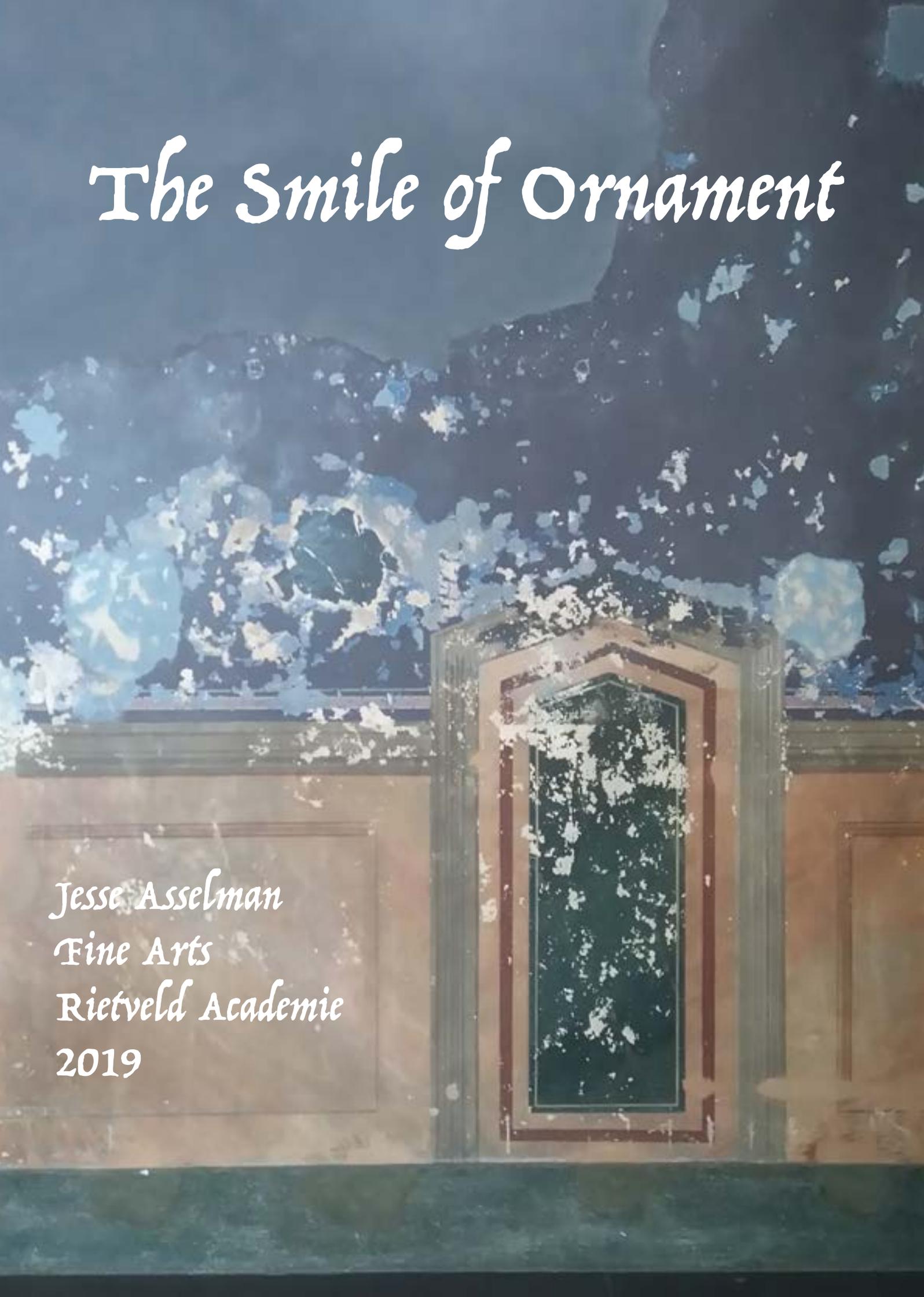


The Smile of Ornament



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You light the fire;
I'll show you something nice, –
A great ball of snow!
- Basho (1643-94)

INTRODUCTION

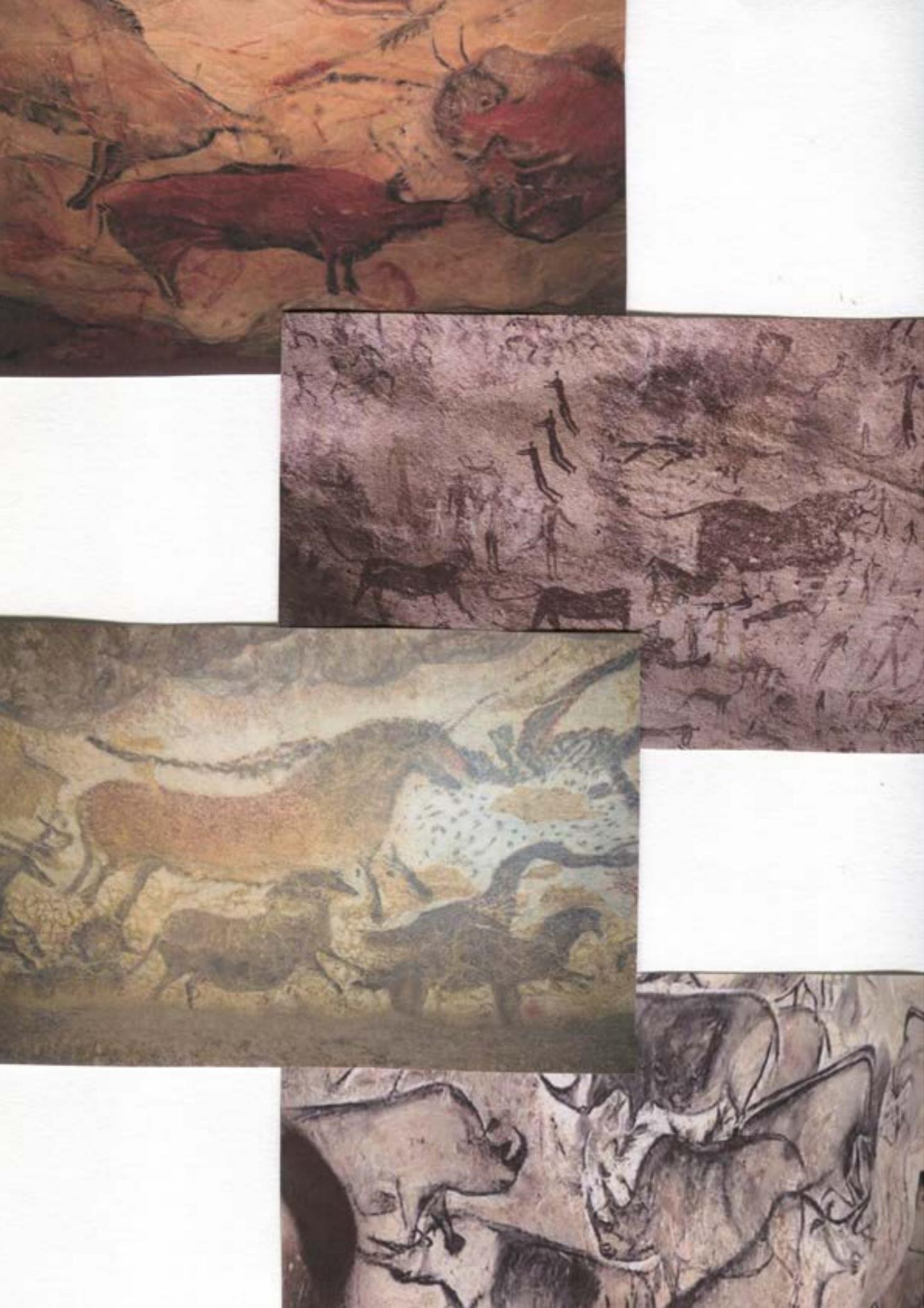
What I do now when I go to a museum with paintings is look at the backgrounds, small details or at the frames, or even at the architecture of the building. I see the world is built up of different constellations of matter that function as a construct that holds everything in relation to everything else. We have been accustomed to look at those things that have something to say (traffic signs, paintings, flowers, advertisements, etc.), but by far the most of what exists around us doesn't necessarily have anything to say (i.e. does not have a 'meaning'). It is in this context that I have developed a fascination for ornament, because ornament, in my opinion, exists exactly within this space beyond meaning. I see ornament expresses an alternative way of being in the world - a 'pagan' way, which we could call a 'down-here' spirituality as opposed to an 'out-there' spirituality. In this sense ornament is the ally of matter, the earthly, the organic, the sensorial, beauty, etc. In my opinion our contemporary world has come to so much idealize purity and abstraction that we have abstracted even ourselves from the world we live in. But this other voice, which lures us back to earth, is still alive in the different ways in which the ornamental expresses itself. I think it is important to listen to this other voice in order to reconnect with the world on a deeper level. In my artistic practice I have always been searching for immersion, both during the processes of inspiration and making, and for the viewer to experience. I try to entice an awareness of connections that we have with ourselves, each other and the world in general. I explore different mediums, most notably: performance, writing, sound, drawing, and painting, but ultimately it always serves the experience I try to create. I see a desire to leave the framed image, and for the 'image' to engulf the viewer. I consider time-basedness as an important tool to come to experience, because it provides a framework in which the work comes to life. Thus I have explored the idea of camouflage as a blending in with a surrounding world by incorporating a chamber plant, or by positioning myself all in green in a field of thistles. In drawing I have questioned the position of an image as separate from our world: where is a drawing anchored when drawn on a blank piece of paper (a blank paper having no background)? Also I have made surfaces without any focus with lots of color, as an exploration of backgrounds and immersive spaces. I have used these surfaces to clothe forms or as a costume. I try to combine these concerns with space with a bringing to life of my own world of experience, which includes drawings of forms that I have seen in the world around me or that are creations of my mind, or certain characters I experience as archetypal for me (such as 'the princess'). I see imagination has to be lived as experience. The images that we encounter in the world around us and those that we create ourselves both are part of something broader and wider than they are themselves – they are part of a world, and we, when we encounter them, share a world with them. To fully experience art we need a kind of immersivity that allows a connection with a work of art on a deeper level. We have to share a world with the work in space and time. Ornament has proved to be a guide

for me in understanding these things because of its relation to matter, time, architecture, spirituality and even psychology. There are bridges between the mental and the physical, and between the material and the spiritual, which are mediated by something that resembles or is expressed by ornament.

I would like to invite you on a journey through space (potentially including all the corners of our world) and time (past, present and future), in which we will look at how our relation to the world around us has changed, and how this is connected to human creations, and what this all means.

Within the dark stretches of time and space, there is this little spark.

FULL of life, it illuminates the universe.



BACKGROUND

Something like a door left ajar millions of years ago.
Shining bright my curious eye peeks in and finds a dream-like party.

Something begins somewhere. We need to orientate ourselves before we can start. Something grows. We need a kind of framing of the situation – a framing in space. Space can be considered as something that surrounds us – something that is outside of us – something in which we are embedded. Let us see space as a universal background in which all of matter executes its play. It is in space that all action is interaction; it is in space that all matter is connected. We can picture how at the origins all matter was connected. Now, all matter is connected. Time. There is no space without time, there is no time without space. Time is motion. In time space grows. Ultimately, time connects to origins – to the beginning of things. Time is expressed in the rhythm of things. It is through the rhythm of things that we experience time. Time and space both play an important role in experience. Understanding experience is key to understanding our relation to the world we are surrounded by. So we will see that experience will remain central throughout my thesis. We will begin with looking at the earliest traces left by Homo sapiens: Paleolithic cave paintings. These paintings could tell us something about how our ancestors experienced the world in relation to themselves. From there we will move on through time and witness how this relationship changes and what the consequences of these changes are. We will see different ways by which these relations are expressed in artistic creation.

Paleolithic cave paintings in Western Europe are considered not to have any backgrounds.¹ The images are made with pigments applied directly to the surface of the stone. We don't see a framing of the picture in any way. The animals created in this way become like beings floating in a vague unbounded space. The way a mental image comes up in the mind might be thought of in similar terms. Might we say that the image conceived in this way becomes more real? Perhaps the whole distinction between a foreground and a background was meaningless for the Paleolithic artist. Perhaps the very idea of 'an image' could be debatable in these Paleolithic cave paintings. Here, the creation of the mind coincides with material reality. The world of matter and the world of the spirit use the same space. The Paleolithic artists worked with what they found in nature; they did not create their own media.²

¹ Hugh Honour & John Fleming. *A World History of Art*. (Revised 7th Edition. London: Laurence King Publishing, 2009) p. 30-31.

² James Trilling. *The Language of Ornament*. (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2001) p. 91-93.

- Cave of Altamira (reproduction in Deutsches Museum Munich).
- Rock paintings from the Cave of Beasts (Gilf Kebir, Libyan Desert), estimated 5000 BC.
- Reproduction of Lascaux artwork in Lascaux II.
- Rhinoceros, Chauvet Cave, 30000 – 32000 years ago.



The Paleolithic world gradually made way for the Neolithic world at the end of the last ice age (around 10,000 BC). The Neolithic age developed in the Near East and was characterized by more sedentary lifestyles and the rise of agriculture. The appearance of more permanent buildings, the invention of weaving and the systematic production of pottery meant that now artistic production encompassed the whole object. This meant the birth of the *tabula rasa*: an unbroken surface with a certain size and shape.³ The significance of this is that in the creation of an image on a pre-defined surface we can distinguish between the field of the subject and the area around the subject, all within the boundaries of the medium. Perhaps we can see this as the invention of background - the moment background took the stage. Background envelops the subject. The outer edges of a background are the end of a world.

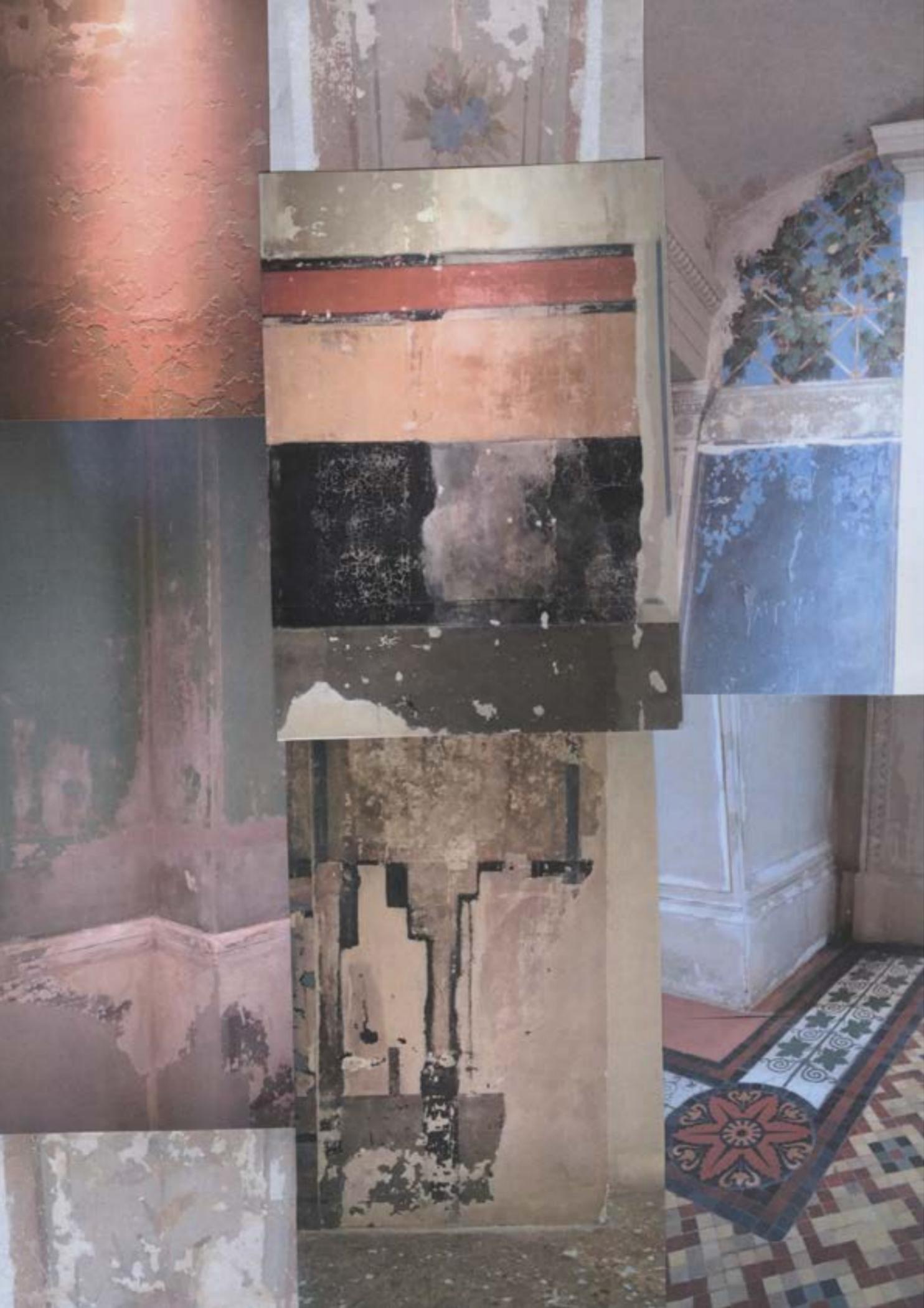
With the invention of background the image became a world in itself, separated from our world. If in the paleolithic cave painting the entire surrounding world - including the creators or viewers - take up the function of background, in the art created from a *tabula rasa* the background is incorporated in the work and in doing so the art represents a world apart from ours. The position of the viewer or maker is different with these two types of art, and this reflects a different relation to the world. We could say that with the paleolithic cave painting the viewer (or creator) and the artwork inhabit the same world - the image is on the same level as the viewer (or creator). With the Neolithic *tabula rasa*, the image moved to another world: a gap or distance formed between the viewer (or creator) and the image. The image moved out of the earthly landscape and into higher more abstract spheres. Interestingly, we can see that in the imagery produced during the Neolithic age there is also a high level of abstraction in its images.

Two forces: one centered around the earth and another leaving the earthly world. They have lived on (and fought) from the Neolithic age up until the present. They reflect two radically opposed beliefs related to the human perception of one's place in the world. Both sides acknowledge the power of images, but they differ in their attitude towards this power of images. The significance of background in this discussion lies in its central role in relating the viewer, the surrounding world and created art works. Where does the background exist? Is the background an integral part of an object or art piece, or is the entire surrounding world the background? Everything has only one background, and that background encloses a world.

Decorating pottery is a practice that goes back to the Neolithic age, and is still practiced in nearly every corner of the world. A bowl from the Neolithic in the

³ Trilling, *The Language of Ornament*, p. 95.

- Tea bowl, Style of Ogata Kenzan, Japan, mid- to late eighteenth century, Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- 'Bear' Vessel, earthenware, Found in Naxos, Greece, National Museum Athens.
- 'Duck' Vessel, rock crystal, found in Mycenae, Greece, National Museum Athens.
- Tea bowl with design of pampas grass, Ogata Kenzan, 1712-31, Japan.
- Bowl, Neolithic, found in the United Kingdom, British Museum.
- Plate, porcelain, 18th century, Nabesjima, Japan
- We've Found the Body of your Child, Grayson Perry, 2000, earthenware.



British Museum is accompanied with the following description:

The vessel is decorated all over, including interior of collar, with an unusual decorative scheme including wavy lines, criss-cross and herring-bone, all finely executed using a variety of techniques including whipped cord and other impressions, incision, slashing and fingernail impressions. ⁴

We see how the potter did not want the surface to be left bare, and had to cover it entirely with decoration; indeed, it seems to have been the most natural thing to do. By covering the entire surface with decoration the bowl acquires a texture. Also noteworthy is the physical way by which the potter engaged with the bowl. The potter has created a shape and has made the decoration to be an integral part of it. The patterns are not random, but have a relationship to the three-dimensional shape of the bowl. The patterns have a way of closing off the surface to the outside, as they do not allow any connection from outside, i.e. the design forms a whole.

A Japanese tea bowl from a much more recent time shows how things have basically remained the same. Here, there is a more markedly contrast between plant-like motif with branches and the black background. Again, the entire surface is taken into account in the process of design. A complete (small) world is created. When one holds a tea bowl like this, one holds a world in between one's fingers. If a little man were drawn in there, he would not be able to leave the cup. He would run and run over the outside and the inside of the cup, but he would never find a gate that would allow him to jump over on to your hand.

A walk through the Neues Museum in Berlin and, more interesting even than the beautiful art objects on display – which have been brought together from different corners of the world within vast stretches of time – it is the walls, ceilings and floors that grab our attention. Seemingly eaten by time, a deeply complex universe is created through the process of revealing and covering of different layers of surfaces applied over the decades. Though artificially created, it opens up the question of background. The wall is telling us that it is physically there and made of stone, that it has a history and that it is planning to stay there for a while. Unlike white walls, where objects and people are suspended in space and time, desperately searching for a connection or a meaning, these are walls that provide grounds for dreaming. Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* brings up the example of Leonardo da Vinci telling his students when in lack of inspiration to contemplate with a reflective eye the crack in an old wall, for there is a map of the universe in the lines that time draws on these old walls.⁵ In front of these walls, art objects and we, the visitors of the museum, become part of this universe of daydreaming.

Central to my thesis is the question of positioning. How do we as human beings, on a spiritual level, position ourselves in relation to the physical world around

⁴ www.britishmuseum.org, collection online, bowl, museum number 1990,1009.31
⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014) p. 163.

us? Starting with the Greeks and later taken up again in the Renaissance there has been, within Western civilization, an increasing tendency to objectify the world we live in, and thereby abstracting ourselves from it. We can imagine how by objectifying the world we have gradually put ourselves outside of it. Standing outside of the world we could finally see the world more clearly and understand it, so we thought. But somehow even then the complete picture eluded us. Where are we standing really, when we are (objectively) looking at the world as if through a microscope or a telescope? Are we not a part of that world? A certain carelessness about the world seems to have marked (Western) history. To turn around – full circle – and see another world within this world, to re-enter a space of immersion, to experience how all things are connected and influence each other, this is my dream for our world.

A vaguely outlined figure appeared in the darkness:
It was big/fat; so much it seemed to blend with its surroundings.
It could have been darkness itself there in front of me.

AN ENCHANTED WORLD

A bird flying higher and higher;
A mole digging deeper and deeper:
What are they doing?

Originally, paganism was a name given by the Christians around the fifth century AD to people relating to a different belief that was characteristically polytheistic. One of the prototypes of pagan culture are the Celts in Europe. Classical Greek and Roman historians were the first to mention the Celts from about 500 BC.⁶ The Celts did not write about themselves. Spread out over a large area of non-Mediterranean Europe the Celts were in reality diverse groups of people, but they shared certain cultural traditions to a sufficient extent for them to be given a common name. Celtic art can be found as decoration on small-scale portable and functional objects such as swords, mirrors and vessels, and it can be found in art used in the context of religious expression.⁷ Celtic art is distinctive in that it is closely integrated with its society; endorsing objects of daily use. Celtic art is decoration: there does not seem to be a distinction between art and decoration within Celtic society.⁸ The fact that the art existed in close association with daily activity suggests a vision in which the spiritual comes close to daily life. The spiritual inhabits the same space as the material world. Indeed, it is even difficult to make a distinction between the two.

Celtic art is an enigmatic art because it is so far removed from our contemporary culture; we approach it with all the preconceptions of modern Western thought.⁹ We have to be careful: everything we say could end up obscuring more and more of what we are trying to understand. When we take a look at the imagery we can find different characteristics, most notably those are: (1) an avoidance of narrative and representational themes, (2) an emphasis on form and pattern, (3) non-realistic human, animal and vegetal motifs, and (4) a symbolic quality about the imagery. Out of this we can conclude that within the imagery there does not seem to be a desire to represent the world around the way they see it; the imagery also does not seem to tell a story, or to represent a Celtic mythology: so, there appears to be another kind of message within Celtic art.

Central to the designs in Celtic art is an ambiguous interplay between forms. As we have seen in our previous discussion on background, we see forms against background. Here, foreground and background exist on the same plane. This can create an ambiguity as to what is the exact form (i.e. foreground) and what is background. The different fields keep shifting from foreground to background and back again. It is as if the image never settles. Figuration falls

6 Green, *Celtic Art*, p. 11
7 Green, *Celtic Art*, p. 9
8 Green, *Celtic Art*, p. 17
9 Green, *Celtic Art*, p. 18



into abstraction and abstraction becomes figuration. The designs also have a hypnotic quality about themselves. We see curves, whirlings, and patterns. It is essentially a communication through forms.

There is a term in English that is usually used in Anthropology in the context of rites: *liminality*. To be 'liminal' means to be 'on the threshold'. The ambiguity of the images could reflect liminality.¹⁰ We see lines balancing on the boundaries and links between worlds - the worlds of foreground and background, and the worlds of before and after. That is precisely where the images exist. Thresholds were important in Celtic myth, and the connection between the earthly and the spiritual world is thought to have been important and embodied in rituals.¹¹ Cernunnos, the antlered figure on the Gundestrup Cauldron in Copenhagen, is one of the very few god-like figures which appears in Celtic art and his combination of human and animal features may refer to the supernatural world to which he is related. He exists in a space where the boundaries between animal and human become blurred. We see the same kind of blurring of boundaries in many rituals when, for example, a shaman wears an animal costume and in a trance communicates with spirits or ancestors. Gaston Bachelard brings up the idea of an ornamented lock: that which has the power to open and shut (that which embodies the threshold) must possess the power of life.¹² The door to another world should be ornamented. Life vibrates on the borders between worlds. In *The Gates of Hell*, a sculpture by Auguste Rodin, we see quite literally a door to another world beaming with life.

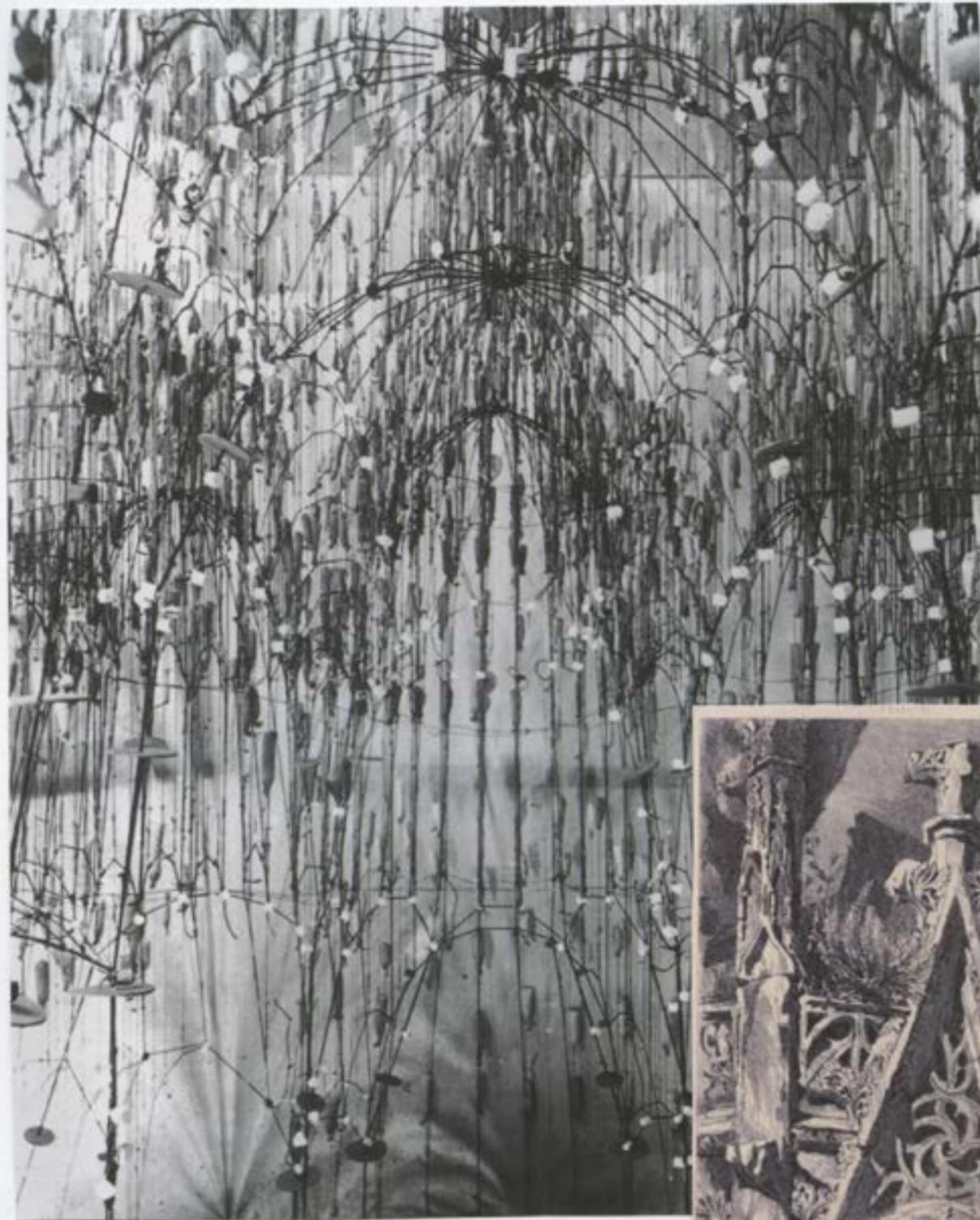
A frontier guard:
 There must be a limit to my paradise.
 In solitude he looks out over the border and writes a poem.



Celtic society was a pagan society. To a true pagan, images are the incarnation of the divine; the images themselves become objects of veneration. Paganism is idolatry, and idolatry is the worship of images.¹³ They show something of the forces that are responsible for all that we see and experience. The worship of images thus becomes the worship of the cosmos. Celtic design is, as we have seen, very ornamental. Ornament has a capacity of charging matter in any form, such as objects and architecture, with a supernatural quality. Ornament exists in an enchanted world.

Approximately around 700 AD, we encounter a time when Christianity had become the predominant religion in Europe. It is the time where we find the oldest surviving illuminated manuscripts (e.g. Book of Durrow, Book of Kells).

10 Green, *Celtic Art*, p. 117.
 11 Green, *Celtic Art*, p. 137.
 12 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 102.
 13 Jan Assmann. *What's Wrong with Images?* (From: Maria Hlavajova, Sven Lütticken, Jill Winder. *The return of religion and other myths*. Utrecht: 2009) p. 25.



These painted gospel books were to convey the word of god to an essentially non-literate people.¹⁴ Ornament was clearly of great importance, and the presence of Celtic ideas is apparent. The motifs used (i.e. spirals, curves, triskeles) in which everything within the image is intricately connected, the deliberate avoiding of copying from life and the symbolic imagery, all testify to a Celtic way of image-making. The books were made for the worshippers to admire. The art transcended the need for words. The words in themselves were less important than the glory of the word of God seen through the ornamented text. The gospel is 'sung' and it is the 'music' that is more important than the words. It seems the power of the imagery of Celtic art was acknowledged by the Christian Church and was used to lure and seduce people into the new religion. In order to speak of higher (invisible) truths, we must recourse to a kind of symbology. Ornamentation must be conceived as symbology.¹⁵

Another 500 years later (about 1200 AD) we see the emergence of a new architectural style: the Gothic. Gothic architecture has in its structural elements something that is very much like Celtic knotwork. We can identify the rib as an individual element within the Gothic, creating larger wholes by bending, intersecting or webbing. Within Celtic knotwork the ribbon fulfils the same function.¹⁶ The Gothic rib has strong ornamental qualities, but it also has a structural function. We see how in a Gothic building structure and ornament go hand in hand: structure mimics ornament, and ornament mimics structure; ornament is not something that is applied afterwards. A Gothic construction seems to have 'grown' like an organism. All the individual parts are intricately intertwined and cooperate to form a large entity. The construction seems to have come into being from within outwards (and not been put together with different parts from without inwards).¹⁷ In a Gothic building we see the structural elements take on a very ornamental quality, and on the other hand we can say the ornaments have structural functions. For John Ruskin, who was a fierce advocate of Gothic architecture, matter is in a sense alive and aspires to form.¹⁸ "Form", he writes, "may be considered as a function or exponent either of Growth or of Force [...]." For Ruskin, a (human) construction, object or architecture should have the qualities of life (i.e. the qualities of a grown object). This emphasis on form is expressed in ornament. Gaudí made for the design of the Sagrada Familia scale models using hanging chains of weighted strings. The models give an impression of the forces at play behind the structure. There is no movement, but the construction is not at rest; a certain tension exists between all the individual elements. This visualization of the forces is surprisingly ornamental in itself. What we see is perhaps something like the backbone of ornament. In the actual realization of the building you can see the flesh.

¹⁴ Green. Celtic Art, p. 164.

¹⁵ Claude Bragdon, Projective Ornament (Rochester New York: The Manas Press, 1915) p. 64.

¹⁶ Lars Spuybroek. The Sympathy of Things (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016) p. 22.

¹⁷ "For things made are separate parts put together, like machines, or things fashioned from without inwards, like sculptures. Whereas things grown divide themselves into parts, from within outwards." Alan W. Watts in The Way of Zen. London: Thames & Hudson, 1957, p. 36.

¹⁸ Spuybroek. The Sympathy of Things, p. 3.

- Hanging chain model, Antoni Gaudí, 1889.

- Part of the Cathedral of St. Lo, Normandy, John Ruskin, Etching, 1849.



At the very end of a long walk as through a river crossing The Vatican Museum, we arrive at The Sistine Chapel, with its frescos, painted for the most part by Michelangelo. We see and feel the presence of a lot of body, both in the form of fellow tourists and as seen on the walls. As a whole it is a dizzying experience. When we look up at the ceiling, we see stories from the bible being re-enacted, we see different prophets sitting majestically within the painted architectural spaces, and we see the enigmatic so-called *ignudi*. However, there are even more intriguing beings to be found. These beings are yellow and are found in between the (painted) architectural spaces that feature the different prophets. These yellow nameless beings are painted with as much care as the ignudi or the prophets. Some stare directly at us with their hollow eyes. When I saw this on my first trip to Rome it felt like a revelation. I felt very attracted to these beings, and the mystery that surrounds them. These are ornamental beings, and they come in many different forms all over the world, often positioned in relation to or as a part of architecture. To me they are as much alive (or dead) as the other characters painted on the ceiling. Their relation to architecture reveals to me their relation to space. These beings opened up to me the idea that structure and background are alive, and that this is profoundly related to ornament. Always in an active connection to the architecture, these ornamental beings have a way of reaching out (through leaning, reaching, screaming, etc.) into the open space that exists within the architecture (e.g. a room) or towards the outside (e.g. outside wall, roof). By doing this they activate the space – or bring it to life. That is also the space where you as a viewer would be. Thus on the East gate of the Stupa at Sanchi there is a Yakshi, or nature spirit, that leans from the architectural construction into the space, thereby activating it. The Notre Dame cathedral in Paris is well known for its gargoyles. A gargoyle is a grotesque carving that serves to convey rainwater from the roof away from the walls. They seem to sprout out of the architecture in a very lively manner. Ornament operates between matter and space. The following chapter will look further into this relation of ornament with the surface of matter and how it relates to pattern.

Forms growing out of - or being eaten by - other forms.
It's a great feast! And everyone is on the menu.



ORNAMENT

Nameless flowers;
We all have something to say,
But there is no voice.

We can all agree the art of the Celts is full of ornament. Ornament is in fact at the core of their visual language. The Celts were not the only ones: all art made by indigenous and aboriginal people (who are also 'Pagan') is more or less saturated with ornamentation. But things are not black and white. The world is not made up of either Aboriginal art or twentieth century Minimalism. All styles up to the twentieth century have had a more or less indulgence into ornament. Ornament, to me, incorporates the Pagan worldview; it is the antithesis of conceptualization. Ornament is the embrace of the material world and all that is part of it: emotions, ups, downs, rights, lefts, colors, movements, experience, life – all things that exist in time and space – all things that are a part of us. Something changed dramatically around the turn of the twentieth century and I wonder if it was for the best. Ornament almost disappeared, but it never really did. Ultimately, ornament will live as long as we are alive and we continue creating things, but there is no denying it has lost a great deal of its shine. We still have the ability to appreciate ornament, but we need to rediscover why we need it. It sounds strange to say that we need someone to explain to us why it is nice to enjoy happy things.

Ornament is many things; it comes in many different forms. But what is it at its core? What is its meaning? In terms of our previous discussion we can say the ornamental is that which is related to the material world par excellence.¹⁹ Matter aspires to form, and ornament is the expression of that. Form is the expression or exponent of growth or forces. However, in the process of growing, form usually finds itself incomplete, unfinished or imperfect. Besides the 'life force' that brings form, there is always the 'dying force' that breaks form down again. Ornament can be seen as form without any meaning other than that it is the expression or exponent of growth or forces.

Furthermore, there are a great deal of voices who mention ornament exists to give pleasure (James Trilling), or to make more special, or even to make you happy (Ruskin)²⁰. There is a kind of positivity, uselessness, and peacefulness connected to ornament. Away from meaning, there is room for freedom and emotion. An icon within Eastern Orthodoxy is an object of veneration. An icon shows a figurative representation that represents an abstract idea. We notice

¹⁹ Spuybroek, *The Sympathy of Things*, p. 54.

²⁰ "[...] for observe, the function of ornament is to make you happy." John Ruskin, *The Material of Ornament* in *The Stones of Venice* (London: Faber, 1981).

- Tribune sculpture, DEMAISON, Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce, Plateau d'Assy, 1946.
- Dragon head with gaping jaws on the roof of the stave church at Lom, Norway.
- Yakshi, detail of east gate, Great Stupa, Sanchi, India, 1st century BC.

the same in altarpieces within Catholicism, but the difference is that with an icon it is the image as a material object that incorporates the divine. So the image here is not merely a tool to access spirituality, the image is the focus point of spirituality. I bring this up because the image is seen as “truth” rather than the image forever being a false representation of an abstract “truth”. This relation to the image helps to understand how we relate to ornament. Ornament is imagery that does not claim to be anything beyond what it is. Ornament in itself does not make any claim to hold truth or meaning. In the absence of conceptual ideas, the emphasis on the earthly grows.

Also, in the absence of conceptual ideas, the image is ‘empty’: it can become a receptacle for ideas and thought and images. We can see that, for example, in the art of indigenous people. A high ornamental quality is often apparent in their art. We can imagine how, for them, the images and objects they create become receptacles for their spiritual stories, myths and visions. Churinga are stone or wooden objects carved or painted with pigments used by Aboriginals in central Australia. They are considered to be highly sacred objects. Here, the divine is connected to material objects. Historically, we can identify two different concepts that are related to this discussion, namely: idolatry and iconoclasm. For the iconoclast an image is a false representation of the divine, because the image stands in the way of the true spiritual experience. Here, the spiritual is related to an intangible ‘out-there’. For the idolator the power of images is a tool to bring the divine close to our world. In this case the divine is ‘down-here’. So, icons and churinga, but also, for example, relics, belong clearly to the world of idolatry. In these cases there is a particular attitude towards a material object because it is considered divine. Paganism in this comparison would be even more extreme, because with paganism the whole world of matter is in a sense divine, and the things made by human hands then carry this message through the ornamentation.

Deeply engrained in Western society is the worship of the word of God and a feeling of guilt towards turning to the material and the sensual. If Western society is one that is founded on the monotheistic belief systems where the word of God reigns, where would we find its counter-image? Nothing can exist without a certain counter-image. I believe this counter-image is essentially an expression in forms, instead of an expression in words. Within the monotheistic religions the word of God is primary, and everything else is in a sense secondary. Narrative is an important way by which words are tied to imagery and forms. We can see how, for example, in Christian art, imagery is connected to the narratives inside the religious text. However, alongside those images, Christian art is also characterized by a lot of ornamentation. Different religions have different relationships both to representational (or narrative) imagery and ornamental imagery. Islamic art, for example, has a negative relation to representational art but uses ornamental designs extensively. I see ornament has a funny position within the history of (religious) art. It has been extensively used by the dominant monotheistic religions, but it has always resisted being tied to narrative. Instead it encircled or pierced through the words: an embellishing of the word to a point of unreadability. Human history seems to have been characterized by an unquenchable desire to apply ornament to



anything that has a surface and a certain value (spiritual or otherwise).

Now let us dive deeper into the subject of ornament. Let us for clarity's sake make a distinction between the ornamental and ornament. Let us say the ornamental is a quality of something. This something is matter and it is something that can be man-made (i.e. artificial) or seen in the natural world. Ornament is intentionally man-made, but can retain a lot of the ornamental quality of the material. In my view, there are three important phases that define the visual aspects of ornaments. These phases overlap and strongly influence each other, but they can help in understanding the link between the ornamental and the physical world.

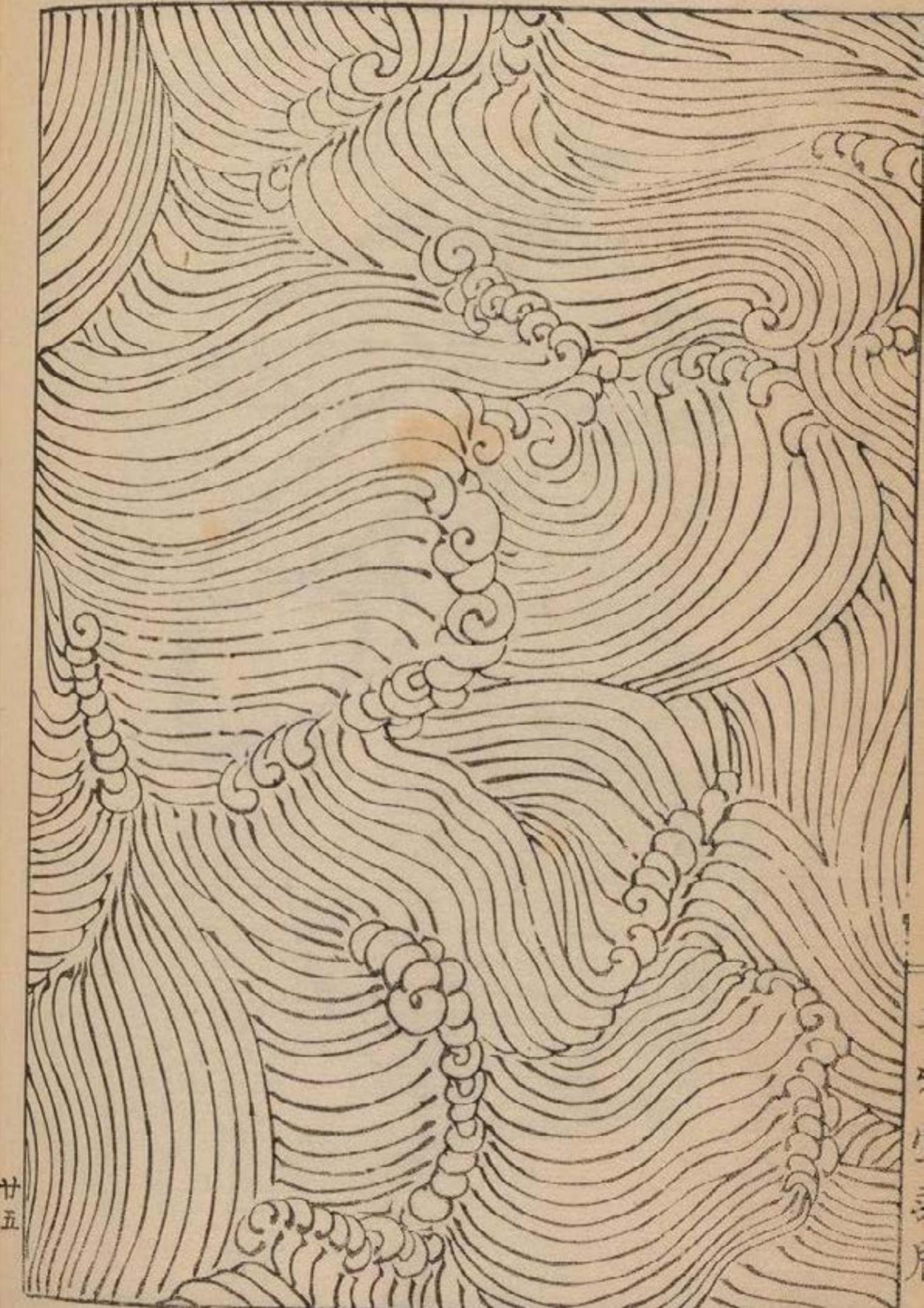
Firstly, ornament is based on the forms and patterns observed in nature. Nature is very ornamental. Ornament is to a high degree a representation of nature. Nature is a master in ornamental craftwork, and we have a lot to learn from it. Examples of its mastery abound everywhere; there is literally no limit. We, as a novice, we observe, see, look, and touch. We perceive with our senses forms and patterns created by nature. In perceiving these, they become part of us (and we perceive because they are a part of us). There is a sensuous quality to the ornamental. In this way, through the senses, the ornamental becomes an acknowledgment of the physical world.

The mind, then, processes the visual material observed in the outside world. Our nightly dreams show how our daily activity, perceptions and emotions are blended. The mind shapes the visual information derived from the outside world. The imagination here plays an important role. The imagination seems to live a life of its own: it shapes what we see, and it shapes what we create. Nobody sees the same things and no two artists or craftsmen make the same thing. Perception is selective. Certain things speak to us. We can actively search for them. Sometimes we are surprised.

Finally, in order to bring the desired shapes into the world - in order to create - one needs hands and perhaps other implements. Through physical interaction with matter we seal our connection to the earthly. We actively perceive the world we live in, and in turn we bring our imagination into the world. Here, in actively working with the hands, there is an entangling at play: an entangling of the senses to the earthly world, and through the senses and entangling of the spirit to the earthly world. There is a materiality about thought.²¹

As we have seen, ornament relates to space. Its place is on the threshold between matter and open space. Ornament relates matter to space. Physically, space is related to time. Ornament also embodies time-based processes. When we look at ornament we perceive this time within the forms, because the spatial forms have qualities related to time-based processes (e.g. growth, cracking, bending, etc.). This combination of spatiality and time-based processes gives ornament an immersive quality. When we look at a naturalistic painting, we look

²¹ Wouter Kusters, *Filosofie van de Waanzin*. (Rotterdam: Lemniscaat b.v., 2014.) p. 92.



at it as if it was a window, because it is really a representation of something, but when we look at an ornamental surface, the opposite happens: the forms reach out into the space in which you find yourself. Ornament reaches out into the surrounding space, immersing all that is in there, including you. Immersion is a breaking of the frame.

The ornamental is an essential feature of matter. Ornament is connected to matter.²² Matter takes on form and texture simultaneously. Form and texture are what we perceive of matter. The shape of a mountain, for example, has been brought about through geological forces coming from the earth and erosion coming from the outside. We, then, see the result of these forces. There are also forces at play as a plant grows into a certain shape. Through form, we feel the presence of invisible forces. These are the forces that are at the core of the physical world; it is because of them the world we inhabit is the way we perceive it.²³

The invisible forces behind all that is.
The forces that make you see what you see the way you see it.
Mysterious creatures holding up the canvas in front of your face.

The ornamental is related to perception. With our senses we generally only perceive surfaces. There is a surface-like quality about ornament. Surface has a two dimensional quality (even though there can be relief). What is seen on this surface is a resultant of characteristics of the material coming from the inside, and forces coming from the outside. A marble stone has an ornamental quality about its surface derived from the quality of the material. A layer of paint can be added to a wall (from the outside). In ornamentation all of these qualities play a role: it is a question of choice of material, what to do with it and what to add to it. What we end up with is a surface.

How do we look at a surface? Texture is that which enables us to get a grip on a surface. To discover what material it is made of; to perceive what happens on the surface in terms of colors, hues, lines, etc. I cannot help but think of the monoliths appearing in *2001: A Space Odyssey* by Stanley Kubrick. In different stages of human evolution we see how the humans encounter a stone of which they cannot identify the material: it is so smooth, so black, so otherworldly. It is like the physical meeting with an abstract idea, and every encounter is accompanied by an internalization of this abstract idea. Every stone functions as a gateway to new era, and in that sense a revolution.

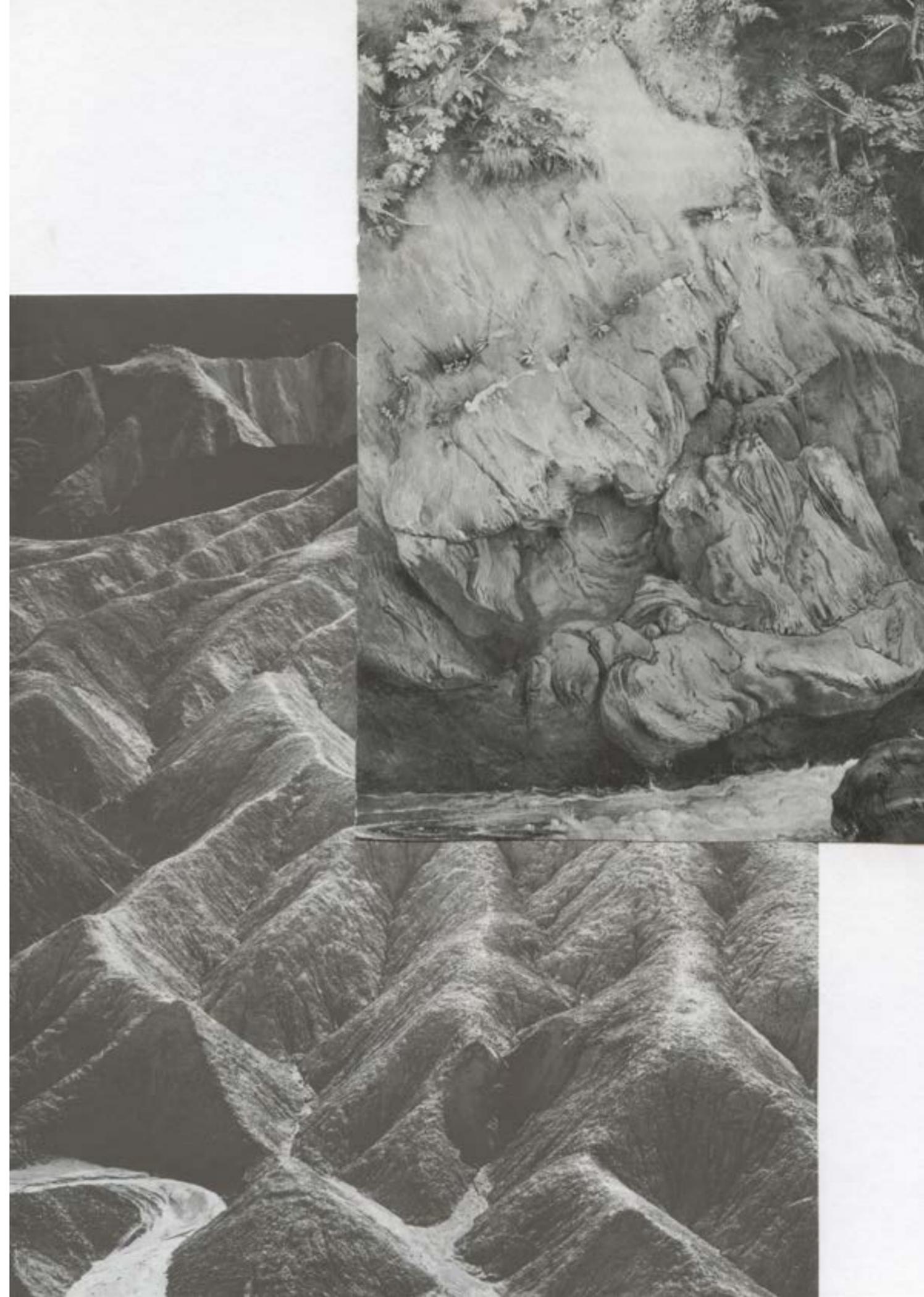
It seems lines have a central role in our perception. We perceive the earthly world through surfaces. Surfaces have texture. Texture is made out of lines.

22 Spuybroek, *The Sympathy of Things*, p. 54.

23 Spuybroek, *The Sympathy of Things*, p. 56.

- *Zabriskie Point*, Death Valley, California, picture by Ansel Adams.

- *Study of Gneiss Rock*, Glenfinlass. John Ruskin. Pen, brown ink, ink wash (lamp-back) and bodycolor, 47.7 x 32.7 cm. 1953.



Lines do not only exist in the world of abstraction, to delineate objects and to distinguish them from their surrounding space, but they are also part of matter, because they constitute the texture on the surface. So, the realm of lines exists somewhere in between the abstract and the concrete.²⁴ Through texture, the surface of a material acquires a kind of depth. William Morris was well aware of this relation of lines to structure and of how lines are perceived psychologically. This is perhaps the reason why his designs for wallpaper are so successful. In his *Some Hints on Pattern-Designing* (1881), Morris mentions, "One of the most important parts of pattern-designing", is "the making of a recurring pattern for a flat surface." He also makes clear from the beginning that decoration of a surface should have suggestive qualities rather than qualities of imitation (of nature). Leonardo Da Vinci created a wall and ceiling painting in the Sala Delle Asse in Milan. There we see a more naturalistic and trompe-l'oeil representation of intertwining plants, leaves and strange gold colored geometric forms, and behind that a blue sky. The very intention is different; one that goes radically against the ideas William Morris sets out. Morris mentions in his *Some Hints on Pattern-Designing* that from the Renaissance on people got confused about ornamentation (its purpose, its function, etc.). I do not think the Sala Delle Asse is a failure; I think it is rather intriguing because of this strange combination of the ornamental and the naturalistic. Later we would see more of that (in for example sixteenth and seventeenth century still life painting). When decoration and trompe-l'oeil come too close to each other, I am always left with a strange sense of wonder. A hyper-realistic still life with flowers and some insects remains strangely silent. The flowers have nothing to say. A sense of emptiness takes hold of me, which fills me with a kind of anxiety. That anxiety of course is the opposite of what ornament stands for.

When an image has a three-dimensional perspective quality, the depth in the image enables connection between the different parts of the image. We see a mutual embedding of different parts. We see a three-dimensional image and we imagine a three-dimensional space that connects all the different parts of the picture in the same ether. In the absence of three-dimensional perspective, (i.e. in texture, patterns) a sense of fragmentation emerges.²⁵ We cannot see how the different parts of the picture connect other than through two-dimensional boundary lines between different parts. In a way there is less information about how the different parts connect and communicate with each other. A certain ambiguity emerges as both foreground and background begin to inhabit the same plane. The different parts start living more independently. Perception and imagination then determine to a larger extent what is seen. Thus, an image with a two-dimensional orientation is connected to a sense of fragmentation within the image. Because of this, the different fragments lose their connection

24 Spuybroek, *The Sympathy of Things*, p. 60.

25 Kusters, *Filosofie van de Waanzin*, p. 151.

- Sala Delle Asse, Leonardo Da Vinci, tempera on plaster, 1498.

- *Acanthus wallpaper design*, William Morris for Morris & Co., 1875.

- *The Ardabil Carpet*, medallion carpet, Safavid, Iran, 1539-40, Victoria & Albert Museum. Inscription: *Except for thy threshold, there is no refuge for me in all the world. Except for this door, there is no resting-place for my head.* (the poet Hafiz)

- *Still-Life with Bouquet of Flowers and Plums*, Rachel Ruysch, 1704, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.



to the broader and functional whole. When looking at the different fragments independently they become more important in themselves (i.e. they do not 'merely' have the function to make the whole picture understandable). The fragments become more enigmatic and mysterious with the absence of information of their three-dimensional qualities and their relation to the other fragments.

We find two paintings by Henri Matisse. *The Dessert: Harmony in Red* (1908) shows a lady arranging fruit on a table. She would have been floating in a dense red space, if it was not for the growing stalks and flowerpots that constitute the patterns on the surface of the tablecloth and the wallpaper. The stalks and flowerpots function as an anchoring of space in which the lady can orientate herself. In *Flowers and Ceramic Plate* (1913), one of the early still-lives of Matisse, we see the flowers growing into a textureless blue space. The flowers provide structure within the picture plane. In both paintings we see the workings of a growing something acting within an undefined field of color. The flowers and stalks – whether really alive or not – are not solely decorative, but are also structural. There are pictures made of his studio later in his life. We see cut-outs stuck to the white walls. Through form and color the cut-outs give a structure to the wall that was not there before. They communicate with and accentuate the architectural qualities of the room, such as a door, a painting, or a cupboard. The cut-outs guide us and connect the different parts of the room and make it a whole that envelops us.

Then there is also the question of what surface is adorned with ornament. It can of course be a wall or an object, but it can also be a person. I think its workings remain essentially the same. Ornament on the body becomes a communication of nameless invisible things. For example tattoos or jewelry can communicate invisible things felt or experienced; costumes for a king or queen can convey status (that is invisible on the naked body); during rites of passage the invisible connections to the cycles of life are visualized. Ornament is a communication to the space around and to time but ultimately also to further dimensions – the dimensions that constitute life and experience.

-Henri Matisse's studio at the Hôtel Régina, Nice, 1952.
-*The Dessert: Harmony in Red*, Henri Matisse, 1908.
-*Flowers and Ceramic Plate*, Henri Matisse, 1913.





A SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

At the intergalactic ball
Mother Earth likes to wear her expensive jewelry.

When coming around a corner in the Tropenmuseum Amsterdam we are faced with an extraordinary being. It seems to have come from another world. The information card says: *Astral ancestor*. 'Astral' meaning: related to a nonphysical realm of existence. That would mean that we, if this were one of our ancestors, would have originated in a totally incomprehensible dimension. I like to believe we have always continued to carry this dimension (this nonphysical realm) inside of us and that we are able to visualize and recognize this world inside as well as outside of us. Ancestors are very important in most pagan religions and are central to the way they view the world. If everything, including humans, animals, mountains, and rivers is descendent from the ancestral beings, then everything is related to you – everything is a cousin of yours.²⁶

Let us explore this idea of extra dimensions. Claude Bragdon introduces us to projective ornament: ornamental forms and patterns derived from looking at the fourth dimension and beyond. He speaks of a hyperspace related to our space in three dimensions; the idea of a direction at right angles to every known direction. This space, he says, is essentially linked to experience.²⁷ Experience can be seen as an adding of time to space, but in reality it is more complex than that, because both space and time have, next to their objective physical qualities, strong subjective qualities. He shows how form lines suggest they are projection lines of higher dimensions. Here we can see that in two-dimensional or three-dimensional ornamental designs lurks the representation of higher dimensions. These higher dimensions can be thought of as to represent invisible connections between things and experiences.

In many places all over the world we find traditions of drawing (linear) figures on the ground. We find the making of Rangoli and Kolam in India and South-East Asia. Usually made with dry rice, they intend to bring good luck or good fortune to the home. In the province of Drenthe in the Netherlands there was in the nineteenth and early twentieth century the curious custom of making sand carpets inside homes. In Vanuatu, an archipelago in the Pacific, we find the practice of sand drawing, which is recognized by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Many of these creations have a temporary character. We see acts of magic performed. The designs have an immaterial quality, but at the same time they inhabit material space. We witness the creation of forms that have the quality of having grown through time and

²⁶ John Reid a senior research fellow at the University of Canterbury's Ngai Tahu Research Centre, in a TEDx talk at TEDx Queenstown - Sense of Place 2014. He talks about the world of animism and explains it's not about belief but experience. He explores the way in which indigenous and Western cultures shape their identity and the identity of the world around them.

²⁷ Bragdon, *Projective Ornament*, p. 11, p. 15.



therefore create space. They can be seen as an act of communication with something immaterial. The flowering of something invisible. A bouquet of flowers for the spirits.

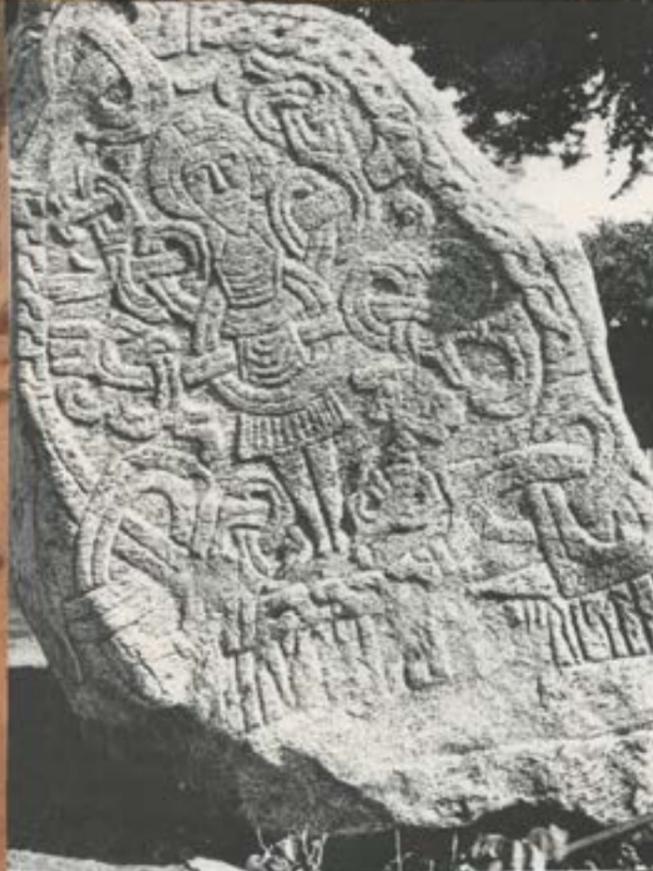
We can speak of the surface of a material having a texture made up of lines. On a grander scale the earth is a surface too. The material the earth is made of is stone. Stone has the quality of being a strong material resistant to erosion. Geology is a study of the solid earth and the processes by which they change over time.²⁸ We can see the vast stretches of time engrained in stone. Remember the idea of a mountain being the resultant of different forces. The entire surface of the earth can be thought of in similar terms: the surface shows a texture made up of stone and earth, and these reflect forces that have been at work for millions of years and are still going strong. When human beings began to walk the face of the earth – to walk over the texture of the earth – they experienced the surface of the earth. They could identify all kinds of characteristics: Water, cracks, plants, the horizon, etc.; and a large amount of lines. As noted above, lines are so important for us in order to make sense of things: it is through lines that things are connected (and disconnected). A line can define its own form and at the same time be a part of a larger, more complex form.

Stones. Stones as anchor points into the physical world; stones as the signs of an anchoring of our spirituality in the material world. The earth is made of stone. Stone and earth are the components that constitute the world as we experience it.²⁹ Stones of bygone times still ornate the landscape in many places of the world, think of megaliths, bridestones, menhirs, or rhinestones. They have been placed and sometimes carved into by people. They give the feeling they do not stand on their own; that they have a special relation to the surrounding environment, and perhaps the earth itself and beyond. A lot of research and speculation has been done on the possible relation of these ancient stones to the magnetic field of the earth, or to celestial events.³⁰ The extend to which this is true is less important than the significance of these ideas. These stones can be seen as symbols of a time in which the mystery of life and the universe was dealt with in a different way. We see a spirituality that points at that which is material. This is matter that points at itself.

Human beings always seem to have felt that material reality is but one reality. A kind of flip side to our consciousness haunts us. The whole of the experience of our being is made up of a conscious part and an unconscious part. There is a part of us we can control, and there is a part of us that seems beyond control – and which seems filled with mystery. With the rhythms of every day we alternate

28 Wikipedia entry: Geology.
 29 Lippard, *Overlay*, p. 15.
 30 Lippard, *Overlay*, p. 26-29.

- A Rangoli painted on the occasion of Diwali, a popular Hindu festival.
- Zandtapijt, late 19th century, Drenthe, The Netherlands.
- Kolam in front of a house in Tamil Nadu during housewarming.
- Sand drawing (Sandroing) in Vanuatu.
- Alpana (painted Rangoli) in Rajshahi, Bangladesh.
- Warriors in Ambush, Aboriginal Mystic Bora Ceremony.





between day and night, but there is also some of the 'nightly' in the day, and some of the 'daily' in the night. We are not self-sufficient systems, but we are intricately connected. All of our experiences and sensations are derived from interactions with the world around us. The interconnectedness of all things is central to our place in the world. Stone can symbolize this interconnectedness of individual things and experiences, because every stone is unique, and yet so universal.

How much body do we have in all this? How much of our self can be said to be ours? In many of the ancient cave paintings there are scarcely any representations of human beings, and the few that are seen are painted more like stick figures – not naturalistically. I think this is significant and reflects a different relation to the self: a self that is open to the outside world, to a point where the outside world (i.e. the environment) becomes a part of the inner experience. The true self (or soul, or spirit) can be represented as a line; the body encompasses the entire surrounding world. The body is an integral part of the world. The body is the world; spirits haunt the body. Standing erect in a landscape a monolith becomes the representation of a soul within its environment.

Now, what relation is there of this earthly talk with ornament? What do these stones have to do with ornament? Ornament is made to give pleasure.³¹ Its aim is to beautify or to make more special. Beauty is related to the visible and the sensual, and attracts us to the material world.³² Here we are again at the core of spiritual dualism. Ornament, with its appeal to the senses, is the ally of the earthly. An emphasis on form, at the expense of (conceptual) content, turns our attention away from abstract concepts towards a materially-bound existence. Form incorporates the expression of opposite forces - the expression of a dualism that permeates all levels of our universe. There is a thin line between representation and abstraction, appearing and disappearing, subjectivity and objectivity, realism and fantasy, light and dark, consciousness and unconsciousness, life and death, fate and free-will, the actual and the potential,

31 Trilling, *The Language of Ornament*, p. 6.

32 Assmann. *What's Wrong with Images?* p. 28-29.

(page 36)

- Stone of the Pregnant Woman, Baalbek, Libanon.
- Iron pillar of Delhi, New Delhi, India.
- *Dolomit zugeschnitten*, Ulrich Rückriem, near Petrikirche, Münster, 1977.
- Burial place of the Viking Age at Lindom Hills, Denmark. There are 628 graves, 200 of which are marked by the outline of a ship in stones.
- *Water Source Sculpture*, Isamu Nogushi, granite, 1965, National Museum Jerusalem.

(page 37)

- Ryoan-ji, Kyoto, Japan, 1450.
- Carnac stones, Carnac, Bretagne, France.
- Runic stone raised by King Herald of Denmark, Jelling. It shows the crucifixion of Christ, but as if in bonds, in accordance with pagan tradition.
- Stonehenge, Great Britain.

(page 38)

- Detail of Celtic Bronze Flagon found in Durrnberg, Austria, late 5th century BC.



sleep and wakefulness, the straight line and the curve. Form is perceived through lines. Form is at the core of ornament. Ornament is a communication through form. Ornament is the playground of the imagination. The phantoms of the mind are ornamental. Silent forms appearing in the darkness. If our mind is so deeply entangled with the material world in which it exists, then much of what is perceived in the material world finds its way into the mind. The mind does not solely think and feels in words. The words that the mind speaks are conceptual articulations of wordless experiences – experiences derived from its entanglement with everything around. The strange (wordless) outside world haunts the mind.

I seek and I don't find myself. I belong to chrysanthemum hours, neatly lined up in flower-pots. God made my soul to be a decorative object. I don't know what overly pompous and selective details define my temperament. If I love the ornamental, it must be because I sense something there that's identical to the substance of my soul.

-Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*³³

We can adorn the surface of the earth with earthly ornaments. We can see this happening in Land and Earth art (e.g. Spiral Jetty by Robert Smithson). We also see it in the Nasca lines in Peru. These creations are all made to communicate something. One can imagine these creations have not been made for human eyes, but for special pairs of eyes somewhere in the sky. Our spirit projects life everywhere (because that is how we connect to things), and we even project it into the sky. The NASA Viking 1 orbiter has actually found a face on Mars. On the picture we see this face staring out at the Martian sky, perhaps looking at the blue globe called Earth. We actually start wondering who is looking at who? Who is bringing life to whom? The face on Mars is of course a projection of our inner experience – our inner experience projected into the outside world, but what if we were ourselves a projection of the imagination or experience of entities outside of us? Here grows the idea that everything brings everything to life. Our cosmos as a collective play of the imagination. All matter, stars, mountains, hurricanes, UFO's, tablespoons and dogs, dreaming each other into existence.

The outside world haunts the mind. Something from outside – from elsewhere – speaks to us. There have always been people who seemed to have a connection to another level of consciousness or existence; think of shamans, mystics, certain religious people, and some artists. Some go into a trance or perform certain rituals, others are led by intuition, and there are those that hear voices (involuntarily). We witness the creation of images that often share certain similarities to each other, and more importantly to our discussion: this imagery frequently shows ornamental qualities. Could it be that in the making of ornament, contact with a similar realm is made? Does ornament contain traces of this other realm?

33 Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*. (London: Penguin Books, 2015) p. 122.

- Long Man of Wilmington, hill figure, England.
- An aerial view of Robert Smithson's "Spiral Jetty" in Utah.
- Cydonia Mensa (Face on Mars), image taken by NASA Viking 1 orbiter.
- Lines and Geoglyphs of Nasca and Palpa, Peru.
- Westbury or Bratton White Horse, hill figure, England.

The Venice Biennale 2013 shows an attempt at reconnecting spirituality with art. Next to looking at contemporary artists it also looked at practices of art making outside the frame of the art world. So it looked at graphic works of tribes in the Pacific Ocean, and gave a stage to anonymous Tantric paintings and the so-called Shaker Gift Drawings. It also featured many artists that had or have an outspoken relationship to this other realm. Matt Mullican, for example, is known for his performances where he brings himself into a hypnotic state, in which he then produces all kinds of drawings and writings. Auguste Lesage was a painter during the first part of the twentieth century, who claimed to hear voices telling him what to paint. The more contemporary Guo Fengyi had visions and made drawings of ghost-like beings. She saw herself as a medium and said that "the message comes from heaven".³⁴

Earlier, in 1989, another important exhibition was held in the Centre Pompidou entitled *Magiciens de la terre*. Western art was put on the same level as art outside of the art world; half of the artists were from non-western regions. Whether successful or not, it was an attempt at opening up to an alternative vision on art.

34 Venice Biennale 2013 catalogue, p.394.

- *L'esprit de la pyramide*, Auguste Lesage, oil on canvas, 1926.
- *Numa*, Guo Fengyi, colored ink in ricepaper, 2005



AN ANCHORING IN THE FUTURE

The gentlemen of Tadpole Galaxy
Moving in mysterious ways.

Let us now take a look at the contemporary world. There is no denying that in a relatively short time enormous changes have taken place and are taking place. We are moving fast. Time is going faster and faster. Progress and change are the giant bulls pursuing us as in a nightmare. They make us run and stumble and fall. We are out of breath, but we get up and keep on running through fields, villages, cities, forests, etc. until we realize we have lost our way. But there is no time to sit and think!

Now let us, like most of us tend to do, think of time being linear. Imagine a line growing straight towards infinity. But under the influence of all sorts of physical forces and processes, inherent to nature and matter, the line curves. The line keeps growing and curving until it reaches its 'tail' (like a serpent eating its tail: the ouroboros³⁵). We have a line extending and then arriving where it started. We can think of time being circular. Every revolution becomes the beginning of a new cycle. Patterns of day and night, sleeping and waking, eating, drinking, breathing, life and death etc. suggest that there is a continuation of repeating cycles originating sometime in the past and extending into an indefinite future. A circular time can be seen as the pagan time. The circular perspective of time is primarily about the present, and extends only to a limited extend into the future and the past. It is how our ancestors must have experienced time: a feeling of continuity and of the all-encompassing cyclic nature of things must have been dominant. The world (the universe) was something big, mysterious and full of gods and one better live in harmony with it. Circular time is the time of the universe and the crux of this story is that ornament lives in circular time. Ornament has in its very being a totally different agenda than the world's troubles over progress and change. Thus we can think how our ancestors lived in a circular time frame, and how they at some point, gradually or not so gradually, left it and went on a special kind of lonely and linear trip. The attempt to get rid of all ornament in the twentieth century also became an attempt to efface the roots that connect us to where we come from. Slowly, we ourselves become like a piece of art floating in a white cube, severed from the ties (the entanglements) that are the source of life. At the same time I am also well aware that contemporary art is very conscious about context – about the positioning of an art piece in relation to social, political, aesthetic, etc. issues –, but these are connections that take place on a more abstract level – the level of discourse around the work – and they are usually not present physically or on a sensorial level.

35 The ouroboros, an alchemical symbol, by Jung explained as an archetype and related to a devouring of oneself and turning oneself into a circulatory process. It is a symbol for assimilation and integration of the opposite (i.e. the shadow). It is a devouring and a giving life to itself; it is derived from the clash of opposites; it is the 'One'. Carl Jung, *Verlossing in de Alchemie* (Olten: Walter-Verlag AG, 1985) p. 68-69.

In 1976, Charles Simonds wrote a fictive ethnographic artist book *Three Peoples*, which tells the story of three different people living in three different kinds of dwelling each characterized by a different relation to time, that is the past, the present and the future and how they relate to each other: the Linear People, the Circular People and the Spiral People.³⁶ The Linear People had a way of quite literally building in a linear fashion over the landscape from past to future. The Circular People were characterized by a life and construction of society that followed the cycles of the seasons, in a way not unlike pagan communities. They had a rather stable society and lived a life of security. Every year they would live up to the winter solstice, at which a great orgasmic celebration would take place in the central circular dome. After that a new year would start not unlike the one before. The Spiral People lived in a world perhaps closest to our own, characterized by a gambling with natural resources and a fixation on the future. Their goal was "an ecstatic death ... to achieve both the greatest height possible and to predict the very moment of collapse." Interesting is how in these stories the different relations to time shape the landscape.

Here we are, still on the ship;
On the lookout,
But no-thing seems to see us.

We can see a continuation of pagan traditions persisting through the ages, and this is especially apparent within ornament. The Green Man, for example, is a motif that is depicted in many Christian churches (especially in the United Kingdom).³⁷ He is characteristically depicted as a face made out of leaves or surrounded by leaves, and frequently there are branches that sprout out of his mouth. He is arguably of Celtic origin. There is no source to disclose their real meaning, but it is often being interpreted as a symbol of rebirth or fertility. These are an example of the lively nature spirits that roamed the lands of our ancestors, connecting the earth to the cycles of life. But I like to think that the Green Man, perhaps symbolizing our deeper nature, is still with us, and I like to dream about the moment in which he will take over – a moment where, as in a kind of explosion, there will be a total shift of perspective within our consciousness (much the same way as the earth at approximately every million years quite suddenly and for mysterious reasons reverses its magnetic field)³⁸. This will indeed be a dramatic moment, but as we will all be so immersively involved in this event, I expect we will hardly notice anything. But it will have been a decisive turn – and an escape back into where we come from. We will somehow be biting our tail in a reconciliation with nature – our nature and nature in general.

But I was no longer the man I had been, for a strange being grew through me. This was a laughing being of the forest, a leaf green

36 Lippard, *Overlay*, p. 99.

37 Alastair Sooke, in a short BBC documentary: *The surprising roots of the mysterious Green Man*, 2019.

38 Robert Lawlor, *Voices of the First Day* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International, Ltd, 1991) p. 94.

daemon, a forest goblin and prankster, who lived alone in the forest and was itself a greening tree being, who loved nothing but greening and growing, who was neither disposed nor indisposed toward men, full of mood and chance, obeying an invisible law, and greening and wilting with the trees, neither beautiful nor ugly, neither good nor bad, merely living, primordially old and yet completely young, naked and yet naturally clothed, not man but nature, frightened, laughable, powerful, childish, weak, deceiving and deceived, utterly inconstant and superficial and yet reading deep down, down to the kernel of the world.

- Carl Jung, *The Red Book*³⁹

We are now well into the twenty-first century and the presence of a virtual world (the cloud, internet, social media, algorithms, etc.) is present all around. We have been talking about dimensions, experience, ornament, matter, pattern, forms, space, texture and more, but definitions tend to blur when they grow old and overgrown. This virtual world is the cause of a lot of confusion. All these wise words, all these old books: how long will they be able to support us? We look into screens now, and screens stare back at us. We are almost absorbed by their gaping eyes, and these screens have nothing to say. What is this virtual world? How do we relate to it? Is it something like another dimension? How can we fit this into our previous discussions?

I believe it is through the concept of experience that we can understand the virtual world best. I think in experience we do not make a distinction between material stuff and virtual stuff. Both can bring about experience, and it is through experience that we associate and connect to these things. It would be a misconception to see the virtual world as a continuation of the religious idea of an intangible 'out-there' God the creator. This virtual world is intangible for our body, but our spirit swims just as easily through the virtual world as through the material world. The virtual world is an immersive environment. But where is the anchoring in all this? When we walk the face of the earth we are tied to our body, and this body can function as a kind of safety anchor so that we do not drift too far away. When we plunge into the virtual world, can the material of our earth still function as an anchor?

What we have in front of us is space – a kind of open space. Open space can accommodate the spirit. The dreaming is all out there, no need to close our eyes and shut the door; no need to run away. We observe the possibility of boundless fantasy. Nameless forms conversing or dancing with each other. With the coming of the virtual world, we have begun to dream with our eyes open. The dream world is deeply connected to the night, to our unconscious, but there has also always been, as I have written earlier, 'some of the nightly in the day'. We have always been daydreaming (traces of it are to be found throughout history). Let me say daydreaming is part of the nature of all living things (if only because it is such a beautiful thought). But now, slyly, this dreaming is

³⁹ Carl G. Jung. *The Red Book* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009) p. 272-273.



- A carving of the Green Man in St. Stephen's Church in Old Radnor.
- A Green Man on the capital of a column in an English church.

becoming a part of reality: not the reality of a drawing, but the reality of an environment. We can dream reality with our eyes wide open now and we can meet each other through our dreams. The dreaming is dangerously close to reality, and is almost overflowing into it; like in the Japanese animation film *Paprika*, by Satoshi Kon. There we see how scientists have developed a device by which psychologists can enter the dreams of their patients. But things go dramatically wrong and we witness how an unstoppable dream parade runs from the dream world gradually into the real world, collecting dreams from everybody. The real world, then, becomes indistinguishable from the dream world, and, except for the heroes of the story, nobody is aware of this blending of the dream and the real.

With the virtual world we have touched the monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Something incomprehensible is happening, which will shift things dramatically. I believe it has something to do with our relationship with the universe. As we have discussed, two different major shifts in human perspective have taken place over the course of the centuries: a shift in spatial perspective and a shift in the relationship with time. We have moved from a consciousness of being an integral part of the world in space and its cyclical nature in time to a position all our own. With the help of the virtual world we are trying to build a new paradise – just for us – filled with all of our dreams.

In the golden skies of medieval painting
A giant castle overflowing with dreams.

I have a dream. Most of us look extensively at screens in our daily life. I like to think that, next to the seemingly functional aim of this activity, the shadow world of our unconscious and dreams is reflected into this virtual world. The silent screens we stare at are open and receptive to our dreams. Gradually, and exponentially, this shadow world grows in proportion to the amount of dreams that is added. At a certain point, the amount of dreaming will surmount the amount of reality. We will have reached a 'critical mass' of dreaming, and that would be the turning point at which our deeper nature (our unconscious) will surface to the level of reality and matter. Unconsciousness will flow into our waking world. There will be no stopping it! We will slumber into a kind of sleep... only to reawake again in some undefined time in the future. I do not believe there is any morality or message connected to this dream, but I can see someone smiling at us.

There is an old being, far away somewhere in the dry mountains,
smiling in my direction.
Like a god it knows no past or future;
It sees the constellations and it understands;
Its movements extend into the world;
Its thoughts create waves of sound;
Its eyes make the sun go up and down.

CONCLUSION

Ornament has been the entry into an unfolding of a different way of looking at the world. Because a different perspective from which to look at things has such all-encompassing consequences – everything changes everything else – there seems to be no end to the discourse, but I have tried to convey this world view to you by bringing examples from a wide variety of places in space and time that illustrate different aspects of this perspective of the world. In so doing we have touched upon background, we have walked through architecture, we have immersed ourselves in space and time, we have touched the earth, we have seen strange creatures, we have dreamed, we have imagined and we have questioned our position to all of these things multiple times. I see this thesis as the nucleus of a snow crystal that could potentially grow and grow as more and more things are added to it, but it always remains centered around a similar unnamable center point.

For me personally the research has further shaped my thinking or philosophy in regards to art. The key concepts I often deal with in my artistic practice, namely experience, immersivity, time and space, have acquired more body. Also, through the research, I have explored spirituality, to which in my opinion art is so closely connected. I am not religious, but I think there is a spiritual side to my dealings with art.

An absence or poor quality of ornament in the contemporary world was indirectly one of the key reasons for writing about ornament. I realize it has made me look at the past a lot, but I can say that I have found things there that help me get a grip on the contemporary. I think there is a present (or a contemporary) within all that we find of bygone ages. Time is a very strange thing, and in my opinion it does not have to function as a barrier, dividing the past from the present and the future. The life is still in the objects that come to us from the past. But I do see a potential in further exploration of the subject into the present and the future, and in its virtual aspects. Also I see a very interesting further and deeper exploration of the relationship between ornament and the psyche (also with regards to psychedelics, trance, brain function, 'madness', etc.).

Let us end on a slightly crazy but happy note. Even though ornament is perhaps still as silent and mysterious as it was in the beginning, we have learned a way by which to deal with this silence. To see the very non-articulateness of ornament as a space for possibility and a sense of freedom. The message of ornament is I believe one of celebration, and perhaps even one of liberation. To see the world as a conglomeration of processes always in a flux, of growing and disintegrating, of cycles in time. In this world there are no limits and bounds, or classifications, or forever defined delineations, or there is an infinite lot of them. Everything is balancing between everything else. Everything is life because of the interconnectedness of all things. The world is a cosmic celebration.

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