

# Realizing Interactions

A Study of Interdependence through Sculpture

Molly Houston

Fall Mentor: Sue Johnson

Spring Mentor: Carrie Patterson

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## Introduction

I have always enjoyed creating art. My earliest memories recall the process of making art as fun, intuitive and community building. My first teachers were my mother and my grandmother. My Grandma worked in a pottery studio in her young adulthood. She was also a magnificent oil painter. On her 86th birthday I walked into her house to find her copying Vincent Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* on a small canvas. At this point, she could barely see, but the visual arts still consumed her daily occupation. She would paint a picture one day, and cover it to paint something new the next. She shared her drive to create with the women in her life and found lifelong purpose in her creations. She instilled these beliefs in me, and is the reason I chose to complete my Senior Capstone in the visual arts. In this project, I have been pushed to wrestle with fundamental questions of what it means to be a creator of art. I sought the help of artists sitting in the bookshelves in my library, finding a quiet moment with them to engage in a back and forth of ideas. From Bernini to Garth Evans, I became a part of their community, finding myself within it.

Discovering relations I held with those who came before rooted me to a community. I will take a page from my Grandmother and say, art is always better when shared. This semester I shared my process with many artists, each questioning the decisions I had made in my own work, allowing me to understand it more than I ever could have alone. I was able to draw connections out of my other studies, uniting different perspectives of thought and creation. In my four years at St. Mary's, I have taken classes in Art, Biology, Psychology, English, Chemistry, Education, Dance, Math, Environmental Studies, History, Sociology, and Physics. This kind of education was

invaluable to the entire SMP process. It required me to discover a connection between the material I was studying and my own niche in this culture of St. Mary's. I was not allowed to relax into a limited and singular breath of study, but rather was challenged to take on drastically different perspectives of my life and culture. From here, I was able to finally unite them. I believe that many of us seek out what is strictly unique about ourselves. From the beginning of this project, I sought rather to discover the connectedness of people and things. I wanted to ascertain how we change in relation and how things relate.

It was when I began to study Buddhism a few years ago that I truly latched onto the idea of internal relation. External relation describes an independent view of existence purporting that we are ourselves independent of our relations. Internal relation instead describes the viewpoint of interdependent existence. It explains that we, as well as everything arises first out of relation. Causes and conditions fundamentally change and influence any particular being (Ingram, 2006). Through relation, we can begin to understand the world and value the things within it. That is, internal relation describes how two things only exist as particular interdependently, sharing and contrasting parts of themselves to form their existence. The idea purports that nothing can have significance or value without this relation to another thing. You cannot fully contemplate or understand something, until you do so in relation.

I used this ideology as a philosophical background for my art work. So I was off to making art. During the marathon of twenty works in twenty days, I reminded myself to begin by relating to my idea and my material. I would start with an idea, and find a material that seemed to suit it. This proved to be ineffective multiple times, so I switched gears. I began with a material, and constructed my idea from its particular qualities. This

technique began a flow state of creating art, each time allowing me to learn something new about the material. I don't mind when parts of my work fall down or break, which they have, because it teaches me something new about its form. The material itself plays just as much of a role in the object's creation as I do. I will often become angry at the material, until it lends itself to compromise with me. I cannot dictate what I want it to do; I must work with it. Every time I enter into a conversation with my material, the qualities of the media open themselves up to me in a new way. Sometimes that is stubborn and unresponsive and sometimes that is a peaceful approach to understanding. It is during such times that I am able to enter into flow states in which I can blend these two stories; my experience with the natural world and my experience working in steel.

Practice is integral to the goal of my work. I must begin the conversation over and over again, even when it is an argument. I practice through repetitively sketching the environment around me and the people in my life. I am drawn towards the connection between plant and human figural forms, but human made architecture is also interesting to me.. As I transfer over to working in steel it becomes harder to allow these forms to take over the compositions of my sculptures. I begin with their base, which involves me crouching on the ground to weld the pieces together. Once that is done I usually have to take a quick break to breath some fresh air. When I step back in the form comes into my mind as I build it. My preliminary designs give me a starting off point, but only when i begin to create in dimensional space can I really conceptualize what the final form will look like.

# Conversations

Garth Evans

Most recently I have found myself in a conversation with British sculptor Garth Evans. He was as much a teacher as he was a creator. By the end of his career he had taught at several universities and schools in the United States and United Kingdom. He was an experimenter, working in many mediums and genres to test, and learn from them. A student of his writes, “ I see in Garth a natural observer- open and curious, slow to form judgments. Over time, in other contexts, it became clear that part of his teaching method lay in his being able to observe and make deductions from those observations” (Cornish). In 1969, Evans joined together with Peter Kardia, Peter Harvey and Gareth Jones to create a radical new course for first year collegiate sculpture students. They taught at St. Martin’s school of Art in London, recognized for being one of the best sculpture departments in the world, and responsible partly for the new British wave of sculptors (Greenwood). It was here that students and professors became vanguards of a massive and distinct shift in visual culture in the UK in the 1950s and 1960s.

Students and professors alike began to deal with ‘modern’ issues of art. Among these were “expressive figuration, abstraction, surrealism and the 'organic', and the influences of Picasso, Gonzales, Duchamp, Matisse, Henry Moore and, David Smith” (Greenwood). Ultimately, Invention in art surged across Europe and was mirrored in design, fashion and music. As a professor, Garth Evans was integral in creating a free form vision of art, in where the students would learn from, but not be dictated by his teachings. There was new territory to cover in the field of abstract sculpture, and his students would take part in exploring those boundaries, as did Evans own work. He both

built off of, and denied strictly following the tenements of movements and artists who came before him.

Abstract expressionism emphasized a sort of automatic, natural creation. Its predecessor surrealism also drew on an automatic human sensibility, however it related itself closely to the subconscious mind. Alongside psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, surrealism delved into the real functioning of thought absent of reason. Neglected associations of thought such as the dream became studies for the visual and literary art. Garth Evans accepts these principles of creation as a study of the mind and its endless capabilities. Like the surrealists, he creates to evoke emotion, but not any specific emotion. Like the Abstract Expressionists, his art reflected his own psyche, but found its highest importance in spontaneous, improvisational and inventive process. He also upheld that the viewers own psyche became an actor on the perception of the sculpture. Their own haptic experience with the object reflects on their past and thought process.

While Evans was opposed to depicting or abstracting specific visual entities, it is important to note the relationship of the human body to his work across his entire career. Sculptors nearly automatically recognize the closer relationship that sculpture has to the body. Especially at a similar scale, sculpture physically interacts with the viewer while two-dimensional work can only allude to this. Evans recognized this tendency in his own work. His student writes “A relation to the body and an intrusion on the bodily space of the viewer also seem somehow involved with the fact that Evans’ sculpture of the sixties attempted to provoke an emotional response or to create analogues to unnamable feeling” (Compton 2013). The sculpture did not have to visually resemble a human figure to do

this. Size and dimensionality immediately related itself to the viewer. Our perception of its gesture and therefore particular energy begins with this relation.

In his work *Untitled No. 39*, the structure stands at just over ten feet, towering over most viewers, but only slightly. Artists such as Henry Moore and David Smith were working much larger than Evans does, creating structure that was too large to interact with the viewers in the same way another person would. Evans blends this boundary between monumental and life sized to create a lively object that stays within the bounds of human extension. He creates within his own ability to extend his body and his work reflects his body. In my work *The Dancers* I too remain within the boundary of my ability to extend, only using a ladder to finish the very top, which stands at about 8 feet tall. We come to both of these works in the same way we would the human figure. Our physical relation to them is closer than that of something very small or very large. We are able to view them from various angles, but are limited in our own size to view them in a particular sightline.

Grounded, both of these works find stability in gravity, but extend into a gesture that evokes movement or rather a moment in movement. In Evan's *Untitled No. 39*, the gesture could be described as folding in on itself. Comprised of four solid linear prisms, the implied line juts out from the floor to eventually reach back towards it. It has not yet touched back down though. Similarly to Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*, the tension between an object that is about to touch another, but has not yet intensifies where the suspected 'collision' will occur. However, this objects suspected path is downwards into the ground. This gesture is physically heavy, succumbing to the forces that prevent its upward stance. The piece hangs heavily over itself. In *The Dancers*, upward and

projecting line heightens the energy of the objects lifting them out. Gravity does not break the movement of the gesture as it does in *Untitled No. 39*. Instead, this force seems to be less wearing on the object.

In Evan's later work into the 1970's, he begins work in steel. He writes, "Steel terrifies me... it comes with an identity, and with associations of its own. I shall try to approach the material as a new thing, without having preconceived intentions. But this will be difficult" (Compton 2013). Steel was not a new material used for art at this point. Constructivists and Abstract Expressionist sculptors both were intrigued with the blending of industry, organic and art. Evan's sought to remove this automatic inclination towards industry in favor of breaking the physical and visual bonds of steel. Attempting for eyes unclouded, Evan's creates *Spring*. A penetrable structure comprised of green flat steel that creates form through intersecting line and implied plane. Similarly to my work *Early Spring*, the physical position of the material changes drastically throughout the piece. Some lines are completely grounded, attached to the floor fully on one side. Some are propped at an angle resting diagonally to the wall and floor plane. Some protrude from the floor to begin to form their own planes in space. This is my intention when creating this piece. In both, the stance of the material constantly changes throughout the piece, further encouraging the haptic experience of implied movement. Both of these objects present physicalities that range from completely succumbing to gravity, to extending out of its grip upward. In my own sculptures I become cognizant of these particular physicalities in the moment of creation. Evans and I are both inclined to test the boundaries of our material by removing its preconceptions. That way, we can realize how



one thing can be endless configurations. Process is not dictated by evaluation; rather the inventive process is indispensable.

### Jean Tinguely

Walking into an exhibit of Jean Tinguely's works would be a sensory experience rarely found in the halls of the most famous art museums in the world. In his lifetime, he has created works that stimulate your sense of smell, touch, hearing, seeing, and tasting and in some instances, all five at once. Viewing pictures of his work will not suffice. His "Metamechanical" sculptures will immediately challenge your ideas of what art is, and more specifically what an artist does. Some would rather call him an "engineer, mechanic or destructionist" (Lindgren, 1969). His reliefs and sculptures inherently cause viewers to reevaluate the meaning of a machine and their own connection to it. He cursed the apathetic generalization of the machine by extending and joking with their limitations. In an entry into one of his hundreds of journals, Tinguely writes, "There is no point in sneering at machines from a safe distance or condemning technology in general terms. They must be grappled with, hand to hand. We must try to grasp what is really lurking behind words like rationalization, efficiency and centralization" (Hulten, 1987). The relationship of human and machine became paramount, and thus the receptive act of the audience took precedence over the creative process of the artist.

Nearly his entire career was spent grappling with humankind's inability to recognize gradual change, and to become complacent to its effects. A major motif of his combined works deals directly with death and destruction. In a letter wrote to Hulten in

March of 1959, highlights his frustration over the necessity of lasting art and denial of impending and absolute destruction. “The most glorious function of art is assassination. Everything moves continuously. Immobility does not exist. Don’t be subject to the influence of out-of-date concepts of time. Forget hours, seconds and minutes. Accept instability. LIVE IN TIME. BE STATIC - WITH MOVEMENT. Resist the the anxious fear to fix the instantaneous, to kill that which is living. Stop insisting on ‘values’ which cannot but break down. Be free, live...which is to die” (Hulten, 1987). He felt the dichotomy of life and death were consistently overlooked in favor of the false singularity of life. He questioned whether or not the values of the increasingly industrialized world were truly making us better, more intelligent or safer, and he did it in the most fun way he possibly could. It was as if he were making a joke of what mainstream culture was describing as very serious and important. In the same letter, he continues, “Nonsense is an dimension that irony can be built into. Nonsense can be useful and consequently make sense. Art is nonsense and -like everything- not senseless” (Hulten, 1987). This theme ties together multiple phases of Tinguely’s work, and can be seen as his only static gesture; Inevitable change and decay. Spontaneous destruction became his composition.

By the 1960’s, Tinguely had exploded from the idea that only particular materials could be artistic. Having traveled extensively outside of Western Europe now, he began to extend his vision of art into a wider spectrum, detailing inspirations from East Asian and Australian cultures. Specifically, both the philosophy of co dependent origination and the art of *ikebana* were deeply influencing in his constructions. Co dependent origination is a Buddhist philosophy that emphasizes all things in the world as originating only out of relations to the things around it. It tells the story of interactions as the creators and

meaning makers of everything (Waddell, Abe, 2002). Similarly, Ikebana is a Japanese art form of flower arranging, and upholds the connection between nature and humanity. An emphasis on form, line, contour and shape begin this connection between natural and unnatural, and ultimately removes the distinction between the two entirely. Tinguely comes to latch onto these ideas, and create his own composition constructions that breathe spirituality and context (Hulten, 1987). The viewers, the creator and the piece itself interact with one another to create one another anew.

His sculpture *Casoar*, was built in 1963 and reflects the cultures from which he was newly acquainted to. This sculpture, both made and exhibited in the Minami gallery in Tokyo, presents an asymmetrical composition of parts and gears we have all seen before, but have no idea where. The piece is comprised of heavier line at the bottom ranging up to the tiniest pieces of wire and balls at the top. Gravity is an influencer and creator of this Meta machine. The parts this work is comprised of also greet human viewers in a similar way. The dense right angle steel bars seems to act as the structure that implies an architecture and resembles the steel beams that proliferate in our buildings and our cities. Slowly, as you move up this machine it becomes less recognizable though. The rigid right angle bars take on a curvilinear, and more organic shape. Atop this bar is a nonsensical assortment of small metal parts that begin to look more like a toy than a machine. The thematic significance of this composition questions whether or not a machine without a purpose is truly a machine. At this same show he begins to deal directly with the idea of destruction. Many of his contraptions began to use explosives, fire and mechanical destruction causing many spectators fear, but more importantly

intrigue. He called these works “stabilized Ikebana” which remains cognizant of death and degeneration (Hulten, 1987). He negated the idea of machine as escaping this truth.

By the 1980’s, Tinguely was composing radical new sculptures that now included the use of human and organic objects such as bone and clothing together with his mechanics. Hulten writes “The artist does not propose any answer or solution to the miseries of the world- he only expresses his anguish, his questions about death and life after death, and his secret sense of the sacred. He holds up the horrors to our face in a mocking fashion so that we can deal with them more easily, because this time they are not real” (Hulten, 1987). Nearing the end of his own life, his sculpture became a vessel for interacting fully with his own mortality. In his 1985 work *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* He elaborately dresses eight figurative mechanical contraptions and bestows each with the skull of a mammal. The interaction between robotic armature and human qualities presents a dichotomy between life and immortality. Each sculpture alone is its own self, but their grouping tells the story of them as interconnected, built by the same things. All of these sculptures create a space where viewers must connect with mortality and destruction.

Jean Tinguely’s work is undeniably spiritual in a form that is not always thought of in this way. He is a philosopher of sorts, grappling with the unknown, spontaneity and mortality throughout his life. Physics and engineering began as a way to study his world as a young adult. They later became mechanisms for contemplating the life cycle through creation. It was a moral imperative to connect to the opposite side of life that so few directly and strongly connect to. Tinkering and playing became the only importance, because settling on conclusions and values denied the purpose and part of the unknown or

unknowable. Playing for my own work becomes imperative. When I find my flow states, it is often in studying and playing with objects and how to connect them. Assembly can become an interaction between myself, the objects and their pasts, and the mechanism I use to build with. When all are in harmony we can create massively. When they are not at all, we can revel in each other's imperfections. The goal can be much less important than the play. Discovering things about myself often occurs in these moments of failure and grief. Coming face to face with my dreads has been overwhelmingly important to breaking obstacles down to my compositions, which in sculpture lie around every corner.

### Andy Goldsworthy

As a sculptor and philosopher, Andy Goldsworthy finds his home and greatest inspiration in the fields and forests of his hometown of Dumfriesshire, Scotland. When one first sees his work it is difficult to understand where he stands in a world of fine art and gallery exhibitions. His work does not last, cannot be stored, preserved or made stationary. Many of his works come into this world and leave from it only to ever be witnessed by Goldsworthy himself, and his few faithful helpers. However, his works are witnessed and interacted with by the beings dwelling near. They take part in the works creation and in its death. They surround and become one with the work, bringing it into their family. These beings are not your common art spectators though. They are the tides, the rivers, the rays of sun and the ever-changing land. They pay homage to each other.

To come to understand Goldsworthy's work it is first important to contemplate the origins of his meditation with the land. "Goldsworthy learns about living things, the

landscape, and the elements, through the intimacy of living and working with them every day of his life” (Deakin 1997). You could call his practice a form of enlightenment in the everyday. The teachings of Zen Buddhism underlie Goldsworthy’s practice and art. I look to the teachings of Dogen Kigen (1200-1253), primary figure in Japanese Zen thought to provide a deeper understanding and history of Goldsworthy’s art and thought. “The dusty world and the Buddha Way beyond may assume many different aspects, but we can see and understand the, only to the extent that our eye is cultivated through practice. If we are to grasp the true and particular natures of all things, we must know that in addition to apparent circularity or angularity, there are inexhaustibly great virtues in mountains and seas. We must realize this inexhaustible store is present not only all around us, it is present right beneath our feet and within a single drop of water” (Waddell and Abe 2002). The word virtue is used very purposefully here. Generally, virtue is thought of as a characteristic of humanity, a thing lacking in the natural order. Through Zen and Goldsworthy, we come to understand virtue as purity present everywhere and at all times. It is the human mind that can both prevent this virtue through clouded schemas, or bring it to clarity through a practice of meditation and interaction.

Goldsworthy comes to realize these virtues in the land from which he works through consistent and undying effort to learn and engage its properties. In his documentary, *Rivers and Tides* which is a medium from which his works are chronicled, he states “It is wonderful discovering something you were completely blind to, but was there the entire time” (Riedelsheimer 2001). It is not a meditation in its most conventional terms, but is meditation nonetheless. In the film we gain but a part of his tireless, backbreaking process. Waking up at dawn to create one of his sculptures from

stone only to have it collapse after eight hours of work is a testament to the soul and body of his work. He writes, “The actual act of collapse and the attempt is becoming interesting enough to become the work. I may have bitten off something I cannot make here. I don't know if I will be able to achieve what I want to; or I will, with a huge amount of luck and chance. But if I don't, I think the act of building and rebuilding, collapse, could become the work” (Goldsworthy 2015). He comes closer to this idea of enlightenment each time. He draws farther away from frustration and anger that his material is not working with him, and instead he begins to give way to its soul and self. After his fourth collapse he exclaims, “ I don't think the world needs me at all, but I need it” (Riedelsheimer 2001).

His process is intricately tied to the purpose of his work, if you were to call it a purpose. I would rather call it a livelihood or a means for living. There is no substitute for time spent, and similarly no substitute for hardship. He writes “I love resistance; difficulty gives energy to my work” (Deakin 1997). At first his frustration with the materials of the land is palpable, but this is denying the thing its soul and complexities. Soon he comes to converse with the material and allows it to tell its story to him. He feels honored in its wisdom. His own intentions fade away to allow the intentions of the thing to come forth. In this way, he becomes a part of the system that brings all things together into one. They are not and could not be separate entities or beings.

Schemas and structures put in place in society become a sort of inalienable fact to us. They limit us from understanding the more truthful nature of things. It is for this reason that Goldsworthy writes, “I am drained by people” (Riedelsheimer 2001). For the most part, they detract from his meditations and discoveries. When he finally catalogues

some of his major works though, people cannot help but be mesmerized in the way it stands out from even the ephemeral works of other artists. He is not interested in portraying human dominion over nature, nor leaving his own self within it. Bridget Goodbody of the New York Times writes “ Instead he goes to great lengths to point out that Mother Nature is in charge” (Goodbody 2007). He enters into his work allowing his intention to be molded and manipulated by the forms, which he is creating. He stands on the threshold between failure and success, often falling off into failure, which becomes the most important aspect of his work.

While I do not work in the ephemeral, which is the primary categorization that defines Andy Goldsworthy’s work, I do seek out the soul and essence of the subjects from which I work. I make art to study the essential parts of both the nature and the manmade around me. However, the natural and living form is most intriguing to me. It is in the interaction between the organic and living forms I find and the human aspects that dwell within and around it that I find my most interesting and exciting compositions. It is hard and dirty work that leaves my body aching and has me pulling splinters from my exposed skin after a long day of work. It ruins my clothes and frustrates me, but it is all so worth it when I am able to finally come to terms with these objects that bring out my and their essential spirit. In both experiences, learning is more important than finality, because finality is boring and never keeps me coming back for more. Every time I enter into a conversation with my material, it opens itself up to me in a new way. Sometimes that is stubborn and unresponsive and sometimes that is a peaceful approach to understanding. These times I am able to enter into flow states in which I can blend these two stories; my experience with the natural world and my experience working in steel.



On the surface, they may seem contradictory to one another, but in reality because they are together in their environments they come to interact. Natural and unnatural is a line that is no longer clear. Goldsworthy is both the actor and acted upon while he works.

## Conclusion

I gained particular and new insight from each of the artists I worked with throughout the entire year. Jean Tinguely created a connection between my own circumstances and how art can draw on and represent them. He came into my life shortly after my grandmother died in January, and helped me in my journey through it. His writing and work taught me how to grapple with some of life's most difficult lessons. However, he did not present death as necessarily difficult, rather he presented it as something that must be engaged actively. His works sought to engage people in these conversations. Healing came from art and communication.

Tinguely gave me the groundwork to move towards a more meditative experience of my world relating itself directly to Zen Buddhist practices. Ephemerality is a theme present in both artists' work, engaging the viewer to discover a new meaning behind art. There are both similarities and differences in my own work compared to these two artists. I am interested in depicting the ephemeral, but I want to cast it permanently in time. I want to pause a bodily movement. The body may be that of a human or of plant life, both deriving their movement from their own particular energy, as well as the energy present in their environment. For example, when I began to work on *Early Spring*, I took a movement from the daffodils that bloomed too early and quickly withered at the quickly returning ice. I began to notice this same movement in humans as midterms approached.

My peers seemed hunched, unable to be fully erect due to the stressors in their environment. They lost their color, hung their heads and remained pulled down by their stances. They truly resembled these withering daffodils.

My final conversation for my Senior Capstone was with Garth Evans. Together with Andy Goldsworthy and Jean Tinguely, Evans brought to fruition my philosophical ideas around art, while also engaging with my work directly in concepts of differing physicalities of a constant material. He and I both use steel to depict physical motion and gesture. I use the term gesture here purposefully. Gesture is the bodily movement that derives meaning. Generally this term is reserved for human movement, but I seek to extend it into our relations to planted life. Moreover, I sought to begin a conversation about physicalities of the object, and encourage relational thinking.

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