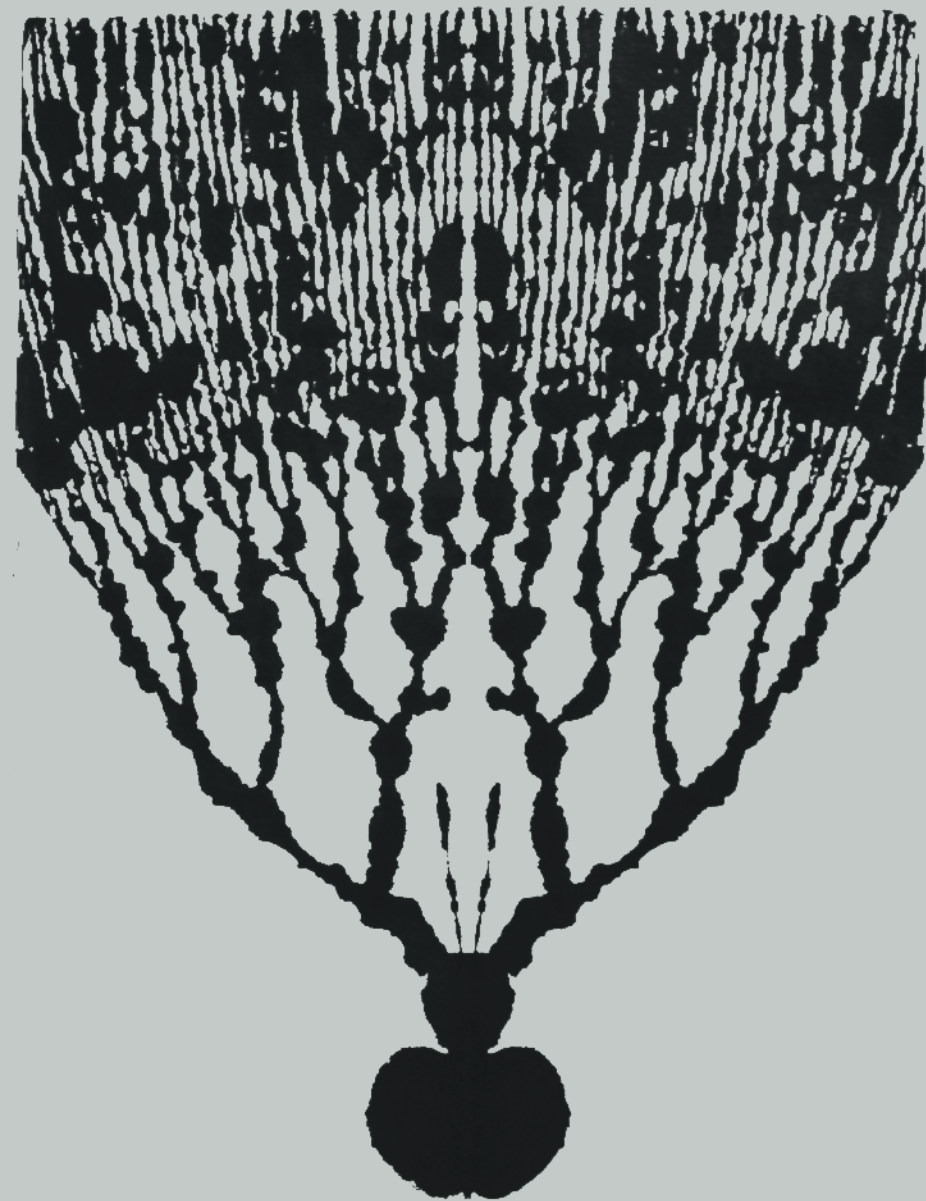
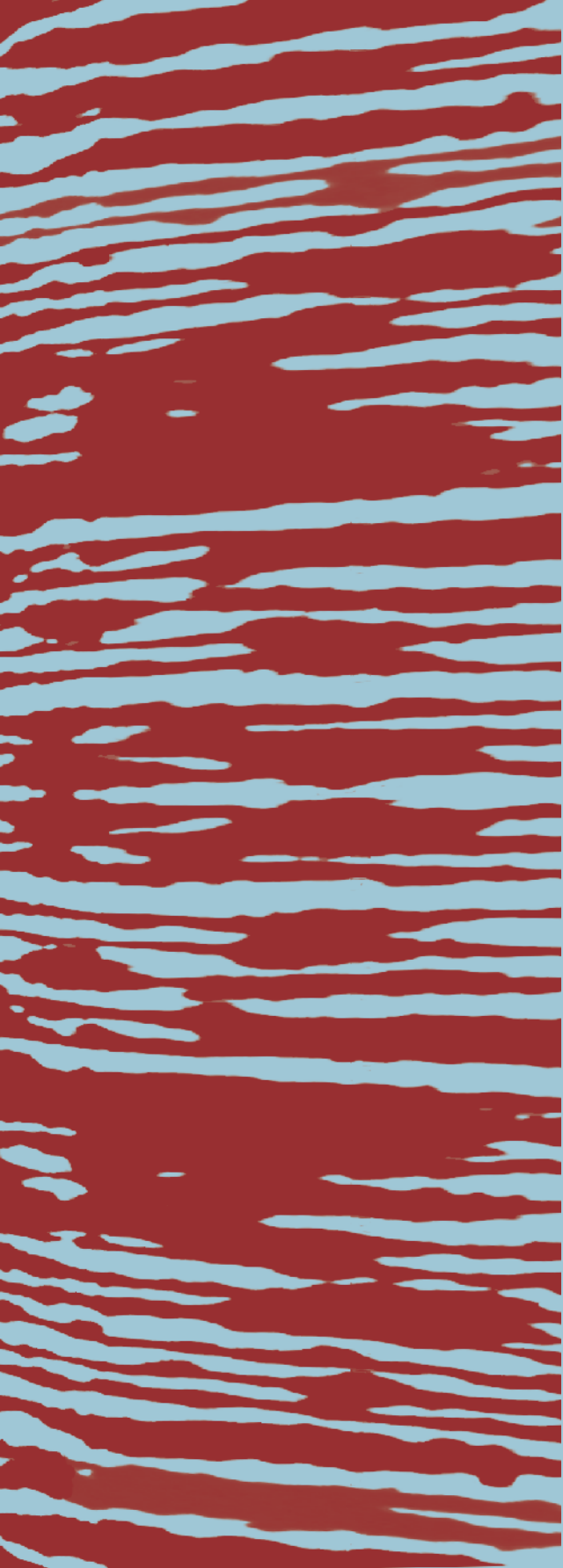


**Peter
Randall-Page**

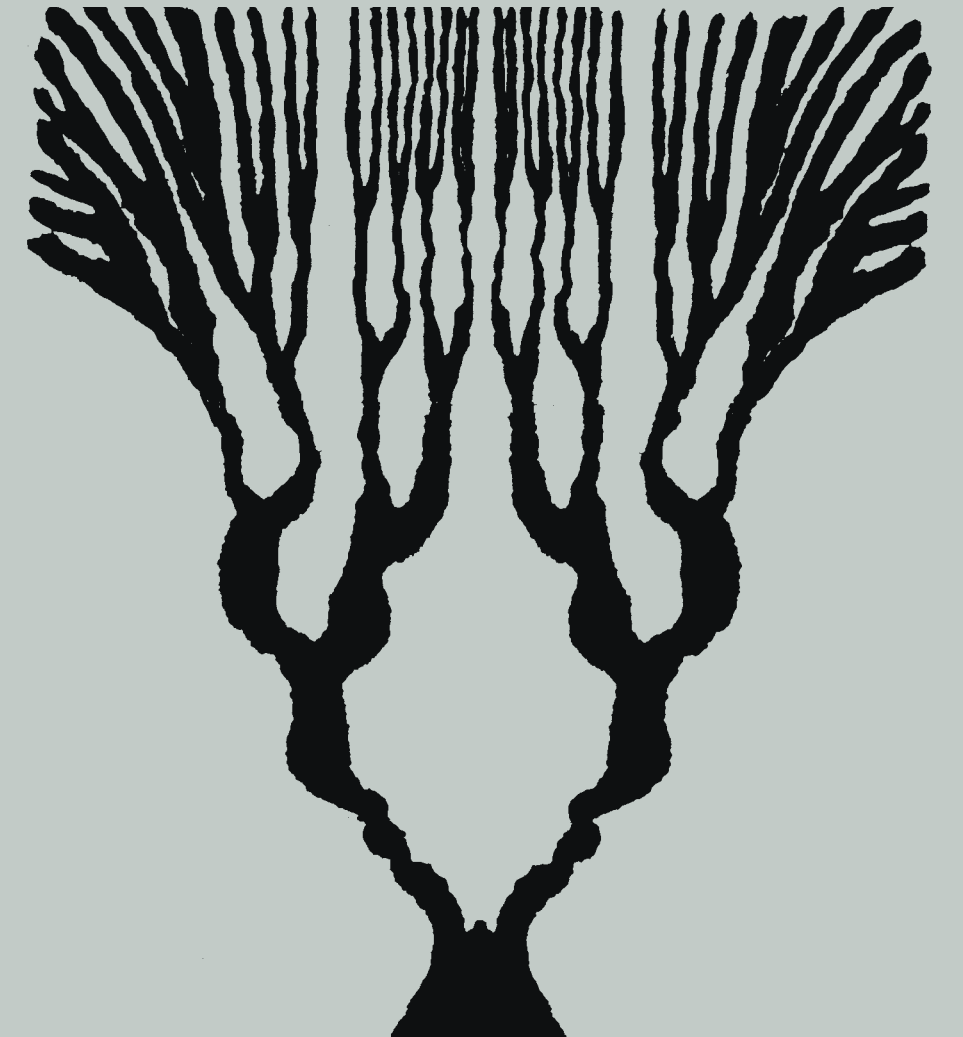


*The force that drives the water through the rocks
Drives my red blood; that dries the mouthing streams
Turns mine to wax.
And I am dumb to mouth unto my veins
How at the mountain spring the same mouth sucks.*

'The Force that through the Green Fuse' from *The Poems of Dylan Thomas*.
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For Charlotte

Peter Randall-Page
Drawings



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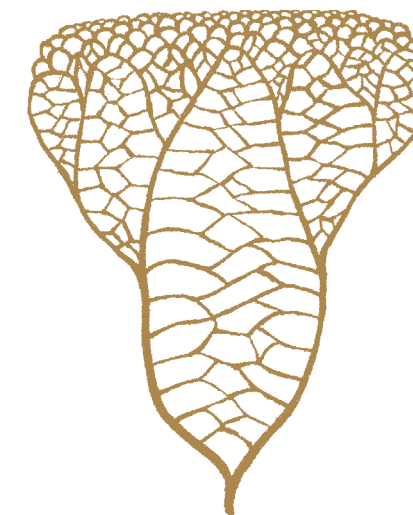


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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Drawings

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Introduction

Geometry is everywhere present in nature – Auguste Rodin

First, a confession...

Despite a long career absorbing and curating art, I am a reluctant writer, but I have greatly admired and enjoyed Peter Randall-Page's work over several decades, so I wanted to repay the pleasure it has given me by sharing a small part of it in this catalogue.

What do I value most highly in Peter's work? His sculptures and drawings make me relate to the natural world more intensely. My litmus test for judging the impact of an artist's work is whether it alters my connection with my surroundings. After spending time with the work, do I view my everyday environment through the artist's vision and make fresh discoveries? Peter's sculptures and drawings exert that power over me. As a keen gardener, I find countless forms – particularly in autumn – whose materiality have been intensified for me by knowing Peter's work: poppy pods with their radiating internal seed compartments, every variety of leaf with incised veins, filigree networks of bare branches, sweet chestnut and conker shells, teasels, skeletal allium globes, rose hips, toadstools and even the pebbles my spade inevitably hits. The list is endless.

Peter's work has always been inspired by his study of natural phenomena and their impact on our senses and emotions. He constantly examines the underlying principles determining growth and the forms it produces. In his words, "...geometry is the theme on which nature plays her infinite variations; fundamental mathematical principles become a kind of pattern book from which nature constructs the most complex and sophisticated structures."

The ink drawings in this exhibition reveal Peter's fascination with the twin forces of order and randomness. Although he sets himself strict 'patterning rules' that echo the rules of nature, he clearly relishes subverting these rules and improvising on his chosen theme, like a jazz player creating unexpected cadences from a deceptively simple sequence of chords.

Peter's drawings are constant reminders that organic forms are not exempt from the laws of physics. Reflecting this, his most recent drawings, the *Branching* series, have been made by allowing the ink to follow gravity in its distribution down predetermined channels on hand-made Indian paper. Then the paper is re-orientated so the ink appears to flow upwards – apparently reversing gravity. Their huge scale invites visceral engagement. Usually created by assembling multiple smaller sheets, they embody growth and development. These drawings explore one of Peter's recurring themes: that the branching patterns of trees, the liquid topography of rivers, the arrangements of neural connections in the brain, and our vascular systems can all look much the same. He compares what he hopes to achieve in his drawings with the way a casual glance through a window can freeze-frame a fragment of nature, a microcosm that enables us to envisage the macrocosm.

I must admit to an ulterior motive for wanting to do justice to Peter's work. I lead the Campaign for Drawing, and though it is now an independent charity, it was initiated in 2000 by the Guild of St. George to commemorate its founder, John Ruskin, who drew almost every day. Peter's work irrefutably proves Ruskin's belief – by drawing nature we come to see it clearly and respect it more. The great Victorian critic, writer and artist would surely approve of Peter's daily sketchbook observations and the powerful drawings, which embody the essence of natural rhythms. Once you have spent time with them, I am certain they will lead you to unexpected discoveries of nature's amazing innate geometry.

Sue Grayson Ford, Founder of the Serpentine Gallery and Director of the Campaign for Drawing



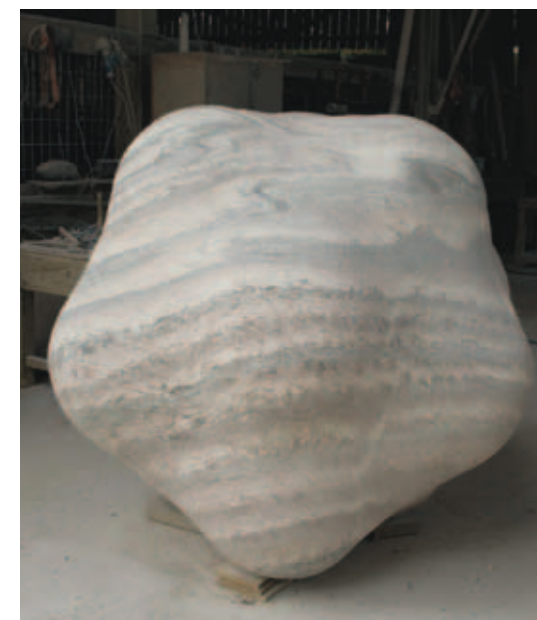
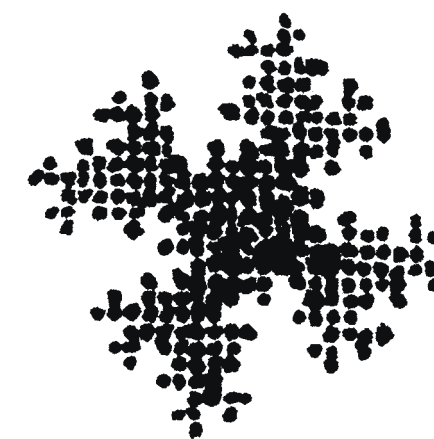
Source Seed I 300 x 272 cm



Peter Randall-Page

in conversation

with **Sarah Chapman**



This catalogue is published on the occasion of a very special joint exhibition at Peninsula Arts Gallery, Plymouth University and Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, which celebrates the work of internationally recognised artist and sculptor Peter Randall-Page. The exhibition has been devised in recognition of the substantial contribution Peter Randall-Page has made within the field of sculpture and will be his first major exhibition in the region for twenty-five years. Entitled **New Sculpture and Works on Paper** the exhibition features all-new works including five large-scale marble sculptures *Shapes in the Clouds I, II, III, IV & V* and a series of large

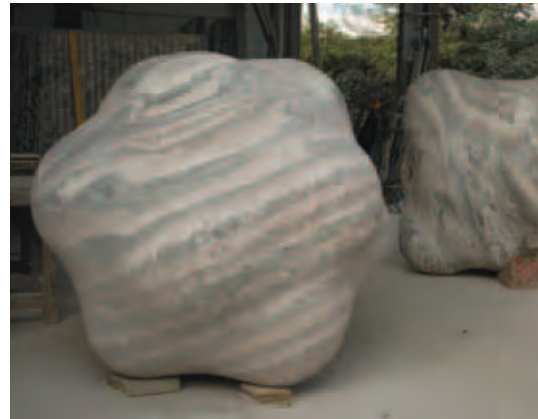
ink drawings. The following interview explores the inspiration behind the new work and reveals how Peter Randall-Page's drive to question and explore the relationship between form and our experience and understanding of the world, both on a material and philosophical level, informs all his creative works. This enquiring approach has resulted in a body of work that is both beautiful and arresting, exploring the tension between structure and fluidity, order and chaos and our relationship with the very space we inhabit.

Sarah Chapman
Director, Peninsula Arts

Peter Randall-Page
in conversation
with **Sarah Chapman**

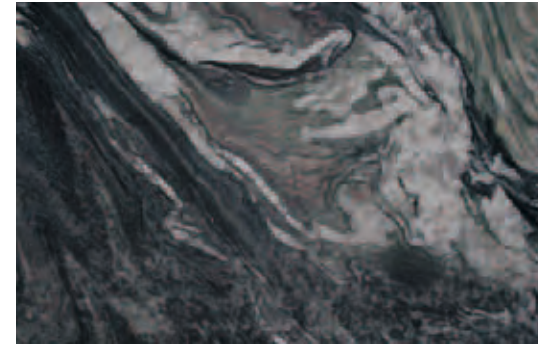
SC: The exhibition features five new sculptures carved out of Rosso Luana marble, which relate to the Platonic Solids. Could you explain the significance of the Platonic Solids and how they have influenced this new set of work?

PR-P: Platonic Solids is the collective name given to the only five regular volumes in which all edges and interior angles are equal. They have been known since antiquity and revered as fundamental to the way things fit together from atomic and molecular structures upwards.



Some years ago, I discovered that stacking spheres together systematically produces curvaceous variations of these elemental forms revealing their organic and expressive nature. This system of stacking is the starting point of the new sculptures.

SC: Whilst recognising the harmonic and symmetry values underlying your sculpture, there is also a very organic



presence to the sculptures, which creates a tension between static solids and implied organic growth and change within the forms. Could you explain this underlying relationship?

PR-P: In these new works, I am interested in the way in which geometry underpins growth and sensuality. You are right in thinking that whilst stone is ostensibly fixed and unchanging, the forms themselves are concerned with growth and metamorphosis. These sculptures have a continuous unbroken surface like a membrane containing the burgeoning forms within – like ripe fruit or the meniscus on a drop of water. The underlying order becomes a vehicle for expression.



Solid Air I, II, III

SC: It would be interesting to understand why some sculptures are carved at a certain scale. What determines the specific size of a piece and how do you go about selecting the stone for a new work?

PR-P: Scale is always important and the decision to make a particular form a certain size is based on its relationship to the scale of the human body.

Sculpture can be seen as the least abstract of art forms. Literature and music have a temporal existence when read or played, whilst two-dimensional art is a kind of window into other worlds. Sculpture, by contrast, exists in our own space and time and, as such, its relationship to the scale of our bodies is critical to how we experience it.

The highly figured Rosso Luana marble I chose to use for these pieces introduces a cloud-like, poetic quality, in contrast to the structural discipline of the forms themselves.

SC: You often produce work in a series where the permutation of the form and the serial character seem important. Would it be accurate to describe these serial works as exploring variations of a theme?

PR-P: I am very interested in the idea of theme and variation, in natural phenomena as well as in music and visual art.

Our universe seems to be driven by the dynamic tension between a ubiquitous

tendency for spontaneous pattern formation, mitigated by an equally pervasive tendency for random variation. In fact, the evolutionary process itself can be seen as a result of these polarities.

Theme without variation would be stasis and variation without theme is inconceivable chaos.

Most of my work is rooted in the concept of theme and variation. I often choose ways of working that combine an ordering principle with a random element. I am interested in the possibility for unselfconscious play that this way of working facilitates, and, ironically, the discipline of order liberates the imagination.

Making a series of works that are variations on the same theme, like these five new pieces, can build an expressive visual language through comparison and contrast.

SC: As part of the exhibition, you have created a series of new large-scale drawings that explore mirror image symmetry, branching and root patterns. In a way that is similar to your sculpture, the drawings seem to express a relationship between underlying form, the nature of control and the organic and fluid. Obviously the materials of ink and paper are very different to the solid material used in your sculpture, however it is interesting to note that gravity seems to be key in both sets of work. On the one hand, the graphic work is controlled through the movement of



paper, allowing the ink to create rivulets over the surface. On the other hand, we are very aware of the sheer physical weight of the sculptural works. Do you see similarities between the ink drawing and sculpture – and are you searching for similar relationships in both mediums?

PR-P: The sculpture and works on paper in the show are superficially very different, but you are right in thinking that they both spring from similar preoccupations.

In his seminal book *On Growth and Form*, the maverick polymath

Wentworth D’Arcy Thompson revealed and explored the way in which the forms that nature produces are all subject to common physical laws, which explain the similarity in form between diverse phenomena.

What I find so exciting about Thompson’s work is that the seemingly infinite variety of forms in the world are actually variations on a surprisingly small number of geometric themes, like the five platonic solids for example.

These themes are a direct consequence of the intrinsic spatial and temporal structure of our universe and are ubiquitous.

River deltas and vascular systems resemble the growth patterns in plants, although the physical processes that produce them are entirely different. In a similar way, the shape of a beach pebble and a potato can be almost indistinguishable, despite the fact that one is formed by erosion and the other by growth.

These new carvings imply growth and pressure from within, although they are formed by a kind of controlled erosion, which is the carving process.

The drawings are made by pouring ink across the paper in a semi-controlled manner, but when inverted, resemble the branching of an espalier tree.

The Catalan architect Gaudi employed a similar technique in order to develop a design for the spires for Sagrada Família Cathedral in Barcelona. He wanted the spires to appear to be reaching up towards the heavens and achieved this by dripping plaster and inverting the result to, in effect, reverse gravity.

SC: Are there underlying rules and constraints through which the ink drawings are conceived and developed? If so, are the rules themselves central to our understanding of the final work, or a stage through which the work is conceived and generated?

PR-P: The branching drawings follow simple rules of subdivision, which are mathematical representations of exponential growth patterns.



This structuring system is only the starting point, but again what I am fundamentally interested in is the happenstance of how the ink flows, and the interaction of chance events with the initial mathematical order. This is a vehicle for expression, balancing black and white, space and form.

SC: Within your work, do you use drawing as an exploratory tool, for testing out and mapping sculptural ideas? In this way, do you think through a process of drawing, or do you model and shape in a three-dimensional form first?

PR-P: Drawing has always been an important part of my practice as an artist.

For me, drawing takes many forms and performs many different functions. I always carry a sketchbook as an aide-memoire for ideas and have always made objective drawings as a way of analysing and studying form.

I make technical drawings when working with architects or engineers and sometimes I make drawings just as things in their own right.

The *Branching* drawings in the show fall into this last category, although I am currently also interested in developing the same ideas using poured metal.

When working with stone, I often draw directly onto the surface prior to carving and occasionally painted boulders become an end in themselves.

SC: The exhibition is very much about celebrating the international significance

of your work, which spans over forty years. The sculpture and drawings within this exhibition are all new works. How do you see your practice as having developed since you first started out? Can you trace some overriding themes throughout your work and what are the further areas you wish to explore and question through your work into the future?

PR-P: For me, the development of my work has been a gradual evolution from an initial fascination with growth towards an attempt to understand and work with the underlying principles that determine the forms it produces.

The relationship between surface and volume, inside and outside, positive and negative, have all been abiding preoccupations as well as symmetry and the idea of metamorphosis.

Fundamentally, however, I am concerned with the human condition and how the world impacts on our emotions. The choice of a particular method of working is a way of creating a space for unselfconscious play, invention and improvisation.

I enjoy genuinely collaborative projects with practitioners from other disciplines and hope to continue working with architects, composers, scientists, mathematicians and writers in the future.



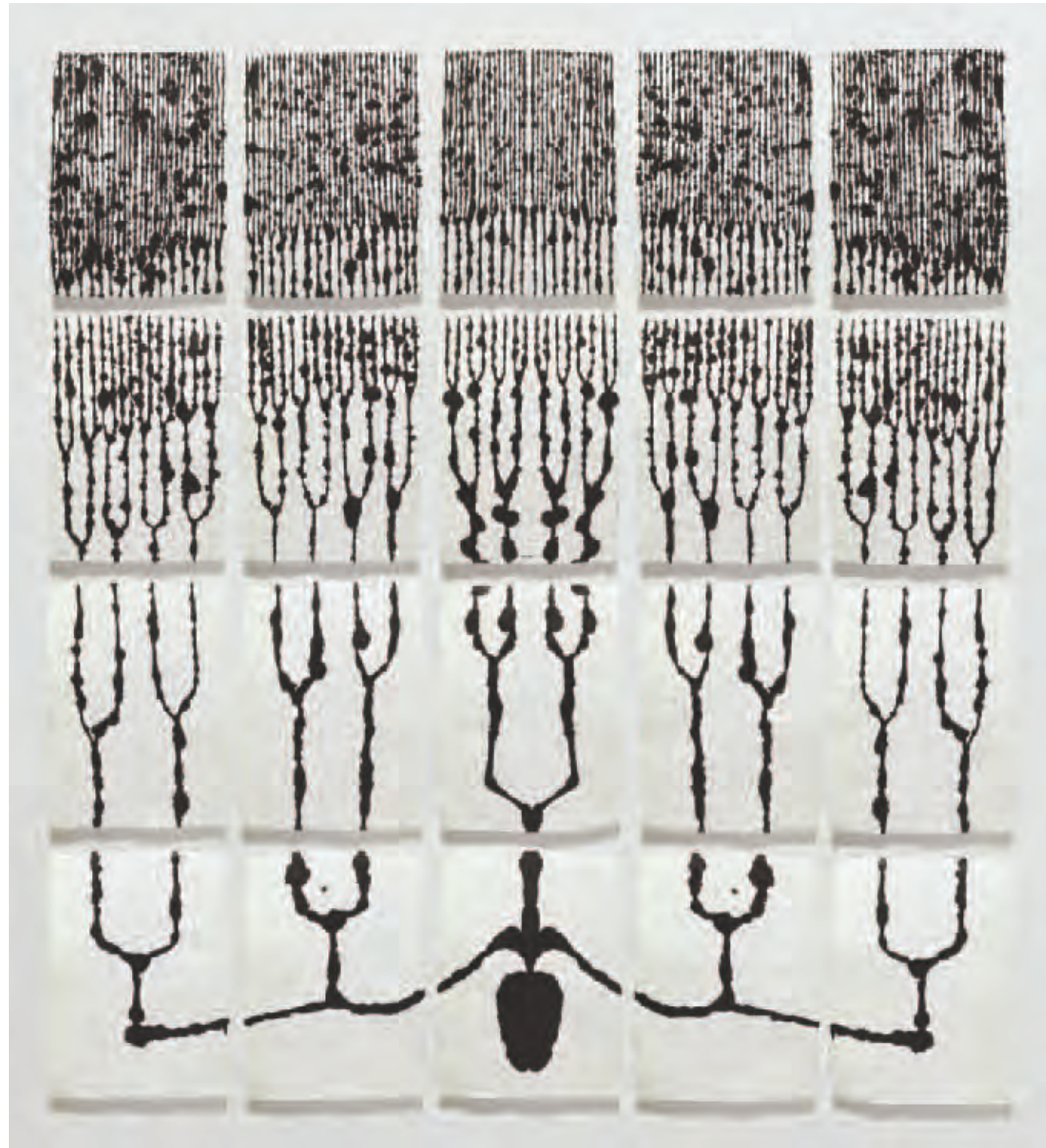
Sap River



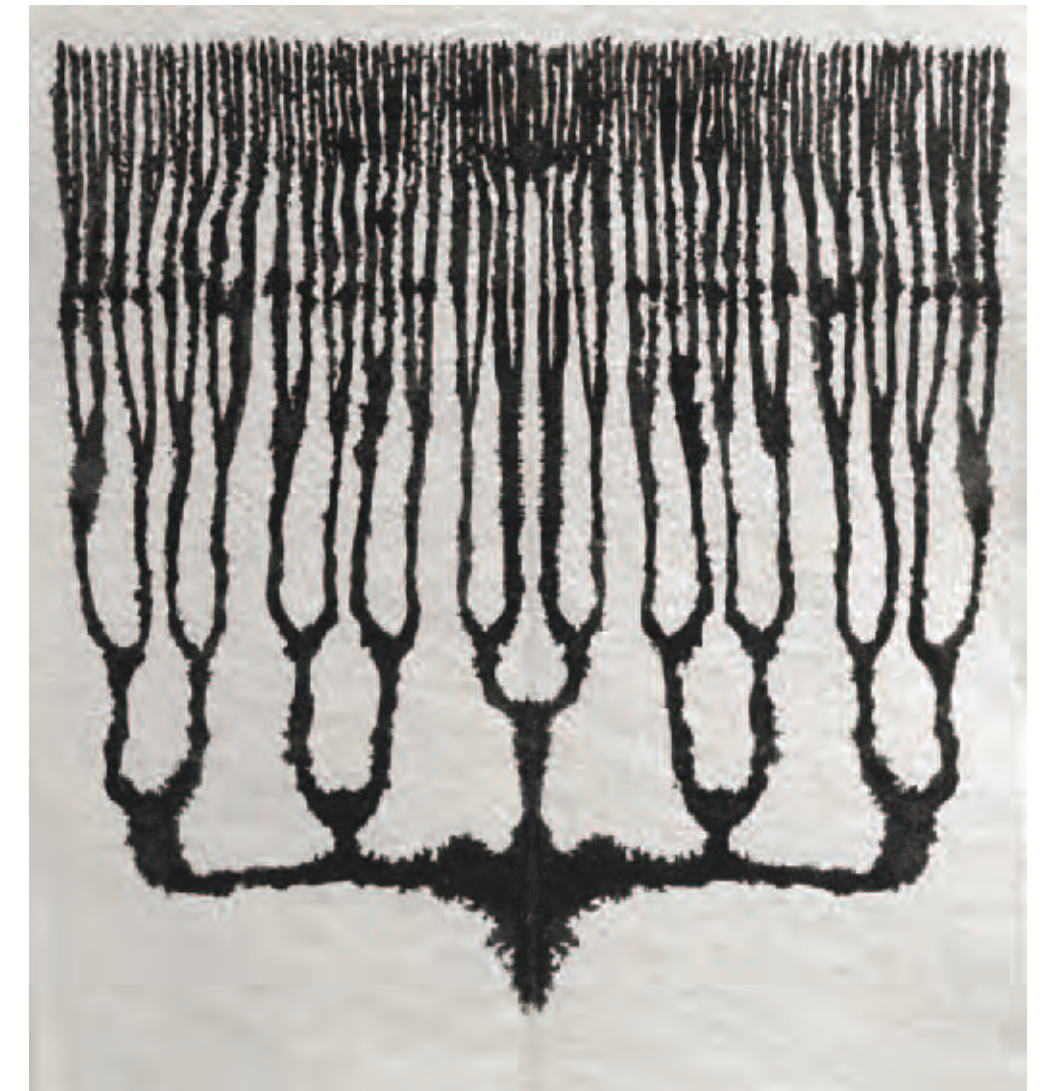
Source Seed II 42 x 31 cm



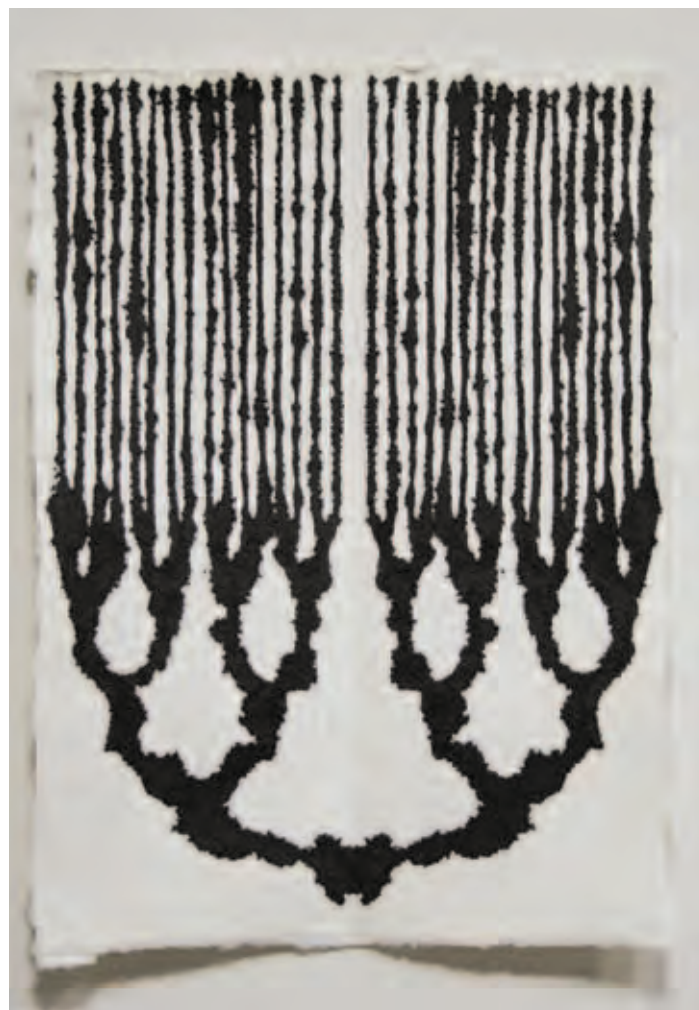
Source Seed III 48 x 49.5 cm



Espalier 303 x 224 cm



Espalier (study) 29.5 x 21.5 cm



Sap River I 29.5 x 22 cm



Sap River II 104 x 71.5 cm



Sap River III 30 x 21.5 cm



Sap River IV 30.5 x 22 cm



Source Seed IV 134 x 95 cm



Sap River V 134 x 95 cm



Pied & Dappled 21.5 x 23 cm



Opposite: *Pied & Dappled* (detail)



Blood Tree



Blood Tree (study I) 38.5 x 46 cm



Blood Tree (study II)



Blood Tree III



Blood Tree (study III)



Red Source 306 x 213 cm



Blood Tree I 198 x 255 cm



Espalier Fan 30.5 x 21 cm



Stag Horn 30.5 x 21 cm



Delta Fan 21.5 x 30.5 cm



Vein 69.5 x 69 cm



Blood Tree (study IV) 30 x 22 cm



Study for a screen 64.5 x 94 cm



Opposite: *Blood Tree II* 68 x 67 cm



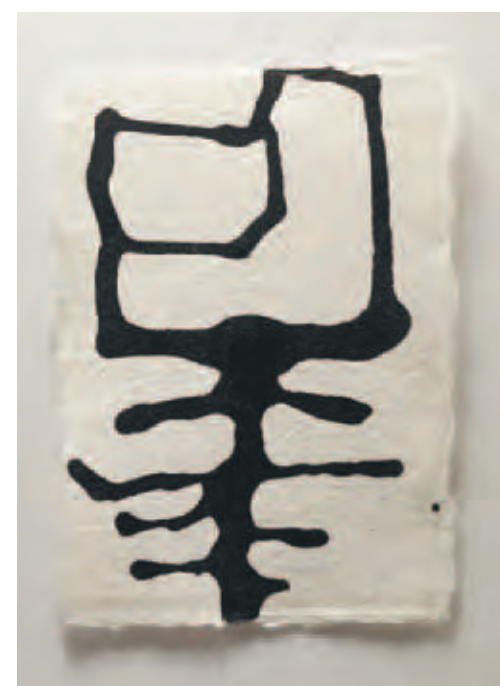
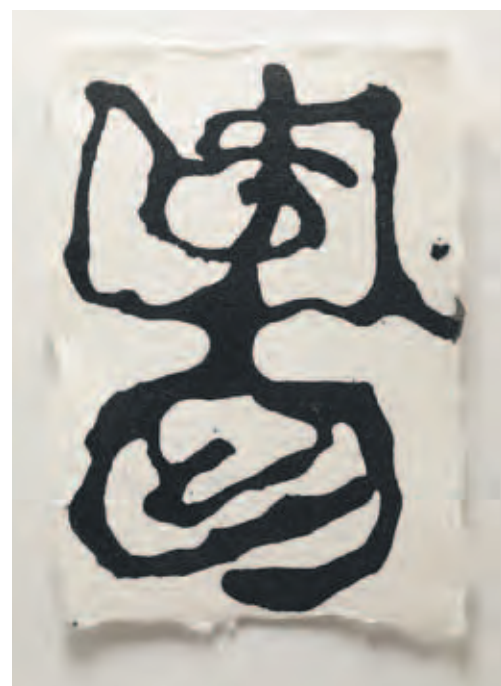
Selection from the Ink Flow drawings 15 x 11 cm



Ink Flow







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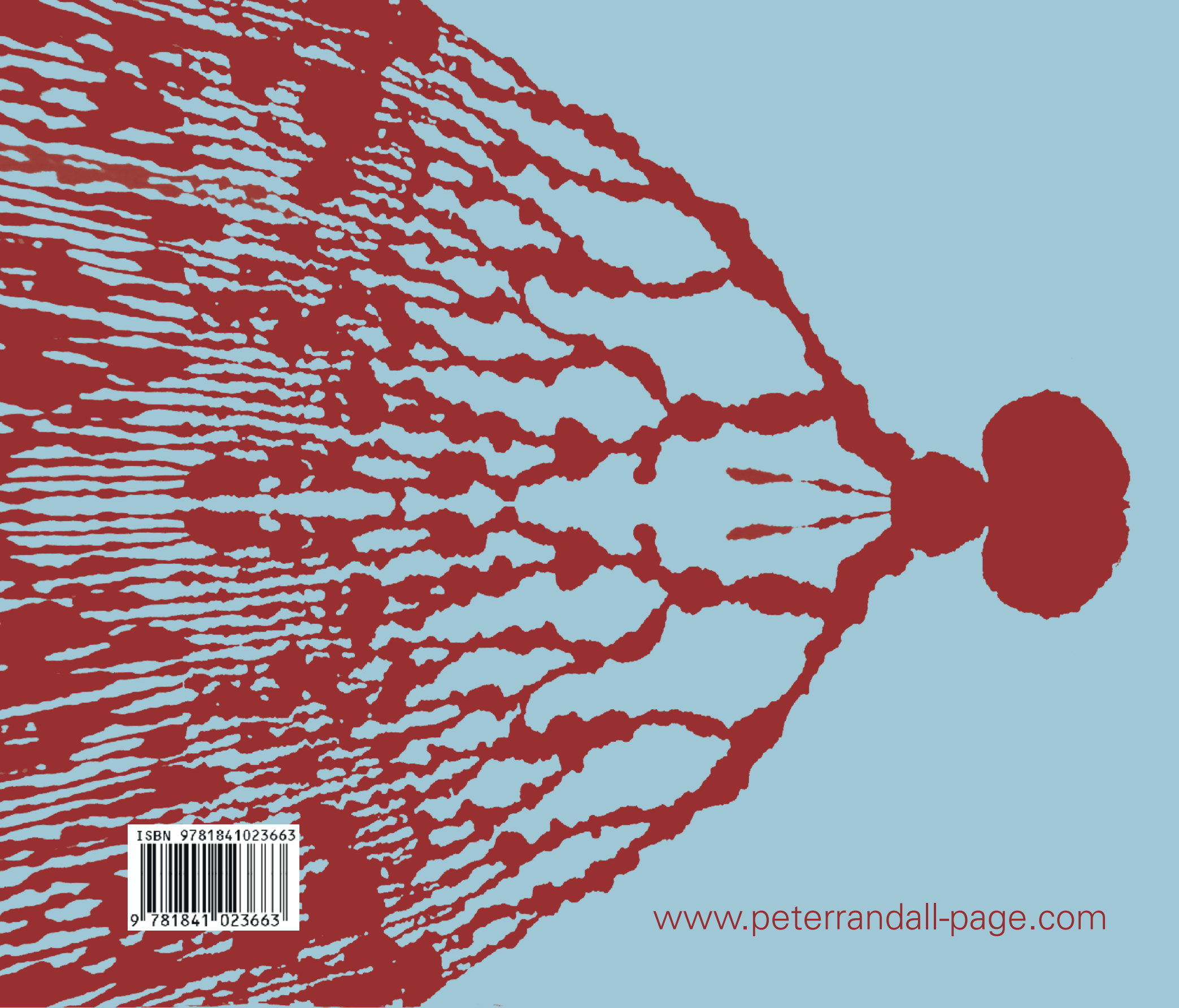
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