

ONE - TO - ONE

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Cuttlebone as a tool, a carrier and a substance offers a multiplicity of uses. It has been my teacher in its immediacy and the significance of its surface. I use this material in a process of metal casting and feel attuned to its directness. It provides an intimacy in my methods and requires an approach that has situated me in my field. This is a mode of working I've also come to value in other people, asking how, and with whom, do I extend myself and am I able to negotiate the realms of art production? Much like architecture, sculpture is commonly associated with solid forms and a building up. I often arrive at meaning through forms that pursue a return to the horizontal. In past works I've expressed this by duplicating the floorplan of an apartment gallery in vinyl, removing all of the vertical supports of an overhead enclosure (fig. 1), or taking a bell striker that one associates with living up high, and placing it directly on the ground (fig. 2).

In my studio, I make room for secondary uses and dynamics that emerge only through an object coming undone, like the iterative potential of applying heat to metal, asking it to become liquid and take new form. With this, there's a desire to pursue ideological shifts in art that are fragile, always shifting and incomplete achievements. Yet what remains a rare constant is that form and content, as well as material and process, are bound up in one another. Having recently moved from one coast to another, and following a shift in how I use my body, this has remained with me over the last ten years of my career as an artist working in sculpture, and it continues to offer itself as a parallel to my thinking.

The internal shell of cuttlefish works as a buoyancy system, bringing water in and filtering it out to move between ocean depths. The bone, when separated from the organism, is a highly porous, air-rich material, primarily composed of aragonite or calcium carbonate and other trace elements accumulated over the course of a mollusc's life. Each bone is singular; written into its surface and size are the varying conditions of the seawater, such as temperature, salinity and its chemical composition, which combine to determine the elemental ratios that are found within its substance. Its uses and distributive properties are

understudied, but we know cuttlebone as a debris material, washed up and gathered on various coastal shorelines. This contributes to the accumulation of lime, from which whole economies, towns and cities have been built. Jewellers use cuttlebone as a mould by preparing it, cutting it in half and rubbing the two sides together until they are flush against one another. After that, casting can be done by carving a pattern into the cuttlebone, adding the necessary sprue, melting the metal in a separate crucible and pouring the molten metal into the cuttlebone mould.

Cuttlebone casting has a multitude of associative potentials. When I have incorporated the shell as a material in my work, it has been mistaken for a 3D printed form, while it is actually one of the oldest casting methods in history. It produces an object with a textured, landscape-like surface consisting of scaffolds, striations and ridges. It is significantly adaptable in terms of where production can take place – in a garage, shed, backyard or at the shoreline. It needs gravel or sand to provide protection from cast-off molten metal and a space for a focused flame; any slight flash of heat from the torch on the shell produces golden amber to dark brown colorations and finally creates ash.

The process of metal casting varies according to the needs of each alloy, and each requires specific tools and facilities. Orienting myself as an artist to metal because it inhabits a series of flows, the process involved encompasses both substances and acute actions. Heat, electricity and gases are equal participants and collaborators for casting to occur, along with knowledge sets, such as wax working, plaster mould making, sophisticated tools, a source of high heat such as a torch, crucible or kiln, and gear to protect the body. The simplicity of cuttlebone casting allows for the very few materials to be intimately bound by their interdependent and specific properties when put in touch with one another. I ask myself if such a process is not more than just a means of production, but also aligns itself with a set of values, as one is using what is found and nearby in the most direct and one-to-one ways, through an application that is only limited by the thickness and overall dimensions of a shell.

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