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SPEAKER

“Outside the Category”

Abstract

It is a recurring theme in my research to establish collections of study models and to find ways of decoding, transforming and representing them in drawings and as new models. The models are “outside the category”: pure form and architectural potential –“prior to an idea”. To become architectural ideas, they must be decoded in drawings in order to be dissolved into architectural signs and rules.

Keywords: representation; research by design; art-based research; models; drawings

Research Imperatives

The 1001 plaster models are “outside the category”: pure form and architectural potential, my basic material in the development of architecture. The models are prior to an idea; to become architectural ideas, they must be decoded in drawings in order to be dissolved into architectural signs and rules. The models are used as a basis for making different representations in drawings (and new models), as well as a tool for making compositions, as city- and landscape-like (/land-art) formations.

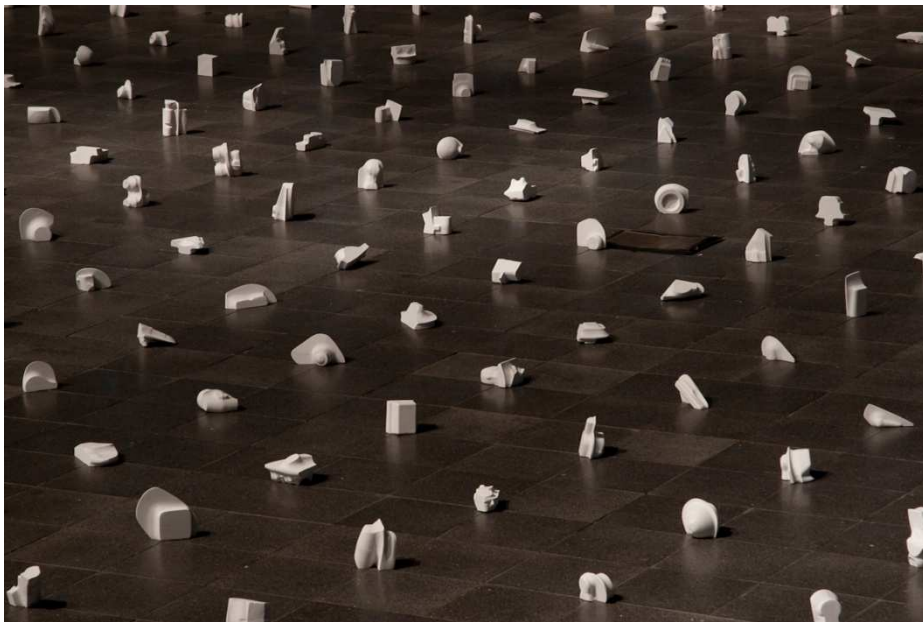


FIG.1. “1001 Models”. Photo: Michael Dam

I am not trying to solve a problem and I have no hypothesis; there is only the work with the drawings. They are accurate and reflective. The drawing analyses and thinks in order to create. The drawing is not only a representation of something but is something in itself, in its own right. Based on the models, I can make drawings and enter into a special world. I obtain craft skills and a kind of logistical overview in the routine of working with many characters at once, of working in a series, both in drawing and in the model-making: making moulds, casting in plaster and subsequently drawing them in different representations. The experience obtained

from the drawings must be passed on to the next drawing. When I know what I am doing, when the routine is there, it is time for me to move on in my search of new drawings and models. It is about being in a “special state of drawing” in order to compose, extend, amplify, clarify, crop and scale and to suggest a structure in search of more precise architectural characters and potentials. An abstract thought is strengthened when it is backed up by something tangible.



FIG. 2 to 4. Moulds (elaborated photos)

There is more to explore than to conclude. To start with, I am not trying to solve a problem or to justify my creations as either art or architecture: they are both, as I think they should be. I want to make objects which I have not seen before, which are of yet nothing but form, which I can rejoice over and about which I can wonder what they will become, objects which can be held in the hand and reflected upon. I want to see how the objects turn out, see where they end up. I want to represent the objects in drawings and invent ways of drawing them. The drawings are something even though they are representations of objects that do not claim to be anything. An object is, however, something in itself, in its own right, and should be allowed to remain so for the entire process. It is in the creation of drawings that the project is forced forward and it is here it opens up and reveals the object's inherent capabilities. As artist and architect, I deconstruct the objects to construct architecture. When I draw, the objects are set free in the drawing. Everything matters in the drawing. I give the drawing an aesthetic layer and dimension, thus helping to open up the idea for myself and those who may view it later. The graphic qualities help to explain and suggest a direction; they are at once obstructions and analyses. If nothing else, the graphic qualities make them potential works of art. It is about thinking with models and drawings, about exploring, concluding current status, enhancing, cropping, removing and adding, in search of making original architectural fabric and,

sometimes, about moving away from the more conventional opinion of what architecture is.

Routines

It is imperative to optimise the process when producing such a large number of models and drawings. You have to be prepared concerning logistics and methodology but also pay attention to how preparation and a strategically planned process influence the final work of art. I work in a phased process and in a series in the creation of knowledge about the models, their differences and similarities, how they should be represented in other depictions and how the logistical challenges need to be addressed. Energy is created in work with a series where production fills the entire space. In addition, I gain a certain lightness in creating, as I am not afraid of ruining the models or drawings, given that there are plenty in stock, and my curiosity is not discouraged by being too careful. The notion of failure is a must and not an obstacle. I think that is a vital realisation. I gain routines - practice makes perfect - and in the end, I do part of the work almost mechanically in my search of knowledge and experience that can be put into the next series of drawings. In this phased process, things turn into something else, not necessarily in a progressive chronological order but in a process that allows for numerous steps back and forth when new connections are discovered or constructed between things I have done in the past and new works and then put into perspective and included in the further work, as a particular view of things: a special way to choose from and in the material. It is about constructing knowledge, insight and meaning in a process-based practice. It is about "preparedness", about being well-prepared, about the routine of working with many objects and drawings at once: about being good at casting, good at drawing and designing, and good at simplifying things. I see the different representations in the model and drawing as documentation of the process stages but also as independent works in their own right, however, that should radiate analysis and process. It is in my artistic development work that I try to draw myself towards and into architecture through a series of transformations and representations.

The Creation of Drawings

I draw the plaster objects in order to achieve an increased awareness of the inherent possibilities of the model. The drawing is an analysis and a study, as well as a

representation. It is about thinking with the drawing. It is about finding the right way to represent the objects in the drawing, about questioning various statements. I see the different representations in the drawing as kinds of obstructions and regulations, as proposals. The explorations are, in fact, obstructions or resistance in itself seen as different techniques and methods of registration. The thousand models are homogenous in expression, are approximately the same size, have the same degree of detail and are, therefore, to some degree comparable and able to be subjected to the same process and set of rules.



FIG.5. "1001 Models", photo: Michael Dam.

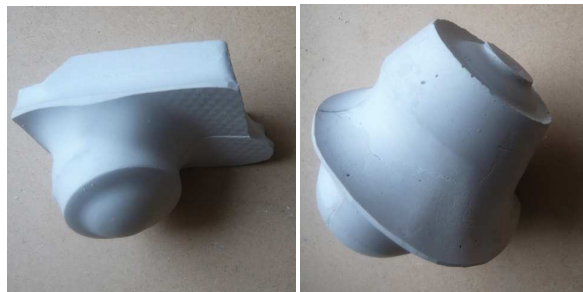


FIG.6-7. Models, detail.

It is about choosing what is right in front of you - in my way of working. It is about giving up and admitting that I cannot control everything, that I cannot reach something and, not least, that I may not bother—that I may choose from among my limited abilities and that I therefore choose the analogue drawing as my tool of awareness when I cannot face learning digital drawing programs, even though they can be great tools. I cannot photograph so I scan my plaster objects, which has proven to be an excellent way to document them, with their cut surface laid horizontally on the surface of the flatbed scanner. To start with, I scan all 1001 models as documentation, not least, in order to make them more operational in the future work of transforming them into drawings. All the models are equipped with a registration-friendly cut surface, which, as previously mentioned, can be read by the flatbed scanner, in addition to the parts of the plaster volume that can be read as a form (which is beyond the cut surface) and spaciousness. I see these pictures as the most objective view of the plaster objects. In addition, I have experimented with a type of X-ray, where transparent images of the object are added together in layers as a picture, so all the information can be found depicted in one glance.

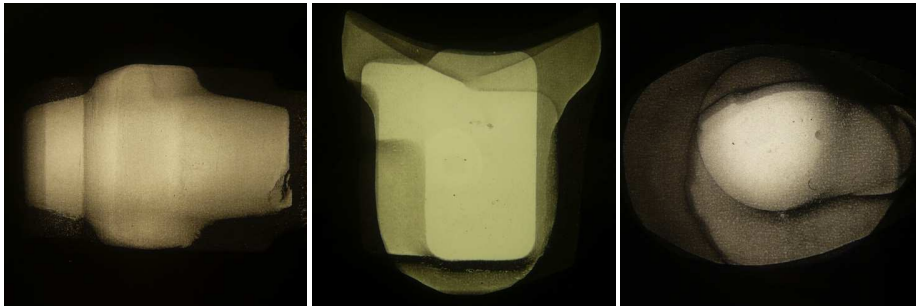


FIG.8-10. X-rays of models

However, the scan seems to me to be a good and objective way to establish study material, even though some data may be lost. Starting from the scans, I can draw templates as simple, chart-like depictions and thus get an overview of all of the plaster objects from the collection, which can, in turn, be decoded into line drawings that suggest a kind of architectural plan or section. I see this overview as my alphabet, my collection of signs, which can be put together in countless ways to create opportunities for myself to form sequences, compositions and, as mentioned, starting points for further considerations in drawings. The templates are without

great detailing or extremities, and I regularly assess which details to include.

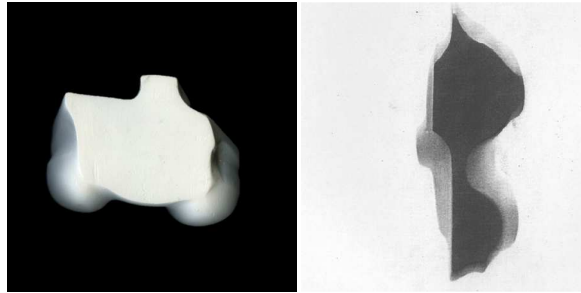


FIG.11. Scan. Fig.12. Scan (negative).

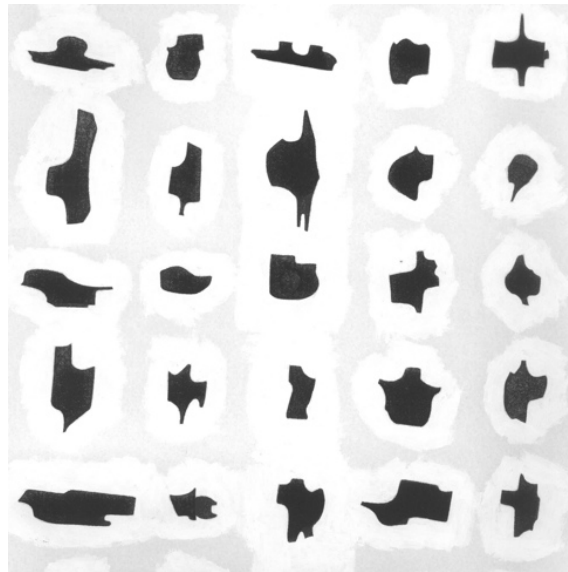


FIG.13. Templates, overview (detail).

In the subsequent drawings, it is important to get the object, as scan, to “resemble a drawing”, to get away from the flat diagram and obtain a greater level of abstraction with multiple layers of complexity that can be opened up to interpretation. It may just also contribute to a mystifying strangeness. I work in black and white only. It is about having complete focus on the essentials of the object, the shape and composition: concentration on the subject rather than gorgeous, colourful drawings. Colours can

blur and seduce; limitations sharpen the eye.

The “imaginative sketch” is a phase that runs parallel to all my investigations. At all times, there must be an ongoing sketching that assembles small incidents, trials and elaborations that give clues about the future development and direction of the project: a series of imaginative sketches (also in colour!) versus the more reduced, elaborate and constructed signs and symbols or fragments mentioned later in this text.

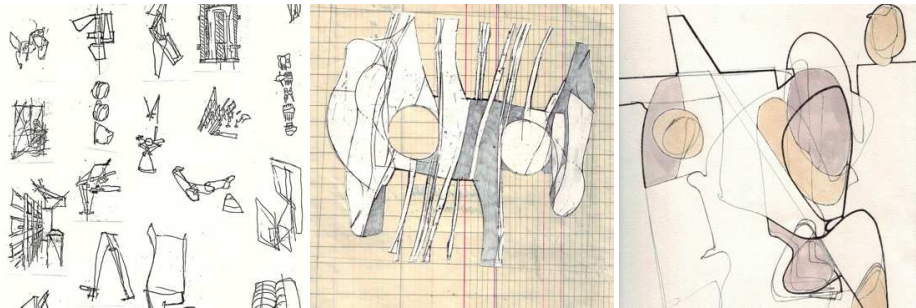


FIG.14-16. Imaginative sketches.

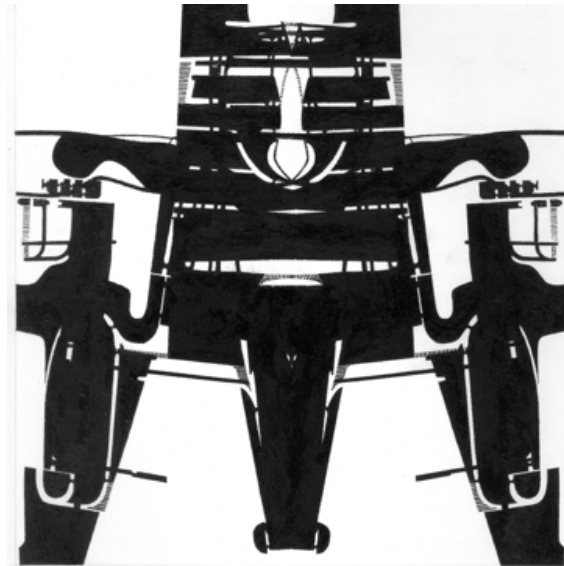


FIG.17. Elaborated sketch.

Based on these templates, I draw the “characteristics” in the same line thickness in very simple line drawings, in order to have a neutral basis without too much initial hierarchy. Subsequently, I work with the hatching/shading of these drawings, horizontally as well as vertically, and with combinations of these in which I later omit the contour line so that the hatching/shading stands alone. These are simple drawing exercises as we know them from numerous “beginner books” on drawing, which I use myself in my teaching when it is about developing a sketching practice. I take this documentation-like material a bit further and transform it into a creative development process with various combinations and studies of the interaction between negative and positive depictions and spaces, between black and white, creating graphic qualities, spaciousness and ornaments, through the repetitive sequences I develop.

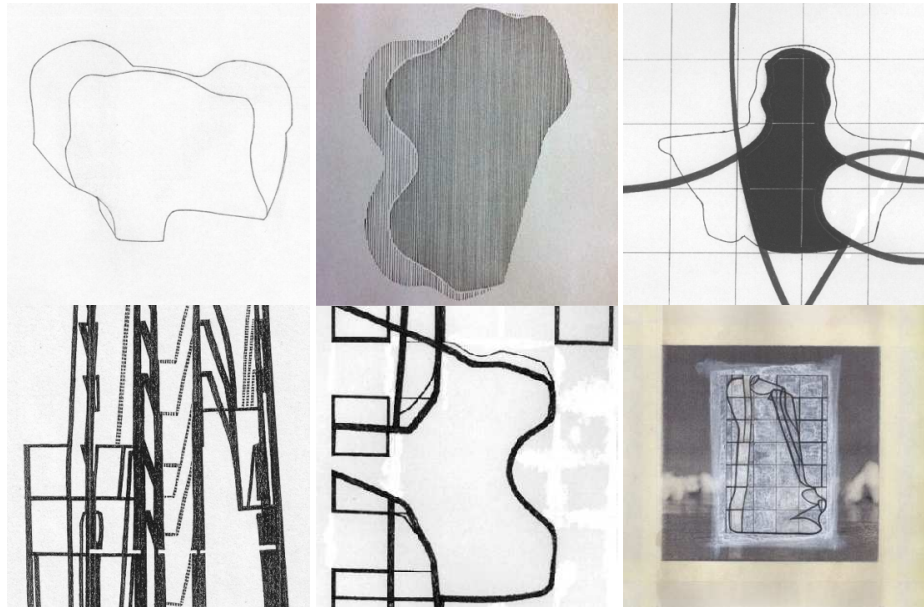


FIG.18-23. Different drawings / depictions.

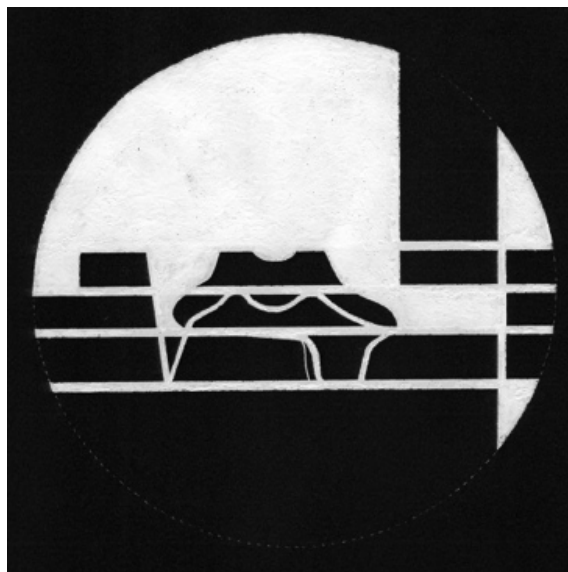


FIG.24. Different drawings / depictions.



FIG.25. Relief in brass.

The line drawings are made more operational and measurable to set the scale and dimensions by inscribing them in geometry, a kind of geometric analysis, either in a rectangular grid-structure or in one that is circular, as it intensifies and defines the shapes and figures, while stabilising any organic shapelessness. I enjoy the interplay between the drawing of the organic plaster objects and the perpendicular structure, which affects how I interpret the plaster using the architect's method of constructing a drawing. I attempt the same with plaster objects by physically cutting them with a saw, making them perpendicular while still retaining traces of a more organic and curved imprint. In this geometric phase, opportunities arise to crop into fragments, as it opens up where "the whole" can seem limiting. A fragment can be read as a part of something bigger, and you imagine images of a fragment as a part of a completed whole. I operate in cut surfaces and sections, in cropping, in the decision-making - in choosing "on" and "off". If the fragments are inscribed into squares, it is possible to construct a kind of chess-like game, which can be combined endlessly by joining the squares together in different ways to form larger wholes.

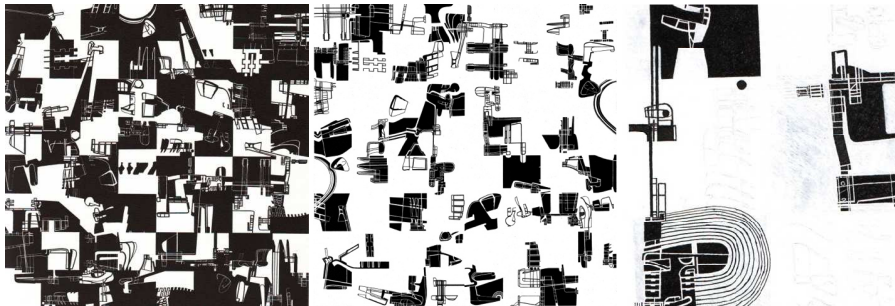


FIG.26 and 27. Game. FIG.28. Game, detail

The drawings are turned from positive to negative, which provides yet another alienating dimension and an eye for the space in between, for the casting mould and the casting. I work with the black and white balance and the negative space between the fragments. In addition, these drawings can be built very quickly in relief models, which are respectively submerged or raised in cardboard or the like, giving a series of models as a combination of both landscape and building as a unity or as a whole. The project moves from being fragments in plaster to being dissolved into architectural signs and symbols, diagrams, in drawings that should eventually be detailed and elaborate and meet the world and its obstructions and resistance in terms of site/building plot, function, tectonics and climate - to create the final construction or

building.

Naming

Things are not always what they seem. We are forced to name objects in order to know what we are talking about. In the naming, we offer the object an identity, something to refer to, and give it attention in order to be able to talk about something and have it mean the same for all of us, so we can navigate, gain answers and create rules. A name is a kind of rule. I am interested in the questions concerning that which is outside the category - that without a name to begin with - where a name occurs late in the process, as the object may lose something in the naming. We may then keep the object open long enough so it does not shut down too early and lose everything that "surrounds" it.



FIG.29-31. Models in wood, laquer and brass (detail)

These surrounding “clouds of possibilities” are also interesting and should be examined thoroughly; you could say: “What we talk about when we talk about love” (Carver, 1981) or, to quote another: “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet” (Shakespeare, 1593). In other words, is the object a building or a landscape, a door handle, a sea or a vehicle - or has the word lost its meaning? I think the poets are very precise in their imprecision. Finally, in the words of Paul Auster: “Yes. A language that will at last say what we have to say. For our words no longer correspond to the world. When things were whole, we felt confident that our words could express them. But little by little these things have broken apart, shattered, collapsed into chaos. And yet our words have remained the same. Hence, every time we try to speak of what we see, we speak falsely, distorting the very thing we are trying to represent. [...] Consider a word that refers to a thing—“umbrella”, for example. [...] Not only is an

umbrella a thing, it is a thing that performs a function. [...] What happens when a thing no longer performs its function? [...] the umbrella ceases to be an umbrella. It has changed into something else. The word, however, has remained the same. Therefore, it can no longer express the thing.” (Auster, 1985). At one point, the material will accumulate the various drawn representations by which it can be grouped, for instance, function, type, material etc., and I will point out and name places in the drawing: foundation, stairs, base, tongue and groove, plateau, and wall or, more poetically, the meeting, the transparent, the wind, the womb, death etc. And finally, I can then try to classify the characters, to describe them and assign them a place in the hierarchy: the taxonomy of objects.

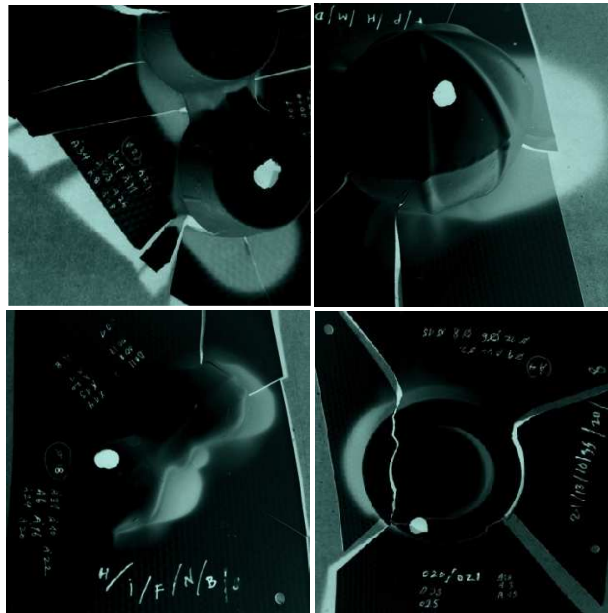


FIG.32-35. Moulds

Signs

I am looking for signs. I create architectural signs and symbols, and I welcome coincidences that emerge in the process, by immediately making them my own personal invention and making it seem as though they have been created on purpose. I want to find myself between the planned and the random because I know that

something will emerge during the process. I make numerous mistakes and cover them up as all part of the process. The aim is to produce complex architectural materials and to disassemble and identify opportunities for further transformations or, what might be termed, operational materials, in order to reflect on the process. The exploration of the model is done by working in a series, ranging from several drawings with few variations to a series of increasing complexity and, hence, greater variation: notations which seek to identify the models and their inner ideas. It is all part of a world where my eyes filter out some things while other things slip through, where there is a feeling or sympathy for certain forms and figures, and where there is an eye for possible directions in the project: where you become a specialist in your own field or your own world.

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