

Alan Frampton

Artist Statement

SMP in Studio Art, 2018

I find sources of inspiration in nature. When I see the sedge grass in the Margaret Brent parking lot waving in the wind with its mass of stalks moving together, and the purple seed heads are blurring together to make a purple haze I think how I can capture that feeling of what I am seeing, not what I am seeing.

North of campus, out in the St. Mary's River there's a sandbar that's sometimes covered by the tide. That's been an interesting place for me. That layer of water makes a fuzzy glassy lens over the sandbar, like looking through an old green bottle. Sometimes the wind makes waves that change the sandbar into a comb like structure, the peaks and valleys of water will show some yellow sand underneath for a second as the waves roll in to shore. I'm trying to search out that feeling of power you can see in the moving water.

Just across the Mattapan Road from our SMP studios is a bamboo grove. The mass of bamboo will bend and twist in the wind. The taller bamboos will twist separately on top of the green bending mass below them. The vertical stalks will bend and twist into a lattice work pattern that will change with each gust of wind. I'm searching out this force that can make these patterns and the feeling you get when the wind hits you.

I'm not trying to capture a realist picture, the actual object that is familiar and tangible. I want to picture the force underneath that makes the object move, bend, twist, fly, or sail. For me abstraction is the way to express this invisible force. I want to capture movement through gesture and arrangement. My work is about power of moving liquids, fluid power of wind and water.

Imagine a bird using the air currents, a fish moving through the water, water flowing over a waterfall being channeled and wearing away at underlying rock, stem and branches bending with the wind, and pictures of wind tunnel experiments.

The first semester of SMP I concentrated in combining some earlier ceramic work and my new interest of printmaking. I'd never done extensive printmaking until I came to St. Mary's. Printing offers a degree of instant result that contributes to my process of making art. I can change a color or reprint another layer quickly. Once you take the paper out of the press or lift the stencil, there's your print. My earlier ceramics did influence my printmaking, but I did not find the finished combination successful. I started to think about what projects I had done earlier that I was satisfied with, projects that were complete and represented what I wanted to capture, and what was the feeling I was trying to capture.

Thinking back to a sculpture class at St. Mary's I remembered two projects that I did that involved showing the force of the wind and water on the St. Mary's River. The first project was a set of three unfired clay obelisks that I put on the beach, like a castle, at the high tide line. I photographed the effects of the tide had on them. After a high tide there was a green coating on the gray surface. It didn't take long for algae to start to make a home. On one obelisk a single small hole had been bored in. I never saw what made it but in 24 hours something had made a home inside the obelisk. In the following days the clay obelisk crumbled away and dissolved like a kid's sandcastle at the end of a day at the beach. In a project to show the direction and power of the tidal flow I made three plastic fins that would each rotate on a steel pole hammered into the riverbed. Getting out ten feet or so into the river, over some razor-sharp oysters and seeing 2 snakes swim by to the shore, I hammered the fins in place. The fins stayed up for a few days but the force from the tides moving in and out tore them apart.



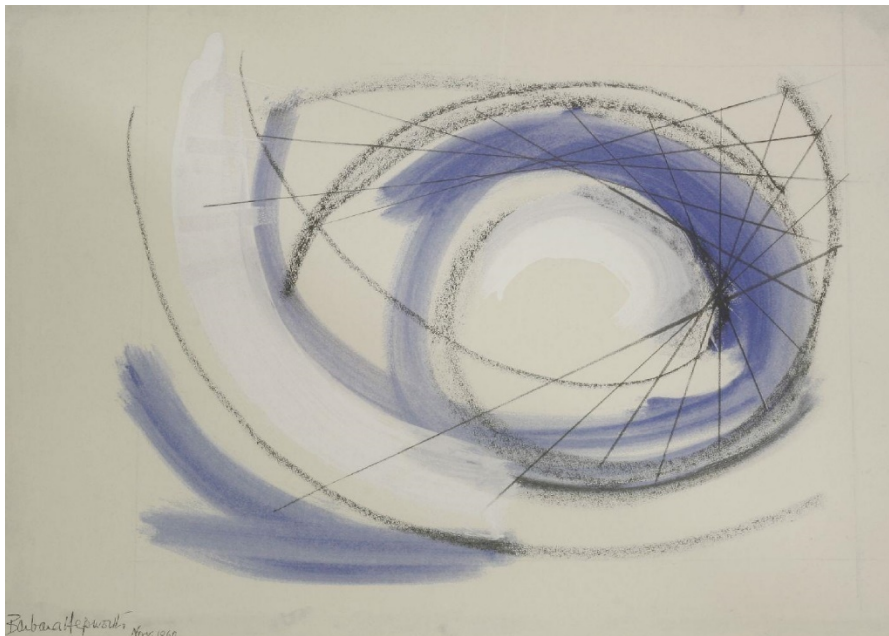
St. Mary's River, Alan Frampton, 2017.

I really enjoyed this project. This project provided a realistic and physical indication of the power of the winds and the waves. I wanted to capture not just the physical result of winds and waves, but the feeling behind them. I wanted to do more and for me abstraction was the way to do it.

An artist who abstractly interpreted nature through her work, and the nature of the materials she worked with is the English sculptor, Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975). Up until a few weeks ago I didn't know anything about Barbara Hepworth. Her name was brought up in a critique as an artist I might want to look at. From the first images on the internet I knew I had found a good model. Hepworth can be defined as a Modernist not just by her work but by the company she kept: Henry Moore, Noguchi, and her second husband Ben Nicholson (Hepworth, 63).

Hepworth's "Spiral", completed in 1960, is an oil and pencil drawing and is representative of her drawings made in preparation for sculptures, and sometimes as drawings in their own standing. Hepworth defined abstraction as separate from drawing physical reality. Hepworth saw

each line in her drawings, each mark she made on a sculpture as influencing what would be marked next (Hepworth, 5). I think that the placement of an abstract mark can be allowed to direct the placement of the next line or set the structure for the whole composition. In “Spiral” the first mark for me is the black curve line running from the left top to the lower right. I see that line as constructing the entire drawing.



“Spiral”, Barbara Hepworth, 1960, <https://hepworthwakefield.org/artist/barbara-hepworth/>

“Spiral” is specifically a study for her “stringed” sculptures and is influenced by an extended trip to the Greek islands in 1954 (Hepworth, 293). Hepworth said the strings in her sculptures represented a struggle between her and the environment, especially the coastal environment of south west England (Hepworth, 5).



“Stringed Figure”, Barbara Hepworth, 1956, <https://hepworthwakefield.org/artist/barbara-hepworth/>

The string marks she has made on paper can be taken to her sculpture. I’m interested in those strings because they I think they capture the movement and flow around a pivotal point. The blue lines form lines of flow while the white lines compliment the direction of movement. I see the black lines provide an Euclidean structure for the movement to be channeled.



“Swirl”, Alan Frampton, 2018.

In my work “Swirl”, I have blue and gray lines swirling asymmetrically around a point in the upper center of the painting. I used thinner black lines to re-enforce the direction of movement.

I am trying to capture the feeling of a swirling mass rotating. I want the viewer to be drawn into the painting and get carried along with its current. When I was painting the lines, I did let the feeling of one stroke of color influence the placement of the next stroke, like an earlier channel formed by a rainstorm will funnel and direct the flow of the next downpour. To compare with Hepworth’s “Spiral” my first line is the blue line that has the most drastic vertical drop. That line set up the bowl like structure, a structure like the swirl when you stir a cup of coffee.

Another artist that was highly influenced by the natural world but depicted in an abstract manner was Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988). Noguchi produced a range of drawings for his works that he saw as two-dimensional studies to accompany his modernist sculptures (Herrera, 90).

Noguchi, inspired by his friend Buckminster Fuller was fascinated by airplanes. While in Europe in the 1920’s Noguchi went to German aircraft factories to watch the shaping of sheets of aluminum for wings (Herrera, 89). To re enforce my message of movement I’ve brought back my original idea of having a sculptural and a print component to my show. To capture the feeling of movement in sculpture I am exploring designs of Noguchi’s work from the 1940’s. A great example is “Kouros” from 1944. Noguchi uses thin slices of pink marble carved into shapes that slot together to form a structure. His abstraction of a classical Greek sculpture form makes an anthropomorphic abstract work (Noguchi, 57). I started working with matt board first as a maquette then as a final material to make sculptures that could capture movement. Following Noguchi’s example, I slot one component into another. In addition to Noguchi, I’m really interested in the freedom of design in the designs of 1950 and 1960’s spacecraft. A comic book rocket ship of the 1950’s looked like it could blast off the page. That look is what I am after, the

feeling of imminent flight. My work “Aeolus”, named after one of the Greek gods of the wind is based on those rocket ship designs in an abstract way, changing the width and angles of the planes of the component parts. I have made more paper sculptures all abstract and working with capturing movement. In “Taurus” I wanted to capture the bulls head dropping and the side to side motion of thrashing horns. In “Pania” I thought about the sailboats out on the St. Mary’s River, how they are pushed along by the wind. I used a horizontal curve to show imply the wake of the sailboats. The vertical components are the sails arcing out as they fill up with wind and move. I want to explore using paper further.



“Aeolus”, Alan Frampton, 2018.



“Kouros”, Noguchi, 1944. New York Metropolitan Museum

My third artist is a Japanese woodblock printer, Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839-1892). Yoshitoshi was born in Japan during the close of the Shogunate. It was a time of political, social, and economic change. After Japan was opened to western influences Yoshitoshi, along with all Japanese artists, had to begin to adapt his designs to incorporate the new and highly commercial

Western” style (Uhlenbeck, 90). Yoshitoshi had more open areas uncluttered by text or seals.
(Uhlenbeck, 15).



“Fujiwara no Yasumasa plays the flute by moonlight”, Yoshitoshi, 1882. Worcester Art Museum,
<http://vps343.pairvps.com:8080/emuseum/media/view/Objects/37713/29443?t:state:flow=94b0881c-8478-40a3-b997-dc9983a7acc3>

The work of Yoshitoshi I would like to concentrate on is “Fujiwara no Yasumasa plays the flute by moonlight”, 1882. This print is a triptych showing the Counselor of State Fujiwara playing a flute that distracts the bandit Hakamadare, who is waiting in the long grass to attack Fujiwara. The figure of Fujiwara is windblown and asymmetrical, exactly the shape I am interested in. Fujiwara’s kimono sleeve blows free in the wind. The bright orange of Fujiwara’s kimono stands out against the background gray. A line of grass that stretches into the distance from right to left, the bandit Hakamadare is in a dynamic pose ready to strike. The line of the grass, the clouds, the kimono sleeve all make movement to the left of the print. The grasses are bending in the wind

that is also moving scattered shreds of cloud over a bright full moon. The combination of the colors, movement, and the stances of the figures capture a feeling of a wind-blown moment. The feeling of the wind blowing on a moor at night is what I try to capture in my work. In my work “Grasses” I’ve tried to capture that wind-blown stand of grass that’s in front of Margaret Brent Hall.



Grasses, Alan Frampton, 2018.

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