



JOHN WALLBANK  
SELECTED PRESS ARTICLES  
ESSAYS & INTERVIEWS

# Artist Boss

Anthony Caro's studio assistants and  
issues of legacy in British sculpture.

## **Book excerpt:**

**'Artist Boss: Anthony Caro's studio assistants and issues of  
legacy in British sculpture.'**  
**Jenny Dunseath and Mark Wilsher**  
**2016**

## **Interview:**

**ANTHONY CARO, PATRICK CUNNINGHAM,  
JOHN WALLBANK, NEIL AYLING & OLIVIA BAX – PART TWO**  
**Studio assistants 1968 to present day, 2005-13, 2005 to**  
**present day; 2010 to present day.**  
**Camden studio, London, UK**  
**Group interview (November 2010)**



fig. 78

Anthony Caro  
*Bench* (2011–13)  
 Steel, wood and clear Perspex  
 147 x 316 x 178 cm

JENNY DUNSEATH *Group cohesion and teamwork appears to be very important in the studio. Many assistants have talked about studio visits and how they were encouraged to bring in photos of their own work, and trips to see exhibitions to discuss sculpture together...*

ANTHONY CARO We should do it more often!

JD *Thinking of the group, let's open it up to you all. There are a several veins of thought about the artist's assistant. One, almost derogatory, position states that the artist's assistant (or apprentice) implies a withholding or deferral of the fullness of one's own practice. The other, more celebratory, position offers a version of an old-fashioned apprenticeship, falling between the period of completing art school and the precipice of an art career. It would be interesting to know what you think about these positions.*

AC These guys are all at different stages, but go ahead.

NEIL AYLING I started here when I was still studying for my BA at Winchester School of Art, so I didn't know what to expect really because I was still young. I knew I wanted to be a sculptor, I knew that for sure.

AC How long ago was it?

NA About five-and-a-half years. It was all new, and I didn't really know what to expect at that time, but I loved it. I think coming here made it real. That you're not just dreaming, 'I want to be a sculptor'; you can see how it's done in real life. I think you only really get a perspective on that after leaving art school, having six months of not being here and trying other work. Then when I went to do my MA at the Royal College it felt like a natural progression.

JD *You worked for Darren Almond as well, didn't you?*

NA Yes, over the summer I started here. That was pretty full on that summer, very surreal.

AC I actually – in your case particularly, and I think in Piers's [Candy] case too – am very conscious of how much you have grown over the years. I don't know how much of that is due to me. I think quite a bit is due to having a job. You've become so much more solid; you seem to know who you are and where you are. At the beginning, you were wobbly. You would hang around and you didn't quite know what to do, what you were meant to be doing or who you were meant to be, and somehow now you know it! There's a clarity that does make it felt.



fig. 79

Neil Ayling  
*Untitled Triangle Workshop* (2015)  
 Pallet wood and photographic emulsion  
 250 x 210 x 260 cm

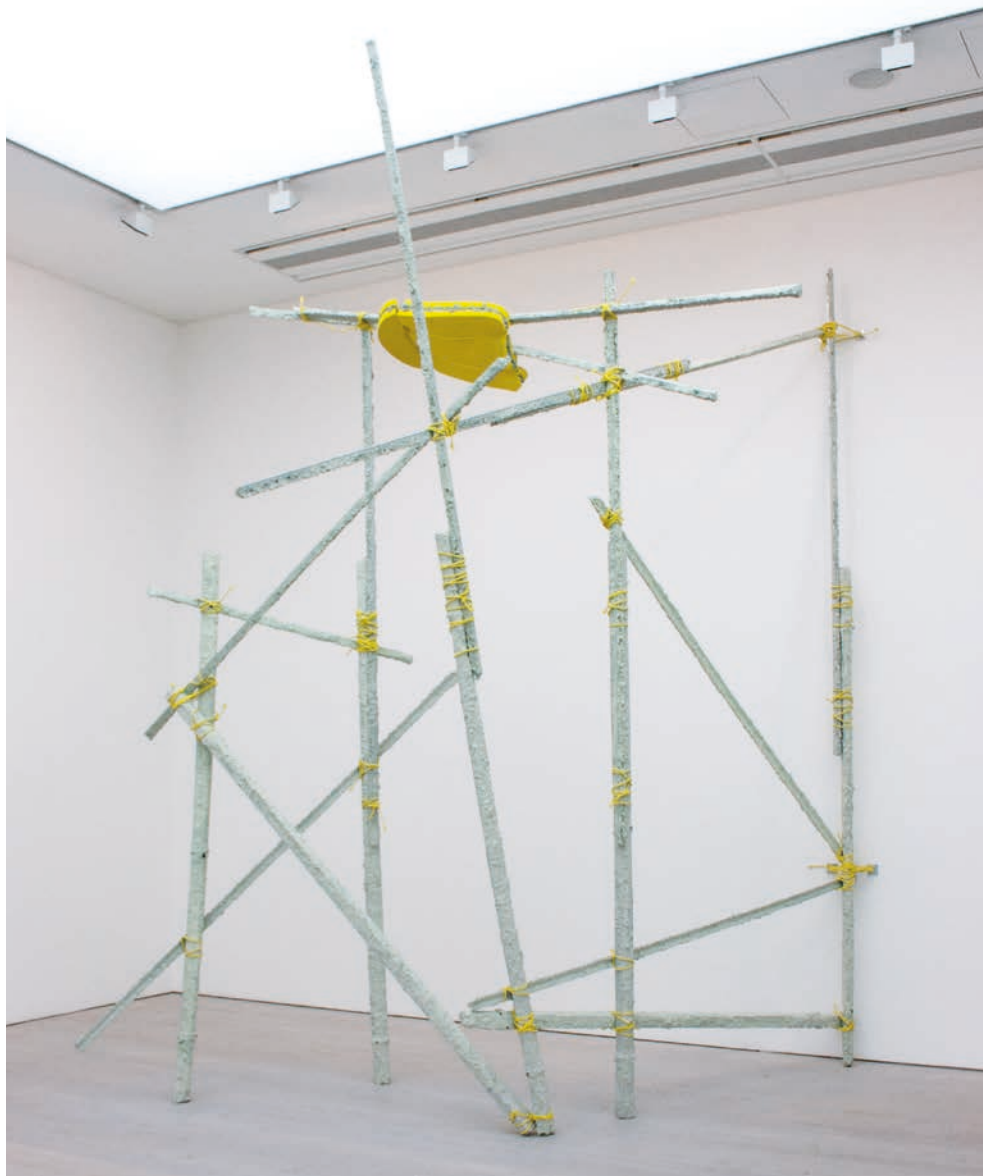


fig. 80

Olivia Bax  
*Sink or Swim* (2015)  
 Paper, glue, paint, plaster, steel mesh,  
 bungee cord, foam and galvanised ring plates  
 420 x 266 x 245 cm

AC What about you, Olivia?

OLIVIA BAX I graduated from my BA in June 2010, so I'm new. At the start of my third year I was really conscious of almost graduating, and we started to have a lot of 'after art school' discussions about what we were going to do, how we were going to make a living. They were completely impractical, and I remember it suddenly dawning on me: 'When I leave college, how am I ever going to make work?' And that was what I really wanted to do, so the prospect of leaving art school freaked me out!

AC Where did you actually make metalwork?

OB At Byam Shaw. Tim Peacock, the technician there, taught me a lot. By the time I was graduating I still didn't know what I was going to do. So when this job came up, it was wonderful because I had admired Tony's work for a long time. And this gives me a chance to keep working on my own work.

AC Can you work on your own now?

OB Yeah, I sometimes come in here at the weekends and I've got my own studio now, too. And I also get Tony and Pat's input. It's really good having other people like all these guys around as well, to talk about art.

AC Is it also because Pat knows so much about how to make an idea real and he can find a quick way of doing things?

OB And all of the professional advice. Pat's good at knowing what opportunities we should pursue or, more importantly, what to avoid!



fig. 81

Neil Ayling  
*Untitled Triangle Workshop* (2015)  
 Pallet wood and photographic emulsion  
 150 x 75 x 80 cm



AC What about you?

ANON. I finished at Central Saint Martins probably three or four years ago.

I was definitely influenced by Tony's work, using certain aesthetics but moving along a slightly different path. When I left there I went straight into The Sculpture Factory – an art production firm. That was my first experience of working with artists. It was very different to working here, but still an insight. I was there for two years before having a few shows myself from that, because I was able to make my own work while I was there. Then I went to work at a bronze foundry, which was a different conversation with artists – because the turnover was so quick, you might be seeing three artists a day; it became very pointed, very specific, different choices from the forms of the bronze, or fixing and the practicalities.

AC What age are you?

AN. Twenty-six.

AC And you, Neil?

NA Twenty-seven.

PATRICK CUNNINGHAM Don't ask me!

JD Don't ask me either!

PC Now you'll have to reveal your age... How old are you Tony?

AC Twenty-six!

[Lots of laughter]

JD *The experience of working as a fabricator is very interesting in comparison to the role of a studio assistant. What do you feel the differences are?*

AN. Working here is a lot more valuable. A lot of decisions are taken out of the artist's hands when they are only coming into the studio once every two months or so. Some artists can work like that, and the work was designed before it was made, and I think that's the difference. Everything here happens on the spot; it's changed and moved and I think that's probably what makes the work so successful.

AC All sculptors are different; we've all got our different ways of doing things. There's not a right way of doing things, not just one way.

JD *How does working here affect your own practices?*

AC Yes. What about you, John?

JOHN WALLBANK For me, working here isn't like a job; it gives you the energy to carry on. I'll come here and then go to my studio afterwards because I enjoy making stuff. The daytime is like a warm-up for my own studio. I get to make stuff all day then I go back to my own studio to steal all Tony's ideas!

[Lots of laughter]

No, I think it comes down to this really hands-on approach; the thing is left open and that makes the fabrication more interesting for us. By saying it isn't working to design... Here you are not just a technician – you work it all out as you go along. That's what makes it interesting.

You don't know if it will be finished in a month or six months. The story is being made as you go along.



fig. 82

John Wallbank  
*Painting (Black & White)* (2015)  
 Bituminous paint, cotton fabric, PVA glue,  
 plywood, staples and PVC coated wire  
 350 x 250 x 250 cm

AC What about you, Jenny? What about the break between art school and where you are now? Do you feel that this was a bridge?

JD I certainly developed more practical skills here than I did at art school, because you're working outside the parameters of your own practice, and that was invaluable. As everyone has highlighted, it's an immersion in sculpture and you're doing something that you're completely involved with; you go home and feel satisfied and able to continue to make work.

AC Can you imagine, Jenny, leaving art school and going straight into teaching?

JD Personally, I felt it was important to have another view outside of working within an art school, and have a transition into teaching.

AC You say that, but you see at Saint Martin's, people like Philip King and all that lot, they finished their studentship and were hired for two days a

week teaching. Frank Martin had a very hard time and said we were eating our own tail, but they did in those days and that's why I was asking Jenny. This isn't the way people are doing it now.

JD Personally, teaching provides me with a constant dialogue about current debate, sculpture and new concerns within art practices. I find it completely invigorating and, of course, that exists within this studio environment as well.

JW What do you see as the differences between art school discussions and these studio discussions?

JD There are several. Conversations in the 'institutional studio' within an academic context will, at times, have to address academic criteria. For example, we may talk in depth about material qualities, characteristics or the sensation of making, then the discussion may lead to the relationship between theory and practice, context around thinking and making perhaps...

AC Yes but you are talking about physical things and they're all very old-fashioned sculptures. You're not dealing with somebody singing.

JD You might be, and one could argue that sound is sculptural. Sound fills a space. Sound is shaped by the physical properties of the source of the sound (like the shape of musical instrument) and is also affected by the environment it's in, or received in.

AC I think sculpture is physical, well, not purely physical, but sculpture has to be very physical. I have a real problem with that sound idea even more than I have with visual things, computer stuff. I think it could be an art form but I don't think of it as sculpture.

JD *What about a physical gesture or action, as in Richard Serra's early films like Hand Catching Lead (1968)?*

AC I think that feeling the weight of things is a sculptural activity. I think I said before, somebody came to my studio – a painter, Bernard Cohen – to give me a hand and he said, 'It's heavy', and that's a funny feeling, something that a painter wouldn't feel that we feel. So I'm not sure that I agree with you; I think it's too big a jump towards sound for me. But still, the way you were talking, it was old-fashioned because it was to do with making, and nowadays it is not necessarily to do with making, is it?

PC But you're all talking about making by the artist's hand, and an awful lot of sculpture isn't made by the artist.

AC Not at all, not all. In fact, very much as Jenny was saying...

PC It's made in big factories, like The Sculpture Factory. They make it all, but it's not like that here. Everything here you have to pay attention to. You couldn't have it made outside, without you being down there. When we made *Promenade* we'd go to Benson's [Benson-Sedgwick Engineering] every day.

AC Yes, we did. But with that *Tower* that went to Japan, I was too close to it. Unlike being an architect... If one had designed it like an architect and said, 'Now I'm away from it, go and make it', it would have been better. I was poking my nose in all the time and saying, 'That's not right'!

OB I think there might be a bit of a 'making' revival in art education and more

emphasis on the importance of it, because students were often frustrated by the lack of practical skills that were taught.

AC At Byam Shaw?

OB Yes, but both my flatmates were studying at different art schools and they were having the same frustrations. Students can't learn how to do things from a half-hour induction that's just: 'This tool does this, this tool does that'. Even in the short time I've been here I've had to use new tools, and that has been a huge learning curve.

JW Ultimately, if someone else does it for you...

OB Yes, exactly. If you're simply watching, you have no practical skills. That's another advantage to being here: you learn things that may end up being useful in your own work.



fig. 83

Olivia Bax  
*Slot & Groove* (2015)  
Paper, glue, paint, plaster and polystyrene  
120 x 60 x 85 cm

PC You think you've missed out by not having more skill-based training? How to cast, how to model, how to make armatures... All that stuff?

OB Yes, maybe. I'm jealous of people starting art school now, because they have introduced these new exchanges, so if you want to do bronze work they'll send you to Romania to teach you how to do it. I think that's brilliant, to have the opportunity to learn as many different skills as possible. Whether they end up being useful or not, it's really beneficial.

JD *That's interesting Olivia: a push for a return to skills in making. Tony, what was the emphasis like at Saint Martin's? Was there a rigorous training in basic skills?*

AC Nobody knew anything! I was there for a few years before we got into

welding at all. And when we got into it, nobody knew how to weld! Jim Sherriff, who had been the casting chap, was trying to help people to weld and to cast and he didn't know how to do it all!

JW I find it quite interesting when you get to a point where people don't know what they're doing, but are prepared to find out, because that's when invention happens. You might not end up making a technically brilliant work, but that's not what making art is about, is it?



fig. 84

John Wallbank  
*Untitled* (2013)  
 Polyurethane foam, polystyrene and plywood  
 182 x 160 x 100 cm

AC John, do you think if you had gone straight from university could you have known how to set up your own studio?

JW After I left Edinburgh I went to the Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop. I used to work there before I got my own studio, so it was quite an easy transition.

AC Is this whole thing anything like the Triangle Workshop?

JW Triangle was more like art school in a way, except that everyone knew what they were doing! It's a collection of like-minded people trying to make stuff.

AC Jenny, what else do you want to ask us?

JD *Well, Tony, you've talked a little about the difference between working here and working for Moore. We've talked about the professional experience that this provides and we've touched upon the similarities and complexities of an art education, either in the studio or in an institution. Perhaps we can talk about how the role of artist's assistant is viewed or perceived... How is it received by your peers, and professionally?*

AC I think it's very bad to be here too long. I remember asking one of Henry's assistants, 'How long have you been here?' – seventeen years! He wasn't going to be able to make his own work; he couldn't, he was imbued! He could only make Henry's work, not his own. One thing we haven't talked about is the practicality of the world and making money, and galleries, and so on. I think this is something we never talked about here and the reason is I'm no good at it! But it's a whole side of being an artist, which as teachers we have neglected entirely. They didn't neglect it at Goldsmiths. Career is part of the job; confidence too.

OB In answer to your question about people's reactions – this is a difficult time to get a job and there are only a small handful of students who have graduated and got an art-related job. People wonder what you're going to do after a fine art degree, so it's great to say I've got this job working for Tony.

AC Mind you, we don't pay them very much here, and we're going to keep it that way! I have had times when people have wanted to come really just to make money and then it's kind of soul-destroying. You don't want that, you want them to come because they love art, they want to learn something and do the whole thing as well as they can.

These days people want assistants far more than they used to.

JW I think they want fabricators.

#### Postscript by Olivia Bax, Neil Ayling and John Wallbank (August 2015):

Looking back on this interview, which was conducted in November 2010, we thought it would be worth adding how the dynamic developed over the months and years that followed. Tea breaks often turned into heated discussions about art and sculpture, and more time was spent visiting exhibitions and other artists' studios. It was apparent that Tony was aware that working in the studio facilitated our own practices. Indeed he made it clear that it was important to him that we treated our own work as the priority. We will always be very grateful for the support and generosity from Tony in the last few years of his life.



## John Wallbank at Arcade

November 4, 2017



**Artist:** John Wallbank

**Venue:** Arcade, London, UK

**Date:** September 12 – November 4, 2017

**Photography:** all images copyright and courtesy of the artist and Arcade, London

Strategies of mapping, whether they be environmental, physical or architectural, define the artistic profile of John Wallbank, who simultaneously intersects the lines between drawing and sculpture through an ecology of material becoming. The graphic trait, elaborated through the digital, as seen in the artist's book *Drawing*, 2013, is analogous to the function of his sculptures, exploring the distance between the raw material given by nature and the artist's approach to the surroundings. By



confronting the chaos of heterogeneous accumulations, the mimetic approach of John Wallbank consists of processing material until reaching the very essence of its elements (glass fibre, resin, cotton fabric), similar to a carving depth. Sculpture is conceived of as a process of sublation between voids and masses, the positive and the negative of material morphologies. By excavating these polarities, the artist prototypes sculptural models via spatial extensions, sequences and scales.

Interested in the adherence to natural and human forms, John Wallbank draws upon the register of classical sculpture to propose a new artistic inventory where geometry is replaced by mapping, form by processes of in-formation and composition by strategies of spatial extensions. It follows that the physicality of his work is marked by the elasticity of material intensities in between sculptural components, which investigate the mutability of shapes between concavities and convexities, lines and folds. When confronting the landscape, the artist's strategy is contemporaneously an act of direct observation and a practice of rendering, moving across the lines and crosses of bodily extensions, mediated by the mastery of tools. As in climbing, the accumulative process of physical measurement finds a stylistic reference in the work of Kurt Schwitters who, by defining his artistic process, whether sculptural or graphic, famously stated: "*Stone upon stone is building*" (Schwitters, 1993). By mastering an imperfect equilibrium between concrete and abstract, chaos and synthesis, sedimentations and altitudes, in Wallbank's hands sculpture reflects a trans-formative process of mapping and moulding.

Three contemporaneous projects developed with Arcade cover and articulate a spectrum for Wallbank's strategies. In *Untitled (Sewn Cube)*, presented at Frieze Sculpture, Regents Park, London 2017, the artist redefines the balancing act between solids and voids by assembling a volume from interwoven flat surfaces, which open to the public sphere, exploring the external relations of the sculptural envelope. At Arcade, the artist shifts attention to the inherent qualities of sculptural models by unveiling the dynamics in between sculptural forces and compositions, with a focus on the linkages that weave the structure. From the chaotic nature of raw materials, the artist configures the expressive axis of a large-scale sculptural model by exploring the inner and outer aspects of spatial extensions. Similarly, the project anticipated for DAMA, Turin, 2017, intends to respond to the existing Baroque architecture by colonizing the space via contrasts and relations among physical objects, as if in a dramatic tension. Moving away from the legacies of space and tradition, John Wallbank's work becomes a vessel for experimental practices and new modes of positioning sculpture.

-Sara Buoso



John Wallbank, 2017, exhibition view, Arcade, London

John Wallbank.

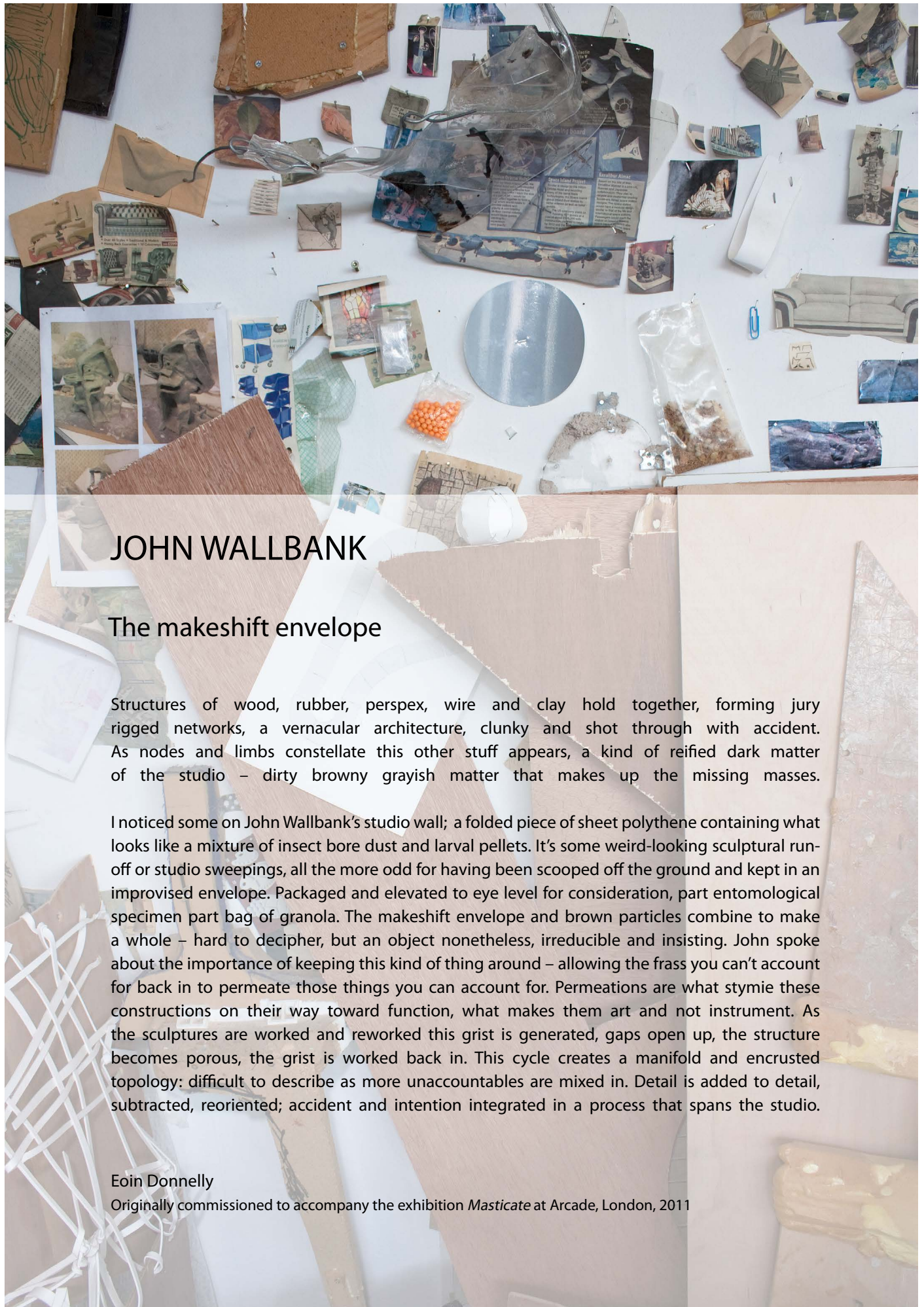
We exist in a world of binaries, from the software programming of zeros and ones to the concept of good and evil and the emotions we experience every day. The efficacy or potency of these phenomena are measured not by their singularity, but by the comparison with their opposite. We as viewers are bound by these habits of comparing and contrasting, constantly using memory and experience to assess and validate our present situation. John Wallbank's keen awareness of this is ingrained in his practice, and is evident in the way that he skilfully - and often wilfully - manipulates the historically sacred boundary between painting and sculpture.

As we look at Wallbank's new paintings, the eye settles on a detail - perhaps the hand mixed pigment of the mottled painted surface, or the frayed edge of scrim emerging from between layers of paper or foam. We appreciate the function of the engineered bracket or tab, and we begin to assume that these details are what will lead us to an understanding the work. Yet no sooner has one quality made itself known than another leaps forward and demands to be considered. We are never sure whether we should take comfort in the objective presence of sculptural form, or begin to interpret the illusion of the painted surface. This pulling between sculpture and painting continues like the force of two opposing magnets, but instead of causing a frustrating deadlock the information accumulates and becomes richer with each oscillation.

Wallbank talks of enhancing aspects of his sculptures - making them more sculptural than sculpture. The irony of how he does so through painting is both thought-provoking and mischievous, using the painted surface quality of the object in conjunction with its actual volume in order to create a type of hybrid tromp-l'oeil, less a visual experience than a cognitive one. For example, we understand that what we are looking at on the wall is *not* a great heavy chunk of forged steel (or wood or stone for that matter), yet Wallbank borrows the descriptive language we use to understand these materials with their characteristics of mass and volume and reinterprets it as surface. Wallbank has avoided a superficial exposition on the differences between painting and sculpture by exploring more subtle and pertinent questions: Instead of understanding a sculpture to be heavy because it is clearly made of steel, we are asked by Wallbank to consider *why* we think it's heavy. What are the visual triggers that conjure weight

and volume, and why are we so willing to believe them? With these new works Wallbank has succeeded in setting the fundamentals of visual and spacial understanding against each other, crucially bypassing any deconstructive temptations caused by historical pretences to create a body of work that is somehow neither painting nor sculpture, but is simultaneously more than both.

*Hywel Livingstone, November 2014.*



## JOHN WALLBANK

### The makeshift envelope

Structures of wood, rubber, perspex, wire and clay hold together, forming jury rigged networks, a vernacular architecture, clunky and shot through with accident. As nodes and limbs constellate this other stuff appears, a kind of reified dark matter of the studio – dirty browny grayish matter that makes up the missing masses.

I noticed some on John Wallbank's studio wall; a folded piece of sheet polythene containing what looks like a mixture of insect bore dust and larval pellets. It's some weird-looking sculptural run-off or studio sweepings, all the more odd for having been scooped off the ground and kept in an improvised envelope. Packaged and elevated to eye level for consideration, part entomological specimen part bag of granola. The makeshift envelope and brown particles combine to make a whole – hard to decipher, but an object nonetheless, irreducible and insisting. John spoke about the importance of keeping this kind of thing around – allowing the frass you can't account for back in to permeate those things you can account for. Permeations are what stymie these constructions on their way toward function, what makes them art and not instrument. As the sculptures are worked and reworked this grist is generated, gaps open up, the structure becomes porous, the grist is worked back in. This cycle creates a manifold and encrusted topology: difficult to describe as more unaccountables are mixed in. Detail is added to detail, subtracted, reoriented; accident and intention integrated in a process that spans the studio.

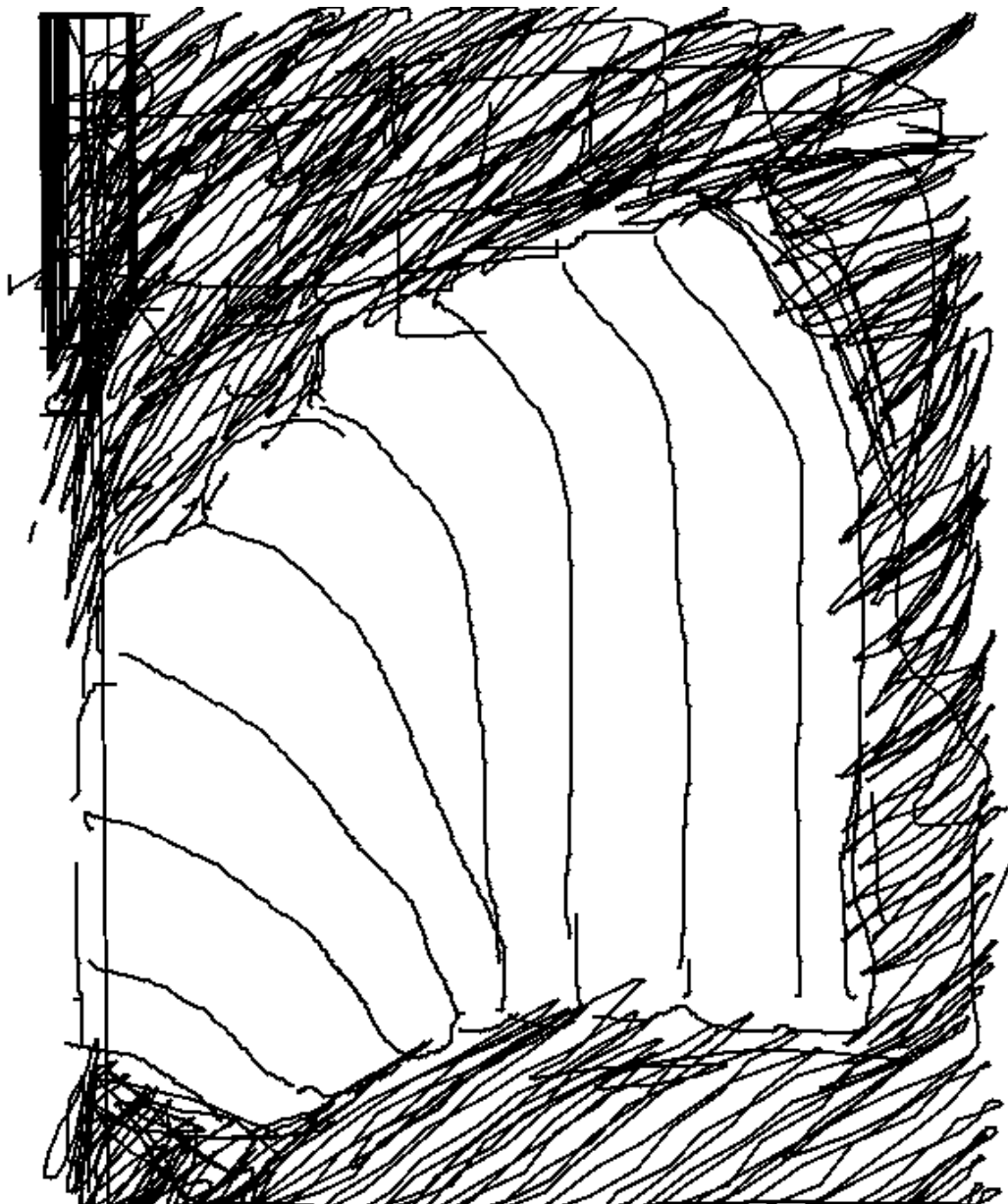
Eoin Donnelly

Originally commissioned to accompany the exhibition *Masticate* at Arcade, London, 2011



## ART ON THE SCREEN: FROM REAL TO VIRTUAL SPACE

By Hywel Livingstone



John Wallbank  
*Segmented Object*, 2013  
Kobo drawing

The ubiquity of the tablet and smartphone is undeniable, and for many leaving the house or indeed the room without one is unthinkable. Screen-based devices have revolutionised our lives in terms of convenience and mass communication, and have also begun to mediate both the way we think and the way we see. The ability to comfortably view everything from stocks and shares to family albums and the latest Hollywood blockbuster, combined with consolidation of daily tasks via an almost limitless array of applications all on a single device has irreversibly changed our cultural landscape - and, in turn, has some fascinating implications for the world of visual art.

Artists respond to the world around them, and for us to ignore such a worldwide shift in absorption of information and perception of images would be disingenuous. David Hockney has applied his mercurial genius to everyday forms of mass-production (the photocopier, the fax, the Polaroid) for decades, drawing attention to their creative possibilities, whilst in doing so democratising the 'high art' form of painting with its associated museological hierarchy. His recent iPad and iPhone paintings are no exception, once again taking a technology (or an app) available to all that possess the host device (no training, no qualifications necessary) and exploring its potential to its highest level - both in terms of execution and dissemination. In a swift and simple move Hockney alleviates the uneasy relationship between the art world and the smartphone/tablet (namely the passivity of the gallery goer who stores visual information digitally, diluting his primary engagement with the real thing) by pre-emptively using the medium of secondary viewing as the work itself, elevating and once again democratising the status of the screen.

The leap from framed image on the wall to framed digital image on the screen is significant and, as Hockney has proved, can be explored, exploited and refined. But how do sculptors deal with the screen? It has become unfashionable today to categorise artists as either painters, sculptors, printmakers and so on, yet sculptures still exist as do the people who make them, and the basic necessary criteria for the making and viewing of sculpture is fixed - space is required, the displacement of which through the creation of a three dimensional object forces the viewer to move and therefore engage in an ambulatory rather than static fashion. This would appear to disqualify the use of the screen and the modes of viewing it engenders from anything sculptural, yet increasingly the two forms are influencing each other.

The contemporary sculptor, John Wallbank (Ambit 214) juxtaposes different and often incongruous industrial materials, sensitively negotiating their inherent qualities in order to create and then immediately resolve formal problems, resulting in objects that lie somewhere between precarious unease and harmonious autonomy. The limitations that are inherent in the materials he uses (plywood, plastic, foam etc) combined with their unknowable behaviour when forced together create a space where there is very little room for forward planning, meaning that the work can only be created responsively in the studio - 'in the moment'. Whilst it may be impossible to pre-design and then execute a sculpture in this fashion, preparatory drawings are however important, if only to retain the fleeting notion of an object long enough to reach the studio. Wallbank has found a way of doing this with a simple, generic e-reader. The basic programme he uses does not attempt to simulate another medium - there are no features to create tone, texture, colour and so on. The single pixel-width line is drawn with a finger on the screen, and the distance between thought and creation is about as small as it could be. By letting the limitations of his chosen format and the lack of creative embellishment free up his process, Wallbank is able to - as with his sculptures - allow the material to exist in its purest, and most enlightening form.

It is notable that some of the artists who explore the potential of digital viewing in the most significant way are those who have something to compare it to, and have known a considerable part of their careers without it. Michael Craig-Martin (born 1941) like Hockney (born 1937) is an expert in two dimensions and has an affinity with methods of mass production - printmaking being an integral part of both artists' practice. Craig-Martin has effortlessly taken his images out of two dimensions, and into three. Despite retaining the flatness associated with their 2D cousins, the sculptures, by definition, have a side and a back which, combined with their outsized scale and outdoor context, demand exploration. However, unlike with conventional sculpture, information about the objects being scrutinised is lost rather than gained as the viewer negotiates their way around them, their simple sign-like clarity exposed as a kind of linguistic pun. The visual information we need to understand Craig-Martin's sculptures is clear only when the conventional sculptural viewing modes stop, and we stand still in front of them allowing their illustrative qualities to return. Finally, after we've done our bit like good viewers of art, contemplating and digesting from different angles and distances, we can reach for the digital camera in order to record the moment, proving we've been there and seen it, before heading for the gift shop. It is only then, looking at the sculpture through the flattening digital screen, that the image is finally made whole, and appears in three dimensions. It is ironic (and no doubt intended) that the discombobulating experience of only achieving true clarity and understanding of the sculpture through a digital screen despite the 'real' object being right there in front of us in real time and space, cannot be reproduced on the printed page, and the reader must imagine these effects. Craig-Martin knows the way people behave, and he knows that when they look at art (especially outdoors free from museum convention) they all have smartphones or digital cameras with them. By combining and subverting what we see in reality and what we see digitally, he, like Hockney and Wallbank, is telling us that the screen is here to stay, and if the ways of viewing art are changing, then so must the ways of making it.

Left: Michael Craig-Martin

*Gate (white)*, 2011

Powder coated steel

Edition 1 of 3 + 1 AP

296 x 256 x 2 cm / 9ft 7 x 8ft 4 x 13/16 ins

© the artist, courtesy New Art Centre, Roche Court Sculpture Park and Gagosian Gallery

Hywel Livingstone is a sculptor who lives and works in London and Cheltenham. He studied Fine Art at Winchester School of Art in 2003, and then completed an MA in Art History at the University of Bristol in 2011. Livingstone has exhibited across the UK and in America. He was awarded the Royal Society of British Sculptors Bursary Award in 2003. [www.hywellivingstone.com](http://www.hywellivingstone.com)

# Mousse Magazine

## John Wallbank "Masticate" at Arcade, London



Structures of wood, rubber, perspex, wire and clay hold together, forming jury rigged networks, a vernacular architecture, clunky and shot through with accident. As nodes and limbs constellate this other stuff appears, a kind of reified dark matter of the studio – dirty brownish greyish matter that makes up the missing masses.

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**John Wallbank**

*Untitled*, 2010, polyester filler, pigment, wire, acrylic, 156 x 204 x 24 cm. © the artist. Courtesy Arcade, London

The unruly sculptures of **John Wallbank** look, perplexingly, something like drawings, sprouting linear appurtenances in all directions – but less the sleek drawing-in-space of Anthony Caro than the knotty, tangled abstractions of, say, Joanne Greenbaum. Cruddy but deliberately shaped lumps of unfinished wood and lengths of found metal are fastidiously angled and bolted together, or sealed inside transparent plastic membranes; the wholes feel at once haphazard and hyperdeliberate, graceful and galumphing, the properties of each part popping out. The young Slade grad, at once unquestionably conversant with Phyllida Barlow's junk-assemblage aesthetic yet bending it in fresh-feeling directions, looks like a figure to watch.

## John Wallbank



courtesy the artist and Arcade  
'Untitled', 2011, by John Wallbank

There's a current generation of young artists coming out of London who are obsessed with how processes and materials might become artworks. It would be easy – and lazy – to dismiss it as 'skip art', but there's often something compelling about the act of cobbling something together from the meanest of means.

John Wallbank's engaging sculptures manage to hold their own – partly because the shitty materials are somehow redeemed by the bizarrely counterintuitive methods of assembly, and the weird elegance of the forms that emerge. The largest of these is an assembly of warped Perspex sheets, chipboard struts, hardboard and polyurethane foam, forming a set of largish transparent enclosures, like an architectural model for some defunct futuristic city designed by a broke visionary.

The oddest aspect of this and another nearby sculpture, made mostly of chipboard and bits of steel bracketing, is that the edges and seams are held together with a 'stitching' of thick plastic strip, which can only have been worked under heat – it would have been impossible to achieve the elaborate twists and knots in their present solid state. This lends them a sort of baroque excess – you wouldn't ever join any two bits of junk materials this way – and Wallbank's methods signify the deadpan desire that art is all about turning lead into gold, investing the slightest, most fragile materials with a surplus of technical prowess, wrong-footing our expectations of what we think dumb materials are capable of.

A number of little drawings in the office area rehearse this precarious, hardly there game. In one, a sheet with a few inked lines that barely add up to any kind of image, is adorned with a little tab of paper, stapled on. It's these unlooked-for moves that suggests that Wallbank is on to something – a poetry of the prosaic, maybe.