

Henrik Søderstrøm | Artist Statement

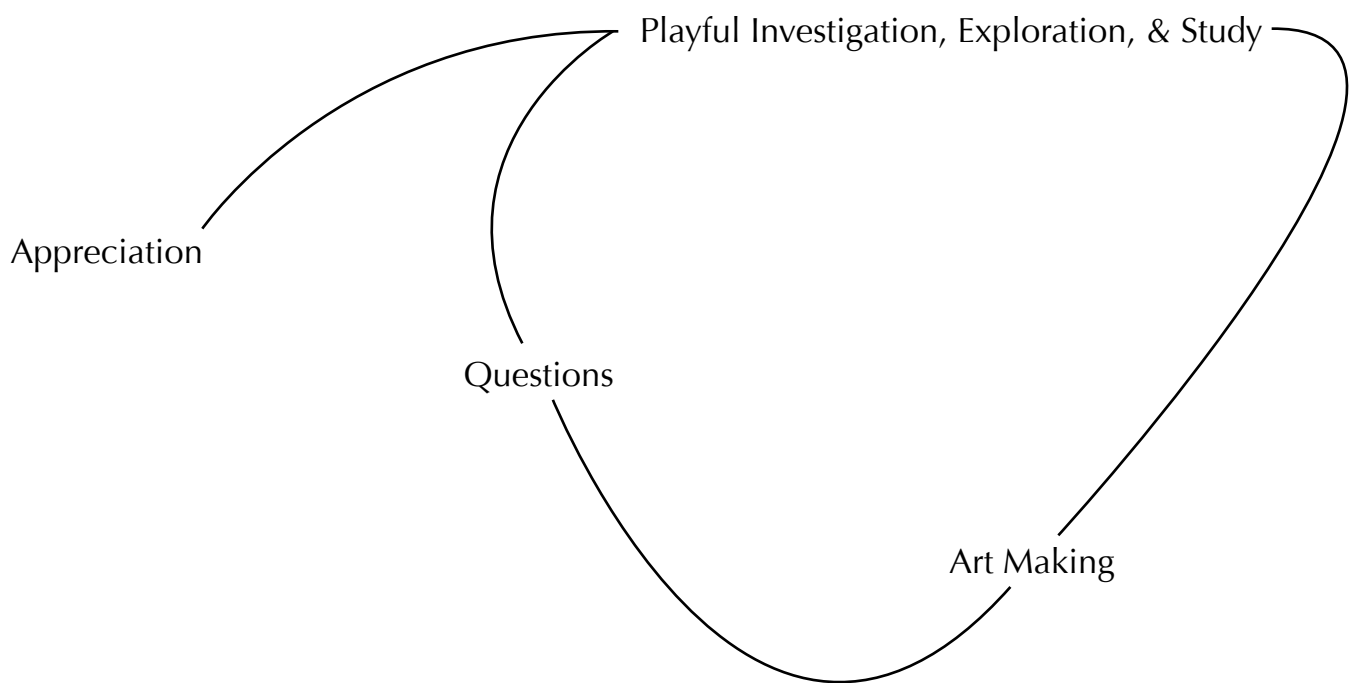
2009

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Honesty in Creative Practice

The most honest art for me is my natural response to excitement about the environment. I am exhilarated by nature's types of structures, and by its types of self-ordering, or emergent properties. When I am enthused about something like leaf structure or the Nitrogen cycle, I investigate it, and this playful exploration is itself my creative process.

Investigation is my vehicle for appreciating my environment more deeply, and the natural result of this process of exploratory appreciation is the creation of my art. Art-making in turn raises questions which give legs to further investigation, and in this way my creative process is circular.



I am blessed to live in a fairly consistent state of awestruck enthusiasm, and I have rarely needed to step into the strange task of making Art happen.

Tension

I use the word tension not to communicate anything strained, but rather in the sense that a piano string is pulled in tension to make sound.

My passion is for investigating the natural world, and my investigations are enacted in a tension between the intuitive and the analytical, or the expressive and the scientific. My creative practice lives and plays on the taut string between these two practices.

This tension is similar to the tension at play between the rhythm section and the soloist in a blues band, where the key provides a consistent chord structure around which the improvisation can move, lending meaning to the improvised notes.

It is also similar to the tension between a skeleton and muscles, where bones provide structure over which muscles are stretched. Without the skeleton, the muscles would be reduced to a pile, and without the muscles, the skeleton could not move.

In the space of this type of tension between the expressive and the scientific, my investigations are like playful exploration. This process is itself my art.

Map of Structured Tension



The Playground from which my Work Sprouts

You and I could discuss the Nitrogen cycle through a pencil and paper or idealize its movements through a computer model without smelling the Nitrifying bacteria in compost.

Grids and numbers outline an abstraction of the natural world, cutting through the vast complexity of a leaf or an ecosystem to craft an analytical model of organic structure.

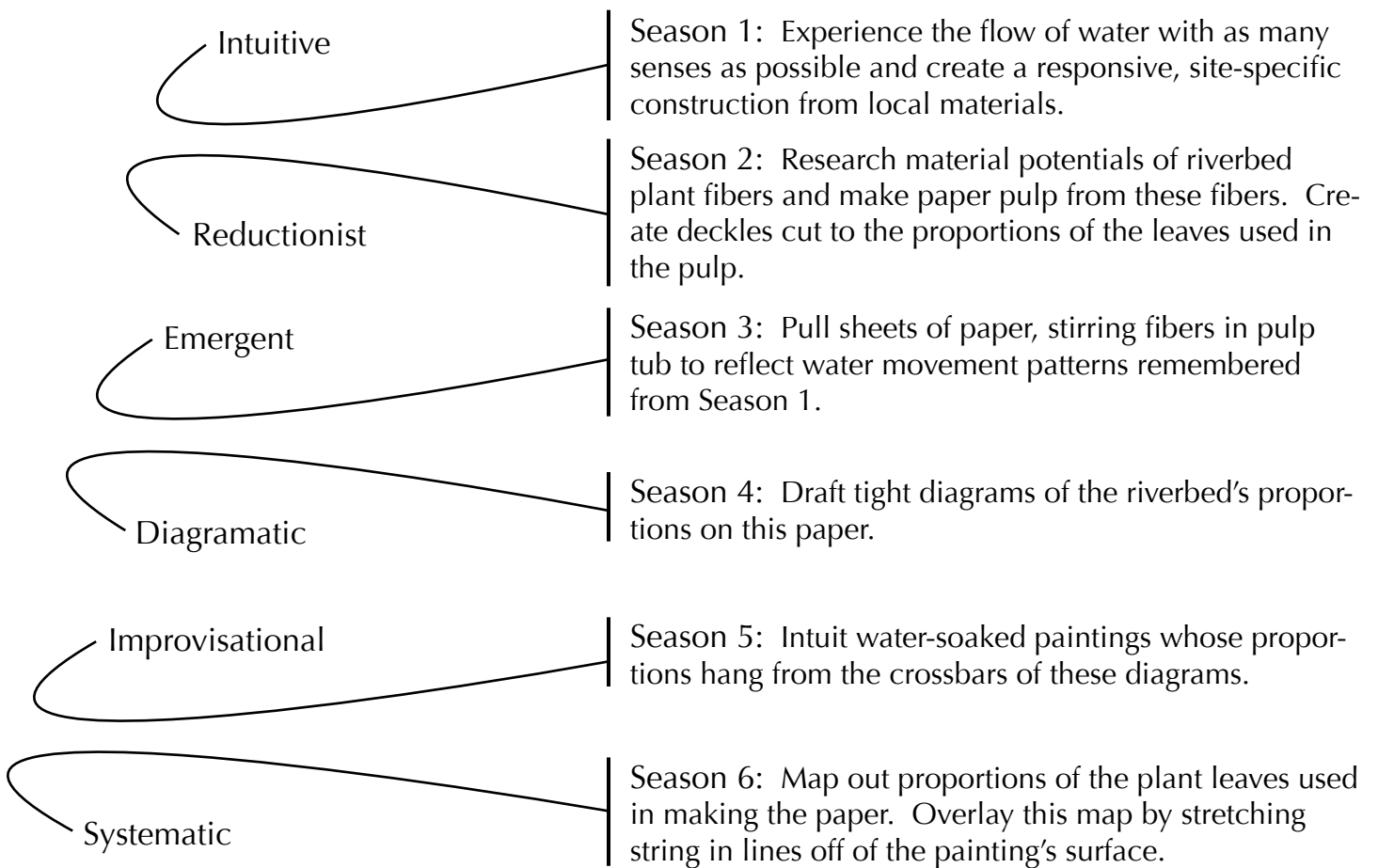
Having grown in to their own shoes, mathematical models can even build their own economy, fastened together with a currency of graphs, diagrams, and numbers. They stand on their own, kinetic analogies to the organic complexity from which they were sparked, but they will never fall fully into step with nature.

The space between nature's order and the systems we create to describe it is an exciting playground for me to explore as an artist. This space exists because of tension between science and nature. As a rope in tug-of-war is only in tension when it is pulled full-heartedly from both ends, this playground is held up by the tension of science standing to pull fully on one end and the natural world standing firmly on the other.

Translations Across the Playground

My process often involves series of translations between the intuitive and the analytical.

In responding to a riverbed, for example, I might divide my creative process into 'seasons' alternating between the expressive and the scientific.



Splendidly Imperfect Translation

Like the translation of poetry from one language to another, these translations of nature from analysis to expression breathe out scratchy imperfections. Meaningful ambiguity emerges between moments of clarity and precision. This is both enacted in my process and expressed in things like brushwork.

I grew up in an old house riddled with floorboards that split in the winter, paint chipping from dryer steam, and walls embellished by bathtub leaks, and the imperfect has always cracked open my creativity and popped restrictive nails out from my intuition.

I love mistakes, especially when they are hung from micrometered steel frameworks like rust growth.