the time (Chang & Chang, 1998:2). "Three Former Lives" typifies this fusion, wholly embracing the fantastical amidst other more everyday practices and occurrences. Through several transmigrations of the soul, the central figure of this tale, the scholar Liu, is able to atone for his past misdeeds and achieve true knowledge and wisdom, finally becoming a person of substance and repute (Roberts, 2014:xxiii). Yet, as a "historian of the world of the unusual" (cited in Chang & Chang, 1998:74), P'u Sung-ling himself exemplifies the kind of boundary crossing that characters such as Liu embody. In creating hybrid histories that include the cosmic universe and the spiritual and human conditions, the imagined becomes as real as objective fact; the past reconstructed through various narrative styles (Chang & Chang, 1998:74, 76-77).

⁵⁷ According to Chun-shu Chang and Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, this was a period of intense political, cultural, social, economic, intellectual and literary crises and transformation (1998:1). While the manuscript was completed sometime towards the end of the 17th century, it was not formally published until the 1760s, about 50 years after this Confucian scholar and writer's death (Roberts, 2014:xxii).

THREE FORMER LIVES⁵⁸

There was once a scholar named Liu who was able to recall events from his previous lives. In his first lifetime, he was a member of the nobility and as corrupt as any of them. He died at the age of 62 and was received by the king of the dead. The king treated him as a village elder, granting him a seat and offering him tea. Liu observed that the tea in the king's drinking cup was clear and pure while the tea in his own was thick and sticky.

"This must be what I have to drink to be reborn with no memory of my past life", he thought.

When the king was momentarily distracted, Liu threw out the contents of his cup and pretended that he had drunk the tea.

Eventually the king looked up Liu's record of misdeeds in life and, angered by what he saw, ordered a group of ghosts to remove him. The king punished him by reincarnation as a horse. Liu was put before a house with a threshold too high for him to cross. He balked, but the fierce ghosts lashed him. In great pain, Liu stumbled forward and suddenly he found himself in a stable where he heard a voice saying, "The black mare has given birth to a colt. A male!" Liu understood the words but could not speak. Too hungry to do anything else, he went to the mare and suckled.

Four or five years went by, and Liu's body grew strong and tall. He had a terrible fear of the whip and would shy away whenever he saw it. The master always protected his body with a saddle pad and held the reins loosely, but the groom and the servants rode him without a pad and dug their heels into his flesh so that the pain pierced him. Out of sheer indignation, he refused food for three days and died.

When Liu came to the netherworld, the king of the dead stated that his term of punishment had not yet ended, and he reproached Liu for evading it. The king ordered his hide to be peeled off and sent him back into the world as a dog. Liu was too dejected to move until a horde of ghosts lashed him savagely. In severe pain, he scurried into the wilderness, thinking he would prefer death. He jumped a precipice,

⁵⁸ This excerpt has been cited from Moss Robert's *Chinese Fairy Tales and Fantasies* (2014:159-161).

fell upside down and could not get up. When he came to consciousness, he was in a dog hole. A bitch was licking him tenderly, and he realised that he had been born again into the mortal world.

As Liu grew into a young dog, excrement and urine seemed fragrant to him, but he knew they were filthy and decided not to eat any. He spent a year as a dog in a state of constant fury, wanting to die. Yet he was afraid to escape this life. Because the master fed him well and showed no wish to slaughter him for food, Liu purposely bit him in the leg, tearing the flesh, and so the master clubbed him to death.

This rash deed angered the king of the dead, and he ordered Liu to be whipped with hundreds of strokes. He then turned him into a snake and confined him to a secluded room so dark that he never saw the sky. Frustrated, Liu scaled a wall and escaped through a hole. He swore that he would harm no living thing and eat only fruits and vegetables. For more than a year he lived in this way, longing to kill himself but knowing that it would be unwise, just as it would be unwise for him to injure someone and get himself killed. One day, while Liu was lying in the grass, he heard a carriage coming and rushed into the road in front of it. The wheels crushed him and cut him in two.

His speedy return amazed the king of the dead. The snake lay prostrate and told his story. Since the creature had been innocent when killed, the king forgave him and judged that he had fulfilled his sentence and could be reborn human. And so he became the scholar Liu, who begins our story. When he was born, Liu could speak. He could recite literary works, essays and histories after only one reading, and soon he earned his advanced degree. Yet he was always urging people to put a thick pad under their horse's saddle, for a heel dug into the flank is worse punishment for a horse than the whip.



CONCLUSION

This book has argued that art-making is an independent and continuous activity, implicated in many spaces, both internal and external, and that this activity is the very substance of a work of art. While ongoing, it is also reflexive and in a constant state of revision, and through it the artist acquires a unique form of knowledge and understanding. This developed and learnt awareness is extended to the viewer who follows in the creative act by bringing her or his own subjective experience as well as a mindfulness to the encounter.

In an attempt to bridge the gap between the experience of making and how it may be related, this inquiry has argued that in order to effectively express something about this activity, it does not suffice merely to talk about but show the products of this process. Artistic making is necessarily talked *through* and *enacted* – as I have attempted to do here in the form of an artist's book. By developing a narrative language alongside a visual and material one, this collection of textual and pictorial tales serves to demonstrate the relationship I have with my own practice. Like Liu's dramatic transposition into different physical forms and worlds embodies the concept of 'boundary crossing', so too do the acts of storytelling as well as art making. As creative, reflexive processes, both modes of representation cross multiple boundaries and open up liminal spaces for transformation to take place.

Like records of things strange in a makeshift studio, artworks are transient records, markers of a continuous but evolving activity that happened at a certain place and time and cannot be repeated. The necessary inclusion of various mythologies, folk tales and fairy stories thus sought to forge narrative, symbolic and material connections to my practice that in some instances were made quite clear, while in others they remained subliminal. While seemingly spontaneous, artworks are the product of a vast, unfathomable influence, shifting and changing in makeshift spaces as well as in the minds and bodies of those whom they affect in turn.

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