Apertures among the rocks

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Art

Maria Helene Van Veen Aas
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Department of fine Art
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Abstract
During a visit to the vast weathered steel sculptures of Richard Serra, I noticed how rust had shed off on their sides and fallen to the ground. I was immediately inspired. It brought up thoughts of fragility in the industrial heavy architecture that surrounds us in modern developments. How polished and well-maintained surfaces of Modernism can also be vulnerable in its robust appearance.
Although the overwhelming potency of heavy metals is its abilities to make us feel separated from nature, it is still subject to natural phenomenons and must ultimately give way to nature’s rules.
I have encountered different experiences looking at contrasts between industrial and natural materials in my art practice, both in and out of their natural habitat. Therefore, I have attempted to uncover certain equilibriums found between fundamentally different components. I consider the emotive qualities of these materials, as well as the ethical considerations that have emerged, as I have studied the interactions between the materials; both within my practice and within their natural habitat.
Art creation is the act of extracting meaning and form from source materials and interpreting them in a new way, which may already speak for itself; to interpret nature’s own voice. This is no new concept, Michelangelo famously thought within every rock lay an unexplored potential art piece. “Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculpture to discover it” - Michelangelo.

My own art exploration ranges from altering the materials with fire, to call attention to primal shapes and even finding new methods of interpreting man-made objects already existing in the landscape. The ongoing studies has afforded me with the possibility to re-think and approach materials in a different manner. To consider the ‘redistribution’ of elements rather than their demolition or destruction, and to ultimately present the works in a new context.
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1. Oscar Tuazon *Manual Track*, 2013. Steel, pressure treated wood. 220 x 180 x 140 cm / 87 x 71 x 55"
2. Ida Ekblad. *Where you might be tomorrow or who you’ll meet or what you’ll see or where you’ll go*. 2015. Various media. 200 x 55 x 55 cm
3. Mia Van Veen. Studio test, 2016. Pigment from rocks, linseed oil
Introduction

My thesis explores the different experiences I have encountered looking at contrasts between industrial and natural materials in my art practise, both in and out of their natural habitat. Moving around in the modern cityscapes, noticing bushes growing and twirling around industrial, discarded metals, I wonder; are these sights now part of our nature? Abandoned houses, and villages, overgrown waiting to be bought and renewed; these are the places I find inspiration. When the environment shapes and tints old metal and wood; from lying outside in the sun-or affected by harsh weather conditions – in what way does this natural process of decay interest my artistic view? My methods of working ranges from altering the most often found materials with fire, to calling attention to primal shapes, and finding new methods of interpreting man-made objects already existing in the landscape. The journey has afforded me with the possibility to re-think, and approach materials in new manners. To consider the ‘redistribution’ of elements rather than their demolition or destruction, and to ultimately present the works in a new context.

Considering fragility in the heavy industrial architecture surrounding us in modern developments, and how the polished and well-maintained surfaces of Modernism also can be vulnerable despite their robust appearance. My practise has consistently been rooted in the construction of opposites, in the contrast between materials carrying different levels of vitality. I have been attracted to the ways in which materials go through stages of change, going from the condition in which they are found, and the altering of these objects after they are brought into the studio space. Inspired by the works of Oscar Tuazon, Ida Ekblad and other contemporaries who work with scrap metals, Ekblad’s ideas of consumerism and waste to Tuazon, whose engagement in First-Nations politics in the states have caught my attention as the current conflicts between aboriginal beliefs and land-claims versus the capitalistic system and its pushing for investment developments are unresolved. Positioning myself in relation to all of this makes for further questioning of my own being and heritage. It calls attention to my behaviours and actions in regards to sculpting, as well as to my use of materials. Acknowledging my own relationship to the place I was brought up, as well as the areas I have lived in or travelled through, I realize how being and living in the the northern hemisphere has shaped myself and my taste, both critically and conceptually.

1 Oscar Tuazon, American Sculptor, lives and works in Paris and Washington State. Images list #1
2 Ida Ekblad, Norwegian Artist, lives and works in Oslo, Norway. Images list #2
1 Natural Pigments

After a visit to Icelandic artist Páll from Húsafell during the late summer months of 2016, I began moving in a direction that in many ways felt contradictory to my previous ways of working with materials. Páll presented a collection of works, where he used stone as the primary element to make sculptures. In addition to making instruments and forms, he was using the extraction of pigments from stones in the local environment, mixing it with moss water to make paint. The color palette was representational of the Icelandic landscape in the fall. Amber, dark green and a reddish-brown color. The red-brown resembling industrial rust, and the dark green being moss, filling in the cracks of the earth’s crust. I was immediately captivated. This artist was living and working at the intersection of man and nature, in an interactive way, bringing the landscape into his artworks. For someone living in an urban environment, longing to be one with nature is usually a utopian dream. I felt a desire to share a similar contact with nature as the one I saw existing with Páll.

After the visit, I started experimenting with pigment extraction from rocks I found in Reykjadalur. To extract the pigments, I had to go through a material treatment process so foreign to me that it became an ethical dialogue between myself, my practice and the materials themselves. I usually let intuition drive my work with materials related to a particular place, using the contrasts when installing imperfect objects in contained, seemingly unnatural spaces, in order to speak about this wounded relationship. The continuous pounding and hammering of rocks then became a type of mal-treatment or abuse of the material. The challenge of adopting a new method, to implement ways of another person, in this case Páll, slowly dawned on me as I kept on extracting earth’s colors against my own sense of material process. Contrary to my previous approach to materials, the pigments came clear as an essence, as premature sand, deprived of its original state. For Páll the rocks were an integral part of his artistic process. He seemed to be at one with them, to have a dialogue with the stones and their surroundings. A give and take relationship that made it functional and balanced. For me, it became a different experience; for every rock I pulverized, it became clearer to me that I was employing a method and constructing a matter, which I was not comfortable with. The escalating distance I felt, developed into a conversation between my practice and the materials themselves, re-discovering and re-considering the political aspects

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3 Images list #3
4 Images list #4
that influence my work. I became aware of a personal and outwardly landscape that speaks about domination, strength and fragility in materiality.

1.2 Processing of Materials

The process of discovery entered into the darker winter days. With the dimming of light, new ideas arrived about the northern winter and its solitude; an exploration, and attempt to embrace the circumstances that cold-dark days offer. To think about earthly, time sensitive objects in not only a dystopian way, but to look closer at materials with those characteristics and what they contain, both physically and conceptually. Previously, I have focused on sculpting/forming/creating from found and discarded materials, discovering new ‘stories’ and inspiration among old, rejected matter. The shapes of these materials, their potential for changing in form, and the story behind them have guided my work. I am interested in objects carrying active qualities, those that when juxtaposed with another object, creates a tension in the space. The ecological composition of Iceland is young, containing some of the youngest natural formations on earth. Now I question whether, faced with this ‘underdeveloped’ matter, my focus has shifted from searching for and creating new structures from that which once was, to the exploration of how time works with ‘unfinished’ constructions. How the hand of the artist is continued by components such as air, weather, and time. To be in here in place, has provided me with the privilege of working with materials that used to be outlandish and distant. I am learning how to manage and embrace obscurity in nature around me, here in this volcanic environment.

1.3 How to Contain a Split Surface

When I first visited Iceland, my body felt as if in limbo, wedged between two continents. Learning that I was standing close to the Peninsula Reykjanes ridge, the energy seemingly being closer to a contained, yet ruptured surface. I saw the moss as glue over split rocks, holding it all together. I began looking at some of the leftover materials in my studio space. A bucket of collected sand, a rock with a beaming character my colleague gave me last year. The grey rock had a thin white line running through it, making a perfect split in the middle. I placed it on the sand and noticed one component’s origin in relation to its weathered
counterparts. Working with these elements I started researching sand as a texture and origin, learning that the black sand beaches will eventually fade away, I began to consider new ways to incorporate organic and industrial components in my work, and to speak about temporality and operational qualities in the initiated objects.

2 Motionless Objects

The vitality of matter, as American theorist Jane Bennett argues, applies to the ways in which the handling of materials debatably affects the objects themselves; whether objects carry meanings and energies that are overshadowed by the social belief that non-human resources are ‘dead’. This is an attempt to take account of the important qualities in materials, often referred to as ‘things’, and to acknowledge that a material is not lifeless because it does not involve human matters or as she puts it in her introduction of *Vibrant Matter*:

> Why advocate the vitality of matter? Because my hunch is that the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. It does so by preventing us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies.

In a local coffee shop in 105, Reykjavik, there is a rose lava rock sitting on a ledge beneath the window. Every day, locals and tourists enjoy their coffee next to this seemingly random piece of rock. There is no doubt that these ‘motionless’ objects have an impact on the people who encounter them, although some might not even notice it. It has been important for me to increase the attention paid towards the inherent qualities of the objects I use in my works. It is an ongoing process of achieving moments where I emerge with a clean conscience. Through my own working ethics and the relationship that I value between the material and my art, I aim to invite the viewer to give vivacity to the objects presented.

2.1 Living Matters

Icelandic artist Egill Sæbjornsson published a book titled *Stones according to Egill*

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Sæbjørnsson in 2012. He presents stones as personalities, with a humoristic twist and animated pictures. From a conversation between Jane Bennett and the artist, Sæbjørnsson questions: “Is art older than art history indicates? Is there art without humankind? Are worms artists? Are minerals artists?” Bennett then poses the question:

Are worms (or minerals) artists? loses some of its sense once art is understood to be a lively, active force in the world, rather than a technique invented and deployed by people. It makes more sense to say that worms and minerals and people can sometimes be co-actants with the force of art.

Sæbjørnsson then asks: “How do stones talk—or let’s say-express themselves?” Jane Bennett replies:

Like me, a stone expresses itself by its characteristic pace, its distinctive shape and texture, and by the idiosyncratic or historically contingent ways it affects and is affected by other bodies. A stone’s pace of change and movements usually (except when it falls off a cliff and instantly smashed into bits) slower than that of a human body.

3 Introduction to Works

I have mostly worked with recycled/discarded metal, wood, rubber, paint and glass, to mention a few. Welding, melting and building containers and casts of the objects, making them into new aesthetical forms with associations to pressure and split surfaces. These materials have often carried an appearance of decay, usually a stark contrast or change from their original form. Most of my work, to some degree, speaks to this change and contrast. I would like to highlight a few works, and explain how they have created meaning through their transforming materiality and backgrounds. I see it as a commutative force from the subversive. There is a relationship to cracks and shattered surfaces, the divided spaces, that makes our perception shift from the whole and flat, to a division before the eyes and of the eyes. An optical attraction to both sides of the matter. I like to guide the viewers of my work to situations where our eyes open, and allow them to drift from side to side, yet still be in a space to focus and breathe. To keep our eyes consistently moved and triggered. Perhaps this

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was a reason for the feeling of unease I had with the extraction of pigments as well. My thinking has revolved around sustaining material through the treatment of the found. It becomes about the possibilities for some object or objects to exist and endure. A familiarizing process that must be allowed to grow before changing the materials into something else.

3.1. Rigidity

In “Mellomrom”\(^7\) from 2015, I collected scrap metal and leftovers from a burned billboard and combined them into a vertical structure. Two metal rods were joined with found objects that I welded on: an earth magnet, a circular container, and a small metal ball. While fabricating the ball, I noticed the way it appeared as a model of the earth underneath the gas fire. Melting using the copper rod, I kept burning and smelting until the round shape had a crust-like surface, similar to that of our planet. The top rod was hung from the ceiling holding the earth magnet at the bottom. Beneath this was a sliver of empty space, nearly touching the steel ball nearly meeting the magnet above. As a separation or a split in the sculpture, the piece functioned as a rupture in space. A tension was created between a vigorous material (magnet) and an attracted material (steel); a meeting between two types of metals, with an emphasis on the space in-between. The earth magnet was found inside an old speaker, and the remains of the billboard were placed as ash at the base of the sculpture in the round, circular container.

3.2. Aluminum

In “Untitled”, from 2015, I cast the insides of a tree in aluminum.\(^8\) I had trawled the alleys and back streets to find a discarded tree trunk that I could bring to my studio. I recovered this old cedar trunk from which I hollowed out the moist, rotten wood inside.\(^9\) The trunk was then buried in a heat resistant container filled with sand in the metal foundry, in preparation for the aluminum pour. It seemed unlikely that the dead wood would hold the molten metal once poured, however, the sand helped it keep its form. During the pour, it caught fire but managed to stay in place due to the supporting sand. Once the metal cooled, I could crack the remains

\(^7\) Images list #5
\(^8\) Images list #6
\(^9\) Images list #7
open and reveal a cast of the inside. The veins became visible in the metal, and the figure appeared as a stump with three ‘feet’. The fire caused a burned cedar smell that lasted for days in my studio, and resulted in a cleansing feeling both during the making, and in its the aftermath.

3.3 Posing Cylinders

“Iona Beach”11, a composition from 2014 was a sculpture I created made from burned beach wood, found steel cylinders with poured aluminium; I balanced the fired wood with the filled steel tubes. I thought about the history of the burned wood, how it potentially came from the ocean as driftwood, only to be picked up by strangers and used for a fire as a re-usable chain. I used recycled aluminum for the pours, so the piece in itself was a collection of reprocessed finds, placed together in a self-balanced posture, each part supported by the other.

4 Distances in darkness and beauty

The Pacific North-West delivers a majestic view of our green areas, ranging from the red woods to the British Columbian rain forests. Finding myself in that part of the world for a solid stretch of my life, I developed a new relationship to the trees and all their mysteries. Peter Wohlleben writes about the secret life of trees in his book The Hidden Life of Trees from 2015. Wohlleben humanizes nature and among his descriptions of the trees, one can almost feel the pain the tree feels when a branch is cut off, or insects are eating into its body. Much of it is relatable, and gives room for an empathy towards the trees. “If we want to use forests as a weapon in the fight against climate change, then we must allow them to grow old, which is exactly what large conservation groups are asking us to do.”12 Wohlleben is suggesting we leave nature alone, to grow and mature; to protect it and be cautious about the ways we are removing/extracting resources from the earth.

5 Beauty in degradation

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10 Images list #8
11 Images list #9
American sculptor Roni Horn did several projects in Iceland. In her piece “Vatnasafn/library of water” (2007), a permanent installation in Stykkisholmur, she collected glacier water from the major glaciers around in Iceland. The 24 columns stand tall in the exhibition space, preserving and containing the different waters separately. The viewer can move around and in-between the water vessels, and see through them. In the process photos that accompany the installation one can follow the ice from when it is being cut out from the glaciers, the melting process, to the installation itself. The uncertainty of the future is present in her work. It is something that I try to emphasize in my own work; the contrast between fluctuating temperatures and global instability, to the depths of the ocean, where things seemingly are continuous. The consistency in temperature, light, and sound.

5.1 Fools gold

I have been influenced by the Arte Povera movement. Their use of simple and organic materials, believing the collective memory was threatened due to modernity and its processed materials. Their promotion of wonders and unexplained occurrences, a rejection of the explained scientific reasons-led them to create assemblages in absurd, myth linked collages and sculptures. Italian Artist Giuseppe Penone made an exhibition titled “The hidden life within” in 2012 where he explores the relationship between man and nature. The Artist carved out the inside of a trunk, leaving the core and showing the viewer the first nature of the tree. Time and the slow-growth history of the tree is revealed and makes for a moment to think about the wisdom nature carries with it, and how human beings easily forget what is at the core of our environment. The motivation behind my work lies closer to experiences of a personal nature. It is important to me that my work carries an openness, to give room for surprises and diverse experiences with the pieces. To keep a nerve in what I do, and in that context, I give the work a chance to grow and expand. I have been tied to landscape and various ways of observing. The progress has gone in a direction of arriving at ground elements, dust-sand-pigments. With roughness and expressive rhythms, the landscape is

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13 Images list 10
14 Italian Avant-Garde movement from the 60s.
15 2012 Exhibition at The Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada.
16 Images list #11
redefined as a subjective experience. My visual language has been challenged in new directions by using different techniques and materials.

For the meaning of most art objects is lodged within a mesh of ideas and feelings held by the creator of the work, passed through the act of authorship into the work, and thereby transmitted to a viewer or reader of it. The traditional work is thus like a transparent plane – a window through which the psychological spaces of viewer and creator open onto each other.17

5.2 Dancing lead

I see abstract forms as a reflection on the ways in which I feel we need to return to the old ways of living with nature and all its imperfections. Rather than thinking we must build outwards, bigger and better, we must look inwards, and use what is already here. It has been important for me to use materials that have gone through their own disconnect or change from their original state. It relates to intuition, the difference between material that is living or dead and how that material is presented in my art. During a visit to the scrapyard, I found material for a series of sculptures in 2016. A stack of folded lead sheets, where dance-like movements helped shape and twist the metal around, – a way to connect and create a flow in the work.18 I use my body to the fullest when I produce a work. Size has become part of the practice as well, to challenge and listen to mind and muscles through the use of large-scale heavy structures. It is an ongoing exploration of bodily awakening through meditation.

Accumulation of lead can lead to kidney and nervous system damage, anemia, stroke or cancer. It has been withdrawn from the market in the recent years, due to its harmful effects on the human body.19 Recycled lead skips the secondary smelting process in production, so that scrap lead is reproduced to its metallic form. The only exception is when the metal has gone through a substantial chemical alteration, like oxidizing or rusting. Once unfolded, I came to notice the soft, forgivable qualities of the material. It formed easily, and unexpected shapes began to appear.20 While unfolding, I revealed and uncovered the oxidizing look of the

18 Images list #12
20 Images list #13
surface. The shades of blue, grey and white climbed out of the shapes as arctic elements, as creatures living and surviving the harsh weather conditions. Some of the shapes animated their existence, and attained a life of their own with the changing of the light from the large windows of the gallery space.

5.3 Flickering lights

I have been longing to free myself from a way of working where I am editing my ideas as they come, restricting the flow of intuitive and direct interactions with the materials. A solution has been a more meditative approach, where an idea or an impulsive action guides me towards the result. It is about a collaboration between mind and heart. In this sense, it has been crucial to listen to what feels right. The process becomes about carefully revealing what is covered by external conditions to be able to see what is, in reality, and allow for something notable to happen. To sense the energy of the place I am in and make decisions based on more than merely the consciousness will allow. I see my works as fragments, regardless of size and form, – as out cuts of a bigger picture. They become events, dialogues and meetings between the materials and myself.

5.4 Crooked downy birch trees

Wabi-sabi is a beauty of things imperfect, Impermanent and incomplete.
It’s a beauty of things modest and humble.
It is a beauty of things unconventional.\(^{21}\)

Beauty, seen in the view of the Japanese Wabi-sabi tradition has some characteristics I find relevant to my art practise. Modernisms ways of considering aesthetical indulgence, usually

evolves around smooth and flawless surfaces, that have to be regularly maintained to keep up appearance. The Wabi-sabi interpretation of beauty embraces imperfections and temporality. The Wabi-sabi qualities can be applied to many of my previous works as well as to the current works in progress. Rusted steel rods are welded on to thick, heavy blocks of steel, making them stand up in space with free movement. Big blocks of clay are sculpted on to parts of the structures, making them thicker than the parts where the rust appears. The clay I am using turns black once it is burned, but for now, it remains unchanged, working as a meeting point between two materials, and a view into what happens between them when they are linked. Raw, fresh clay-juxtaposed with rusted pieces of steel. In the first sculpture, I noticed the way the clay attached itself to the rust immediately, and the rods seemed to support the heavy-leaning clay part without any hesitation. It seemed unlikely that the thin steel rod would be strong enough to catch the weight of the clay, so this came as a forgiving first experience with the work. The once dried clay-covered rod is leaning on the other rod which is assisting it to stand tall. I let the structure stand for a couple of days, and when I returned to it, the clay had cracked in several places, creating a pattern along the length of the rod. Transitioning from a two thin, straight and distanced poles, the layer of clay added another element. While one rod still stood up as a supporting vertical, its opponent was able to exist in its fractured form. The fragility of this structure is apparent in every part of the work. The heaviness of the clay, together with the cracks, made some of the structure separate from the metal. When I picked up the pieces, I noticed how the rust had attached itself to the clay.

A merging of two substances, attaching themselves to the other, and in the end leaving traces from having had to let go. As clay embraces the rust steel, slowly removing some of its rusted parts, leaving it with less weight though only minimal pieces. For the instalment of my ongoing project with steel and clay, I am most likely to be building the works on site due to the fragility of the dried clay. The steel structures will prerequisite being secured to the floor, before the clay can be applied.

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22 Images list #14
23 Images list #15
5.5 Shedding rust

On a visit to Richard Serra’s piece “Wake” (2004) in Seattle, I noticed rust from the sculptures on the ground, close to the edge of the great rusted steel curvy shapes. The heavy, industrial, steel forms are engaging the viewers to move around and in-between them. I thought of the small pieces of rust that released themselves from the dense, weighty piece as reflective of the fragility in industrial material. In particular, regarding time and the rigidity it brings with it. The tarnish gives a rustic feel-which, is the closest meaning of Wabi-sabi in the English language. One might think of Serra’s works as highly maintained and smooth, which is again the modernist beauty in form. However, there are hints of the imperfections stemming from the industrial areas resting in the surface of his works. The installation feels solid and secure as a protective shield, yet by moving around between the curvy wave-like forms, we are awakening our consciousness and feeling our own vulnerable presence. It is the fragility in the industrial I find captivating. Both in regards to the material decay, as well as our own bodily experience with its architecture. The overwhelming strength of heavy metals, and its abilities to make us feel separated from nature.

“The End of the Twentieth Century” is an installation made in 1985 by Joseph Beuys. The piece consists of thirty-one basalt rocks on the floor in an apparently unsystematic manner. The rocks have been drilled trough, leaving a cone shaped hole in each one of the Basalt forms. Clay and felt is then used to fill the empty spaces, and the basalt part that was removed, is placed back into the whole in a polished state. Beuys and his language of materials, his view on art as a consistently practiced and disciplined work has inspired my working process. “The End of the Twentieth Century” was handed to the curators as sketches without installation directions, which gave the piece another layer in the exhibitions it participated. Beuys provided the sculptures but he didn’t order how they should be arranged in the space. A similar feeling was applied to my piece “Weathered steel, clay” (2017). Due to the fragility of the dried clay I needed to build the works on site. The steel structures demand to be secured to the floor, before the clay can be applied.

24 Images list #16
25 Images list #17
I entered the exhibition space with these materials, letting the final touch be guided by the material itself.

6 Conclusion

At the exhibition in Gerdarsafn, I showed four clay and steel sculptures. Parts of the piece was made on site, by applying thin layers of clay on top of the two horizontally positioned steel plates, next to the two other rusted steel, vertical sculptures. Playing with ideas of support, allowing time to continue the work and watching the clay move on to multiple, small shapes once it dried out over the course of the installation weeks. The clay separated itself from the rusted steel surface, forming a landscape resembling layer above the heavy metal sheet. From the tests, I could see how the unattached rust pieces had absorbed into the clay. The origin of the industrial metal I used for the exhibition, had been exposed to oxygen and water in the temperamental weather conditions of Iceland. Hafnarfjordur has been my go-to site in the search for rusted metal-objects. Down by the harbour, I have spent many days looking at discarded objects that drifted in with the ocean, and left over materials from companies in the area. I take great pleasure in the scenarios that comes up during the course of a material search. For this project, I was negotiating with a group of male workers from a metal supply/welding shop. After getting to know them, they offered me the steel as a gift on the condition that I would take it off their hands. The counter material I used; clay, was purchased from a store in Reykjavik. The store sells craft materials from around the world. The contrast between the pre-packed, expensive clay to the rusty steel that the workers ended up giving to me, were important factors in the way the materials were juxtaposed. Ideas about consumerism and extractions from nature which are pre-packed then sold, and the strength and weight of the steel, were triggering the working process.

As the installation began in the special museum, I was able to play with the architectural specificities of the space. A church-arch seen trough the window; reflections of the ceiling mirroring the steel shapes. Noticing how the indoor air affected the clay, thinking about the journey from its original place to the gallery floor. As I applied the clay on the steel, notions about its materiality, the way it gave out a soft, forgiving and smooth layer, still knowing it would destruct itself, – a kamikaze, not preserving it versus maintaining its

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27 Images list #18-23
smooth awakened thoughts about control and letting go. The supportive poles let the largest piece float in the space, – a light appearance, hence its heavy weight. The arched sculpture, resting on a block of clay, an untouched piece of the earthy material and a different presentation of the same dialogue. The arched piece, together with the squared steel structure, made for two vertical shapes in the space. The squared piece, not combined with clay, rested on its own form, making the relationship between the sculptures more distinct as they all varied in the ways in which they were supported, treated and positioned in relation to one another and in the space.

There is an engagement I try to achieve in my works, that emphasise the critical environmental conditions we are facing today and, acknowledging the rises and falls of ground materials around us. The sculptural works I present become independent energies, separated from both me as an artist, and from the viewer. It is a way to give value and appreciation to the things that are so easily overseen and dismissed. To give time and stillness to allow the senses to be triggered by the slow-growing things, and allow them to rest in their process. To let the materials, keep their own language, even though ‘reborn’ in their new environments.

During my defense, I was asked about the context of the work. How it related to ideas about negotiation, in a political way, and a question about why one of the pieces was standing “alone” without any clay attached to it. For me, the political aspects are rooted in the danger of vanity - desires and lusts after precious minerals and oils to sparkle and speed up our lifestyle. The surface of the clay was applied to perfection; on all four, I wanted the layer to appear flawless as a whole, with the clay being a bought material, precious clay from earth-a representation of how natural produce is becoming exclusive. Thinking about a strive for perfection when making a smooth layer, pushing the limits until they become blurry and worn-out. Similar to that of keeping up an appearance, or trying to be something it will naturally move away from. The fear of becoming disconnected from nature, drives my work. What if no one stops to smell the flowers or watch the insects, or study their behaviour to learn more about ourselves? Scientists select specific areas and species for their research. They might study how the river salmon impact songbirds, to prove that the changes from human development is disturbing our ecosystem, and therefore destroying a balance that will influence every living being. If humans continue to push for further extractions and maltreatment of our earth, we will need to return to old methods of living. If we can no longer

28 Images list #18
29 Images list #23
look ourselves in the eyes due to polluted waters, or cracked mobile phone screens, perhaps we must return to looking each other in the eyes and stand closer against the trees to breath. Oscar Tuazon\textsuperscript{30} begins every project with a ritual, even if it is not always apparent in the final art piece. This way of preparation for work is important to my practice as well. It is again about this Heart-body-mind connection, and how I wish the relationship between humans and nature today was less abusive. In this sense, I think the process of the work could have been emphasised more on during my defense. How I made deals with the workers to get the used metal, and how I bought the clay as a reference to manufactured “land” covered in plastics. Some viewers made the remark that standing there, over the cracked clay, gave them a sad and beautiful feeling. One man that had just come from a drive, saw a similar landscape, to that he had seen. Another said it reminded him of airplane views. Some people discussed the seemingly light presence the sculptures had in the space, how they appeared floating, tough the steel was heavy and rough. The support for each sculpture made that difference, each one was leaning onto either blocks of steel or clay. Each one; besides the one who was standing alone. The one who had gone trough the same process like the other ones, but one could only notice it by taking a close look at the rusty surface.

Bibliography


Mia Van Veen

*Weathered steel, clay*

2017