

PETER RANDALL-PAGE

UPSIDE DOWN & INSIDE OUT



# INTRODUCTION

There are, in the crudest of terms, two approaches to understanding the world. Some seek to uncover general, universal principles behind the bewildering accumulation of particulars; others find more enlightenment in life's variety than in the simplifying approximations demanded in a quest for unity. The former are Platonists, and in science they tend to be found in greater numbers among physicists. The latter are Aristotelians, and they are best represented in biology. The Platonists follow the tree to its trunk, the Aristotelians work in the other direction, towards branch and leaf.

The work of artist and sculptor Peter Randall-Page explores these opposing – or perhaps one should say complementary – tendencies. He sees them in terms of the musical notion of theme and variation: a single Platonic theme can give rise to countless Aristotelian variations. The theme alone risks being static, even monotonous; a little disorder, a dash of unpredictability, generates enriching diversity, but that random noise must be kept under control if the result is not to become incomprehensible chaos. It is perhaps precisely because this tension exists in evolution, in music and language, and in our lived experience of the world, that its expression in art has the potential to elicit emotion and identification from abstract forms. This balance of order and chaos is one that we recognize instinctively.

This is why Peter's works commonly come as a series: they are multiple expressions of a single underlying idea, and only when viewed together do they give us a sense both of the fundamental generating principle and its fecund creative potential. The diversity depends on chance, on happy accidents or unplanned contingencies that allow the generative laws to unfold across rock or paper in ways quite unforeseen and unforeseeable. Like Paul Klee, Peter takes lines for a walk – but they are never random walks, there are rules that they must respect. And as with Klee, this apparent constraint is ultimately liberating to the imagination: given the safety net of the basic principles, the artist's mind is free to play.

It might seem odd to talk about creativity in what is essentially an algorithmic process, an unfolding of laws. But it is hard to think of a better or more appropriate term to describe the "endless forms most beautiful" that we find in nature, and not just in animate nature. We could hardly fail to marvel at the inventiveness of a mind that could conceive of the countless variations on a theme that we observe in snowflakes, and it seems unfair to deny nature her inventiveness merely because we can see no need to attribute to her a mind, just as Alan Turing insisted that we have no grounds for denying a machine "intelligence" if we cannot distinguish its responses from those of a human.

This emergence of variety from simplicity is an old notion. "Nature", wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson, "is an endless combination and repetition of a very few laws. She hums the old well-known air through innumerable variations." When Emerson attested that such "sublime laws play indifferently through atoms and galaxies", it is surely the word "play" that speaks loudest: there is a gaiety and spontaneity here that seems far removed from the mechanical determinism of which physics is sometimes accused. For Charles Darwin, one can't help feel that the Aristotelian diversity of nature – in barnacles, earthworms and orchids – held at least as much attraction as the Platonic principle of natural selection.

Peter Randall-Page  
at Pangolin Editions,  
July 2014





But one of Peter's most inspirational figures was skeptical of an all-embracing Darwinism as the weaver of nature's threads. The Scottish zoologist D'Arcy Thompson felt that natural selection was all too readily advanced as the agency of every wrinkle and rhythm of organic nature. The biologists of his time tended to claim that all shape, form and regularity was the way it was because of adaptation. If biology has a more nuanced view today, Thompson must take some of the credit. He argued that it was often physical and mechanical principles that governed nature's forms and patterns, not some infinitely malleable Darwinian force. Yet at root, Thompson's picture – presented in his encyclopaedic 1917 book *On Growth and Form* – was not so different from Darwin's insofar as it posited some quite general principles that could give rise to a vast gallery of variations. Thompson simply said that those principles need not be Darwinian or selective, but could apply both to the living and the inorganic worlds. In this view, it should be no coincidence that the branching shapes of river networks resemble those of blood vessels or lung passages, or that a potato resembles a pebble, or that the filigree skeletal shell of a radiolarian echoes the junctions of soap films in foam. Thompson was a pioneer of the field loosely termed morphogenesis: the formation of shape. In particular, he established the idea that the appearance of pattern and regularity in nature may be a spontaneous affair, arising from the interplay of conflicting tendencies. No genes specify

*Twixt Line & Form*  
2013, granite  
Unique  
41 x 57 x 48 cm  
31 x 61 x 57 cm  
60 x 54 x 51 cm  
Photo: artist's studio



(ABOVE LEFT)  
*Maquette for Seed*  
2007, bronze  
Edition of 12  
24 x 16.5 x 16.5 cm

(ABOVE RIGHT)  
Peter Randall-Page  
with *Seed* before its  
installation at the  
Eden Project,  
Cornwall  
Photo: Marc Hill



where a zebra's stripes are to go: if anything is genetically encoded, it is merely the biochemical machinery for covering an arbitrary form with stripes.

It is a fascination with these ideas that gives nearly all of Peter's works their characteristic and compelling feature: you can't quite decide whether the impetus for these complex but curiously geometric forms came from biology or from elsewhere, from cracks and crystals and splashes. That ambiguity fixes the imagination, inviting us to decode the riddle. This dance between geometry and organism is immediately apparent in the monumental sculpture *Seed* commissioned by the Eden Project in Cornwall: an egg-shaped block of granite over 4 metres high and weighing 70 tonnes, the surface of which is covered in bumps that you quickly discern to be as apparently orderly as atoms packed together in a crystal. But are they? These bumps adapt their size to the curvature of the surface, and you soon notice that they progress around the ovoid in spirals, recalling the arrangements of leaflets on a pine-cone or florets on a sunflower head. Can living nature really be so geometric? Certainly it can, for both of those plant structures, like the compartments on a pineapple, obey mathematical laws that have puzzled botanists (including Darwin) for centuries. These plant patterns are called phyllotaxis, and the reason for them is still being debated. Some argue that they are ordered by the constraints on the buckling and wrinkling of new stem



tissue, others that there is a biochemical process – not unlike that responsible for the zebra’s stripes and the leopard’s spots – that generates order among the successively sprouting buds.

The bulbous, raspberry-like surface of *Seed* was carved out of the pristine rock. But in nature such structures are typically grown from the inside outwards, the cells and compartments budding and swelling under the expansive pressures of biological proliferation. “Everything is what it is”, D’Arcy Thompson wrote, “because it got that way” – a seemingly obvious statement, but one that brings the focus to how it got that way: to the process of growth that created it. With this in mind, the bronze casts that Peter has created for this exhibition are also made “from the inside”. They are cast from natural boulders shaped by erosion, but Peter has worked the inner surfaces of the moulds using a special tool to scoop out hemispherical impressions packed like the cells of a honeycomb, so that the shapes cast from them follow the basic contours of the boulders while acquiring these new frogspawn-like cellular patterns on their surface (p.12-16). By subtracting material from the mould, the cast object is itself “grown”, emerging transformed and hitherto unseen from its chrysalis.

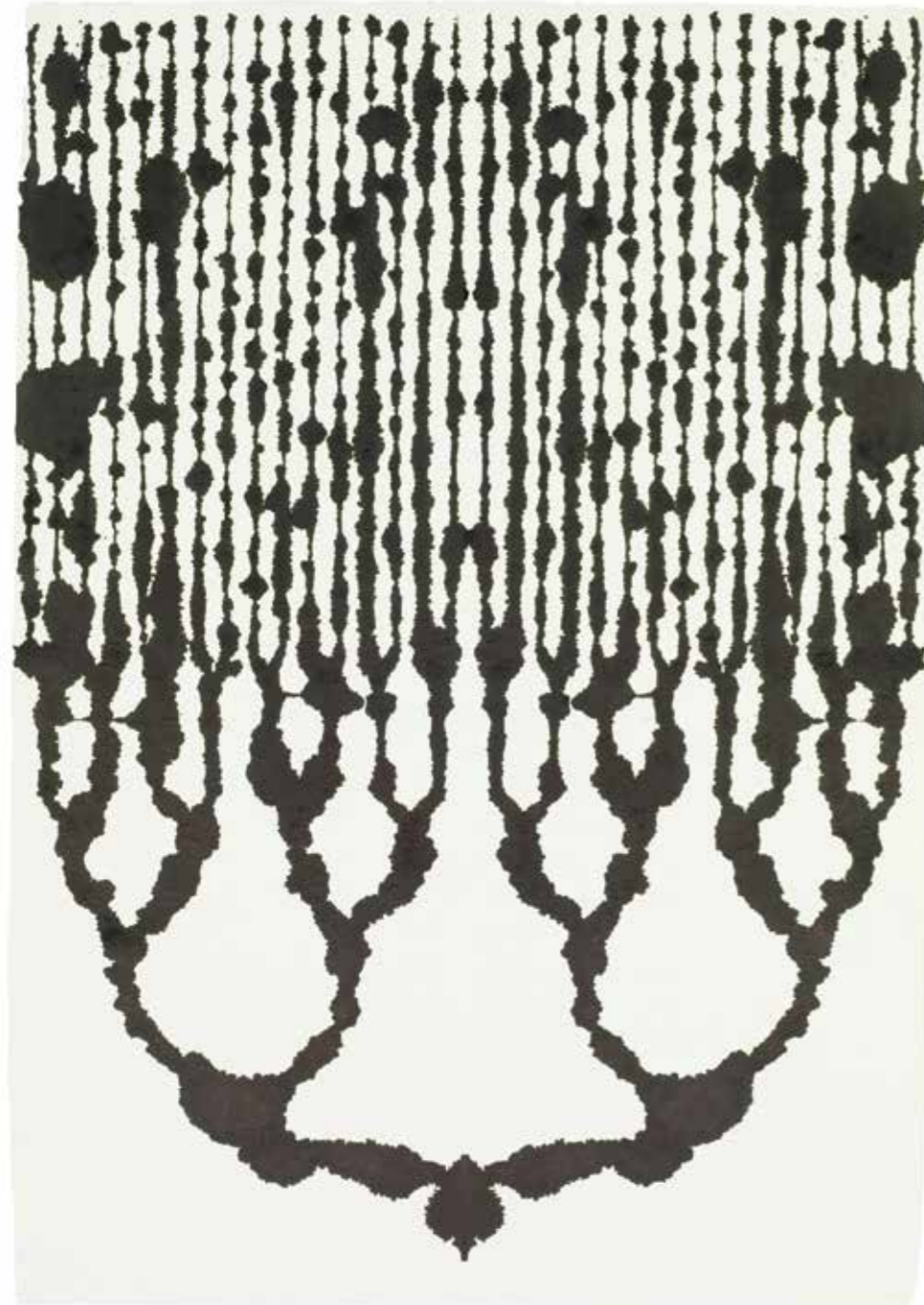
The organic and unfolding character of Peter’s work is nowhere more evident than in his “drawings” of branching, tree-like networks: *Blood Tree*, *Sap River* and *Source Seed*. These are made by allowing ink or wet pigment to flow under gravity across the paper in a quasi-controlled manner, so that not

(LEFT)  
Peter Randall-Page  
working on the sand  
moulds for  
*Inside Out*, 2014

(RIGHT)  
*Inside Out II*  
2014, bronze  
Unique  
74 x 80 x 65 cm







(LEFT)  
*Sap River V*  
2013, black ink  
on paper  
Unique  
134 x 95 cm  
Photo: Steve White

only does the flow generate repeated bifurcations but the branches acquire perfect mirror symmetry by folding the absorbent paper, just like the bilateral symmetry of the human body. The results are ordered, but punctuated and decorated with unique accidents. The final images are inverted so that the rivulets seem to stream upwards in increasingly fine filaments, defying gravity: a process of division without end, arbitrarily truncated and all emanating from a single seed. The inversion suggests growth and vitality, a reaching towards the infinite, although of course in real plants we know that these branches are echoed downwards in the traceries of the roots. There is irony too in the fact that, while sap does indeed rise from trunk to tip, driven by the evaporation of water from the leaf, water in a river network flows the other way, being gathered into the tributaries and converging into the central channel. Nature indeed makes varied use of these branching networks – and often for the same reason, that they are particularly efficient at distributing fluid and dissipating the energy of flow. But we must be vigilant in making distinctions as well as analogies in how they are used.

Were real trees ever quite so regular, however? Some of these look more like genealogies, a mathematically precise doubling of branch density by bifurcation in each generation – until, perhaps, the individual branches blur into a continuum. We could almost be looking at a circuit diagram or technical chart – and yet the splodgy irregularities of the channels warn us that there is still something unpredictable here, as though these are computer networks grown from bacteria (as indeed some researchers are attempting to do). If there can be said to be beauty in the images, it depends on this uncertainty: as Ernst Gombrich put it, the aesthetic sense is awakened by “a struggle between two opponents of equal power, the formless chaos, on which we impose our ideas, and the all-too-formed monotony, which we brighten up by new accents”.

The vision of the world offered by Peter Randall-Page is therefore neither Platonic nor Aristotelian. We might better describe it as Neoplatonic: as asserting analogies and correspondences between apparently unrelated things. This tendency, which thrived in the Renaissance and can be discerned in the parallels that Leonardo da Vinci drew between the circulation of blood and of natural waters in rivers, later came to seem disreputable: like so much of the occult philosophy, it attempted to connect the unconnected, relying on mere visual puns and resemblances without regard to causative mechanisms (or perhaps, mistaking those analogies for a kind of mechanism itself). But thanks to the work of D’Arcy Thompson, and now modern scientific theories of complexity and pattern formation, a contemporary Neoplatonism has re-emerged as a valid way to understand the natural world. There are indeed real, quantifiable and verifiable reasons why zebra stripes look like the ripples of windblown sand, or why both the Giant’s Causeway and the tortoise shell are divided into polygonal networks. When we contemplate these objects and structures, we experience what art historian Martin Kemp has called “structural intuitions”, which are surely what the Neoplatonists were responding to. And these intuitions are what Peter’s work, with all its intricate balance of order and randomness, awakens in us.

PHILIP BALL

SCULPTURE







*Inside Out I*  
2014, bronze  
Unique  
54 x 63 x 70 cm



*Inside Out III*  
2014, bronze  
Unique  
88 x 103 x 114 cm







(LEFT)  
*Ironed Out I*  
2009, iron  
Unique  
11.5 x 25 x 16 cm

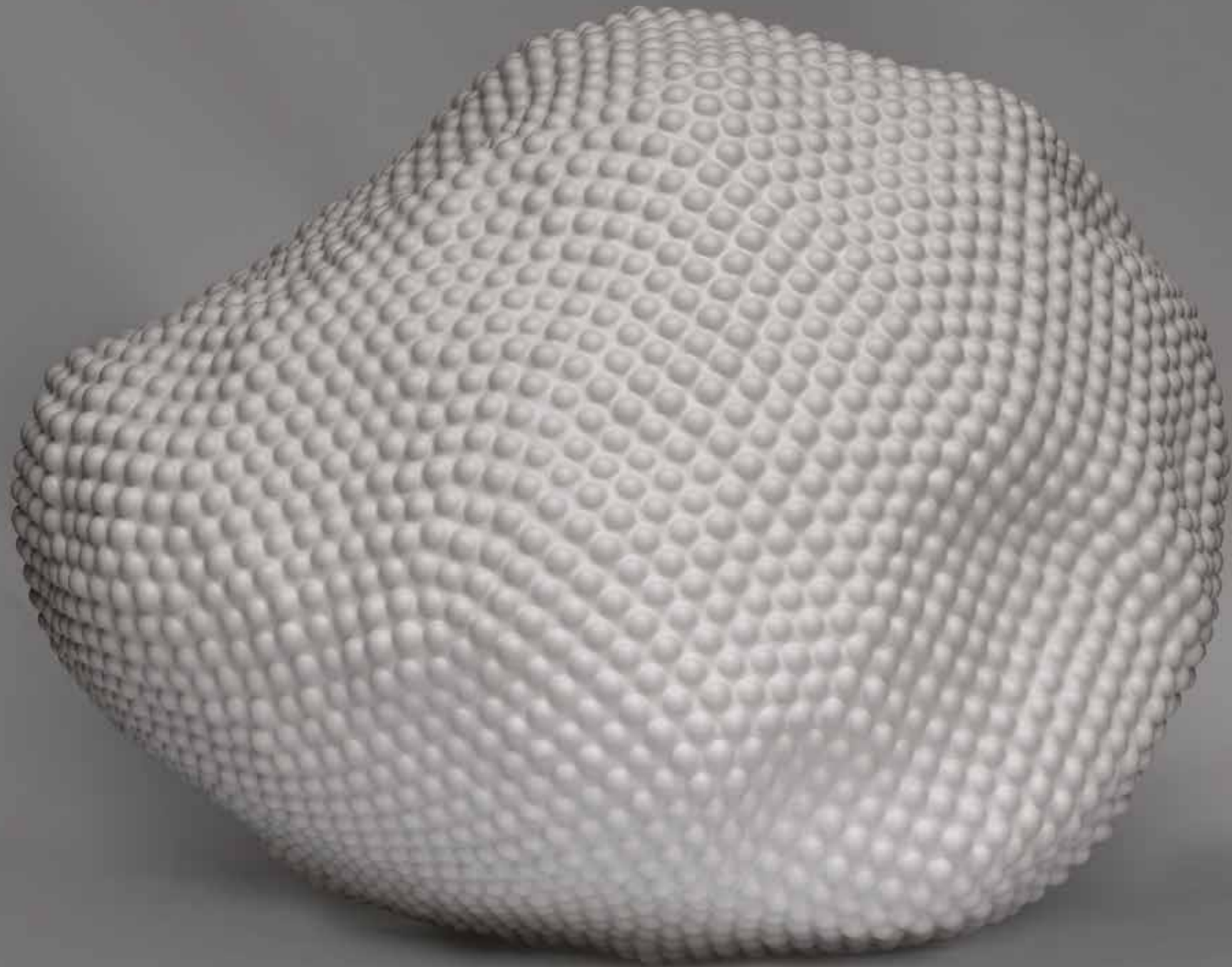


(RIGHT)  
*Ironed Out II*  
2009, iron  
Unique  
15 x 25 x 16 cm

*Theme & Variation I*  
2008, painted bronze  
Edition of 4  
55 x 100 x 85 cm







(LEFT)  
*Theme & Variation II*  
2008, painted  
bronze  
Edition of 4  
140 x 170 x 130 cm



(RIGHT)  
*Theme & Variation*  
2008, sterling silver  
Edition of 4  
13 x 20 x 16 cm



(FAR LEFT)  
*Stone Maquette I*  
2002, granite  
Unique  
11 x 13 x 12 cm

(LEFT)  
*Stone Maquette II*  
2002, granite  
Unique  
10 x 12 x 11 cm



*Stone Maquette III*  
2003, granite  
Unique  
10 x 25 x 11 cm

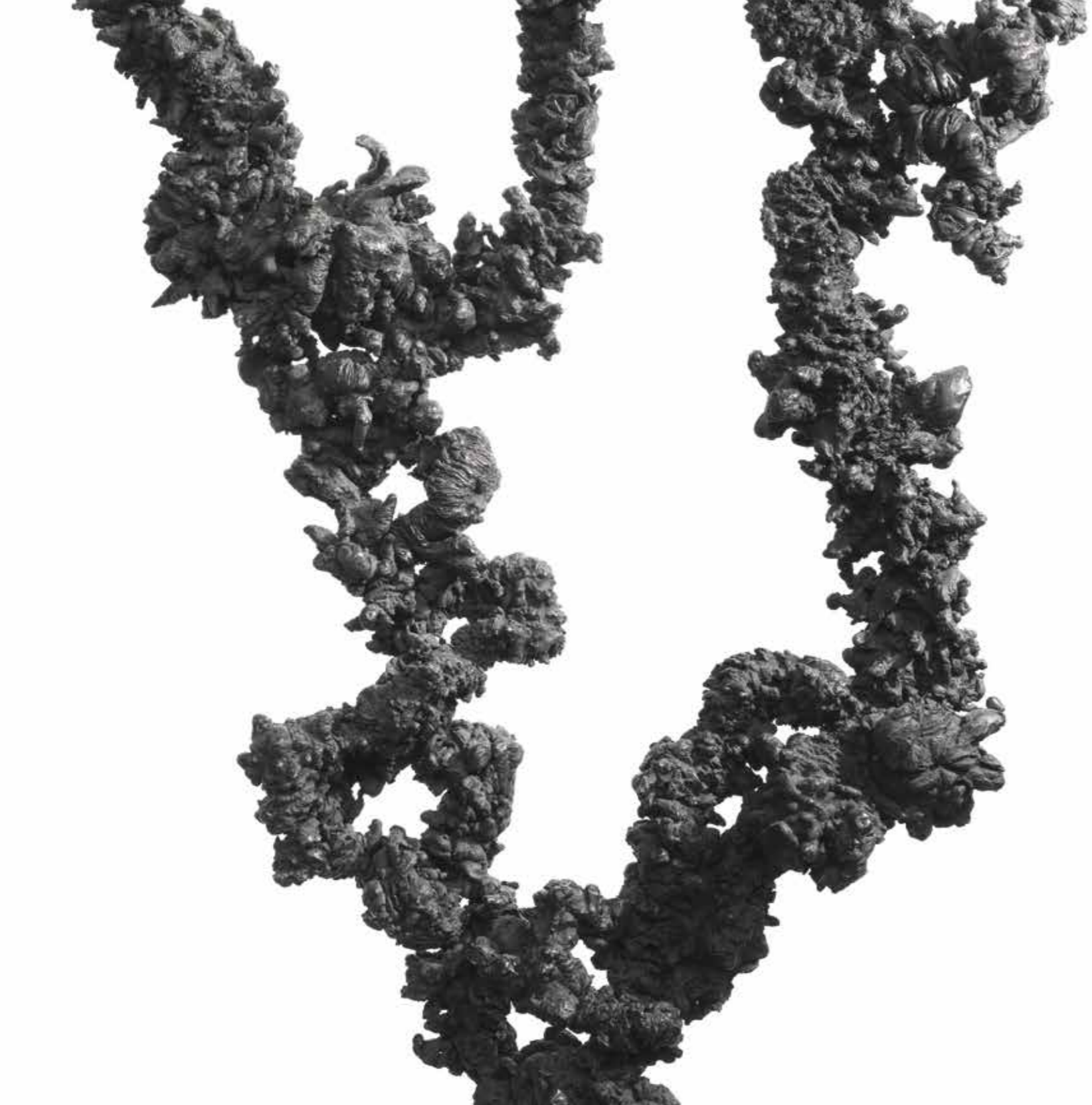




*Caged Stone III*  
2003, granite  
and bronze  
Unique  
12 x 16 x 16 cm







*Up Flow*  
2014, bronze  
Unique  
128 x 77 x 12 cm ex base





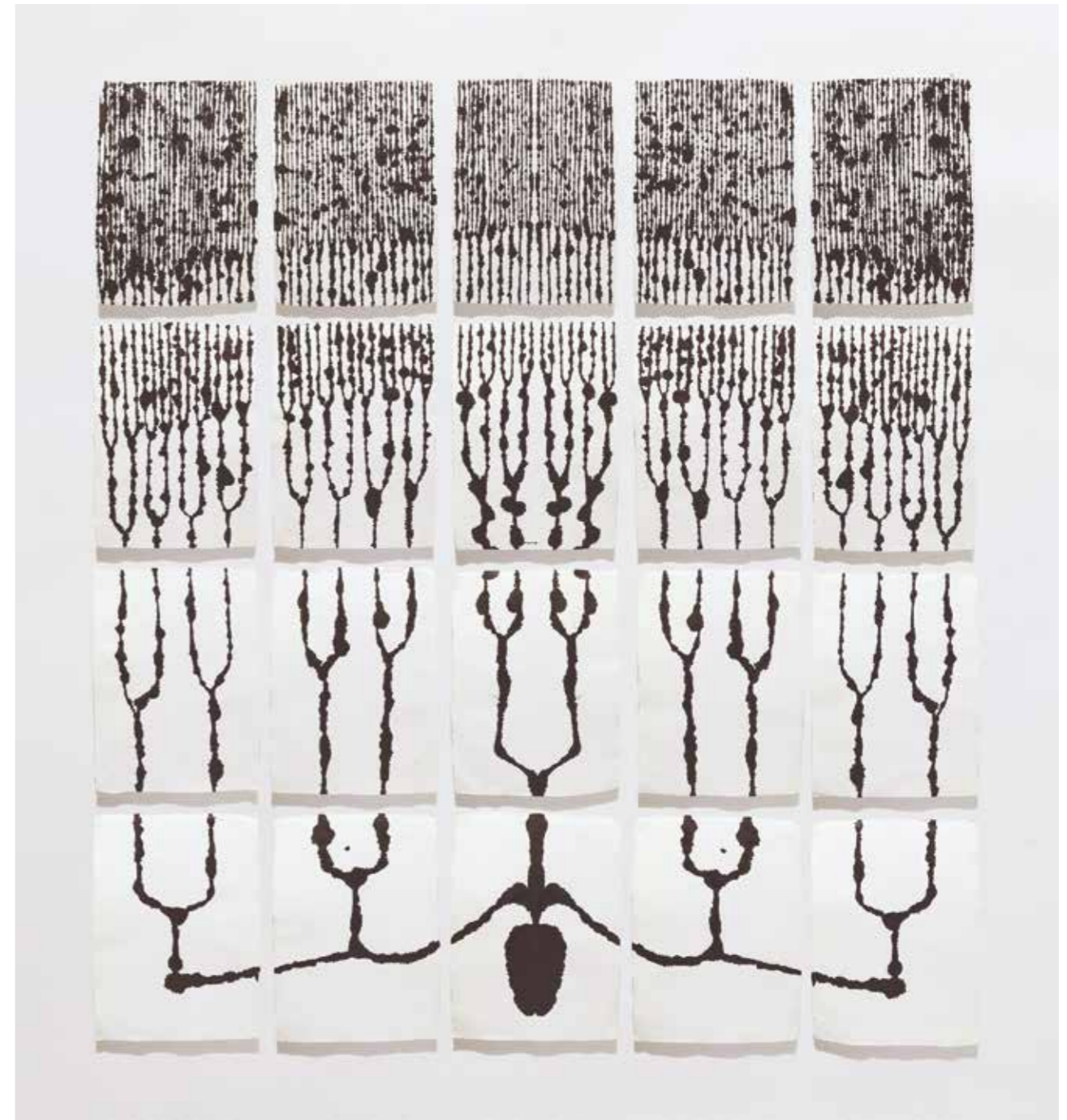
WORKS ON PAPER.





(PREVIOUS PAGE)  
*Delta Fan* (detail)  
2013, burnt sienna  
ink on paper  
Unique  
30.5 x 22 cm

(RIGHT)  
*Espalier*  
2013, black ink  
on paper  
Unique  
307 x 279 cm  
Photo: Steve White







*Blood Espalier*  
2013, burnt sienna  
ink on paper  
Unique  
303 x 482 cm



(LEFT)  
*Source Seed I*  
2013, black ink  
on paper  
Unique  
300 x 340 cm

(RIGHT)  
*Source Seed IV*  
2013, black ink  
on paper  
Unique  
134 x 95 cm







(LEFT)  
*Blood Tree III*  
2013, burnt sienna  
ink on paper  
Unique  
198 x 85 cm

(RIGHT)  
*Blood Tree I*  
2013, burnt sienna  
ink on paper  
Unique  
198 x 255 cm  
Photo: Steve White

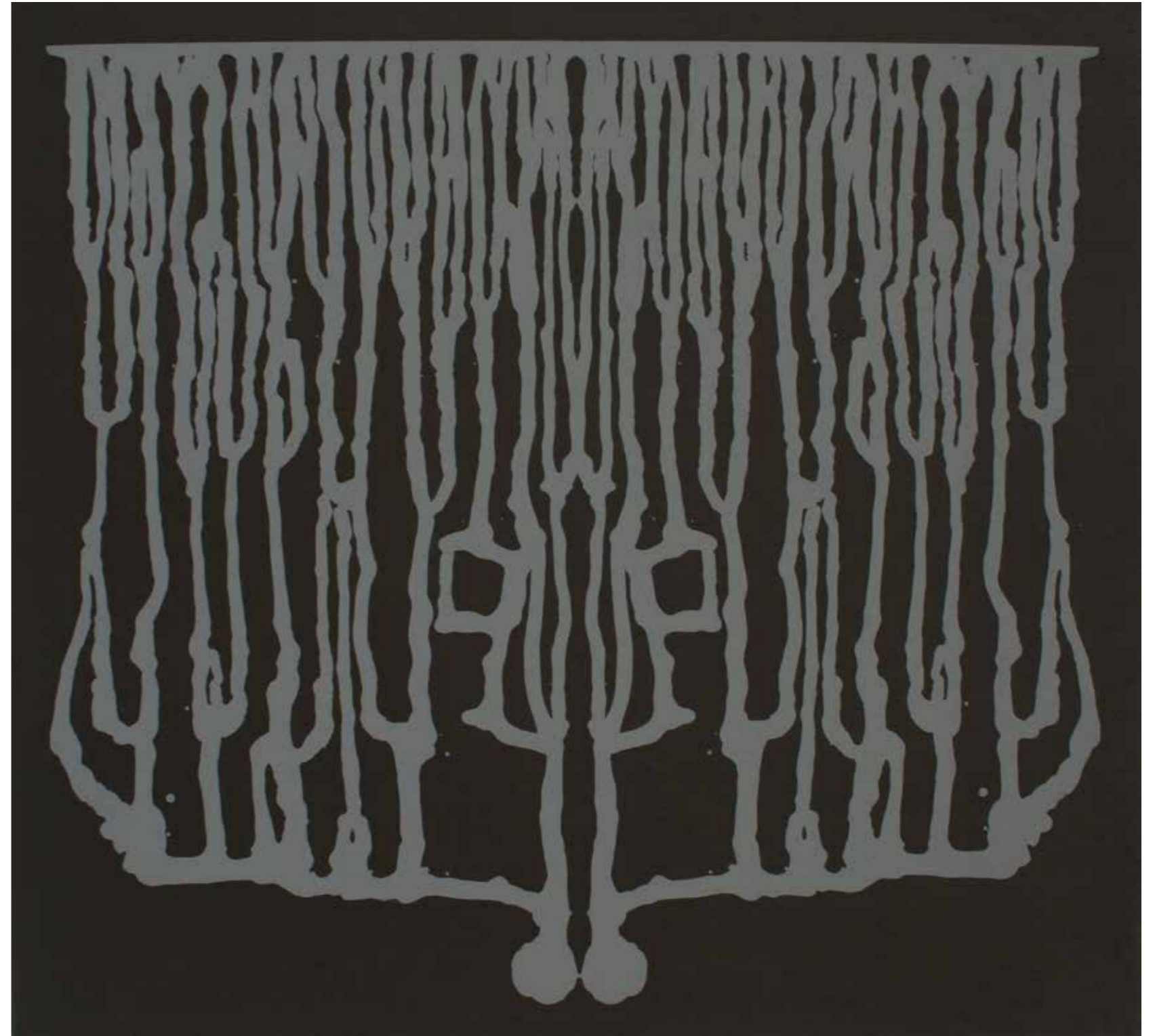




(LEFT TO RIGHT)  
*Rorschach Leaf I, II & III*  
2014, black ink on paper  
Unique  
199 x 82 cm each  
Photo: Steve White



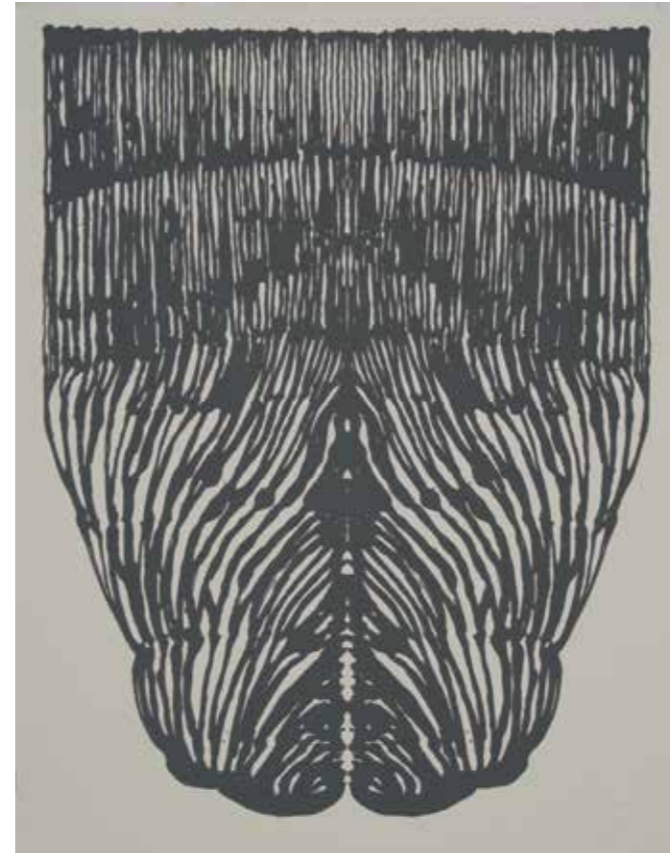
*Espalier*  
2014, silk screen  
Edition of 20  
41.1 x 48.4 cm





*Sap River I & II*  
2014, silk screen  
Grey on black is an edition of 10  
Otherwise edition of 15  
39.2 x 32.3 cm





*Confluence*  
2014, silk screen  
Each an edition of 20  
30.5 x 23.1 cm



*Source Seed*  
2014, silk screen  
Each an edition of 20  
41 x 26.8 cm

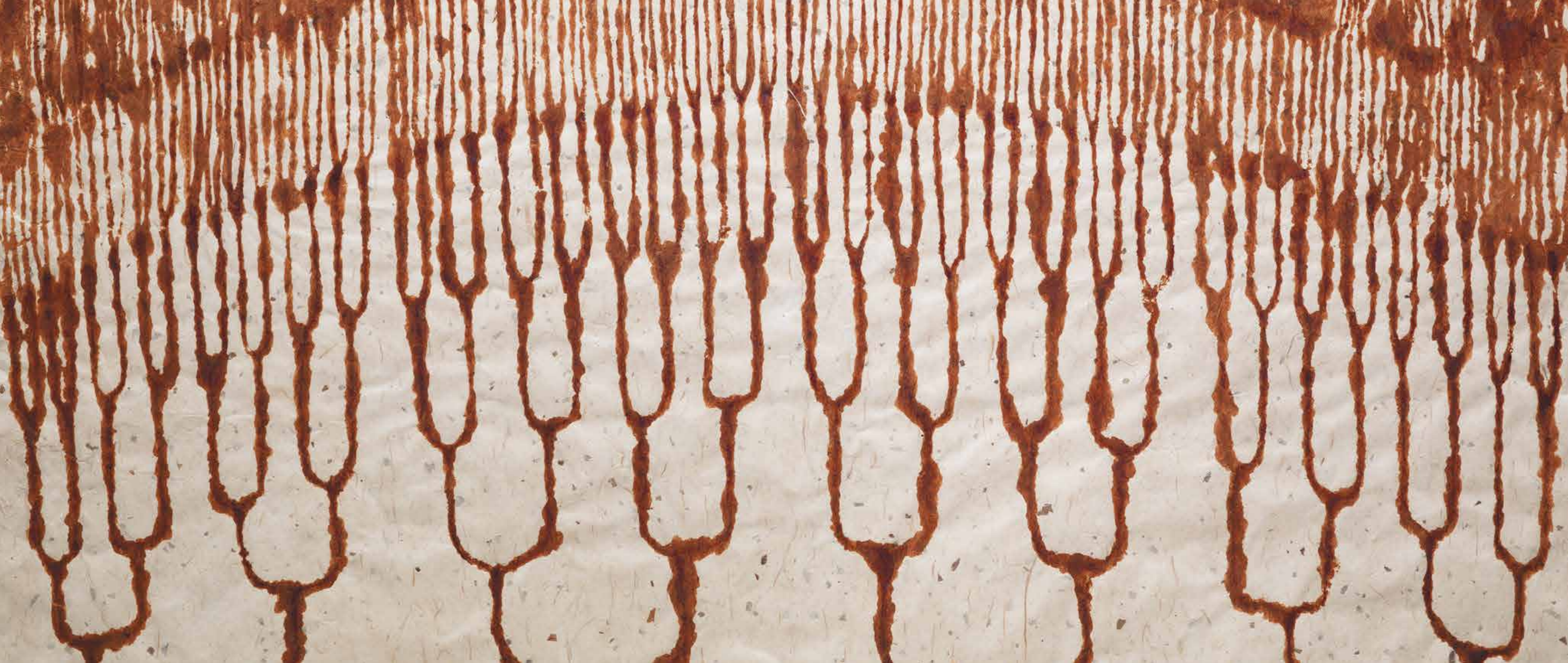


(LEFT)  
*Vein*  
2013, burnt sienna  
ink on paper  
69.5 x 69 cm



(ABOVE)  
*Study for a Screen*  
2014, burnt sienna  
ink on paper  
64.5 x 94 cm







## PETER RANDALL-PAGE

2013 Invited contributor to Interdisciplinary Science Reviews: article on D'Arcy Thompson  
Awarded Honorary Doctorate of Letters, Bath Spa University

2012-13 Invited artist, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

2012 Judge, Threadneedle Prize, Judge, John Ruskin Prize

2011 Invited participant in Eskisehir Ceramic Symposium, Turkey  
Judge, International Print Biennale, Newcastle  
Judge, First 108 Public Art Commission, RBS, London

2010 Awarded Honorary Doctorate of Letters, Exeter University  
Invited speaker, Noguchi Museum, Long Island USA

2009 Awarded Honorary Doctorate of Letters, York St John University

2007 Residency on Lolui Island, Uganda with Ruwenzori Sculpture Foundation

2006 Winner of the Marsh Award for Public Sculpture ('Give and Take')  
Invited plenary speaker, Bridges Maths/Art Conference, London

2005-06 External assessor for the new Sculpture MA, Cork Inst of Technology, Eire

2004 Invited Artist, Gwangju Biennale, South Korea  
Selector for the 'Discerning Eye' exhibition, Mall Galleries, London  
Participant in the Taurenne Dialogues, France.

2003-05 Member of the design team for the new education building, Eden Project

2003 Jerwood Sculpture Prize Judge, RWA Sculpture Open Judge  
'Give and Take' large boulder work enabled by Sculpture at Goodwood

2000 Participated in Sculpture Symposium in Oggleshausen, Germany  
'Womb Tomb' large boulder work enabled by Sculpture at Goodwood

1999-2005 Associate Research Fellow at Dartington College of Arts

1999 Awarded Honorary Doctorate of Arts, University of Plymouth  
Architectural ceramics symposium, 'Creating the Yellow Brick Road'

1989-96 'Local Distinctiveness' project with assistance of Common Ground

1994 Artist-in-residence at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania  
and Australian lecture tour; aided by British Council travel award

1993 Visiting Lecturer in Sculpture at Royal College of Art, London

1992 Participated in Stone Sculpture Symposium in Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan

1982-89 Visiting Lecturer in Sculpture at Brighton Polytechnic

1986-87 'New Milestones' project with the assistance of Common Ground

1980 Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Travelling Fellowship, marble carving Italy

1979 Worked on conservation of 13th-century sculpture at Wells Cathedral

1973-77 Studied at Bath Academy of Art

1954 Born Essex

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2014 *Peter Randall-Page: New Sculpture & Works on Paper*, a partnership exhibition between Peninsula Arts, Plymouth University and Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery  
*Drawings, Prints & Sculpture on a Domestic Scale*, Thelma Hulbert Gallery, Honiton

2013 *Drawings and Prints*, The Innovation Centre, University of Exeter

2011 *Peter Randall-Page at the Bath Art Affair*, The Octagon Chapel, Bath  
*Recent Works*, Salon & Forecourt, Royal British Society of Sculptors London  
*Sculpture in the Garden*, RHS Wisley, Woking, Surrey

2010-11 *Drawings*, Southampton City Art Gallery

2010 *Clay*, Purdy Hicks Gallery, London  
*New Sculpture and Drawing*, Jerwood Space, London  
*Peter Randall-Page at Canary Wharf*, London

2009-10 *Peter Randall-Page at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park*, in and around the Underground Gallery

2008-09 *Stones, Sunlight and Shadows: New Sculpture in the Woods*, New Arts Centre, Roche Court, Salisbury, Wilts

2008 *Rock Music Rock Art*, Pangolin London  
*Sculpture in Lister Park*, Bradford, West Yorkshire

2005-06 *Rocks in my Bed*, One Trinity Gardens, Quayside, Newcastle Upon Tyne

2003 *Sculpture and Drawings*, The Natural History Museum, London

2001 *Nature of the Beast*, Djanogly Art Gallery, Nottingham; Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield;  
Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne

1998 *Whistling in the Dark*, Galerija Tivoli, Ljubljana, Slovenia; Stedelijke Musea,  
Gouda, Netherlands  
*New Sculpture and Drawings*, Stephen Lacey Gallery, London

1996-98 *In Mind of Botany*, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (1996); Atkinson Gallery, Millfield School,  
Street (1997); Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre (1998)

1994-95 *Works on Paper 1983-94*, University Gallery, University of Tasmania; Motorworks Gallery,  
Melbourne Grammar School; Meridian Gallery, Melbourne, Australia

1994 *Boulders and Banners*, Wenlock Priory, Shropshire  
*Boulders and Banners*, Reed's Wharf Gallery, London

1992 *Sculpture and Drawings 1980-1992*, Leeds City Art Galleries and Yorkshire Sculpture Park;  
Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh; Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol; organised by The Henry Moore  
Centre for the Study of Sculpture, Leeds

1990 *Sculpture and Drawings*, Spacex Gallery, Exeter

1985 *Sculptures*, Anne Berthoud Gallery, London

1980 *Peter Randall-Page: Sculpture*, Gardner Centre Gallery, Sussex University



## SELECTED RECENT GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 *Committed to Paper: Master drawings and prints by sculptors* Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Michigan, USA
- 2013 *Blickaschen 9*, Frankfurt, Germany  
*Sculptural Ceramics*, Pangolin London  
*The Sculpted Stone*, The Garden Gallery, Hampshire  
 Sculpture on display at Taichung & Taoyuan Cities, Taiwan
- 2012-14 *Beauty is the First Test*, Pump House Gallery, London & tour
- 2012-13 *Sculpture Promenade*, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
- 2012 *Carving in Britain from 1910 to Now*, Fine Art Society, London  
*Sculptors' Drawings and Works on Paper*, Pangolin London  
*Contemporary Sculpture in the Park*, Deutschordens Museum, Bad Mergentheim, Germany  
*Uddenskulptur 2012*, Udden Hunnebostrand, Sweden  
*STEIN Zeit*, Rottweil, Germany  
*Pertaining to Things Natural*, Chelsea Physic Garden, London  
*FIDEM XXXII*, The Hunterian, Glasgow  
*On Form Sculpture*, Asthall Manor, Burford, Oxfordshire
- 2011-12 *Figure in the Landscape*, The Gallery, Winchester Discovery Centre
- 2011 *40 Artists: 80 Drawings*, Burton Art Gallery & Museum, Devon  
*Three+*, Hillsboro Fine Art, Dublin, Ireland  
*Forcemeat*, Wallspace Gallery, New York, USA  
*Kettle's Yard: Found*, The Brompton Garage, London  
*Best of Silver*, Pangolin London
- 2010-11 *Stone*, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, Yorkshire; Pier Arts Centre, Orkney; Cass Sculpture Foundation, West Sussex  
*Inside Out: Sculpture in the Digital Age*, Object Gallery, Sydney, Australia; and touring to Leicester, Manchester & Falmouth
- 2010 *Crucible*, Gloucester Cathedral, Gloucester  
*International Sculpture*, Racconigi, Italy  
*Contemporary Sculpture 2010*, Newby Hall & Gardens, Ripon  
*Sculptors' Prints and Drawings*, Gallery Pangolin, Stroud
- 2009 *Fire and Brimstone*, Gallery Pangolin, Chalford, Stroud  
*Blickaschen 7*, Bad Homburg, Germany.  
*40 Artists 80 Drawings*, The Drawing Gallery, Walford, Shropshire  
 Sculpture on display at the British Council Building, Kampala, Uganda.
- 2008 *British Sculptors' Drawings: Moore to Gormley*, British Museum, London  
*Sterling Stuff II*, Pangolin London  
*2D to 3D: Drawing Towards Sculpture*, Bournemouth University, Poole

## COMMISSIONS

- Bristol City Council  
 BUPA, London  
 Cambridge,  
 Cardiff University  
 Dartington Hall Trust  
 Devon County Council  
 East Sussex County Council  
 Eden Project  
 Forestry Commission  
 Gwangju Biennale, South Korea  
 University of Iowa, USA  
 Isle of Anglesey County Council, Wales  
 Jerwood Sculpture Park  
 Karlsruhe University of Music, Germany  
 London Clinic  
 London Docklands Development Corporation and Conran Restaurants  
 Lothian Regional Council, LEEL, Edinburgh Old Town Renewal Trust  
 Manchester City Council  
 Millennium Seed Bank, Wakehurst Place, Sussex  
 The National Trust  
 Newcastle City Council, Silverlink Properties  
 Nuffield College, Oxford  
 Oggleshausen, Germany  
 Oxfordshire County Council  
 Plymouth City Council  
 Ruwenzori Sculpture Foundation, Uganda  
 Said Business School, Oxford  
 St George's Hospital, London  
 Southwark Cathedral  
 Taylor Wimpey, High Wycombe  
 Teignbridge District Council  
 Uplands Community College, East Sussex  
 The Weld Estate, Dorset  
 Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust, West Sussex  
 Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan

## PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Arnolfini Collection Trust, Bristol  
The British Council  
The British Embassy, Dublin  
The British Museum  
Burghley Sculpture Garden  
Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Nottingham  
The Contemporary Art Society, London  
The Creasy Collection of Contemporary Art, Salisbury  
Derby Arboretum  
Dulwich Picture Gallery  
Falmouth Art Gallery  
Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, USA  
Leeds City Art Galleries  
Lincoln City Council  
Milton Keynes Community NHS Trust  
Museum Würth, Germany  
The National Trust Foundation for Art  
Snite Museum, USA  
University of Nottingham  
Nottinghamshire City Council  
University of Tasmania  
Tate Gallery, London  
Ulster Museum, Belfast  
Usher Gallery, Lincolnshire County Council  
Victoria Art Gallery, Bath  
University of Warwick, Coventry  
West Kent College, Tonbridge





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5th September - 4th October 2014

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