



Copenhagen working papers on design  
2010 — N° 01

Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl —  
**The Digital Clay**

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Research and Development Work at The Danish Design School



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Published by Danish Design School

Photo credit: Ole Akhøj [p. 18, 19, 20, 42, 44, 48/49]

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1. oplag 2010

Design: Surplus Wonder / surpluswonder.com

Typeface: Replica

ISBN: 87-92016-17-0

**Nykredit**

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# **The Digital Clay**





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01 —

# Introduction

## **The Experimental Laboratory of Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl**

— Research and Development Work at The Danish Design School

In the period from 2004 to 2008, four 'Artists in Residence' were employed at the Danish Design School in three-year positions defined as 50 % artistic practice and 50 % teaching. The four Artists in Residence were: Furniture Designer Niels Hvass, Interaction Designer Simon Løvind, Illustrator Henrik Drescher and Ceramist Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl. The four Artists in Residence were connected to the Department for Research and Artistic Practice and – by means of their innovative, cross-disciplinary and explorative development activities – they contributed to strengthening the dimension of research based teaching at the school.

The Danish Design School's first research plan "Research and Artistic Practice 2003-2006" was built on the four pillars: Basic Research; Applied Research; Practice-based Research and Artistic Practice. Artistic Practice was defined as "design practice and reflection of the highest level, challenging, exploring and examining the boundaries of the design disciplines".

In The Danish Design School's present research plan "Research Strategy and Plan 2008-2010" the components are further simplified in accordance with the OECD's Frascati Manual. It thus includes: Basic Research; Applied Research and Development Work. Development Work can thus also be artistically anchored. The general dimension of research at The Danish Design School emphasizes that "development work will typically take as its starting point the creative experiment in the actual design process" and further announces: "If we consider the design process and the research process as a whole there are a number of common features. One of these common features is reflection, understood in its duplicity as reflection in the process and reflection on the process."

This duplicity is an important characteristic of Martin Kaldahl's work. It is for example expressed in his continuous focus on paradoxes – and the paradoxical – as well as in the meeting between the modern digital media and the antique material: clay, between technique and art, between the reproducible and the unique and between technology and craft.

Martin Kaldahl has navigated within this fascinating cross-field in the period from August 2005 to July 2008. His position as Artist in Residence has resulted in a number of fruitful activities. Martin Kaldahl has explored the field of a ceramist in untraditional and unexpected ways. He has held exhibitions within Denmark and abroad, and he has carried out a number of experimental courses, where he opened his laboratory for his students, so that these were involved in his work. Finally – in the autumn of 2008 – Martin Kaldahl presented selected works in an exhibition at The Danish Museum of Art & Design, Copenhagen.

The present publication documents his activities as Artist in Residence as it provides a view inside the experimental laboratory with a focus on his process and source of inspiration. We can thus follow Martin Kaldahl's journey through his three-year employment at The Danish Design School. A journey that continuously was stretched between the poles of tradition and renewal and thus fundamentally explored the position of the craft in the late modern.

Martin Kaldahl's stay at The Danish Design School was made possible through a generous grant from Nykredit, whose support of and interest in the project we are all deeply thankful for.

Anne-Louise Sommer,  
Rector

February 2010

02 —

# The Digital Clay

Why this title for the project? As a constellation of words and concepts, the title is simultaneously both straightforward and indigestible. Anyone will know what the words describe separately, but in combination the meaning gets less clear.

Poetically, the title expresses something essential about my project because I chose, right from the start, to base the project on the premise of an artistic working method. It has been an inspirational process, partly steered by intuition, if regarded in comparison for instance with a PHD-project having an introductory argument or thesis, developed in a controlled process and leading to the final conclusion. By working under the aegis of The Danish Design School, it has also been my intention to support and shed light on that particular part of the designer or craftsperson's creative process, which is about gaining new territory for inspiration and giving yourself new possibilities for development – even if, at times, following tortuous paths. The title works from this perspective. Brief, clear and indistinct.

Furthermore, it has a structural resemblance to my ceramic works, or could be seen as a linguistic parallel:

I always make an effort to make visual juxtapositions that are immediately distinct and easily read, while allowing for a mental space that is bigger and more multifarious than the object itself.

The Digital Clay is that kind of specimen. What images are conjured up by the words? Above all, naturally, the title points to the fundamental fact that there is a digital as well as a physical world to relate to in this project, which is in itself the pivotal point for my many visual experiments. The clay is highly physical and the digital very virtual. Next, it is quite evident that we freely make our experiences in both universes, easily moving between them. So what might develop in the in-between-gap, where we corporally find ourselves?

From a perceptual viewpoint, how can you work to integrate these two 'realities' into finished works, thus creating new kinds of visual expression?

The point of departure for my work in this project has been a wish to integrate digital tools with my own ceramic practice. Not primarily to use the computer as a practical instrument for efficiency reasons, but rather to apply digital programs as

inspiration in developing new formal and ornamental expressions in ceramic materials.

Further to creating form digitally in 2D or 3D, and to obtaining a certain technical skill level with this, my interest has been focused on perceptual issues that are at play throughout the process from experiencing a digital, visual expression on the screen, to the 3D-printed object or its physical transformation into clay. To look at how potential cultural significations of a particular, digital aesthetic can be used in new juxtapositions of form and ornament, or form and image.

During the first year or so of my work with 3D-modelling in the program Cinema 4D an obvious connection could be seen to my previous experiences with form from physically modelling in clay over many years. I did indeed myself experience the virtual experiments through this lens, i.e. my knowledge of how form can convey emotional content through proportion, the graduation of curves, texture, etc. Therefore, in my search for the elucidation of a particular digital aesthetic, my interest was caught by certain formal types, that I have later called 'utopian forms'. These are forms, which clearly would never occur with-

out the assistance of the computer program, and specifically forms that cannot be 3D-printed and will only exist digitally. This led to experimenting with hand-modelling the forms directly in clay from what I saw on the screen (an example of this is 'Nurbs and Loop 1' from 2007), which I have described in the introductory text to 'Form and Utopian Form'.

A different method of shedding light on a specifically digital expression has been employed in certain ceramic objects, where a distinctly digital form (either as a 3D-print or transformed into clay) is joined together with the cast of a literal length of branch, here representing the genetically determined natural form as such. The finished ceramic object thus points to both a digital and a physical space. It contains, so to speak, the immaterial in its materiality.

One of the great challenges of computer programs is their offer of infinite possibilities. There is also the fact that certain inherent tools in the programs tend to put their aesthetic stamp on the shape development very strongly. This often leads to a kind of 'freeze' in the working process, in that experiments get to resemble each other over and over.

During one of these moments of 'running idle', I moved my attention towards another field of interest, namely the relationship between form and ornament, and I began working in 2D with Adobe Photoshop and especially Illustrator. I explored the potential for new ornament through image manipulation, e.g. by using Google Earth to look at motorway-junctions from an ornamental perspective. In this way I was picking up, from a new angle, an earlier thread and motif in my ceramic work: knots and the anatomy of knots. This led to experiments with the image/photograph in an ornamental context: juxtapositions of the perspectival character of the image and its potential narrative content, with a purely ornamental underlining of its surface and flatness. For example, by miming elements in the picture with added lines or a coloured dot to further emphasize the surface, it acquired a markedly graphic character.

In relation to the three-dimensional object, these sketches primarily aim to accentuate the formal 2D and 3D similarities by putting them on the same footing in the finished object. While regarding the image as an ornamental element, its narrative obviously does not disappear, but the signifi-

cance of the narrative is transformed by being part of an integrated formal interplay with a given 3D form, which already possesses its own 'story' (e.g. branch –ramification – motorway approach system – knot) as in the 'Branchobject'–series.

In other works I have focused on the representation itself: the coupling of the cast branch as 3D-object with the depiction of tree-bark wrapped around an oval shape to create a new object, where its rather machine-like appearance is in contrast to the separate elements, as can be seen in the section entitled 'Manipulation'.

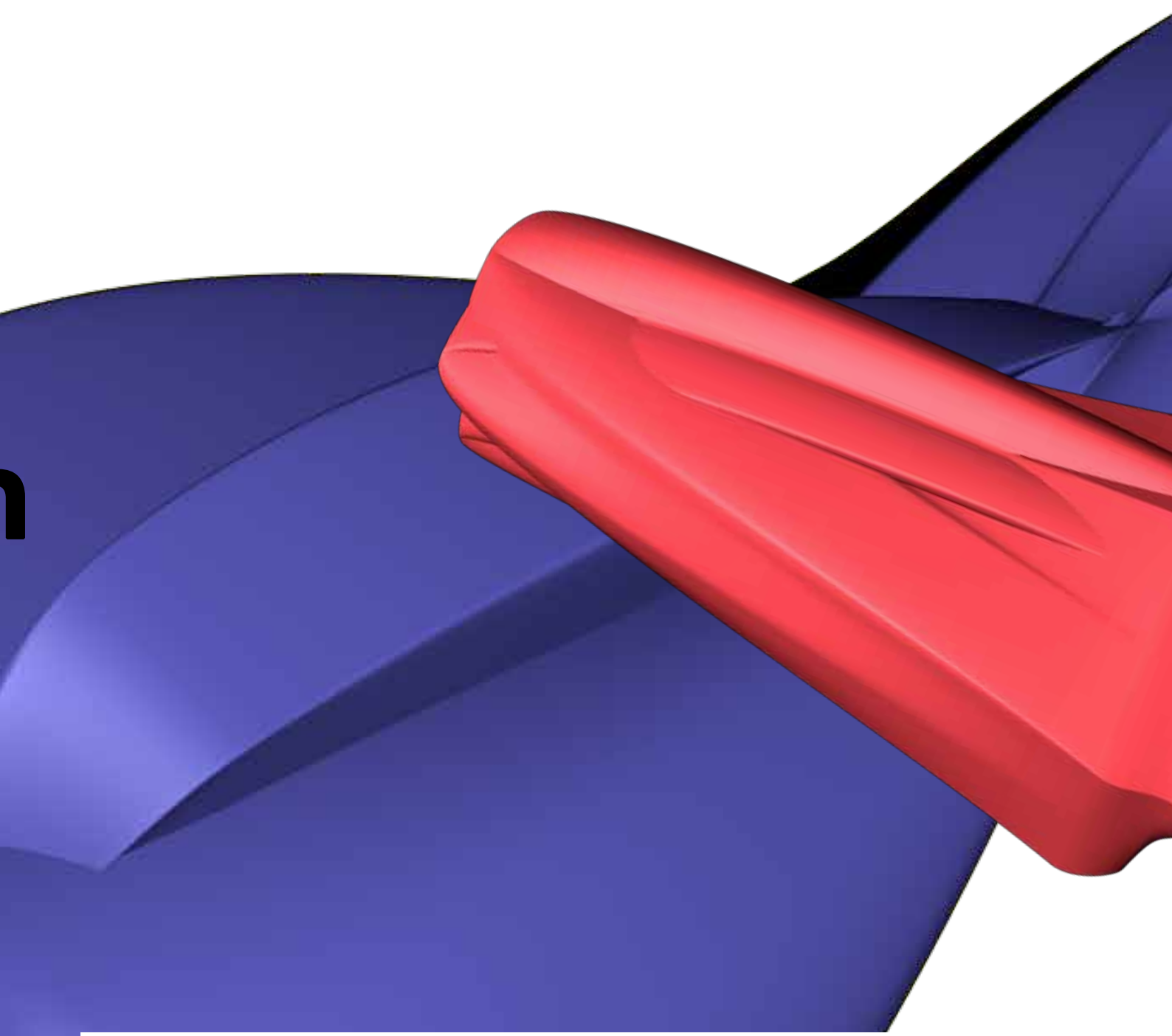
As this publication shows very clearly, the experiments made during my artistic research period point in many diverging directions with all their open ends, whose results are undergoing continuous development and will slowly find their way into my ceramic works in the times to come.

03 —

# Form and Utopian Form







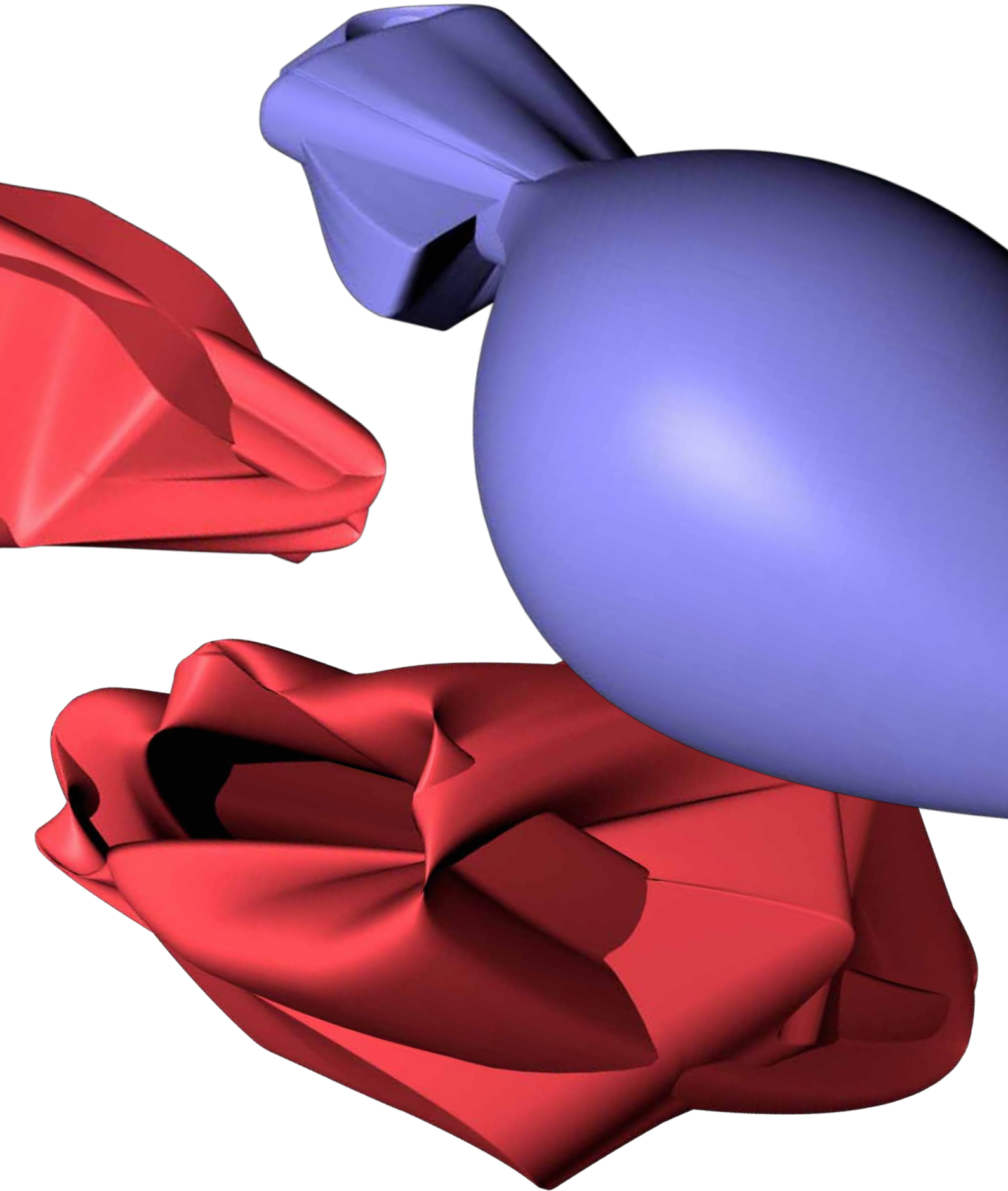
How can you speak about utopian form? From which perspective can a form be regarded as utopian? As part of my investigations around aspects of a digital aesthetic I have been looking at ways of using specific 3D-graphic tools to create shapes and forms that would be otherwise unimaginable. In my visual perception of form, when just looking at my screen, I do not have to distinguish between forms that I can actually physically make by 3D-printing or milling and those which the printer would not be able to read and print. This latter category caught my interest and I decided to actually make some of these in clay by hand-modelling them as precisely as I could. Or rather, I interpreted the objects as I experienced them on the screen.

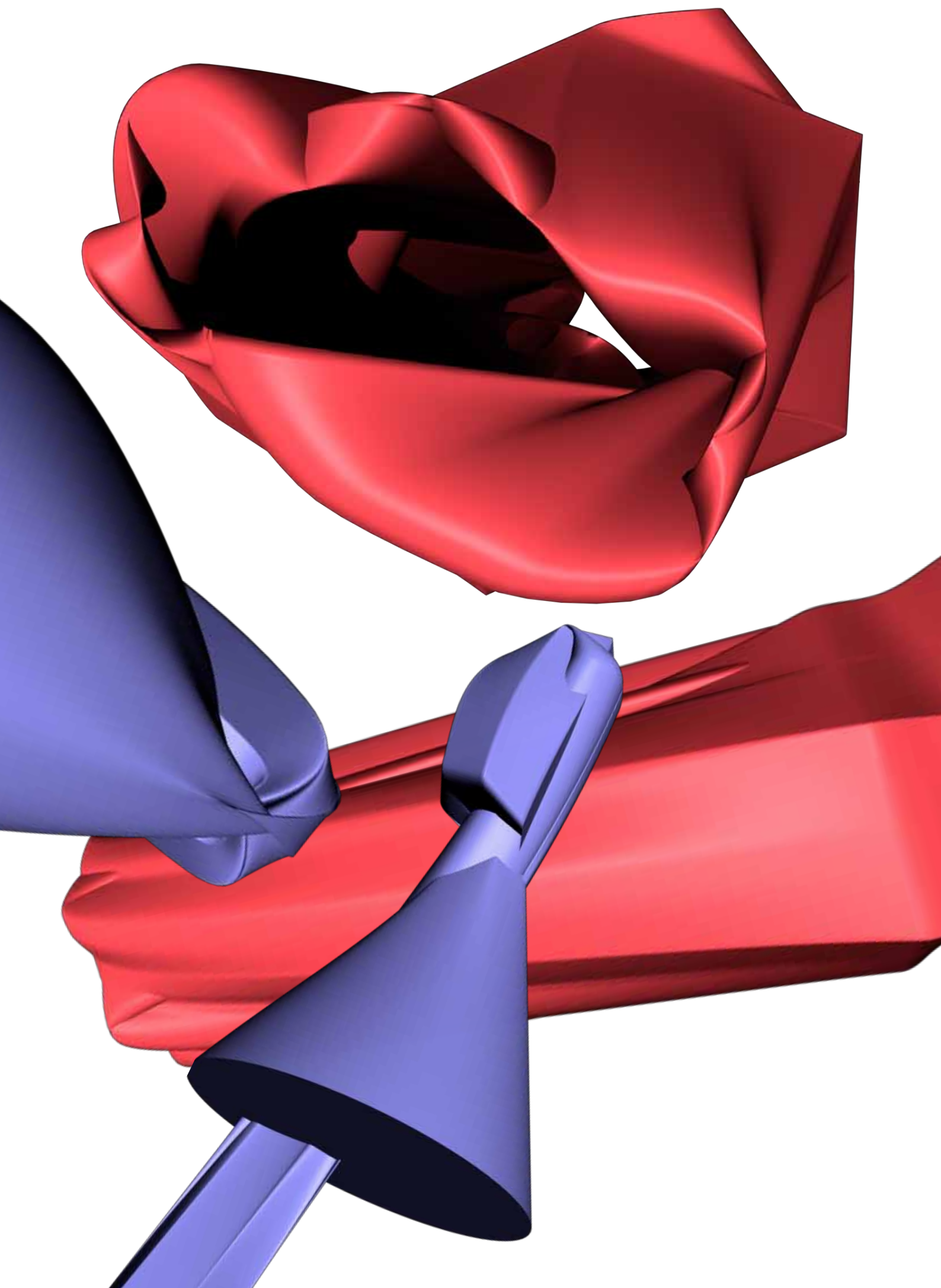
'Nurbs and Loop 1' (2007) is an example of this. The form is modelled in the 3D-program by using a nurbs tool to connect the individual splines (could be compared to the construction of a traditional kayak: the form results from the skin being stretched tightly over the timber).

It starts with a randomly drawn figure at the bottom combined with three hexagonal shapes, a little displaced in relation to each other, and finished off at the top with a copy of the bottom spline – just slightly enlarged and rotated.

The exercise of modelling this form gave me a very matter-of-fact insight into how differently we perceive in virtual and physical space. Although I felt very familiar with this particular form from my screen-work, it actually took me a long time to really grasp it well enough to be able to model it precisely.

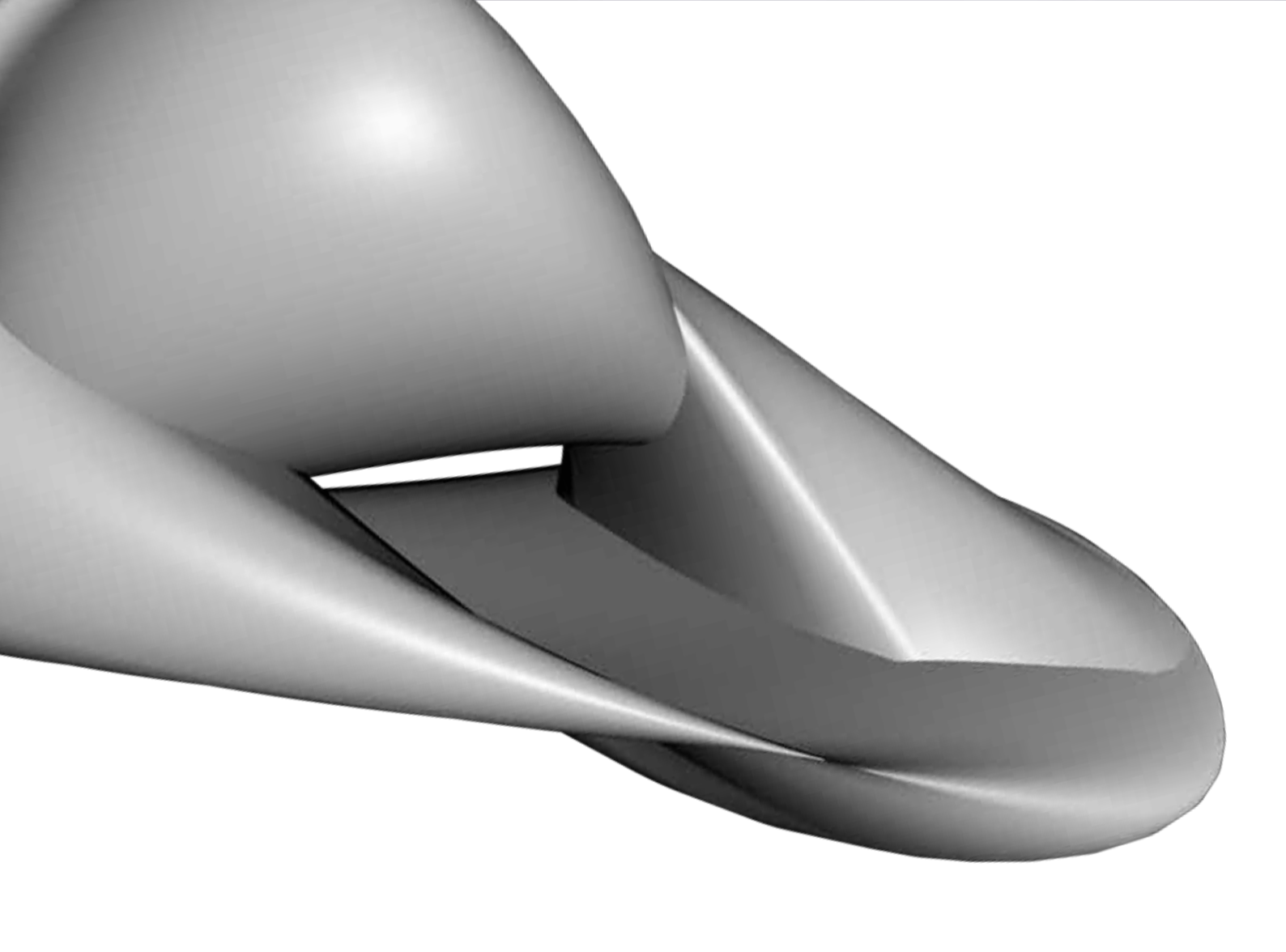
Shown here are other examples of these form-types. They are shapes and spatial relations that you would hardly be able to imagine without digital tools, and they represent an illusory universe, where everything is possible. Where utopian visions exist as self-evidently as any other 'possible' form.











04—

# Pattern and Space



'Nurbs and Loop 1' ( 2007)

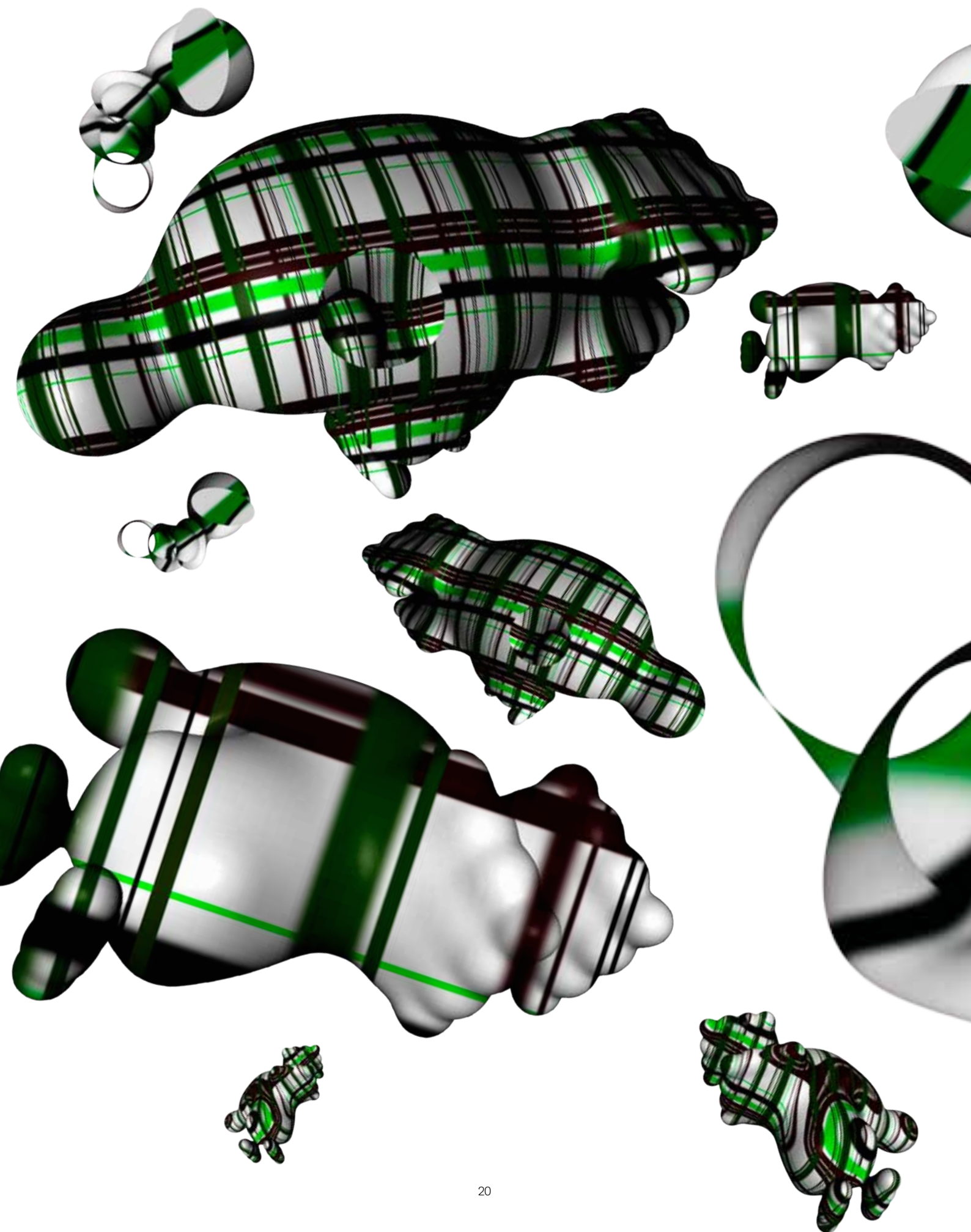
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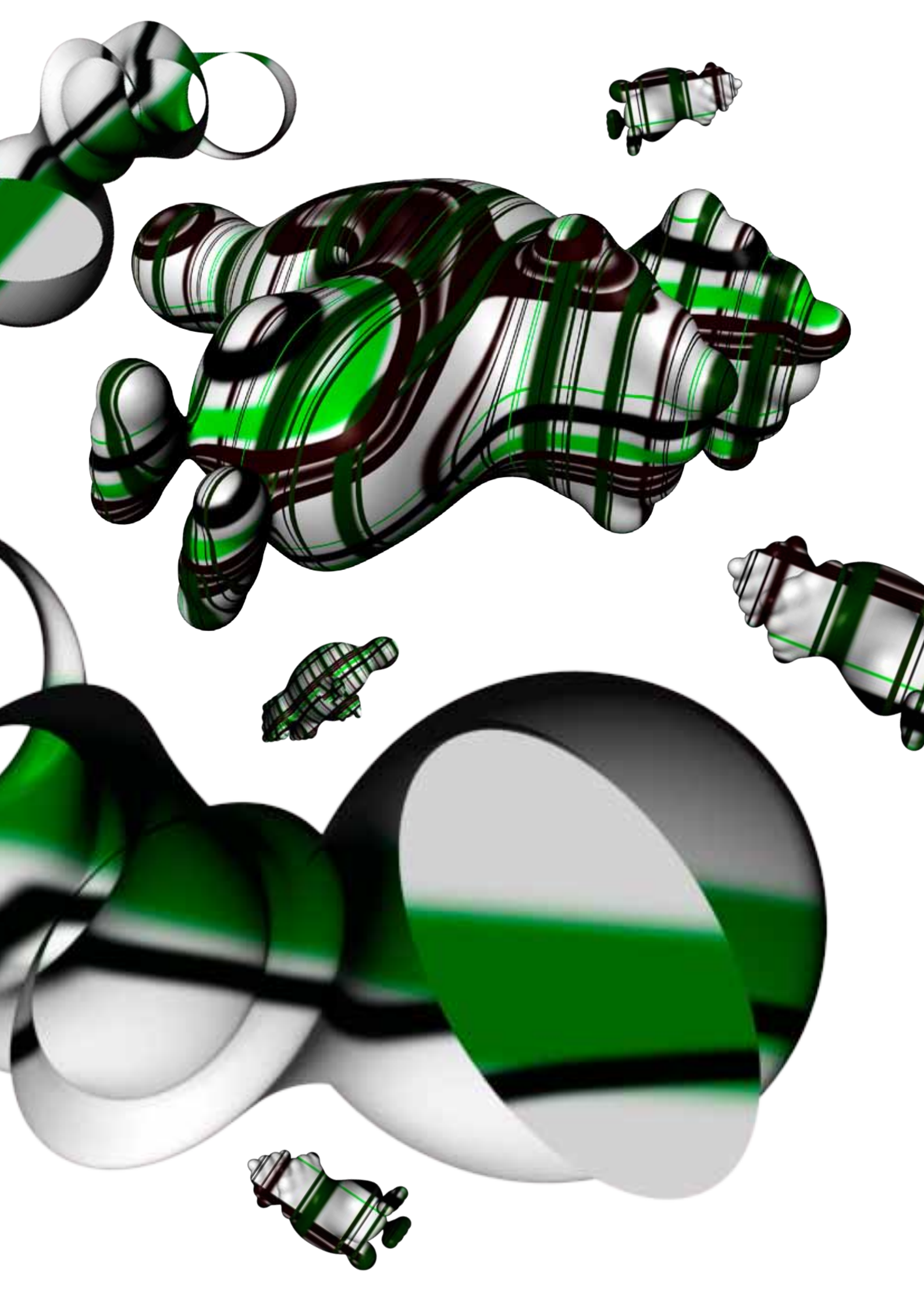
As a point of departure I have been working with familiar principles of pattern, such as the chequer pattern and stripes. A series of spatial patterns were drawn in Illustrator using effects such as overlapping, sharp and blurred lines, light and darkness, the capacity of the colour to stand out or recede, opaqueness versus transparency, the scale of the pattern, etc.

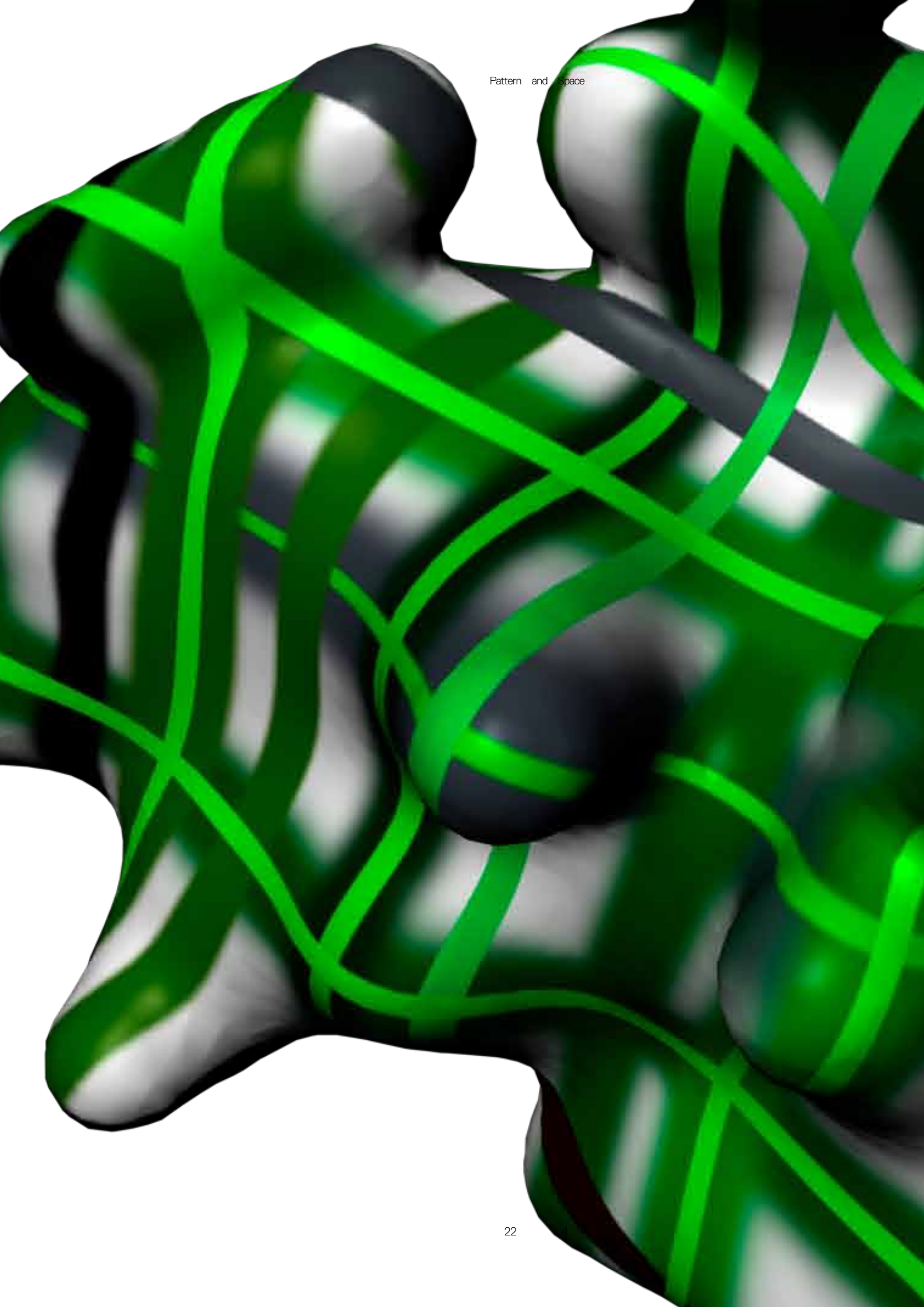
These patterns have constituted the basic material for many experiments applied to form in the 3D-program. There are 8-10 different modes of applying pattern in Cinema 4D. Only one or two of these have visual interest for me, resulting in more or less utopian visions of the form/ornament relationship (considering what is technically possible to transfer onto an actual ceramic object).

In exploring the potential of manipulating the pattern by mixing 2D and 3D effects in the same image, I chose to let illusion be a guideline and in the process came to use the actual screen-print images of the digital experiments as the material to be applied onto the ceramic form, by means of printed decals.

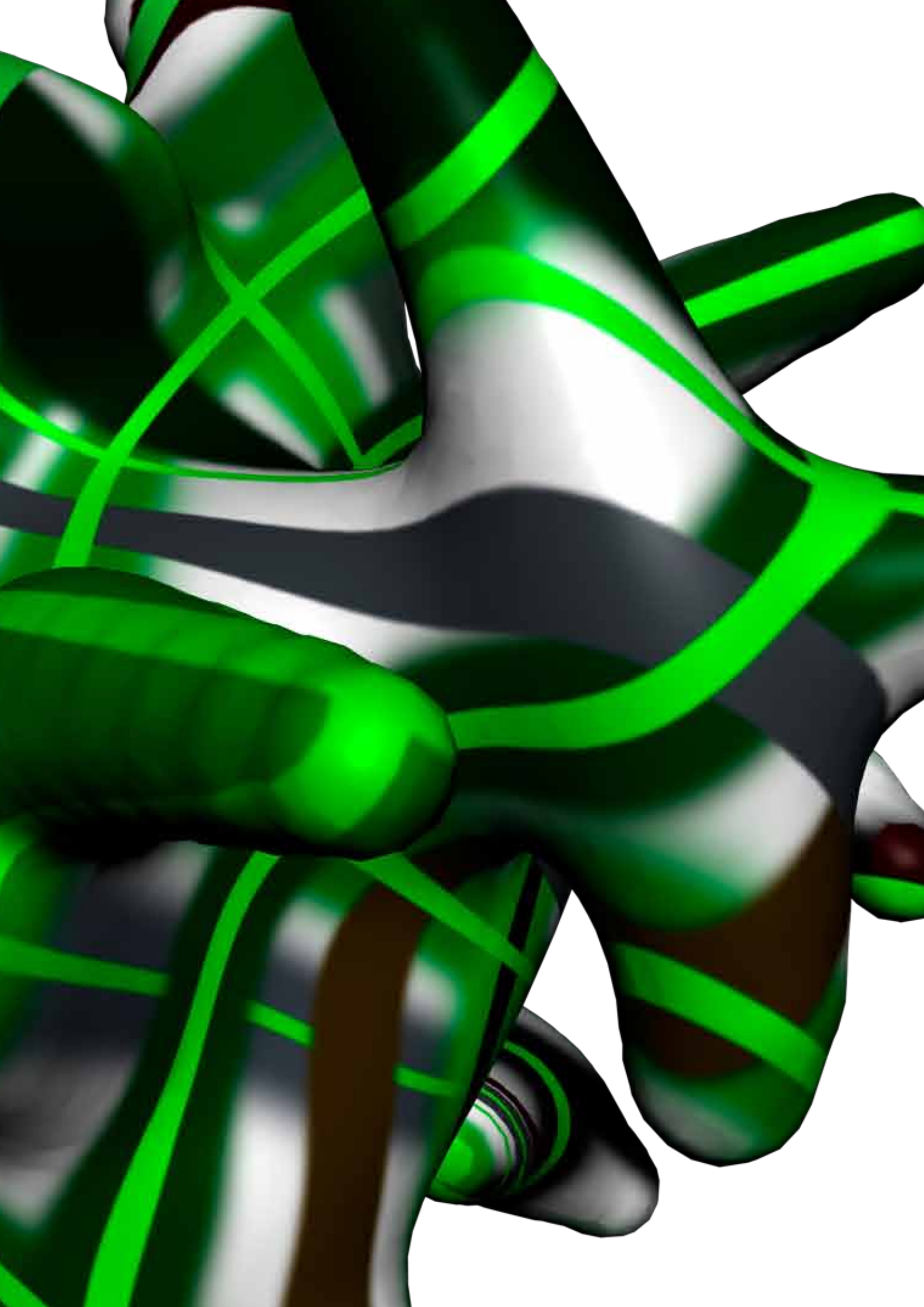
















05 —

# Purely Ornamental



# /mental



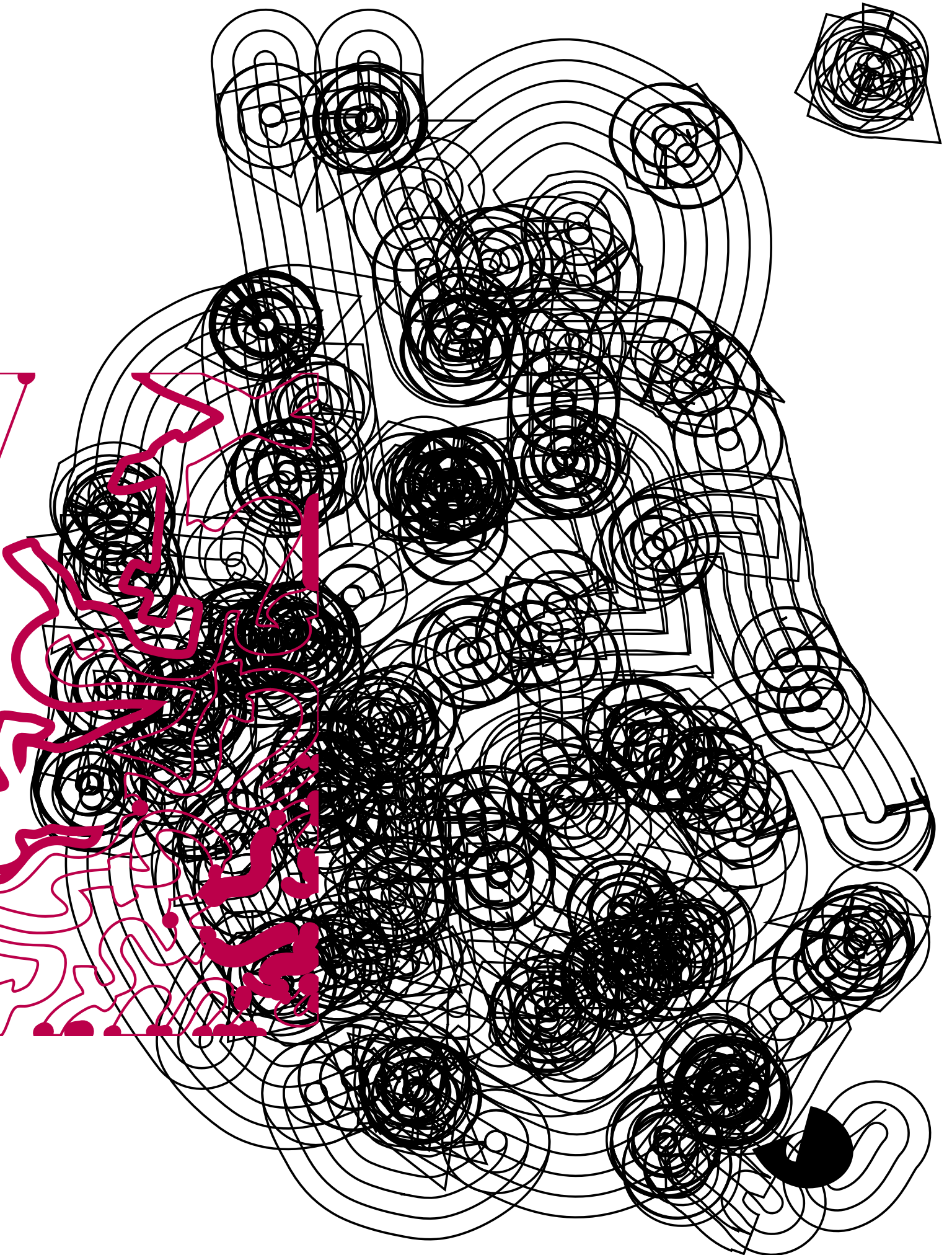
The rapidly sketched doodle, made in Illustrator. Laser-cut in white cardboard.

Subsequently, I worked with the digital manipulation of photographic snapshots of this figure, exploring purely ornamental possibilities. Combining the outline drawing with the spatial image. The borderland between these? In and out of 2D- and 3D-programs. Contrasts, spatiality, scale and all the oddities of tracing.

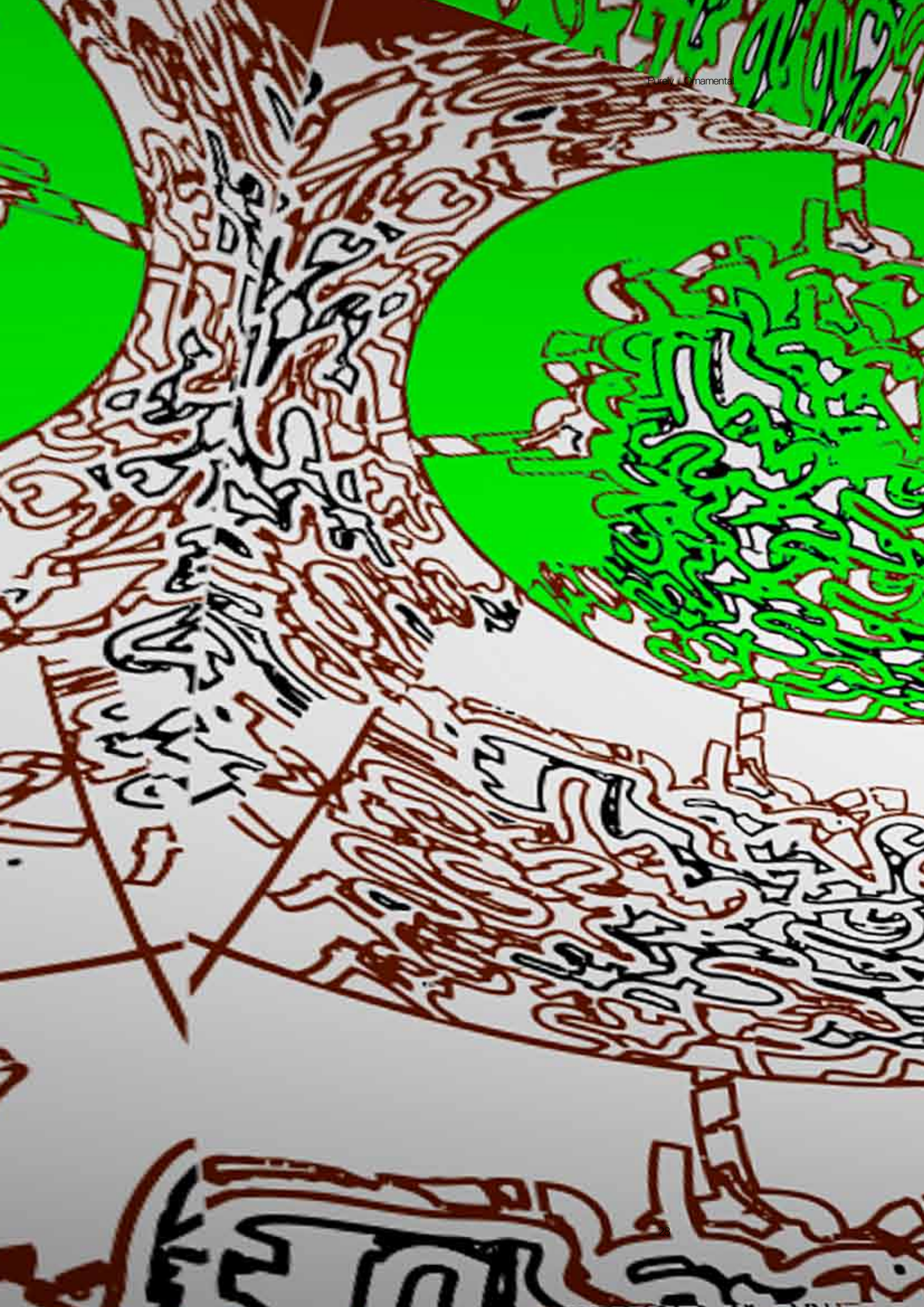
When does the ornamental become ornament?



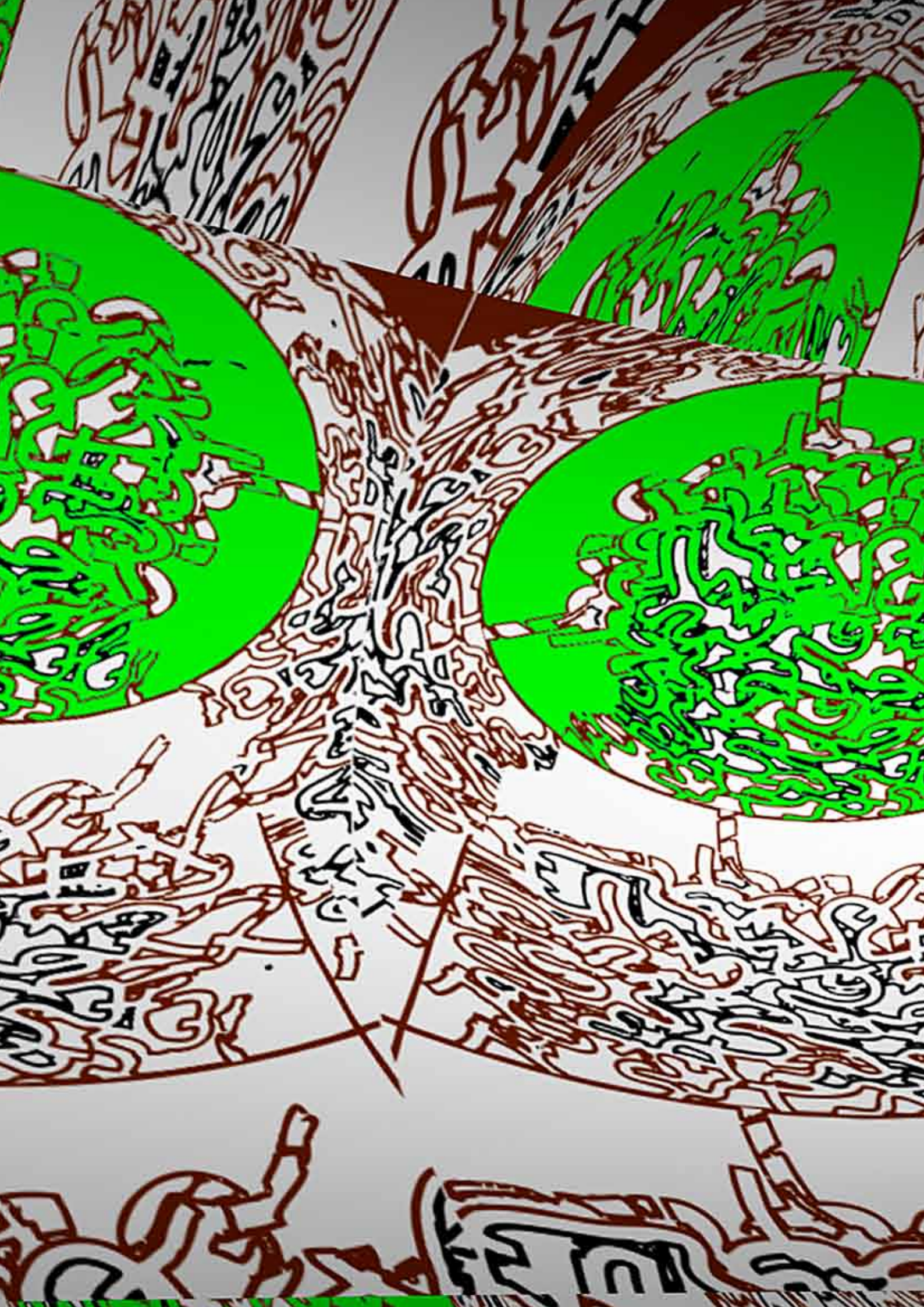












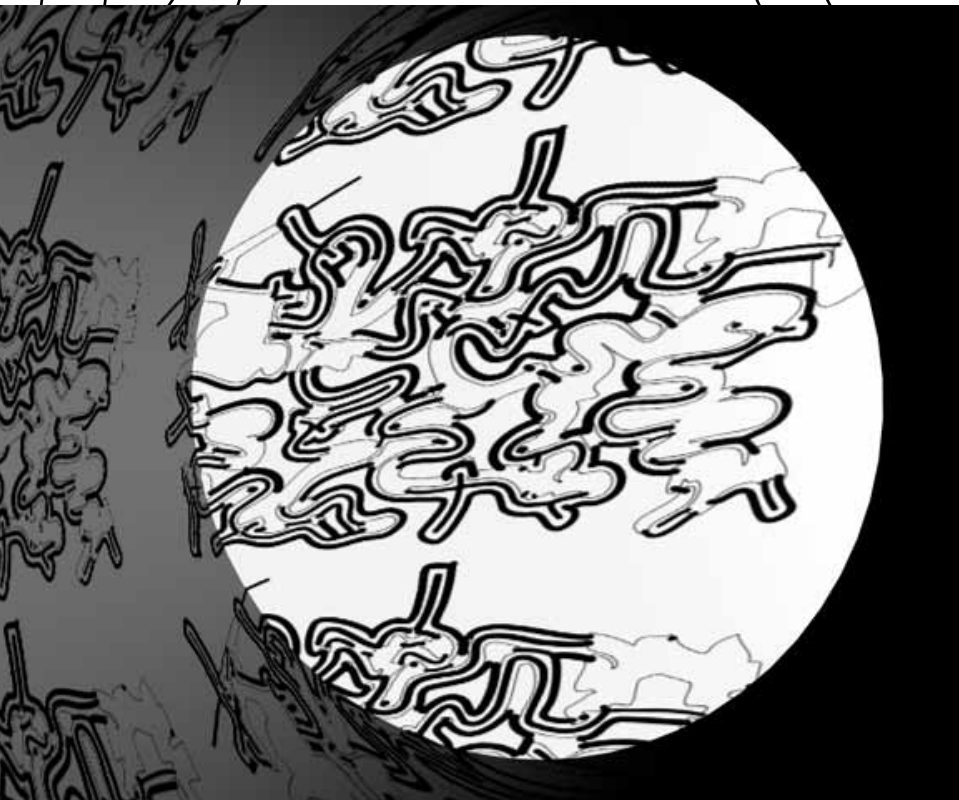


Purely Ornamental

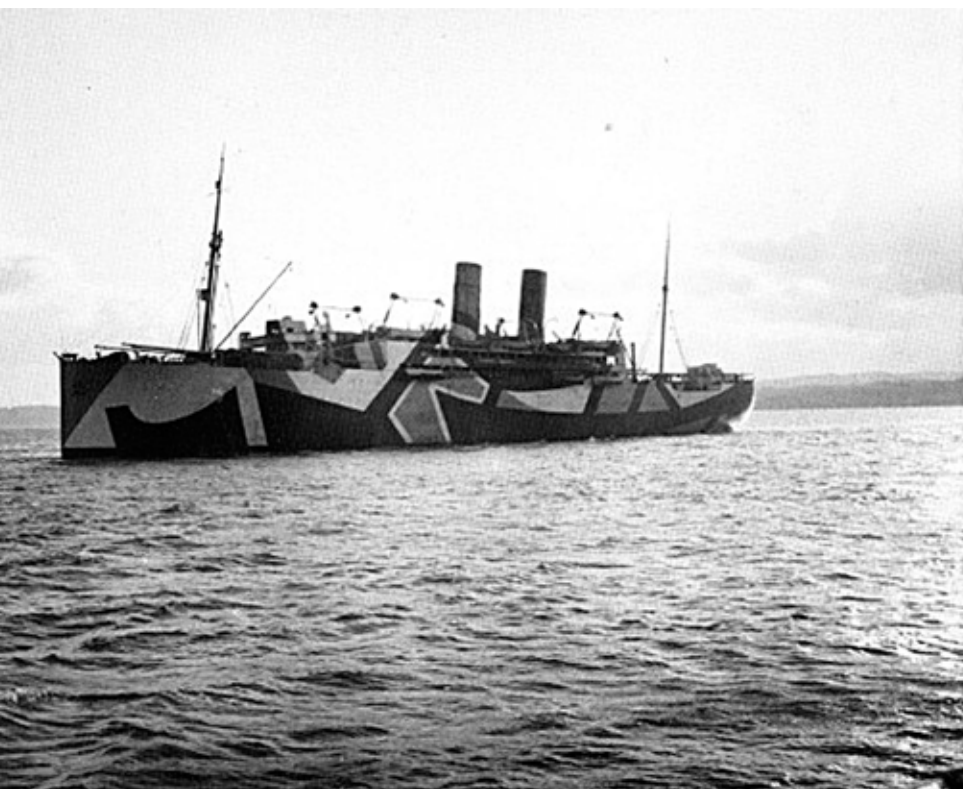
Dazzle

06 —

# Da



# zzle



To disturb or confuse form has always interested me a good deal more than underlining or emphasizing it, and I have worked with this repeatedly over the years.

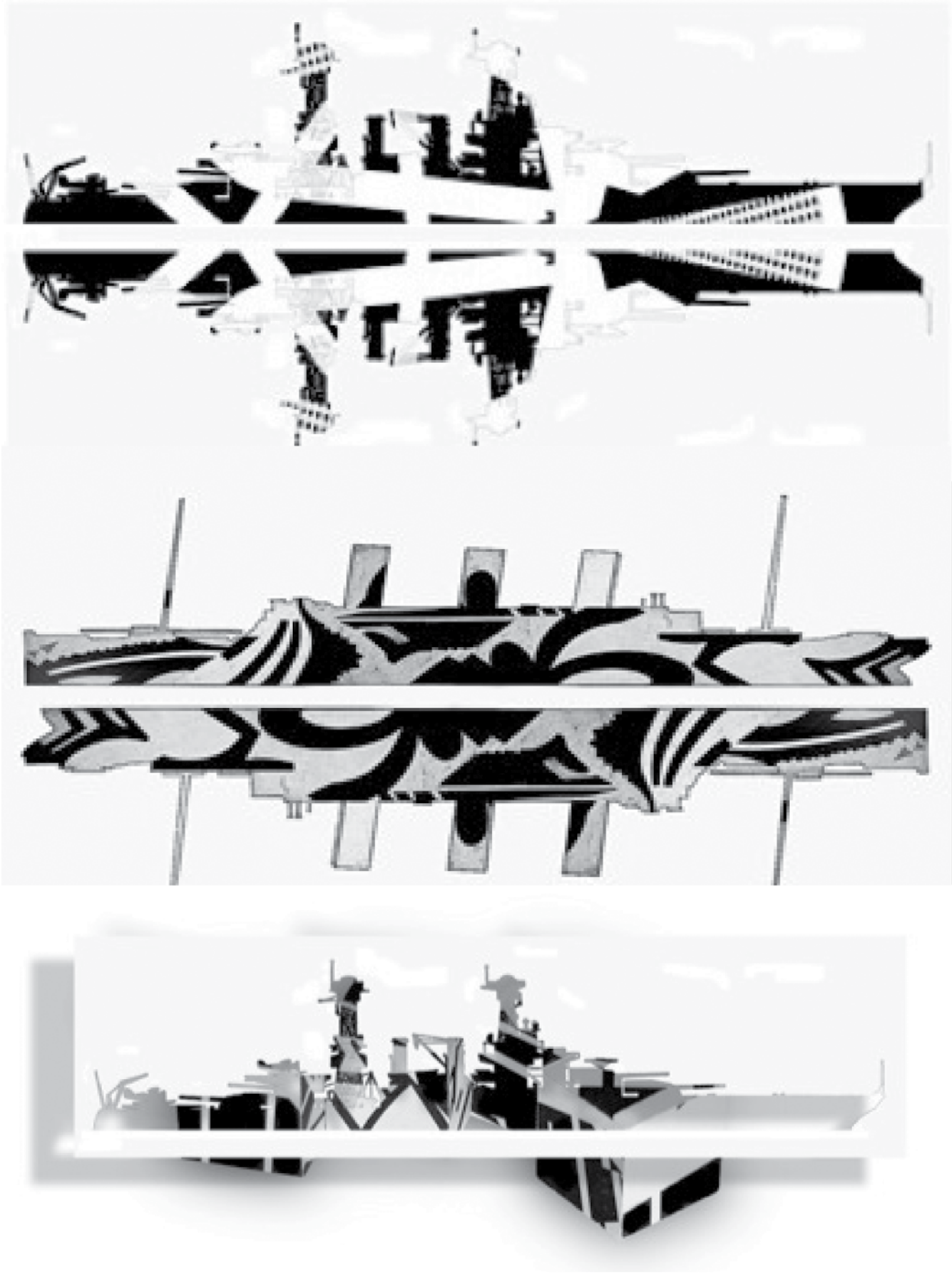
During the late years of World War I, a large number of ships of the British Trade Fleet were painted with stunning large-scale patterns – often brightly coloured – with the purpose of disturbing the enemy view and perception of the scale, quantity and direction of the ships. The phenomenon was called Dazzle Painting and was the result of a long series of experiments, that were carried out because traditional camouflage techniques proved useless at sea, in permanently changing light conditions.

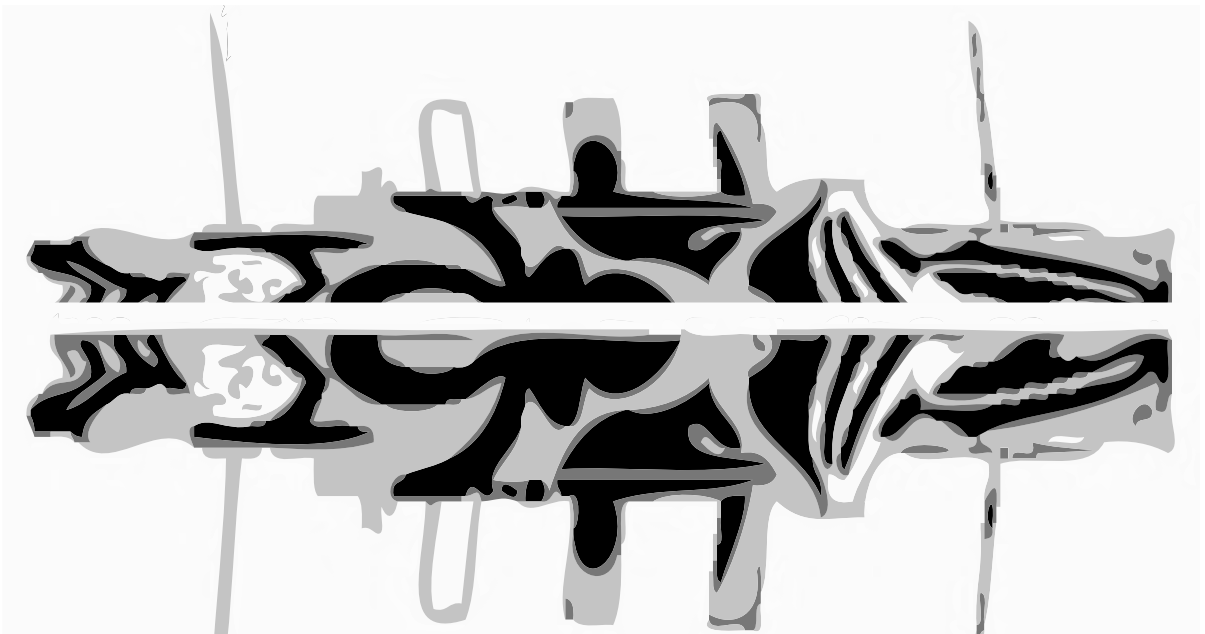
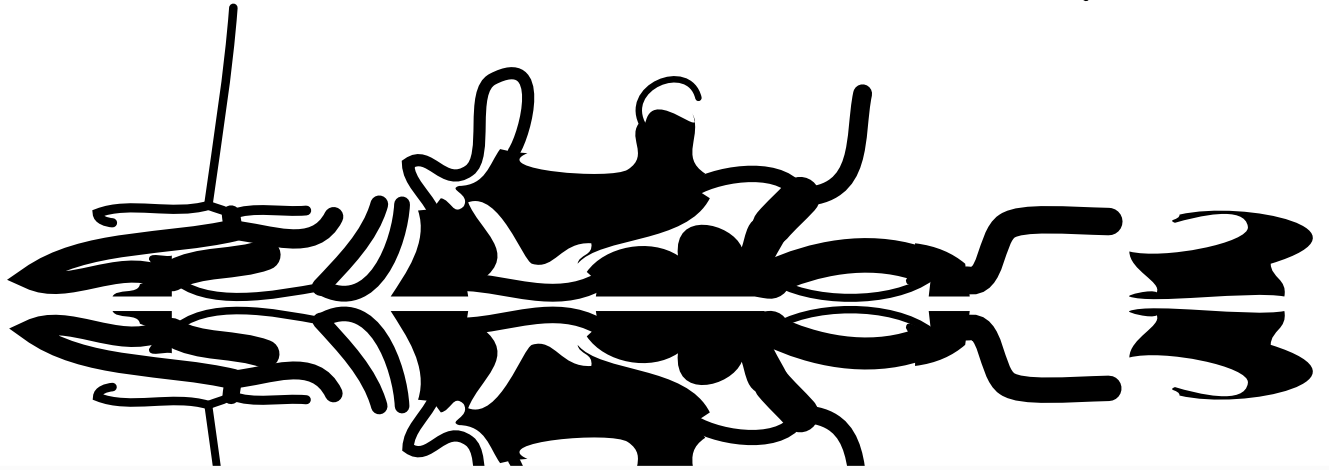
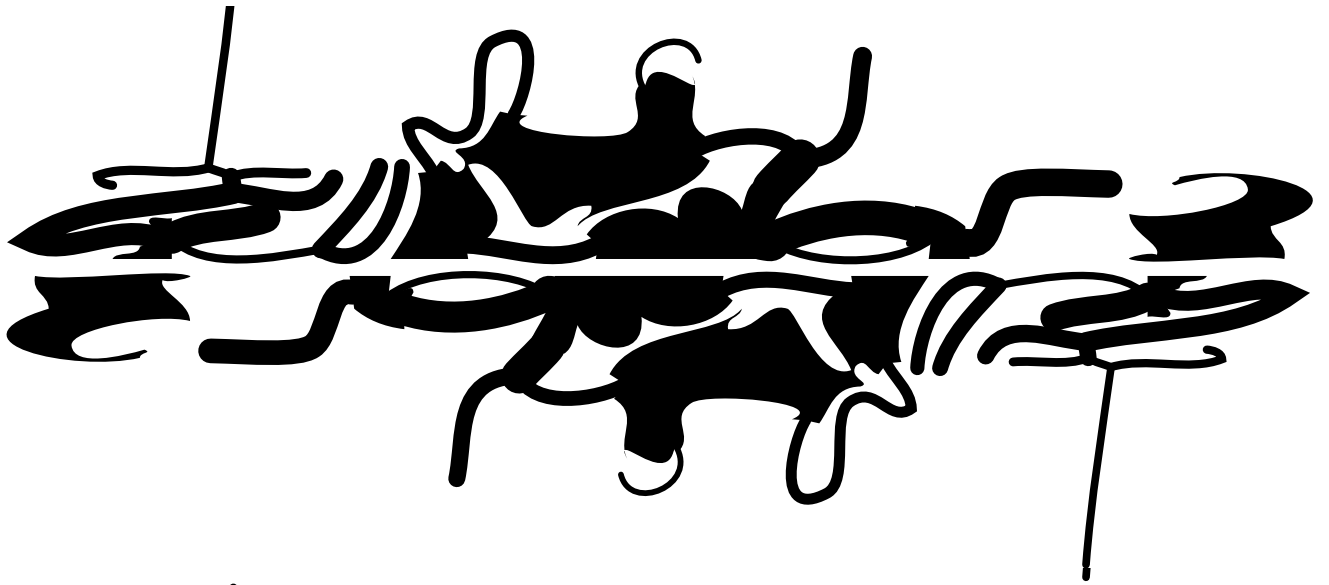
A design-office was established at the Royal Academy of Art in London. Here all designs were tested with regard to the impact of the patterns and the chosen ones were sent off to shipyards in southern and western England for the actual

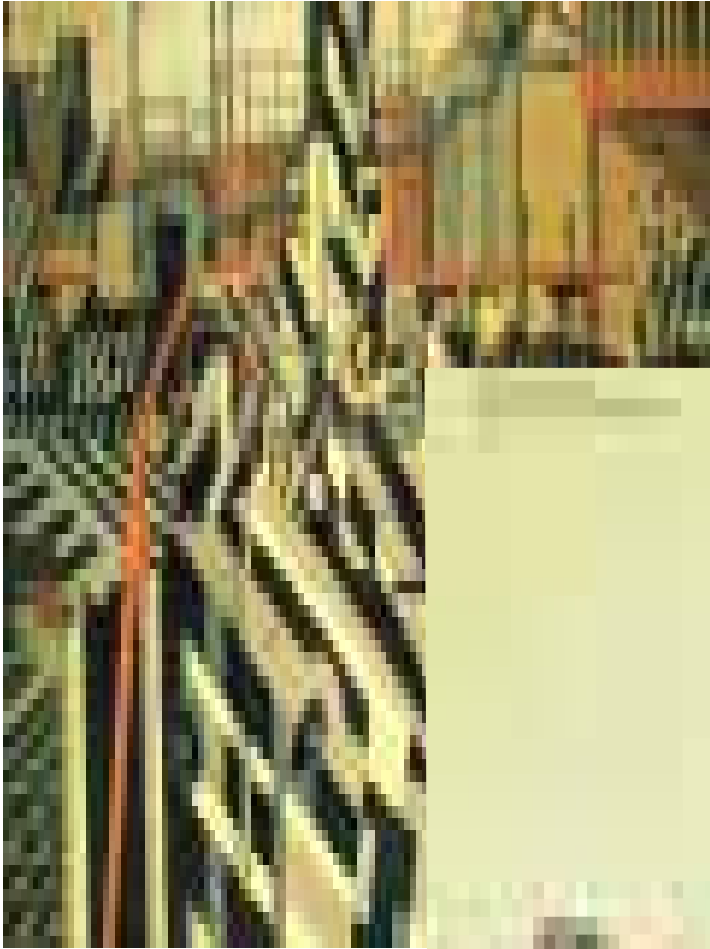
painting on the hulls. More than 1800 ships were painted during an 18-month period. After the war all the patterns were completely painted over again.

Warner Cubes is the term used for the small wooden blocks with painted patterns, that were later employed by American naval officers to develop the individual design by simply holding a negative template of the shape of the ship in front of the cubes, moving them around while observing the impact on the form. An interesting principle of random selection.

In this section, I have been playing around with the phenomenon by using images of some of these ships, or paintings of the time – most notably the picture by Edward Wadsworth, showing the painting of a ship in the dock in South Hampton.







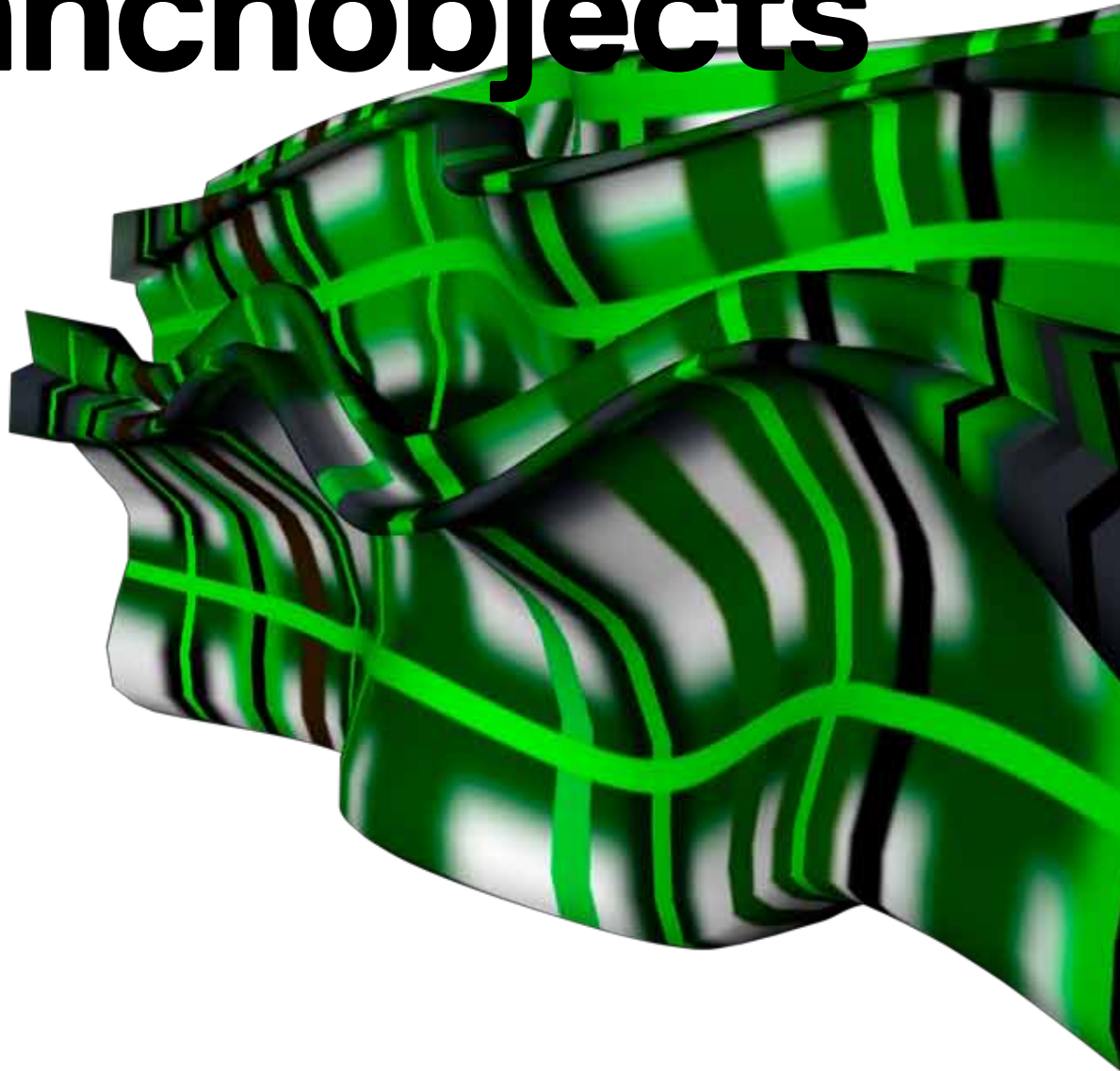






07 —

# Branchobjects



Ceramic casts from short lengths of branches have been part of my expressive vocabulary for quite some time, in juxtaposition with completely different form categories. Genetically determined form elements meet shapes generated as 3D-graphics on the basis of geometric figures.

Others are created on the idea of a branch. A simple digital drawing, where the shape of the branch is recognizable – no more.

Or the drawn contour of a branch in the 3D-program, copied and pasted into a sequence of three drawings. Nurbised, creating a landscape of sorts between them.











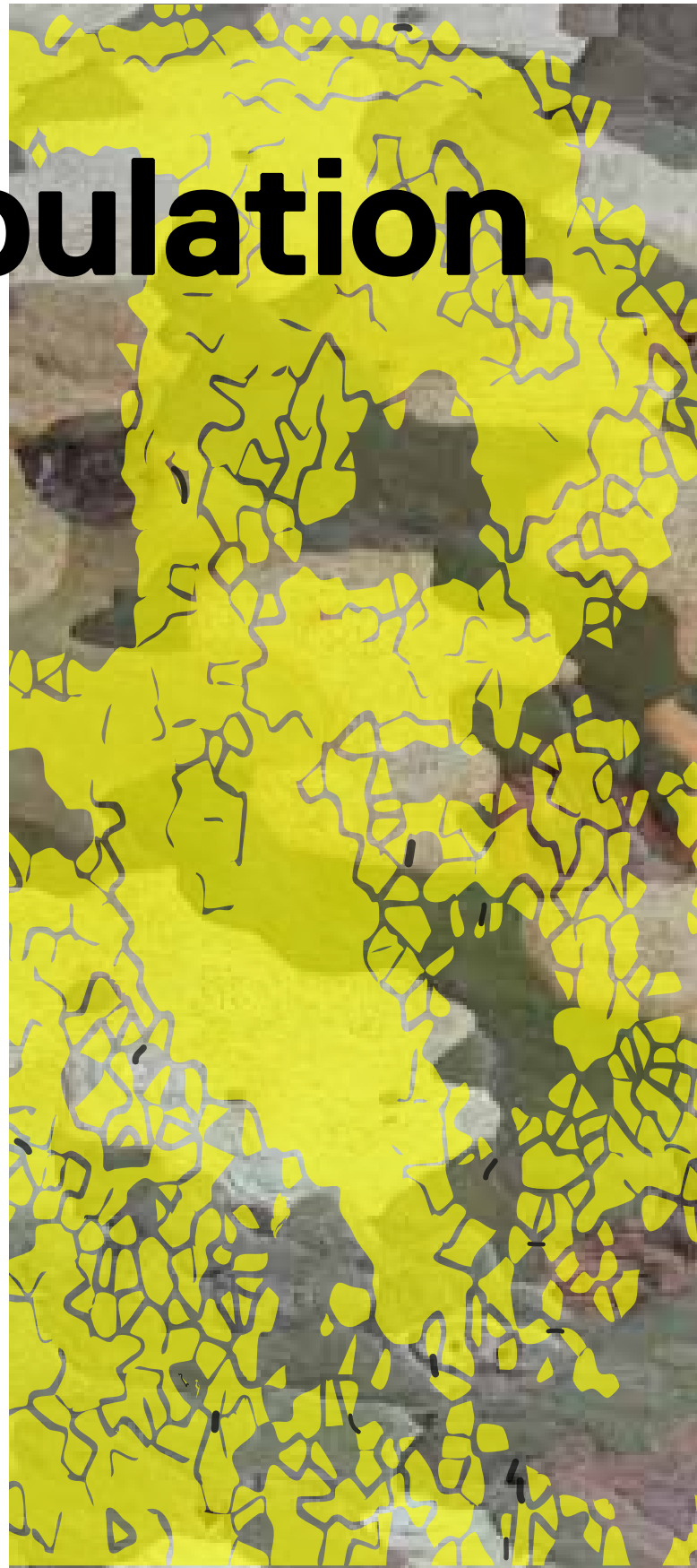


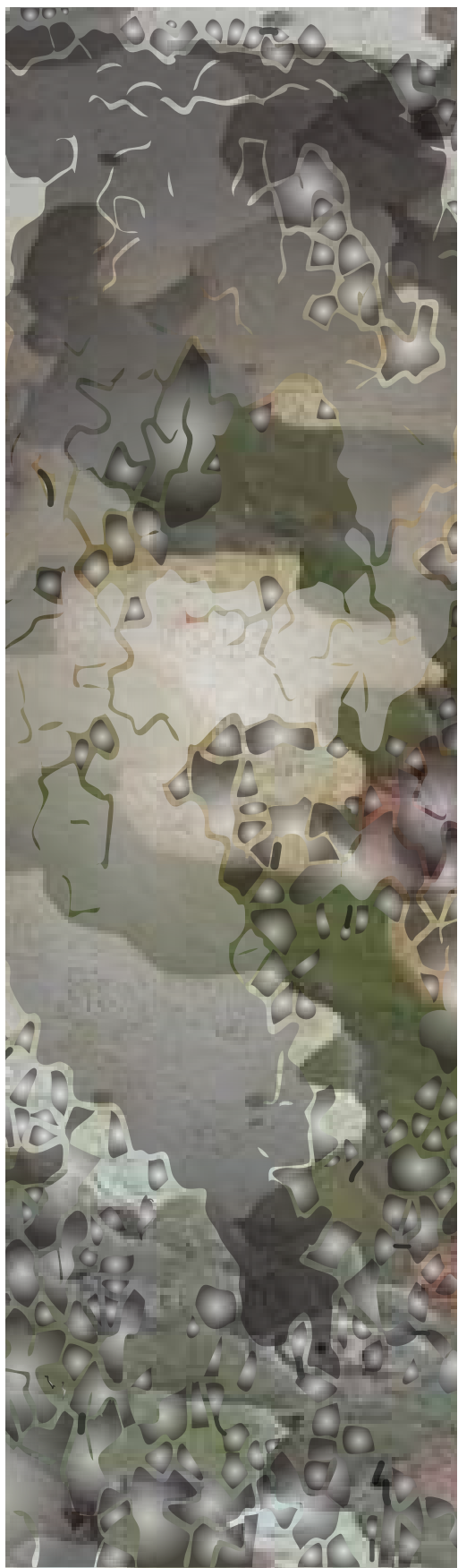


08 —

# Manipulation

Images of easily recognizable patterns from nature, e.g. the bark of a plane tree, exposed to as-natural-as-it-gets image-manipulation. Subordinated the shape of a branch - not of a plane.



















09 —

# The Great Google Earth Ornament Search

Knots and knots in the making, both in 2D and 3D, have for a long time interested me as ornamental expressions.

The anatomy of knots – the space around them, as signs and signifiers.

Highway junctions are particularly interesting from a perceptual viewpoint. They are invisible. We obviously experience these junctions as functional, possibly as functional sculpture, but to see them as ornament you need help by flying or from Google Earth.

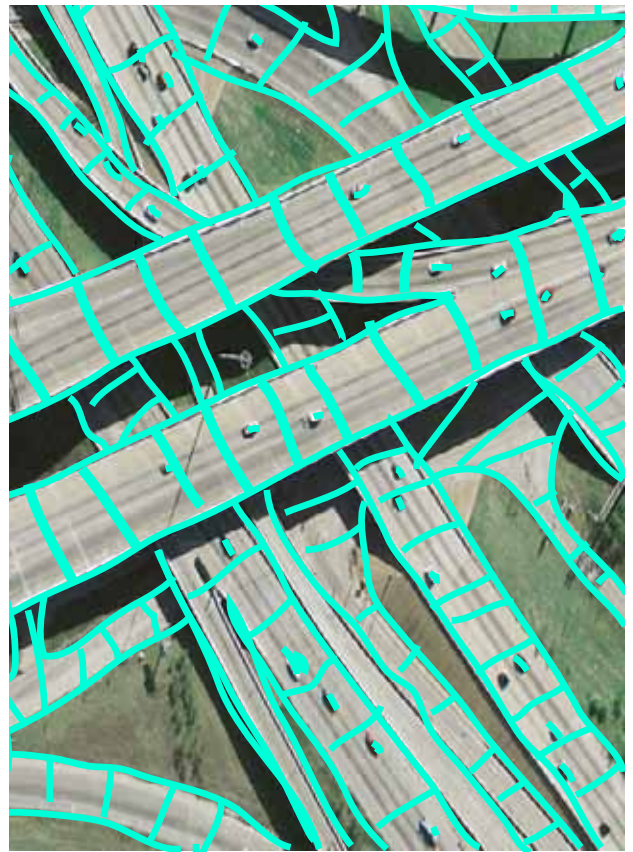
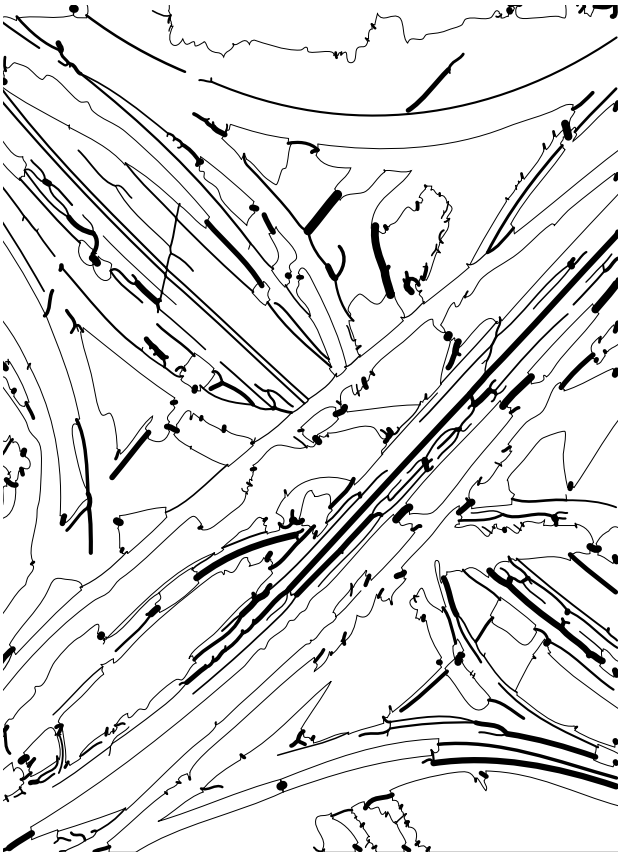
Every single day we draw figures while driving around in these fantastic sculptural structures without ever experiencing them in their entirety – precisely as ornaments.

Google Earth is the ultimate ornament-search-machine.





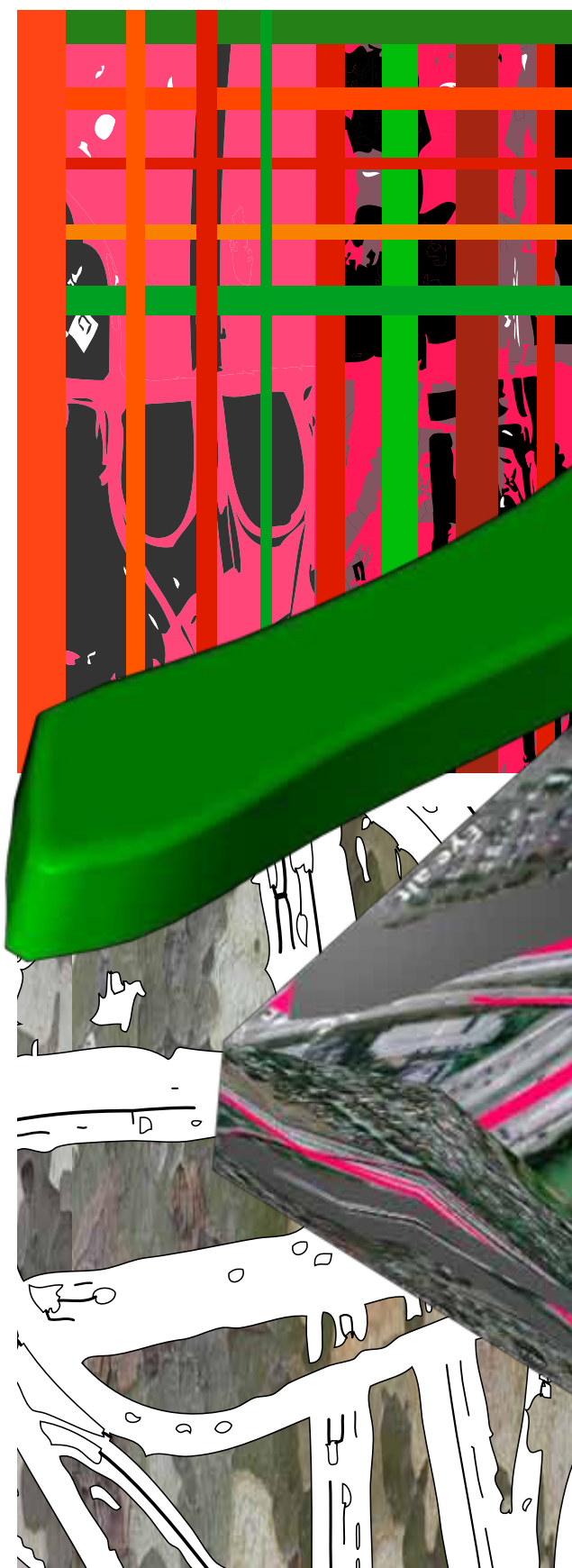














10 —

# Teaching External Lectures

# g and I S

## Teaching

One of my intentions behind working with digital tools in the project was to support and inspire an incipient interest among students of Ceramics and Glass for involving digital tools more creatively in their working processes and as a means of inspiration for innovation of the classic themes within the field.

During the artistic research period I have fulfilled the 50% teaching obligation, partly with projects within the area of Ceramics and Glass and partly with transdisciplinary activities.

Further to this I have taught introductory courses dealing with the process from 3D-modelling to 3D-print, again focusing on a playful approach to the use of digital modelling. In other courses, the computer program has been used to reinvent the classic observation-modelling discipline to strengthen the awareness of form. Students have been asked to work on the computer and subsequently try to model in clay from screen-prints of their digital objects. Then a 3D-print of the object has been made and from this a scaled up version of the same objects should be handmodelled. This demands an observational eye on more levels and provide a first hand experience of the different perceptual levels at play in the virtual and the physical space.

I have been giving lectures about my working methods in transdisciplinary courses to exemplify the process of renewing your inspiration for the benefit of your own practice, for instance in collaboration with Louise Mazanti and have led workshops on working with large scale spatial patterns for students from interior design, fashion and ceramics.



11 —

# Articles and

## External Lectures

- 2005 Artist's Talk, Nancy Margolis Gallery, New York
- 2007 Artist's Talk, END exhibition, Danish Museum of Art and Design and Bomuldsfabriken, Arendal, Norway
- 2008 KUR 08, Copenhagen. Annual conference on Contemporary Craft and Design
- 2008 HDK, Kunsthøgskolan för Design och Kunst, Gothenburg
- 2008 Kunsthøgskolen, Oslo
- 2009 Royal College of Art, London. Ceramics and Glass Department

**cles**  
**Exhibitions**

**Articles** (magazines, newspapers)

END, exhibition catalogue, 2007. Museum of Art and Design, Copenhagen.

Article by Love Jönsson: 'Do We Know Ceramics ?'

Berlingske Tidende M/S, Sept. 2007: END – exhibition.  
Review by Tine Bendixen

Weekendavisen, Kultur, Sept. 2007: END – exhibition.  
Review by Synne Rifbjerg

Politiken, Kultur, Sept. 2007. END - exhibition.  
Review by Libbie Fjelstrup

Information, October 2007. END – exhibition.  
Review by Allan de Waal

Keramik Magazin, magazine, Germany, 2007. END - exhibition.  
Catalogue text by Love Jönsson

Kunsthåndverk magazine, Norway: END – exhibition, 2007.  
Review by Jorunn Veiteberg

Art and Perception, magazine, Australia, 2008.  
END – exhibition. Catalogue text by Alison Britton

Villabyerne - weekend, newspaper, April 2007. Interview on  
research project by Ulla Blankholm

Fokus Magazine, issue 4, 2008. 'Kaldahl's Digital World', inter-  
view by Anne-Marie Gregersen. Published by Danish Crafts

Kunststoff, issue 16, 2007, magazine : 'The Future Forms of  
Ceramics'. Interview by Charlotte Jul

Berlingske Tidende, Boligen, April 2009: 'The Digital Clay'.  
Studio-interview by Kirsten Sørrig

Kunststoff, issue 23, 2009, magazine: 'The Computer and Clay',  
interview-conversation between Flemming Tvede Hansen og  
Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl. By Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl

MINDCRAFT, 2009. Exhibition catalogue. International Furni-  
ture Fair, iSalone, Milan. Published by Danish Crafts

**Exhibitions**

2005 Puls Contemporary Ceramics, Bruxelles.  
Solo exhibition

2005 Nancy Margolis Gallery, New York. Group show

2006 SOFA, Chicago.  
International Contemporary Objects Fair.  
Represented by Galleri Nørby, Copenhagen

2007 COLLECT, V & A Museum, London.  
International Contemporary Objects Fair  
Represented by Galleri Nørby, Copenhagen

2007 END. Danish Museum of Art and Design,  
Copenhagen and Bomuldsfabriken Kunsthall,  
Arendal, Norway. Group exhibition with 7 ceramists  
from England, Norway and Denmark

2008 New Church Furniture and Equipment, Selskabet  
for Kirkelig Kunst, Copenhagen. Group exhibition.

2008 The Digital Clay. The Danish Museum of Art and  
Design, Copenhagen.  
Solo exhibition of work made during the artistic  
research period at The Danish Design School

2009 MINDCRAFT. International Furniture Fair, Milan.  
Group exhibition by Danish Crafts



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### Studio:

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DK-4000 Roskilde

### Curriculum Vitae

1954	Born in Randers, DK
2008 - 2006	Studio in Roskilde, Denmark
2005 - 08	Member of Jury for The Vallauris Biennale, France
2004 - 05	Visiting designer/ research fellow, Danmarks Designskole
2003	Head of Dept. Ceramics and Glass, Danmarks Designskole, Copenhagen
2002 - 05	Member of Kunstnersamfundet, DK
2001	Curator of Crafts Collection for Danish Crafts
2000	Member of selecting jury for the Jerwood Applied Arts Prize 2001, UK
1997 - 2002	Curator of exhibition: British Ceramics.2000.dk - at the Grimmerhus Ceramics Museum, DK (author of catalogue essay)
1997 - 2002	Editorial member of 'Danish Crafts Magazine' ('Dansk Kunsthåndværk')
1997 - 2008	Studio in Copenhagen
1997 -	Teacher at The Danish Design School, Copenhagen
1995 - 98	Board member at the Grimmerhus Ceramics Museum, DK
1993 - 97	Teacher at the Jutland Academy of Fine Arts, Aarhus, DK
1990 - 97	Studio in Aarhus, DK.
1988 - 90	Teacher of Ceramics at Vestbirk Folk High School, DK
1981 - 88	Royal College of Art, London.
1977 - 81	MA RCA Ceramics and Glass
1974 - 77	Studio in Odder, DK
	Works with ceramists in England, France and Denmark
	Aarhus Academy of Art, DK

### Selected Solo Exhibitions

2008	The Digital Clay, Danish Museum of Art and Design. Exhibition on artistic research at The Danish Design School
2005	Puls Contemporary Ceramics, Bruxelles
2003	Gallery Nørby, Copenhagen
	Clara Scremini Gallery, Paris
2002	Puls Contemporary Ceramics, Bruxelles
2001	Clara Scremini Gallery, Paris
2000	Puls Contemporary Ceramics, Bruxelles
1999	Udstillingssted for Ny Keramik, Copenhagen
1997	Gallery Nørby, Copenhagen

### Selected Two Artist And Group Exhibitions

2009	MINDCRAFT – by Danish Crafts. Milan Furniture Fair
2007	END. An International Ceramics Exhibition Project. Danish Museum of Art and Design, Bomuldsfabriken Kunsthall, Norway
2007	Summerexhibition, Drud & Køppe Gallery, Copenhagen
2007	Biennalen 07. Biennial for Crafts and Design, Trapholt Art Museum, DK
2007	Collect, V&A Museum, London
2006	SOFA, Chicago.
2006	Musée Magnelli, Vallauris, France
2006	Collect, London. Crafts Council at the Victoria and Albert Museum
2005	Nancy Margolis Gallery, New York
2005	Collect 05. Crafts Council at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Represented by Gallery Nørby
2004	Clara Scremini Gallery, Paris
2004	Superdanish, Toronto.
2004	Biennalen 2004, Copenhagen.
2003 - 07	Scandinavian Design beyond the Myth. Travelling exh. to 12 museums in Europe
2002 - 04	From the Kilns of Denmark. Travelling exhibition. 5 museums in the US (starting at the American Crafts Museum, N.Y.) (2004: La Maison du Danemark, Paris, and Nordic Embassies, Berlin).
2002	La Tradition de Demain - Innovation au Quotidien. Designexhibition, La Maison du Danemark, Paris.
2000	Danish Porcelain 1775 -2000, The Danish Museum of Decorative Arts, Copenhagen
	Tableware of the Future, Designproject for Royal Scandinavia A/S. Showroom in Copenhagen and Trapholt Museum, DK
1999	Keramik aus Dänemark, Munich, Germany
1998	1. Nordic Ceramics Triennale (touring exhibition), Stockholm; Gothenburg, Sweden; Kolding, DK 1999



- 1997 National Arts Council exhibition, Copenhagen  
Sort Rum (Black Space), Copenhagen, Milan.  
(Design exhibition with Hans Thyge Raunkjær)  
2. Danish Ceramics Triennale, Trapholt Museum, DK  
Danish Ceramics 1850 - 1997, Sophienholm, Copenhagen
- 1996 Clara Scremini Gallery, Paris (with Karen Bennicke)  
Danish Art and Design, St. Petersburg, Russia
- 1994 Charlottenborg Efterårsudstilling, Copenhagen  
Inaugural exhibition, Grimmerhus Ceramics Museum
- 1993 Young Contemporaries (Keramikkens Underskov),  
Copenhagen

### Public Collections

National Arts Council, DK  
Trapholt Art Museum, DK  
Kunstforeningen af 14. august, DK  
Grimmerhus Ceramics Museum, DK  
Röhsska Museet, Gothenburg, Sweden  
MIMA, Middlesborough, UK  
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris  
Danish Museum of Decorative Arts, Copenhagen  
Victoria & Albert Museum, London  
National Museum, Oslo

### Awards

- 2007, 09 National Arts Council, Grants
- 2005 Ole Haslunds Kunstnerfond, DK. Honorary Grant.
- 2005 The Sotheby Award, Collect, London
- 2003 The Danish National Bank Jubilee Fund  
(2005,03,01,96,94)
- 2002 National Arts Council, DK (Statens Kunstfond). Stipend.
- 2001 Crafts Council Annual Prize, DK  
(Kunsthåndværkerrådets Årspris)
- 1997 The Design Foundation, Ministry of Culture, DK  
The National Arts Council, DK. 3-year-Grant
- 1996 Danish Contemporary Art Foundation
- 1994 National Arts Council stipends, DK (1994, 2000)
- 1989 The Sir Eduardo Paolozzi Travelscholarship, RCA

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Kraks Blå Bog, Denmark, 2002 -  
'From the Kilns of Denmark'. Catalogue, Rhodos Ed.  
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The Works of Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl). 2001  
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by Lars Dybdahl)  
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Danish Crafts Magazine. Interview  
Keramikkens Underskov. Catalogue 1993



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