

PETER RANDALL-PAGE

UPSIDE DOWN & INSIDE OUT



INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

Peter Randall-Page
at Pangolin Editions,
July 2014



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

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



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

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



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

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



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

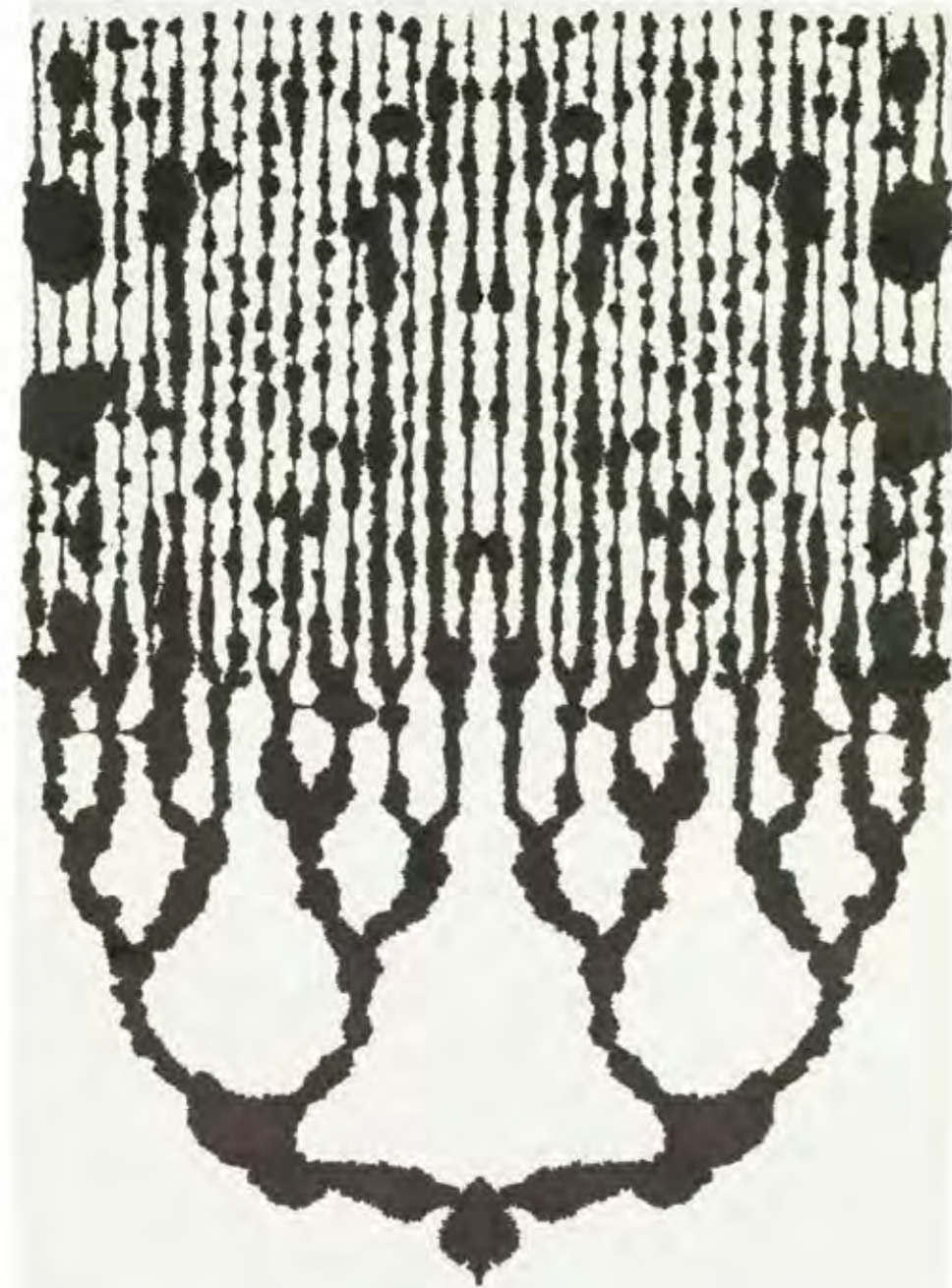
The bulbous, raspberry-like surface of *Seed* was carved out of the pristine rock. But in nature such structures are typically grown from the inside outwards, the cells and compartments budding and swelling under the expansive pressures of biological proliferation. “Everything is what it is”, D’Arcy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

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

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

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





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

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

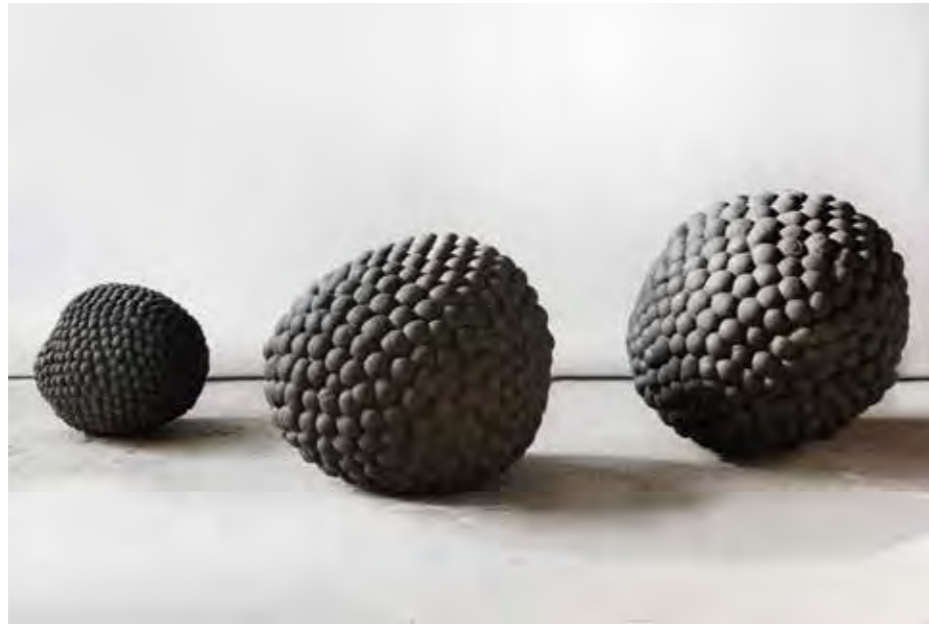
Were real trees ever quite so regular, however? Some of these look more like genealogies, a mathematically precise doubling of branch density by bifurcation in each generation – until, perhaps, the individual branches blur into a continuum. We could almost be looking at a circuit diagram or technical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

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

PHILIP BALL

SCULPTURE





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



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





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



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

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





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



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



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

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



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



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





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



WORKS ON PAPER



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

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





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



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



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



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

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

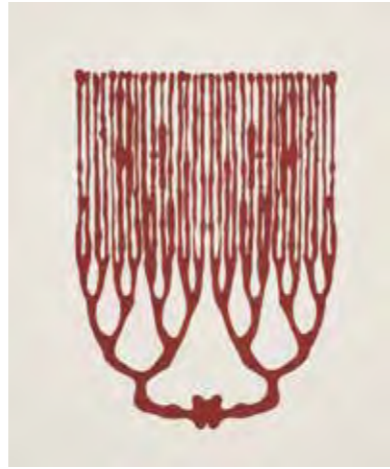




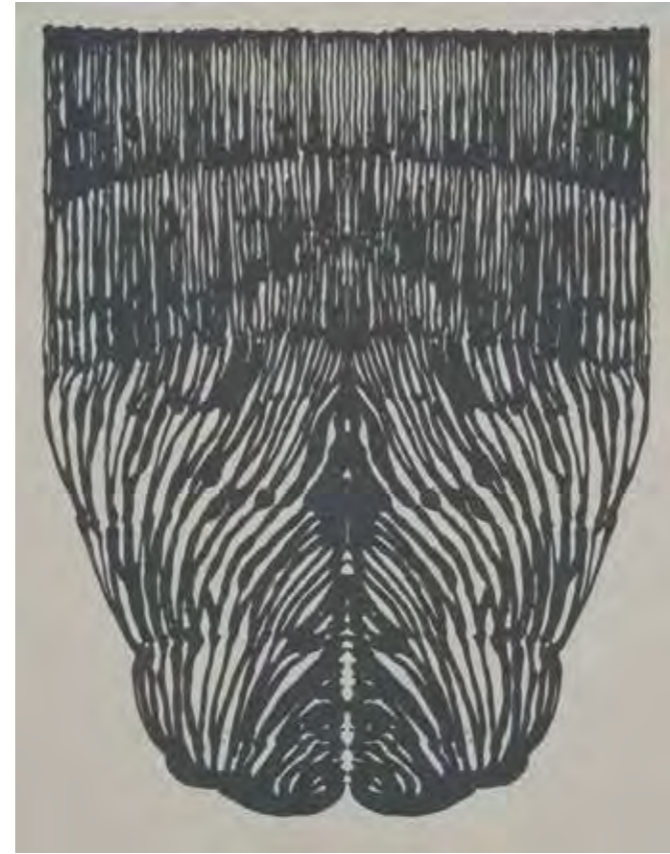
(LEFT TO RIGHT)
Rorschach Leaf I, II & III
2014, black ink on paper
Unique
199 x 82 cm each
Photo: Steve White

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





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



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



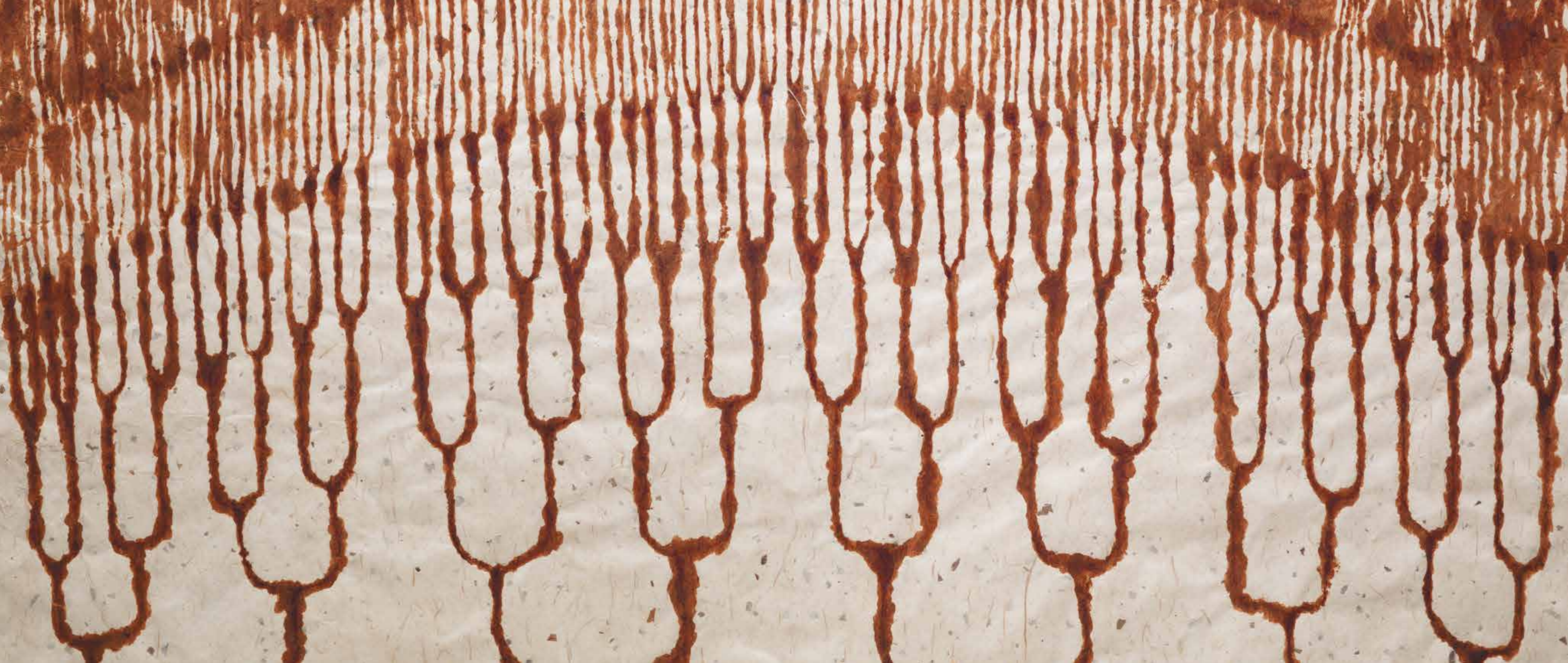
Source Seed
2014, silk screen
Each an edition of 20
41 x 26.8 cm



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



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



PETER RANDALL-PAGE

2013	Invited contributor to Interdisciplinary Science Reviews: article on D'Arcy Thompson Awarded Honorary Doctorate of Letters, Bath Spa University
2012-13	Invited artist, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
2012	Judge, Threadneedle Prize, Judge, John Ruskin Prize
2011	Invited participant in Eskisehir Ceramic Symposium, Turkey Judge, International Print Biennale, Newcastle Judge, First 108 Public Art Commission, RBS, London
2010	Awarded Honorary Doctorate of Letters, Exeter University Invited speaker, Noguchi Museum, Long Island USA
2009	Awarded Honorary Doctorate of Letters, York St John University
2007	Residency on Lolui Island, Uganda with Ruwenzori Sculpture Foundation
2006	Winner of the Marsh Award for Public Sculpture ('Give and Take') Invited plenary speaker, Bridges Maths/Art Conference, London
2005-06	External assessor for the new Sculpture MA, Cork Inst of Technology, Eire
2004	Invited Artist, Gwangju Biennale, South Korea Selector for the 'Discerning Eye' exhibition, Mall Galleries, London Participant in the Taurenne Dialogues, France.
2003-05	Member of the design team for the new education building, Eden Project
2003	Jerwood Sculpture Prize Judge, RWA Sculpture Open Judge 'Give and Take' large boulder work enabled by Sculpture at Goodwood
2000	Participated in Sculpture Symposium in Oggleshausen, Germany 'Womb Tomb' large boulder work enabled by Sculpture at Goodwood
1999-2005	Associate Research Fellow at Dartington College of Arts
1999	Awarded Honorary Doctorate of Arts, University of Plymouth Architectural ceramics symposium, 'Creating the Yellow Brick Road'
1989-96	'Local Distinctiveness' project with assistance of Common Ground
1994	Artist-in-residence at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania and Australian lecture tour; aided by British Council travel award
1993	Visiting Lecturer in Sculpture at Royal College of Art, London
1992	Participated in Stone Sculpture Symposium in Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan
1982-89	Visiting Lecturer in Sculpture at Brighton Polytechnic
1986-87	'New Milestones' project with the assistance of Common Ground
1980	Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Travelling Fellowship, marble carving Italy
1979	Worked on conservation of 13th-century sculpture at Wells Cathedral
1973-77	Studied at Bath Academy of Art
1954	Born Essex

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2014	<i>Peter Randall-Page: New Sculpture & Works on Paper</i> , a partnershp exhibition between Peninsula Arts, Plymouth University and Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery <i>Drawings, Prints & Sculpture on a Domestic Scale</i> , Thelma Hulbert Gallery, Honiton
2013	<i>Drawings and Prints</i> , The Innovation Centre, University of Exeter
2011	<i>Peter Randall-Page at the Bath Art Affair</i> , The Octagon Chapel, Bath <i>Recent Works</i> , Salon & Forecourt, Royal British Society of Sculptors London <i>Sculpture in the Garden</i> , RHS Wisley, Woking, Surrey
2010-11	<i>Drawings</i> , Southampton City Art Gallery
2010	<i>Clay</i> , Purdy Hicks Gallery, London <i>New Sculpture and Drawing</i> , Jerwood Space, London <i>Peter Randall-Page at Canary Wharf</i> , London
2009-10	<i>Peter Randall-Page at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park</i> , in and around the Underground Gallery
2008-09	<i>Stones, Sunlight and Shadows: New Sculpture in the Woods</i> , New Arts Centre, Roche Court, Salisbury, Wilts
2008	<i>Rock Music Rock Art</i> , Pangolin London <i>Sculpture in Lister Park</i> , Bradford, West Yorkshire
2005-06	<i>Rocks in my Bed</i> , One Trinity Gardens, Quayside, Newcastle Upon Tyne
2003	<i>Sculpture and Drawings</i> , The Natural History Museum, London
2001	<i>Nature of the Beast</i> , Djanogly Art Gallery, Nottingham; Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield; Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne
1998	<i>Whistling in the Dark</i> , Galerija Tivoli, Ljubljana, Slovenia; Stedelijke Musea, Gouda, Netherlands <i>New Sculpture and Drawings</i> , Stephen Lacey Gallery, London
1996-98	<i>In Mind of Botany</i> , Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (1996); Atkinson Gallery, Millfield School, Street (1997); Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre (1998)
1994-95	<i>Works on Paper 1983-94</i> , University Gallery, University of Tasmania; Motorworks Gallery, Melbourne Grammar School; Meridian Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
1994	<i>Boulders and Banners</i> , Wenlock Priory, Shropshire <i>Boulders and Banners</i> , Reed's Wharf Gallery, London
1992	<i>Sculpture and Drawings 1980-1992</i> , Leeds City Art Galleries and Yorkshire Sculpture Park; Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh; Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol; organised by The Henry Moore Centre for the Study of Sculpture, Leeds
1990	<i>Sculpture and Drawings</i> , Spacex Gallery, Exeter
1985	<i>Sculptures</i> , Anne Berthoud Gallery, London
1980	<i>Peter Randall-Page: Sculpture</i> , Gardner Centre Gallery, Sussex University

SELECTED RECENT GROUP EXHIBITIONS

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

COMMISSIONS

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

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

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



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5th September - 4th October 2014

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