

□ Cube Gallery

AN INTERVIEW WITH TONY BLACKMORE

Tony Blackmore is an artist based in London, UK, who creates folded reliefs out of drafting film. 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?

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

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

TB One look at my bookshelf shows that there are quite a few books on American minimalists such as Donald Judd and Carl Andre. Other favourites include Josef Albers, MC Escher and Bridget Riley. Although I admire these artists, I find reading much more inspiring. My two all-time favourite books are Maurice 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.

Particular historical 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 Museum. Whether it's Japanese swordsmithing, historical British fashion or Islamic textiles, I love to see the traditional processes behind different crafts as



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they inspire ideas that can be interpreted 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?

TB I spent time in Japan as part of a travel scholarship during my Masters Degree in 2012/2013. Prior to that I was a huge admirer of Japanese crafts such as papermaking, lacquerware and metalwork.

While in Tokyo, I became fascinated with its unique and contradictory built environment. As a result I spent most of my time photographing the streets. What caught my eye was the 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. It was this lightness that inspired me to create art with drafting film.

A very notable experience was also seeing the flagship stores of fashion designers Issey Mayake and Rei Kawakubo. Both designers fold, layer and construct their clothing. It is an interpretation of these aspects of Japanese architecture and fashion that inform the constructive processes behind my folded reliefs.

CG Why drafting film instead of any other translucent material?

TB Drafting film is a type of polyester film



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traditionally used for architectural drawings. I use a particular brand that has a wonderful, satin-like translucent quality of surface that both absorbs and reflects light. When varying the type and direction of natural or artificial light the surface creates illusions whereby each angular plane appears to shift in tone and depth. These illusions are further heightened with the movement of the viewer. To be fully appreciated, this phenomenon must be seen in person. I have tried using other materials but nothing quite compares to drafting film in this way.

Apart from its unique surface qualities, the brand of drafting film I use is 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 What is the creative process for each piece? Does this evolve depending on the piece or is there a set routine that you follow to arrive at the final artwork? Could you explain a bit about the planning process behind each work?

TB There is always a set routine that I follow to arrive at the final artwork. This process can be sectioned into four distinct parts; drawing, scoring, folding and sewing. The process starts with drawing an underlying composition. A sheet of drafting film is placed over this composition with lines scored on both sides of the film using an etching needle. Each scored line is patiently hand-folded to create a relief of inward and outward

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folds. This patience is continued when the artwork's surface is nurtured and formed into a finished relief. The final part of the process involves drilling tiny holes into the artwork's white MDF backing board. Invisible fluorocarbon thread is threaded through the artwork and the drilled holes later filled with white putty. The overall impression is one where the artwork appears to float upon its background.

Although there is a set process, I always have different ideas that develop when creating the line drawings for the compositions. This is the part where I have the most creative fun. These drawings can be based on constructive interference patterns, numerical sequences or systems-based distortions of grid patterns. While I continue to learn the types of compositions that fold best, the final folded form that eventually emerges never fails to surprise me.

CG How has showing your works at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition affected your career?

TB I was selected for the RA Summer Exhibition in both 2018 and 2024. The effect the 250th anniversary exhibition in 2018 had on my career surpassed anything I expected and could be described as my 'lucky break'. In addition to selling the artwork at the exhibition, I sold all of the remaining artworks in my studio. Financially, this enabled me to give up my day job and to fully focus on my artwork. I had several galleries get in touch, including Cube Gallery. I chose to go with Cube due to their commitment to original, exceptionally well-made artwork and showing their artists internationally. With Cube, I have had my artwork shown in the US and Europe.

While 2018 was a special year, I was delighted to be accepted again in 2024. Being part of the summer exhibition has a special kind of magic that's hard to describe and knowing that over 200,000 visitors are going to see your work is just mind-blowing!

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CG Are there particular areas as an artist you would like to explore in the future?

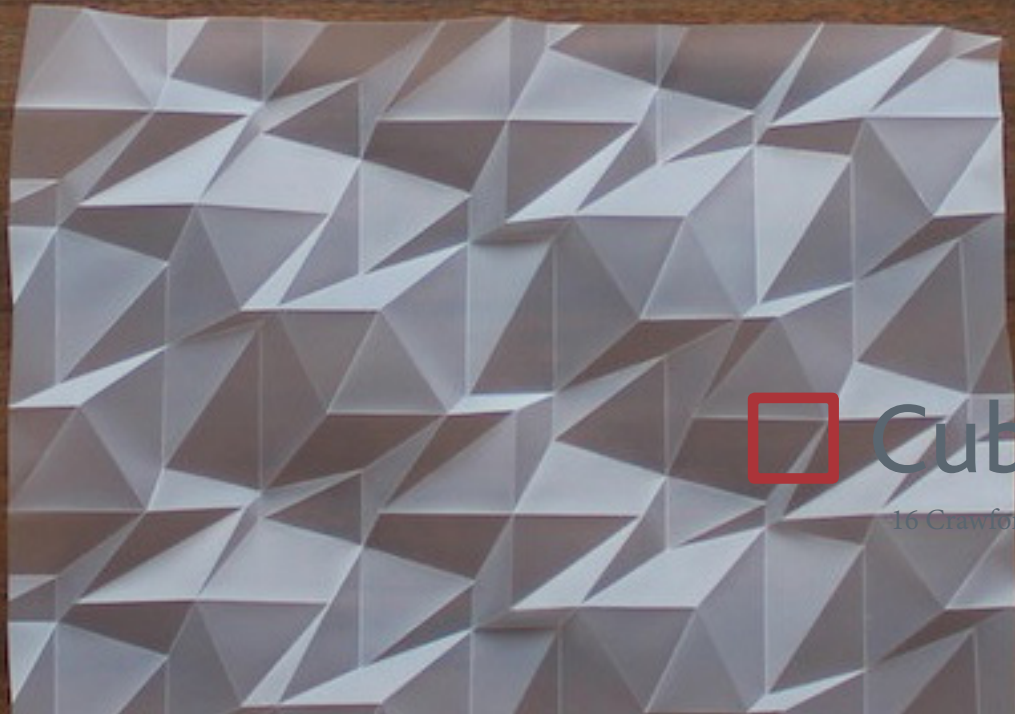
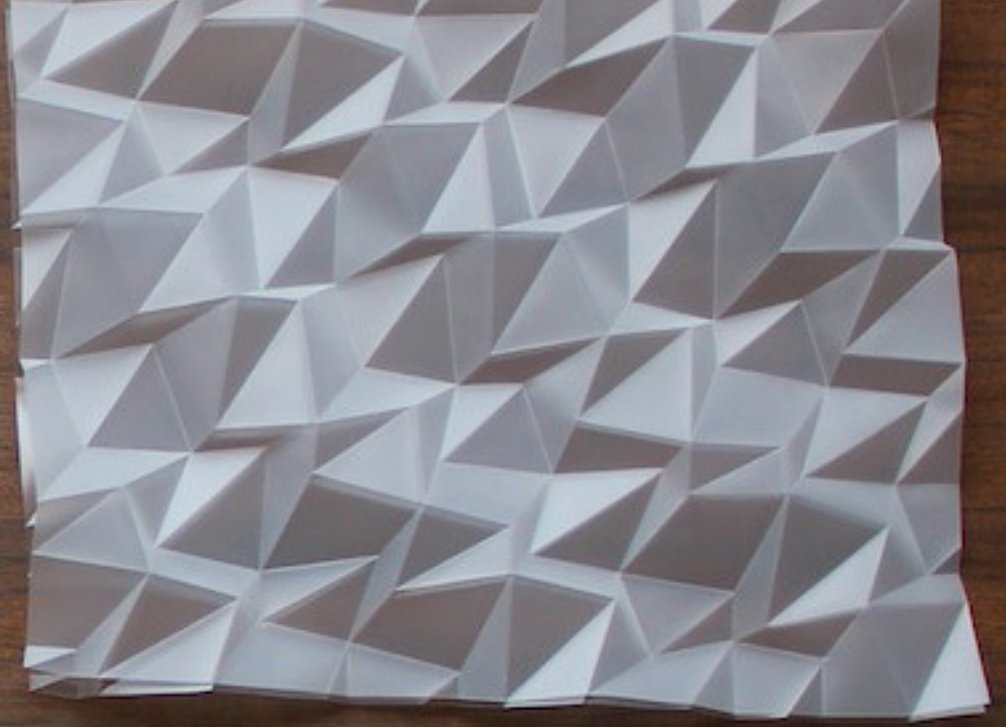
TB Yes, there are.

Many viewers have spoken of my white monochrome artworks as having an immediate calming effect upon them. To me this is a very important aspect of the work and my artworks have been hung in various spaces to create a particular kind of ambience. To take this further, I would love to explore creating a body of site-specific artworks that collectively transform the perceptual experience of a particular space as well as complimenting its architectural qualities.

The second area is to further develop colour in my artworks. I first introduced colour during the first Covid lockdown where I created and sold small pieces from home. These artworks are created by cutting out, overlapping and sewing together layers of differently-coloured photographic lighting gels that are 'capped' with a layer of polyester film. Depending on how the light hits each plane this seamless folded surface acts a little like dichroic film; composed of three or four nominal colours, it creates the impression that many more colours have been used.

While I immensely enjoy the finished outcome of my smaller 'Colourfolds', there are areas to be explored and challenges to be overcome. The process is very time consuming and the larger they are the more the folded form flattens out under its own weight. It's taken a while but I continue to perfect my techniques in the hope to create vibrantly coloured artworks of a type that no other artist makes.

While originality is very important to me, I also believe that now, more than ever, we all need a little more colour in our lives.



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