

## The road less traveled: wayfaring and alchemy, amateurism and wanderlust

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Creative investigations—scientific, artistic and cultural—depend on finding new pathways through which to negotiate the material and conceptual worlds we inhabit. The premise of **Wayfaring** is that such pathways are best created by a nomadic exploration of new collaborations, processes and experiences. This type of thinking and making requires the recognition of the potential for every relationship formed, obstacle encountered or interaction achieved to be connected. Everything builds. Nothing is wasted. Navigating the unknown necessitates a moment-to-moment improvisation.

We do not exist alone and we cannot create alone. Wayfaring involves encounters with others and pathways serve their purpose when they are followed and extended. This is how knowledge is created and shared. The anthropologist Tim Ingold has employed a relational approach to argue that human development depends on embodied skills of perception and action within social and environmental contexts. In ways that have informed the curatorial ideas of the **Wayfaring** exhibition he has focused on the use of lines in culture, and the relationships between anthropology, architecture, art and design.

*“Someone who knows well is able to tell. They can tell not only in the sense of being able to recount the stories of the world, but also in the sense of having a finely tuned perceptual awareness of their surroundings. Thus knowing is relating the world around you, and the better you know, the greater the clarity and depth of your perception. To tell, in short, is not to represent the world but to trace a path through it that others can follow.”*

(Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, 2011 p.162)

Wayfaring avoids any insistence on direct point-to-point connection. The wayfarer is not determined to move from A to B and then to C. For the wayfarer movement is a way of being—as with life, journeys are always unfinished and continuous. The wayfarer finds their own way—established routes and previously mapped directions are forsaken for detours and the new possibilities they open up. The unfinished journeys and overlapping paths that this exhibition allows us an insight traverse the intersecting territories of writers, researchers, educators, makers, craftspeople, filmmakers, architects and poets. And the detours for at least one of the artists have involved basket weaving, bread making, butchery, pottery and taxidermy. All the crafts involved in that list are significant in their basis in a kind of alchemy—transforming base materials into things of an entirely different quality and value, whether as objects that balance function and aesthetics or sources of nutrition that do the same. In relation to the philosophical and cultural value of art practice this allusion to alchemy is an important metaphor and one that emphasises the fundamental importance of materials and their manipulation and transformation.

The raw materials of any given practice can drive the process and shape the ideas manifest through that practice as much as the intentions of the artist handling them. The hand and the mind generate and share an intelligent material space in which thinking through making and understanding by doing transform both materials and the human agents who make, use,

consume or perceive them. In this, art making across all its possible disciplines can have much in common with and much to learn from traditional craft skills. That most artists approaching other crafts or disciplines do so with a degree of amateurism is not necessarily a disadvantage and could be seen to have its own value. Jaques Rancière, in *The Intervals of Cinema*, asserts amateurism's value as a theoretical and political position, one that sidelines the authority of specialists by re-examining the way the frontiers of their domains are drawn at the points where experience and knowledge intersect.

Wayfaring with a kind of wanderlust opens up new routes by which to explore shared territories and new ways to think about inter-related systems. This exhibition demonstrates the fundamentally material ways in which this can occur. It might involve a particular engagement with the interface—collage, casting, screen-tests; or a testing of the threshold or support or barrier—door, wall, shelf, screen, plinth—the things in-between; or a transition across a void, a space—the gaps in-between. This in turn represents an assertion of the importance of disregarding norms and rules. As Buckminster Fuller insisted in *Only Integrity is Going to Count* (1983): “Each one of us has something to contribute. This really depends on each one doing their own thinking, but not following any kind of rule. We're all on the frontier... We are here as local information harvesters, local problem-solvers in support of the integrity of an eternally regenerative universe.”