

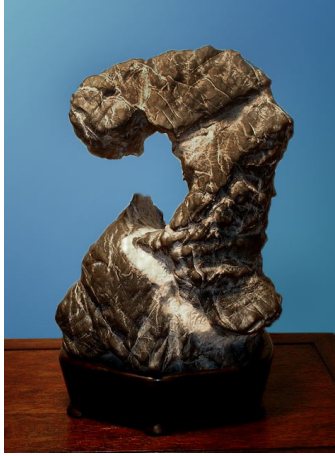
GEOMETRIES OF SURVIVAL

“It matters what stories tell stories. It matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what worlds world worlds.” — Donna Haraway

The emergence of complexity relies on two essential ingredients. The first is an irreversible substrate: Time. A flow of material passage in which things can happen, and cannot unhappen. The second is Nonlinearity. Not a straight line, but a multitude of directions and bifurcations, creating a knotting and entangled meshwork of causality. Here, effects echo out at different rates and proportions. Small changes on the level of organisation can cause large effects, both in nearby regions of events and much further down the line. This is the system we find ourselves enmeshed in, and provides the diverse possibility and unpredictability of nature; a reality much greater than the sum of its parts.

Such concepts are hard to hold in the mind all at once, but in Jack Laver’s ‘Cut from Shadows’ exhibit we can see them gain weight and tactility. We are surrounded by their aesthetic sensuality as eddies of converging lines reach out from every surface of the collection. They pull us in, down into the stygian depths of their fluid passageways as they shatter into further directions and texture. A spatial logic no human hand could hope to emulate. This may be the first thing that strikes us in his work. The non-human element at play. Laver takes great care to offer much of the formal and compositional design of his works, over to the materials that share in his practice, and in doing so they are afforded the space to speak to us directly. We are presented with the reality of their production. The site of a mutually transformative collaboration, where various, interdependent human and non-human agencies congeal to perform patterning of intricate complexity.

Removed from the context of its creation any representation of these processes, no matter how laborious or exact, would fall flat. But, that is not to say it is without reference. Despite its non-specificity there is an abundance of familiarity here. Each of us brings our own iterations, brought to mind by the memory of their occurrence in our previous experiences. The patterning of the work flickers with recognition as a multitude of discernible features of the natural world surface in the structural arrangement of forms. We might see weather systems, the ripples and currents of wave patterns, the jagged fritillary of a coast line, or veins of crystallized minerals exposed and accentuated, on its cliffs, by the turbulent movement of water and wind. An unending passage that erodes a body of rock into swirling layered forms. When given the space to speak for themselves materials write a longing poetry to wider bodies of patterning structure and movement that emerge between micro and macro proportions. To see the whole world in a grain of sand.



Example of a 'Gongsbi' (scholar or spirit stone): Used as objects of contemplation or a focus for meditation by Chinese scholars of the past.

The composition of Laver's fluid encounters can be seen to echo out across the breadth of reality. These nonlinear formations expose an underlying habit in the structural behavior of matter, and the diverse range of their material occurrence has inspired a broad range of fields into the study of complexity. Their theories call upon such formations to explain the self-organizing behavior that builds fungal networks, waterways, the veining of blood throughout your body, and other systems of material passage and exchange that facilitate life. However, they also speak to the patterns of movement in systems that withdraw from access. Those systems that step away from our ability to perceive due to the momentary blip of existence we have, within the vast reach of their operation. Here, these nonlinear structures have been used to explain the distribution of crime hotspots in cities, the outbreak of flu epidemics, fluctuations of economy, or the dispersal of information and ideas. The systems appear insubstantial, their spatial patternings hard to point to, or hold complete in the mind. But, though their passages will not hold a shape for our inspection, they are no less real. We are snared in their causality, shaped by it. We feel their effects. See them in shadows; they throw up across the walls.



Gunnera plant: Underside of its leaves, displaying the routes of water and nutrients in their vascular systems.

The theoretical frontier of complexity has transformed not only the way we think about the universe, but also represents a profound shift away from reductive principles that have guided science for centuries. But, that is not to say this collection simply serves to illustrate scientific concepts. The agency and vitality of Laver's inks, pigments and adhesives are prominently displayed and discourage us from taking them as only a substrate for some preconceived message, inscribed into the work by the artist's gestures. By taking materials on their own terms — to perform as they will — they join the ongoing dance of matter's dynamism. His abstract assemblages move to its rhythm and show a diverse array of elsewhere formations; whilst being obliquely the thing they are themselves. We are asked, not to find some set fixed meaning, within his abstract assemblages, but instead read the shadows of our subconscious — in the associations, and trains of thought, they set in motion. In the release of control over these pieces, and the unpredictability of their outcome, Laver is seated beside the viewer in the production of meaning — to join a wider forum of material discursive practices with no final point.

Laver offers structures to think *with*. They take us into ourselves and out, to far away places, through patternings that resonate with the dynamic, and transformative behavior of matter. We have inherited a variety of impoverished geometries that negate our ability to understand and effectively engage with the world we live in. These mechanisms of understanding were set in motion generations before we were born and see us 'civilized' enough to be outside of nature, and to stand above it. With a self-aggrandising belief that our cognitive abilities by far surpass anything else, we afford ourselves the right to dominion over nature; see it as something put there for us to do with. The reductive approach — embedded into the western worldview, by the 'Mechanical geometries' of the enlightenment period — cuts the world into smaller and smaller pieces so as to understand it. A hierarchical order of significance is constructed with 'Man' — a very particular type of man — sat at the top and all else arranged below with ever greater degrees of otherness. These notions have shaped the harmful relationships we have with each other and the biosphere at large. Over time the movement of our misguided behaviors have solidified into structural currents of human and material agencies that see us hurtling at an ever greater speed into our own destruction; taking out much of the rest of life on earth as we go. It is so hard to even imagine the ways we might redirect them — the actions we take alone, seem to serve primarily as catharsis from the accelerating weight of the problems we face. Because it matters what shapes we think matter with. How we picture the world directs our action in it. Any hope for our survival depends on a drastic alteration to how we see and engage with the insubstantial patterning in systems that prevent us from living well with the rest of nature.

The 'Cut from Shadows' exhibit offers alternative geometries. The networks of intermingling substances and bleeding thresholds — where each undulating line of fluid relies on all others in the arrangement to find its position — hold a shape of genuine relevance to the material systems of the world we live in. They offer different models of interaction than the inherited shapes and positionings of the western worldview, towards theories of entanglement. These knotting frameworks look less at the individual units of systems, to see a far wider scope of relations and the transformative interactions that make them. In fact, they barely recognise individual units at all. It becomes hard to put a defining cut where one thing ends and another begins, when things are considered

from far greater breadths of time; than the short sighted human timescales we are used to. These ‘String Figurings’ help us to see the fixed outlines we forgot we drew around things, phase into one another or fold in on themselves. See the cuts we made between each other, and the rest of nature, rejoin. And, the contradictions of inside/outside, us/them, culture/nature, here/away decompose — as we reconsider our position in the open network that is existence.

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