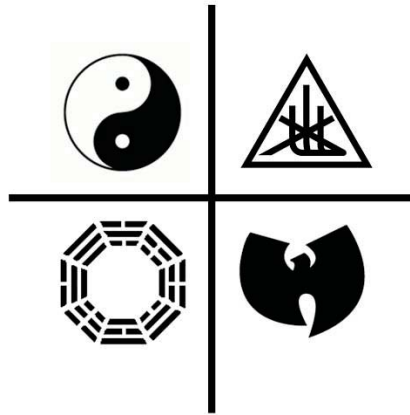


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# THE TAO OF MAGIC

Daniel Kelly 2015

# **The Tao of Magic.**

**An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the post-graduate degree of**

**Master of Fine Arts**

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**Daniel Kelly**

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## Abstract

This study examines an individual path through creative practice which draws from esoteric literature and builds upon a culture of contemporary relevance. Through the application of themes such as Taoism, anthropological magic, hip hop music and abstract expressionist painting, all of which influence my personal creative journey, I am able to contextualise methods of production and place them within the serendipitous context from which the works originated. By expressing themes of the world that are somewhat unknown, like the depiction of God or the understanding of magic, I set out to inform, through clues, a process and a hybrid of themes that reset the stage in a collective fashion of individual belief.



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## Introduction.

This thesis project explores the influence of 'magic' within an art practice. It draws upon, and brings together, beliefs and concepts from eastern religions, anthropology, hip-hop culture, martial arts films and key movements in modern and contemporary art practice to convey a personal vision or 'way' of making art within a lived philosophical context. This is a highly personal and idiosyncratic journey that embraces the chance elements of the painting process and sculptural bricolage, combining them with critical reflection and aesthetic experimentation.

To show the artist's leaps and associations regarding magical manifestations, gestures, actions and fusions, a collective foundation of the word 'magic' is used in this text. Through approaching magic from literature that explains and deconstructs the word 'magic' into accessible compilations, a standpoint of knowledge toward the subject is formed. By explaining it through artistic practice one can get a better understanding of what we as artists are capable of within this realm.

Books relating to the occult and mysticism have been particularly relevant to this study. Aspects of Eastern religion such as Taoism and Buddhism offer insights into 'magical occurrences' in the artistic practice. Also various aspects of Western mysticism such as Palmistry, Astrology and Divination propound similar viewpoints on 'magic'. This subjective preparation is redirected upon art observation through the analysis of creativity. Thus Max Gimblett's interpretations are associated with Rohan Wealleans' approach to paint, with an eye for mystical abilities, and the subject or artist is rationalised through significant prediction or appreciation for the techniques involved.

This form of critical reflection influences my own aesthetic experimentation, integrating mysticism from both Eastern and Western so-called books of magic. This 'way' of producing art becomes a personal endeavour — bettering the self and generating art objects that contribute to the world to balance a 'karma' of knowledge.

By taking an object from everyday life (such as a steel ruler) and imbuing it with importance or an element of faith (faith being an actualised hope in something that may or may not be real) and belief (being one's own point of view on something that is understood as *most* true), within its new found context, a new meaning becomes visible — embracing the realm of play. This animism of sensibility, the 'soul' of the object's new found meaning (the steel ruler as a sword), is based on the input of external chi (energy that is outside

of the body) into an object, thus animating it with belief. Like a powerful mythical sword that holds the magic of belief through symbolism, the readymade object when manipulated combines its symbolism with material associations of the object's former life and use. How is it that children can hold a manifestation and vision of an object that could be used as something else, like a stick that in an instant becomes a sword? Universally they play until age and the expectation of a growing 'rational' understanding of the world brings a stop to the performance. But, like a Jackson Pollock drip painting, the childlike notion can live on holding the creative act 'in' and 'through' the artistic expression that is simple and playful. While the power of water (or paint), through the power of fixity is placed to rest and form the unknown aspects of permanent manifestation of solidified liquid.

*Water reaches its goal by flowing continually. It fills up every depression before it flows on. The superior man follows its example; he is concerned that goodness should be an established attribute of character rather than an accidental and isolated occurrence. So likewise in teaching others everything depends on consistency, for it is only through repetition that the pupil makes the material his own.(Wilhelm, 2001)*

By opening the complex fusions of personal play toward something that becomes art, the piece can then be imbued with a history so an inner sense lives on.





Figure 1 Wu-Tang logo

The Wu-Tang Chamber.

The Wu-Tang symbol was created in 1992 by Allah Mathematics (T. Rza, 2005). This symbol (fig 1) has the potential to become recognisable within the world as a whole. By moving it outside of the musical world and into the art world, placement of this logo in artworks could further the 'brand' and could do so at a rate that is indeterminable as it is an underground esoteric sub-culture. This mission is a motivating factor within this art practice. 'Play your part little soldier...' (Chef, 2009) says Reakwon (one of the nine generals of the Wu-Tang Clan), this quotation reflects the way of the Wu-Tang collective and their underlying unity and dedication

to the 'cause' that the Wu-Tang holds as potentially influential through the art of rhyme. The 'cause' is the furthering of the knowledge with its strong association with subjects such as the Shaolin Temple, poetic ingenuity, the art of rhyme, and mottos like 'keeping it real' and 'telling the truth'. The motto 'keeping it real' is belief through action that can be translated as a true expression of something that is not false in origin and offers an underlying connection to the real people in this world with whom you have something in common. This translates into the making of art objects, through the people who are appreciative of your work (an esoteric sub-culture of listeners or makers).



Figure 2 Wu-Tang Light Sabre and Wu-Tang Sword (version 1).

By being straightforward and genuine in one's work, the hope is that others may see your open attempt to communicate and be appreciative.

My personal and creative position is that I have introduced myself to the Abbot (Robert Diggs aka RZA) and asked if I could be a Killa Bee (disciple) in 2009 at an after party for his concert. After discussion I was told yes. Now the question becomes 'does this give me permission to create my own Wu-Tang logo' as so many disciples have done in the past? I have, many times in fact, and will

continue this task as a ritualistic process of creation. Within the period of thesis study I have been incorporating the logo on weapon handles, blades, axe heads etc. This is my own form of homage to the RZA's efforts in the film 'Man With the Iron Fists' (R. D. A. RZA, 2012). The RZA acts in this movie as a blacksmith, and this is relevant to my role as a maker of weapons. To place these weapons in the realm of art spreads the knowledge of the Wu-Tang symbol, bringing light upon change of context from a music symbol into art gallery realm. It is evident that the clan are interested in incorporating music and art as in early 2014 they produced an album to be sold through the Museum Of Modern Art titled "Once upon a time in Shaolin". The crafted metal box that holds the Compact Disc was fashioned by British-Moroccan artist Yahya. This happened after my creation of a Wu-Tang Light Sabre 2013 (fig 2) inspired by the 'Star-Wars' saga, thereby bringing a form of collective advancement to the Wu-Tang logo in the world of art fused with popular culture references. I would argue that the role I can play expanding the Wu-Tang brand is to branch out into the art gallery context, similar to the way the RZA is doing by making films.



Throughout this Masters in Fine Arts programme I have made a series of weapons cumulating in a final rack that holds an assortment of weapons titled 'The Wu-Tang Clan will rise again' (2015) (fig 21). Using found materials as readymade components, mixed with hand crafted elements, over a two year period I have focused on making sculptures that resemble weapon props that communicate ideas of a fictional world while using components that are very much of our current world. By referencing the humorous aspects of my own exploration into the three-dimensionality of the Wu-Tang Clan logo, a hybridism of cross cultural connections occurs.

Through this process of taking a two-dimensional esoteric symbol and making it three-dimensional, I am bringing physicality and materiality to this bat-like symbol that stands for a large collective of hip-hop artists. I bring this symbol into a place of a Kung-fu standpoint by creating weapons that are commonly associated with the martial arts world, for example how skill with the staff is associated with the Shaolin temple. I created a staff that has the Wu-Tang logo at one end and the five elements of wind, water, fire, earth, and metal engraved in the steel cylinder that slides up and down the staff. This invention was inspired by a movie about

the Shaolin monks titled 'The 36th Chamber of Shaolin' (1978), a Shaw Brothers Kung-fu film directed by Liu Chia-liang, in which the main character trains under strict command and reaches a level of Kung-fu where he makes his own three poled staff. Almost all of the weapons on the rack can be used for real life training. This is a reversal of the Wu-Tang's approach of adopting samples from Kung-fu movies and flips the hip-hop group toward giving back something they (or I) created to the world of Kung-fu, and inadvertently raises the standard to 'innovation' in the art gallery scene.

Within this thesis the purpose of this logo development is a personal endeavour to explore my interest in the world of Kung-fu through a comical idea of the movie prop. This in part acknowledges the city of Wellington, New Zealand, where the movie industry, and especially the work of Wingnut films and Weta Digital, explores the creation of 'fantasy' totemic objects. I seek to create a series of objects that have a distinct characteristic, or 'essence', but which don't aspire to be fully authentic in their 'fantastic' appearance. The hybridism of aesthetic between the crafted and the 'found' is central to these sculptural forms.

The construction of each weapon involves an extensive and undetermined period of time as I rely on the objects to be found or 'appear' with a potential that lies within each component revealed. I then combine forms together to create my own standard of 'realness'. This 'realness' goes through a cognitive operation of determining a strong internal logic or material taxonomy through an intuitive adaptation of material associations and symbolism.



Figure 3 Wu-Tang Swords

Parts such as caste moulds (fig3) of the primary logo that appears throughout the weaponry, stand as a collective link to the expansion of the Wu-Tang brand. Expanding the enterprise of Wu-Tang and bringing it to the world of art is a methodology or

procedure of advancing the corporation into the world of visual culture. As New Zealand is a geographical region that has little direct association with the American hip-hop group, this speaks of my own upbringing. Many groups of friends were brought together through an interest in the collective of the Wu-Tang. While this kind of group situation seems to be fading, I personally hold tight to the childhood togetherness that sparked many great moments in time, among friends. This personal wish for the camaraderie and solidarity to continue is manifest through my dedication to the reconstruction of the logo, many times in different shapes and forms on the rack of weapons.

Wu-Tang are based in and strongly associated with Staten Island, NYC. Throughout my childhood in Whangarei, New Zealand Wu-Tang was highly significant and represented a group of people larger than an average music band, with each of the nine main members having his own variation of the Wu-Tang logo. The variance of this logo is an established practice; other groups that are incorporated with Wu-Tang manage their own modification and brand their subgroup with an analogous symbol, but all hold to the 'W' like shape. The specificity of my own application includes taking the form into three dimensions and



exploring its materiality. Through bringing it to the weapons I explore poetically evocative Wu-Tang lyrics such as:

*“... I'm on the trigger plus I got the Wu-Tang sword...” or “...quick to stick my Wu-Tang sword right through your navel...”* (T. Rza, 1993)

Although direct suggestion to the lyrical content brings a reality to the rhyme (above) possible through straight execution of an idea, I believe it is the ‘making’ that brings the Wu-Tang sword to life.

Taking everyday readymade objects such as a vacuum cleaner pipe, a metre long steel ruler, closet railings and table legs, I manipulate the objects into blades, keeping connected to my established intuitive process of finding objects and my knowledge of their potential adaptation, creation and symbolism. This is evident in the work 'Water Sword' (2015) (fig 3) where I aligned the blade with the I-Ching 29th hexagram of the ‘abysmal water’ by cutting the ruler at the 29cm mark. Through this a manifestation of Taoist numerology exemplifies that most decisions made are full of symbolic content or religious notions, drawing on mystical or occult findings in literature.

To solidify each of the weapons through the Wu-Tang symbolism, I have ‘created’ through types of material drawn from

the world around me and those that have material potential to become or fit as seen through my own trained eye. The weapons are constructed through the adaptability of parts and often given a somewhat crude finish, intentionally appearing somewhat rough in places like an advanced ‘teenage’ attempt at sword modification or creation. One such example is the swords titled 'Wu-Dang Gza Genius' (2015) (fig 4). These swords are crudely cut and wrapped with purple cloth, yet these objects hold the weight, reality and balance and are more realistic and wieldable than any of the other swords. As these two short swords are devised as training weapons, they do not need a pristine finish to ‘function’.



Figure 4 Wu-Dang Gza Genius 2015

The qualities that I prioritise in the weapons are the adaptations of symbols and unique materials, all the while trying to 'keep it real' and to better induce wonderment from the viewer. My own

creative agency guides objects' locations and placements, and in context replicates a weight and semi-realism of weapon props that speak to the viewer of intuition and originality through construction, much like the goal of Wu-Tang poetry.

*Wu-Tang going to bring it to you in the purist form...the gods is here to take over this shit. (Wu-tang forever first interlude)(T. RZA, 1997).*

With such strong conclusions as these the Wu-Tang collective place themselves on a high level within the world of hip-hop. Referring to themselves as 'gods' is a sort of prediction as to how they are going to rule the realm of gangster rap and become 'legendary' in the eyes of their followers.

Now this attitude may appear boastful, but it establishes the confidence and belief that you are involved in an action that is significant and will be remembered. In the contemporary art world, of course, being remembered is part of the game; confidence in your own work will lead towards self-assurance. Yet a contradiction exists as often a lack of confidence in or satisfaction with an object or work is a key driver for continuing on to the next work, to keep exploring the subject. Magic refers to this same confidence as a positive thing also:

*"Those who are associated with some good magic, have in virtue of that courage and confidence."*(Malinowski, 1965)

## Taoism in Art

Taoist philosophical theory is also a key influence on my practice. Taoism is based around the yin/yang symbol (All things carry yin and embrace yang.) (Tzu, 1963) and works its way up to the Pa-Kua (fig 5), through which the I-Ching has its derivative beginning, holding thousands of years of intense study and consideration that is crucial to the understanding of the Taoist religion. The Pa-Kua symbol appears on 'God Staff'(2014) (fig 6) signifying a connection with the elemental forces of earth. This symbol holds the eight elemental directions and is moreover the foundation of the I-Ching and its 64 hexagrams.



Figure 5 Pa Kua Symbol





Figure 6 God Staff 2014



Figure 7 God's Plans 2015

The I-Ching is a book of magic that evaluates a variety of situations through the divination of natural elements.

Throughout my paintings there have been underlying references to paint as water or as an element unto itself. By the way of painting a mountain above a lake, such as in 'God's Plans' (2015) (fig 7 ) I could consult the I-Ching by looking up the combination of the mountain above the lake to find the hexagram of 'Decrease', number 41 out of 64 possible options. The knowledge of chance within the process of divination was an afterthought. By

consulting the I-Ching after the two elements appeared on the canvas, a true adaption of painting and the divine qualities of the I-Ching were revealed to me:

*“One must draw on the strength of the inner attitude to compensate for what is lacking in externals; then the power of the content makes up for the simplicity of form. There is no need of presenting false appearances to God. Even with slender means, the sentiment of the heart can be expressed.”*(Wilhelm, 2001)

What this quote reveals to me is a lesson on the capacity of the artist to make the most of 'slender means', or for me to be open to the idea I was already channelling — a representation of a mighty god within the mountain as subject matter. Or that my 'simplicity of form' in paint application could hold the 'Power of content'. I consider the I-Ching to be magic, and with its abundance of views and such an openly interpretable approach to words it can fit all situations. As Carl Jung observed, *“The Chinese took to internal means with a childish ignorance to the world.”*(Jung, 2014). This kind of conceptualization underlies my philosophy toward the content of my painting and reveals the subjective approach of 'simplicity' that I employ.

Taoist 'wu-wei' is known as non-action, and this is something that I strongly believe is the way to the path of the 'Tao'. By deciding when and when not to act, creation through movement takes on a purer form. Recognition of this decision is the actual knowledge inbuilt within man; the contemplation then becomes the light around the person. Alice. A. Bailey's book 'A Treatise on White Magic' (Bailey, 1951) includes potent explanations of what 'magic' is or could be from the perspective of Tibetan thought and what is known as 'the white brotherhood'. I found many references throughout the book to the 'soul' and the principles of light which relate to Taoist teachings, with a strong parallel emphasis on achievement of 'good'.

*“One of the things which every disciple has to learn is to achieve that wisdom of when to work and when to refrain, and on an understanding of those periods or interlude which are characterized by speech and silence. It is here that many mistakes are made here that many workers fail to make good.”*(Bailey, 1951)

So my form of the notion of non-action plays a part in the preliminary application of chemical alchemy and flow that resides in paint: through perseverance of a gracious flow in the

application of paint the chemical reaction is manifest. Here the painting is formed by the Tao (Heavenly Way) itself through water's stagnation and the resting of 'non-actions' — stages of grace which arrive after the initial application. When I speak of 'grace' I am referring to the painting process — when I pour puddles of paint and leave them to rest. These puddles cause a motion that seems to incorporate magic or myth such as in 'Dragon Flight' (fig7) that I discover through reflection on the

finished result. To gain an instilled viewpoint on 'magic' through an anthropological approach, the informed theory of what magic is helps me to master an explanation. As B. Malinowski states *"Magic is used as something which over and above mans equipment and his force helps him to master accident and to ensnare luck."* This kind of magic exemplifies the painting process of 'Buddha Cube' 2015. Primary decisions were made with the initial pour





Figure 8 Dragon Flight 2014

and then left to my hand to guide the flow of paint, then to see what emerges from the unconscious. Through alchemy and non-action the settling form combines 'chance' and 'decisions', yet exists as a result that is neither. It is an external manifestation of the theory of Taoism and magic:

*"For absolute purity only exists when entire freedom from control has been brought about"*(Bailey, 1951)

I would propose this painting technique is magic at its very essence: like water can take on any form but still hold its essence so can the soul. As white magic is concerned largely with the soul(Bailey, 1951), there is a strong relationship between this materia prima of the universe and the white magic of purity that is incorporated through paint as a representation of water and what it can do.

*"Water has more than a purely physical or biological meaning; the spiritual realities, of which it is the symbol, are never attached to it arbitrarily, but are directly and logically derived from its essence... mysterious attraction of water as something sacred, as a*

*symbolic and manifested expression of a psychic or cosmic reality, lives on in Art, especially in painting and poetry."*(Burckhardt, 1987)

I attest that great hope now lies with the painter or poet to contemplate and reveal the other worldly, such as the unmistakable suggestions that appear within 'Dragon Flight' 2014 (fig 8). Revealed is an insight into the micro world of the puddle through digital enlargement — a scene that I can only describe as magical due to its construction and result. Through non-action and guidance by the hand, the result is anciently mythological as dragons and dinosaurs appear in micro details after close consideration of the result. The process is the dominant distinguisher from soul to action, and the result alludes to what is not of this world. But it could be pulled apart by analysis of technique and theorised through this:





Figure 9 Buddha Cube 2015

*“Soul is neither spirit nor matter but is the relation between them... the soul is the mediator between this duality: it is the middle principle, the link between God and his form... therefore the soul is the form-building aspect, and is the attractive factor in every form of the universe.”(Bailey, 1951)*



Figure 10 Guardians of the Immortal Island 2015



## Contemporary Relevance.

In speaking of my two major paintings of the 2015 thesis year ('Buddha Cube' and 'Guardians of the Immortal Island'), I acknowledge the developmental value of a 15year period of progression through multiple experimentations. I like to call it 'evolution' and 'advancement of originality' as built from previous works of my own. This stance has its origin in the movement of the Gutai painters from Japan and their strong inclination towards ability:

*"Gutai motto's, "Do not imitate others" and "Create what has not been done before," did not simply mean a pursuit of formal uniqueness and innovation. They rather suggested being thoroughly individualistic, and that individuality is the most precious character."*(Paul Schimmel, 2012)

I would argue that my own individualism has transformed over many years of painting construction to the current moment — a powerful, meditative, and unique understanding of the essence of paint. Through my process there is important decision making in the moment and great responsibility of result when unearthing

depictions of demons and gods as seen in the two works titled 'Demon Skull' and 'God Appears' 2015 (fig 11). This consequently is positive stimulus through my expectation and patience. My own connection with the phenomenon of paint puddles is revealed after nature has taken its course, set and become long-lasting. Fixed in time and guided from previous knowledge of amounts and types of paint, level of ground, forming something that stands out like a radical pattern that I do not want to disturb. This becomes the time to leave well alone the manifestation of self to age, with a position of gratification. Often then the moment will be correct and other important patterns or figures will emerge.

When speaking of the 'pouring' technique, one artist that deserves mention is Dale Frank. He experiments with the concept of painting through intuitional application. Franks observation of the moving paint is similar to mine in that he stops when he

*"looks at the canvas and thinks, that's right."*(Forrest, 2014)

This type of hiatus or ending is relevant to me also as I consider that when the eye is happy with the means, and the knowledge gained from previous paintings determines this eye, it is time. Dale Frank dilutes his paint giving a less solid feel compared to paint used in 'Buddha Cube' 2015. Within this painting is a more solid chunky reaction which I hold to be a more real and less weakened paint representation as I have found the magic occurrences in thick paint are more realistic and more discernible to the eye. As in Dale Franks work titled, 'She really wanted one of those Chinese Crested dogs but she'd have to get rid of her boyfriend first,' 2014 (fig 13) where it is described as

*"descending further into the realms of alchemy with the employment of a range of fluids including turpentine, lighter fluid, and oil as catalysts for determining density, flow, mix, and timing."*(Forrest, 2014)

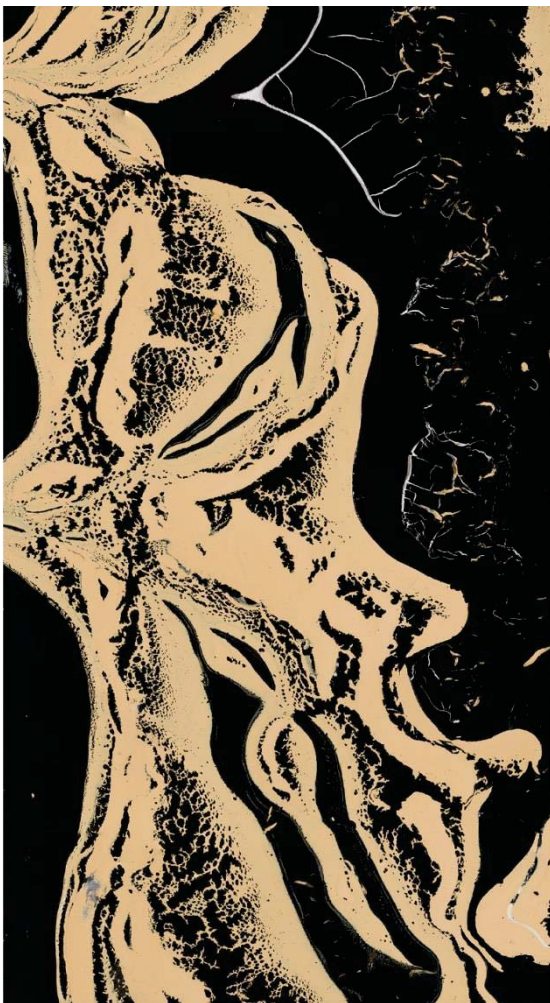


Figure 11 God Appears 2015 and Figure 12 Demon Skull 2015





Figure 13 Dale Frank She really

wanted one of those Chinese Crested dogs but she'd have to get rid of her boyfriend first 2014

This idea of great seriousness is important to the evolution of my own painting style and is evident in my work titled 'Guardians of the Immortal Island' (fig 10). Within this piece is personal painting evolution; my style increases potently within this work due to my increasing knowledge of the reactions of acrylic and enamel paint. But I have chosen to conceal this development through a puzzle-like arrangement. Weeks after completion, I

came across Jackson Pollock's Painting titled 'Guardians of the Secret' (1943) (fig 14)

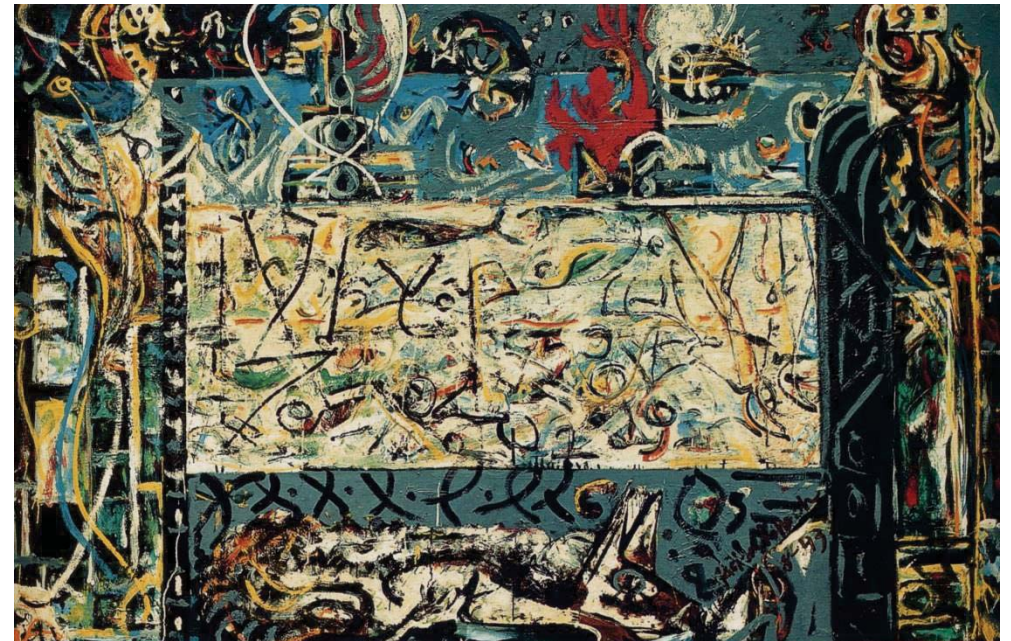


Figure 14 Jackson Pollock Guardians of the Secret 1943

The composition was excitingly similar to my work, even down to the use of the word 'guardian' in the title. This doesn't happen very often, but I would relate it to a form of 'collective unconscious' like circumstance, where on my part I may have suppressed the memory on a subconscious level. But there was no conscious trace in my mind of a thought or memory of this work at all. This kind

of embraceable luck and ensnarement of accident is ‘magic’ according to anthropologist(Malinowski, 1965)

*“Yorkshireman expressed his desire, “to deeply and directly fixate sensations, or to directly connect spirit and matter, Attaining these, people of Gutai broadheartedly keep burning their lives with great seriousness and joyfulness.”(Paul Schimmel, 2012)*

I attest that this is not the only magic that occurs within this painting. The technique of ‘puddling’ is full of nature’s disposition through creative experimentation in the use of paint as an element similar to water. It is my position that paint is an element of ‘nature’ due to its similarity as a liquid to water. My own hand guides the paint to a resolved positioning on the canvas and then the outside forces are left to form and move it for hours as it slowly dries. The stillness of air within the studio influences water’s own alchemy, becoming a component of paint manipulation. This unravelling of force imbued with my own spirit through the application creates a pattern and form unlike any other in these experiments.

The puddling is difficult to master and I have spent many years in search of sublime manifestations within its minute occurrences. But the main occurrence of ‘magic’ that happened within ‘Guardians of the Immortal Island’ is the face in the top middle-left section. This bearded figure was not formed by my hand, but through the chemical reaction of acrylic and enamel paint placement left to form overnight and reveal itself the next day. This type of event is precious within my practice; therefore, I have chosen to enlarge this piece through digital photography. By choosing the title ‘God Appears’ I am bestowing an importance and imagined belief of importance that is a contributing factor of my own belief in acquiring mastery. Much like the Wu-Tang confidence in and vision of the future and what it could be.

To balance out opposing forces like the yin and yang principle and not be unbalanced about the presence of good and evil, I have chosen another piece that was formed in exactly the same way. This piece is of a demon skull, ‘Demon Skull’ (2015) (fig 12). Full size the works stand two meters tall and at one point two meters wide. They oppose each other in a battle of yin/yang proportions, bringing the philosophy of the east, through technique, to a religious problem of the west through applied title and subject



matter. The duality between God and the Devil, through being a dichotomy of sorts that is powerful and unique, creates a stance that situates modern ideology of that 'no one knows what God looks like' and how the Devil is seen to be demon with skull like features etc. This fits my stance as an artist: I am trying to create the undetermined through chance-fuelled technique. The art historian Selden Rodman interviews Pollock, who rejects the usual label for his Art:

*"I don't care for abstract expressionism'... it's certainly not 'non-objective', and not 'non-representational' either. I'm very representational some of the time and a little all of the time. But when you're painting out of your unconscious, figures are bound to emerge."*(Jachec, 2011)

My unconscious was also active in the sense of a clear mindful approach to the power of the meditative pour technique. The massive amount of paint used in each pour I liken to RohanWealleans' dunks in paint such as 'Blue brain' 2010 (fig 15) in which I would argue not much conscious thought is involved in the action until the next step. For Rohan the next step appears to be the removal of portions of paint with a cutting tool to reveal

the layers. My secondary step differs, being a tilt of the canvas, waiting for an appearance of uniqueness of form. This kind of strategy relies on the mind to determine a balance of composition and insight into details of significance: "...holding to the attitude of constant detached observation"(Bailey, 1951)

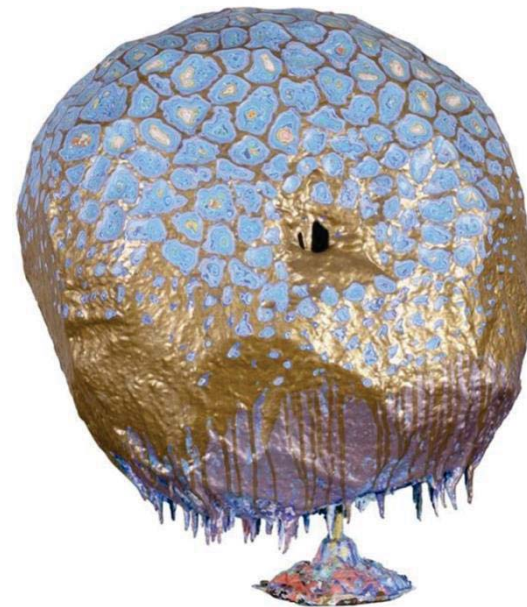


Figure 15 RohanWealleans Blue brain 2010

Through cutting up and then rearranging square paintings of equal size, a playful disposition is manifest and distorts the way in which 'Buddha Cube' (2015) (fig 9) was made. The result demonstrates that through pattern new meaning can arise from



the facet's placement. This consideration of form and composition is analogous to a calligraphic process; one that is unified and comfortable to the eye, with balance, and a staggered repeat of pattern.

Shi Tao, a poet who painter Brice Marden drew inspiration from explains:

*"The ultimate aim of painting is not decorative beauty but truth. What is truth? It must not be confused with formal resemblance; indeed formal resemblance only reaches the appearance of things, whereas the function of truth is to capture their essence."*(Anfam, 2012)

The idea of capturing the 'essence' of water's abundance, is one of my goals within 'Buddha Cube' (2015) (fig 9). This form of event is likened to Max Gimblett's concept of 'momentary truth' through mind state and application of paint.

*"...Gimblett articulates a space in which the act of meditation unfolds."*(Lewis Hyde, 2013)

When looking at 'Buddha Cube' (2015) (fig 9) a swirl of unison floods my mind and in time settles at a full realisation of the

intricacies involved through the creative process of puddling. This piece holds symbolism too; within are small yin/yang variances of size, and not conventional yin/yang due to the unbalanced swirls as depictions of yin/yang they flow as when created into positive and negative divergences of shape, with the intention to create some unique symbols, placing them as innovatory inventive symbolism. These crucial swirls add to the complexity of the image of a truth of water's essence. Where Max Gimblett's concern was with Zen Buddhism in the empty yet mindful swift motions in works such as 'Teacher' (2000) (fig 16), I am more concerned with the chemical and alchemical process of the pour to puddle, waiting then evaluating the result through contemplation and analysis. Then toward light manipulation through altering the experience by way of tampering in the divine, to give self and nature (or water or paint) a way to merge together and represent my own visual outcome. Pollock's 'all over painting' technique in his later large scale drip paintings made a unified pictorial surface where the eye of the viewer had



Figure 16 Max Gimblett *Teacher* 2000

little place to stop. Conversely the small yin/yang depictions in 'Buddha Cube' (2015) add a certain seriousness and possibility of finding evidence of and a relation to Taoism.

*"Pollock, working directly, never made studies for paintings, with the result that he fused drawing and*

*painting. Marden esteems drawing as highly as his paintings, seeing as intimate and direct, painting as being more about refinement."*(Siegel, 1999)

Refinement during the process of completing a work, such as 'Guardians of the Immortal Island' (2015) (fig 10) takes place through cutting painting in to squares. I would argue that the painting lies close to Pollock's fusion of drawing and painting. I have considered that the drawing process comes through the canvas when placed to a degree of non-sequential order. But as an arrangement that tells a little story of myth and cautious methods that can be unravelled by the viewing, is a possible angle to consider.

Some of these 'secrets' are easy, such as having two dominant figures on the outside protecting the inner realms, much like the Lord of the Rings (Fellowship of the Ring, Great River scene) statues that loom on either side of the river, hundreds of meters tall with arms extended protecting what is within from evil, or perhaps themselves a distraction from the secrets within (fig 17). This kind of placement in the painting protects the land of the secrets, land of canvas, land of confusion, land of meditation, land of Shaolin legend. This depiction of nature on the middle inner



right and left panels hold this fusion of heaven and earth, a core component within both Eastern and Western religious literature such as the Bible and the I-Ching.



Figure 17 Lord of the Rings Great River scene

*“The vertical arrangement of oriental calligraphy, which Marden suppresses in varying degrees, points to an interesting divergence in Eastern and Western thinking’s.”(Siegel, 1999)*

In ‘Guardians of the Immortal Island’ (2015) (fig 10) there is a reference to Chinese calligraphy in the vertical arrangement,

though not as suppressed as in Marden’s ‘Cold Mountain 3’ (1991) (fig 18). Rather the forms are celebrated with depictions of Heaven, Earth and under the earth. A description of the centre panel is placed in the title ‘Immortal Island’ and this is what it is, a panel of hundreds of immortally robed ‘beings’ engaging in a gathering of intellectual discussion.



Figure 18 Brice Marden Cold Mountain 3 1991

A kind of otherworldly prerequisite to perceive such a vision becomes esoteric in nature and within lays the test as to whether the viewer has the level of enlightenment to perceive such a vision.

The title gives clues to the personal vision of the maker. It has become clear through my own research that Pollock's 'Guardians of the Secret' 1943 (fig 14) has been advanced with technique and applied strong myth, with clearer divinity that holds a special method of 'puddling' to the extreme. This is a sort of recollected finding that is manifest with coincidence through strong structural similarities. Also a spiritual notion that could be accepted or not:

*"Marden admits openly to spirituality, claiming that if you accept certain unknowns it becomes easy to accept the idea of the spiritual."(Siegel, 1999)*



A mission that's lifelong.

The yin/yang theme is now stationary in paint within 'Buddha Cube'. This led me to create a fluid representation of this core principle in Taoist teachings. I have chosen to focus on a life experience to make visible the never ending circulation of the yin/yang. By taking from the everyday a moment of clarity and an associated hallucination, I have sought to capture mesmerizing sound combined with hypnotic imagery to play upon the iris in the video work 'Mission that's life long' 2015(fig19).



Figure 19 Still shot from 'Mission that's life long' 2015

Through the period of study and in prior video works I have explored states of fluidity and flux using the elements of smoke, water and fire. In 'Mission that's life long' I have found the most magical of conclusions within an object as simple as a coffee cup. The 'magic' lies in the hypnotic swirl of coffee foam upon the surface of the liquid. Through constant rotation of the foam thousands of shapes fluctuate and morph in a rotating motion. Projected onto a large wall the image spins giving the viewer time to come to grips with the compressed richness of visual complexity combined with sound that is looped and has a volume suited to the space.

The untitled sample of music was created by the Beastie Boys with lyrics by Inspector Deck of the Wu-Tang Clan, both from New York and popularly received in the 1990s. This combination of artists is meaningful to me as both have been strong personal influences throughout the last twenty years that I have been listening to music and making art. The RZA (Robert Diggs) author of the Wu-Tang manual and Abbott of the Wu-Tang Clan musical group, as mentioned earlier, is currently making Kung-fu films and expanding the Wu-Tang brand. I have incorporated an

excerpt of his first film 'Man with the Iron Fists' (R. D. A. RZA, 2012) into my other film created within the MFA program titled 'Smoke Tao' (fig 20). The excerpt gives an element of narrative to my somewhat abstract film and incorporates the idea of weapon making and being a blacksmith (as RZA's character is in the film), which, as previously noted, has informed my creation of weapons.



Figure 20 Smoke Tao still

This work expands the exploration of my first attempt at film production in 2001 where I used fire to represent meditational qualities. The course of development has not been influenced by any other than my own journey, excepting the New Zealand born film maker Len Lye. I'm particularly inspired by his film 'Free Radicals' 1958-1979. The dance of shapes within this film has the core of abstraction at heart and is exemplified through a drumming soundtrack. The lines dance and flicker like flame and bring the mind to a place that is meditative without a strong reference to objectivity. This non-referential objectivity of the dispersion of the micro is more greatly perceived through large-scale projection and tends to bring the viewer to a place where they can consider process and the particulars of the universal essence that is all around us commonly known as the Tao.



## Conclusion

I am not, through my art, imitating the East by any means, but rather adopting (and adapting) specific ways by which to look at the world. The same goes for my interest in the Wu-Tang Clan, as I am inspired by their ways of perception and want to investigate and honour them further. The fact that Wu-Tang takes an interest in Eastern martial arts and philosophy (two sides of the coin in the Taoist religion) coincides with my interests as a child. It is evidenced through my painting, video and sculpture that there is philosophy and practical relevance to the Kung-fu world within my final installation.

Wu-Tang swords and a Wu-Tang staff made with certain controlled ready-made objects link to the innocent notion of play the idea of training to gain skill, knowledge and awareness and the potency of objects as ceremonial weapons. Through artistic skill I have composed an arrangement of referential signifiers to sub cultures and grand props from the movie world. I liken this to a Wu-Tang verse splashed with technical reference to pure and different religions or subjects. Within the piece 'Wu-Tang Clan will rise again' (2015) (fig 21) references from Lord of the Rings (Gandalf's staff) to a light sabre (referencing Star-Wars), to a

Shaolin staff encrusted with elemental symbols and a Wu-Tang point, to a Tai-Chi sword with a Wu-Tang carved symbol etc. This cross referencing is over-shadowed by the dominance of the Wu-Tang logo's appearance; this reflects my persona in life. For example T-shirts, shoes and hats can define a person; it's what they represent. Within the sculpture 'Wu-Tang Clan will rise again' (2015) I reveal to the viewer my interests. I have chosen martial arts weapons to do this — becoming objects with a suggested use and value. A staff can be used, a sword can be used and a painting can be absorbed.

My paintings are the philosophical side of the coin, embracing Asian understanding of non-action. I have not set out to copy the East but to explore and grasp certain notions. For example in 'Buddha Cube' (2015) (fig 9) and 'Guardians of the Immortal Island' (2015) (fig 10) there is clear reference to both Western and Eastern abstract expressionism, whether Gutai, De Kooning, or Pollock, there is my own technique that infuses a born nature of the unknown through miniature detail. The digital enlargement of portions of paintings to create 'Demon Skull' and 'God Appears' 2015 exemplifies this notion of importance to the macro

of paint manipulation and speaks of serendipitous action resulting in spiritual manifestations interpreted as otherworldly 'magic manifestations' caused by the act of 'leaving well alone' the paint.

*"Such things cannot be thought out but must grow again from the forgotten depths, if they are to express the supreme presentiments of consciousness and the loftiest intuitions of the spirit. Coming from these depths they can unite the uniqueness of present day consciousness with age old past of life." (Jung, 2014)*

Although this passage is referring to mandalas, there lies a common goal which is the balance and harmony of intuitive action. This combined with twentieth century paint application technique brings the East and West together through the guided

light of play combined with an intellectual emphasis on the desired patterning and enacting of my chosen subject matter.

*"Aiiyyo you know the half, some get respect, most we show the path*

*They quoted tracks while we spoke math, blowin fast*

*Expose the craft, first picks chosen in the draft." (Deck, 2001)*

So it is in this acceptance that I lay my faith. It does not matter if the viewer is knowledgeable about the Wu-Tang logo, I-Ching scripture, myths of Shaolin or the way in which the painting was created. The desire is that the idea of the secret lives on to be discovered whenever the disciple is ready to learn.





Figure 21 Wu-Tang Clan will rise again 2015

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## Manifesto of the Chamber of Tao.

Taoism is like a coin, it has two sides. On one side you have the Kung-Fu, Tai-Chi, Chi Gong, and sword play. On the other side you have the philosophies that help you learn in the right way to harness the practical opposite side. These philosophies are based around books such as the Tao-Te-Ching, I-Ching, Yin/Yang principles and a number of other texts that teach about the 'way'.

The stance that I propose is that you must learn as much about the 'Way' as possible and you will be busy for a lifetime. But make sure you put to practice the things you recall when you are training in your everyday life. This could be as subtle as the way you step, the way you eat, the way you throw something! All can be acknowledged and applied with things you learn about through investigation to the 'Way'.

Always be on the lookout for new material on the 'Way', books, symbols, create drawings of the things you admire and you will be on the path to self-realisation. Create art that reflects your inner most valued 'things' and they will come in handy along the 'Way'.

Have goals to understand aspects of the 'Way', it could be memorising a verse from the Tao-Te-Ching. It could be coming accustomed with the 64 hexagrams of the I-Ching or learning how to control the light around us through contemplation and fixation. Baby steps to start with! But never forget where you are from! It is grounding to have a home.

Act only when you need to, otherwise you will wear yourself out. In time you will use the time of rest as your greatest time of discovery. Contemplation is a must, this creates the light. Be mindful of your thoughts and stay away from repetitious ones as they can grow to destroy what you should be focusing on.

Remember what you have said and make it count. Be wise in what you say, this will take time and reading about the 'Way' will help. Seek out new knowledge. You may take from

other religions that which is relevant. Read poetry, sing poetry, and live your life in a day. Don't be afraid to ask important questions to the right people.

Embrace and remember the occasions that you think are influenced by a higher power and hold tight to the fact that you were there. Be mindful that history repeats its self, the universe will show you the way in dark times. In these times you MUST remember as much as you can so when it happens again you will be the master of your own destiny.

Create righteous art that helps you remember the time and place. These works will fit together in the end. Don't be afraid to throw things away, material belongings can weigh you down. Carry something in your pocket that may be of use, even if it is only a prediction of yours. Mind your step, play games that help the mind to focus. This will train your mind to see clearly others actions.

Make sure you choose the right teacher for the knowledge you want to know. Make sure you do not see evil within them. If so be restrictive in what you say.

Do righteous and memorable things as often as you can, someone else might be watching. Go down in history. Be as many things as you can. Stay true to yourself. Study others and learn to not do as what you see as wrong. Harness and embrace chance. Use positivity to your advantage. Stand up for what you believe. Try to be truthful, it is your greatest friend. It will help you in the end.

The End