

Making Meaning

Recently, I have been making a series of objects that explore perspective, appearance, colour, and craft. They have been designed and built using a combination of analogue and digital methods, and have been very much influenced by my background as an architect.

The forms of these objects developed from abstract shapes and patterns, which I found I kept sketching in only subtly different guises: squares, combinations of triangles, and so on. I'm not sure exactly what I found appealing, but the more I think about it the more I see repeated angles and proportions. Given my architectural background, it should not be too surprising that I am interested in the steps between two-dimensional drawings and three-dimensional objects. There is always a tension between these two – the ideal and the real.

One of the things I have tried to do through these objects is make idealised graphical forms visible, while also enjoying their contradictory constructions. 'Triangulated' was designed around a vision of an orange square. The object is in no way square, but that is what you can see if you stand in a specific spot, at a specific height and angle. I find it interesting that when we identify rectilinear objects we always look past visual distortion. We accept objects as having right angles, though they are skewed to our eyes. Only in very specific circumstances can we truly see a square. Mounted on a customised surveyor's tripod, 'Triangulated' recalls instruments of measurement and surveying, which of course it is itself: in a back-to-front way, it requires your placement and measurement to be properly seen.

An image of two combined triangles forms the basis of 'Triptych'. Frontally, the geometry of the three objects appears identical, though there is variation in surface hue. Viewed obliquely, the variation in geometry and further variety of hue becomes apparent. At a tight angle, reflections in the surface are visible. I enjoy the variation between two-dimensional appearance and three-dimensional actuality. In 'Blue Fold', colour works differently. A very dark blue, almost black, causes the object to appear singular and flat. Folds in the surface only become apparent with the viewer's movement. It is only at this time, also, that light catching the surface reveals the subtle blue hue.

Tension between the ideal and the real has been very apparent to me in the making of these objects. A lot of time and energy goes into making them look sharp, flat, and smooth. Some drawing and calculation is digital, and from this I produce working drawings for fabrication. But the making is all by hand, with an accuracy

of usually one to two millimetres. Never a clean process, it is always a means for reflection and realisation, with frustration and changed plans. But this is what makes the making worthwhile, and gives it some meaning. For me, the process itself is as important as the end product.

Broadly speaking, I would say all making offers opportunities for both reflection and realisation. Much as the mind wanders often while walking, the mind often wanders when sanding. Usually vague feelings and thoughts slot into place as time elapses. At other times, the physical properties and interactions of materials are encountered almost as metaphors for other areas of life. Their working requires patience and receptivity, awareness of pliability, weight, fit, deformation, and so on. Most of the realisations are the result of very mundane actions. For example, recently I realised that a wooden strip that formed one side of a piece had warped ever so slightly after it was clamped and glued. You wouldn't see it if you were standing away, but you would if you put your eye to a corner and looked along the edge. To remedy this, I filled in the areas that dipped and sanded down the surface using sandpaper taped to a block. It took me quite a while to realise that the filler, which was much harder than the wood, was causing me to sand into the wood. I was getting a straight edge, but not at the angle I wanted. I then had to refill and level the surface before sanding down the surface more slowly; forcing my hand to keep the angle I wanted. Doing something repetitive such as this, you realise how the geometry and mechanics of your body make it very difficult to meet the idealised image. The curved sweep of your arm, my right, which makes a very slight but inevitable difference to the sections you can sand, inevitably limited by your reach and position, which need to be blended together. It forces you to be patient, and to properly appreciate the adage "measure twice, cut once." While a physical and emotional process, it is also very much a social one. Procuring materials, learning from and sharing experiences, working through problems together, we get to exchange little pieces of understanding, and in so doing some form of meaning.

For me, the purpose of these objects is to work with, and understand a little better, the relationship between ideal, apparent, and actual conditions.

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