

IN VISIBLE LINES

by

Daria Dasha Valakhanovitch

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ABSTRACT

DARIA DASHA VALAKHANOVITCH, OCAD UNIVERSITY, IN VISIBLE LINES, MASTER OF FINE ARTS, INTERDISCIPLINARY ART, MEDIA AND DESIGN, 2018.

In Visible Lines addresses the complexity found within the visual simplicity of the familiar realm of the line. Working through the lens of Tim Ingold's anthropological study of lines, the exhibition and paper explore human interaction with invisible and visible lines that govern our space. This process was conducted through practice-based research as a working methodology which explores the line in space through ceramic sculpture. Drawing connections between physical and conceptual interaction with the abstract nature of the line, I invite spectators to engage and reflect on the inherent power of lines.

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INTRODUCTION

I am watching Toronto from outside my front door. In the silence that accompanies the fog, the urban landscape and I are lonesomely looking into the distant sky. Staring into what appears to be nothing and overwhelmed by racing thoughts, I redirect my gaze to my feet. I begin to observe the space and place that surrounds me. Immediately outside reality begins with concrete-cast steps connected to a cinder block retaining wall, leading to a driveway. Beyond the driveway is a static wrought-iron fence dividing my neighbour's yard from mine, and to which a U-lock affixes a bicycle. A bluejay is chirping while darting back and forth between a tree and a telephone cable hung from timber poles. A plane flies overhead leaving a short-lived trail of vapour. The view is accompanied by the sound of a passing train. The landscape I am describing is quite ordinary, but what captivates me is how it is intricately composed of lines. We navigate this world alongside the line. At times the line directs, separates and connects us. If we think of ourselves as practitioners of the world, we participate by creating, laying, making, following and crossing lines, a practice that has become a prime mode of expression in human communication and a "distinctive component of humanity itself."¹ Similarly to the concept of time, I believe that our existence is reflected in the line.

Approach It is by observing and reflecting on the everyday landscape that I began my research journey. The exhibition and paper together emerged from aerial photographs I took while moving to a new place. These images not only document my journey but have also allowed me to view how territory is structured. Observing the land from an aerial view has propelled my exploration of the lines that form our everyday landscape. From this geography emerged a geometry that I re-contextualize into my studio practice. In the following paper I explore how visible and invisible lines govern our world.

I start by following, documenting and creating lines. I am invested in discovering the meanings of the line and its limitations. I have come to the realization early in my research that the line cannot be separated from human context and that the line not only is a direct reflection of human ideology and perception but also illustrates our interaction with the natural landscape.

¹ Faietti, Marzia and Wolf, Gerhard "The Power of Line: Preface" in *The Power of Line: Linea III*, (Hirmer, 2015), 6.

Framework Realizing that a line is more than a trace, a gesture or a concept, I venture to suggest that a line is also a conceptual tool used to control how we interact and behave in society. In my work, the line serves as a visual metaphor embraced in order to explore the hidden complexity contained within the supposed visual simplicity of lines. My research is framed by the writing of Tim Ingold, a social anthropologist who wrote *Lines: A Brief History* (2004), a work that can be considered a “comparative anthropology of the line,”² Denis E. Cosgrove, a geographer who investigates the role of spatial images in *Measures of America* (1996) and Ruth Markus, an art researcher at the University of Tel-Aviv who proposes insight on line sculpture in the 20th century, in *Line and Space as New Artistic Language* (2006). These works were chosen for their diverse ways of approaching the line as a subject. This process was conducted through practice-based research as a working methodology. Drawing connections between environment and human interaction with the abstract nature of the line, I invite the spectator to reflect on our perception of the line through painting and sculpture. In doing so I explore the following questions:

When does the line stop being a line?

When we follow lines, what are we actually following?

How can the line be used as tool to navigate, contain and order?

² Tim Ingold, *Lines: a Brief History* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 1.

BACKGROUND

It was 1991, and one day my mother told me that we were going to move to Canada. I was nine years-old, with no sense of the world at large beyond occasional plane rides between Saint Petersburg and Omsk, in Siberia, where we would go visit my grandparents. In either place we spoke the same language and ate the same food. I gave little thought to what lay outside the USSR. Having never encountered a border, the concept had yet to occur to me. Nor did I question the nature of the line, as at that age lines simply appeared printed on paper or even drawn out by my own hand. Armed with a visa to America and a well-planned layover, we landed in Gander, Newfoundland and exited the plane with our lives in two carry-on bags. There was a strict plan to follow: stay cool and find an immigration office where we were to ask for refugee status. This adventure became one of my most formative experiences, whereby crossing a line in the form of a border, and crossing through many latitudes and longitudes to get to Canada, led me into a new life, a new language and sadly made me leave a part of my identity behind. My nomadic life experience has informed my politics and creative practice. And naturally these experiences have infiltrated my art practice.

FRAMEWORK

I am fascinated by the complexity dissimulated within the visual simplicity of the line. My research is driven by questioning and reflecting on the line from multiple perspectives. Throughout this investigation, I have engaged geography, anthropology and perception to explore the power held within the line. I suggest that making, following and crossing lines can be considered a practice from which one can gain new knowledge of our history and humankind.

Threads and Traces I am engaging with Tim Ingold's book titled *Lines: A Brief History* (2004), a work that can be considered a "comparative anthropology of the line,"³ in which he uncovers relationships between lines and surfaces, speaking and writing. Ingold notes that to study "both people and things is to study the lines they are made of."⁴ He elegantly distinguishes between lines, traces, threads, filaments, language, notations and marks, and presents us with an assemblage of metaphors and questions that alter the way we perceive the line in our surroundings. His work has moved me to question the meaning and the use of the line, not only in my own work but also in the world at large. Ingold focuses on two kinds of lines, *threads* and *traces*, which to him appear "to be not so much categorically different as transforms of one another."⁵ For Ingold, the line in its myriad forms has the power to generate surfaces. In other words, things do not abruptly become something else; the line allows us to see the continuity that emerges as traces thread into new forms. Ingold's ideas present an anchored ground for my research through his extensive taxonomy of the line, their relationships to surfaces and most importantly their ongoing transformation.

Ways of Seeing I am using landscape imagery as a way of seeing, which has led me to consider the work of Denis E. Cosgrove, a professor of geography whose practice is invested in discovering the meanings of landscape in human and cultural geography. He investigates the role of spatial images and representations in the making and communicating of knowledge. In the book *Taking Measures Across American Landscape* (1996), Cosgrove's essay titled *Measures of America* looks at how

³ Ingold, *Lines: a Brief History*, 1.

⁴ Ibid,4.

⁵ Ibid,2.

cartographic and settlement practices formed the American landscape.⁶ He also posits that viewing the landscape from an aerial view creates new knowledge into the interpretation and representation of land.⁷ *Measures of America* is largely concerned with how various practices have shaped the American landscape by comparing European and historical perceptions of land, environment and aerial vision. In general, Cosgrove does support and promote the “landscape idea” as a “term which embodies certain assumptions about relations between humans and their environment, or more specifically, society and space.”⁸ He takes up a phrase by John Berger who notes that “Landscape first emerged as a term, an idea, or better still, a way of seeing.”⁹ For Cosgrove it is a “visual term, one that arose initially out of renaissance humanism and its particular concepts and constructs of space. Equally, landscape was, over much of its history, closely bound up with practical appropriation of space.”¹⁰ Similar to Berger’s notion, I utilise landscape as ‘a way of seeing’ the lines that structure our world.

My practice is inspired by aerial photography which allows for a particular perspective of seeing and experiencing the world we dwell in. More specifically, this view permits me to capture the forms that make up the landscape structure that I incorporate into my work. This points toward my reason to draw from Cosgrove: He offers an outlook on the importance of the aerial view in understanding landscape structure. Hence, a bird’s eye-view allows us to construct and shape how humans have engaged with the natural landscape by structuring and arranging the terrestrial surface with lines.

Cosgrove notes that the “boundaries that fragment terrestrial space disappear in flight, so that space is reduced to a network of points, intersecting lines and altitudinal planes”, providing a grand view of landscape.¹¹ From this lofty perspective, one can see new shapes formed of lines. Only through deduction do we realize these geometric arrangements of lines are in fact rows of trees, or flowing waterways, or roadways, or any number of natural features. These shapes might also represent natural or artificial

⁶ James Corner and Alex S. MacLean, *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Pr., 1996), xi.

⁷ Corner and MacLean, *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape*, xi.

⁸ Denis Cosgrove, "Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea," in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 10, no. 1 (1985), 46.

⁹ Cosgrove, "Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea," 46.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹¹ Denis Cosgrove, "The Measures of America", in *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Pr., 1996), 5.

boundaries, often designating a change in ownership and a clue to social structure. Contrastingly, in more densely populated areas we see invisible lines forming grids and lattices of empty space between structures.

Measuring But what to make of landscape before technology made the aerial view commonplace? We find that lines nonetheless played a part in the mindset of those who were entering new territories. Cosgrove states that European colonizers, themselves issued from a culture of endemic warfare over ownership of territory and boundaries, saw “North America as a ‘blank space’, but it was also a measured space. It was locally fixed by a grid of astronomically determined lines: latitude and longitude”, making these lines an abstract “intellectual inscription of measure across the globe determined by astronomical movements.”¹² This “expression of spherical geometry” is formed of invisible lines. This makes longitude and latitude among the first lines used to travel and determine spaces and places, but because of their abstract nature, Cosgrove notes, European settlers “could not control the immensity of american space as well as the difference of American nature.”¹³

Therefore, he theorizes that measuring, mapping and imagining the landscape was a more effective and less dangerous way to cope with unknown land.¹⁴ These scientific lines are abstract, yet they determine space and place, forging a conceptual foreground for the physical line, a concept that eventually became a gesture and trace of ink on paper, creating new meaning where the line begins to not only represent a measured space but most importantly a physical interaction with the natural landscape. This view allows us to consider making lines as an embodied practice.

¹² Cosgrove , *The Measures of America*, 7.

¹³ *Ibid*,7.

¹⁴ *Ibid*,7.

Invisible Line Similarly, for Ingold, latitude and longitude and the line of equator are created by measuring distance without any appearance in the natural world. Interestingly, they are only “real” when drawn by a cartographer’s hand with ink on a paper “without any physical counterpart in the world.”¹⁵ The invisible line is unseen and intangible, has no colour, weight or physical appearance, but its invisible presence can nevertheless be strongly felt. Ingold refers to these lines as “ghostly lines”, “lines that have no real phenomenal presence in the environment” and proposes to look at this line in a “visionary and metaphysical sense.”¹⁶ These “ghostly lines” are more than a method of measurement; They also represent powerful conceptual notions that can separate and distinguish peoples, cultures, politics, religions, and the known from the unknown.

Boundaries In our world, these “ghostly lines” are embodied in the form of borders and territorial delineations. For example, the division of the world into Eastern hemispheres entails far more than simple geography, as does the Canada-United States Border, most of which runs along the 49th parallel north and is also invisible for the vast majority of its length. In *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, a collection of essays by Tim Ingold, the author explains:

Boundaries of various kinds may be drawn in the landscape, and identified either with natural features such as the course of a river or an escarpment, or with built structures such as walls and fences. But such boundaries are not a condition for the constitution of the places on either side of them; nor do they segment the landscape, for the features with which they are identified are themselves an integral part of it. Finally, it is important to note that no feature of the landscape is, of itself, a boundary. It can only become a boundary, or the indicator of a boundary, in relation to the activities of the people (or animals) for whom it is recognized or experienced as such.¹⁷

Whether the boundary manifests itself in a natural form, as a body of water or high mountains, or as divider of space, or as a concept, these elements can only become boundaries when agreed upon as such in the minds of people, making it a human concept. In *Metaphors We Live* (2011), Lakoff and Johnson speak of such concepts as ones that “govern our everyday functioning down to the most mundane details, our

¹⁵ Ingold, *Lines: a Brief History*, 49.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 49.

¹⁷ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011),193

concepts structure what we perceive.”¹⁸ Making these conceptual systems “a central role in defining our everyday realities.”¹⁹ Thus, the line is an integral part of this system to which we have grown accustomed. But seldom do we take time to acknowledge the elementary presence and power behind lines.

In Landscape Ingold notes that “to perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance. Remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past.”²⁰ With that in mind, I would like to acknowledge the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Huron-Wendat whose land I stand upon today and whose relationship with the line adds another perspective to the experience of territorial lines.

It must be said that we all have different ways of perceiving and experiencing lines in all their forms, and this is due in part to the politics behind them. This brings me to the territorial lines that delineate culture and identity within Canada. The invisible lines that surround reserves in my opinion are paradoxical in nature; lines which delineate Indigenous land from Indigenous land! In a discussion with an Anishinaabe colleague who perceives this territorial line as ‘ephemeral’, she explains they are transitory – they only exist as a Western concept, and in Canada, have only been around for 142 years or so since the Indian Act was put in place in 1876. This is a comparatively small blip on the timeline for these lands since Anishinaabe peoples have been here for 10,000 years. With the push for Indigenous sovereignty and self-governance many Nations will also be reacquiring lands by bringing Treaty back to court, and by doing so in the future these ephemeral lines will change again. To my understanding this is a one sided line, as this line is imposed and governed by politics from outside the line. Ingold cites Mark Monmonier in his book *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (2011), who notes that “[to] present a useful and truthful picture”, referring to the map, “an accurate map must tell white lies.”²¹ In regard to the lines that delineate Indigenous land one can say they are made of ‘white lies’.

¹⁸ Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2011), 3.00

¹⁹ Lakoff, and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 3

²⁰ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, 265.

²¹ *Ibid*, 241.

Crossing Drawing from my own experience of traveling and immigrating, I can state without reservation that (despite the simple geometrical wording) when one *crosses* a border, it is not simply a question of intersecting the borderline with the line of one's own path, but rather through a mesh of bureaucratic procedures. One must sign declaration forms, present one's passport to be stamped, wait in this room or that hallway before one can be said to have officially passed through. In other words, one crosses a border by physically interacting with material through a sort of ceremonial procedure. One can say that we experience the borderline not just physically, but materially. Even if each experience is subjective, we perceive lines not only with our intellect but with all our senses. What I am putting forward is that crossing lines, whether they are material or conceptual boundaries such as national borders, is ultimately a bodily act.

Senses and Line Maurice Merleau-Ponty explores the ways in which we perceive the world through the lens of philosophy and phenomenology. In *The World of Perception* (2004), a collection of his lectures, Merleau-Ponty describe the world of perception as “the world which is revealed to us by our senses.”²² He rejects Descartes' point of view that senses are deceiving and that one must solely trust the intellect.²³ For Merleau-Ponty, perception of the world can only derive from our senses. He further explores consciousness and the senses, noting that during the mid-century, psychologists “[emphasized] the fact that we do not start out in life immersed in our own self-consciousness but rather from the experience of other people.”²⁴ For Merleau-Ponty this means that to become aware of self one must first make contact with others and that this reflection always brings one back to oneself but that this “owes to the contact with other people.”²⁵ If we can take this idea that one becomes conscious of oneself through others, and apply it to the manifestation of the line, then I would like to suggest that the line enables one to become aware of oneself and one's place in space. Line creates not only awareness of our limitations but also helps us triangulate our position in the world. I believe that one can project oneself into the line, as much as the line can be a projection of humanity.

²² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 39.

²³ Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, 41.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 86.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 86.

Line and Space

Lastly, I would like to transition toward the physical and tangible line, the line in sculpture. To do so I am undertaking the work of Ruth Markus, an art history researcher from University of Tel-Aviv who wrote *Line and Space as New Artistic Language in Modern Sculpture* published in *Pictorial Languages and Their Meaning* (2006). The article is concerned with line in sculpture in the 20th century noting that “linearity has developed into one of the foremost characteristics of modern sculpture” resulting from the need to “develop new artistic language that could express new concepts of reality.”²⁶ She contrasts traditional and modern sculpture suggesting that the beginning of the 20th century was a “milestone in modern sculpture; instead of sculpture made out of solid masse surrounded by space – sculpture became a void surrounded by material and space became a new material, which transcended its “materiality.”²⁷ Markus looks at the cognitive and communicative means of the line, science and philosophy to unravel this shift in art, suggesting that the Scientific Revolution “led to a change in the way the object was perceived and conceived.”²⁸ Her work allows me to position not only my line sculptures but also to further understand how one perceives the line in space.

Thus far, I’ve approached only a fraction of the lines that manage people and space. Potential examples are beyond numbering. In addition to describing the inspiration I take from the patterns of the real-world landscape, I have briefly explored the invisible line in the form of the border, the frontier and the more abstract lines of latitude and longitude. From this viewpoint, one gets the sense that both lines and our experience of them are purely subjective. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that these lines have great potential to delineate, separate, determine land space or even reinforce our identity.

What we can conclude is that ultimately lines in all their forms are part of the perceived world, the “world in which we live, yet which we are always prone to forget.”²⁹ I propose that lines, visible or implied, are distinctive constructs that contain human imprints

²⁶ Ruth Markus, “Line and Space as New Artistic Language in Modern Sculpture”, in *Pictorial Languages and Their Meaning* (Tel-Aviv University, 2006), 307.

²⁷ Markus, *Pictorial Languages and Their Meaning*, 306.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 305.

²⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, 39.

made on the natural world, and that they are ubiquitous wherever people are found. This makes the line the most elementary representation of humanity.

METHODOLOGY

Practice & Research

Coming from a painting and drawing background, I have developed a variety of approaches throughout the years where I have systematically worked with lines and landscape as a way of seeing, and in doing so have flirted with a multitude of materials. This thesis project strives to expand upon the line in my practice by bringing the line into installation and sculpture. My research is led by a practice-based methodology which has allowed me to create new knowledge through observational and self-reflexive methods. Graeme Sullivan, author of *Art Practice as Research* (2010), identifies that an artist is a “key figure in the creation of new insights and awareness that has the potential to change the way we see and think.”³⁰ In my research, sculpture and painting are two studio practices that not only allow me to question the process but also to situate and create a discourse beyond the studio.

In the book titled *Making* (2013), Tim Ingold suggests that the difference between the theorist and the craftsman (or the artist in this case) is “that one makes through thinking and the other thinks through making.”³¹ Further, Ingold refers to Peter Dormer’s idea that “[allowing] knowledge to grow from the crucible of practical and observational engagement with the beings and things arounds us”, constitutes what Ingold calls the “art of inquiry.”³²

Methods

Ingold states that “in the art of inquiry, the conduct of thought goes along with, and continually answers to, the fluxes and flows of materials with which we work. These material think through us, as we through them.”³³ His view of the artist is that of an “art practitioner”, who in most cases is considered based on their finished work, which ‘swallows’ the actual process of making. As an art practitioner, I can agree to some extent that this may be true. However this thesis project, being of an interdisciplinary nature, allows us not only to focus on the final project, an artifact produced by the artist, but also on the process of creating which in return delivers insight into the relationship between work and process.

³⁰ Sullivan Graeme, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005). 70.

³¹ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013), 6.

³² Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, 6.

³³ *Ibid*, 6.

STUDIO INVESTIGATION

My studio investigation combines photography, drawing, painting and sculpture. Through these disciplines, I explore the nature of lines by reinterpreting them through materiality and dimensions. Photography serves to document landscape structure. I use these images to isolate various elements of the landscape that either represent or allude to the manufactured structures that appear within it. Patterns emerge, which I appropriate and reinterpret into my work. For example, perfectly straight lines denote the imposition of human agriculture on the land, but the defiantly curving, undulating lines of a river that winds its way through and breaks up the ordered pattern of the fields recalls the forms of the natural world. This interplay of patterns forms a visual language that I am attempting to decipher and speak through my work.

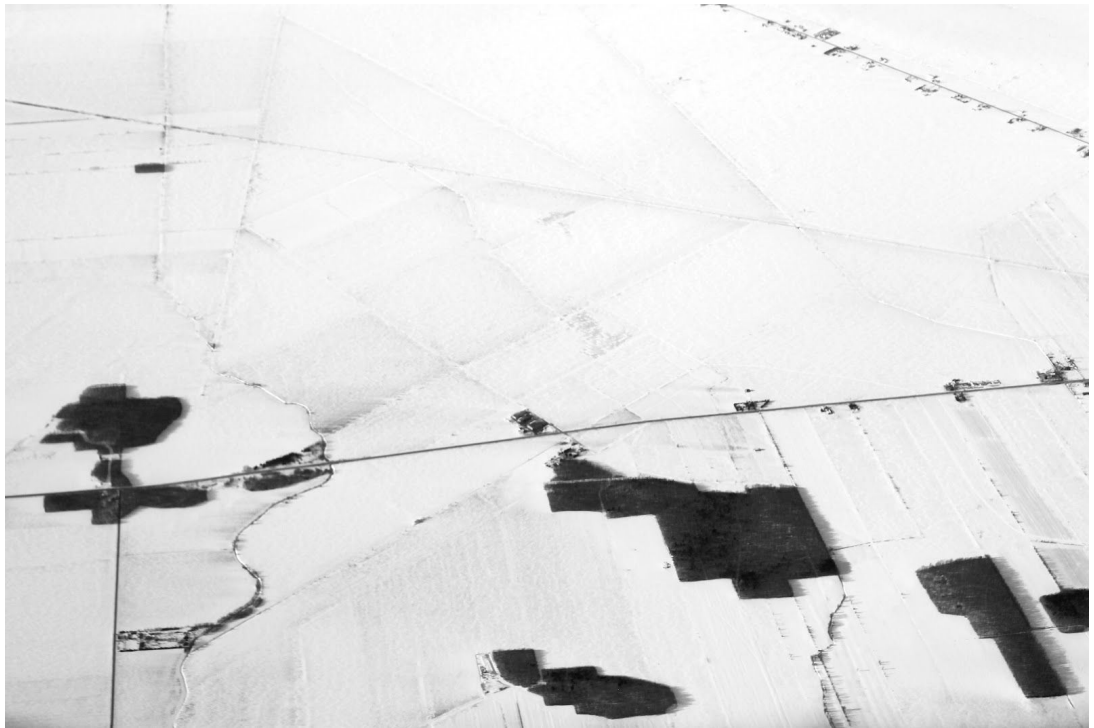


Figure 1. Sample of my aerial photo-documentation, 2017

Driven by an interest in mark making, I work interchangeably with varied mediums and tools in order to create a looser stroke and mark. When drawing and painting, I have a tendency to challenge myself by varying and appropriating uncommon tools or

techniques to create my work. Handling unknown materials with unfamiliar tools is for me a way of letting go, of losing control and leaving room for the unexpected. For many, experimentation can be frightening, but in my case the unexpected is an important element in my process and the driving force that leads me to new discoveries and occasionally to problems that turn out to be solutions.

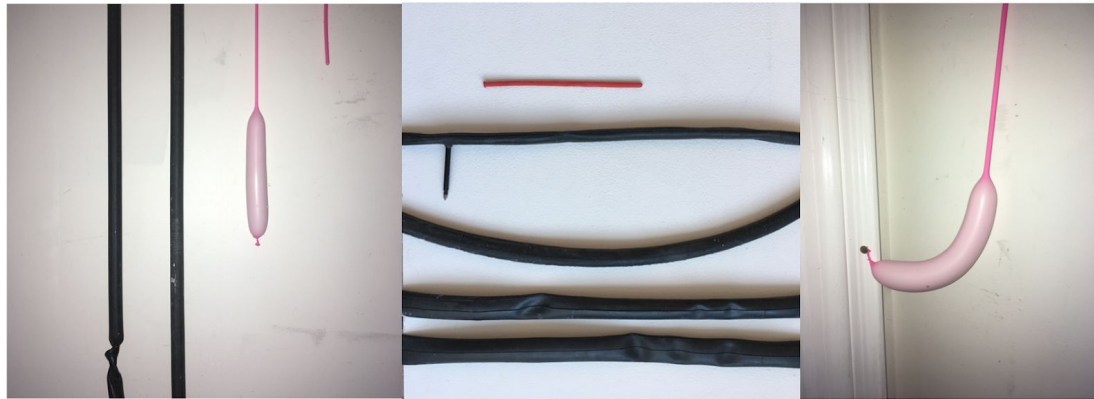


Figure 2. From tubes, balloons to lines, an illustration of my process whereby I use unconventional material like tire tubes to create three-dimensional lines.

Along the way, my interest in understanding the power of ‘ghostly lines’ such as borders propelled me into engaging with the line in a tactile way, through sculpture where I continued to explore the line through materiality. I wanted to give shape to these invisible lines I had passed through, and pull them out of the ether into the material plane where they could be looked at and directly observed. For this process, I combined traditional clay methods, casting, hand building, and wheel throwing. These techniques aided me in expanding my various means of creating lines. Casting allowed me to make hollow and therefore more lightweight pieces which were perfect for a wall installation. Wheel throwing allowed me to create solid, full-bodied lines, their heaviness of weight enabling me to utilize gravity to enhance and articulate organic line forms.

Ceramic artist Shary Boyle expresses in a lecture that working with clay is ‘as close as you can get to touching flesh’. Indeed, clay is a distinctly sensory medium that allows one to work directly with our body without the necessity of instruments or tools which stand in-between maker and material.

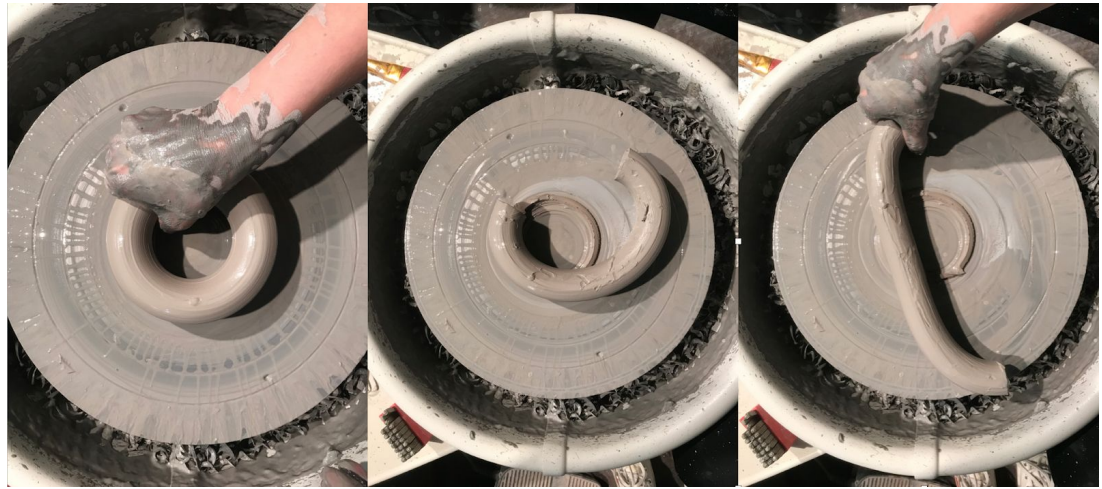


Figure 3. Illustration of my process throwing lines on a pottery wheel.

Though clay can be associated with craft or manufacture, in the case of this project it has been used for the above-stated material qualities and employed strictly as medium for sculpture, without any traditional ornamental surface treatment or glazings that are employed in ceramics and pottery. The majority of my ceramic works are low-fired (also referred to as bisqued), meaning the clay is not fully vitrified and has a porous, soft quality that resembles soapstone. I decided to work with the clay at this stage because it allowed me to refine it by sanding and polishing while also creating a surface that can absorb various pigments.

The colors in my works are mostly monochromatic and I play with white-on-white which seeks to evoke the idea of the visible and invisible. Using white-on-white allows the pieces in my sculpture to merge with the surface of the wall, creating an illusion of the invisible and the idea that these objects (lines) are emerging from the plane rather than simply having been mounted on the wall. To create this illusion, I painted the clay pieces with a soft acryl-gouache wash, leaving them with a matt finish which enabled for any imperfections to disappear and, without any light reflecting, caused the pieces to blend in with the wall's surface.

My work combines the straight line with curved and sinuous, “more natural and living line”.³⁴ These latter lines have different rounded ends which refer to the point in space. The curved line appears in my sculpture as a connector, connecting form to form or point to point. As this project progressed, lines started connecting to other lines and were transformed in the process. New shapes grew out of pushing the linear form to the end of its material allowance, which altered the meaning associated with linear form. Some of the clay lines began to expand, losing their uniformity of width, until they might better be described as ellipses, or tubular forms. I refer to these loosely as thick-bodied lines, or swollen lines.

My material investigation eventually enabled me to question *When does the line stop being a line?* This led me to re-evaluate my body of work, and return to painting where I depicted the line as an inanimate object in a still-life style. I came to be intrigued by the qualities of form, colour, texture, and composition, and changed my approach by adopting a more painterly style.

In my case, painting is a slow process that distends time and permits me to immerse myself in a meditative state, where the outside world is suspended and I become one with the art and truly ‘think through making’. Painting captures my experience of seeing, similarly to Merleau-Ponty’s view that the painter’s task is to explore the process of seeing, and likewise Ingold notes that “to see with, or according to, a painting is to question the ordinariness of our everyday perception of objects, to rekindle in us the astonishment of vision, and to remind us that there are things in the world to be seen only because we first can see.”³⁵ This is precisely what I am pursuing in my work. I have sought to take this simplest and most ubiquitous of elements and wrest from it its hidden meanings and complexities through the processes of gesturing the line on a surface, of bringing the line into and out of space through sculpture and painting, and of manifesting the line in a dynamic way and with all of my senses.

³⁴ Mallin S.B. “Thinking the Line Through Serra’s Sculpture” In: *Art Line Thought. Contributions To Phenomenology* (In Cooperation with the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, vol 21. Springer, Dordrecht 1996).

³⁵ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, 265.

STUDIO PROCESS

Like my research, my studio process is inspired by the aerial photographs that document my journey to a new place. These images capture a bird's-eye view of a temporal winter landscape half-buried under a blanket of snow. Observing the landscape from this perspective allows the viewer to gain a greater sense of space "upon which the imagination can inscribe grandiose projects at imperial scale."³⁶ These images capture not only my trajectory; they are also the blueprint of my research. They allow me to see how land is structured with lines. As stated by Kandinsky, "to plunge into the outside reality, we become an active part of this reality and experience its pulsation with all our senses...the movements envelope us by a play of horizontal and vertical lines bending in different directions."³⁷



Figure 4. Sample of my aerial photo-documentation, 2017.

Observing the everyday and capturing land seen from this view allowed me to question the power of lines, which in turn led me to examine different platforms of aesthetic

³⁶ Cosgrove, *The Measures of America*, 4.

³⁷ Kandinsky, Wassily. *Point and Line to Plane*. (New York: Dover, 1979), 17.

explorations of line through painting and sculpture. I began with the line on the plane. Later, I freed the line from the surface into real space until finally I extended the line through material investigation into free standing forms. By interpreting the line both as a gesture and as a form, my work allows a renewal of perception and an effect on the viewer.

My photographs capture the structure and forms created by the act of delineating and colonizing space. From that distance and angle, details are blurred and become abstract and transform into visual vocabulary that I reintroduce into my work. In my paintings, lines are embodied by the moving trace of a gesture. Ingold regards embodiment as a “movement of *incorporation* rather than inscription, not a transcribing of form onto material but a movement wherein forms themselves are generated.”³⁸ The paint marks in my work are not measured, nor do they imitate. They result from the incorporation of body and material agency.

Through my studio work, I strive to convey the notions of the invisible and mutable line. I create imagery that alludes to abstract landscape sceneries which are inspired by my memory of place and space. In *Landscape Practice, Landscape Research: An Essay in Gentle Politics* (2003), David Crouch and Charlotta Malm regard space,

and by extension, landscape, as given character by the expressive performance through which the individual encounters it. For the individual this constitutes a feeling of doing, an act of space-ing, constituting landscape anew in a multi-sensual patina, and provoking imagination and its translation into different sensual feelings and spacial intimacies.³⁹

I recurrently speak of landscape but to be clear, in my work I am not seeking to create landscape per se. Rather, I use landscape as a ‘way of seeing’. I believe that from landscape can flower new knowledge and change and allow us to question the ways in which we engage with the world. Ingold compares landscape to the surface of the page, referring to the Middle Ages when reading was compared to wayfaring, and “the surface of the page to an inhabited landscape.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, 193.

³⁹ David Crouch and Charlotta Malm, “Landscape Practice, Landscape Research: An Essay in Gentle Politics” in *Deterritorialisations - Revisioning Landscapes and Politics* (London: Black Dog, 2003), 254.

⁴⁰ Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History*, 91.

In Ingold's words, "the landscape is the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them."⁴¹ Throughout my life, I have crossed, followed, and created an array of lines. My work can be thought of as a weaving together of outside realities and reflections, wayfaring between memory, identity, place and the lines that underline them. I have sought to understand this tangle of lines from the world, and I have found that my work is an attempt to untangle these knots both literally and metaphorically.

Somewhere in Between For Merleau-Ponty, philosophy and the arts, especially painting, "have forged ahead boldly by presenting us with a very new and characteristically contemporary vision of objects, space, animals and even of human beings seen from the outside, just as they appear in our perceptual field."⁴²

The work titled *Somewhere in Between* consists of a series of paintings that appear simple and repetitive, yet their simplistic nature belies the overlooked complexity of the lines that forge our landscape which at times we fail to see from the ground. Ruth Markus describes lines and patterns as "basic cognitive and communicative means, understandable by human beings everywhere - means which know no frontiers or language barriers."⁴³ The lines and patterns created in these works reflect Rudolf Arnheim's opinion, to which Markus refers in her article, that "human grasp of reality is based on natural and automatic process of turning visual stimulus into structural patterns."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ingold, Tim *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, 193

⁴² Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, 45.

⁴³ Markus, Ruth "Line and Space as New Artistic Language in Modern Sculpture", in *Pictorial Languages and Their Meaning* (Tel-Aviv University, 2006), 309.

⁴⁴ Markus, *Pictorial Languages and Their Meaning*, 310.

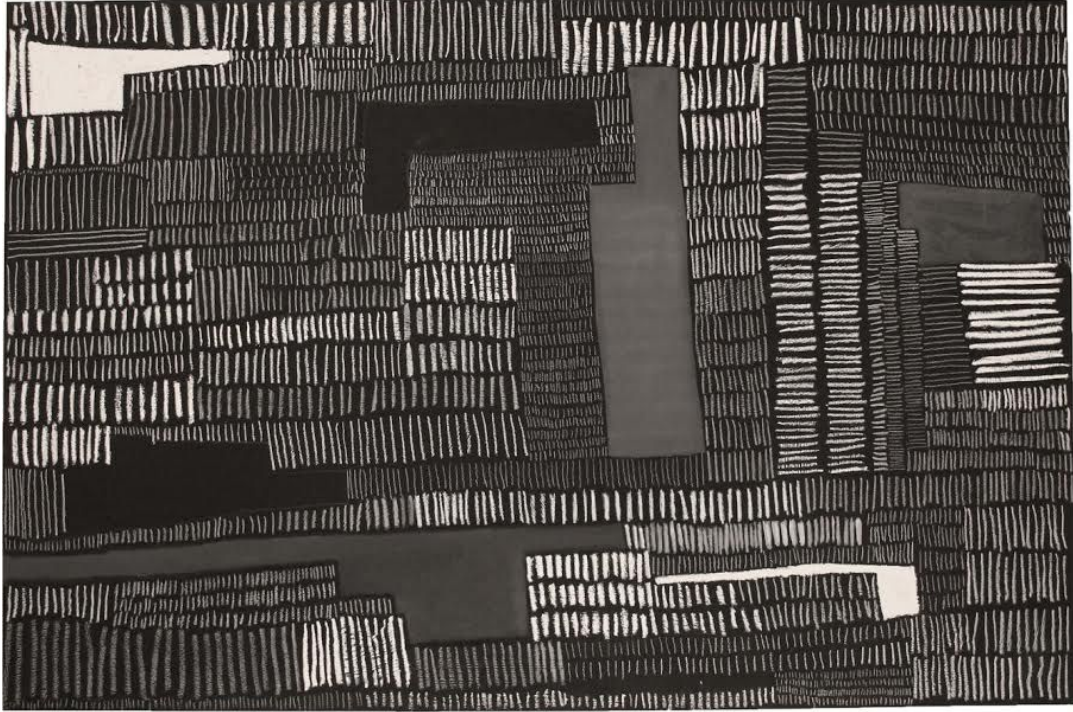


Figure 5. Photograph of a painting from the series *Somewhere in Between*, oil on canvas, 30x60", 2017

These works are filled from edge to edge, and the plane is occupied by rhythmic traces left by oil stick covering the surface, mimicking the way trees cover rural landscapes. They offer a sensory feast of texture where hues of white and greys are spatially arranged, conveying an abstracted landscape seen from above. In this work “the concept of landscape, by contrast, puts the emphasis on *form*, in just the same way that the concept of the body emphasizes the form rather than the function of a living creature.”⁴⁵ The lines in these works symbolize the human imprint on the natural landscape, but the space in between lines is just as important as the line itself, and allows us to picture the rectilinear forms threaded by traces of lines. This recalls Tim Ingold’s theory of the line, which refers to the line as threads and traces by which surfaces are formed.⁴⁶ In the same manner, the lines in my painting can be considered threads and traces that depict a “phenomena of modernity”.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, 193.

⁴⁶ Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History*, 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 155.

Lignes Naissantes

Ruth Markus explains that “linear sculpture is any sculpture constructed of outlines that enfold space and give it form, or of lines that design a form in space.”⁴⁸ For Markus and many other art critics, the work of art that revolutionized modern sculpture is Pablo Picasso’s *Guitar*, (1912), a cardboard sculpture depicting a guitar, a work that displays a relationship between material and space which contrasts traditional sculpture generally created from solid mass.⁴⁹ It is important to note that for its time, Picasso “introduced another innovation – creating a three-dimensional form out of two-dimensional materials.”⁵⁰ This may no longer seem revolutionary today, but I find myself fascinated by the interplay between dimensions, and I habitually transition between the second and third dimensions in my work, which enables me to experiment with the perception of things.

Markus puts forward that “It appears that a naive, intuitive grasp of the world can co-exist with a conceptual process of abstraction, which occurs when an artist gives up details consciously, and chooses minimal characteristics that are essential in conveying the concept of the object.”⁵¹ In the installation piece entitled *Les Lignes Naissantes*, the line transitions from the plane into space, exploring linear concepts of reality through abstraction. With this work I attempt to capture the rhythmic patterns formed by trees ordered in a linear fashion, offering a memetic thread to the manufactured landscape. It is a wall installation, composed of 120 clay casted pieces forming a twelve-foot rectangular grid emerging from the wall. These tubular lines are representative of trees that are used as an alternative for delineating terrestrial space and property, or like those grown in an orchard. Because trees are a natural organism, they can blur the line between natural and manufactured landscapes. My “trees” are abstracted and stripped of any natural, identifying features such as branches and leaves. The white on white scheme conveys the illusion between the visible and invisible. The rhythm of the work draws the viewer into an imaginary landscape where they are welcome to reinterpret and create new meaning of lines in space.

⁴⁸ Markus, *Pictorial Languages and Their Meaning*, 306.

⁴⁹ Markus, *Pictorial Languages and Their Meaning*, 305..

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 305.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 310.

Green Lines One day, while on a hunt for new art supplies, I stumbled upon a very interesting gardening wire coated in a primary green rubber. It was particularly soft and pliable (like the plants it was created to come into contact with). Ruth Markus writes about how modern technologies have allowed for the artist to explore new and unconventional material which has “excited artists’ imaginations and contributes to the appearance of many new sculptural forms.”⁵² Although today one can obtain pretty much any material with relative ease, my interest lies in discovering unconventional material which I introduce to my studio practice.

This wire or, as I think of it, this line in three-dimensions, I have cut in small pieces and manipulated with my hands, making a cluster resembling a knot. In the book *Making*, Ingold speaks of a similar line which is knotted and has two ends, and which



Figure 6. Photograph of a painting from diptych titled *Green Lines*, oil on canvas, 30x30", 2018.

⁵²Ibid, 307.

according to him constitutes a *meshwork*. He draws a parallel between a 'meshwork' and 'network' which are both composites of lines, explaining that a meshwork is an "entanglement of lines" that may "loop or twist around one another, or weave in and out". Whereas the "lines of a network are connectors: each is given as the relation between points, independently and in advance of any movement from one toward the other."⁵³ For Ingold, network lines "lack duration" and are purely a "spatial construct". Interestingly, lines of meshwork are described by Ingold as a "movement of growth" that features knots instead of nodes. "Knots are places where many lines of becoming are drawn tightly together" with "loose ends somewhere beyond the knot."⁵⁴ The lines in the diptych titled *Green Lines* are representative of the lines found in a meshwork, where the ends are loose and protruding from a knotted body. These pieces emerged from a study in which I wanted to give more emphasis to this thinner line. I then photographed these wire clusters and returned them to two dimensions as still-life paintings. In these works, lines are magnified, generating a new presence and much to my surprise they anthropomorphized and came to life. This work holds within itself the energy of that transition between dimensions, between reality and representation.

Lines Transformed

In the early stages, my work mainly tended towards straight lines, however over the course of this project the lines in my work slowly began to transform. Ingold observes that despite the "infinite variety of lines"... "we are left with two grand classes: lines that are straight and lines that are not."⁵⁵ He associates the straight line with "humanity and culture" and all other lines with "animality and nature."⁵⁶

The impetus for this turn towards the curving, organic line was the introduction of clay, or more specifically, it was my response to clay's material quality that transformed lines from the rectilinear to curved. Clay permitted for new kind of lines to emerge. In fact, some new shapes emerged that may no longer wholly fall in the category of lines, or stretch the definition. The emergence of the line into three-dimensional space poses a conundrum, namely *Does the line retain enough of it's characteristics for us to continue calling it a line?* Tim Ingold questions if *tubes* can be considered lines. He suggests that "we perhaps need a separate category of rods, to denote lines in three-dimensional

⁵³ Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, 132.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 132.

⁵⁵ Ingold, *Lines: a Brief History*, 54.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 55.

space whose rigidity allows for engineering of stable structures.”⁵⁷ Possibly this is true in regard to structures with a precise functionality; In the case of my work, I am referring to sculptural elements that focus on the depiction of linear form in space. A tube is hollow and its purpose is to be a vehicle. For example, it permits liquids and gases to travel through itself, from one location to another. However, the line can also be said to be a connector between two points, even if its sole purpose is to carry along itself. So, whether a tube does or does not contain something, it is also a line in space. Both line and tube have one thing in common: To connect *something* from point *a* to point *b*.

The clay sculptures in this series are handbuilt. They combine both curved and straight lines; The thinner, curved line is a connector and the thicker, straight line is exaggerated and by contrast may not even look like a line. Again, this question of *Is it a line or isn't it?* plays into my work, and I believe that the resulting forms capture some of the tension generated by this question. In this vein, and reminiscent of the *Green Lines* diptych, my sculptures have gained an anthropomorphic quality and their absurd nature evokes a sense of play.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 51.

EXHIBITION

The exhibition held at Ignite Gallery is comprised of six sculptural installation works. As described previously, in my exploration of line I have ventured through multiple methods of studio based disciplines. When the time came to install my work, I became acutely aware of the gallery space's properties which led me to a thorough an editing process of the work to be exposed. I was faced with the unexpected difficulty of curating a minimalist exhibition, where each work would require specific placement and be given a wide enough space to be properly considered. After much deliberation, I edited my show down to six sculptural works.

The exhibition is minimal in nature, where each work has been given consideration with regards to its placement and plenty of space to breathe, allowing for the light (both artificial and natural) to perform and extend the sculptures while creating new lines through shadows.



Figure 7. *Les Lignes Naissantes*, ceramics and acryl gouache, 9'x 3', 2018. Photo by Tom Feiler

When the visitor enters the space, they are first led past the linear installation *Les Lignes Naissantes* which takes the form of a grid composed of three-dimensional lines emerging from the wall, a work inspired by manufactured landscape. This work

consists of 120 clay pieces, forming a 3 by 9 foot rectangular grid. It allows the viewer to move about and experience lines in space through an intimate and close reading by walking alongside them.

Throughout the exhibition, the spectator shifts their attention between sculptural wall installations, to the piece titled *The Point*. From a distance this piece looks like a dark point on a wall, but as one approaches one sees the smaller individual points appear. *The Point* consists of plaster-casted three dimensional lines that are bundled together to create a 12-inch in diameter point in space. This piece is inspired by Kandinsky's observation demonstrating the importance of the point within the creation of a line. Kandinsky describes the line as "the track made by the moving point; that is, it's product."⁵⁸ This piece seeks to express the transformation of the line into the point allowing the viewer to reevaluate the relationship and transformation between the line and the point.



Figure 8. Point, plaster and acryl gouache, 12''x 5'', 2018. Photo by Tom Feiler

In parallel to the works mentioned above, the viewer encounters the works titled *Formation* and *Récolté*, both of which are composed of ceramic wall installations of line transformations and accumulations.

⁵⁸ Kandinsky, Wassily. *Point and Line to Plane*. (New York: Dover, 1979), 57.



Figure 9. Formation, ceramic and acryl gouache, 6'x 6', 2018. Photo by Tom Feiler

Formation is a combination of three pieces asymmetrically emerging from the wall. All three are white on white, capturing the transformation of the line into a circular form. This piece is heavily influenced by the exploration of varied methods of creating lines, from casting to wheel throwing.

Récolté, which in French translates to “harvested”, is a piece that seeks to reflect on the fact of lines being a fundamental part of daily life. This piece consists of an accumulation of nine ceramic tubular lines, varied in shades of greys, strung from a string measuring 45 inches in length, mimicking a catch of fish or a cultivated plant hung to dry. As a counterpoint to the weightlessness of some of the other works, gravity plays a role here as this bouquet of lines is pulled towards the ground by the weight of the clay. The latex covering the cotton string evokes sinew and skin, and the ceramic forms refer to bone and body.

The flow of the exhibition ends on two pieces that face one another, entitled *Falling in Line* and *Spontaneous Accentuation*. *Falling in Line* is made of unfinished plaster castings, each measuring roughly 40 inches in length. These two white parallel lines are hung seamlessly from the wall. Like *The Point* they seek to capture the transformation

of the point into the line in space, evoking drips of paint as they race along a surface towards the floor, leaving behind them the lines of their journey.

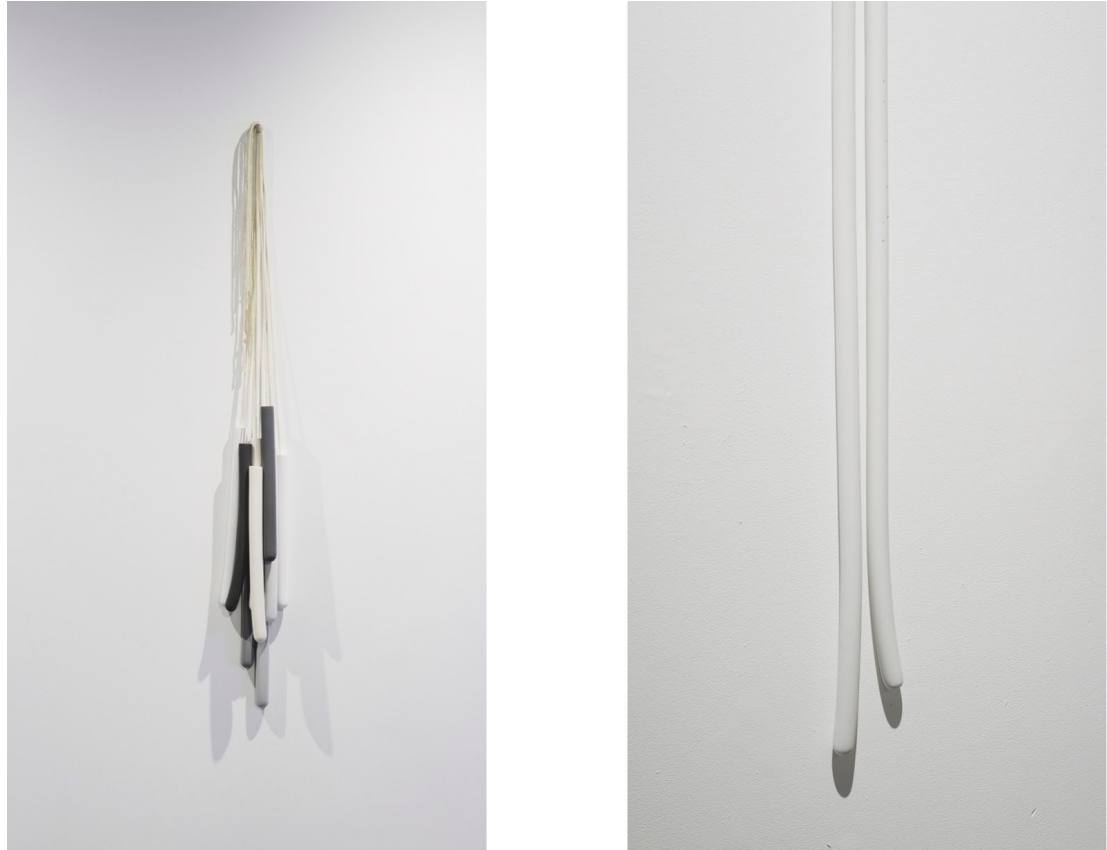


Figure 10. *Récolté* (left) ceramic and acryl gouache, 45''x 8'', 2018. *Falling in Line* (right), plaster 46''x4'', 2018
Photo by Tom Feiler

Spontaneous Accentuation is a ceramic wall piece which consists of two organic curved black lines. The longer line embraces the smaller one, and the width of each line varies slightly. These lines resemble marks and reference a painterly gesture, and yet their three-dimensionality and rounded ends cast shadows that marks could not. The resulting optical confusion requires further scrutiny by the viewer. The title is lifted from Kandinsky, for whom the “spontaneous accentuation” of a line refers to the relation of a growing point, and this piece questions, just as Kandinsky does, “When does the line as such die out, and at what moment is a plane born?”⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Kandinsky, Wassily. *Point and Line to Plane*. (New York: Dover, 1979), 90.



Figure 11. Spontaneous Accentuation, ceramic and acryl gouache, 24''x 24'', 2018. Photo by Tom Feiler

In summary, the exhibition *In Visible Lines* provides an opportunity to focus one's attention on the line, not merely as an element in the service of something else, but as the centerpiece, and to draw attention to the power it holds within itself, its limitations, and its mutability. The spectator is free to explore the work and to generate their own meaning as they immerse themselves in the geometry of the imagery and artifacts which reflect my interpretation of the line.

CONCLUSION

This project was initiated by images portraying land structured by and embedded with lines. I had always worked with the line but never gave it further thought. I took for granted just how integral and mutable the line is in all aspects of our lives. This propelled me to further explore the lines that govern us.

In this paper I've approached only a fraction of the lines that manage our space. Drawing from my own experience, I was eager to look at the lines that have shaped my identity. The lines I have explored are often invisible and yet contrastingly have a profound effect. They take the form of a natural boundary, or an arbitrary border or territory, or of an inked signature on an immigration form. The mutable nature of the line propelled me to approach the line in a tangible and visual way in my studio practice. My intent was to bring the line into space, in order to create a landscape of my own interpretation. I have explored the line through painting and sculpture where lines took many shapes and forms. I gestured the line in paintings which lead me to engage physically with the line, leading me to pull it from two dimensions into three-dimensional space. I explored the line through clay which transformed the line into objects and created new lines that inspired further interpretation and questions.

Throughout this project the lines in my work have transformed, from the trace of a gesture to the tangible, sculpted line in space, from straight to curved, to tangled. Lines that were static became dynamic, while others anthropomorphized and sprang to life. By physically and texturally engaging with the line through materials like clay and plaster, the lines transformed and developed new forms and dimensions. But what I found most interesting is that the lines in my work took on a "bodily" quality. By this I mean that each line carried with it the imprint of a physical characteristic of my own body, such as the precise shape of my hand, the length and strength of my arm, or the idiosyncratic gesture of a movement captured in a static moment. Each piece in some way reflexively echoed its own act of creation. The *weight* of the line took on new meaning, as some pieces used gravity to evoke their specific imagery (Recolté) whereas others outright defied gravity in order to describe a movement (Formation).

Throughout the studio process, the visual appearance of the line certainly metamorphosed, but this transformation has yet to arrive at a static outcome. In fact, during the final stages of the exhibition installation the work continued to transform. As I entered into the process of staging the lights for each work, I saw that the projected light created an array of unexpected shadows. It was only at this moment that it became clear that these shadows could not be ignored or minimized; they were part of the work and would have to be carefully controlled and incorporated. Not only was there the controllable, static, artificial light of the gallery to consider, but also the elongated, moving shadows cast by the light of the setting sun of the gallery's west-facing windows. The staging of each piece therefore incorporated these elements in order to create yet more lines and to add yet more dimensionality. The resulting plays of shadow extended and brought each work to life beyond the "neutral" space of the studio.

Lines take a multitude of forms: they may be conceptual, metaphorical, visual, or abstract, and often a single thread can flow through each of these interpretations. Throughout this process I have learned that lines are a crucial part of our lives, and that we live with lines and through them. I have grasped early in my search that it is impossible to divorce the line from its anthropological history and interpretations, and in fact it has become clear that the line is a direct reflection of the human itself.

It is a universal system of belief, a human construct that is created and agreed upon as such in the minds of people.

But it is also a consequential concept that affects how we navigate the world. The idea that linearity represents an act of separation and division, is slowly changing through new means of technology. In the digital landscape the line is taking up new meanings, where the increasing interconnectedness potentially results in a less bordered global community. With that said, the meaning of line is not concrete but in flux. This allows for an ongoing exploration of the line. With that said, I plan to continue my future investigation into the line through painting. Inspired by Edouard Manet quote "There are no lines in nature, only areas of colour, one against another." I intend to eliminate using the line directly and instead reveal the line through an overlapping of geometric shapes and colour juxtaposition.

I would like to conclude, if I may, by returning to my earlier suggestion that the line should be thought of as a tool, through which we can better understand and structure the geometry of our institutions and our lives. By crossing the line between function, structure, artifact, and material my aim is to create artworks that will contribute new vocabulary to the existing notions of the line.

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