

Kenji Nakama

The Process of Letting Materials Speak

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I am often questioned about the way I perceive things. Most people find it particularly different. Many are curious because it is not usual to find someone who believes that common things are alive. I think, we can't see it because materials act in different ways than we are used to and sometimes materials need some help to allow us to see it. I experience it every day in my personal life and in my studio, where I try to find the way to help them say what they want to say.

The Process of Letting Materials Speak, is an approach to my process of working with common materials from an emotional and perceptual perspective. I start recounting struggles and achievements I went through in different stages of my life within my cultural background to introduce the midpoint. This concept shaped in many ways my creative process and my perception of the world. In the next chapters I relate and compare my position with the theories of Transitional Objects, Affordances and other less accepted but significant in building up my vision of the material world. I finish the thesis reflecting on my own process of making a series of work to point out the thoughts and decisions I made in my practice.

I Want to Be a Ceviche

My grandparents moved from Japan to Lima, Peru in the 1930's with a contract to work in the agricultural sector. At that time, the foreign relations between Peru and Japan were good until the Second World War started. During this period, the Japanese population in Peru was absurdly attacked. Some of them were sent to concentration camps in the USA and forced to abandon their family, businesses and material possessions. Even though things calmed down over time, it brought enormous consequences for the Japanese. Some of that first generation to arrive in Peru, are called the Isei, like my grandfather who never felt comfortable and wished to go back to Japan. The second generation, born in Peru from Japanese parents are called Nissei and they grew up with a certain sense of embarrassment of their cultural heritage that they managed to keep in low profile outside of the Japanese community, while others denied the values of their parents. Part of the process of integration was giving Spanish names to the new infants besides the Japanese name (my name is Kenji Héctor).

I belong to the third generation called Sansei and I was raised following some Japanese traditions like food, festivities and the Butsudan which is a small, household Buddhist shrine. All Sanseis I know do not speak Japanese and we don't know too much about our family history, which is a consequence of what previous generations experienced during war times.

My parents decided to not send me to the school of the Japanese community, because they were worried that I would only be surrounded by Nikkei's (Japanese-Peruvian in general) and would have problems to relate with the rest of the Peruvians. Instead I studied in an average catholic school. I wasn't aware of my heritage until I saw the curiosity of my friends for my lunch prepared by my mother or their surprised faces when I talked about my family festivities, or energies and spirits, which is so normal in my family. Like the

generation of my parents, I also learnt how to keep certain subjects low profile because of shame and because I wanted to be equal. In that period, the private and public space, the Japanese and Peruvian world were incompatible and I was disoriented standing on both sides.



Picture of the Nakama family, 1982, Lima, Peru. My grandmother(left), father(middle), mother(right), my older brother(below) and myself.

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In the Peruvian language, we have racist ways to point out the ethnical, physical and geographical characteristics of a person while still being 'kind' but of course this heavily depends on the context. We call indigenous folks *Cholo* or white friends *Gringo*. My friends call me *Chino* which means Chinese, which is completely wrong but within my friendships it is an expression of confidence and proximity. I am aware there's a lot of unconscious racism lying behind all this but within the friendship we don't mean to be derogatory. Because of these kinds of things, it feels like ethnicity matters a lot and at the same time it feels like it doesn't, it feels like being Peruvian but not completely, being inside and outside at the same time.

In 2001, at the age of 19, I travelled to Japan for the first time to obtain the Japanese citizenship and passport, a right I had because my father and mother owned that nationality. I was hoping to find out how Japanese I was, but throughout a year of working in a Japanese factory, I didn't connect with my colleagues and Japan as I had expected to. I was quite sure it was due to my poor level of Japanese language. However, most of the immigrants I met who were living there for a longer time had had the same experience: they lived quite isolated, they didn't have any social relationships or friendships with the Japanese. At that moment, I thought they marginalized themselves because they didn't want to make the effort of learning and understand the Japanese cultural codes, that they were feeling scared of losing

their cultural identity by trying to integrate and because their knowledge of Japanese language wasn't good enough to have a fluid and real communication. The common opinion I heard was that they were treated as foreigners and not as equal. In his investigation about the marginalization of Brazilian nikkeis in Japan, Takeyuki Tsuda gathered information from the Japanese side. One of the informants argues that besides the language problem of immigrants, Japanese society is ethnically homogeneous which means it doesn't cope well with ethnic diversity like the Nikkei people.

It reminds me of Ariana Miyamoto, Miss Japan 2015. She is the first "Hafu" Japanese woman to win that contest. Born and raised in Japan, she is the daughter of a marriage between a Japanese woman and a man from the United States. When she was asked if the term "Hafu" bothers her, she replied:

"If I say I am 'Japanese' the reply would be: 'No, you can't be'. People will not believe that. But if I say I am 'hafu', people agree. There is no word like hafu outside Japan, but I think we need it here. In order for us mixed kids to live in Japan, it is indispensable and I value it."(Wingfield-Hayes)

The introduction of the word "Hafu", which means Half, produces in me several contradictions. The idea of what it is to be and not to be Japanese is still very rigid, if someone doesn't look, speak or wear all traditions, their being Japanese is just out of the equation.

In that context, the term Hafu refers to something that is not pure, incomplete, a lack of one part. It seems to reinforce the categories based on the belief on the existence of race, of blood purity that have no sense intensifying separation rather than integration. Nevertheless, its negative connotation has been changing and bicultural Japanese are more accepted than before. In my humble opinion, (I have no first-hand information and theoretical tools to go further) I believe the word Hafu can have a positive effect, it can create awareness

of the diversity and at the same time loosen and expand the definition of what is to be Japanese. I hope they start a process of including rather than excluding, that Peru and especially Lima must also work on.



Ariana Miyamoto. Image by CBS News. Web. April 13, 2015..

After a year, I left Japan with my Japanese passport carrying a strange feeling of disillusionment. Although it is the country of my ethnic origin, I realized I am not as deeply attached to Japan as I am to the Nikkei culture. I'm more connected with the Half, the midpoint because of its openness to external influences and capacity of adaptation to circumstances while keeping its origins and sources, making the identity more flexible and fluid.

The year before my graduation, I met an old friend of my family, who is very well-known within the Nikkei community for his ability to see the immaterial world of spirits. Since that meeting, I started to consider that all unusual experiences I had related to spirits, dreams, energies from places and objects, family beliefs and even things from Catholicism that had made no sense, were not haphazard but connected and meaningful.

The integration of two different perspectives of the world gave me a feeling of relief, happiness, peace of mind, and calmness. I had achieved a sense of the necessity to reconsider my rigid standing points, to open my own boundaries. This is all unconsciously present in my artistic practice.

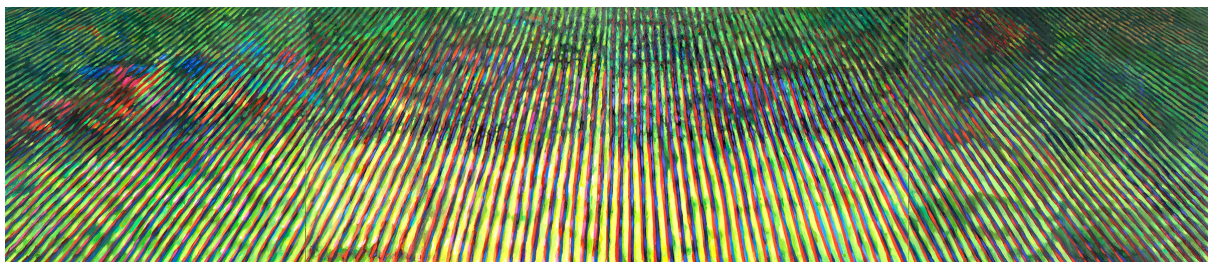
The Paper Paved Road to the Material

I finished my Bachelor studies in Painting, in 2006, Peru. It was a period when Internet started to become more present in my daily life and I felt the necessity to make a comment on how we have become more familiar with screens and technology and less with nature.

I was fascinated with the fact that the White Noise and other kinds of distortions are images that don't repeat themselves, are in constant movement and change, and moreover these images are created neatly by the television itself and not by human hand, which I interpreted as an expression of the life of the artefact.

In the process, I realized that my interest for colourful images produced by the television was a comparable approach as the one that impressionists had in catching the natural light on landscapes. However, a big difference lay in what we considered nature (space) and in the tools we used to hold those moments (time). In my case, I used a digital camera I could zoom in with and take pictures of the imperceptible stages of the distortions.

Through a series of photographs and paintings based on the photographs, the screen of the television was presented as a Natural landscape, a project that I named 'New Nature'.



Lilies, 2006, oil on mdf, 150x480cm

Influenced by the ideas of Marshall McLuhan I started to consider television and technology not as neutral media whose only function is to transmit information, but the

medium itself, due to its nature carries a system of ideas that shape the way we think and perceive the world. In a period of three and a half years, I made small changes like using the concepts of Zapping and fragmentation of reality.

Due to the nature of television, only a fragment of reality can be selected, which is edited and shaped by economical and political interests and then presented as real. The fragmented condition of this reality is intensified by the Zapping, the action of passing from one channel to another. We viewers construct our perception of the world through these fragments.

After several years working on the same project, I got fed up because I couldn't find a way out to evolve in conceptual and formal ways. Painting became a very slow and boring process of copying a photograph without space to change, think and surprise myself. With the aim to open up my process and make a big change I quit painting.

In 2010 I started working with printed materials like magazines and books in which I found a way to go further on the conceptual framework developed for the previous project. Moreover, I found in paper a quite new and unknown material I felt very comfortable to work with because of my skills in Origami and the familiarity with the material since it is a material we interact with every day.

For the exhibition, *Mutacion y Desborde*, the pieces were developed taking in consideration and reflecting on the inner qualities of the printed material, as a medium to carry information, the wide range and amount of information, its reproduction, and its origin in nature. I wanted to bring back the element of nature to the paper and present it as living organisms such as viruses, fungus or plants taking over the structure that used to contain them. It was a way to make a comment on the state of the industry taking over natural sources, the way the information is produced and how the body reacts when it is consumed.



Untitled, 2011, magazines, books, telephone guides, encyclopaedias, wood bookshelf, 200x150x90 cm

For the next project, I didn't want to make a rational or anthropologic statement on media anymore. I felt I was talking more than the works themselves. So, I decided to focus more on the material itself and less on specific concepts.

From then on, I would work with white bond paper, it led me to focus on the formal and material aspects. Following this intention, *Garden* (2011) and *Garden 2* (2015) came to life. These works started by taking in consideration the size and other elements of the space to set the composition of my 'paper things'. Taking advantage of the wooden floor I tried to point out the similar origins of the paper and the floor, its processes of transformation.



Garden 2, 2015, Collage of bond paper, 400x450x50cm

For *Folding Studies* (2014), I focused on the different visual effects produced by folding the paper in different ways. I approach to it as a drawing or a monochrome painting to show up the movement, gestures of the stripes of paper. The works were built up using one thickness of paper and one kind of fold for each piece. The decision of planning beforehand the structure, material and technique of each piece was an attempt to find out the different results based on simple rules of construction and moreover a way to give space for chance and unexpected outcomes by pushing the limits of the material under controlled conditions.



Folding Studies #13, 2014, Collage of bond paper, 130x100cm

After several years of working with the same material I got fed up again. By that moment, it was clear for me that I have little interest in images and more in the medium that carries them. Within the artistic environment of Lima, where strong political statements on our history, rational processes in which the idea and academic investigation rule contemporary artistic practice, I didn't know how to approach the materiality of things in general. I wasn't aware that the material practice could be an investigation in itself. Aware of my lack of critical and practical tools and aiming for a change I decided to study at a master programme.

Materials Inhabiting the World

While packing for my trip to the Netherlands, I had to decide which things I would bring with me to spend the next years. It was not an easy task considering the huge amount of things I had gathered through all my life in Peru. In the process of selection, I got rid of many things I considered useless and of the things I kept, I brought a few objects that belonged to my parents; they have no economical value at all but have an immense sentimental value.



Crucifix(left), Daruma(middle) and Omamori(right)

Considering I am in a process of change and adaptation, some experts would explain my emotional attachment to these things as Transitional Objects because they bring me comfortable feelings and a sense of protection, which is very well depicted in the figure of Linus van Pelt in the cartoon Peanuts. Linus is a kid who is always carrying a blanket and sucking his thumb wherever he goes. According to Donald Winnicott, in the early stage of life, infants don't make a difference between their body and their mother's body. She is not even considered as an external body, she is part of the infant's body. When the infant is separated from breast feeding, the absence of the mother produces a sense of loss which is filled by an object to deal with this feeling. It could be any object chosen by the child like a blanket, a teddy bear, as long as it carries attributes of the mother like the smell, texture,

softness, to substitute her presence. This object is called transitional object because it helps the infant to move from dependency of the mother to independency.

In adulthood, transitional objects give us emotional security to deal with the absence of someone but also, confidence to deal with the stress which could take form in clothes, cars, expensive things to project signs of comfort and to project our personality.

In this sense, transitional objects stand at a middle point between the inner world of the infant and the external reality. It is a bridge that helps to move from one stage to another, and while crossing it the child develops the capacity to recognize his own body and the existence of external bodies.

There are elements of transitional objects related to my artistic practice. One is the transformation of the object, once it is chosen by the infant. The object is imbued with personal meaning based on characteristics of another subject, a living person. Thereby, the object talks about itself, about the possessor and about a subject. I believe in this process, the object loses its condition of object and shifts to an area where things are not well defined, it is a grey area where things are not meant to be just object or subject, my body or an external body, the inner or external world. Another aspect that interests me is the newly transformed condition of the object. This new thing stands in a midpoint between two opposites and carries characteristics from both sides.

In my artistic practice, from the moment I pick up objects and materials from streets, containers and shops and place them in my studio, they become something else. I find in common materials a potential, something that triggers ideas and emotions that I don't figure out at first glance. Through the process of discovering and clarifying the reasons of my emotional connection, which is shaped by personal experiences, the material is at the same time affected and influenced rather than imbued by my intentions, that makes me look at them no longer as lifeless but as entities carrying something of me. The outcome is the result

of an interaction that I try to make visible, until I feel the material speak of itself, its inherent material properties, of what I want to say about it, and about the interaction between us.

However, transitional objects slightly differ from the way I perceive things. From my point of view objects are not meaningless that I can fill up with personal content and bring them to life. It is a different condition beyond or in-between the categories of person and thing, living and non-living. We assume things need to move, have organs, think and feel like humans to consider them alive but I think material objects have a special way to act. They carry energy that affect us as well as, the things and space around them. I find the verb affecting more suitable than imbuing because it is about a relationship, an exchange between bodies influencing each other rather than bringing something under control.

There are some theories that, despite being rejected by scientists, caught my attention because they offer a different role we humans give to common things.

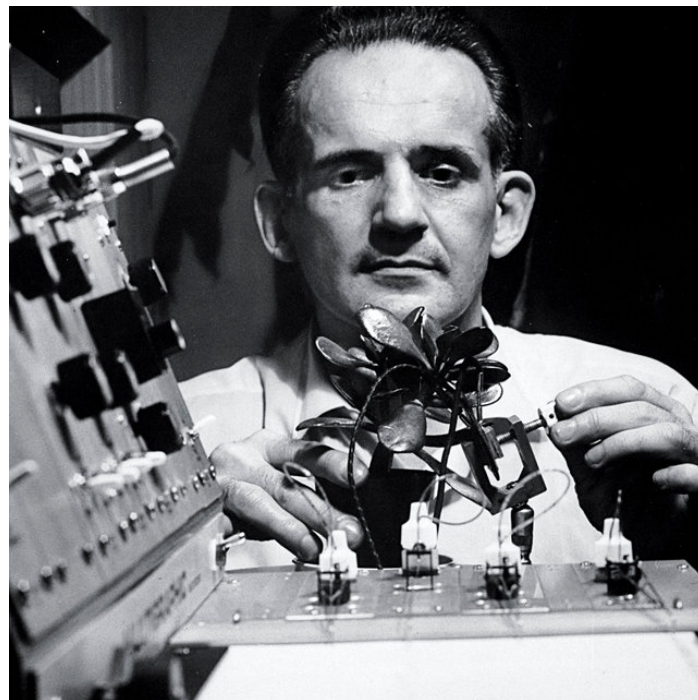
You Don't Know Me

On February the 2nd of 1966, Cleve Baxter, an ex-agent of CIA and a world polygraph expert, was sitting in his office in front of his lie detector machine and a plant, a *Dracaena Massangeana* that was brought by his secretary. Guided by his boredom and curiosity, he connected the sensors of the polygraph to the plant to see if he could get some response. He decided to burn the leaves of the plant to induce some stimuli on it. Unexpectedly, before he could even turn on the match, the polygraph registered a pattern in the way a human would have reacted to fear.

Since then, he carried out similar experiments to demonstrate that plants have feelings such as pain, fear and affection and can also remember people from whom they received damage and received care. He also concluded that plants have the capacity to read human

intentions as well as human emotions and thoughts, an ability that he named 'primary perception'.

His experiments were more controlled in isolated rooms where plants could not be influenced by unexpected external stimuli that could obstruct the information of polygraphs. He continued investigating the primary perception on plants reacting on other living organisms instead of humans. For the next project, he separated plants and shrimps in two different rooms without any human presence. Through a mechanism, the shrimps fell in boiling water triggering the reaction of pain of the plants in the other room.



Backster performing one of his experiments, Image by Henry Groskinsky. Web. December 21, 2013

Wondering if not only plants were sensitive to its environment, he figured out the way to register on the polygraph, the activity of single cells such as yeast, amoeba, blood and sperm. He found out that sperm reacted to the presence of their donor, ignoring the presence of other males in the room. In his experiments with eggs, he got signals of heartbeats belonging to a chicken embryo in incubation, despite the eggs being bought in a store and

they were unfertilized. Cleve Backster stated: "Sentience,.... does not seem to stop at the cellular level. It may go down to the molecular, the atomic and even the subatomic. All sorts of things which have been conventionally considered to be inanimate may have to be re-evaluated." (Tompkins and Bird, 12)

The publication of his findings became a pop culture phenomena named the Backster Effect that encouraged many to go further on his theory. However, the scientific community rejected his theories claiming the lack of objective scientific evidence on his investigation. They failed to detect any response from plants to which Backster replied that the plant probably shut down to protect itself.

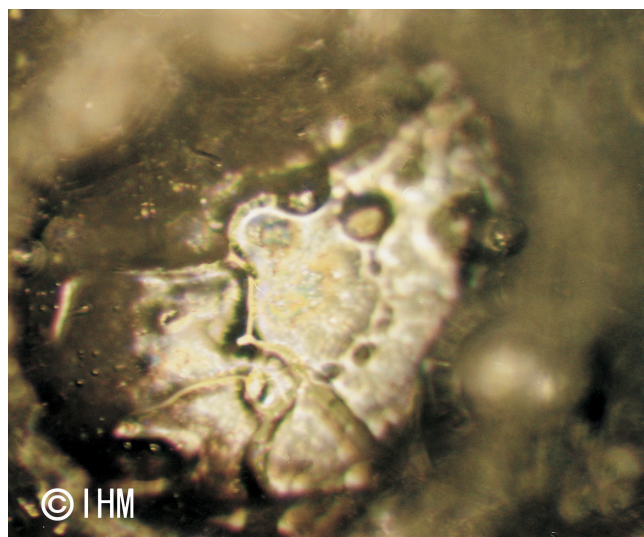
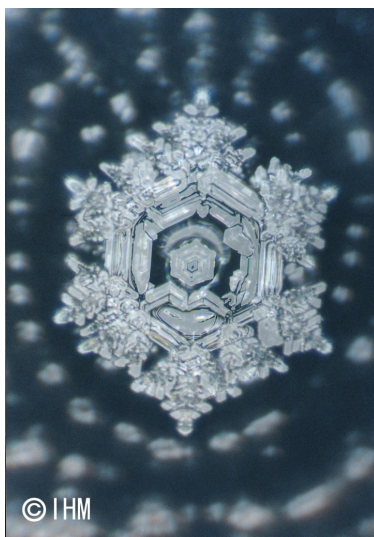
I include this example for two reasons. Firstly, I have no doubt about the energies and connectedness of the natural world. I experienced the power of plants in common life and later, in a healing ritual from the Peruvian rainforest. And secondly, the experiments that Gibson made, to find the life in plants and other things, reminds to the process I go through in my studio with materials.

You Don't Know Me, Vol.2

The Japanese Dr. Masaru Emoto conducted a series of experiments on water in 1994. According to his website, he took samples of water from different sources, from a river, a tap and a lake and froze it to observe the crystals under the microscope. He found out that the structure of the crystals from tap water, lakes and rivers close to big cities were very different in shape from the crystals taken from lakes and rivers where the water is kept pristine from development.

Wondering the reasons of this difference, he went further on with his experiments and exposed water to negative and positive environments. He used phrases like love, peace or pleasant music and prayers on the water crystals. The resulting images of crystal exposed to

positive energies showed beautiful crystals, perfect geometric structures, sharp borders and symmetry that are considered as beautiful crystals. On the other hand, the water exposed to negative thoughts and words, using phrases like ‘I hate you’, ‘demon’, showed ugly crystals, imperfect, broken structures and half shaped forms. He concluded that positive or negative energies coming from us and the environment changes the physical structure of water in unique/visual ways.



Beautiful water crystals formed after the prayer at Fujiwara dam(left). Ugly water structure before the prayer at Fujiwara dam(right), Web.<https://fractalenlightenment.com>

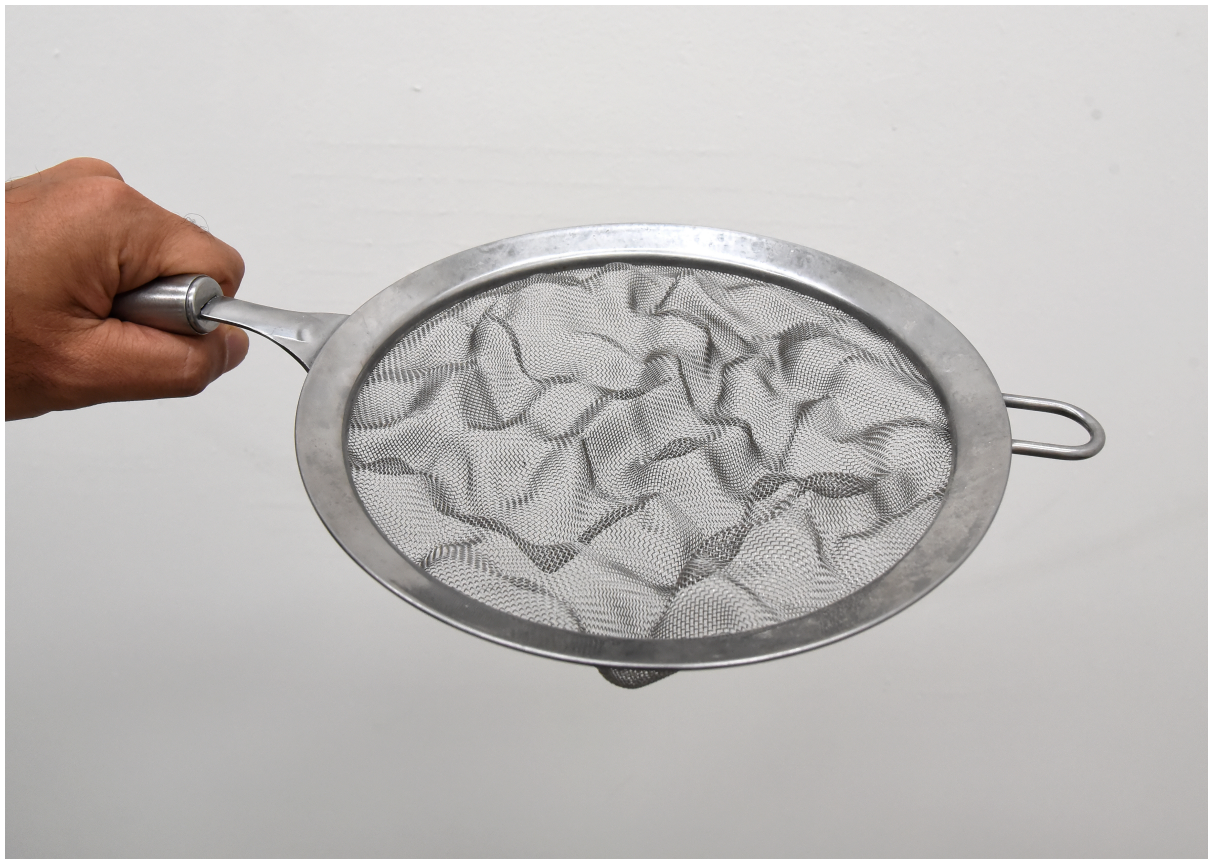
Emoto is criticized, among many things, for not sharing enough details of his procedure and what is known doesn't meet the minimum standards of control to consider his experiments as scientific evidence, suggesting manipulation in the results that brings down the whole theory.

I'm aware of the criticisms from scientists on Backster and Emoto's ideas, there are few reasons to not consider them as businessmen making money from the sale of books or bottled water filled with positive energies. Is not my intention to demonstrate the existence of emotions in plants or any structural changes in water, although it would probably never be

possible to achieve it in scientific terms, however it still triggers in me a feeling wonderment; what if it is true? What if water and plants are actually affected by our presence, by our thoughts, feelings and intentions? What if water and plants emanate positive and negative energies? How we would be affected? In what ways would our relationship with nature change? The possibility to think of a different relationship with nature and things than the scientifically accepted and unanimated nature, is important fuel for my work.



Untitled, 2016, Colanders, 40x20x4cm each



Untitled, 2016, Colander, 40x20x4cm

We Are Here

When I visited the exhibition of Song Dong *Life is Art, Art is Life* at the Groninger Museum, Netherlands in 2015, I was amazed by the installation “*Waste Not*” a display of common objects owned by his mother. She used to gather things to reuse them for the next generation of family. When her husband passed away, her desire to hoard things became uncontrollable, exceeding even the space of her house.

It is possible she didn't accept the loss of her husband leaving her and was unable to accept reality. The traumatic episode could have triggered her desire for hoarding things as a way to keep her husband alive and keep memories closer by surrounding herself with common objects with personal meaning.



Song Dong, *Waste Not*, 2005, Installation view at Projects 90, United States.



Song Dong, *Waste Not*, 2005, Installation view at Projects 90, United States.

She explained what these objects mean for her in her memoirs:

“All these many items are not merely specimens, rather they are lives that were lived. The months and years have left us with so many remnants, but those months and years have also taken many things with them. The reason I’ve tried, by every means possible, to hold on to these things is so as to extend their lives” (Hudek. *The Object*. 185)

From a psychological and scientific perspective, the idea of extending people’s life through objects, considering the existence of life after death, considering any sign of life in objects or the existence of soul or any matter beyond material bodies is considered irrational and a childish way of thinking. However, when I experienced the installation, everything Song Dong’s mother stated made sense; for me the objects carried a presence difficult to explain.

I think her perception differs from transitional objects because someone doesn’t choose an object to project memories of people or imbue spirit in materials. I believe the

animated condition doesn't emanate from all things and is not something that makes them move from one place to another. They have their own peculiar way to react, to be *in* the world, which is not a condition imposed or forced unto them, but it exist through the relation of many circumstances.

According to Harry Garuba, the potential of the animist thought goes beyond a system of beliefs because it unconsciously refuses boundaries and demarcations of the dualistic structure set by modernism. He argues:

“...the possibilities that animism offers for instituting a different regime of knowledge, one rid of the dualisms of the modern. Here, I argue that there is a need to reach for new conceptual vocabularies that transcend the modern episteme in order to take advantage of this recent convergence of interest in the logics of animist thought, however difficult it may be to achieve this.”(Garuba)

Animist thought is also political because it opens the possibilities for different existences in terms of gender, sexuality, race. He refers to the need of a new vocabulary to transcends dichotomies. I consider the midpoint; I stated in the chapter about my cultural background, using the example of the hafu, to refer to a grey area between the knowable and definable and all that fails definition. This new vocabulary I aim to activate and facilitate in my artistic practice. This awakens of the object happens when I feel the piece has carried elements of its origins, it carries something of me, but also it transcends both turning into something new, something I cannot define.

Ode on a Flower by Richard Feynman

"I have a friend who's an artist and has sometimes taken a view which I don't agree with very well. He'll hold up a flower and say "look how beautiful it is," and I'll agree. Then he says "I as an artist can see how beautiful this is but you as a scientist take this all apart and it becomes a dull thing," and I think that he's kind of nutty. First of all, the beauty that he sees is available to other people and to me too, I believe. Although I may not be quite as refined aesthetically as he is ... I can appreciate the beauty of a flower. At the same time, I see much more about the flower than he sees. I could imagine the cells in there, the complicated actions inside, which also have a beauty. I mean it's not just beauty at this dimension, at one centimeter; there's also beauty at smaller dimensions, the inner structure, also the processes. The fact that the colors in the flower evolved in order to attract insects to pollinate it is interesting; it means that insects can see the color. It adds a question: does this aesthetic sense also exist in the lower forms? Why is it aesthetic? All kinds of interesting questions which the science knowledge only adds to the excitement, the mystery and the awe of a flower. It only adds. I don't understand how it subtracts." (Feynman)

You and Me, so Happy Together

I collect cheap, discarded and common materials. They are easily accessible and because they are familiar to almost everyone. Sometimes I find them in the street or sometimes I buy them. Often it is because I am attracted to something in their colour, shape or texture, but also it can be for reasons that I haven't yet realised.

Without knowing what will come up, I find myself wondering what to do and how to approach the material. I do not often start with a draft or drawing because I consider my knowledge on materials to be limited, although I know what most people know such as plastic straws are used to transfer liquid to my mouth or cardboard boxes to contain and transport things. Those are the uses we all take for granted. But we find other uses depending on our purposes and goals, like cats finding a place to hide and sleep in a box, attaching things with plastic straws or using envelopes as paper notes. I'm interested in those unknown possibilities and different ways of using materials.

In order to find these and go beyond my common and limited knowledge, I interact with material by touching, holding, breaking, bending, cutting, placing, walking around and staring at them. I have no idea in advance of the direction I will take, just the intention to bring out their visual and tactile potential to use for my artistic purposes, that I hope to unleash and share with others.

In the process, the reaction of the material orients me and frames my range of actions. For example, the fragility of the paper envelopes invites me to bend them but also to be careful and avoid any liquid. While a bucket doesn't offer the possibility to bend it does offer the use as a pedestal. However, I don't perceive those characteristics as limitations, they are strengths that could lead to find other possibilities.

In James Gibson's theory of Affordance, he refers to the possible actions that objects (and environment) offers to perform in relation to a body. It means that depending on the particular materiality of a body and its specific needs, it will perceive a particular affordance. For example, a stone could be used as a missile for thieves, as a paperweight for me, a hammer, a knife or a tool to make fire. A chair offers me the possibility to sit down and rest my back and legs, for a cat it offers the opportunity to lay all his body on it or hide beneath it.

In case of manufactured objects the affordance is more specific, its materiality narrows down the range of action, so its purpose could be more easily perceived, like a button to push to open and close a door. The possibilities might seem limited because even though objects might look different in appearance there's a recurrent pattern in many of them. However, the use of the material object is not fixed, it is flexible in relation to the particular body and its intentions. Therefore the possibilities are unlimited according to Gibson:

“An affordance is an invariant combination of variables, and one might guess that it is easier to perceive such an invariant unit than it is to perceive all the variables separately. It is never necessary to distinguish all the features of an object and, in fact, it would be impossible to do so”(Gibson 134)

As a maker, what I see first in material objects are their physical characteristics. I see first the surface, where I find all the information I need. It is contained and latent, waiting to be perceived. For example, the marks and scratches on the surface of a bucket, it says something about its past, about the interaction or friction with the roughness of the floor, metals, heavy stuff. The surface, size rings of a trunk can tell us its age, the shape can tell about its interaction with the weather.

In his book, *In Praise of Shadows*, Junichiro Tanizaki compares the different connotations of the shadow, the darkness in the west and in Japan. For example in the West, silver and steel are polished until they have a shiny or glossy finish that reflects light. It gives an idea of eternity and a timeless object. However, in Japan they prefer not to polish silver, they find more value on the brownish colour that silver gains through the passing of years.

Fingerprints and irregularities on the surface, changes in the colour because of the impact of the sun; the surface changes through the years, accumulating layers of time, information about its history, its interaction with people and surroundings. For me, accepting those marks, is to accept the individuality of the material, time, ageing, and its life quality and beauty. It makes no sense for me to erase those marks, deviations, irregularities or distortions because it is part of their nature and what makes them unique. Materials are not rigid and static entities, about which everything is known. They say more than I could say about them and more than I could perceive.

The way I access materials and bring out what they can tell is through interacting with my hands, eyes, my body and its senses through different actions. It is a physical practice rather than conceptual, it is subjective experience rather than an objective approach. It is in this process where the material is opened to many combinations and ways to behave and act that gives me possibilities to discover its aesthetic and conceptual potential.

The work *Come Out and Play*, came out of this process. I led myself guided by the shape and structure of a single kitchen paper roll. I later painted it in a way associated to the traditional Chinese and Dutch pottery. I think this piece stands in the midpoint because it didn't lose its reference to the kitchen paper, it carries it with a part of me and the result transcends both of us.



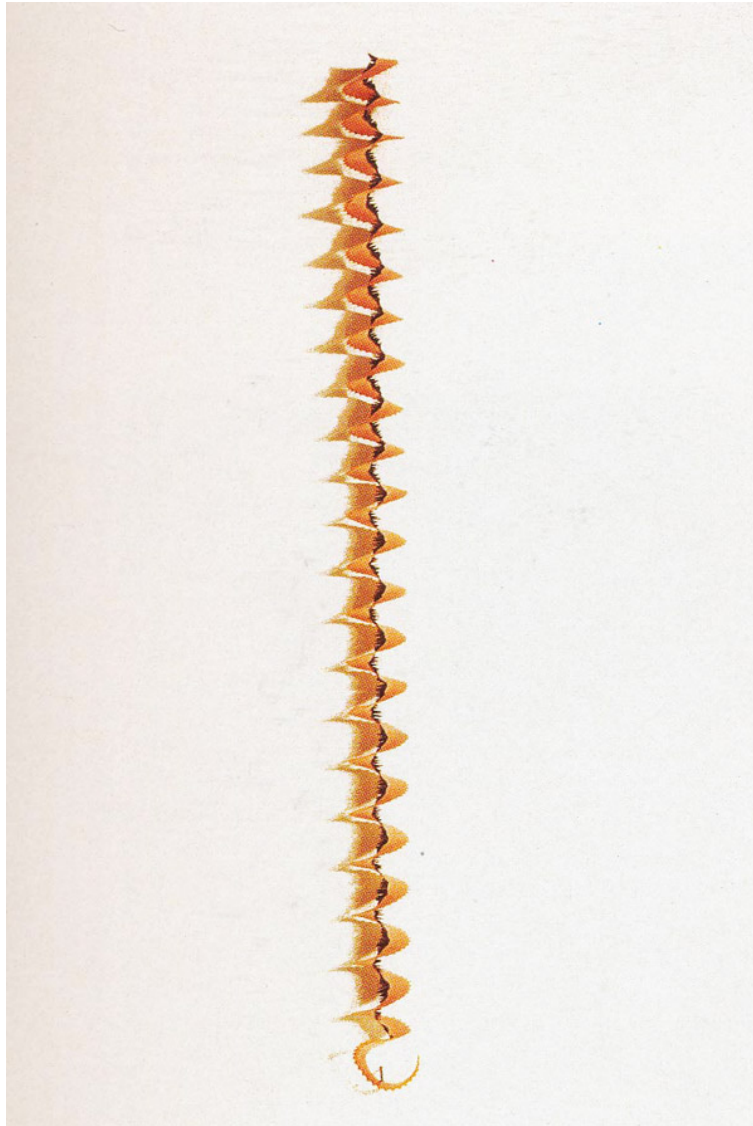
Come Out and Play, 2016, kitchen toilet paper and blue marker, 56x14x14cm

The electronic album *94 Diskont* by Oval, goes in the same direction. It was recorded using the “mistakes” of the CD that were created by scratching, gluing masking tape, breaking and manipulating the surface of the CD. In this case, the CD isn’t used as a medium to carry music as we might have used and known of it. Here, the object becomes a material source to produce glitchy sounds. The result is full of textures flowing along the electronic atmosphere like click and cut sounds and other noises that brings me back to the materiality of the CD.



Oval. *94 Diskont*. Album Cover. Martin Bott, Album Artwork Design. Mille Plateaux Records, 1995

On the other hand, the work *Untitled*, by Tom Friedman cannot be achieved using materials other than a pencil and sharpener. Although this simple action has been performed by several and taken as granted, Friedman's observation and awareness about that specific act, led him to push the sharpener's purpose further creating an intriguing continuous and long spiral made of the leftover of a shaved pencil.



Tom Friedman, *Untitled*, 1992, Pencil shaving, 50.8x3.8x3.8 cm. Web.

In the field of design, the process of the Brazilian designers known as the Campana Brothers relates to my practice. They make objects using discarded materials and techniques related to the local craftsmanship, industrial leftovers, surroundings, etc. The favela chair, is a result of their experience in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, they picked up slats of woods from a local fruit market and through the process they came up with this chair. Its way of construction reminds the way homes at favelas are built up.



Campana Brothers. *Favela Chair*, 2003, dezeen. Web. 14th March 2017

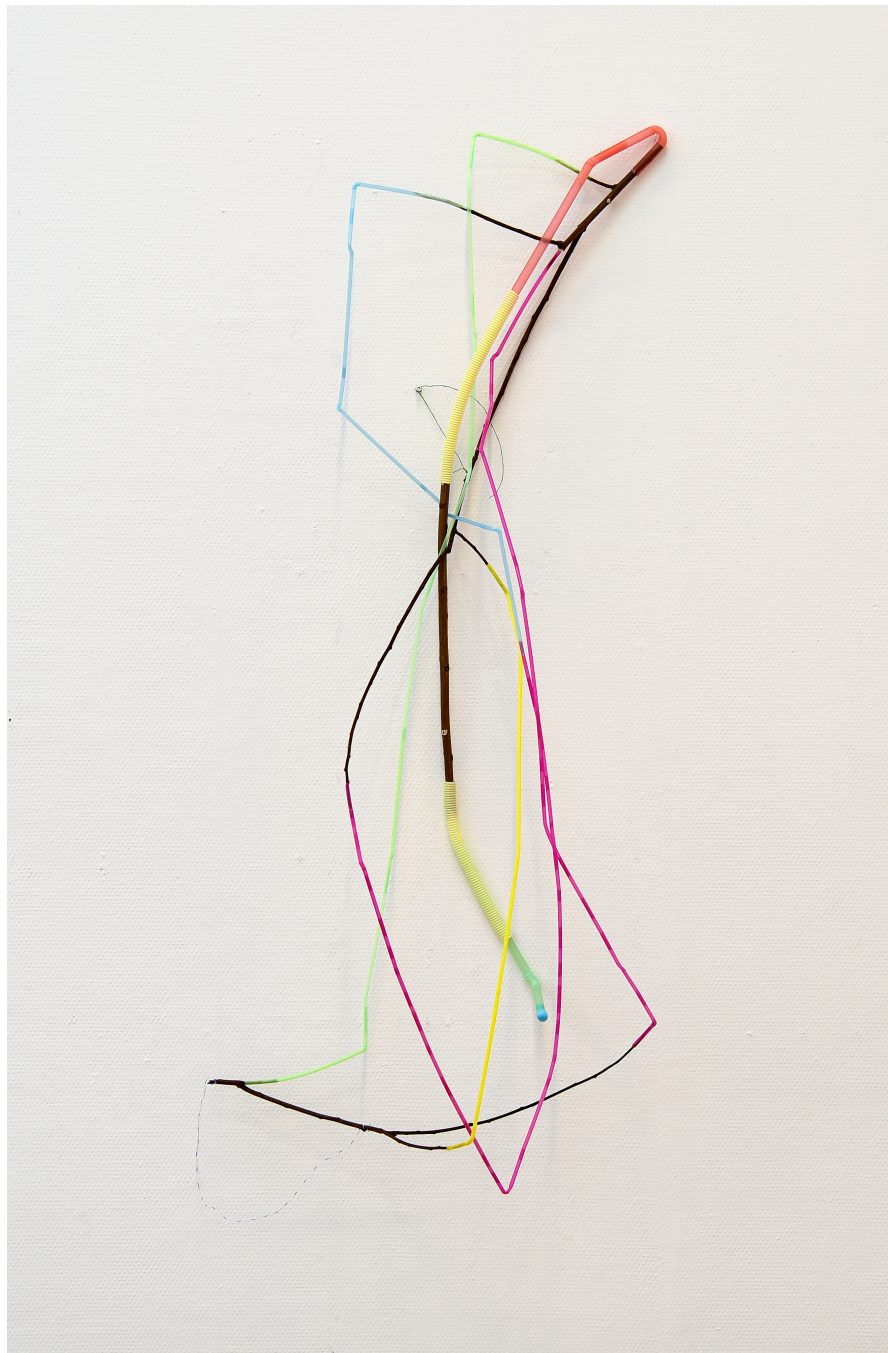
Decisions and Directions



Blue in Green, 2016, Plastic Straws, spring onions and plastic bottles, 90x24x9cm

Blue in Green, started as a visual curiosity in my studio. I had been gardening green onions to use in my meals. I placed two improvised pots just under a long pink line made of plastic straws that I had been working on and I attached to the wall. The green onions and plastic straws looked alike in form. Guided by curiosity, I brought both things together and to my surprise, they matched in thickness and shape. Suddenly the straws looked as if they were extensions of the plants, like projections of its own growth. It also reminded me of some sort of intimate plant communication or transfer of fluid, energy or other substance to stay alive, or a plant built up using human technology. Excited by the discovery, I wanted to develop this idea in the next piece, using materials related to the organic and industrial.

With the intention of making a closed circuit, I used branches I picked up from the garden and leftovers from previous works I had considered as leftovers. I connected all parts and after many attempts to hang it in the way I had planned, it accidentally turned upside down by its own weight and shape. The new form was much better than I had expected and I ended up very pleased with what the piece did.



Untitled, 2016 Plastic Straws, plastic tubes, cables and branches, 150x60x40cm

This piece became important for me. Besides carrying all ideas of the previous experiments, it is more suggestive, less explicit and it gained some uncertainty that I hadn't been able to achieve before. I am still wondering how this system works or what kind of substance runs through the tubes and branches. The sense of fragility and ambiguity makes me look at it as a drawing where lines, colors and composition, are in balance and integrated.

Although in the process, there was an element of chance and intuition, the unexpected result came out within a framework. I set some boundaries by limiting both the range of the materials and the technique I used. I believe the use of these limitations results in an artwork that, on the one hand, has clarity and form, but also remains open for interpretation.

Motivated by the result, I decided to add more materials in the next piece and make it heavier and bigger. In order to give the materials some structure, I used as a model a Peruvian cornet *Wagra*, which had been floating in my mind during those days.



Wagra, Image by Juan Pablo Murrugarra Fotografía

I wanted to use the shape and the way horns are placed together in the Waqra – they are attached one after another, in order of size from the smallest horn until the bigger horn where the sound comes out. I also aimed that my piece could talk about nature, industry, plastic and musical instruments. I placed a mouthpiece at the beginning and a big lamp screen at the end simulating the output and I tried to put together buckets, cardboard tubes, plastic tubes, trunks and branches. After many attempts, I stepped back from this idea and kept few materials because I couldn't achieve the organic quality I was looking for and the materials didn't connect to each other as I wanted. At the end, I tied up colorful ribbons on the piece to give a festive character that I loved.



Process of building up the Cornet, 2017.



Process of building up the Cornet, 2017.

For my seminar, I presented the horn on a pedestal. The associations, interpretations and comments of my friends were interesting because they were beyond my expectations. The feedback I received from tutors and friends recommended that I reconsider the presence of the mouthpiece because it made the whole piece 'too obvious'. They also suggested that I could be using the fragments and remains of the cornet in my studio that I had left out.



Cornet, 2017, bucket, trunk, lamps screen, ribbons, mouthpiece, 127x83x50cm



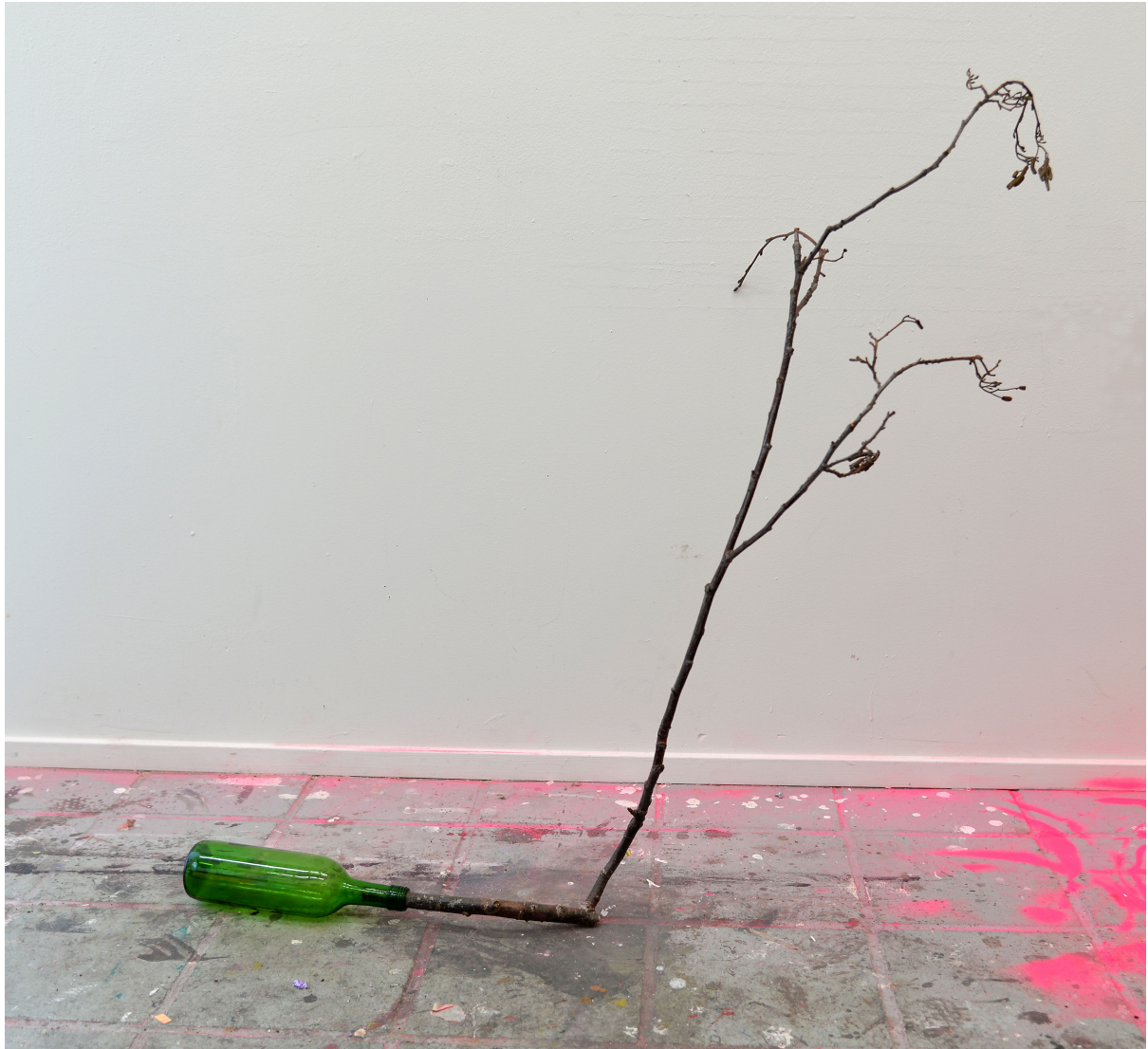
Untitled, 2017, bucket, trunk and lamp screen, 109x67x50cm

Later, I reflected on the process of construction of the cornet and found it was too controlled in comparison to the green onion piece. I had decided in advance upon the structure and construction of the cornet, and this plan didn't allow me to consider other choices and decisions expressed by the materials. The interlayering of organic and artificial elements was too predictable made the whole artwork feel redundant. I feel that I got carried away by my obsession for technique which blinded me to the intrinsic qualities of the material. Moreover, I felt that the obviousness of the horn didn't suggest other uses than the one I decided, and only reduced the range of associations.

When disassembling the cornet, the fragments did not seem as pretentious as the whole cornet, they seemed humble and strong. The fragments were somehow more open to interpretation than the cornet, which I had worked on for a long time. Back in my studio I put some leftovers together and I ended up pleased by two pieces.



Untitled, 2017, bucket, trunk and foam, 67x55x49cm



Untitled, 2017, branch and glass bottle, 101x93x51cm

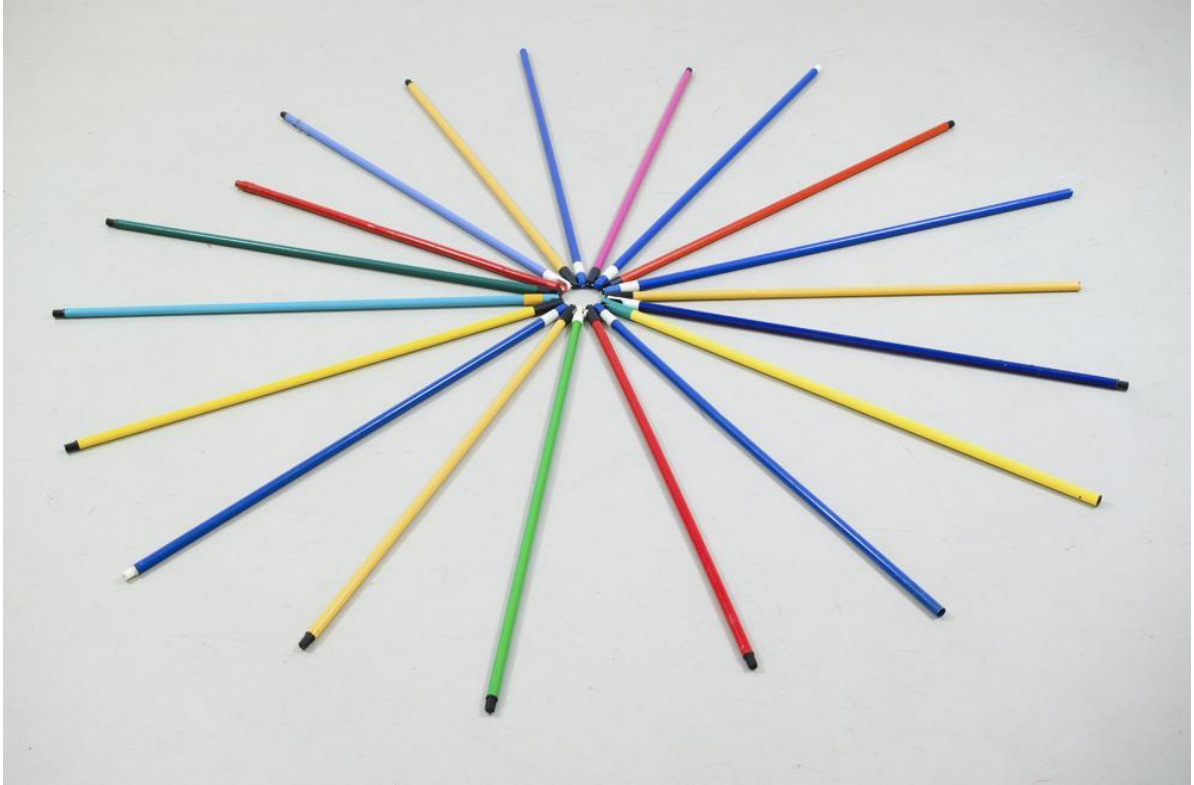
In the piece, *Untitled*, the materials don't pretend to be something other than what they are. I found that its honesty and the economy of the materials used seemed to generate more meaning as an artwork than the cornet. These two aspects of honesty and economy have a potential that I want to grasp in more of my works. The other piece is a skinny branch, coming out of a wine bottle. It reminds me of a life given to alcoholism, falling into a slow drying process. Both pieces use the same technique and range of materials. However, the meaning I gave to the glass bottle piece was completely different from what I intended and expected. And I'm very pleased with the outcome.

Through the process of developing these pieces, I realized I'm not interested in working on a specific subject like the dichotomy of Nature/Industry, Nature/Culture. I did that before starting the master and I didn't know I wasn't comfortable with that.

While I was studying in Lima, my idea of achieving meaning, was by imbuing meaning, lots of meanings, in the painting. After graduating I worked in a similar way, but with paper. Little by little I detached myself from that idea, but then I didn't know what exactly was my practice about. By that moment, I still carried the idea that the material was a medium and empty container to fill with meaning and the same time I knew it wasn't.

During the master, I learnt that the materiality can be also a research and the main subject of my work because materials are meaningful, all the information is in the surface and in can be experienced. Moreover, besides the meaning we give on materials, there's a meaning that materials give to themselves that I aim to bring out of them.

Tony Feher is an artist who has a great influence in my work. He uses everyday objects like glass pots, marbles, plastic bottles or cardboard boxes. I'm fascinated by the honesty and directness of his materials. He presents them as they are, there are no tricks or illusions and I think that is what open his material for broader meaning. His piece *Sharadiant* and his installation made of blue plastic bags, for me are great examples of his aesthetical approach to materials that shows Feher's ability to bring out the beauty of humble materials.



Tony Feher, *Sharadiant*, 2000, Blaffer Art Museum. Lucien Terras. Web. 14th March 2017



Tony Feher. Installation view at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Web. November 13, 2001. Image by

Joshua White.

CONCLUSIONS

Through the thesis, I addressed my ideas about the way I approach materials. I see them not as inert passive objects but as entities alike humans, living organisms, and subjects carrying energy, memory, and power to act. Energy that emanates from the interaction between me and the material. Memory that comes from the surface of the material, visible to myself according to my perception and experience. Power to act in relation to my actions and senses.

My relationship with materials is determined by the midpoint. It is the result of a balanced interaction between the material and myself, where we both express our intentions for our own benefits. It is an equal relationship, trying to get the best of us. My idea of midpoint aims to connect opposites in order to erase those rigid forms and structures to allow differences. The midpoint aims to remove the material from its state of object, and allowing it to be different. By achieving this I believe I let the material speak which is the purpose and meaning of my work.

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