

□ Cube Gallery

AN INTERVIEW WITH TONY BLACKMORE

Tony Blackmore is a paper relief artist based in London, UK. Here, Tony shares more on his artistic inspirations, his connection to Japan, and the discipline behind each geometric surface.

CG Did you always want to be an artist? Was there a pivotal moment when you decided to follow your path as an artist, and if so, what was it?

As a teenager I had always wanted to be an architect and took Art, Maths and Physics A' Levels with a view to applying for an architecture degree. However, I really enjoyed the art and went on to do a Foundation Course at the Winchester School of Art. On our first day the Head gave us a prep talk on the hard life of being an artist and told us that only one student on the whole course would be an artist in 25 years time. Asking if we envisaged ourselves as that artist mine was the only hand that shot up.

CG Are there any artists, dead or alive, that inspire you and your works?

TB One look at my book shelf shows that there are quite a books on American Minimalists such as Donald Judd, and Carl Andre and Larry Bell. Other favourite include Josef Albers, MC Escher and Bridget Riley.

Whilst these artists I admire, I find reading much more inspiring. My two all-time favourites are Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* and Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space*. Both books provide views on our understanding of the environment and our relationship to the world. A very influential piece of text I always return to is *Repetition-Compulsion, World Historical Rhythms in Architecture* by Ross Wolfe which explores the perceptual effects of rhythmic repetition within architecture and the re-suing of styles within the history of art and architecture.



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Finally, particular arts and crafts also provide much inspiration and I love to spend time in places such as the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert. Whether its Chinese pottery, historical French and British fashion or Islamic textiles I love to see the processes behind different crafts. This may later generate ideas on how traditional processes can be interpreted and re-applied with modern materials.

CG Your time in Japan greatly influenced the art you create today, could you tell us a bit more about that period, and the connection you now have with Japan?

TB I spent time in Japan during my Masters course in 2012/2013. Prior to that I was a huge admirer of Japanese crafts such as papermaking, lacquer ware, metalwork. Whilst in Japan I became fascinated with its unique and contradictory built environment, which has been shaped by Buddhism, wars, earthquakes and modernism. As a result I spent most my time walking and photographing the streets. An aspect of Japan that influenced me most is lightness within some of its traditional and modern architecture; a lightness that originates from the traditional shoji screen or the ability to slide a door with the tip of a finger.

I try to maintain that connection to Japan via talks at the Daiwa Foundation in London and I practice a form of Japanese Buddhism that connects me to Japanese people. I would love to return to Japan to more fully explore its countryside and a mention



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of Japan is not complete without me mentioning my love of sushi!

CG What is the creative process for each piece like, does this evolve depending on the piece or is there a set routine that you follow to arrive at the final product? Could you explain a bit about the planning process behind each work?

TB The process for each piece can be sectioned into four distinct parts; drawing, scoring and folding and forming. The process starts with planning and drawing an underlying composition. A sheet of polyester film is placed over this composition with lines scored on both sides of the film using an etching needle. Each scored line is then patiently hand-folded to create inward and outward folds. This patience is continued and rewarded at the moment when the artwork's surface is pushed, nurtured and formed into a finished relief.

Currently, the images I create can be sectioned into two distinct types. There are those artworks that are more deliberately wavy. This first type is based on constructive interference patterns composed from two sets of parallel lines overlaid onto each other at a specific angle. The second type is based on grids of squares and rectangles. These explore how a wave can be produced as a consequence when the diagonals, of differing series of squares and rectangles, are folded. Whilst I continue to learn which patterns fold best each individual folded work never fails to surprise me.

CG Why polyester film instead of any other translucent material?

TB I use polyester film because it has a wonderful, satin-like translucent quality of surface.

When varying the type and direction of natural or artificial light, the surface can transform to create illusions of squares and triangles that appear to shift in tone and depth. These illusions are further heightened with the movement of the viewer. This is almost impossible to capture in a photograph and to be fully appreciated must be seen in person. I have tried using other materials but nothing quite compares to polyester film in this way.

Apart from its unique surface qualities, the brand of polyester film I use is also UV resistant and doesn't yellow over time. It also retains its structure through its strong dimensional qualities and is impossible to tear. These qualities are important to the longevity of the work.

CG How has showing your works at the Royal Academy's 250th Summer Exhibition affected your career?

TB The effect on my career has far surpassed anything I expected and could be described as my 'lucky break'. In addition to selling the artwork at the Summer Exhibition it also led to the selling of all my remaining artworks in my studio. Financially, this has enabled me to give up my day job for the first time to fully focus on my artwork. I had several galleries get in touch, including Cube Gallery, and preferred to go with Cube due to their commitment to well-made quality work and showing their artists internationally. With Cube, I have had my artwork shown for the first time in the US.

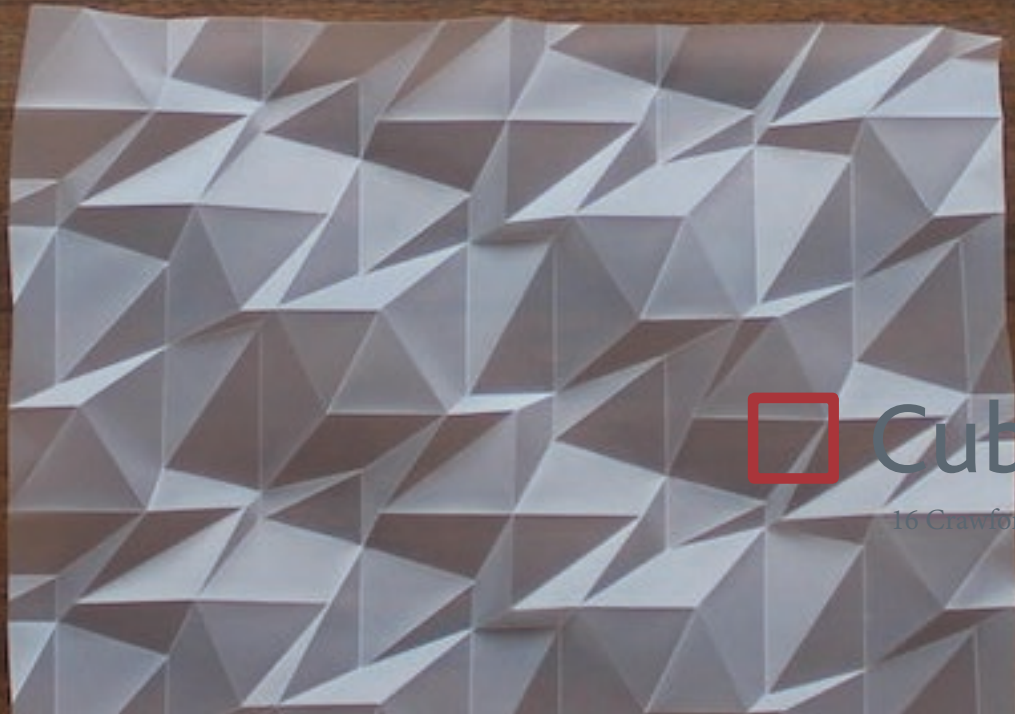
I have just moved into a larger art studio, and one that has the luxury of heating and ventilation! This comfort and space will enable me to create ever better artwork.

CG Is there a particular area as an artist that you would like to explore in the future?

TB Yes, there is. Currently I am perfecting a technique that allows me to stitch each folded work to a backing board. This new process is opening up all sorts of creative possibilities allowing me to create more depth in the work as areas can be stitched in place. It is also leading to a change in composition that is making each work more architectural. I am really enjoying making these pieces and look forward to showing them.

My artwork also has a property whereby it can be illuminated by fluorescent lighting. With recent investment in some photography equipment, I intend to photograph with daylight and fluorescent lighting and explore that typical Japanese blend of Zen and neon.

And lastly, over the last few years I have produced a three-inch pile of drawings and sketches that never fully evolved as folded pieces of work. I am returning to these drawings to fully realise some as line drawings and to see how others can be interpreted tonally.



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