Ethereal Lines

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We are all interconnected in this universe. Whether we realize it or not, our thoughts and actions have an impact on the balance of the cosmos we inhabit. Even if the impact is minute, it still exists, and understanding how our ecosystems and social systems are interwoven is critical. The human subconscious is understood by our intuition and consciousness, which is the feeling and awareness of our external and internal existence. A state of ‘flow’ is regarded as the optimal experience, usually when you are in a state of profound enjoyment, creativity, and full engagement with life.¹ While creating in a state of flow, intuition is activated, making this intimate process of my work imperative. My creative work is informed by how the human intellect and body is influenced by external and internal forces, and why as living creatures we so often attempt to maintain a sense of order that is inevitably fleeting.

Through intuition and awareness, I am constantly observing and absorbing my surroundings. If there are visual patterns found in nature, such as rivers, veins, trees, etc., then there must also be ones within our consciousness and subconsciousness. A sense of comfort is gained in an individual when they create a routine or repeat the same action over and over again. Like bouncing a ball against the wall, walking on the same path or saying the same prayer every day. Environmental psychology suggests “that our view of the rooms, the houses, the whole landscapes we inhabit gives us mental maps which are essential to the way we chart our course through life.” A sense of place is a map of the spirit, and these maps become intimate guides to our personal journeys.²

As Akiko Bush discusses in her book *Nine Ways to Cross a River*, rivers can divide us but also connect us. Rivers or paths mark the passage of time and are archives of natural change and human behaviors. These rhythms and patterns can offer us reassurance, balance, and inspiration.³

Humans create lines wherever they go. Movement through landscapes are forms of threading our individual biographies with the landscape. A line can also represent an enduring trace that can continue to be read after the gesture has been completed. Humans leave traces in landscapes from frequent repetitive movements. There are lines manufactured by humans such as ropes, necklaces, wire fences, brick walls, sidewalks. And then there are the lines found in nature such as fungal mycelia, roots, the leaves of trees. These complex bundles of lines are connected from a center or a point of origin.⁴ The lines I make in my work are influenced by the body and the movements it makes in space.

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⁴ Ingold, p.41, 52, 72.
Artists such as Ruth Asawa, with her organic wire sculptures, and Kim Cridler have also discovered inspiration in natural patterns. The metalsmith Kim Cridler is influenced by the familiar forms and patterns found in nature like trees and vessels. She argues “that no matter how carefully we construct and manage our daily experiences, life will not leave us alone or untouched by change.”5 As humans we innately avoid and dislike change even though it is one of the few reliable constants in our lives.

Through manipulating lines such as wire and pipe, I create pieces that represent these subtle natural patterns. Besides the ones observed in nature, one can also discover similar shapes and lines in the fabricated structures we inhabit, such as buildings, roads, or rooms. The repetition of the movements I make while creating these works restores in me a sense of control in our remarkably tumultuous world. Yet the final iteration of each piece reminds me that as much as we may try to control every little outcome, it is not possible. We must learn to live with unpredictability, which people innately find uncomfortable and nerve-racking.

To get inspiration for new pieces I review my notes, photos, readings, and the natural objects I have collected. My notes help me organize my thoughts and are often derived from books or classes I am taking. They also come from conversations had with peers and professors, or notes taken during critiques. The source of the forms I create originate from observation and navigation of my surroundings, including buildings, sidewalks, and local trees.

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Walking and exercising outdoors are also ways to measure human experience. During walks outdoors, I observe and collect objects I want to study or use for my art. I really stop and look closely at what is around me. Often, I will choose not to listen to music and walk in complete silence, so that I can be completely mindful, and take notice of my surroundings through all my senses. I focus on looking at the trees, plants, the shapes of their branches, the size of their trunk and how they got there. If it was planted and cared for by a human, or if it is naturally occurring in the wild. I collect plants of a specific size and shape that I think could fit on the body. I take photos of plants in which I see repetitions or similarities, such as lines or shapes that can be found across multiple varied species of plants. I will also sketch these
observations and use all these stored archives to influence what I create. I observe my habits and once I find a course I enjoy, I want to relive it.

My current series of work usually starts from one continuous spool of copper wire or pipe. In works like *Ether* where I use very thin pieces, I pull and unwind the wire, and count how many times my arm makes the motion - swinging from left to right. The wire hits the floor and lays there in a large pile. Once I cut the wire and, without planning, have the approximate amount I need, I pick up the pile and start manipulating and amassing the wire segments together. It looks and feels as if I am working with a mass of dough. I am standing, and my whole body is kneading the wire. Thicker wire is harder to work. Sometimes I record videos during this process to study the repetitive motions I make. This also documents the method I use to make a specific piece. Once I achieve the desired round pancake-like shape, I anneal, melt parts of it, place it through the rolling mill and then electroform them to make them stronger. It is only after the pieces are rolled through the rolling mill that the desired organic pattern emerges. This is the same process for each piece, yet in each case the final result is unique.
I began working with wire in this way during my first semester at New Paltz while researching shapes, lines, and movements recurrent in nature. At the time, I was using sheet metal to interpret sketches derived from shapes and lines; veins, branches, rivers. To relate these works to the human body I formed some of them to the shape of my own body. I began by playing with and compressing scrap copper wire. Working with just my hands, I formed the metal directly onto my body. While heating the resulting metal form, I accidentally melted some of it. The fluid wire flows like liquid, much the way blood flows through our veins, or water through rivers which propelled my research in a new direction. This spontaneous work method, or workflow, led me to these fascinating natural, organic, and capillary results. I discovered how I could translate my concepts into tangible, expressive, aesthetic outcomes. This flow process and state of making work is what leads me to new ideas.

The work both embodies and manifests a playful, spontaneous, and serendipitous act that transforms something neat and orderly (a spool of wire), into harmonious and intentional chaos.
On days when I am unable to get into a flow mindset, everything in the studio seems to go wrong. On days when I am feeling serene and in profound enjoyment, my work process functions effortlessly. Often, I am unable to plan what I want to create too far in advance, and if I do I find that such intentional and planned projects can kill the flow of creativity, and the outcome of the work is unsuccessful.

Many of the systems in which we live exhibit complex, chaotic behaviors. Although we might have maps to guide us on our journey through life, “no matter how well you know the initial conditions, determinism doesn't rule the Universe.”

Similarly, the initial conditions and process of my work, guided by the intimacies emerging from the repetitions of my movements, are predicted, and known, yet often the exact outcome is not. Our lives and nature are inevitably driven by chaos, whether internal or external, emotional or physical. Yet chaos “teaches us to expect the unexpected [and] deals with nonlinear things that are effectively impossible to predict or control”.

These are the ideas and phenomena that I am reflecting on while unearthing how to live happily in a constant state of turbulence and unpredictability.

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Pipes and Chain (close-up)

Ether (side view)
Pipes and Chain (close-up)

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LOCATION
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(Exhibition flyer)
Bibliography


