

ANITA CHOWDRY

JOURNEYS WITH PATTERN AND COLOUR

A review of Central Saint Martin's Degree Show One 2014

May 26, 2014

It is the season of degree shows, and Central Saint Martin's Show One, featuring students graduating from the Fine Art courses, is currently open to the public until the 27th May. Having graduated myself in M.A. Art & Science in 2013, it was very evocative to feel the same energy and buzz in the vast King's Cross campus. It was great to catch up with students I knew from when I was there and see how their work has developed, and also to discover new people and things. Altogether it was very inspiring, and reminded me of the freedom the students have had to experiment and push the boundaries as far as they can go – a luxury that one can rarely have outside university...

I shall briefly cover some of the practices and pieces that resonated with me, while stressing that this is a subjective and personal blog post, and therefore no snub is intended to the many great presentations that I do not have space to mention. I must admit I did gravitate towards the students of my old teacher David Stewart, senior technician and resident **metalwork** maestro at the college.

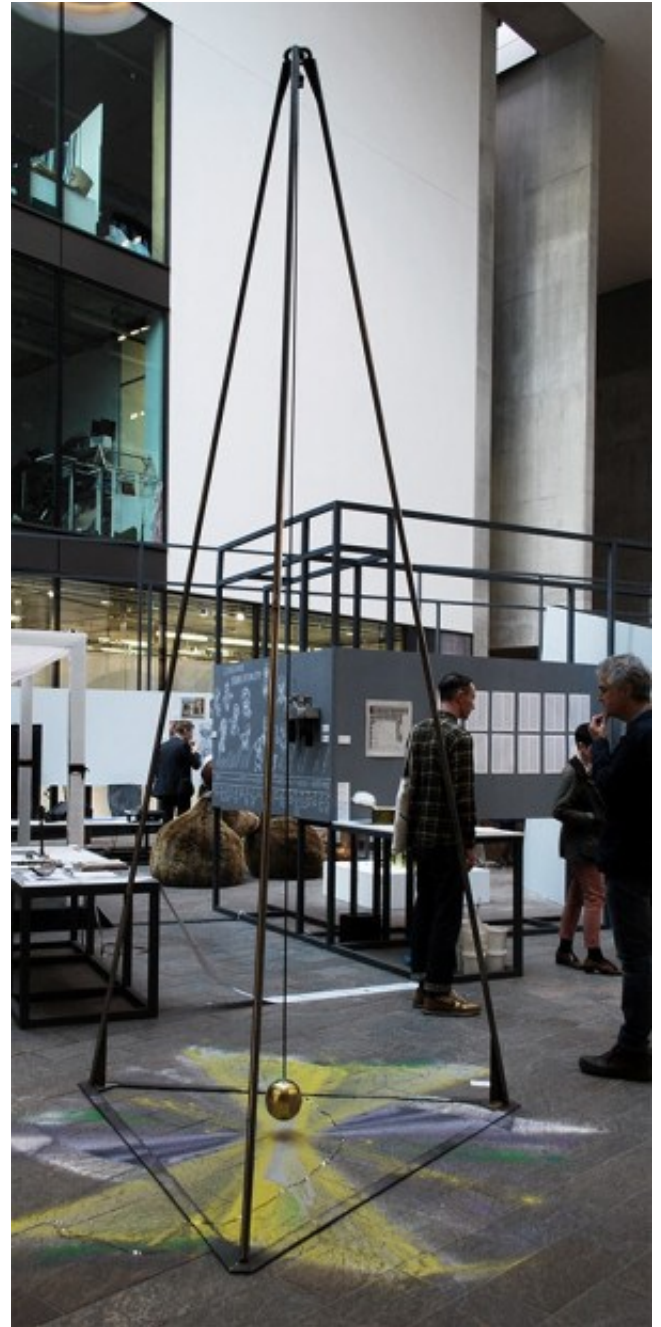
I was impressed by this large Foucault pendulum by M.A. Art & Science graduate **Roderick Macleod** – I have been fascinated by **pendulums** for some time. The Foucault pendulum is a device that was invented around 1851, and demonstrates the rotation of the Earth. Macleod's beautifully crafted hollow brass bob contains coloured powders that trickle out of a tiny hole as the pendulum swings back and forth; over a day it traces a full circle as the ground beneath the pendulum moves!



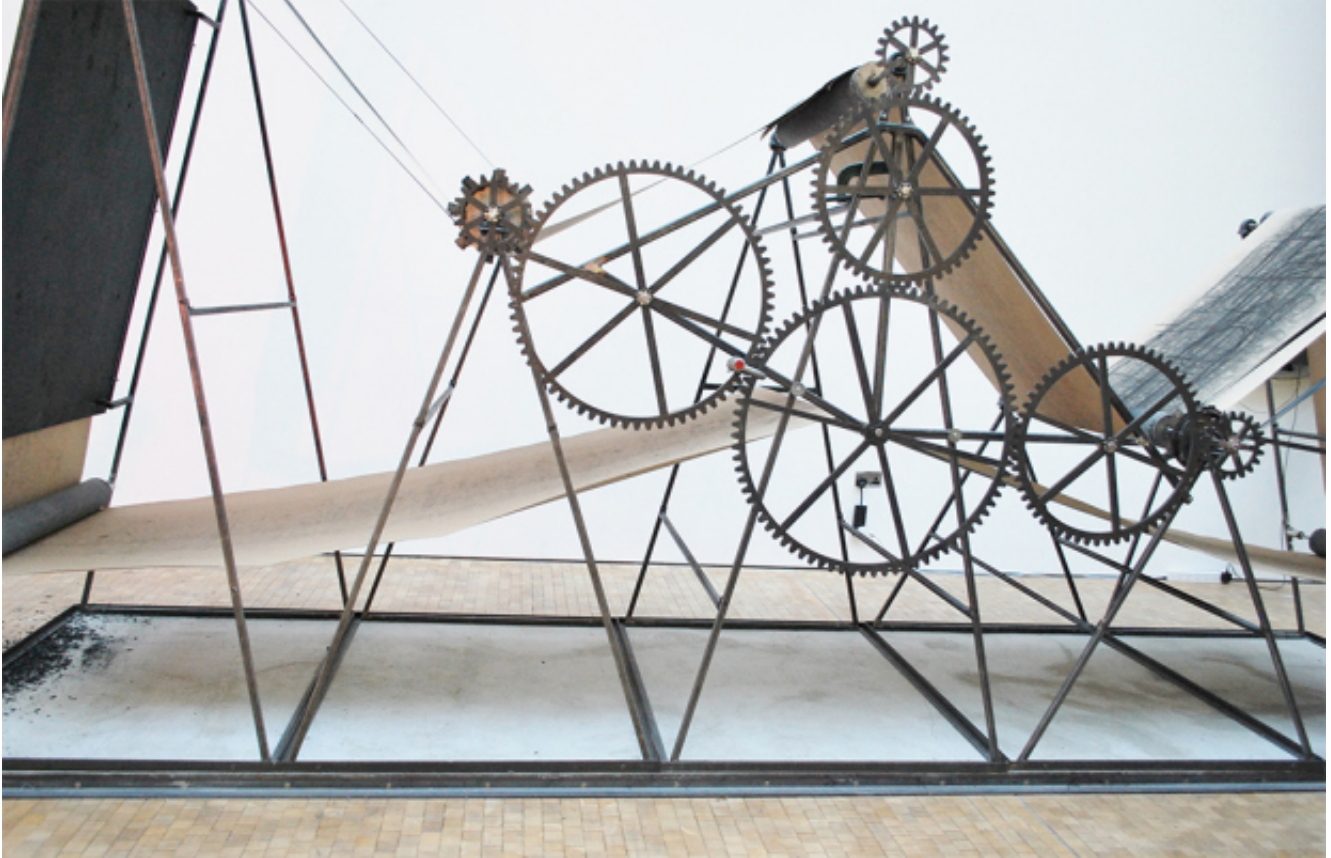
Roderick Macleod, M.A. Art & Science

sure that he made the brass bob with mechanical engineering technician Ricky Lee Brawn on his vintage metal spinning machine....

I did not
get to see
Roderick,
but I am



Roderick Macleod, M.A. Art & Science



*LAB 1 drawing machine,
Octave and Theo*

B.A. Fine Art graduates **Theo de Guelzl** and **Octave Marsal** have collaborated to produce a stunning project installation called LAB, which explores the act of **drawing** as a visceral and intensely physical activity (I am entirely in sympathy with that one!). A magnificently over-sized steel drawing machine complete with gears and rollers, reminiscent of the workings of an 18th century tower clock, is installed close to an indescribably beautiful clear acrylic tower, intricately etched with classical architectural compositions. An elegantly filmed video expresses the processes by which these artists work.

I remembered working in metalwork alongside M.A. Fine Art graduate **Teresa Braula Reis**, whose work is all about considering negative spaces in the architecture we inhabit. Reis' work is stylish and clever, conceived as understated site-specific interventions. They are designed so as to be easily overlooked – until something slightly odd makes you look again, and you begin to engage with the visual puns she has engineered.

Reis' Degree show installation in the Lethaby Gallery derives from a project called *A House Within its Shadow*: you can walk through what appears to be a doorway bounded by corporate glass panels, and then realize that it has taken you nowhere, and you are walking on the rubble of a concrete wall that has just dropped out of the doorway – quite surreal!



*LAB 2 Etched acrylic tower
Octave and Theo*



Theresa Braula Reis, M.A. Fine Art, structural intervention

Also in the Lethaby Gallery is this beautiful 8 ft. photographic collage of frames taken from old archival film by **Martin Guinard-Terrin**, M.A. Fine Art. Concealed behind the panel is a pile of pristine black coal. I immediately thought of the analogy between coal as a fossil memory of previous life and the disjointed images as fossils of previous events..... subtle, delicate and shimmering luminously on the polished metal.



Martin Guinard-Terrin, M.A. Fine Art, archive film images on aluminium

I enjoyed talking with M.A. Art & Science graduates **Charlotte Wendy Law** and **JJ Hastings**. Like most of us 'Art & Sciencers', these artists are multi-faceted polymaths, presenting their work as a laboratory of interconnected ideas that are process-based as well as conceptual.

In **Charlotte Wendy Law's** work one senses a passionate and poetic immersion in experiencing changes of state in natural materials. I particularly enjoyed her documentation of ancient iron-smelting processes, undertaken in a rural setting, entitled *Bloom Little Sister*. Bloom is the spongy metal product of heating together charcoal and a natural iron ore, such as haematite, in a clay furnace. I remember last year David Stewart hauled in a bag-full of raw red haematite from an old Cumbrian mine for this project, so it was exciting to see the result.



Charlotte Wendy Law, M.A. Art & Science, Bloom

Susan Beattie also presented the theme of changing states in metals, focusing on the aesthetics of form, in this exquisite presentation of drips of molten metal dropped into water. They look like a collection tiny sculptures, or maybe weird ocean life-forms, and I would like to have them!



Susan Beattie, M.A. Art & Science, Metal drops on sheep's wool.

JJ (Jaden) Hastings brings her experience as a scientist specializing in biological research to her cross-disciplinary practice, raising questions about what it means to be human, both in physical and in metaphysical terms. *Point of Departure* is a bioinformatics project in which Hastings has been creating 3-D imagery of human proteins, including a rotating holographic projection. I was entirely unable to photograph it, but it is well worth seeing. In our conversation Hastings described herself as a kind of contemporary alchemist and explained the signage on some of her pieces – cryptic symbols that look like those used by Renaissance alchemists, but which are in fact markers for different types of proteins. Science meets the arcane in Hastings's *Reliquary* pictured below, which contains a pig's heart (biologically similar to a human heart) from which all the proteins have been leached.

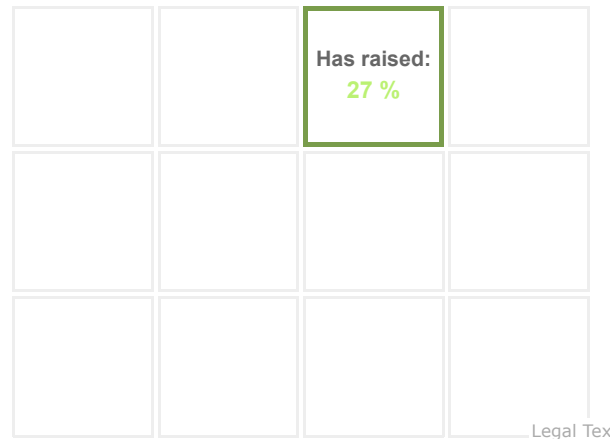


JJ Hastings, M.A. Art & Science, Reliquary

This is a very small selection of the work on show. A year after graduating, I was able to see the whole picture a lot more objectively than when I was in the thick of it, and what I came away with was a gratifying sense that what the students had achieved was exactly what motivated me to study fine art practice so late in my career.

There is the feeling of a kind of Renaissance in the direction that contemporary art practice seems to be taking: looking outward at universal human experiences, re-assessing our physical and spiritual place in the universe, and reviewing what it actually means to be a human being. And it seems the search for beauty, in the deepest sense of the word, is for many artists an integral part of the journey.

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Category : Art and Science, Central Saint Martins, Drawing, Engineering, Installation, Metalwork
 Tags : alchemy, drawing, installation, metalwork, pendulum, polymath

8 thoughts on “A review of Central Saint Martin’s Degree Show One 2014”

Walter Blackstock on June 2, 2014 at 7:35 pm said:

Hello Anita,

Thanks for this interesting selection: I was quite unaware that such work goes on and must make a note for next year! Is it open to the public?

The Foucault pendulum interested me. Strictly speaking, at the latitude of London, it should take more than a day to trace 360 deg. Tobin in “The Life and Science of Léon Foucault”, Cambridge University Press (2003) quotes 28 hr 53 min for Edinburgh (56 deg N) and 31 hr 47 min for Paris (49 deg N), so interpolating for London, I’d guess around 30 hr to trace a full circle. Apologies if that sounds pedantic!

The biography of Foucault is very good, technical but well-written: it’s also a beautifully produced book. Recommended.

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anitachowdry on June 2, 2014 at 8:26 pm said:

Hi Walter,

Pedantic is great, and thanks for the details, I and I think my readers will find this interesting.

Central Saint Martin's shows are open to the public, as are most degree shows. The Next St Martin's show will be Wed 18 – Fri 20th June at the King's Cross campus, and it will be very interesting because it will show the designer's work – architecture, jewellery, product design, textiles etc. The standard of concept and craftsmanship are always very high (again, they have state-of-the-art workshops and brilliant technicians)

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charlotte on May 30, 2014 at 2:01 pm said:

hi anita, thanks so much for the review, just wanted to let you know the metal drops were by Susan Beattie and not May. Was good to see you

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anitachowdry on May 30, 2014 at 2:09 pm said:

Thanks for that Charlotte, and apologies to Susan Beattie. I have duly corrected the error. Best, Anita

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anitachowdry on May 26, 2014 at 2:29 pm said:

In response to Anna Warren's comment: I think the London College of Printing is now the London College of Communication, part of the leviathon University of the Arts London, that also governs Central Saint Martin's. It is still a very good college.

But I agree with you, that political short-sightedness is disinheriting the very people society should be nurturing – talented young people who do not happen to belong to the minority of wealthy families who can afford the ever-increasing tuition fees. Are we heading for a cultural bankruptcy?

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anna warren portfolio on May 26, 2014 at 8:34 am said:

Most impressive work – obviously the facilities they have are wonderful! Not to mention the teaching of course.

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anitachowdry on May 26, 2014 at 12:32 pm said:

Hi Anna, yes, the facilities are amazing, and, as every student will agree, it's the top-class technicians who are really insispensible. One feels bereft of all this support once one has graduated!

All this comes at a cost, of course, and universities are increasingly under pressure to charge premium tuition fees in order to maintain this level of quality. And ultimately, we are going to have a situation where this kind of superb education is denied to the majority of ordinary young people, because it becomes prohibitively unaffordable. The education funding policies of successive recent governments has actually ensured the worst form of social engineering, and that breaks my heart.

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anna warren portfolio on May 26, 2014 at 1:10 pm said:

It is heartbreaking – the government here in Australia is proposing deregulating the universities, so fees will increase dramatically and take opportunities away from all but the most wealthy. I graduated from the London College of Printing (as it was then) in 1978. The facilities we had then were nothing like students have now, but our education was free! Education is the most valuable gift anyone can receive, and it is so short sighted to limit in the way that is bound to happen.

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