

Base Notes: an attempt at 'sculpture'
Lu Rose Cunningham for EUCA Annex

In the room where the exhibition is to be, we discuss 'sculpture.' What that might mean, might not. Challenged by the term, I feel myself grasping for terminology, for a definition that encompasses the ever-expanding nature of sculpture. We talk of *research-led* shows - this show in particular - as *test beds*, as sites of convening/communing/collecting. *Assemblages*, *mark-makers*. Structures of *blue-prints*, of *site-specificity*, of *site-non-specificity*, of coalescing. Of *curiosity*, of *constellations* - of *people and things* - operating across *physical matter* and *thinking*. Note *object-relations*, transcribe a *sensibility* of sculpture, without having to actually sculpt - do - with bare hands, without acquiring sharp chiselling tools or a 3D printer; without stone quarries or factory-led forms of fabrication to access. Within a home, within reach. Address objects in combination - *composition* - and *iterations*. Address *gestures*, which sit within the language of 'sculpture,' mull over on the tongue *practice*, *practise*, *praxis*.

In the room where sculpture eludes me, we talk of Carlo Scarpa, how he re-imagined spaces with natural light, as demonstrated in the Fondazione Querini Stampalia plan,¹ with corners, steps and thresholds to instil a sense of visual and literal journeying. Sculpture as interacting with surfaces beyond the flatness of walls. The invitation of *touch*, of working with or against a surface, of a closeness to a material or the ability to move back from, more around, pass by.

As we search Scarpa's work, I recognise how my eyes cut plains and planes in the scene before me. How I am sat adjacent to a desk and opposite a window, parallel facing with a door, angled with my body poised outwards to the room, as if my body, its skin - its own textured surface - has shifted to greet the room. Drawing the eye/mind/body over wooden beams, my gaze a spirit level measuring horizontals and verticals, composing the room into an Agnes Martin-esque grid. A room as a sculpture as a minimalist painting. Feeling my weight in the chair as its base gives, which in turn implies the human body, its own joints and axis. The chair as simultaneous *elevation and support*.² Wondering if I qualify as a sculpture. If my presence is sculptural - my voice, my echo, the conversation it partakes in.

¹ Orietta Lanzarini, *Carlo Scarpa*, The Architectural Review, <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/reputations/carlo-scarpa-1906-1978>, (2023).

² *Elevation and support*, a key phrase to the curatorial research of the group show at EUCA Annex. We discuss the term, considering how sculptural discourse can move beyond arguably problematic devices such as plinths, pedestals and stages, finding alternative modes of presenting and holding space for objects. An attempt to withdraw from classification, noting how alternative supporting structures can function without dominating, but rather enhance a space, with colour and texture, with its own form. Alternating heights, scales and impact. I consider the gestures offered in the space by the removal of traditional presentation modes, surpassing connotations of such devices when considering 'elevation' - the problematic associations of monuments, of masculine and modernist devices of power. Of raising objects to a higher level to take on an authority/higher status than everything else in the room. I look to objects such as rugs or steps, how they might hold up a form - an intimate, subtler object-to-object relationship fostered. I consider the gesture of 'support,' an adjacent position beyond the overly simplistic, individualist, colonial relations of something raised up, instead looking at more freeing structures such as cradling arms or hammocks, notions of care implanted in modes of making. Offering 'elevation' and 'support' as terms that contain the other - not binary, but rather both holding weight and positions, with every work able to engage with the physical features of the room but also individually and collectively fill the space with a range of character and positionality. Encapsulating the fundamentals of spatial and structural design/display. Within *Base Notes & Place Holders*, artists commune who have addressed the challenges of presenting

Beyond the glass window, the sun maps localised geography. One materiality upon another material, upon another material culture. Worms as living sub-cultures in soil culture, dissecting their own plains. Mechanised, metabolising more composted earth, forging deeper levels of the ground to hold up. (Question for another day - if worms enable elevation and support of the ground that sits underneath all the world's objects, are worms the ultimate armature?) The sun flashes light onto the undersides of leaves in the garden, illuminations of green spreading. Sculpture as *colour*. I learn of Jessica Stockholder, finding her piece *My Father's Backyard* (1983)³, noting her intervention of reds and blues across pre-existing familial structures, an injection of hues that shifted the flatness of a shed's plane and neighbouring square of grass to become an animated set, transforming stationary textures and tones of existing sites. *A pictorial way of looking, (or thinking,) with the physical matter of the body and the materiality of things in space.*⁴



Above: Jessica Stockholder, *My Father's Backyard*, installation view, backyard in Vancouver, BC, Canada (CA), 1983. Photo by Jessica Stockholder.

In Jessica's work, the surface of an object purports to let us know something about its mass.

pieces, shifting the boundaries between an artwork and any form of presentation device, questioning the value, uniqueness, power and agency of the work.

³ Jessica Stockholder, *My Father's Backyard*, <https://jessicastockholder.info/projects/art/my-fathers-backyard/>, (2024).

⁴ Jessica Stockholder, About, <https://jessicastockholder.info/about/>, (2024).

*This something is sometimes accurate, or informative about the nature of the thing we are apprehending, and sometimes the surface tells another story entirely — sometimes the surface generates a kind of fiction. It is this possibility, inherent in materiality, to generate fiction that I am enamoured with. This interest has fuelled my exploration of how paint meets, sticks to, or appears to jump off of, many different kinds of material. The addition of more materials put pressure on the edges of the frame.*⁵

Sculpture as *pushing beyond a set frame, traversing, growing out*. Yesterday, I learn a cluster of flower heads is called an *inflorescence*, from Old French to blossom, to grow. I consider the cohort of artists coming into the room, like seedlings planted, each one feeling things out. Forming structures, branching out in connection to another being. *Base notes and place holders*. Fittingly, I discover base notes in a perfume form the foundation on which the entire perfume is built, providing the last impression of the scent. Transportive notes, the continuous pieces that fill a room/hold a room/hold your attention, directing. Vibrations of green in which I feel a strange intimacy. A *cross-rhythm* between me and these outdoor forms, object-relations at play. I'm wondering if sculpture could be an inflorescence, sweet-scented; if an inflorescence is the physical action of *intimacy*. What if we framed sculpture as intimacy. A placeholder for connection.

Start the next day thinking of this intimacy. A tenderness sought in relating research to loved ones, to widening my thinking to theirs. I reach out to friends who have often struggled to self-title their practices as sculptural, perhaps through unease at the historical formality of traditional sculptural discourse. Annie⁶ posits sculpture akin to her own contemporary context as *space*, sending me an article⁷ on artist Julie Becker. It refers to her 1996 thesis work, *Researchers, Residents, a Place to Rest*, reproducing interior spaces at varying scales. Becker deployed small models, elevations, and floor plans throughout her work. They are, by implication, always connected to something larger—human-scale — at least speculatively and potentially.⁸

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Anna (Annie) Metzger, a Glasgow-based artist working across digital, sculptural, photographic and painterly modes of image-making, often using 3D and moving-image forms and structures as a framework for cycles or sequences of images. Many of the materials used are yielding, being translucent or soft and pliable, including plasticine, textile, nails, glass and Perspex. Metzger is interested in non-verbal written language, coincidences, gloaming and fear. Her work is concerned with source material that has a 'deviousness or malevolence... sowing seeds that destabilise or defamiliarise known objects.'

⁷ East of Borneo, *View from the Inside Out; Julie Becker's Los Angeles*, <https://eastofborneo.org/articles/view-from-the-inside-out/>, (2024).

⁸ Laura Brown, *The Intuitive Approach and the Objective Attempt*, <https://www.x-traonline.org/article/the-intuitive-approach-and-the-objective-attempt>, (X-TRA, 2019).



Above: Julie Becker, *I must create a Master Piece to pay the Rent*, installation view, MoMA PS1, New York, June 9–September 2, 2019. Photo by Matthew Septimus.

Where the exhibition is to be, the room is currently occupied by sofas and a desk. Though empty of the proposed artworks at this moment in time, the room enacts a performance. This room doubles up as a space of both theatre and mundanity, of familiar structures and stimulated *intervention*. Potential energies - a *circuit board* channelling human to material presences. Housing - for people, for works, for the two.

This room has been constructed in such a way that partitions can slide into cavities - taking the living quarters into exhibition mode - and its entrance and departure points move from kitchen walkway to the outdoor garden path. Such malleable collapse of boundaries reveals a pliability to the space which surrounded Julie Becker too, an ability to move from reality to fiction and back, *without being detected, to occupy both realms at once*.⁹ An understanding of the transitory experience of occupying private space is evident in the many rooms of the space, the many-rooms room as liminality and spatial in-between. In-between spaces, not solely domestic, not solely public and commercial, emerging from a city where transience is not just a state of living, but a state of development. The social imagery of late-capitalism. The multi-function of this annex room - the annex as an in-between - floats between possibilities of impermanence and denies any settling point for the audience. Sculpture as *indistinguishability*. The space where the two 'rooms' - gallery and home - connect is separated by an embraced shadow gap cast by the

⁹ East of Borneo, *View from the Inside Out; Julie Becker's Los Angeles*, <https://eastofborneo.org/articles/view-from-the-inside-out/>, (2024).

partitions. Separated by a fine shadowy line - I find myself thinking about delineating space, about borders. I ruminate the act of coppicing and think of my friend Sunny Vowles¹⁰, who shares,

I engage with hedge-laying, practising this act to then inform an artistic practice. A process of thinking through a father tongue¹¹ of function, division, and history, to bring it inside, back outside, dissect the structure; physically, materially, theoretically. To offer it up in another form - a sculpture - a personal experience that is their truth, in that it is true to their experience of the act or practice of processing the material of an existing form. A form that, -perhaps quietly- is steeped in multiplicity, now nurturing, now reinforcing a seemingly fixed form. The multiplicity of form, of interconnectedness. A quote I have been turning in relation to this;

*"Rhizome is the often-conjured term used philosophically by Deleuze and Guattari as an "image of thought that apprehends multiplicities," and like the tuber system it moves horizontally rather than vertically. This is close to the *pratītyasamutpāda* of Buddhist philosophy, which denotes the co-arising and interconnectedness of all existence" - Anne Waldman, *Bard Kinetic**

With a research practice that focuses on subverting connotations around rigidity in sculpture, Sunny speaks to Form, writing of their approach to sculpture with inherent poeticism.

A hare sitting on her enclave on the ground, named a form, a hare's resting place. The Forms according to travelling water; like the movement of calcite water to create stalactites and stalagmites, or water flooding downhill to a river, to be caught by a bundle of sticks put there, staked in by a coppice worker - a fascine. The fascine serves almost as a filter, allowing water through, but catching sediment; a man-made structure that will enforce embankments from erosion, and perhaps contain a river in its bed. The fascine too serves to treat a symptom of the Capitalocene. In dealing with the excess water brought about by exposing and also covering large areas of land with concrete, tarmac, paving etc. The excess water brought about by the increased carbon in the world's atmosphere which began advancing significantly during the industrial revolution.

In the landscape the human hand sticks out. I often think of the lonely cairns built in mountains, how even in a field of scree, a cairn stands out as a man-made marker to keep a walker on the route. Hedgerows are interesting because once shoots have sprung and warped the stakes, binding and weaving from view, the structure seems to grow there of its own accord, and the human hand is hidden. So there is this hand thing, and there are details in a form that give information of how the object was made - a protruding mark in a surface that tells you it was once molten plastic, poured into a mould. Is the form loosely bound? Was the maker in a hurry, not rushing to finish, but rushing to continue, an urgency to form, mark, get something down, to relate. Letting everything seep into the next. There are always these connections between objects in space, and there is the existence of boundaries. Boundaries are a barrier, a barrier that exists permanently in reality, or the mind. But we too could imagine crossing that barrier, taking the shape of another being that may shift through matter easily, as if this structure were not

¹⁰ Sunny Vowles, a friend of mine and interdisciplinary visual artist based in Leeds. Working primarily with sculpture, their practice also comprises text, sound, movement, installation and collaboration, their work deeply considering the passing of agency and the act of listening to produce relations to self, others and environments.

¹¹ The phrase given at the 1986 Bryn Mawr College Commencement. First published in *Dancing At The Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*, Harper & Row (1989). Also find at https://serendipstudio.org/sci_cult/leguin/.

permanent, as if this boundary were a source of food, a route through, a way to inform a practice, a home.

*I shapeshifted into a fly to cross the hedgerow.
I am a bird nesting deep in warped branches.
The lines of civilization that pen a life in.¹²*



Above: Fascine laid by Leeds Coppice Workers, spring 2024. Photo by Sunny Vowles.

A week later, Isabelle¹³ and I continue this questioning - consider Sunny's proposition of the form being 'loosely bound' - as Isabelle expresses a difficulty in describing their work as sculptural, despite it often being categorised as such. Isabelle later shares more, conveying how, despite this friction,

¹² Words by Sunny Vowles, from an email thread between us, May 2024.

¹³ Isabelle Pead, London-based artist and long-term collaborator of mine. Isabelle is an artist working across sculpture, sound, video and performance. Often utilising large scale installation, her work is informed by actions of storytelling and collectivism, exploring the relationship between the voice and the sounding body. Isabelle's practice extends itself sculpturally in two senses. Firstly, the work presents sound as a sculptural device in itself, having a felt presence in the room, altering audiences' sonic perceptions, leading how they might navigate a space - how they might place themselves in the centre or a corner, new positions possible - and via the metal speaker stands Isabelle welds in order to hold the sound sources, the stands themselves tall limbs speaking out to the room, sensorial bodies in situ. Isabelle's work has expanded into an interest in the resonant properties of the voice and the material properties of sound, to create immersive, vocal, listening installations. An example of such work can be viewed here via Isabelle's website: <https://www.isabellepead.com/>.

when considering my ephemeral terminology, particularly that ascribed to sonic art practices, I find a remarkable similarity to the 'sculptural'. There is an inherent interest in traversing space, resonating with structure and perhaps most importantly, a consideration of form. Form that can hold space, house time, speak to faded memory and encapsulate incandescent loss. In many ways, I view sound as a sculptural form which traverses interior and exterior space. It holds presence, shapes space and exists as a material that can be felt and interacted with, resonating space object and body. When combined, sculpture maps the space which sound navigates, creating a sense of cyclical simultaneity. A unending process in which physical borders are perpetually challenged by permeating sonic form.

As Salome Voegelin says: 'simultaneity defies hierarchies and historical privileges, and relationality rejects the actuality of borders and generates entanglements that un-perform organising structures and ideologies through the intertwining of those who they govern for and those who are governed against.'¹⁴

I am now envisioning wooden fascines, linear bundles mapping woodland, and lay them in parallel with Isabelle's sounds, visualising bars of music filling a room. Fascines and soundwaves - sculpture - as traversing a plane, as the view of a plural world - of multi-performances, of mobility, of *orientations*.

I once considered talking about sculpture as the coming together of concrete forms in a concrete space. But such discussions, the propositions, the varying entrances to a practice, interest me most, expanding - sculpting - my position. Rather than describe each work, I move towards the spatial, aesthetic, transformative experience and pull that into prose, encounter a riot of slippery poetry, present conversation. The syntax of each work, of the room the artwork is held by, each person positioning something for someone else, bringing a fragment of their own life into being among others. Of potential outcomes, of rearrangements, of not being quite sure. The group show as many fictions. Fiction as a way of not-knowing. *Collaboration as collage, elevating juxtaposition and chance over unity of effect... Working not with answers, but inside the space of these questions.*¹⁵ Sculpture as opening space as inviting questions.

Base Notes: an attempt at sculpture, written by Lu Rose Cunningham ahead of the group exhibition *Base Notes & Place Holders* at EUCA Annex in summer 2024, as part of London Festival of Architecture. The piece, an open-ended enquiry, is led by conversations with EUCA Annex curator TC McCormack and artists Annie Metzger, Sunny Vowles and Isabelle Pead.

¹⁴ Salome Voegelin, *Singing Philosophy: Deviating Voices and Rhythms without a Time Signature*, article for De Gruyter, Open Philosophy (2021).

¹⁵ Danielle Dutton, *Prairie, Dresses, Art, Other*, Prototype (2024).