

## *Rubber, Steel*

*Metalwork as an expressive media*

*Théotime Ritzenthaler*



*“All work is an act of creating and comes from the same source : from an inviolate capacity to see through one’s own eyes - which means : the capacity to perform a rational identification - which means : the capacity to see, to connect and to make what had not been seen, connected and made before.”*

*Ayn Rand*

## **Abstract :**

I think of art as a human intervention that facilitates an emotional experience. In my work the intervention is material-based, pulling from a wide range of metal-working techniques both following craft tradition and contemporary experimental approaches.

To facilitate a response by a viewer, my work needs to be shown. At KHiO I dedicated my master education to learn how Installation can be leveraged to forward this goal.

In this text I will give as comprehensive as I can a description of my practice and of the current state of my work. I will describe my process and how my work comes to be created as well as presented. I will dedicate special attention to Installation and the Visitor as these aspects are central to my work here at KHiO.

I also provide references that might help the reader understand how my process looks as well as examples from my own practice to illustrate the development into my current understanding.

I will present the physical result of my master project and show concrete examples of my process, and my decisions.

I find inspiration in exploring the potential of each technique. Materiality includes the rigor of craft and conventional understanding of the methods, their applications and contemporary relevance in production and industry.

In "*Rubber, Steel*" I explore different aspects of the materiality of metal. Archetypal structures reminiscent of industry are juxtaposed with experimental emotive approaches. I leverage the tensions between impersonal materials, forms, techniques and the emotional layer below.

This Installation juxtaposes metal as structure and industrial material with metal as emotive and introspective media. A Lamp and a frame are creating a tense space, the viewer must make a choice, to interfere to face the work or to walk around it. In this way the spectator is an actor of the scenery and is included in the ongoing unfolding of tensions. In the frame, burnt rubber and burnt stainless steel are hanging, surrounded by forged work. The viewer is free to contemplate their material features and emotional potential.

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## **I. Background :**

### **A. Making :**

I got into making art because it offered me freedom of technique, HDK-Steneby offered to explore the whole range of metal-working, rather than specializing on one aspect of the craft. My choice was also motivated by the trust students were given. At Steneby the workshop was offered as a playground, where experimenting and using machines in unconventional ways was encouraged. This was only possible because the school nurtured a sense of camaraderie and openness. The mixture of experienced craftspeople, artists and neophytes allowed for a productive shock between expertise and unconventionality. Craftspeople brought their technical knowledge, artists their understanding of expression and their ability to recognize potential and newcomers contributed fresh perspectives and rekindled conversation. I had arrived at HDK with a love for metalworking and discovered there the world of art, what expression means, how to conduct an artistic process and reflect critically upon my work. There I learned how to make work, at KHiO I wanted to learn how to present it. My studies have been centered around developing an understanding of the installation potentials of my practice. Before presenting my Master's work a presentation of my way of working will help understanding what this document is relevant for.



fig1 : Metal workshop, HDK-Valand, Steneby Campus <https://www.steneby.se/om/>

## 1. Materiality :

I am a material based artist, this means that my process is built upon exploring material-potential, this I call materiality. Materiality is the ensemble of the features of a material whether raw, treated according to conventional craft methods or pushed into experimental domain. Below are examples of material features that go beyond the commonly known aspects of steel.

A material based artist's expression is the result of Materiality. I find inspiration in exploring the potential of each technique. Materiality includes the rigor of craft and conventional understanding of the methods, their applications and contemporary relevance in production and industry. Materiality also involves exploring beyond the realm of application of the techniques. The way I can use different techniques to shape and transform material is my inspiration. I began my metalworking practice by forging which is responsive and conducive to spontaneity. I carried this spontaneous approach into other techniques, as a result I do not start a project with a formalized intention. I might have some idea about what I will make or how I will work but my goal is to make something I will love.

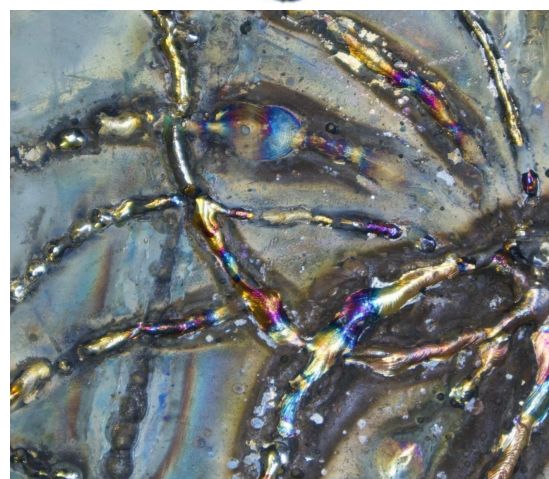


fig 2 : Forged steel, clay slurry, 2022 / fig 3 : Welded steel, 2023 / fig4 : Burnt steel, 2022, photos Théotime Ritzenthaler





fig5 : Forging, 2022, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler



fig6 :Turning, 2022, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

## 2. Process :

Through experimentation I discover techniques (the various outcomes from one tool), material features (textures, colors, forms) and artistic features (volumes, shapes, directions). I make choices regarding which discoveries I want to keep using and investigating. My decisions are most of the time motivated by intuition and follow an iterative process :

1. make
2. observe
3. critique, formalize expression : what is this doing? - what does it need?
4. make while addressing the needs.

*And so on...*

All my decisions are made to reach personal satisfaction with my work, formulating my thoughts through conversation and hearing opinions can develop the understanding of what my work is needing to reach satisfaction.

As I begin working I am usually totally lost, building up inertia in my process is one of the biggest challenges I regularly face. The solution is to just start working, ensues a grueling period of forced work in the workshop, where nothing seems to be interesting, nothing grabs my attention and I feel quite purposeless. I force myself to experiment with new techniques or refine my understanding of old ones. Over the years I have for example learned to use 5 welding techniques and the various expressions I can achieve using these processes.

During this experimentation phase I effectively expand a library of materiality that I have been contributing to for 9 years. By relying on serendipity, I find expressions, features, make mistakes and expand my knowledge of the material.



There are two ways out of this limbo, either I find a compelling expression that I am fascinated with and keep exploring, or I resolve to a craft project like making tools or working on the proper application of a technique. Either way I gain a deeper understanding of a specific technique and renewed inspiration follows.

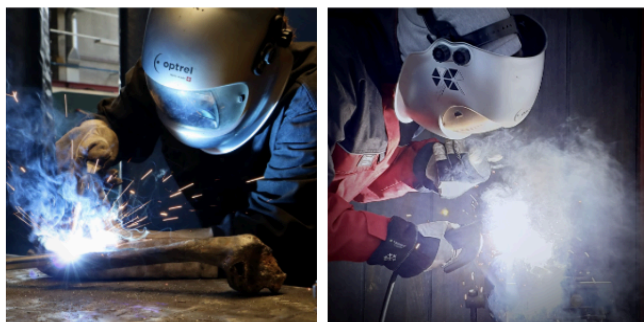


fig7 : TIG welding, 2022 / fig8 : Gas welding, 2023 / fig9 : MIG welding, 2022 / fig10 : Stick welding, 2024 (photos Théotime Ritzenthaler)



Once the first building block is placed, whether in the form of an abstract expression or of a strict application of craft, I can begin to look critically at my work. *What is it missing?* is the question governing my process. At this time I apply my artistic understanding to formalize my impression of what I have made and follow my intuition to establish the next steps. I pull from my “library” of materiality the complementary expressions and techniques to the current state of the work to bring it in accordance with my intuition. I am done when I do not find that anything significant is missing.

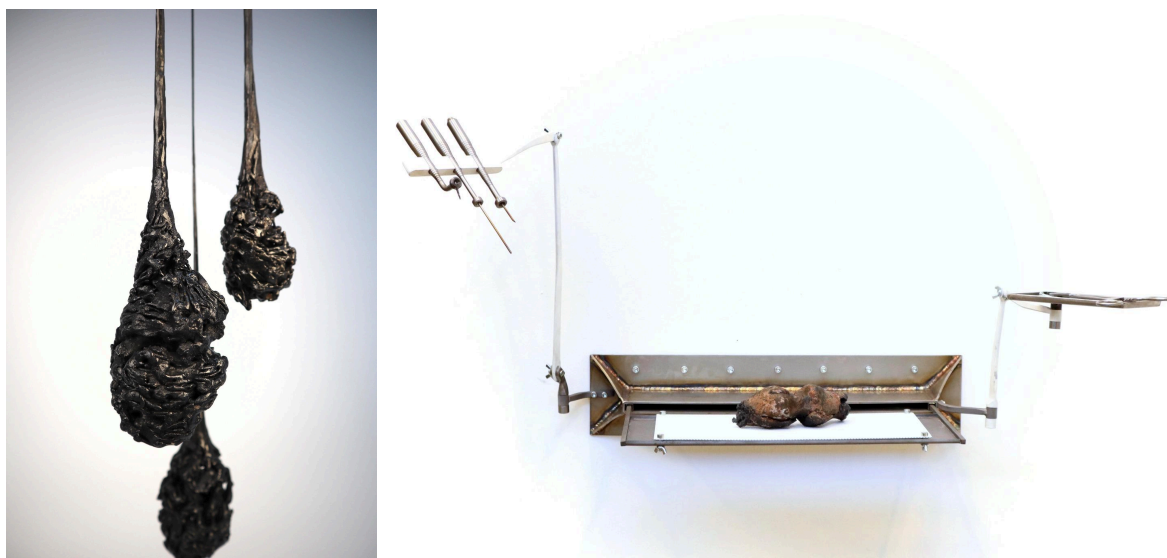


fig11 : *Inevitability*, burnt and forged steel, tar, nylon, 30x30x200cm (pictured), 2021 / fig12 : *The Healing Bench*, welded, machined, forged steel, clay slurry, paint, 80x40x50cm, 2021, photos Théotime Ritzenthaler

Writing comes at a later point, usually after physical progress has been made. At this stage the objective for me is to organize and articulate my thoughts about the work, why it is compelling to me and how I achieved that. I attempt to understand expressive motivations for each element of the work, materials, scale, technique, placement, and so on. I put emphasis on reflecting on the work as it can be seen and try to adopt the posture of an external observer. By dissociating myself from the making process I can observe themes reflected by the work, acknowledge them and examine them. This process allows me to layer and contextualize the conceptual aspects of the work without formalizing them. In other words I can sort the concepts reflected and relate them to broader contexts. In my work the concept is only a consequence of my engaging in critical reflection on the results and formal explanation is at best low resolution and redundant. The writing process is closer to a retrospective study that offers insight in the success of the work. Understanding why I found a work compelling might also give me tools for further projects.

## B. References

In this part I will present three artists whose approach is in some way analogous to mine. I will discuss their relationships to the making process, materiality, craft and conceptual frameworks and draw parallels with my own work.



fig13 : Hubert Duprat, *Trichoptera (caddis larva) case on pedestal*. Photographer: Fabrice Gousset.

### 1. Hubert Duprat :

Although he does not limit himself to a single material, his practice is a good illustration of creating a library of material features from which he then pulls at will to create works. I saw his retrospective at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris and was impressed by his use of various materials for their own sake in a manner that pulled the visitors attention to their materiality

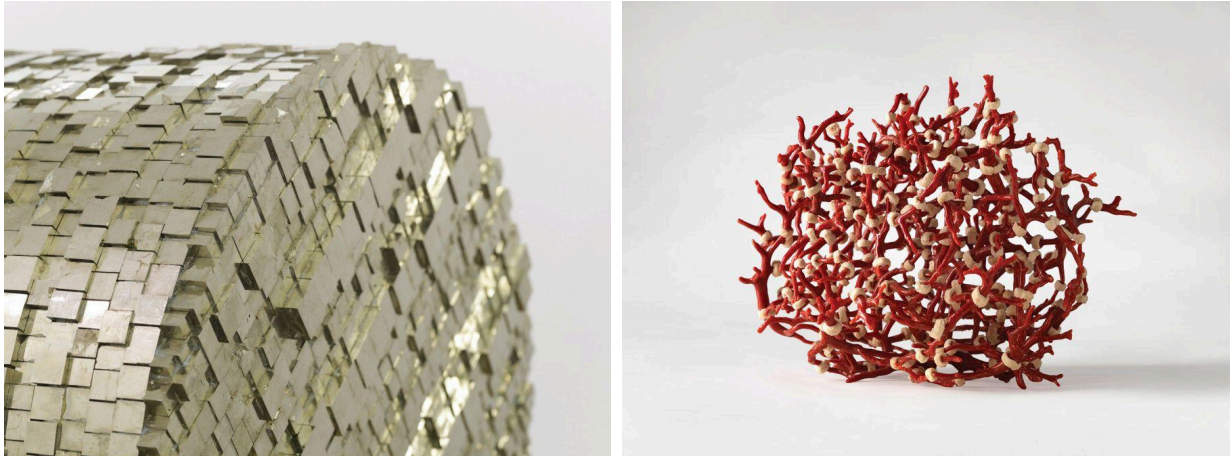


fig14 : Hubert Duprat, *Untilted*, 2007-2008. Crushed pyrite crystals, araldite glue, base, 44x48x48 cm / fig15 : Hubert Duprat, *Costa Brava Coral*, 1994-2021. Red mediterranean coral, bread, glue, 20x22x24 cm, photos Galerie Art Concept

*“the Duprat oeuvre also draws inspiration from chance and the empirical, combining discovery of objects, remnants and texts in a testing-out of matter, technique and dexterity. The artist is equally happy in the natural world or working with weird minerals (iron pyrites, calcite, ulexite, etc.), species that defy classification (amber, coral, etc.) and everyday industrial materials (polystyrene, concrete, paraffin, modelling clay, etc.) His repurposed processes come largely from the crafts – marquetry, goldsmithing, upholstery – but also from such vernacular domains as string art.” (Jessica Castex, Curator, Musée d’Art Moderne de Paris, 2021)*

There appears to be no idea, concept, message at the root of his work, other than an exploration of the potential of a great variety of materials and techniques. His work comes across as a beautiful and poetic invitation to observe and discover the marvel of materiality. I recognize the same approach I use, the construction of a library of features, that are combined to create a piece. One major difference is how viewers relate to the work. In Duprat’s work, one is a spectator, observing a foreign but fascinating object. Visiting this exhibition gave me a similar feeling as the geological museum in Oslo, an unending stream of amazement and wonder at all the world had to offer, the visitor is an observer. I try to include the visitor in my work, to let them take an active part in exploring the Installation.

## 2. Pierre Soulages :

Another example would be Pierre Soulages, I visited his own museum and admired the artistic sense displayed. Soulages's understanding of the materiality of not only paint but also of light allowed him to create striking works. He used paint almost as a sculpting material and the light reflected as his actual media. I found the architecture of the museum and the level of commitment to his artistic vision reflected in the building inspiring as well. The use of raw steel plate as wall panels highlighted not only the blackness of his paintings but also the color of the steel and let the glimpses of light reflected by the paint make a striking impression. *"Il est organisé autour de la technique et de la matérialité des oeuvres présentées de Pierre Soulages."* translation by me : *"(the museum) is organized around the technique and materiality of the presented works of Pierre Soulages"* (Musée Soulages)

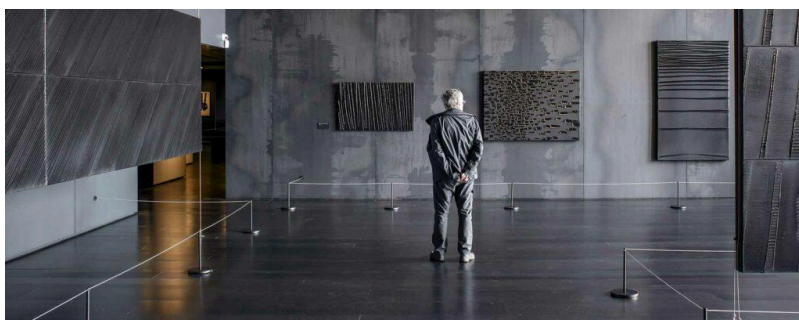


fig16 : Pierre Soulages Museum / fig17 : Peinture 128 x 159 cm, 22 septembre 2018, 2018. Acrylic on canvas. 128 x 159 cm. ©Pierre Soulages / ADAGP, Paris, 2019. Courtesy of the Artist & Perrotin.

*"With specially prepared brushes, palette knives and domestic implements, Soulages created complex textures, combining areas of smoothness and roughness and digging deep lines into the thick, layered paint.*

*For Soulages the tactile values in his paintings, as well as his related abstract bronze reliefs, were not as important as the ways in which the surfaces absorbed or reflected light. [...] This fascination with black and its luminous potential led him in later life to create some remarkable juxtapositions. At the turn of the 21st century he used collage to make a series of compositions consisting of horizontal black and white strips. The optical brilliance was striking even when the explosions of black paint seemed to overwhelm the swathes of white."* (The Guardian, 2022)

Once again, Soulages does not describe a concept, idea or other, he just works and feels his way to the results, he talks about "failing" a painting, or "emotional states" but never states an intention or a definitive goal. *"Je me suis aperçu que je ne travaillais plus avec du noir, que je travaillais avec la lumière réfléchié par des états de surface du noir(...). Ce phénomène allait très loin en moi".* Translation by me : *"I noticed I wasn't working with black anymore, that I*



was working with the light reflected by the surface states of the black (...) This phenomenon went far into me” (FrancelInfo)

I think the way the movement of the viewer impacts the painting, because of the changes in the reflections of light is quite influential to me and is something I am leveraging in my current work as well. The sense of reverence and muted introspection I felt in his museum is also similar to what I notice my work doing.

### 3. C.F. Andersen :

A third example worth mentioning to understand my approach is C.F Andersen, Norwegian artist Blacksmith (1858-1947). Andersen was a master at his craft, and knew how to forge steel perfectly, how to force the material to his will and what the material was capable of doing. He forged the railing of Nordraaks plass in Oslo and it is one of the most impressive forged works I have seen. His understanding of the craft was put at the service of the idea and of the expression. As a blacksmith myself I recognize techniques that only someone familiar with the craft would have used.

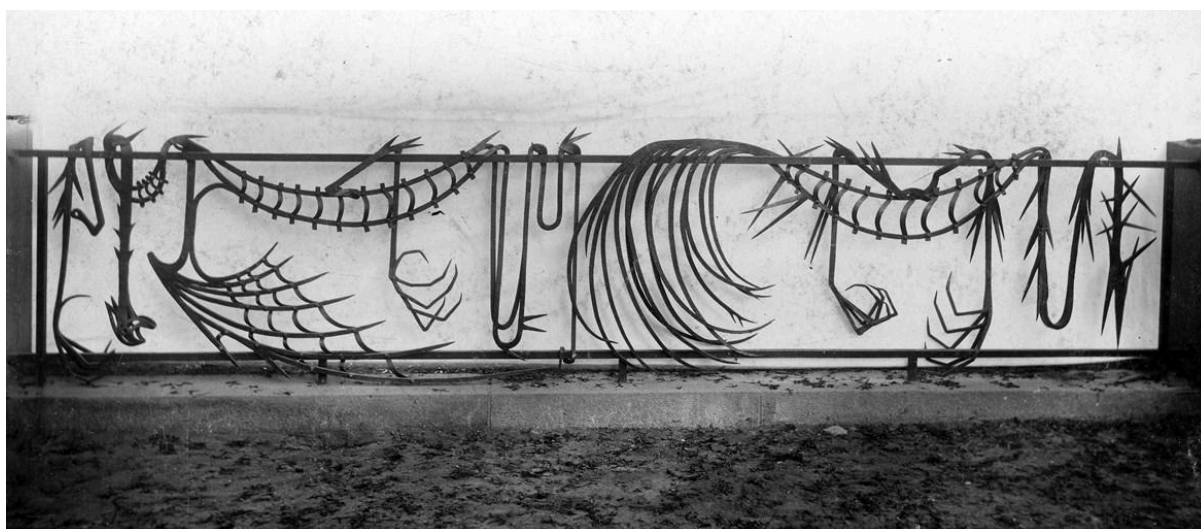


fig18 : C.F Andersen Kunstsmid, Nordraaks plass railing 400x60x10cm, photo Arkiv Kunstindustrimuseet

Here the craft has an integral part to the artwork, the artist leveraged all his specific knowledge to give its strength and weight to the expression. As a viewer the build quality is impressive and recognizing the skill of the craftsman adds another dimension to the interest of the work. In this approach, the artist's skill is put to the service of his project, he has learned to think as a blacksmith and the forms produced are a function of his expertise, but are no less instinctual than the use of the alphabet when one decides to write. This discreet quality of craft mastery in which the process is entirely subordinate to the expression is described by Glenn Adamson *“It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that craft is either*

*present or not present in a work, or that it is present in some quantifiable sense. In fact, craft is a strictly qualitative consideration, in which the goal is always effacement in the service of the total work.” (Adamson, G, Thinking through craft, Bloomsbury, 2007)* In my practice, I blend craft whose purpose is effacement as described by Adamson with an approach in which the objective is reversed. In the latter, the technique is treated as an end in itself. My approach can be compared to the one of Andersen, as metal has become for me an underlying property of instinctual work. Metal is my material of predilection because of the freedom it offers. I approach any issue, whether artistic or technical from the perspective of a metalworker. I pull from the library of materiality and processes tools and expressions that can be applied to solve a problem.

To summarize, my making process rests upon materiality, craft and intuition. I build a library of materiality that includes craft techniques and experimental approaches. When I build my work I pull as guided by intuition, in an iterative way, from this collection of knowledge. Techniques for their own sake and craft are combined to create my work.

I apply my artistic understanding to formalize my impression of what I have made and follow my intuition to establish the next steps until I reach a personal satisfaction with the work.

While this forms a relatively complete picture of my making process, to understand my practice as a whole, the Installation practice and the experience created for the visitor must be considered. These two aspects have been the focus of my master project and will be explored in the following part.

### C. Showing :

My studies at KHiO have been dedicated to developing an understanding of the installation potentials of my practice. This investigation is fundamentally regarding the relationships between work and support structures and the experience resulting from those. First, I will present a few relevant previous projects to elucidate the state of my thinking about showing as I began my Master. While not consciously doing so, these works manifest experimentation with various display methods, hanging, podium, wall mounted, free standing, but also with Installation as a practice and as an expressive tool.

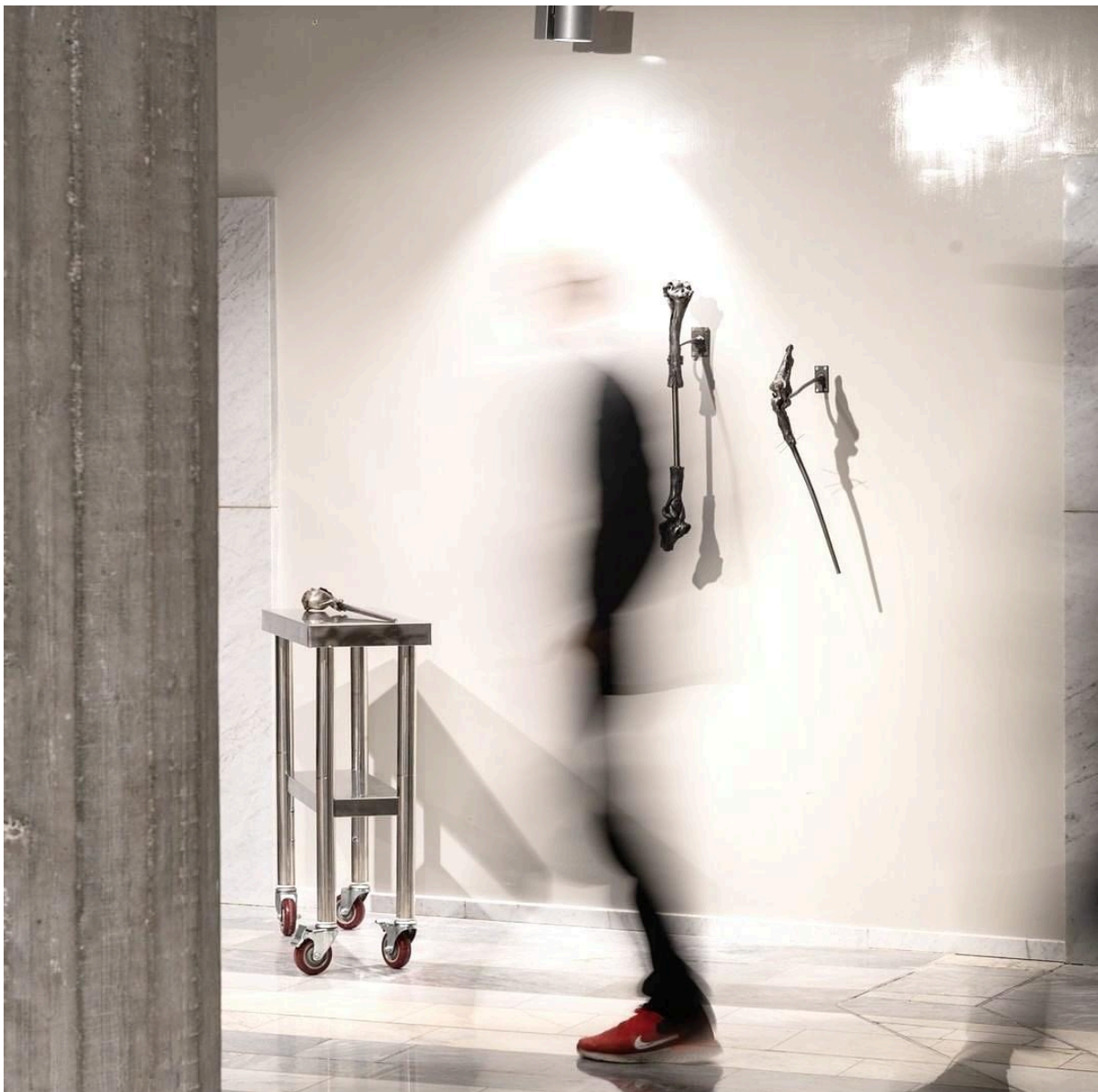


fig19 : *Orthopaedics, forged and machined steel, Installation view, Extended Family, Stockholm Craft Week, 2022*

### 1. *Inevitability* :

This work was created in 2021 when the workshop was unavailable. I found myself in unexplored territories, using new materials and Installation for the first time.

This site specific sketch (see below, fig20) materialized the immersive potential Installation practice can have. I kept this experience in mind for future reference but focused my efforts on the making process to translate the objects in metal.

In *Inevitability*, burnt wire drops coated in tar are suspended from the ceiling. Their texture is swarming and lively, but the color seems oily and decayed, combined with the suspension, this created a work that hangs precariously mid-air but also between life and death.



fig20 : Site Specific sketch, Plastic, 2021 / fig21 : *Inevitability*, Burned steel, nylon, tar, 2021, 300x100x100cm, Atelier Richelieu, Paris, 2019 / fig22 : *Inevitability*, detail, 2021, photos Théotime Ritzenthaler

Here the display method was a consequence of the process, but it had a great impact on the expression of the work. I did not realize the importance of the immersive quality of the preliminary sketch I made until later but this work marks the beginning of my investigation in display methods as I moved away from making objects that could simply be placed. Hanging work is not a great leap from placing it on the floor or on a plinth, but the technical difficulties that come with this showing method made me promise to myself to avoid it if I could. Hanging work in this way marks an integration of the pieces in their environment, they emerge from the ceiling, they are an extension of the architecture.

## 2. Nostalgia :

These pieces are forged out of sheet metal, which cracks and splits during the process. The result reminded me of the branches of the scots pines growing in Sweden, when found dead on the ground, their dead-alive duality is strong. The pieces have been later burnt and coated in brass. It is also during this process that I discovered that by pouring a clay slurry over the hot metal I could give it colours. Colour has always been a challenge for me as a metalworker. Using paint seems to cover and hide the process and the materiality. To me colour had to be an equal counterpart to the metalwork, brass brushing, enameling, chemical patina or the clay slurry add their own aspects of materiality to the work.

This work was very much an Investigation in a specific technique, and showing it only became a concern once the pieces were made. I experimented a lot by placing the works in various situations to learn about the pieces. However, because of the explicit intention of exhibiting this work I settled on classic plinths. Any object can be shown successfully on a podium and it did also work conceptually here. I chose to use undersized podiums from which the works would break out of. The plinths create associations with the museum space, and reinforce the sensation that these parts belong somewhere else and had been taken and placed in this romanticized position, hinting to the often idealized view we have of the past. The white plinth was used to mark a separation of the sculpture from the mundane space around it and elevate it above.



fig23 : Nostalgia, Forged and burn steel, clay slurry, brass, 70x20X15cm, 2022 / fig24 : Nostalgia, brass detail, 70x40x30cm, 2022, photos Théotime Ritzenthaler

This project was an investigation in a specific making process, but also in classical display methods, using the archetypal structure of the white podium. The issue with this decision is that I later understood that these pieces were actually relying on not only the podium but the whole exhibition space around them. To avoid this dependance on specific conditions requires a further development of the works.



### 3. Orthopaedics :

This project is in many ways an elaboration of Nostalgia, I used the same forging technique, the same patina method, and focused on alternative display methods.

Orthopaedics are juxtaposing precisely machined and polished steel with hot forged steel bones, a clay slurry was poured over the warm metal to give it its color. The branches of Nostalgia became knee joints because I had suffered an injury at the time and association to human bodies made for a more visceral and gripping work. The tension between structure and emotions materialized through the medical imagery, but my interest was already deeper than the superficial surgical theme.

The mundane aspects of metal and its known forms, although less exciting than experimental approaches, are manifestations of materiality as well. I started to include bolts, nuts, threaded rods to highlight known material features among experimental techniques. I hoped to draw people's attention to the material by contrasting known forms to the unique features of my pieces like the burnt texture of stainless steel or the sheet metal forged in bars.

As I had learned from my previous project I focused heavily on the display methods. During the project I understood the narrative potential of the presentation, how I was going to show the work was just as important as the work itself. I hung pieces from *Orthopaedics* on the walls, as in *Inevitability*, the works were integrated into the architecture, offering a sense of stability by using the whole wall as an anchor for the pieces. For this project, using my own lighting became a consideration, I used 4000K light (neutral white) to reinforce the associations with an operating theater and the feeling of impersonality and neutrality. The impersonal surroundings to the pieces strengthen their impact because it creates a sense of realness to the whole experience.

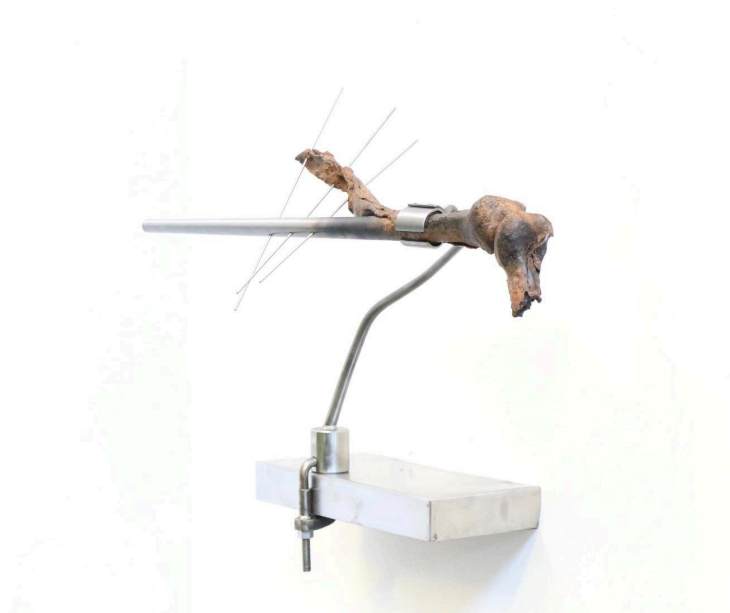


fig25 : S-Pin, Orthopaedics, Forged, machined, welded steel, clay slurry, 80x40x50cm 2022, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler



*fig26 : Orthopaedics at Trädgårdsföreningen, Göteborg, forged, machined, welded steel, clay slurry, table, medical fabric, 2022, photos Théotime Ritzenthaler*

In this project, my investigation into the tensions created by the interaction of structure and emotions was materialized. The display method became an integral part of the process and I understood the immersive potential of Installation. However, I still conducted this project by making a series of sculptures and expanding around each individually which resulted in a series of work that, while cohesive, did not contribute significantly to each other. Shown together they can seem monotonous because of the clear pattern repeated in each work.



*fig27 : Osteogenesis, Installation view, Galerie Daniel Vignal, Vabre, France, 2022, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler*



#### 4. *White Noise* :

The two versions of this piece are the only public and outdoor pieces I have made. *White Noise* originated as an assignment to create a memorial, I developed a texture that would create a visual white noise. This texture was applied to large sheets of metal in front of which the visitor could engage in introspection. While this work is older than all the others, the similarities with my master project are numerous.

The scale of the work, monumental, dominating the viewer and filling its field of view as well as the works independence, self standing in its surroundings.

The use of texture and large sheets of metal to create an immersive texture to lead to introspection.

The tension created by negative spaces, transparency and in its second iteration, the interaction of the experimental texture with a grid.



*fig28 : White Noise (1), Forged, torch cut steel, clearcoat, 120x50x200cm (2020) / fig29 : White Noise (2), Forged, torch cut, welded steel, oiled, 120x10x250cm (2022), photos Théotime Ritzenthaler*

Without being a conscious continuation, my master work borrows many aspects from this work. The monumental, dominating format and the use of planes and transparency is now directed to indoor showing. Many aspects are now intensified, such as the contrast between structure and emotions, the use of materiality and an overall deeper thought surrounding Installation.



Upon my arrival at KHiO, I had already learned much about how to show my work, and it was clear to me that by pushing this process further I would improve the quality of my work. I knew that the tension created by expressive and emotive experimental metalwork juxtaposed with impersonal structure was effective. I also knew that by integrating work in its environment, I could create immersive experiences and that light was a powerful tool for the same purpose. I had also experimented with large work, negative spaces and occupying the viewers field of view. In the following part I will expand upon my work here and how these elements combined to lead to the final work. I will also elaborate on my process and learning outcomes here.



*fig30 : White Noise (1), detail (2020), photo Théotime Ritzenthaler*

## II. Remains, Excavating Feelings :

Each year of my master's has been dedicated to different parts of the project. While my second year has been directed towards the final exam and applying my learning, the first year was an opportunity for renewed exploration and deeper investigation into Installation. Let me start with an account of the work done during the first year.

### A. Breaking systems

As I began working I kept building upon my Orthopaedics project, combining forged organic bone shapes with clinical and polished steel structures. I chose to use the shape of a rib bone because it allowed me to start occupying the space in a different manner. To these experiments I quickly added a site specific element to explore how to create more intimate relations with the space surrounding the works.



fig31 : Site specific experiment, forged and welded steel, oil, 20x15x15cm (2022) photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

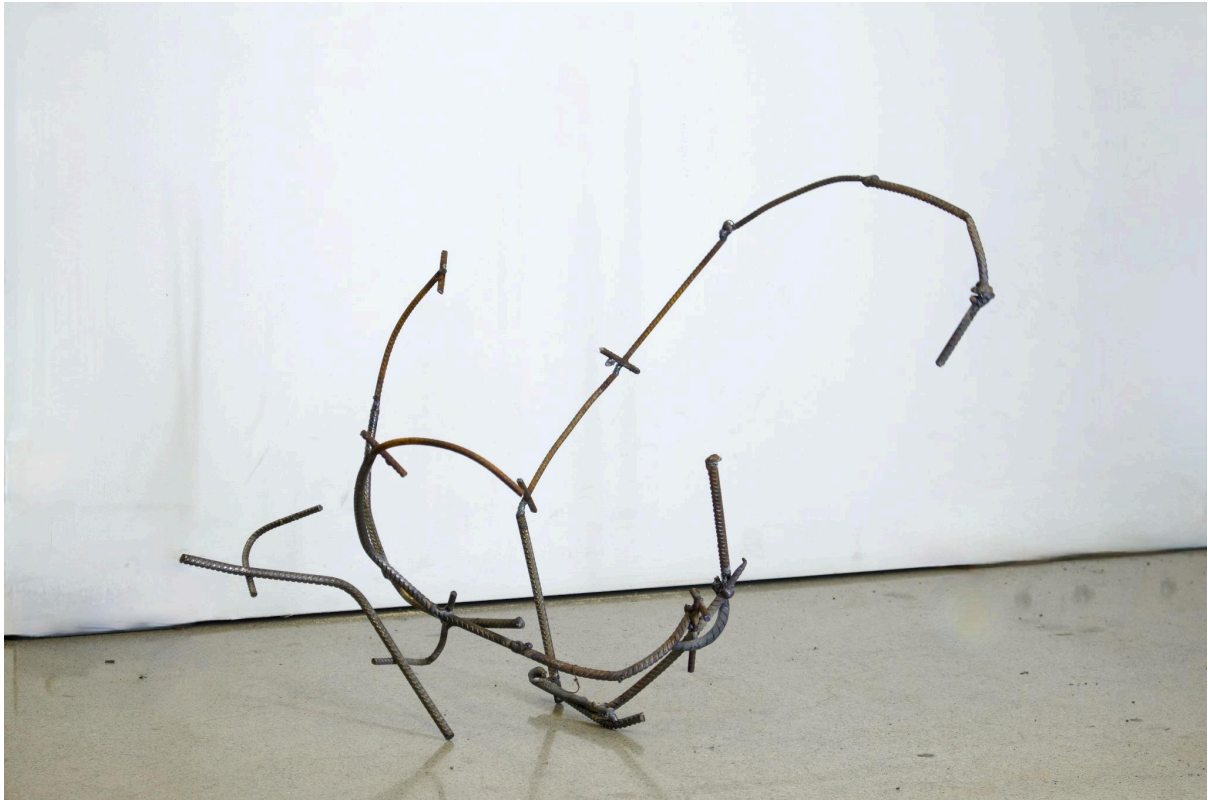
In tutoring with Jorge Manilla he pointed out that in my process I tend to create a structure, or system and then work within this set of rules. The effect this produces is that a viewer can then understand all of my pieces by referring to this system. For example in *Orthopaedics* : Forged bone - Machined taper - polished clamping device is a repeated pattern. The work loses intensity, and does not challenge the viewer's perception once the system is



established. And if the spectator is not engaged the work becomes less interesting, the variations open the door to questions from the viewer and invites a closer investigation. Jorge invited me to explore outside of those sets of rules I impose on myself.

Using found materials forced me to focus on the lines and directions created, The ribs, and their texture, dimensions were reduced to simple lines and compositions.

Using rebar, material I do not like allowed me to have a freer experimentation. The lines created revealed new interests, volumes, tensions, that I can further investigate in return.



*fig32 : Rebar experiment, welded steel, 30x45x50cm (2022) photo Théotime Ritzenthaler*

At the same time I took an interest in stick welding, a technique I had neglected previously. I practiced the craft originally to add a process to my repertoire but quickly found a lot of value in this technique. The sensory feedback, the sound, the smoke and the influence of my hand upon the weld pushed me to experiment further with the technique. I used the stick welder to “draw”, effectively translating my movement into steel. These drawings have strong relations to the three-dimensional shapes I was working on.



fig33 : Stick weld drawing, cast iron, weld, 50x70cm, 2022 photo *Théotime Ritzenthaler*

During the first semester I created a network of pieces, related but very different from each other, using steel, aluminum, silver, cast iron and diverse techniques such as forging, welding or sheet metal forming.

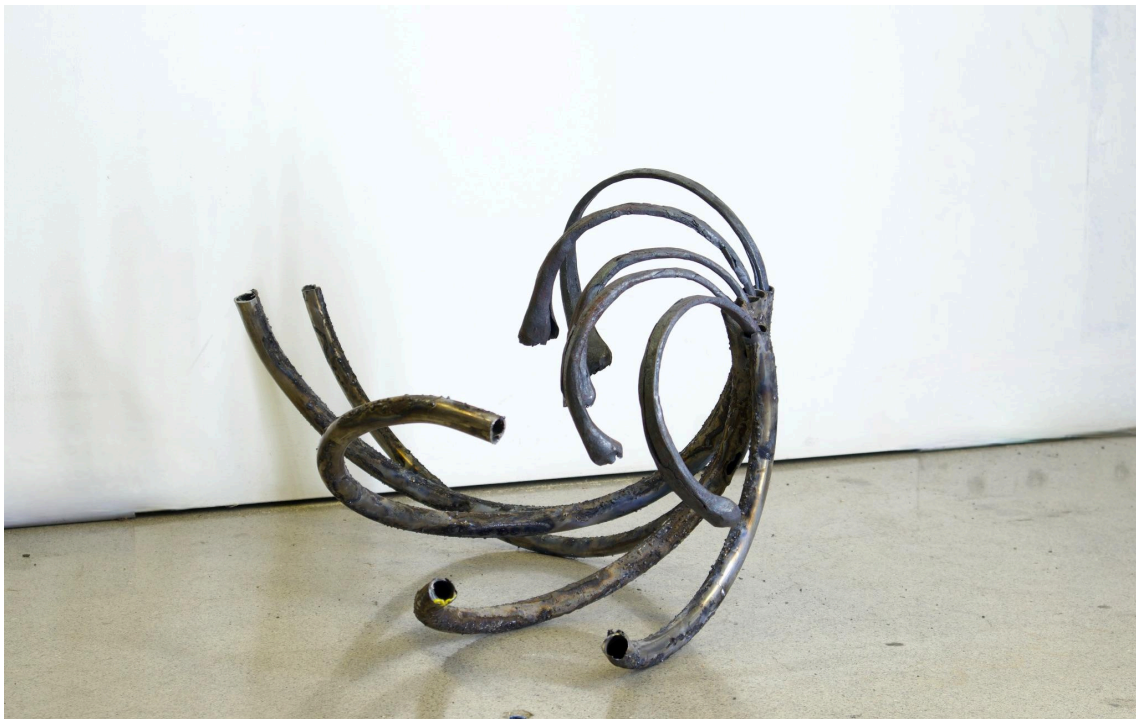


fig34 : No title, welded steel tube, forged steel, 50x40x35cm, 2022, photo *Théotime Ritzenthaler*



fig35 : No title, rolled steel, 30x30x40cm, 2022 / fig36 : No title, forged, welded aluminum, forged, welded steel, 90x60x100cm, 2022 photos *Théotime Ritzenthaler*

Since I was working with the objective of installation practice, the individual works became less relevant. In this approach, each element needed less refinement, and became less powerful. I put much less emphasis on refining a single piece from a craft standpoint but rather on how a network of objects, scales and techniques can create a cohesive experience. The “finished” state of my work had shifted, from the single piece it was now a consideration for a whole installation. While the careful craftsman in me, used to a thorough iterative approach, found this new approach challenging because the focus shifted away from the objects, this change allowed me to keep working in a heavily material-based approach and make use of a variety of techniques.



## B. Installation as a process

When entering the exhibition space I engaged in an exploratory process in the manner I do with making. I brought everything I had made and started placing objects in the room. I worked on creating a cohesive and engaging experience for myself, following my intuition. I had at my disposal a large variety of work and objects. Most of these elements were displaying interesting material features but were incomplete, only a fragment of a potential work. While I saw great expressive potential in those objects, more work needed to be done to reveal it. I understood that I could make up for their incompleteness by creating metaphorical links between objects.



fig37 : Remains Excavating Feelings, Installation view, 2023, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

In the image above, the fragments of rebar on the floor and the piece placed above communicate strongly. This way of working allowed for the unexpected to emerge during the installation practice. As objects interact they create expressive highlights in the room, sorts of clusters of expressivity. As a whole the Installation is then more varied, less monotonous and more engaging for a viewer as an explorer. Retrospectively the Installation “*Remains, Excavating feelings*” can be conceptualized as an investigation into the metaphorical links between works.

While installing I leveraged what was at my immediate disposal, the trolley I used to bring the work, the ladder used to install became support structures for the works.

Trolleys, shelves, ladders, and other equipment like screws, and hardware invoke the industrial world because of their produced nature and their functionality. They link back to the original use of the techniques I use such as forging or welding. The mechanical and industrial atmosphere created offers an analytical and objective standpoint from which the viewer can safely engage with the emotional nature of the work.

Relying on bought objects allowed me to expand my work while applying my craft skills where they made an expressive difference. Using a ladder to present a small sheet metal piece, allowed me to create a much larger work while leveraging existing resources and the efficiency of modern manufacturing. The same techniques used for the industrial production of these elements are put to the service of artistic expression in my practice.



fig38 : Remains Excavating Feelings, ladder, Installation view, 2023, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler





fig39 : Remains Excavating Feelings, trolley, Installation view, 2023, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

### C. *Remains, Excavating Feelings*

In “*Remains, Excavating Feelings*”, several tools became of greater significance. Light becomes a narrative tool. I also found an interest in the additional layer that shadows create. I used them to draw links between objects and offer new perspectives on some works. My wish to keep using neutral white light and the use of light and shadows as expressive tools made using my own lamps a logical choice. I had built a lamp for taking pictures and began using it as part of the installation. The intense presence and highlight it created contributed to the creation of expressive clusters and the fact that this functional element became a main piece in the room added a lot of value. On one hand it creates a tension between intense presence and shadows. On the other, its immaterial quality contrasts with the grounded and physical nature of metalwork. Light still serves as a functional guide for the viewer by directing their attention and engaging them in an explorative experience to discover what lies in the darkness. But the lamps as objects become metaphorical spectators as well, they show the work and show how to look at the work, their immobile, contemplating posture and the neutral light they emit is indicating how the viewer is to behave in the space and engage with the work.



fig40 : *Remains Excavating Feelings*, Installation view, 2023, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

Visitors are led to become exploratory actors of the scenery. The scale I work with lets viewers enter the work, experience it from a variety of perspectives and in a variety of scales. The Installation is first experienced as a large composition, then the viewer can perceive tensions and dialogues between objects and with the room. As they approach the work, visitors are invited to narrow their focus and to start to look at specific materials and expressions. I have worked with subtle cues to direct the movement of visitors in the way I want to. An extension cord, unraveled on the floor, extends the Installation and creates a tacit border that most people will not cross.



fig41 : Remains Excavating Feelings, Installation view, 2023, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

As a material-based artist, metal has a conceptual relevance in my practice. The juxtaposition of made and bought elements, using similar processes but expressing widely different aspects of human life, structure - emotions, create an interesting tension in my practice.



fig42 : Remains Excavating Feelings, detail, welded steel, 10x15cm, ladder, 2023, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

While materiality and the making process have been central in my bachelor's. The first year of my master saw other aspects come into focus. The installation process approached in a similar fashion as I did making, with iteration and intuition as main directing principles.

The title "Remains, Excavating Feelings" refers to my association with the works presented "Remains" hints to pieces that seem old and weathered, discovered rather than made on purpose. "Excavating Feelings" juxtaposes a scientific and an emotional word, reflecting the impersonal standpoint adopted to present the works. My goal is to create a neutral and objective space that allows for an authentic, honest and personal engagement. Whether it be through introspection and contemplation or purely aesthetic appreciation by taking part in a multisensory experience. I have during my several exhibitions during this project paid attention to the way people interact with my work. I noticed that features such as intense light, directed towards specific works can be used to direct the flow of visitors. Adding sound to the Installation was a first, playing droning deep sound loops created a sense of detachment from the space. Viewers didn't hear their own movements in the room and were less self-aware, which promoted introspection and slower exploration of the space and the works.

The relatively dim lighting of "Remains, Excavating feelings" did not lend itself well to the discovery of unique material features. While those features were omnipresent, they took a background role to the profit of forms and macroscopic qualities.





fig43 : Remains Excavating Feelings, detail, forged steel, aluminum, 100x120cm, 2023, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

I wished to find a way to bring attention back to specific material features which are the basis of my inspiration without backpedaling on newer additions.

The final work produced during the first year is an installation in which I have extracted the three key elements from “Remains, Excavating Feelings”, purposeful lighting, an impersonal framing and an emotive approach to metalwork. To those elements I brought back a greater focus on materiality. This piece I made without planning, fast, using a technique I discovered on the actual object, It embodies a certain artistic purity. It was not premeditated, it manifests the way I engage in material investigation and captures a moment in which I was consumed entirely by the act of making.



fig44 : MA1 show, Installation view, lamp, trolley, burnt stainless steel, bungee cord, 150x120X80cm, 2023, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

This work introduces several notions that I used for the second year. The two parts seem to be engaged in a dialog and create tension when facing each other. The trolley creates an aspect of instrumentality and itinerance that surrounds the piece. In the setting of a group show, the self standing nature of this work allowed it to stand out from works around, the itinerant aspect and “in progress” expression gave it a sense of autonomy within the space. It was as if the work existed beyond the room, asserting its independence, while claiming the space around itself.

### III. *Rubber, Steel :*

My goal for the second year was to combine the acquired experience of Installation with a thorough making process based on materiality. I decided to work on the same platform as the final work of the first year. In the following part I will delve into the specifics of each aspect as explored in my final project.

#### A. *Rubber, Steel*



fig45 : *Rubber, Steel*, Installation View, welded, forged, burnt steel, burnt rubber, hoist, lifting strap, wheels, lamps, extension cord, 2024 ~300x220X120cm photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

*Rubber, Steel* is an Installation consisting of a light mast projecting intense white light facing a gantry crane in which burnt rubber and burnt stainless steel are hanging, surrounded by forged work. The Light mast and the Gantry crane in their silent, towering confrontation give rise to a tense space between them. To face the work, one must step into this tense zone. There the viewer can contemplate the various material expressions created by treating industrial materials in experimental ways. There is a sense of purposefulness and itinerance in the work, as if it was still in progress, on its way to serve a purpose that should be obvious. *Rubber, Steel* is also a series of works aimed at investigating how the themes emerging in this Installation can be explored in various forms. I leverage archetypal forms of the Industrial and Artistic worlds to promote different responses to similar material features. The Light



mast and Gantry crane, commonplace on construction sites or warehouses, frame the emotional approach with a sense of purposeful, impersonal objectivity.

The use of torch cut steel profile as material hints to the form of the moulded picture frame and invites the viewer to contemplate the experimental approaches as they would an abstract painting, while keeping the notion of industrial objective framing underlying.



fig46 : Rubber, Steel, burnt rubber, welded steel, 92x42cm, 2024 / fig47 : Rubber, Steel, detail, burnt stainless steel, torch cut steel profile , 2024, photos Théotime Ritzenthaler

From the perspective of someone outside of the contemporary art world, those two different directions of exploring the same features and materials give rise to a dynamic interplay between the novel scenario-building of the installation and the less challenging presentation of the frames. The Installation, through its clear inspiration in existing forms is conducive to associations and fantasy. On the other hand, the frames remind of the artistic context and of the possibility of simply observing the works without engaging in story-telling. When shown together, the frames ground the work in the art world and attract the viewers attention on materiality, while the Installation invites extrapolation, association and reverie.

In the following part I will delve in further detail in each aspect I carried over from the first year, I will expand upon the process and show concrete examples of iteration and instinctive decision-making.



## B. Impersonal framing

The first stage of this work was to create a frame, I felt like I needed to constraint my exploration to be more effective. Conceptual restraints are not productive since I do not work from an explicit concept so I resorted to physical constraints. Building a small gantry crane served several uses. First it allowed me to start working quickly since I was following a plan, it served as a kind of warmup. Second, it defined the scale of the future work.



fig48 : Gantry Crane, welded steel, casters, 110x100x223cm, 2023, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

I made the gantry crane as large as I could, I wanted it to dominate the viewer. The work of the previous year was quite discreet, on the floor and I even experimented with smaller sizes than previously. For my final work I wanted a sense of undeniability and monumentality. I was previously expanding around materiality by finding ways to present a material feature in a sculpture, then finding a way to show that sculpture, then integrating these sculptures into a cohesive installation. I am now reversing the process, by creating support structures, creating a frame for an installation, then creating the mechanism by which the piece will interact with the support structure, then creating the piece in a contracting manner refining smaller and smaller elements. This approach is one of the ways iteration enters my practice. Working on successive aspects of the work, refining one before moving to the next is a way for me to ensure cohesion in the work. When one part is finished, I can trust it as a reference for developing what follows.

On a more concrete note the main iterative process that i followed for the crane was regarding the hoist used to hang the work :

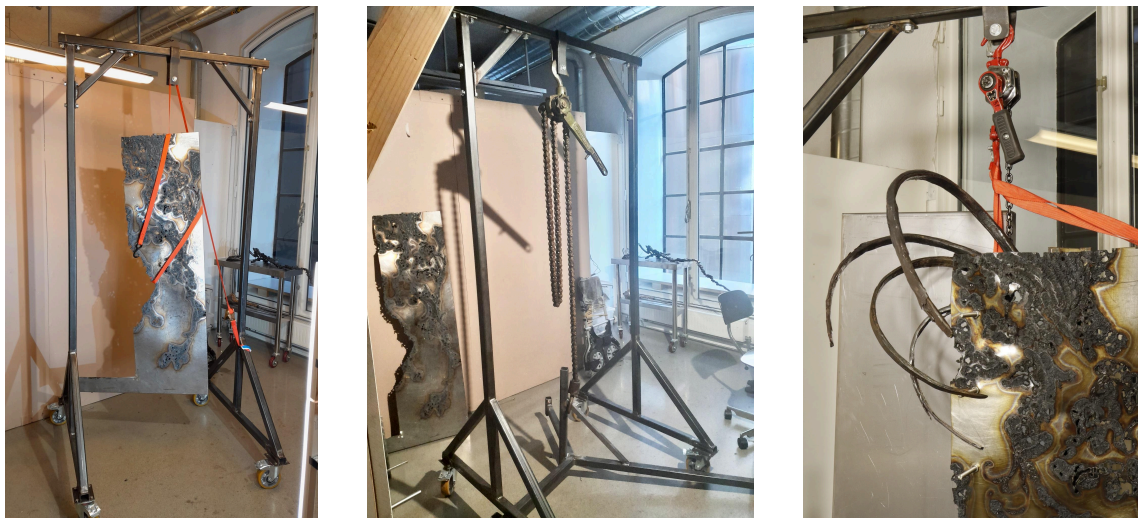


fig49 : Ratchet strap / fig50 : large hoist / fig51 : smaller hoist, photos Théotime Ritzenthaler

The ratchet strap was a matter of convenience, it was available to me and allowed me to start working. I never intended to keep using it but the color did work well. I bought the large hoist later, but its disproportionate size made it look comical in the crane. I was not pleased with the green color either. I then purchased a smaller red hoist, the color was the one I found already on the strap.

When discussing framing I must touch upon the expressive framing the industrial aesthetic gives to the emotional approaches displayed. The Instrumental aspect of the gantry crane, the neutral white light and the industrial production techniques I use create a sense of detachment surrounding the work. I have a reluctance to impose, expect or demand anything from visitors. I'd rather people see something I didn't intend than to dictate what they should see. I want people to engage with my work on their own terms and for them to leave to me the responsibility over the choices I make. In the context of showing my work, Objectivity is the practice of reducing stimulation external to the work. If the stimuli cannot be reduced, for example the architecture of a building is not necessarily within the scope of an artistic intervention, it should be at least acknowledged. The question asked should be : Does the stimuli add or take away from the expression? If the stimuli takes away, the artist might modify its intervention to mitigate the negative impact, or consider what new experience might be strengthened by it and shift intention. This process is applicable for any artist.

Framing is also a way for me to define aspects of the work. I put it upon myself to make as many decisions before the work even enters the exhibition space. By defining the support structure and the lighting of the work early in the process, I can ensure independence for the work from the conditions surrounding it.

### C. Purposeful Lighting

The effectiveness of intentional use of light and shadows for my work has been established in my first year. For my exam work I intended to bring in very intense light, and to work on the format of that lamp as an object as well.

I understood that a second object with a stiff vertical posture would not produce the kind of tension expected. I needed to construct this lamp as an expressive counterpart to the crane, this proved to be quite challenging. The lamp had to keep the Industrial style I chose for the crane to create a sense of coherence, that these two objects came from the same industrial world. But at the same time the lamp needed to be dynamic and maybe a bit aggressive, inquisitive, to contrast the stable and monumental, impersonal nature of the crane. I decided to make the lamp practical and foldable, inspired by a trolley. I decided to build it in a way that I could move it easily and in a compact format. This forced me to approach the question as a practical problem to solve rather than as an expressive one. The folding arm created the dynamic expression I wanted, while having a practical necessity that was matching the crane. I wanted to have as much light as possible. I hoped that the brighter the light, the darker the shadows would be and the least dependent on outer influence the work would be. I wanted the lamp to be so bright it would be uncomfortable to stare into it, creating an undeniable presence that would, because of its intensity, discourage excessive attention.



fig52 : Light Mast, folded, welded and fabricated steel, 70x100x15xm, 2023 / fig53 : Light Mast, open, welded and fabricated steel, 70x100x200cm, 2023 photos Théotime Ritzenthaler



As I installed the work for the first time I noticed that the Light mast seemed flimsy and delicate, my goal was for it to offer a challenge to the crane and it fell short of that. Through further work and experimentation, I understood that I could alleviate those issues by making the Light mast higher and more massive at the bottom. By adding a box and fins on the bottom structure of the mast I shifted the center of mass towards the bottom. As a result, the lamp looked more balanced, anchored and imposing. Coiling the extension cord on the base also strengthened this effect.

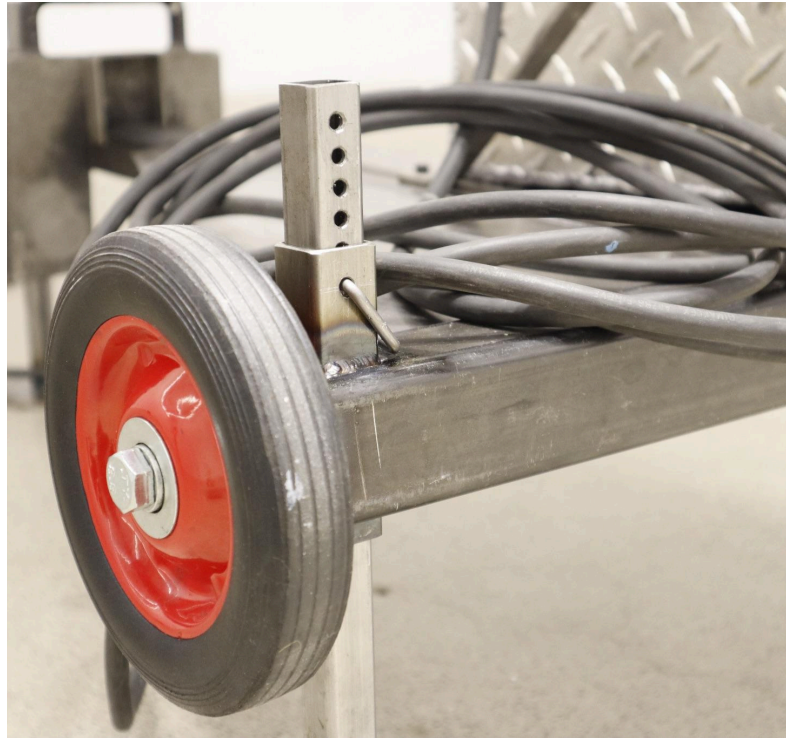


fig54 : Light Mast, open Lamps, steel, oiled, casters, welded aluminum, 110x100x223cm, 2024 / fig55 : Light mast detail, extending leg, extension cord, wheel, 2024 photos Théotime Ritzenthaler

As discussed previously, the crane formed a reference point to continue the work; several iterations and modifications were necessary to make the light mast function as an appropriate counterpart.

### ***D. An emotive approach to metalwork***

For this work I wanted on one hand to create a more refined and thought through piece compared to the fast and thrown-together preliminary works. On the other hand I wanted to reintroduce more materiality as a main expressive feature.

#### ***1. stainless and rubber***

I chose to use the same stainless steel plate I made for the MA1 show. I discovered the material feature of burning stainless on this piece. It manifests the raw and instinctive approach to materiality. The fact that it was a used countertop adds life to the material. Although the way it has been treated is novel, the material carries associations and a life of its own.

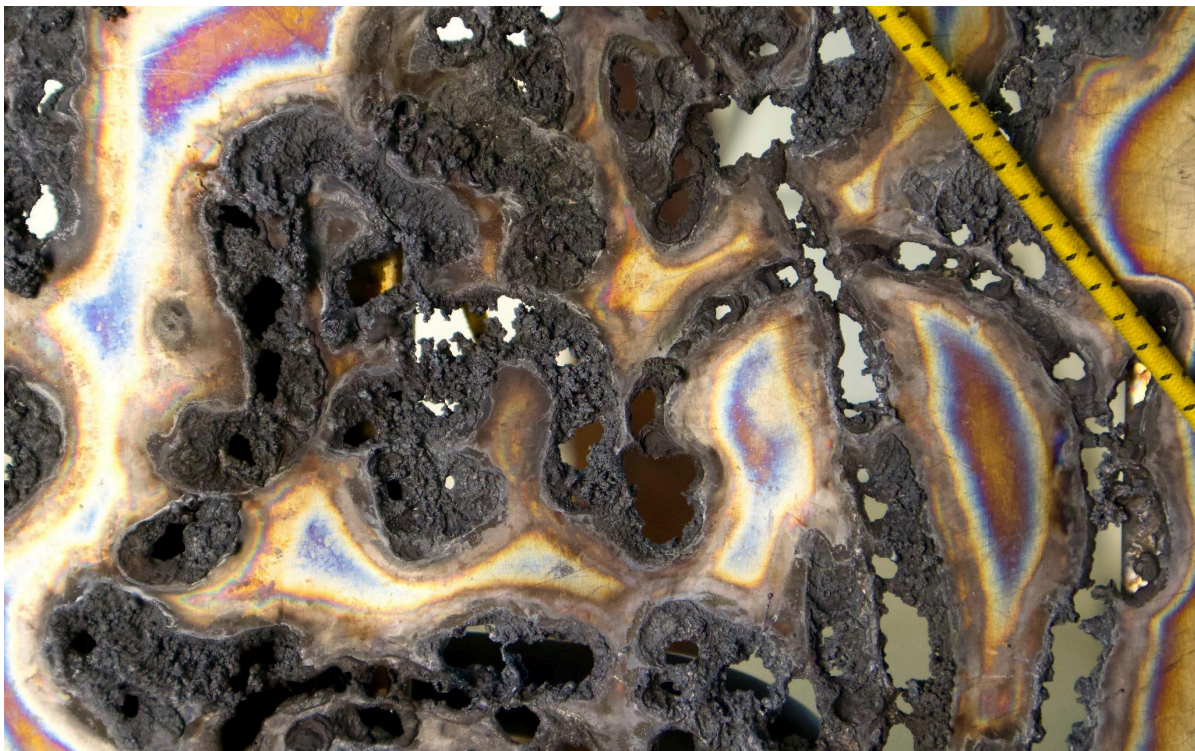


fig56 : Detail burnt stainless steel, 2023, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

I felt like this plate needed a counterpart, so I thought of adding another sheet that would complement this original one. During the process I thought of these two plates as a couple. They needed to share enough features to be connected but also to be clearly different.

I conducted an iterative process of experimentation to find what expression would accomplish that. First I tried to rely on my knowledge of steel and textures, I tried to find techniques that would offer a dark tone in contrast to the shiny stainless steel. No matter



how dark I tried to get the metal to get by working it, its shiny surface never presents a good contrast to the first plate.

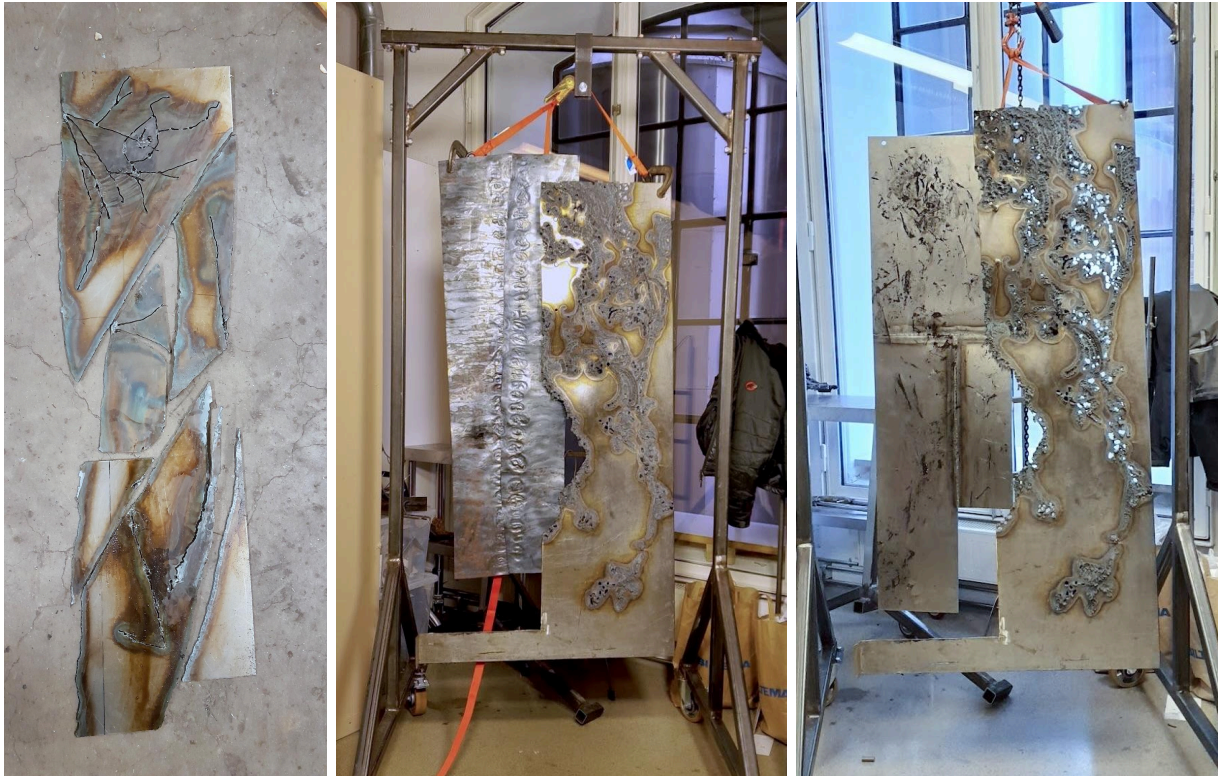


fig57 : Steel, torch cut, welded, oiled, 2023 / fig58 : steel, welded, oxide, 2023 / fig59 : Steel, welded, rubber, 2023, photos Théotime Ritzenthaler

During this process I did understand the importance of the bent edge of the tabletop, it gave the sheet more substance and presence, I decided to have bent edges on the plate I would use. In a conversation Zeke Filemon Isendahl suggested I use rubber. While I am generally not interested in using different materials than metal, rubber appealed to me.

Rubber and stainless steel are both functional and industrial materials.

I burnt the rubber with the oxy-acetylene torch in the same manner I did the stainless steel and glued it on a steel plate on which I bent the edges.

The two plates present the expression, manifested through two materials opposed in many ways. Stainless is supposed to be immutable, here it is porous, colorful and twisted by the heat. This contradiction reminds me of the idea that I use metalwork and Industrial techniques as an expressive tool, bringing forth emotive properties of impersonal and instrumental materials. Rubber is used to absorb shocks and dampen sounds but its color is matte and it absorbs light as well. The oils of the rubber when burnt create a similar effect as the paintings of Pierre Soulages, revealing many colors from the black surface. Both materials are typically used for their physical properties, here they become expressive mediums. I linked the two plates with three threaded bars protruding from the surfaces. This motif is recurrent in my work.





fig60 : Rubber, Steel, Detail, burnt rubber, burnt stainless steel, forged steel 2024, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

*Rubber, Steel Metalwork as an expressive media - Théotime Ritzenthaler 2024*



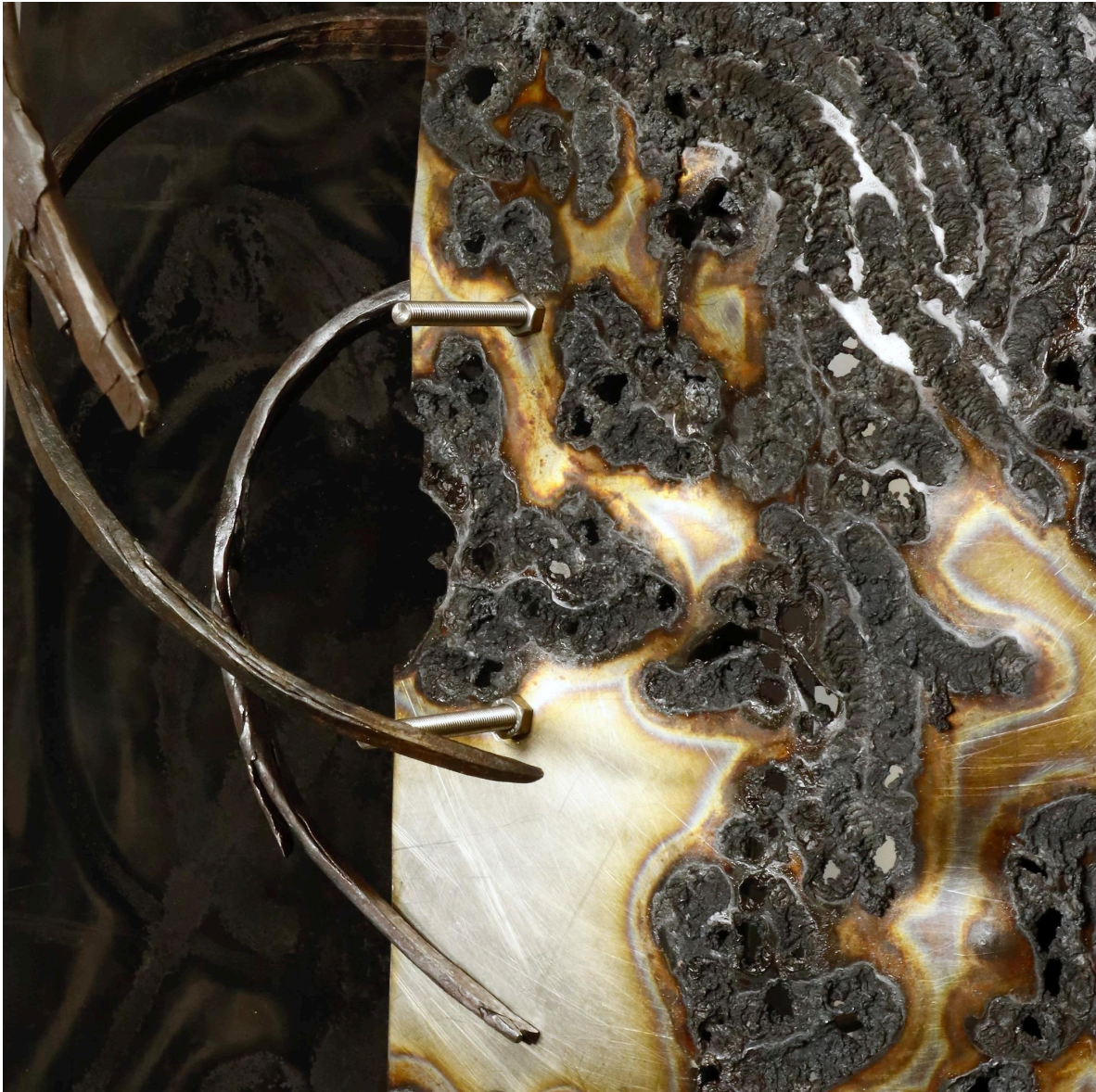


fig61 : Rubber, Steel, Detail, burnt rubber, burnt stainless steel, forged steel 2023 photos Théotime Ritzenthaler

## 2. *forged steel*

At this stage I felt like the work was missing something, the frame made it appear calm and monumental but maybe also passive. I wanted to add some explosive energy to the work. Seen in the images above, a sculpture made of forged sheet metal helped in several aspects. It brought some aggressivity into the expression and another layer of materiality, especially forged work that I was missing. These objects are made of sheet metal that I forge into a bar, when drawn out, it cracks and splits organically, revealing an inherent fragility. Once again a contradiction is explored here, the fragility of forged steel.



fig62 : Sheet metal forging, 2022 / fig63 : forged sheet metal, 2022 photos Théotime Ritzenthaler

However the calm and taming presence of the frame was not disturbed enough by this addition.

I discovered that I could displace the tension by leveraging the metaphorical links I had experimented with in the first year and added more pieces outside of the frame. Those objects broke the symmetry of the frame, destabilizing it a little and shifted the point of tension.



fig64 : Rubber, Steel, Detail, burnt rubber, burnt stainless steel, forged steel 2024 photo Théotime Ritzenthaler



As I forge the steel, the layers separate and crack, creating delicate and fragile forms. These parts are manifestations of the instinctive and responsive nature of the forging process. The responsive quality of hot steel is highlighted by my specific technique, generating these subtle and uncontrollable results.



fig65 : Rubber, Steel, detail, forged steel 2024, photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

### 3. Hoist, casters, color

The lifting strap and the hoist, both red, as well as the yellow of the casters complete the picture and contribute the most colorful touches to the whole. Once again these elements contribute to the framing of instrumentality and industrial detachment. Their colors signify the possibility of human interaction, it marks their “toolness”. Intense color is here useful, it is an indication rather than an aesthetic consideration. Additionally, those strong colors, exclusively present on tools in the piece, reinforce the connection to the working world of production and industry.



fig66 : Caster / fig67 : strap and shackle photos Théotime Ritzenthaler

The Casters and the Hoist also create the sensation of the work being itinerant, in progress. This furthers the detachment of the work from the space surrounding it and reinforces the idea that the work is autonomous within the space.



fig68 : Rubber, Steel, Installation View, 2024 photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

As in previous works, the visitor is engulfed by the work, the light creates a bubble in the space and claims it. The crane is standing and can be approached from all directions but to face the work one must step in between the lamp and the crane, exposing themselves.



#### 4. Transparency



fig69 : Rubber, Steel, Installation View, welded, forged, burnt steel, burnt rubber, hoist, lifting strap, 120x100x223cm, 2024 photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

Negative shapes and transparency are recurrent throughout the work. The general transparency allows the piece to display delicate qualities while being tall and imposing. Above can be seen the contrast also present in the negative shapes, geometric in the structure and flowing in between the plates.

Transparency is also an important feature of the burnt stainless steel seen below, the texture reminds of lace and reinforces the sense of sensitive fragility manifested through metalwork. On an abstract level, the directions created by the forged pieces converge towards an imaginary point somewhere over the stainless steel plate creating a tense negative space there.

The space between the light mast and the crane is treated in a similar way, the tension created by the confrontation of these two pieces and the flooding light gives substance to the space in between.



fig70 : Rubber, Steel, Installation View, 2024 photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

### ***E. Further exploration***

After completing this Installation I felt compelled to push the project in a new direction. I decided to conserve the conceptual aspects explored above, mainly Impersonal framing and the material features explored here and to explore those in an even more condensed format. I created frames of structural steel to display the textures of rubber and steel.

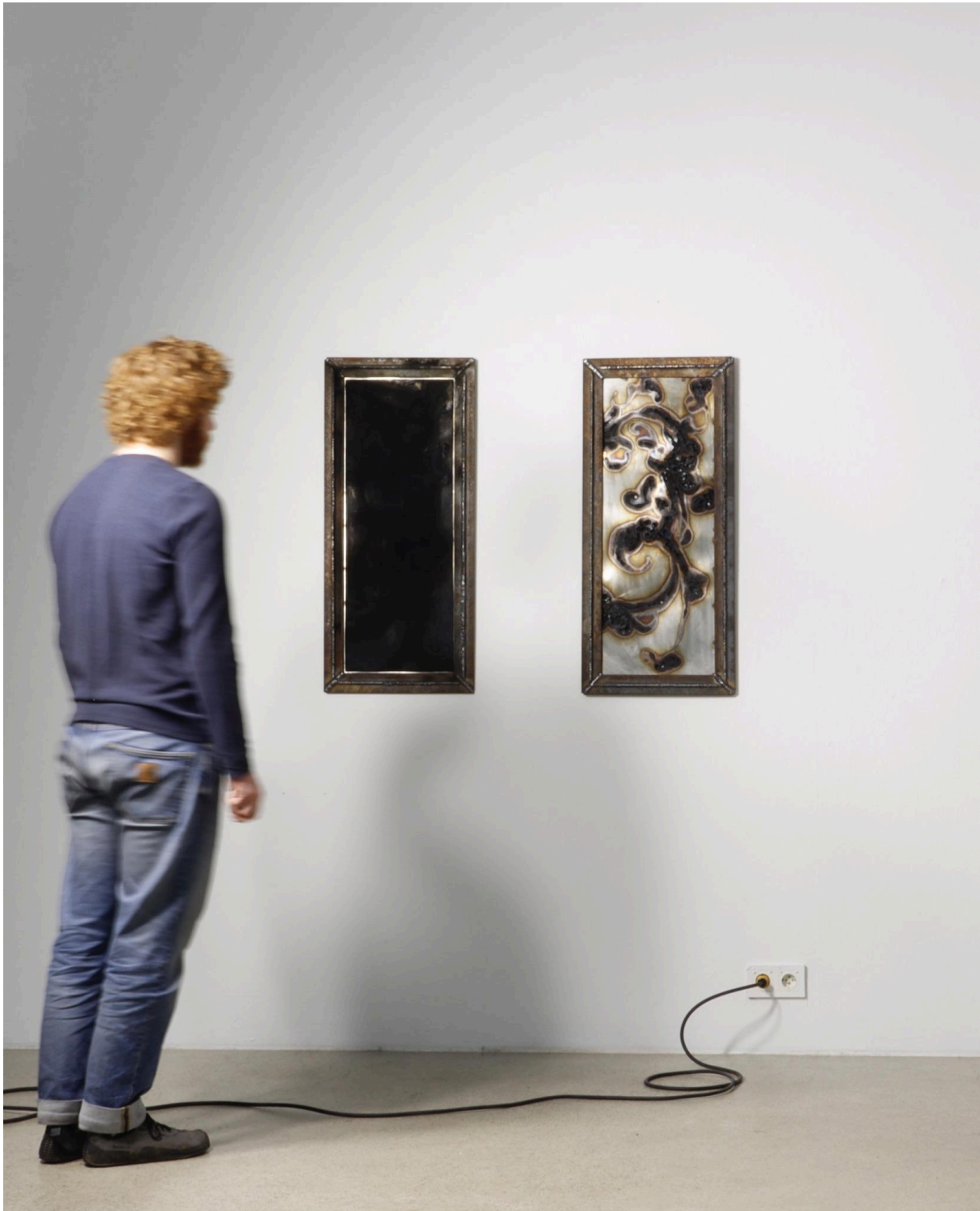


fig71 : Rubber, Steel, diptych, torch cut, welded steel, burnt rubber, burnt stainless steel, oil respectively 92x42cm, 2024 photo Théotime Ritzenthaler



In this development I appeal to the archetypal artistic format of painting, even the torch cut edge of the frame reminds of ornamented picture frames while still preserving the industrial and instrumental connotations. I think that presenting the material features I am interested in in that manner makes them more approachable to a different type of audience. Here visitors know how to interact with the work and might pay greater attention to what is there to be seen, rather than to the associations they might have to it. I think that shown in parallel, the Installation and this work can create a cohesive, approachable but still novel and unique experience.

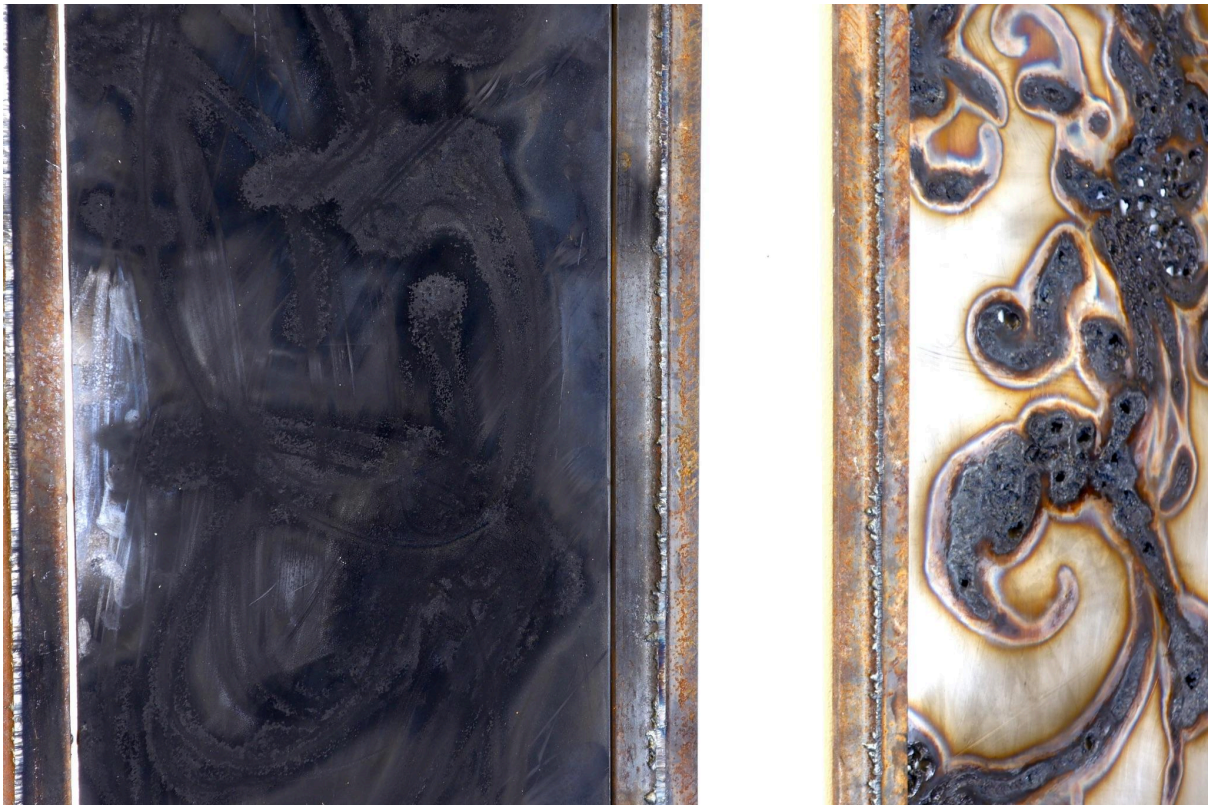


fig72 : Rubber, Steel, detail 2024 photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

The dimensions of the frames were picked to match the proportions of the crane (1:2,3). Their elongated shape evokes reverence and elegance.

I placed the Installation in a way that delimits an area and frames the diptych. During the process of working on the installation, I always imagined the viewer facing the crane as they would enter the space. This display was not possible in every situation so I had to find a new way to install the work while still creating a striking experience. placing those two frames on the wall allowed me to still face the visitor as they would enter, and framing those with the Installation allowed me to keep using it as a striking narrative tool in this new context. The tense space created by the Light Mast and the Crane is extended to this diptych because the viewer must still cross it to approach those works.



fig73 : Rubber, Steel, Installation view, 2024 photo Théotime Ritzenthaler

#### **IV. Conclusion :**

I do not start a project with a formalized intention. I find inspiration in exploring the potential of each technique. Materiality includes the rigor of craft and conventional understanding of the methods, their applications and contemporary relevance in production and industry. By relying on serendipity, I find expressions, features, make mistakes and expand my knowledge of the material.

My decisions are most of the time motivated by intuition and follow an iterative process. *What is it missing?* is the question governing my process. At this time I apply my artistic understanding to formalize my impression of what I have made and follow my intuition to establish the next steps.

Through previous works I developed a sense of the immersive potential Installation practice can have. I understood the narrative potential of the presentation, how I was going to show the work was just as important as the work itself. The use of archetypal forms from the metalworking and art worlds and the associations they create became an expressive tool in my practice.

As I joined the Master program at KHiO, my work was already materialized as an investigation into the tensions created by the interaction of structure and emotions.

My goal was to learn how to show my work, by translating my practice into cohesive Installations.

In the first year I understood I tend to create a structure, or system and then work within this set of rules. A viewer can then understand all of my pieces by referring to this system. As a consequence, the individual works became less relevant. In this approach, each element needed less refinement, and became less powerful. I put much less emphasis on refining a single piece from a craft standpoint but rather on how a network of objects, scales and techniques can create a cohesive experience.

When entering the exhibition space I engaged in an exploratory process in the manner I do with making. I understood that I could make up for the incompleteness of individual pieces by creating metaphorical links between objects. As objects interact they create expressive highlights in the room, sorts of clusters of expressivity. I leveraged what was at my immediate disposal, the trolley I used to bring the work, the ladder used to install became support structures for the works. Relying on bought objects allowed me to expand my work while applying my craft skills where they made an expressive difference. Additionally, purposeful lighting added a great value to the process, directing the viewer, creating tension with shadows and contrasting with the grounded and physical nature of metalwork.



Three key elements emerged from my process : purposeful lighting, an impersonal framing and an emotive approach to metalwork.

The Light mast and the Gantry crane in their silent, towering confrontation give rise to a tense space between them. To face the work, one must step into this tense zone. There the viewer can contemplate the various material expressions created by treating industrial materials in experimental ways. The work is monumental, dominating the viewer and filling its field of view, independent, self standing in its surroundings.

The visitor is engulfed by the work, the light creates a bubble in the space and claims it. The neutral white light and the industrial production techniques I use create a sense of detachment surrounding the work, letting the viewer engage with the work on their own terms. Whether it be through introspection and contemplation or purely aesthetic appreciation.

In the crane, burnt rubber and burnt stainless steel are hanging, surrounded by forged work. The materials and their treatment present contradictions and tensions. Both rubber and steel are typically used for their physical properties, here they become expressive mediums, bringing forth emotive properties of impersonal and instrumental materials. Around those delicate and fragile forms from forged steel hang.

As a whole, *Rubber, Steel* is a series of work framing emotive, experimental features with different manifestations of instrumentality, such as industrial or artistic archetypes. The juxtaposition of archetypal and experimental approaches generates a dynamic tension between structure and emotion.

By expanding my practice beyond metalwork, to include installation, I challenged myself to think on new terms about art. Making continues to be a crucial part but I am now more keenly aware of the viewer as I work. This broader perspective led me to consider the expressive potential of new mediums, such as light and sound but also rubber and other materials I had not envisioned before.

In the future I am interested in discovering the extent to which my work is economically viable without compromising my artistic integrity. I am also curious about what materials and new techniques will present themselves. And third I am excited to apply my learnings regarding installation practice to a great variety of spaces beyond the white cube.

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