

SYNERGETIC STRATEGIES

Eamon O’Kane

From a House in the Trees to a House of the Dead

My work often takes its starting point from a very specific piece of history and then expands to a much wider context. I frequently work simultaneously on quite different projects and bodies of work. One theme I have returned to a number of times throughout my career, is that of the history of the house I grew up in. The starting point for this body of work was the fact that King James II stopped off at the house at the time of the siege of Derry in 1689.

The King was welcomed by the owner of the house and a dining table was laid under the canopy of a sycamore tree (which I played in as a child). After the siege, as the monarch’s forces retreated and laid waste around them, James spared Cavanacor House because he had enjoyed its hospitality. This passage describes the event in some detail: “On 20th of April 1689 King James passed thro’ on his way from Mongevlin Castle to Strabane, after dining under a big sycamore tree in front of the house of John Keyes esq. at Cavanacor, to whom he gave protection, which afterwards saved this gentleman’s house, when those of all the Protestant houses round him were burned. The old oak table on which the unfortunate monarch sat to dinner, and the antiquated china upon which the dinner was served are preserved as curiosities.”¹

In 2007, I created a work for a solo exhibition at the RCC Art Centre in Letterkenny. *The House And The Tree* included a reconstruction of an original part of my parents’ house that was demolished half a century ago. The reconstruction included a film of derelict vernacular architecture around the county. These ruined buildings were a result of migration of communities, and audio recordings of *Sean-fhocail* (Gaelic proverbs) augmented the film. The sycamore tree, which the King dined under, had blown down in a storm in 1999, and the cut-up fragments of the tree formed the centerpiece of the show along with a large wall drawing of the tree itself. The project developed into a touring exhibition with the works evolving and changing as they moved from venue to venue. I worked with a local carpenter in Bristol to transform the sycamore tree into a seventeenth-century style table and chairs, similar to those used by James II. I approached the installation of the exhibition at Plan 9 in Bristol in much the same way that I would approach a period of research in my studio. The intention of this was to work directly with the material and not form any preconceptions of how the show was to be installed prior to the four days of installation. I had the advantage of working with an experienced craftsman for the design of the furniture, and specifically, all “waste” material from the process was kept. I worked with these wooden fragments in the space for four days, eventually settling on laying them out over the floor. I have continued to develop this working process, having been refined and enhanced

1 M’Corkell, 1823

by my reflections on the interventions that the public has carried out in my interactive installations, as well as other installations such as my works *In All Things* and *Wood Archive*.

In 2009, using the 17th century-style furniture produced in Bristol, I directed the staging of a re-enactment (by the English Civil War Reenactment Society) of the meal James II had under the sycamore tree in Ireland. This took place at two sites in the New Forest on April 19—almost 320 years to the day of the actual event. I gave the re-enactors a brief synopsis of the background history and asked them to improvise the roles they were given. The film was shot in one take and then edited. The furniture was installed in the gallery space with the video documentation of the re-enactment. This was connected to another re-enactment, which took place on the same day, that of a hunt that James II led (being the last king to hunt in the New Forest in the late 17th Century). I was interested in connecting the two places, using the fact that King James II had visited both. Again, I intentionally took an improvised approach to how the artwork should evolve and this was also the case in my approach to directing the resulting performance.

King James II retreated from defeat at the siege of Derry, which had lasted 105 days—from April 18 to August 1, 1689. Thereafter he and his troops were involved in a number of battles and skirmishes before meeting William of Orange and his troops at the Battle of the Boyne. A museum dedicated to the history of the battle is now located in my grandmother’s childhood home, Oldbridge House, Co. Meath. A few kilometers away from Oldbridge, Newgrange is a 5,200-year-old Neolithic passage tomb located in the Boyne Valley. It was originally accidentally discovered in 1699, nine years after the battle of the Boyne.

“The place was extraordinary, I remember seeing it in around 1969—all alone, just me and him. No cameras, no lights, nothing. The whole place was just illuminated. I’ll never forget it ... He was the first person in about 5,000 years to see it.”² The quote is from an interview with Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly, where she describes first witnessing the winter solstice event at Newgrange alongside her father, Professor Michael J. O’Kelly after he rediscovered the winter solstice phenomenon when he unearthed the roof box at the site. In 1961, archaeologist Patrick Hartnett selected O’Kelly to be the director of excavations of the site. It was in very poor condition and had no public access. O’Kelly confirmed a local legend on December 21, 1967, that the sun rays during the midwinter sunrise go straight down the long passage to the central the tomb. The rays of sun “pass through a small ‘roof-box’ opening above the doorway to penetrate along the whole length of the passage as far as the center of the chamber.”³ He conducted extensive research during the excavation and was able to calculate that the tomb was built to align with the winter solstice. “But it was quite obvious to us that it couldn’t happen at Midsummer because of the position of the sun” says O’Kelly. “So if the sun was to shine in at all, the only possibility would be in Midwinter.”⁴ He describes the moment he witnessed the light enter the roof box and illuminate the tunnel, only to fade to total darkness once again. “I expected to hear a voice, or perhaps feel a cold hand resting on my shoulder, but there was silence. And then, after a few minutes, the shaft of light narrowed as the sun appeared to pass westward across the slit, and total darkness came once more.”⁵ The feat of engineering involved in the construction of Newgrange is astonishing, not only in relation to the scale of the boulders and quantity of earth used but also with regard to the precision of the construction and its alignment with the seasonal

2 Hogan, 2007
3 Harbison, 1998
4 Welfare & Fairley, 1980
5 Welfare & Fairley, 1980

cycles. “I think that the people who built Newgrange built not just a tomb but a house of the dead, a house in which the spirits of special people were going to live for a very long time. To ensure this, the builders took special precautions to make sure the tomb stayed completely dry, as it is to this day ...”⁶

My recent stop motion animation based on the Newgrange site and entitled *Liosanna* (ringfort in Irish) is a development of *Regeneration*, another stop-motion animation from 2006, created by filming the process of making a series of paintings based on the transformation of the Blanchardstown area (outside Dublin) over a ten-year period. The process of painting echoes the construction of man-made interventions as the layers of paint chart the rapid build-up of an urban landscape. The animation loops back to before the beginnings of this development, when the area was farmland. In *Liosanna*, I use aerial views of the archeological sites in the Boyne valley. I have also made a film of the stone carvings at Newgrange using 3D animations of renderings of the various stones and carvings at the site, merged together in a series of layers: evoking the layers of time and creating illusionistic spaces perhaps akin to those hallucinogenic visions that are presumed to have inspired the patterns and symbols in the first place.

Professor John P. Miller of the Department of Cell Biology and Neuroscience, Montana State University has conducted research into recurring geometric motifs of ancient rock and their relationship to visualizations caused by specific anatomical and neurophysiological characteristics of the human visual cortex. He points out: “Ancient cave paintings and rock engravings can be found on every continent. Clearly it was a practice of great importance - not merely ‘art for art’s sake’—carried out by hunter-gatherer societies. By studying this practice on a global scale, the art reveals similarities in both style and subject. The similarities are evident even though the artists could not have been influenced by one another.”⁷ David Lewis-Williams is also fascinated by similarities of artistic expression throughout ancient civilizations and argues we must be open to layered explanations of these commonalities between prehistoric societies which were separated by time and geographic location: “Was there an underlying, not easily detected, bedrock of belief that expressed itself in contrasting ways? In geological terms, was there a subterranean chamber of molten rock that rose to the surface in different places to form batholiths, each similar to others in its origin but each shaped by the forces of erosion to display its own hills and valleys? Today, many archaeologists are reluctant to seek generalities of this kind. They prefer to see each society as possessing its own unique culture, that is, the set of beliefs and norms that individuals learn from birth and with which they creatively interact. There is, of course, truth in the concept of the uniqueness of human cultures, but it is by no means the whole story.”⁸

I have been working with the spiral form in drawings, paintings and sculptures which investigate its recurrence in natural forms such as fossils of ancient creatures and in different forms of rock art. Professor Miller specifically highlights the stone carvings at Brú na Bóinne, such as the entrance stone at Newgrange, in their use of the spiral form. One of the most common geometric motifs is the spiral, painted and carved throughout the world. And yet the symbolic meaning of the spiral in prehistoric art is speculative. Some argue it may have represented the sun, or the portal to a spirit world. Perhaps it represented life itself, or life beyond life—eternity. Or else, it may have had a more prosaic, functional purpose, that of a calendrical device, employed to deconstruct time into chapters, seasons and solstices. From the painted and engraved walls of the Upper Palaeolithic to the decorated megalithic standing stones of the Neolithic, the symbols persisted. In Europe, the megalithic art of Ireland featured the spiral intensively.

At Brú na Bóinne, a significant center of human activity for almost 6,000 years, the spiral symbol is a dominant feature. [...] passage graves of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth, each standing on a ridge within the river bend. Each of the three main megalith sites have significant archaeoastronomical significance. It is thought that Newgrange and Dowth have winter solstice solar alignments, and Knowth has an equinox solar alignment.”⁹ Professor

6 Welfare & Fairley, 1980
7 Miller & Robinson, 2021
8 Lewis-Williams & Pearce, 2005
9 Miller & Robinson, 2021

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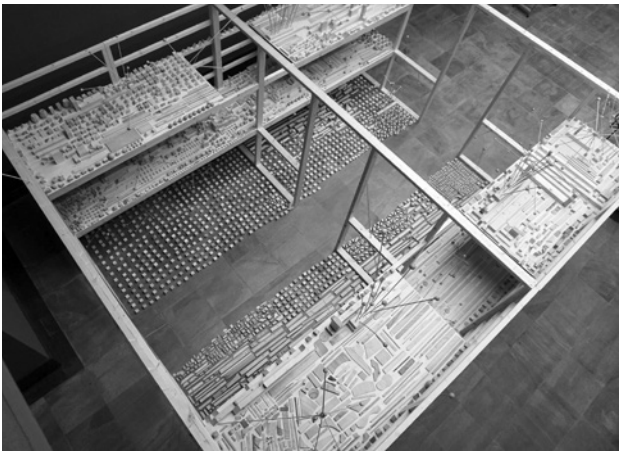
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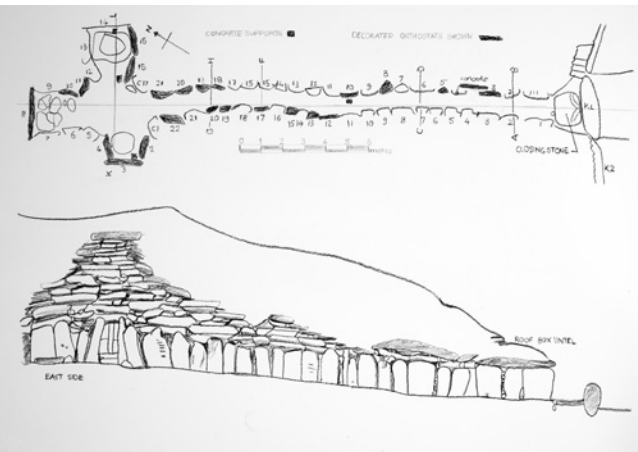
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i-ii. *20th April 1689* by Eamon O'Kane 2009
Installation views Plan 9, Bristol UK

iii. *In All Things* by Eamon O'Kane 2018
Wooden objects installation view M100, Odense Denmark

iv. *Wood Archive* by Eamon O'Kane 2018
Wooden objects and structure installation view Norwegian
Sculpture Biennial, Vigeland Museum, Oslo

v-viii. *Synergetic Strategies* by Eamon O'Kane 2021
Mixed media works on paper, installation view and details

ix. *Liosanna* by Eamon O'Kane 2021
Painted animation still from 4K-video (duration 3 mins)

All photos by the author

Miller goes on to argue that this use of the spiral could be explained by research he has carried out into their relation to the human nervous system. “The ubiquitous nature of geometric motifs, such as the spiral, clearly raises the question: What is the art saying? It also raises another question: What relationship do geometric motifs have with the human nervous system, with hallucinations, for example? We need to understand the relationship between brain, vision and interpretation. What is the cortical basis for geometrical visual hallucinations? What causes these geometric patterns [and even more complex patterns] to be generated in the cortex? The scientific literature has a host of images drawn by people during or directly after they were experiencing hallucinations induced by drugs, or direct electrical stimulation of the visual cortex of the brain. One can argue that there is a clear commonality between hallucinations and prehistoric geometric motifs, such as the kerbstones at Brú na Bóinne.”¹⁰ The similarities between these prehistoric stone carvings and the hallucinations brought on by different stimuli on the visual cortex are striking. I have done a number of drawings on paper which explore these similarities in relation to the Knowth Kerbstones and the Newgrange entrance stone. “These predicted hallucinations are very similar to the real, recorded hallucinations. Therefore a plausible hypothesis may be that prehistoric rock paintings and geometric art forms are simply an accurate record of the artist’s vision. However, was the artist who created the 18,000-year-old mammoth ivory plaque from Siberia doing so under the influence of drugs, migraines or near-death experiences, or was this simply a pleasing and meaningful pattern? Similarly, the predicted hallucination ray patterns that come out of the computer model of the visual cortex bear a striking resemblance to the prehistoric engravings on one of the Knowth kerbstones.”¹¹

Tunnels and Portals

As children growing up in the northwest of Ireland we often visited sites of archaeological significance. This was due to our father’s interest in history, and he signed the family up as members of the Donegal Historical Society as he was President of the society and then later Chairman of the Federation for Ulster Local Studies. We would often go on field trips and sometimes lectures by local historians. I remember visiting archeological digs, numerous stone circles (including Beltany stone circle a few miles from my home) and passage tombs as a child. Growing up in a historical house also surrounded us with a sense of layered time, the derelict buildings in the yard with trees growing out of them and finding pottery, flint arrowheads or antique toy soldiers when digging in the garden. From the front door of the house, you can see Croaghan hill atop of which there is a Neolithic hillfort and cairn. One can see the river Deele that St. Patrick attempted to make a crossing of. An account of St. Patrick’s visit goes as follows: “Patrick comes round the shoulder of Cruachan Lighean, preaches to the people and baptizes them at his well where Ith lies buried at the Foyd. Then he descends to the lowlands at Murlog where in attempting to cross the stream the axles of the chariot are broken again and again. ‘Be ye not amazed at this thing for yonder land from stream thither does not need that I should bless it, for a boy shall be born ... and his name will be Colmcille.’ And the Ford of The Chariot is the same ever since—Tyleford.”¹²

Trips to visit our grandfather also further nurtured this interest in the past. He was head of the National Trust in Northern Ireland and deeply engaged with conservation of historic buildings and the natural environment. In fact, he was responsible for buying up a huge stretch of the coastline on behalf of the Trust in the 1960s, thereby designating it a nature reserve and protecting it from being developed into golf courses and hotels. Later in life he became head of Christies in Northern Ireland, and visits to his house included being surrounded by auction catalogues and antiques as well as excursions to other people’s homes to conduct valuations on prized heirlooms. At that time, around his retirement, he was also in the process of restoring an old watermill, which he brought back to life and put to use in the production of flour and flax. In the 1950s he had bought another property closer to where I grew up in Donegal. That house was an old rectory set in 20 acres of

rugged farmland right in the middle of a valley in a place called Glencolumbkille, named after St. Columbkille, mentioned by St. Patrick in the quote above. During family holidays we would spend weeks with our cousins fishing and exploring the local area. We would visit the Court Cairns in the valley of Malinmore to the west. These are built of massive stones in a manner which was current throughout Atlantic Europe at the time. They are burial places erected with huge stones forming a space in the middle of the “court,” with chambers branching off from it. We would also visit the six *Portal Dolmens* at Malinmore, which are supposed to be the finest of their type in Ireland. These consist of a number of standing stones which are surmounted by a capstone, and I have memories of these huge rocks and feeling dwarfed by them as a child. In fact, a lot of the huge stone formations on my grandfather’s property had a completely different sense of scale than they do when I visit them today. What I remember as a cave is almost just a small indentation in a rock face. The same could be said of the sense of scale of the ringforts (*Liosanna* in Irish), which date back to the Celts and are from around 350 BCE. They normally consist of a number of circular earthworks, and there is one near Glencolumbkille at a place called Doonalt. They are about 20 metres inside and were built as defensive installations. The most dramatic one I remember from my childhood is closer to the house I grew up in. It is called *Grianan of Aileach* and sits atop the 244 metres high Greenan Mountain at Inishowen in County Donegal. It was one of then royal sites of Gaelic Ireland and the seat of the Kingdom of Ailech. The main structure is later than the Celtic ring forts and dates to about 600–700 CE, but there is also evidence of an earlier settlement. The structure comprises of three terraces, and these are linked by steps. The walls are almost 4.5 metres thick and 5 metres high and there are two long passages within them. There would have been wooden buildings inside the ringfort when it was built originally, but now it is an open arena which has a bit of a feeling of an amphitheatre. I remember thinking of this structure as being huge as a child and the short tunnels as being endless.

Another tunnel that features strongly in my childhood memories is the souterrain (underground refuge) beneath the Graveyard of Church of Ireland, also in Glencolumbkille. The refuge was probably constructed by early Christians in order to hide from Norse raiders. It used to be easily accessible but is locked and out of bounds today. My grandfather’s house used to be the rectory for this church and is situated nearby. As local legend would have it (there is a rumor that) the tunnel was connected to the rectory (which is several hundred metres away) and as children we used to search for the entrance to the tunnel and imagine it being used to escape from the Vikings or pirates.

The Flight of the Earls—Donegal to Rome

A few hundred metres from the gate of my childhood home there is a small village called Ballindrait or *Bhaile an Droichid* in Irish, which means “town of the bridge.” The bridge in the village is connected to an important moment in Irish history, *The Flight of the Earls*. “According to local tradition, Rory O’Donnell, Chief of Tirconnail, and O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone, met at the bridge at Ballindrait on their way to Rathmullan to join their extended families and other noblemen of Ulster in the Flight of the Earls on September the14th, 1607.”¹³ The permanent exile of the Earls was a watershed event in Irish history in that it symbolized the end of the old Gaelic order. Hugh O’Neill, who was the 2nd Earl of Tyrone and Rory O’Donnell, the 1st Earl of Tyrconnell, left the small fishing town of Rathmullan in County Donegal for Spain on a small ship with about ninety followers. The chieftains of some of the leading Gaelic families of Ulster were on board this boat and they were about to seek refuge with England’s main enemy in the hope of making a new life for themselves or regrouping and gathering support to return to claim back their lands. After reaching Spain, the Earls and their entourage proceeded to Rome with many being killed along the way by English spies as well as dying from disease and hunger. “After their untimely deaths, variously from disease, exhaustion and deprivation, at least seven but possibly as many as

¹⁰ Miller & Robinson, 2021

¹¹ Miller & Robinson, 2021

¹² Hegarty, 1938

¹³ Anonymous, 2011

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x. The grave of Hugh O'Neill, San Pietro in Montorio, Rome, Italy. Image courtesy of Fr Micheál MacCraith 2016

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xi. *The History of the True Cross* (1447–1466). Excerpt from the frescoes by Piero della Francesca in Basilica San Francesco in Arezzo, Italy. Image courtesy of Augusto Corsini

xii. *Where there are People there are Things* by Eamon O'Kane 2014. Installation view CCA, Derry, North Ireland

xiii. *Synergetic Structures* by Eamon O'Kane 2021. Objetcs in plaster, Jesmonite, plastic and clay

xiv. *Distillation Portals* by Eamon O'Kane 2021. Minerals on paper discs

Photos xii-xiv by the author

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eleven or more members of the O'Neill and O'Donnell exiles, including the earls themselves, were buried between 1608 and 1623 in San Pietro in Montorio. The form of the burials, the surviving grave-slabs and their inscriptions, the earliest records of these and of their architectural context, together with correspondence between two successive Spanish ambassadors and the Spanish court of Philip III, hint at the circumstances of this Gaelic community's exile."¹⁴

In 2006, I had an artist residency at the British School at Rome and visited Trastevere along with my father. We managed to find the tomb of Hugh and Rory O'Donnell, located in front of the altar of San Pietro in Montorio. At the time the tomb was covered by a carpet, but we were able to pull it back to look at the inscription and it was a very moving experience to see the names engraved on the marble slab. The tomb was excavated pretty soon after our visit and it is estimated that including the earls and their servants there are about eleven members of the Irish community in exile interred at San Pietro in Montorio. During my time in Rome I also had an opportunity to visit The Vatican Necropolis, which lies 5–12 metres below Saint Peter's Basilica and under the Vatican City. The Vatican organized secret archaeological excavations during the second world war, from 1940, and until 1949, and these revealed parts of a necropolis dating back to Roman Imperial times. The work was undertaken at the request of Pope Pius XI as he wanted to be buried as close as possible to St. Peter. The excavations had to be done in secret due to the Nazis' interest in archeological artefacts, which they were collecting for Hitler's Führermuseum. Apparently, the priests and monks at the Vatican dispersed the soil and sand from the excavations from small sandbags concealed under their robes whilst they were making their daily walks in the Vatican courtyards and parks.

The necropolis was not originally one of the Catacombs of Rome, as it was an open air cemetery with tombs and mausolea, which was very common in the Roman Empire at the time. Roman law dictated that it was forbidden to bury the dead within the city walls, and this meant that burial grounds sprang up along the roads outside of the city. These graveyards were much more social spaces than we are used to contemporary graveyards being. The four walled mausolea were roofless and open to the elements and each would have been designated to a particular family, which meant that during particular festival days the family members would congregate in these outdoor rooms and spend time celebrating their deceased loved ones. The events could be seen as having much more in common with a family picnic than a somber memorial, and in this way could be seen to be more like the Mexican tradition of the day of the dead or even the Irish Wake tradition. The free-standing sarcophagi would have functioned almost as tables for the food and drink, and even included a hole through which wine, milk or honey could be poured to feed the dead and allow them to participate in the feast. The Vatican necropolis was begun as a burial ground built adjacent to the Circus of Caligula on the southern slope of the Vatican Hill. These spaces were deeply important to the Romans. This importance makes Constantine's decision to turn this particular necropolis into the foundations for a Christian Basilica all the more astonishing. My visit to the Necropolis was fascinating. I remember checking in with a Swiss Guard station near one of the entrances to the Vatican City and then entering a small doorway along with the other members of the tour group, mainly consisted of Christian pilgrims, and descending a staircase. The tour is now called *The Scavi Tour* (Scavi being Italian for excavations) and the spaces consist of a mix between an ancient pagan and Christian cemetery and burial ground from the 1st century. I remember being astonished at how clear the transition from one belief system to another was, and as we ascended the gradual incline, our tour guide pointed out frescoes of Roman life slowly becoming one with portraits of Christ depicted not as the bearded man we are familiar with but as a clean shaven Roman. One got the feeling that this transition from a pagan belief system to a Christian one must have been a huge public relations coup built on Emperor Constantine's own unswerving belief which had been cemented before and after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, as depicted by Giulio Romano 1520–1524 in the Vatican City Apostolic Palace. The air was

14 McGurk, 2007

warm and humid and most of the floor was dirt, sand and stone, and I was able to imagine the priests and monks making the slow and steady excavation of the spaces during the war. Some of the spaces were confining and wouldn't have suited anyone prone to claustrophobia—especially not if you think of the huge basilica above. It was hard to imagine these confined spaces in their heyday being open to the elements, with the blue skies above and probably trees and bushes interspersed around them.

During the excavations in the 1930s and 1940s the remains of a tall, thin man were found in the ruins of the necropolis. After a period of intense research, analysis and debate it was determined the remains were those of St. Peter. Pope Paul VI made the official declaration in 1968 when he declared the remains to be those of St. Peter. Pius XI had died on February 10, 1939 in the Apostolic Palace, but he still got his wish to be buried close to St. Peter and is buried in the Papal Grotto of Saint Peter's Basilica. Our guide pointed out the bones at the end of the tour. They are directly under the foundations of the altar of Saint Peter's Basilica and contained in a hermetically sealed plastic box constructed by NASA in order to preserve them.

From NASA to a Nursery

During the autumn of 2020, I had a research sabbatical supported by The Meltzer Research Fund for six months, allowing me to develop an artwork in the studio for this project. It allowed time to work on archiving, and as this excavation of past works was simultaneous to making new work in the studio, the process gave the opportunity for a particular type of critical reflection which juxtaposed my current work with my early work as an artist over 25 years ago. With the objective distance that time affords one begins to detect certain patterns in one's own artistic development—themes, formal concerns, aesthetic preferences etc.

In *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* Tim Ingold proposes ways of thinking through making where practitioners from different fields “correspond” with one another through materials in the generation of form. On reflection I feel that this is what I have been doing through my research and practice, but it is mainly a one-way process in which I receive inspiration through histories and forms and put them in dialogue with different materials, which in turn has a transformative quality and allows me to take the artwork on journeys into other associations. Of course, Ingold is suggesting collaboration between practitioners, and this has occurred for me from time to time, but it is also important that this correspondence or collaboration primarily occurs between the artist and the work itself, as that is where the really interesting things can happen.

The title of some of my new works, *Dark Matter*, refers to the invisible form of matter thought to account for approximately 85 percent of the matter in the universe. I have been inspired by Robert McFarlane's *Underland*, where he explores Neolithic burial chambers in the Mendip Hills of Somerset, and North Yorkshire's Boulby Underground Laboratory, where physicists such as Christopher Toth investigate dark matter a kilometre below the surface. I am interested in comparing different approaches throughout the centuries, including the stone carvings on passage tombs at Newgrange, which date from 3200 BCE, and right up to images of space produced by NASA. I have also been making formal connections to the recent past through a ten-year project at a site at my home in Denmark, and I am using the archive accumulated from this research as a comparative to the distant past of sites such as Newgrange.

In August 2009, I became the owner of a property with 6000 m² of greenhouses which had been used up until the day we took them over. During the following ten years, I used the site as an experimental space where I examined the relationship between the flora and fauna and the disintegrating architectural space. My regular walks throughout the complex produced thousands of photographs and many hours of audio-visual material. These experiments involve making drawings and sculptures where I explore the micro and the macro simultaneously. A cast of a piece of machinery for distilling water becomes a model

for an architectural construction with echoes of an ancient building and so on. Throughout the ten years working with the greenhouses on the site, I have developed a variety of activities and strategies which could be seen to be connected to a type of archeology of the recent past. Now that the architectural structures are removed from the site and it is slowly becoming a forest again, I am able to excavate what is left in my archive of images and artefacts whilst having a memory of the place itself.

In January 1975, Buckminster Fuller sat down to deliver the twelve lectures that make up *Everything I Know*, all captured on video and enhanced with the most exciting bluescreen technology of the day. Props and background graphics illustrate the many concepts he visits and revisits, which according to the Buckminster Fuller Institute include “all of Fuller's major inventions and discoveries”[...]“his own personal history in the context of the history of science and industrialization,” and no narrower a range of subjects than “architecture, design, philosophy, education, mathematics, geometry, cartography, economics, history, structure, industry, housing and engineering.” In his time, as a passenger on what he called Spaceship Earth, Fuller realized that human progress needs not separate the “natural” from the “unnatural”: “When people say something is natural,” he explains in the first lecture, “‘natural’ is the way they found it when they checked into the picture.”¹⁵ The title of this essay, *Synergetic Strategies*, is taken from a phrase by Fuller. In the mentioned lecture series, he describes the significance of the term synergy: “So, I find then that the Universe, itself, is synergetic, it is a great complex of generalized principles, each of which IS synergetic, so that we really have a Synergy of Synergy, there is an exponential synergizing of the generalized principles of Universe themselves. Now, quite clearly, then, the Universe being complex, and synergetic, if we were able then to cope with the totality, we might be able to find out about parts, and we have what I call three well-known Synergetic Strategies of obtaining important information.”¹⁶

I am taken with an observation made by Fuller during these lectures where he relates Einstein's theory of relativity to a deeper understanding of the universe, explaining that when one looks at the night sky one is looking into a type of time machine where it is possible to see stars that have died many thousands of years ago simultaneously with stars which are being born more recently. “I'm going to use items that Einstein did not use, but you're very familiar with the *Big Dipper* the *Big Bear*. And as we go in, the first star in the end, in the handle of the *Big Dipper*, you're seeing a live show taking place 75 years ago. Going to the next star at the turn of the handle, you're seeing a live show taking place one hundred years ago, and going in one more star, you're seeing a live show taking place two hundred years ago. It's anything but on the same blackboard, because a hundred years difference at 6 1/2 trillion miles each year, you've got incredible depth of observation, where the brightness makes it seem to be akin in that pattern. At any rate, then you look at *Andromeda* and you can see a few little sparkling lights of a whole galaxy there; and you're looking at a live show taking place just one million years ago ... it takes exactly 1 million years for that light to get here. Come back again to looking at *Orion's Belt* and the *Betelgeuse* and the other bright stars, one is a live show 1500 years go, and another 1100 years ago. So Einstein said, “The Universe is an aggregate of non-simultaneous and only partially overlapping energy events.”¹⁷ He goes on to describe this in terms of ‘scenario:’ “Now, this is a very interesting kind of a definition, because it is also the definition of what you and I would call “scenario.” In a scenario we have a man born, and then he gets to be “daddy,” and he has children, and then he gets to be a “grand daddy,” he overlaps the grandchildren, and then he dies. There is an introduction of a life, and it blooms, and a star is the same. And the star has its duration, so are the beginnings and endings of these local energy systems; but Einstein said “I think that in this non-simultaneous Universe, that the energies that are being given off by this one might be associating elsewhere.”¹⁸

In conclusion, I have been developing artworks which examine the history of humankind's relationship to mapping the night sky and the cosmos through mark making and symbols. Through these artworks I am making connections between early indigenous belief

15 Fuller, 1975a

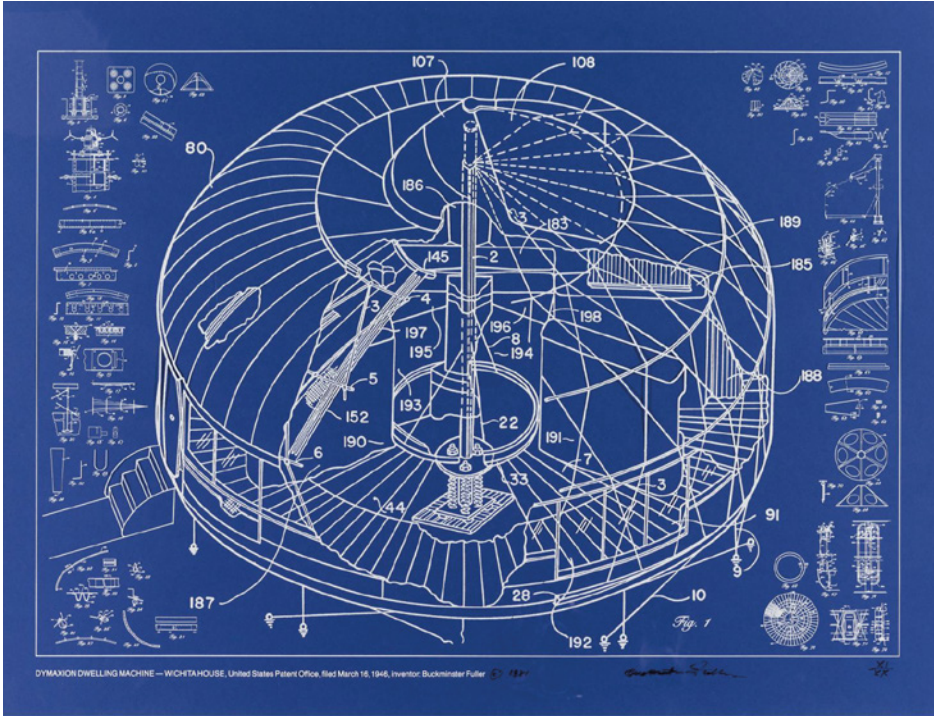
16 Fuller, 1975b

17 Fuller, 1975b

18 Fuller, 1975b

systems and their understanding of the unknown and more contemporary thoughts about the origins of the universe. Fossil forms from the natural world connect with ancient spiral carvings or the structure of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim Museum. I am attempting to develop a type of synergy between the artworks activating the formal, material and historical connections and hopefully allowing the viewer to do the same. Buckminster Fuller has inspired me to see the universe as a series of interrelated connections through time and space and he is able to prove this through among other things Einstein’s theory of relativity. It is entirely possible that many of the early civilizations (including the one that built Newgrange) built this into their belief systems and societal structures through an intuitive reading of the world around them and maybe especially the night sky. I hope to use my own Synergetic Strategies to further investigate a variety of different histories and phenomena and to use the time machine in the sky above our heads as a reminder of how the past affects our present and points to our future.

xv



xvi



xv. *Inventions: Twelve Around One* by Buckminster Fuller 1981. Screen print on clear polyester. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Image courtesy of Nathan Keay MCA Chicago

xvi. *The Constellations for Each Month in the Year* by W. G. Evans Image courtesy of New York for Burritt's 1856 edition of *The Atlas to Illustrate the Geography of the Heavens*

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MATTER, GESTURE, AND SOUL—“SUCH STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF”

Torill Christine Lindstrøm

“We are such stuff that dreams are made of”—says Prospero near the end of Shakespeare’s “The Tempest.”—And indeed, we are matter, body, and soul. Our minds and sciences dig into the abysses of atoms and galaxies, and transcend the time-space horizons of meta-physical realities of both matter and mind. And in the multitude of the possible and the potential, we try to grasp, capture, envision—and express our experience of reality.

Not only we. In the depth of time, as far back as archaeology can reach, “we,” our ancestors, whose genes still vibrates in our bodies, created art.—What we call “art,” that is. Their concepts and ideas may have been different, but “different” can mean anything from “totally different” to “slightly different.” Yet, as long as we, as well as the earliest hominins, are human beings, there are abilities and interests that we share. One is to create art, whether it is pictures, patterns, rituals, performances, sounds, sculptures, body-art, gestures, dances, decorations, and much, much more.

Art captures the essentials of life—and what may lie beyond.

Art stretches beyond the obvious and objective, transforms it through the subjective experience of enlightened persons, and is shared with a community, even with humanity itself, in shared collective archetypes.¹ That is why art from ancient times and distant places can touch us, move us, create emotions, motivations, and motives.—Matter, the materiality of art, creates our souls.

Creativity reduces the “otherness” of “the other.” Creativity makes us feel closer to prehistoric people as well as to people from various cultures; and makes us look at the world differently.—The difference between the ordinary and the exceptional disappears.—In art, the exceptional that lies deeply embedded in the ordinary, is extracted and exaggerated. This creative process makes us see things with new eyes, our perception is transformed.—Immediate impressions become expressions, further to be laden with symbolic meaning, and channeled into solid symbols.

Every creation has a creator. A person with a creative soul is somebody who touches others by their voice, body, movements, gestures, and material products, - or simply by pointing out the exceptional in the usual. Creative persons see and experience things differently. Natural forms of stones and stone walls in caverns may ignite and stir the creative mind into fascination, imagination, awe, perhaps even to aesthetic arrest.—Lappesteinen *sieidi* (The Lappestein sacred stone) is one (see Fig. 1).² A sculpture formed by natural forces, and transformed by mental forces to become a symbol and sacred sanctuary for Sámi populations at Hardangervidda, and a loved landmark for later populations.

But matter can be further transformed. And in the perceptive process, as well as in the material transformation, also the soul and mind of the creator is transformed. The

¹ Jung, 1943

² Lappesteinen (“the Sámi Stone”) is a sieidi. A sieidi can be of wood or stone, and is a sacred object, indicating a sacred area, and a sieidi is also a site for offerings, for the Sámi (Åikäs, 2011). Sieidi stones are usually large and stand out in the landscape. They are unshaped by humans, but have spectacular shapes that appeals to the imagination. The Norwegian main road Riksvei 7 (Rv7) now runs close to Lappesteinen. It seems that this modern road was deliberately curved around it, so that Lappesteinen is preserved for the future as one of many Sámi cultural heritage sites (Thomassen, 2009).—Personally, I feel a thrilling anticipation when approaching it, and a deep sense of awe when seeing it, and touching it.