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## *Attestation of Authorship*

'I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.'

Rie Shibata \_\_\_\_\_

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## *A b s t r a c t*

This project utilises the Geisha philosophy of *Wabi Sabi* to re-realise and appreciate every moment of our ordinary mundane lives. By adapting *Wabi Sabi* aesthetics and disciplines into my photographic practice, the aim is to unveil the hidden aesthetics of objects and for us to re-realise the value in every *Ichigo-ichie* moment of flux and *impermanence*. Reviewing or realising every *Ichigo-ichie* moment is an act of being totally committed to every mundane moment of life in an attempt to uncover the extraordinary hidden within the ordinary.

The approach is to reveal the unnoticed aspects of the mundane and to inspire the spectator to appreciate the untouched organic qualities of imperfection, incompleteness and imbalance. Subsequently, the spectator would develop his or her own personal ideas to extend the inner narration of the object.

This project consists of 80% practice-based work, accompanied by an exegesis, which constitutes the remaining 20%.

# *Introduction*

In my childhood, I was trained to become a Geisha; a classical Japanese female performer in Japan. I was required to learn traditional Japanese performing arts, 茶道 *Sado* (way of tea), 華道 *Kado* (flower arrangement) and sometimes *Haiku*<sup>1</sup>, all of which are influenced by the Buddhist idea of *Wabi Sabi*<sup>2</sup>. *Wabi Sabi* is concerned with the beauty of imperfection and incompleteness with a specific focus on *impermanence*<sup>3</sup>.

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1 According to Lanoue (1991), “Haiku (俳句) plural haiku, is a form of Japanese poetry, consisting of 17 moras, in three phrases of 5, 7, and 5 moras respectively” (p. 8).

2 According to Koren (1994), Wabi-sabi (侘び寂び) represents a comprehensive Japanese world view or aesthetic centred on the acceptance of transience. The aesthetic is sometimes described as one of beauty that is “imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete” (Koren, 1994,p.24).

3 Buddhist Monk Sasana (1999) suggests that “impermanence (無常) is one of the essential doctrines or Three marks of existence in Buddhism. The term expresses the Buddhist notion that all of conditioned existence, without exception, is in a constant state of flux” (p. 1).

It is not only a philosophical thought on life; it is also about the appreciation of single moments that we consume and their meanings. There are philosophical and conceptual similarities between the notion of impermanence and the cultural aspects of Geisha life. The ultimate goal of the Geisha's tedious training process of performing skills and disciplines is to prepare her, as a classical entertainer, for the *Ichigo- ichie* performing moment — a moment of pride and dignified elegance. *Ichigo- ichie* also associates with the Buddhist concepts of transience, which mean “for this time only”, “never again”, or “one chance in a lifetime”.

The concept of impermanence is consolidated through *Haiku*. Barthes (1982, pp. 78-79) suggests that *Haiku* is about realising again how to appreciate the aesthetic of ordinary life. Therefore the philosophical idea of *impermanence* is also about valuing and appreciating the single moments of our daily lives<sup>4</sup>. Each moment is unique and different from any other, which is often unnoticed.

In this project, I explore the Geisha's philosophy of *Wabi Sabi impermanence* to unveil the hidden aesthetics of everyday objects through photography. This action responds to the philosophy of *Ichigo-ichie* that the photographed moment will not happen again.

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<sup>4</sup> Fifteen years ago, I lost my younger brother in an accident. He was fourteen. I still remember that the conversation we had that morning was quite typical. I was in a hurry and simply said "I will talk to you later" before leaving. I regret not spending extra time with him that morning but the experience made me realise the impermanence of life and the fact that even mundane moments can be important.



Bhikkhu (2004) says that “realising that the effort that goes into the production of happiness is worthwhile, only if the processes of change can be skilfully managed to arrive at a happiness resistant to change” (p. 1).

Hospitality is an essential quality of a Geisha. Chiba (2007) mentions that a Geisha’s training in mannerisms such as greeting, walking and talking form the foundation of Geisha hospitality (p. 28). During my experience, every morning I cleaned Geisha items such as fans, drums and hair costumes before training started.

Attending to every detail is to prepare for the *Ichigo-ichie* moment that I share with the audience and this cannot be achieved through improvisation. Chiba (2007) also suggests that the philosophical ideas of *impermanence* inform traditional Japanese thoughts on hospitality (p. 29).

There are parallels between From Chiba’s Geisha hospitality and Bhikkhu’s *impermanence*. For example, both of them value and appreciate each single moment in time. Between the serving (Geisha) and the served (audience), their mutual feeling of happiness does not last forever and they appreciate the moment of serving and being served. In my project, I use a camera instead of a fan to capture an object’s *Ichigo-ichie* moment, which is *impermanent*.

Hisamatsu (1987) suggests that “one of the important philosophies of 茶道 *Sado* (way of tea) is *Ichigo-ichie*, and believes that human beings have an unexpected power to break through adversity when they do not consider a moment of despair as negative and instead have a positive worldview to appreciate the moment that they are facing” (pp. 197-199).<sup>5</sup>



Figure 1. Rie Shibata. *Experiment: rubbish*. Photograph, 2008.

If people re-realise the ordinary and mundane, everything in our lives becomes valuable. Re-realising to change our perception of life could be a conceptual approach for my action method.

Applied to my photography, the photographing moment is *impermanent*. It will never happen again; it is also a challenge to explore and celebrate the joy of decaying objects. Decay is often seen as a symbol for sadness or melancholy, however decay also celebrates the past moments. As an example, the cap (Figure 1) is bent and rusty; its decay reminds us of the moments when it was new. If an object never decays then it cannot be appreciated in time.

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<sup>5</sup> Translated from Japanese to English by Rie Shibata.

My work is influenced by this philosophy of the Geisha performing. Oichi, a contemporary Geisha said, “when I am performing in front of spectators, I use full power to entertain people because the moment will never happen again. The spectator who appreciates *Ichigo-ichie* will connect with me and together we have a special time” (Oichi, personal communication, July 19, 2008).<sup>6</sup> She is applying the notion of *Ichigo-ichie* in her performance; this idea can be adapted to my photographic performance in the terms of capturing the moment of mundane. And the notion of *Ichigo-ichie* is actualised if the spectator is able to realise the “happiness” of the mundane.

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<sup>6</sup> Translated from Japanese to English by Rie Shibata.

## *Structure of the Exegesis*

This exegesis consists of three chapters:

In Chapter One, I discuss the critical framework through the application of Geisha philosophy in photography, connecting to *Wabi Sabi* aesthetics and ideas of exformation and *Ichigo-ichie*. In parallel, I interweave my reflections on practice with the theory in this chapter as there is cross over between them.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the structure of my design approach. I also include my exhibition design to complete this chapter. In Chapter Three, I give a concluding summary of the project.

In Appendix, I document the research processes and practical experiments that lead to the final body of work.

# Chapter One: Critical Framework

## Geisha Wabi Sabi

The relationship between Wabi Sabi, impermanence and Ichigo-ichie are strongly connected by time. They exist in the flux of life so they can be easily ignored (Figure 2).

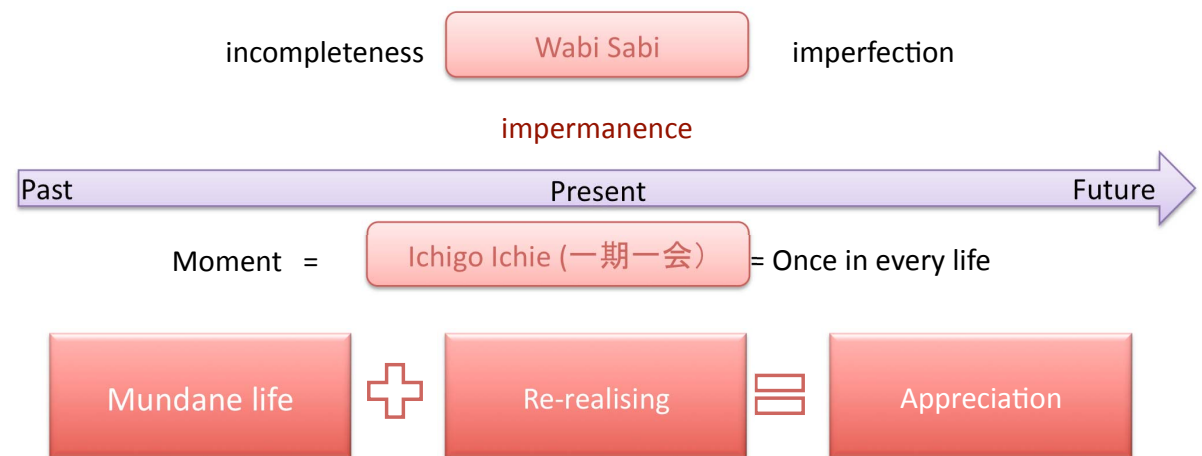


Figure 2. Rie Shibata. Diagram: Underpinning philosophy of Geisha, 2010.

According to Fronsdal (2001), “Beyond the ordinary experience of impermanence, Buddhist practice helps us open to the less immediately perceptible realm of impermanence, i.e., insight into the moment-to-moment arising and passing of every perceivable experience. With deep concentrated mindfulness, we see everything as constantly in flux, even experiences that ordinarily seem persistent” (p. 1). This structural diagram (*Figure 2*) of Geisha philosophy provides an overarching relationship between *Wabi Sabi* aesthetics, time and the appreciation of a mundane life. As an underpinning aesthetic in the Japanese tea ceremony, *Wabi Sabi* is part of a Geisha’s philosophical principle, and is usually expressed as imperfect, sad, incomplete and dark. Yet, on the other hand, Geisha are often associated with colour, brightness, fascination, and elaborateness, so I am interested in synthesising this tension. In the context of Geisha performance, the spectators would only connect with the performer through the *Ichigo- ichie* performing moment, which is often colourful, fascinating and grand. Yet, on the other side, the darkness, sadness, imperfection and incompleteness of the mundane training life is often left unnoticed. In my work, through the photographed *Ichigo- ichie* performing moment, I intend to re-realise the mundane; as a moment of dignified elegance.

According to Carter (2008),

wabi-sabi is a way of seeing into the non-worth of  
things, a decided preference for the ordinary,  
rustic, simple, untouched, imperfect, old and  
withered, and as such, it is a way of seeing our  
usual world of luxury and brand names as an  
impoverished world of contrivance, empty  
reputation, and kitsch (p. 81).

I am yielding to his way of seeing *Wabi-sabi* in the here and now to explore man-made objects as the subject of my photographic practice. The idea of looking for the aesthetics within a mundane life or decayed objects is to reconsider our ordinary ways of looking at objects and as such to re-realise and discover new points of view.



Figure 3. Rie Shibata. Experiment: point of view. Photograph, 2010.



Figure 3.1. Rie Shibata. Experiment: point of view macro. Photograph, 2010. (Shibata, 2010).

For example, one of my experiments involved approaching this statement through tools (Figure 3).

Viewing them from various angles evokes different feelings and opens up new things. Referring to the concept of *Wabi Sabi*, Ui Design (2008) suggests there are seven key aesthetic principles, namely *fukinsei*<sup>7</sup> (imbalanced, uneven), *kanso*<sup>8</sup> (simple, basic), *kokou*<sup>9</sup> (austere, aged), *shizen*<sup>10</sup> (natural), *yugen*<sup>11</sup> (subtly profound), *datsuzoku*<sup>12</sup> (unworldly), and *seijyaku*<sup>13</sup> (calm). I am interested in *yugen* aesthetics, which I consider to be the invisible beauty or hidden beauty within a mundane life. Tiny close up details of objects are often unnoticed; profiling them from a specific angle will reveal the object's history and experiences,

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7 It means that "asymmetry, odd numbers, irregularity, unevenness, imbalance are [is (sic)]used as a denial of perfection as perfection and symmetry do [does (sic)] not occur in nature" (Ui Design, 2008).

8 "elimination of ornate and things of simplicity by nature expresses their truthfulness. neat, frank and uncomplicated" (Ui Design, 2008).

9 It means "basic, weathered bare essentials that are aged and unsensuous. Evokes sternness, forbiddance, maturity and weight" (Ui Design, 2008).

10 It means "raw, natural and unforced creativity without pretence. True naturalness is to negate the naive and accidental" (Ui Design, 2008).

11 "values the power to evoke, rather than the ability to state directly. The principle of *Yugen* shows that real beauty exists when, through its suggestiveness, only a few words, or a few brush strokes, can suggest what has not been said or shown, and hence awaken many inner thoughts and feelings" (Japan from Asahi to Zen, n.d.).

12 "transcendence of conventional and traditional. Free from the bondage of laws and restrictions. True creativity" (Ui Design, 2008).

13 "silence and tranquility, blissful solitude. Absence of disturbance and noise from one's mind, body and surroundings" (Ui Design, 2008).





Figure 4. Rie Shibata. Experiment: unfocused.  
Photograph, 2008.

thus uncovering the unnoticed beauty that we often ignore. My work (see *Figure 3.1*) is an experiment in achieving an underpinned quality of *yugen*. Carter (2008) suggests “Laced with the incredible mystery that something exists, even if impermanent, rather than nothing at all existing, and so is to be treasured just as it is... at once entirely natural and wholly spiritual” (p. 83). I believe that this work gives the spectator an inner space to meditate to reveal *Wabi Sabi-yugen*. Therefore, portraying a seemingly boring image is another approach to providing such an inner space. This also has a strong connection with the extensive and wearisome training discipline of the Geisha, itself often left unnoticed.

*Wabi Sabi* defined as ‘seeing beauty in the negative side’, leads me to explore what people usually throw away or think nothing of. My work intends to connect with and stimulate people to reconsider the commonly perceived lack of value in having a mundane boring life. In the work in *Figure 4*, I experimented with different levels of focus and there are certain points that stimulate the spectator to engage with the photographs. Such suggestiveness awakes inner feelings and thoughts, thus engaging the spectator to establish a relationship with my photography.

The approach of making things unclear leads to the idea of encouraging the spectator to pay attention. It is called *exformation*<sup>14</sup>. Hara (2006) states that *exformation* is to process the information in an attractive way to confuse the spectator and, as a consequence, curiosity will evolve.

I would also take this approach in my work. Rather than convincing the viewer through implementing information, *exformation* provides a different method to express a unique point of view for the viewer to hold on to. Hara (2006) also says, “When people receive information, they are in a passive role, not needing to think about it, *exformation* is a tool to make them think about something.”<sup>15</sup> For me, the Geisha discipline, and its underpinning philosophies of *Wabi Sabi*, *impermanence* and *Ichigo-ichie* are contained in my own *exformation*. This experiment, unfocused (*Figure 4*), also drew upon the idea of *yugen* to suggest not only the viewing of the ordinary given aspects but also to engage in further thoughts on what these things (in the photographs) mean to us.

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14 “... as half of a conceptual pair, the other half being ‘information.’ *Exformation* doesn’t mean ‘making known,’ but ‘understanding how little we know’” (Hara, 2007, p. 370).

15 Translated from Japanese to English by Rie Shibata.

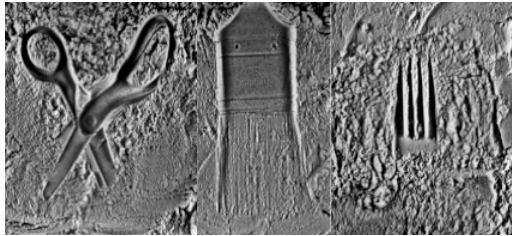


Figure 5. Rie Shibata. *Experiment: print Photograph*, 2010.

I am also interested in investigating how people weave a background of things and suggest that once people start to immerse themselves in these mundane things, they will be prompted to connect to our seemingly forgotten everyday life. The experiment, print (*Figure 5*), was influenced by Hara's wrinkle *exformation* experiments. I called these experiments "Kenya Hara What If" experiments". Hara (2007) says, "what if something was different from its usual expected state? What would you see or feel?"<sup>16</sup> This experiment is designed to confuse people; to stimulate them to consider what it is that confuses them, subsequently knowing more than what they first encountered. Therefore, I asked a question, "what if the surface of all things was soft like powder?" This experiment draws the spectator's attention through the process of transforming the 3D form of the object into a 2D flattened form, and changing its surface quality. While the spectator is shown the 2D visual form in the photographic print, the physicality of the material, colour are left out. The incompleteness, through *exformation*, reminds us of how little we know about these mundane things and engages us with seeing the unnoticed beauty. The plasticity of paper is inspirational to my experimental practice, as no matter how you play with paper, it creates different aspects and forms to be considered every time.

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<sup>16</sup> Translated from Japanese to English by Rie Shibata.

The experiments depicted in *Figure 5* was designed to investigate the beauty of simplicity and irregularity. Irregularity sometimes has the negative connotation of untidiness however, according to Koren (1994) irregular chaos and simplicity can exist together. He discusses irregularity in *Wabi Sabi* ; “...things *wabi-sabi* often appear odd, miss [missed], happen [happened], awkward, or what many people would consider ugly ... *wabi-sabi* may exhibit the effects of accident... they may show the result of just letting things happen by chance” (pp. 62-67).

The bowl (*Figure 6*) is ‘broken’, has ‘scars’, is ‘old’, and has ‘missing’ parts. Yet each ‘scar ’ constitutes a new moment carrying past information and memories. How and what was it before? How could this happen? We answer these questions by using our own memories and experiences to fill in those past ‘new’ moments. Is this broken bowl new? Is broken new? Referring to my structural diagram (*Figure 2*), *Ichigo-ichie* is a moment in flux of *impermanence* and it never happens again. It is new.



Figure 6. Rie Shibata. Experiment: broken. Photograph, 2010.



Figure 7. Rie Shibata. *Experiment: shoe*. Photography, 2010.



Figure 8. K.O'hara. *24 hours*. 2006 In *(Extended Portraint Studies Since 1970)*. Göttingen: Steidl.

The shoe (*Figure 7*) is decaying every day, unnoticed. When approaching this, I was inspired by Japanese photographer Ken Ohara's work. His unique experimental photography, and a cinematic time based performative event, led me to develop a series of photographs of the shoe to collate a collection of moments of decay in response to impermanence and the flux of time. His work challenges our lack of concern for impermanence; once it is reconsidered, we might value the mundane things in life more. His work makes me wonder, what is the difference of approach with using still photography rather than filming, especially when there is not a great amount of difference between subtle moments in still photography and a clipped frame of film or animation?

His work "*24 hours*", as seen in *Figure 8* has enlightened me. When I review the work again and again, I become aware of more details of movement, and I start to contemplate why did his arm move? I believe still image photographs offer the time and space for the spectator to use his or her imagination, which is unable to be achieved by film (or video). Through this approach it allows the spectator to be involved in the work through his or her own creative thoughts.



Figure 9. Rie Shibata. Experiment: series of bubble gum. Photograph, 2008.



Figure 10. Rie Shibata. Experiments: big image 500mm x 2000mm. Photograph, 2008.

One of my works, a series of bubble gum images (Figure 9), was influenced by this idea, as I continuously recorded the piece of bubble gum to explore how it relates to the time and shape of the object.

The bubble-gum's shape changes each time it is chewed but this is rarely noticed as the chewing process happens inside the mouth. The constantly changing shapes are new and *impermanent*, yet the transition between the new shapes is unnoticed. How can I address the unnoticed? I experimented with making a large-scale print of the chewing gum (500mm x 2000mm) that represents a moment – a Geishagraphy moment (Figure 10).

I had an opportunity to test the spectators' response when I was invited to present my research at a conference in Kyoto Jyoshi University in August 2010. I showed this picture (Figure 10) to some students without any explanation. There were interesting reactions. One suggested "a part of raw meat"; another said "a part of organs". After some discussions I disclosed the mundane identity of the object.

In a way, each chewed new shape of the gum represents an *Ichigo-ichie* moment as shown in Figure 9. I perform, through capturing these moments, and each moment is a Geisha performing moment.

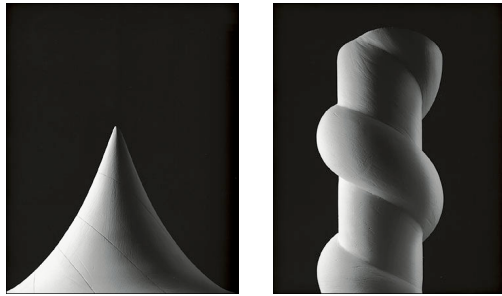


Figure 11. H.Sugimoto. *Mathematical Forms. Surface Screw*, Gelatin silver print Edition of 5. 150 x 120 cm. 1999  
In (SUGIMOTO). *Los Angeles: Fotofolio*.

The large scale of the displayed image of chewing gum was influenced by Japanese photographer

Hiroshi Sugimoto's work. I was inspired by his unique way of seeing objects.

One of his works is based on mathematical forms and uses simple light to create positive and negative space;

see *Figure 11, "Mathematical Forms. Surface Screw"* (Sugimoto, 1999, p. 1).

This work is only effective with a large-scale print, as it is needed to display the uncertain scale and

the profound inner depth through the tones of light and shadow. I was also inspired by his way of capturing

objects that encourage the spectator with associate an extended metaphor to them rather than revealing the

whole object. This has been one of my approaches in attempting to stimulate the spectator to self reflect upon

my work. When Sugimoto was interviewed he said "I have my own technical standards set up, so as far as

choosing, which photographs work, the issue is whether the photograph expresses my concept. As for the

sublime, I'm not particularly looking for it. If that's what people see... I quite like to show it"

(Sugimoto, as cited in Ford, 2005, P.3).

Sugimoto enjoys how the spectator reacts. When the photography is too abstract, it is difficult to communicate.

So it is important to reveal the hidden significance for the spectator to reflect on.

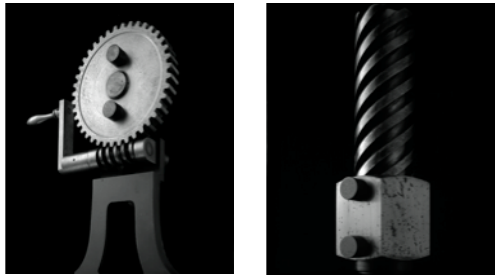


Figure 12. H.Sugimoto. Worm gear. Gelatin Silver Print Edition of 5 150 x 120cm. 1999. In (SUGIMOTO). Los Angeles:Fotofolio.

The image of Figure 12, “Worm gear, 2004 Gelatin Silver Print Edition of 5”, is an example of how Sugimoto transforms complex forms to those conveying simplicity. This idea inspired me to experiment with how I can re-realise the hidden complexity of an object through simple forms; thus responding to the kanso aesthetic approach of “simplicity”. The complex shape and components of the machine are presented with simplicity. This leads me to the “less is more” theory and I discover that it is important to find a viewing angle with a simple form that also contains the complex and subtle details of the object.

I also consider the relationship between *Wabi Sabi* and emptiness. I would like my work to coax the spectators into revealing the profoundness of the unnoticed object for themselves.

According to Hara (2007), “...communication happens when the recipient, offered not a message but an empty vessel, supplies the meaning himself” (p. 241). When aligning our approach with the concept of using *Wabi Sabi* to re-realise the value of mundane life and things, we discover a different point of view, which in turn changes our way of seeing and appreciating what is around us.



Western photographer Edward Weston's photography also inspires me. Heiting (2001) suggests that, "His [Weston's] own work is direct and honest as it is – leaped from a deep intuition and belief in forces beyond the real and the factual" (p. 7). Being honest about the object that we photograph is in contrast with how we approach, and how we want to perceive, photography nowadays.

The idea of being honest about an object is probably to get as much information as possible from the object, and present it in its simplest way. Therefore, my approach of revealing the detail is subtle, in order to offer spectators the opportunity to create their own space to re-realise their own view on the object, and subsequently to re-realise the impermanence of our mundane life.

## *Chapter Two: Design Approach*

There are two components to my design approach; they are action research (Scrivener, 2000) and automation (Lai and Mikuriya, 2003). Both are guided by *Shu Ha Ri* disciplines, illustrated in *Figure 13*. In this chapter, I shall discuss the framework that connects the established underpinning philosophy with my practice. The inclusion of my exhibition design completes this chapter.



*Figure 13. Rie Shibata. Diagram: design approach. 2010.*

## *Shu Ha Ri (守破離) as Practical Disciplines*

In my project, there is an interesting relationship between the Geisha's discipline and photographic discipline. Training principles behind Geisha come from the Zen Buddhist philosophy associated with Sado (way of tea), Japanese dance and flower arrangement. To become a Geisha, one needs to go through the gradual process of learning to prepare for the moment of performance. Photography has parallels; when becoming a photographer, learning the required skill is imperative and each captured moment is an act of performing while also the practice to prepare for another moment of performance. Letting go of ego and being honest about photography is my Wabi Sabi approach. This will allow the intrinsic honesty and naturalness of the subject to unfurl.

Carter (2008) approaches several kinds of Japanese arts in his discussion.

His ideas on the tea ceremony support my project.

Carter (2008) suggests,

...as with all the Japanese arts, the key to success is  
practice, and the results of the practice includes  
an increase in physical and mental well- being, a deepened  
respect for nature as well as for one's fellow men and  
women, a markedly diminished ego, together with the  
growth of a spiritual dimension (p. 99).

Shu Ha Ri disciplines are essential in Japanese martial art training. I adapt them in my photographic practice,  
departing from “*Shu* (守)”<sup>17</sup>, learning the basic form and preparing for “*Ha* (破)” Ha is to break through

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<sup>17</sup> Furuya(1996) describes “Shu is protecting stage which is first stage of practice that the form or shape of the technique must be mastered or protected just as teacher's way which is the beginning fundamental form” (p. 24).

by finding the new and staying away from the established *Shu*.

Furuya (1996) suggests, “The second stage of training is breaking the form... the basic form is broken into its infinite applications. It means the fundamentals are mastered and are now applied in all situations” (p. 24).

It parallels to my photographic practice of conducting extensive experiments and finding my own way.

For example, I take photographs of the same object but at different angles repetitively until I have developed my own feeling for the object. Carter (2008) contends that “the specific disciplines and techniques taught are meant to be generalized as habits for and in living all the other parts of one’s life... these habits themselves cease to be habits and become internalized as spontaneous reactions to the varied happenings of everyday life” (p. 75). Applied to the disciplines of Geisha training and as a part of a Geisha’s inner-self, her spontaneous reactions will potentially lead to the stage of “*Ri* (離)”<sup>18</sup>. *Ri* is about letting go of everything, such as ego and traditions. This enables me to take photographs spontaneously and capture the intrinsic honesty of the object. Achieving the state of *Ri* will complement the Ichigo-Ichie moment both for the Geisha and the photography. My conceptual practice in this research is guided by Shu Ha Ri disciplines.

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<sup>18</sup> Furuya (1996) describes *Ri* as “releasing form... The third stage of mastery, the student forgets all forms and masters the formless technique, leaving old ideas behind him... he has fully matured in his training” (p. 25).

## *Action research*

The nature of my research is experimental and is rooted in practice. I mainly yield to action research. Scrivener (2000) states; “Reflection-in-action has a characteristic structure typically the practitioner finds that the problem cannot be solved as it has been initially set, so the framing of the problem must be surfaced and criticised, and the problem reframed: a way of shaping the situation to a new frame must be found” (p. 7). When I get stuck and do not know where I am aiming, this “reflection in action” is useful as it forces me to review how I am doing and pushes me to critique my own work and find the problems (Figure 14).

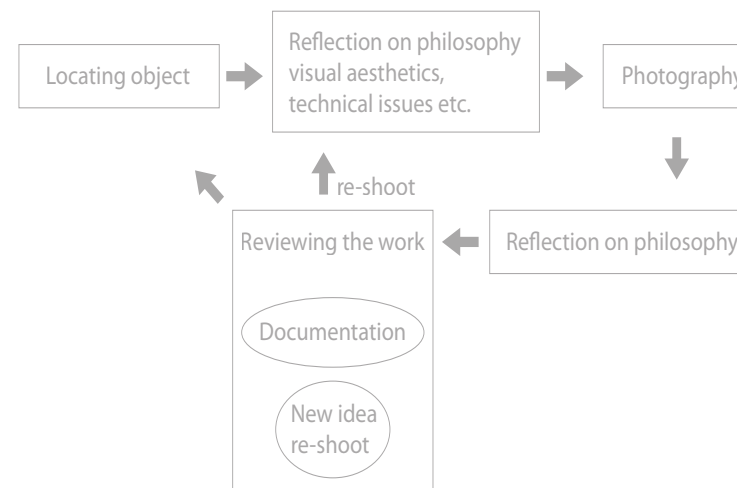


Figure 14. Rie Shibata. Diagram: action research. 2010.

Even if the problems are not solved, it will bring a new direction to the project as Scrivener (2002) suggested.

After reviewing each photograph, I compile all the data in a document with critical annotations and ideas on how to improve in the next shot. The process of reflection is cyclical until I am satisfied with the result.

Winter (1989) mentions the risks involved in action research;

The change process potentially threatens all previously established ways of doing things, thus creating psychic fears among the practitioners. One of the more prominent fears comes from the risk to ego stemming from open discussion of one's interpretations, ideas, and judgments. Initiators of action research will use this principle to allay others' fears and invite participation by pointing out that they, too, will be subject to the same process, and that whatever the outcome, learning will take place (pp. 43-67).

This method can be very threatening and demands a very critical and potentially egocentric attitude to problem solving. Sometimes this method can inhibit initiating new directions. For example, when I was taking super macro shots of objects I knew what appeared in the viewfinder. However, when I reflected on each photograph and critiqued it, there were several new ideas to lead to the next step. Action research sustains critical engagement with surfacing problems. Sometimes, the process of problem solving can become a process of creating problems, but removing one's fear and ego enables the unexpected to emerge. Despite this problem, I have found it useful in times requiring critical reflection.



## *A u t o m a t i o n*

In the initial stage of my experiments I was faced with the difficulty of choosing the appropriate subject so I decided to use an approach known as “automation”.

Lai and Mikuriya (2003) state that, “...a tendency to undermine the value of calculation and planning as genuine manifestations of the self. It is largely seen as a way of tapping directly into primordial forces” (p. 269).

I wandered around the city finding tiny things to capture with my camera without any prior intentions.

Gross and Shapiro quote the Taoist photographer Denuto; “Even when working on assignment, my best images are those that are spontaneous. I find my best work is unplanned –it comes from the heart.

I photograph what moves me” (Denjto, as cited in Gross of Shapiro, 2001, p. 28). Achieving a state of *Ri* while capturing images is a crucial response to my aim of exploring *Wabi Sabi* through unveiling the hidden.

Bresson (1999) also suggests that spontaneous actions include a “synchronicity” between subject and object.

Graham, (as cited in Gross of Shapiro, 2001,p. 29), agrees with this position, when he says that spontaneity “naturally occurs when a person forgets the self and gives up the compulsion to control the environment. Only when one is fully in tune with the ever-changing environment can one harmoniously respond to it like the echo to a sound or shadow to a shape”. I use this method for some of my experiments, in particular capturing the decay of food. However, when I set everything up, I organise the motif and then I let go (*Ri*) of my intentions and allow the food to decay in its natural way. The photographs that I have taken with the aesthetics of natural decay refer to letting go of the ego, which is parallel to the principles of *Wabi Sabi*.

Carter (2008) suggests, “*Wabi sabi* also means to cut through reputation, ego, economic status, and power as human pretense” (p. 82). While the ideal of automation is appealing it is not always possible to achieve a state of total lack of intention.

Without some kind of original intention or discipline, to drive your actions, such as the '*Shu*' of *Shu Ha Ri*, spontaneity lacks purpose or a quality of self-cultivation. Therefore *Shu Ha Ri* as the inner disciplines are crucial when I am working with the automation method.

## *Exhibition design*

While the Geisha's *Ichigo-ichie* moment is glamorous and sometimes grand, my photographic *Ichigo-ichie* moment in this project is not. The exhibition<sup>19</sup> space is a mundane space. It is ordinary and plain, yet it is sophisticated in the details. The work itself also shares these qualities with the space. The spectator who appreciates *Ichigo-ichie* will connect with me and together we will have a special time (Oichi personal communications, 2008). My photographic notion of *Ichigo-ichie* is actualised if the spectator is able to realise (or re-realise) the "happiness" of the mundane.

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19. I have included the final exhibition works in the appendix.

## *Chapter Three: Conclusion*

Throughout this research I have studied Geisha philosophy in depth; it has since become an integral part of my mental depository and continues to influence my work as a professional photographer.

The *Wabi Sabi* beauty of *impermanence* exists in everyday life, yet is often left unnoticed. Through this photographic experiment I am convinced that it is not only a philosophical idea; but is also about the appreciation of each single moment that we consume.

My work, made up of seemingly boring images, unveils the hidden beauty in mundane life. It provides the spectator with an inner space in which to meditate and subsequently to appreciate the *impermanence* of life.

Experimenting with the notion of the *Ichigo-ichie* moment in Geisha performance through my “photographic moment” has been invaluable in raising my practical level of photography. Furthermore it has enabled me to propose to the public that there is value in every mundane moment, as these moments will never occur again, and hopefully through this way of thinking we have more appreciation for what is around us. In parallel to Geisha, my photographic works perform for and through the *Ichigo-ichie* moment.

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~Appendix~

Geishagraphy  
Journey of Geishagraphy

This book shows the visual journey of Geishagraphy

Rie Shibata

## *Appendix contents*

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
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<b>Impermanence</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Ichigo-ichie</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Final exhibition work</b>	<b>47</b>

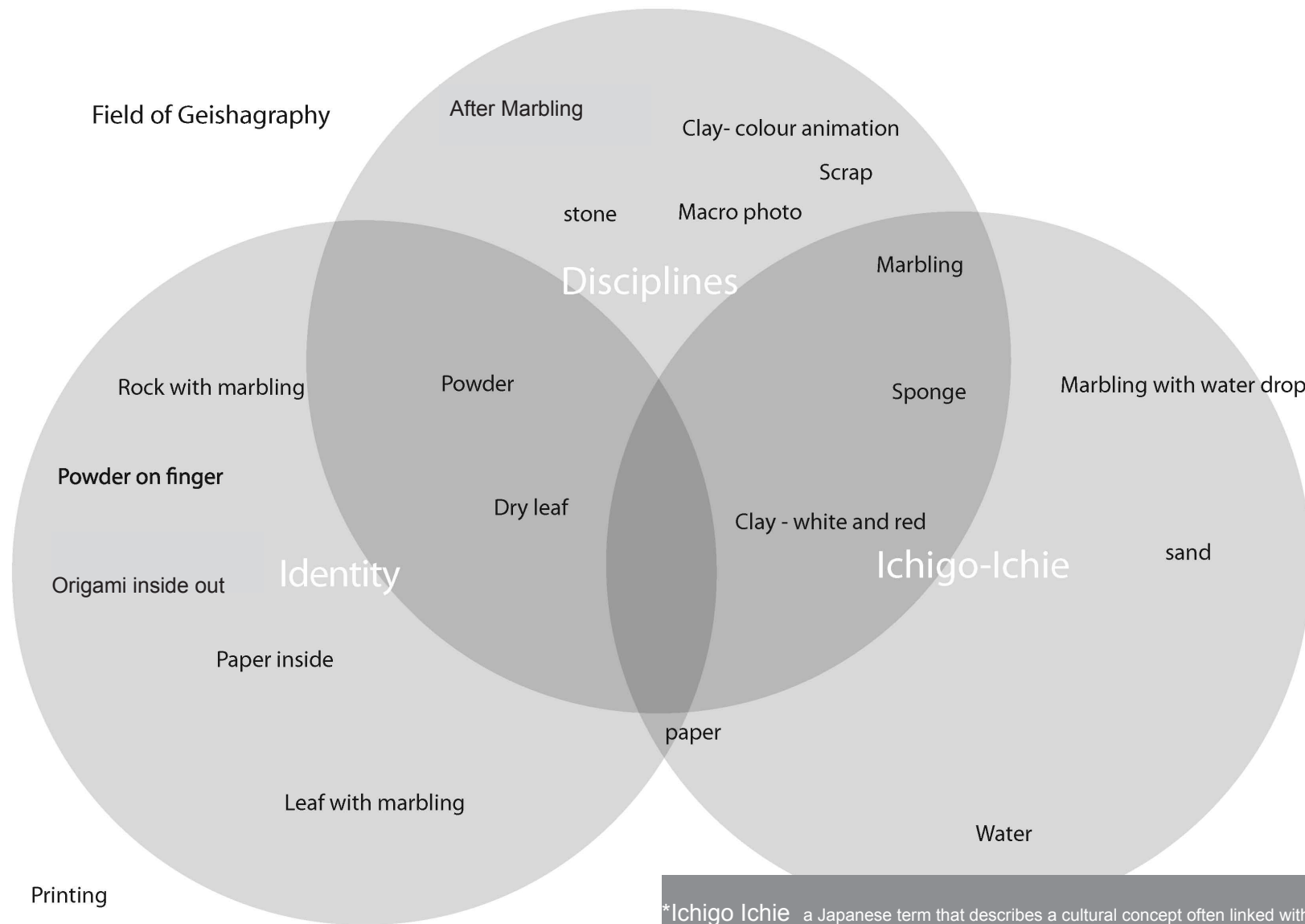
## *introduction*

In this journey I begin by showing the process and approach I took to develop “Geishagraphy” by exploring philosophical ideas through photographic practice.

Firstly I created a diagram showing what I believe a Geisha to be.

I categorised this diagram into three sections; “identity”, “disciplines”, and “Ichigo-ichie” (the philosophical school of thought behind Geisha hospitality).

From this diagram I could start to think about how ideas and concepts from these three sections can be expressed through photography.



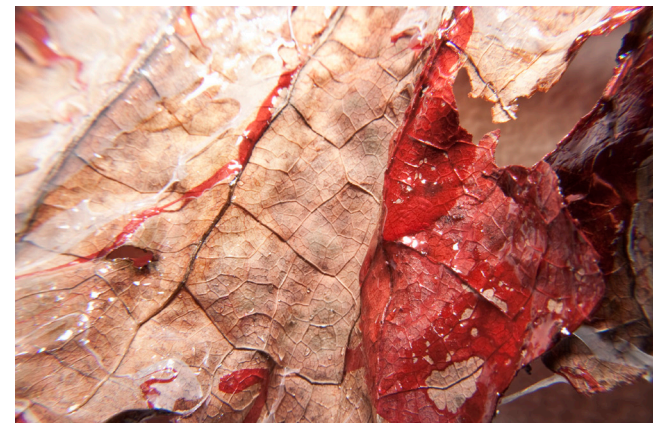
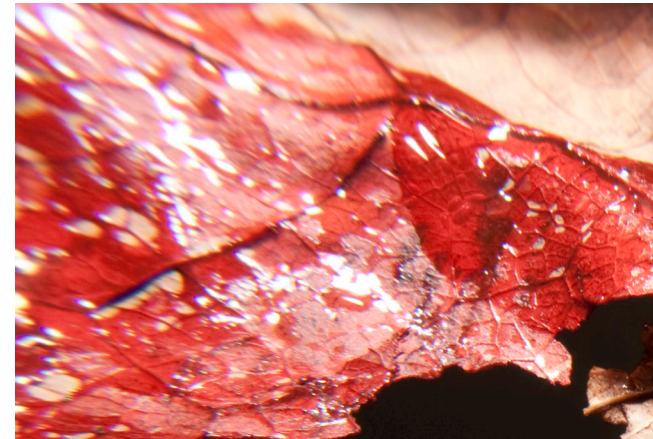
\***Ichigo Ichie** - a Japanese term that describes a cultural concept often linked with the famed tea master Sen No Rikyu. The term is often translated as “for this time only”, “never again” or “one chance in a lifetime”



# *Geisha identity*

## 1. Marbling with natural objects

- In this experiment, I used marbling art with stones and dry leaves in an effort to express my personal feelings for Geisha training. **Marbling art did not stick to the objects well** which represented my struggle with and dislike for Geisha training. I used stones to represent the young Geisha as none of the stones are the same size and shape which helped show the individuality of each Geisha.
- I noticed this experiment was not engaging enough with Geisha philosophy so I moved on from this.



Selected works, 1-05-08. Marbling art on objects

## 2. Geisha colour experiment and materials

- In this experiment, I tried to use white and red colour combinations to express Geisha. However, it seemed I was just expressing what a Geisha was aesthetically and therefore did not experiment further, until later when I came back to study aesthetics more deeply.
- The colour experiment did, however, lead me to realise the changes each moment of difference can make.

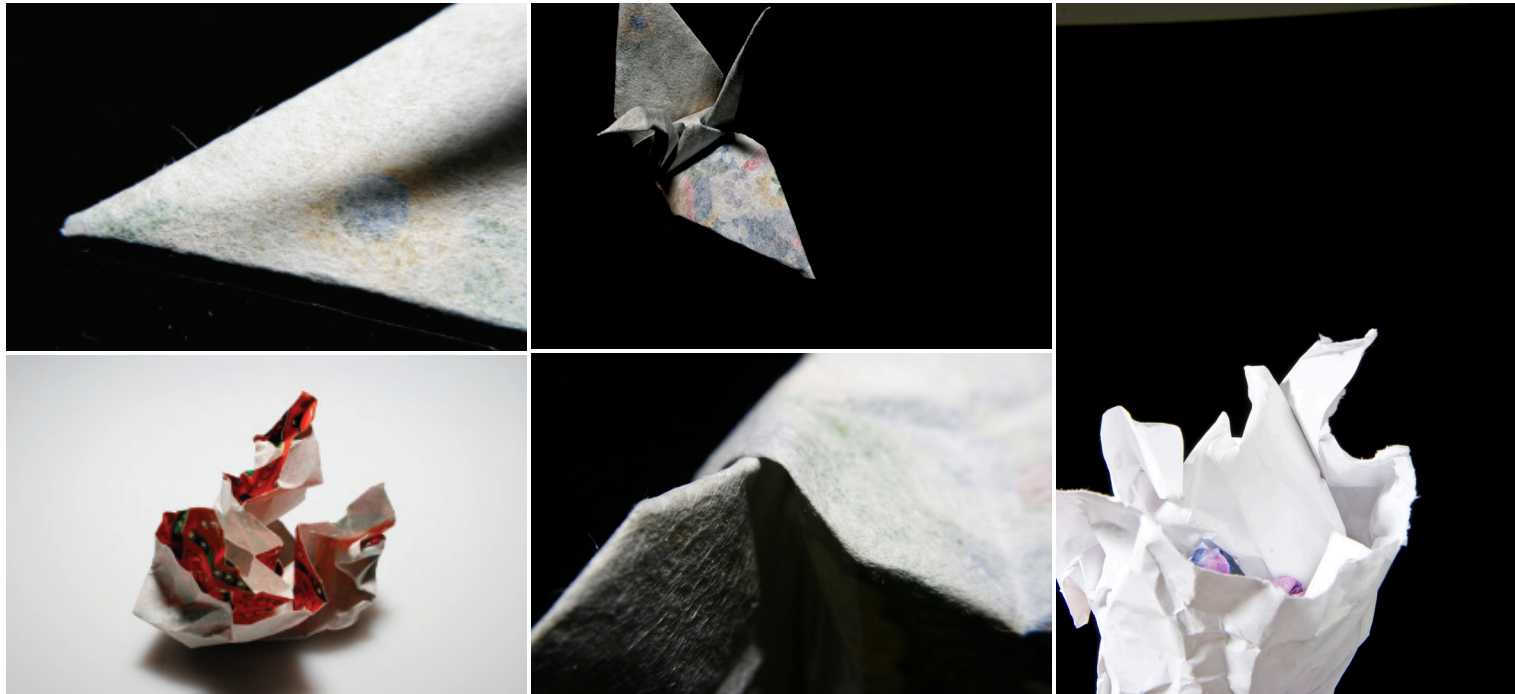


Selected works, 15-05-08. Geisha material experiment and colour experiment.



### 3. Origami experiment

- This experiment shows origami paper, inside out, in an attempt to represent “me” in New Zealand. I am in New Zealand studying, with no outward sign that I have any Geisha training or background but inside I still have a Geisha’s identity. Therefore the paper is **inside out**.
- After this experiment I became interested in the philosophy of “**exformation**”.
- In this experiment, I struggled to show the **subtleness** of Geisha feeling.

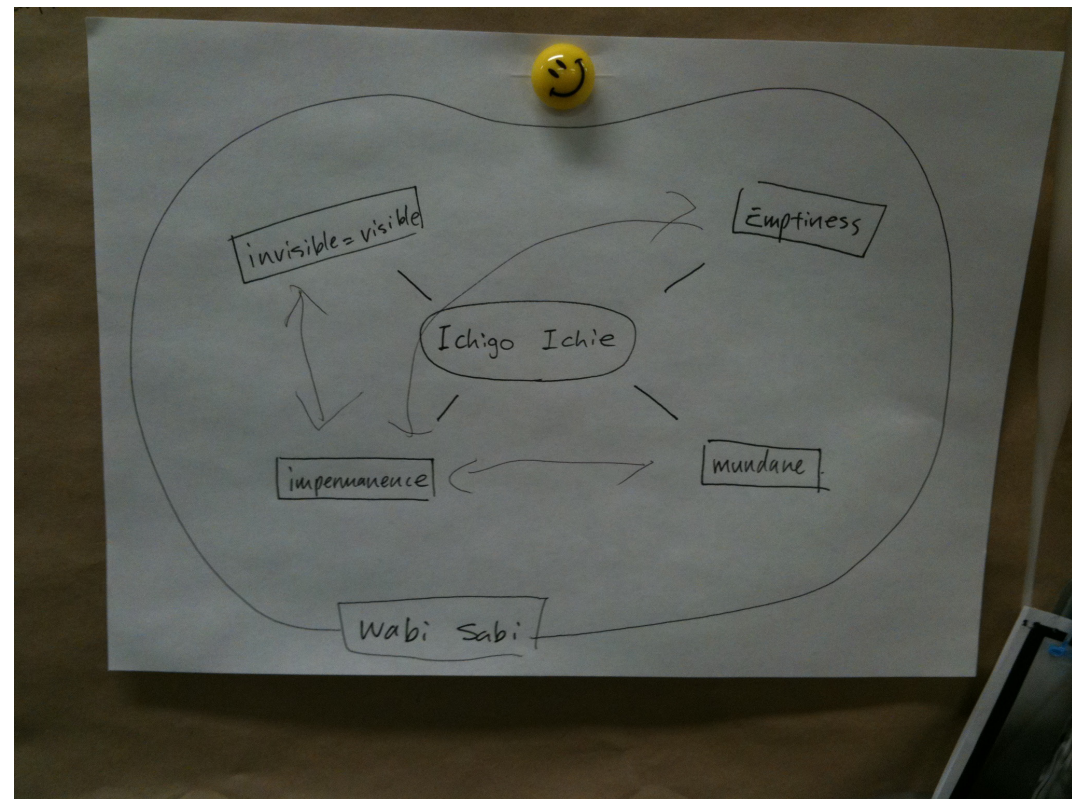


Selected works, 1-06-08. Origami paper

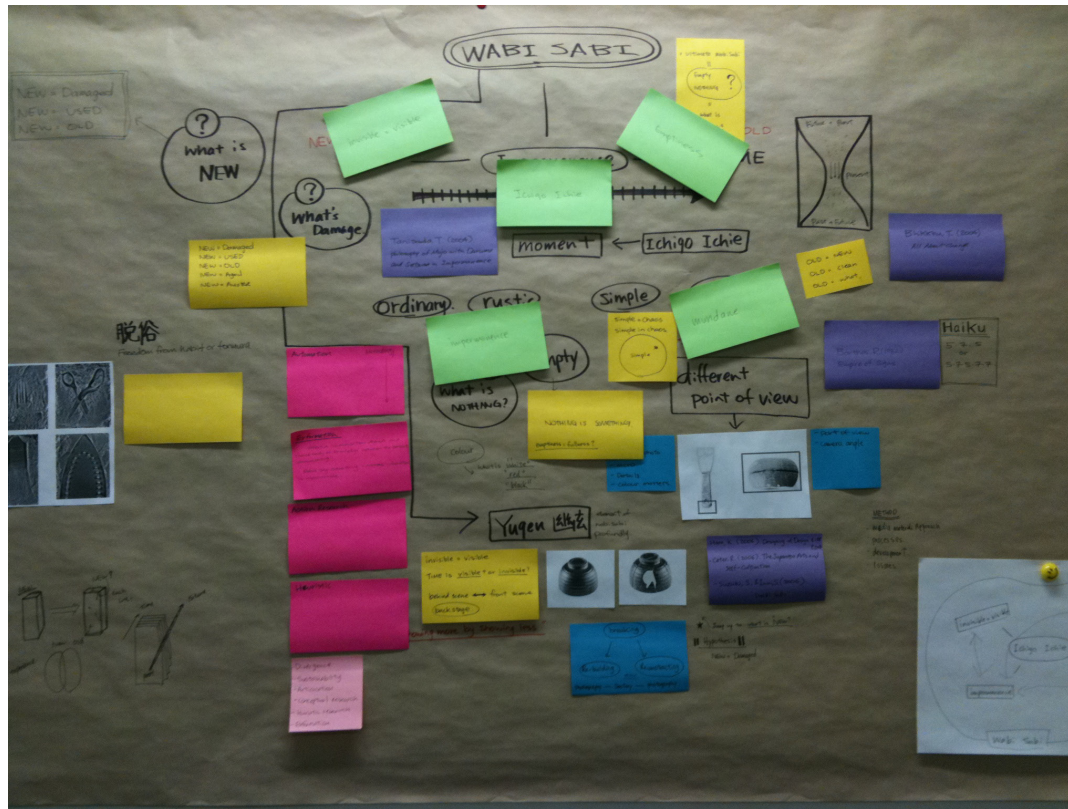


After the Geisha identity experiments, I noticed I was only describing what a Geisha is to me personally and not engaging with the philosophical aspect.

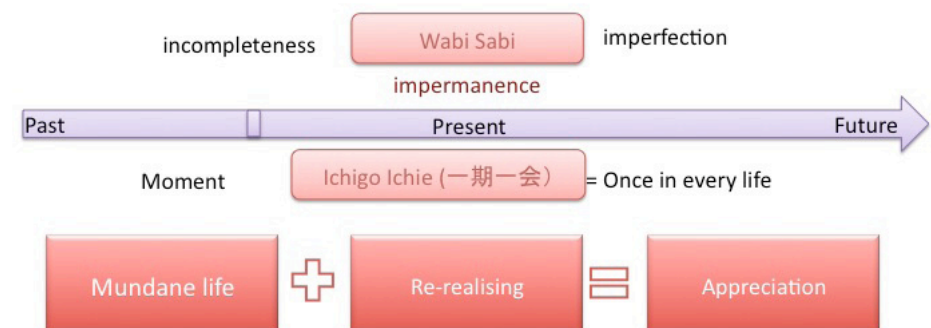
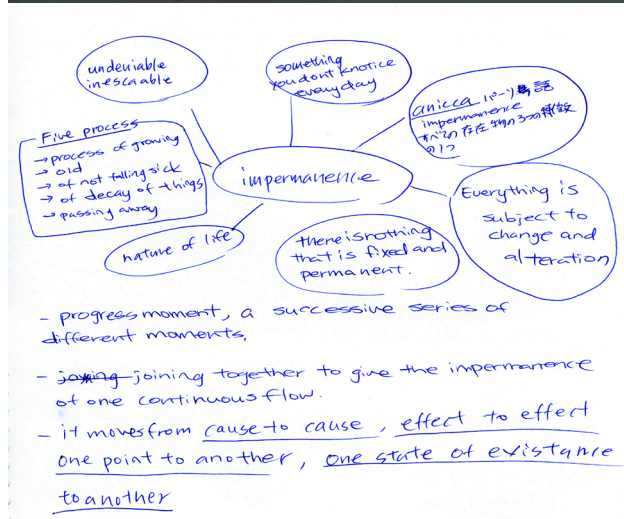
I then shifted the idea from the Geisha herself to the Geisha's philosophy and to applying that to my photography.



Wabi Sabi words relationship and Brain Storming



I decided to simplify the map and see what the relationship between Wabi SABI, Ichigo-ichie and impermanence is.

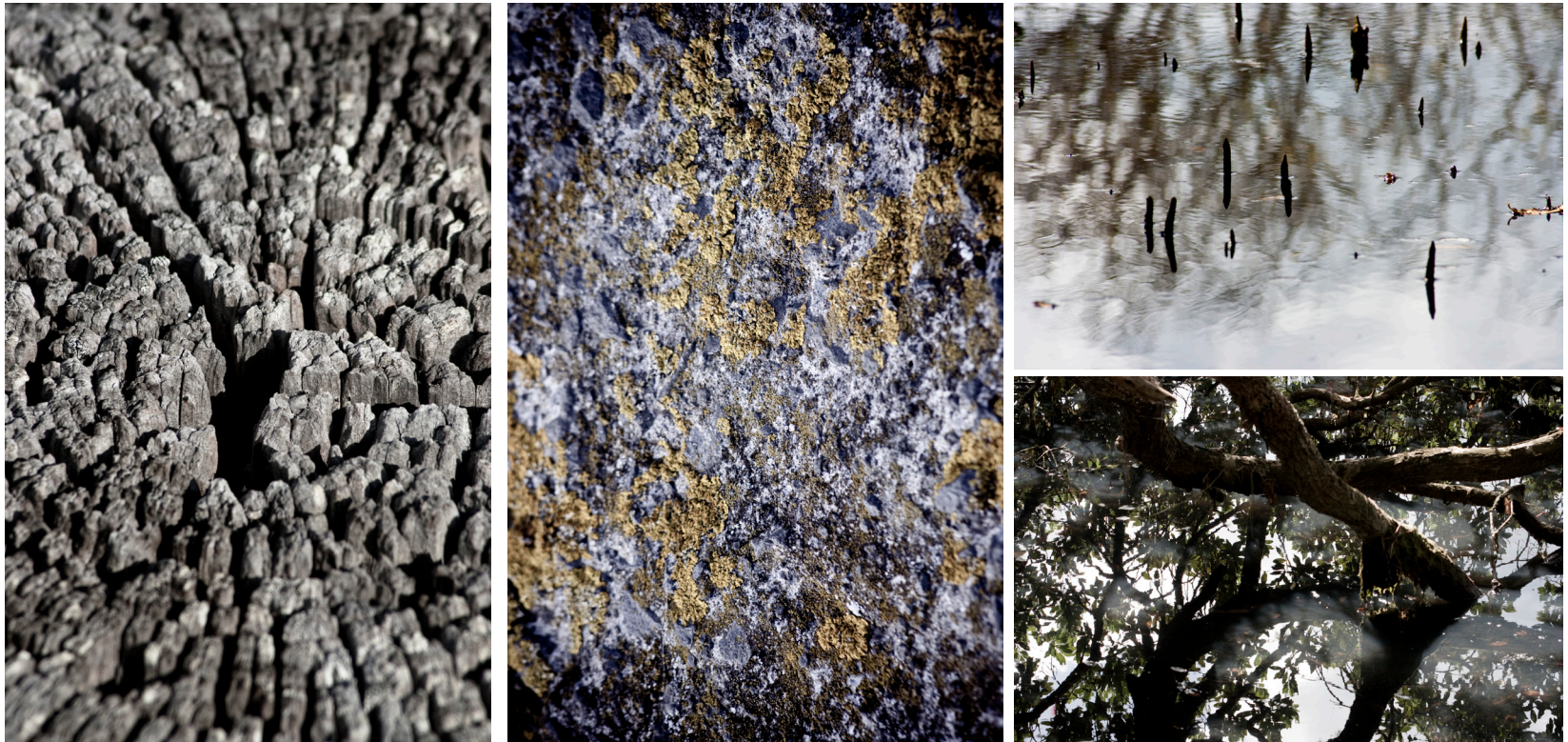


Brain storming Map



#### 4. Confusion (exformation) Wabi Sabi

- These works show the “**exformation**” philosophy of the confused image. While they are abstract images, they can however get people to think and **question** what the meaning behind the image is or to try to see what the picture is.
- Using a **macro lens** is an effective way to show the image differently or to have a wide depth of field so I am able to **control** the viewer’s eye.

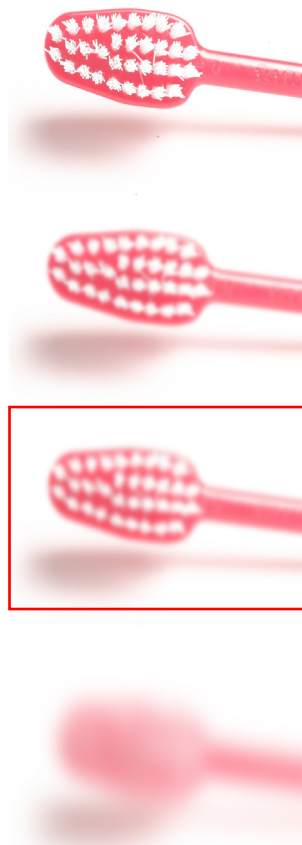


Selected works, from left to right, 15-07-09. (Devonport). 22-07-09 (Waiuku).

## 5. unfocused (Wabi Sabi yugen)

-After the exformation philosophy research developed, I was trying to consider how to confuse people and get **more attention**. My new idea was to use progressively more blurred images to confuse them, which is an idea also used in **yugen**. I tested how much I could reduce the sharpness of each object before too much blur would caused people to lose interest in the image.

- Everyday I took my camera and shot photos around me, making sure they were out of **focus**, almost like not wearing glasses.



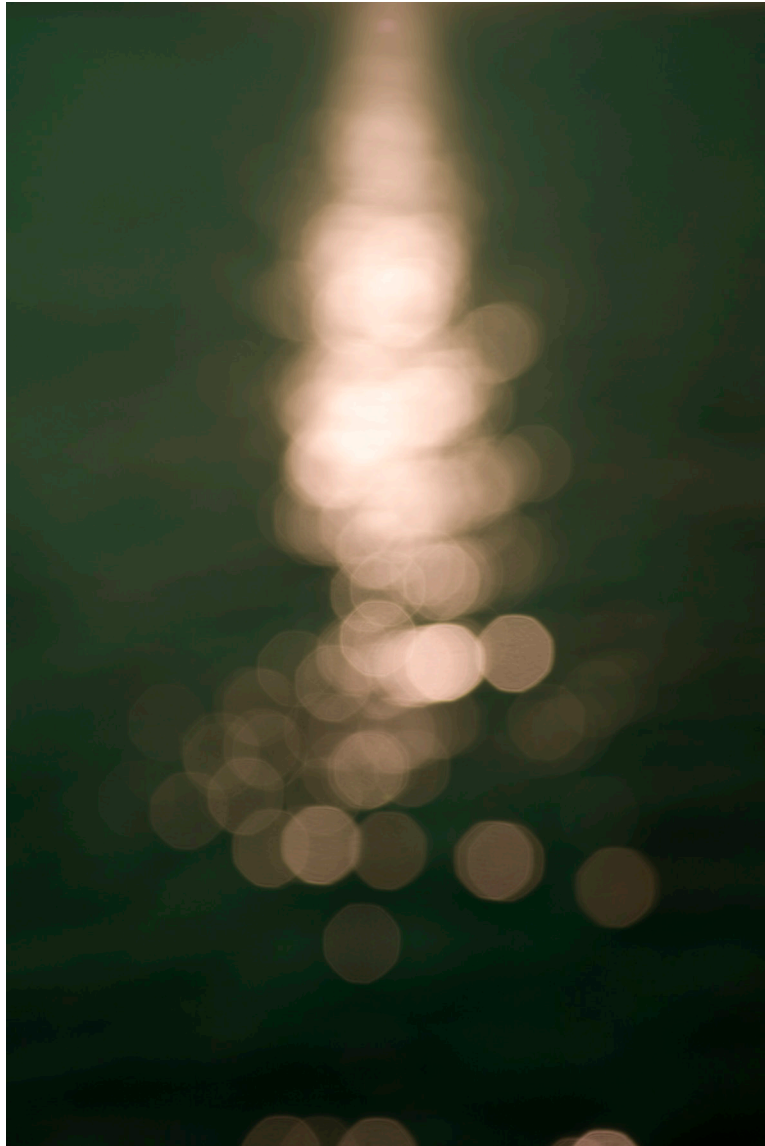
12-08-10 out of focus test

amount of sharpness (test)

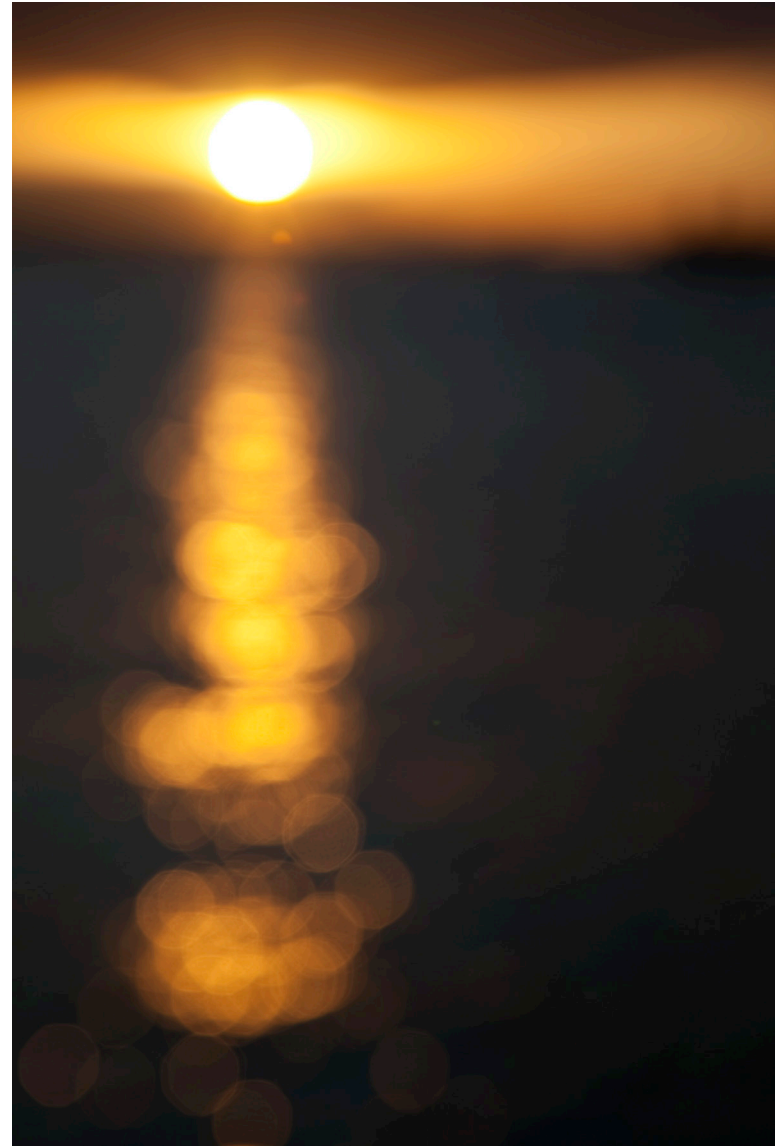


Selected works, top two 19--08-09, bottom two 20-06-10





Selected works, Sunset 20-08-10



Selected works, Sunset 20-08-10



## 5. Wabi Sabi simplicity

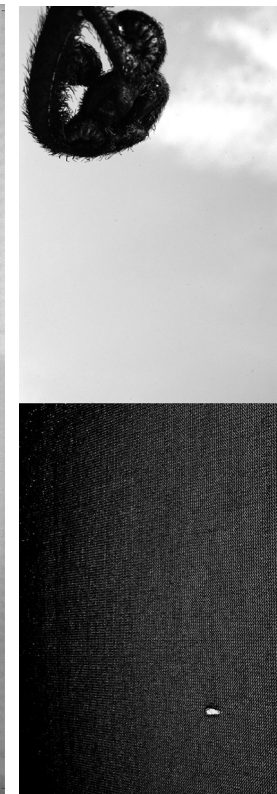
- In this experiment, I have considered the **space** around the object, using **form and counterform** to create simple images that are able to control the viewer's point of view. This approach **does not use much depth of field** to create the image but is effective.
- This experiment can also use either **black and white** or colour images; black and white images seem more simple, however colour images are able to give a little **more information** to the viewer to assist them in identifying what each image is.



Selected work, "rope" 20-08-08 (Devonport)



Selected work, "powerplug" 11-09-07 (printing room)

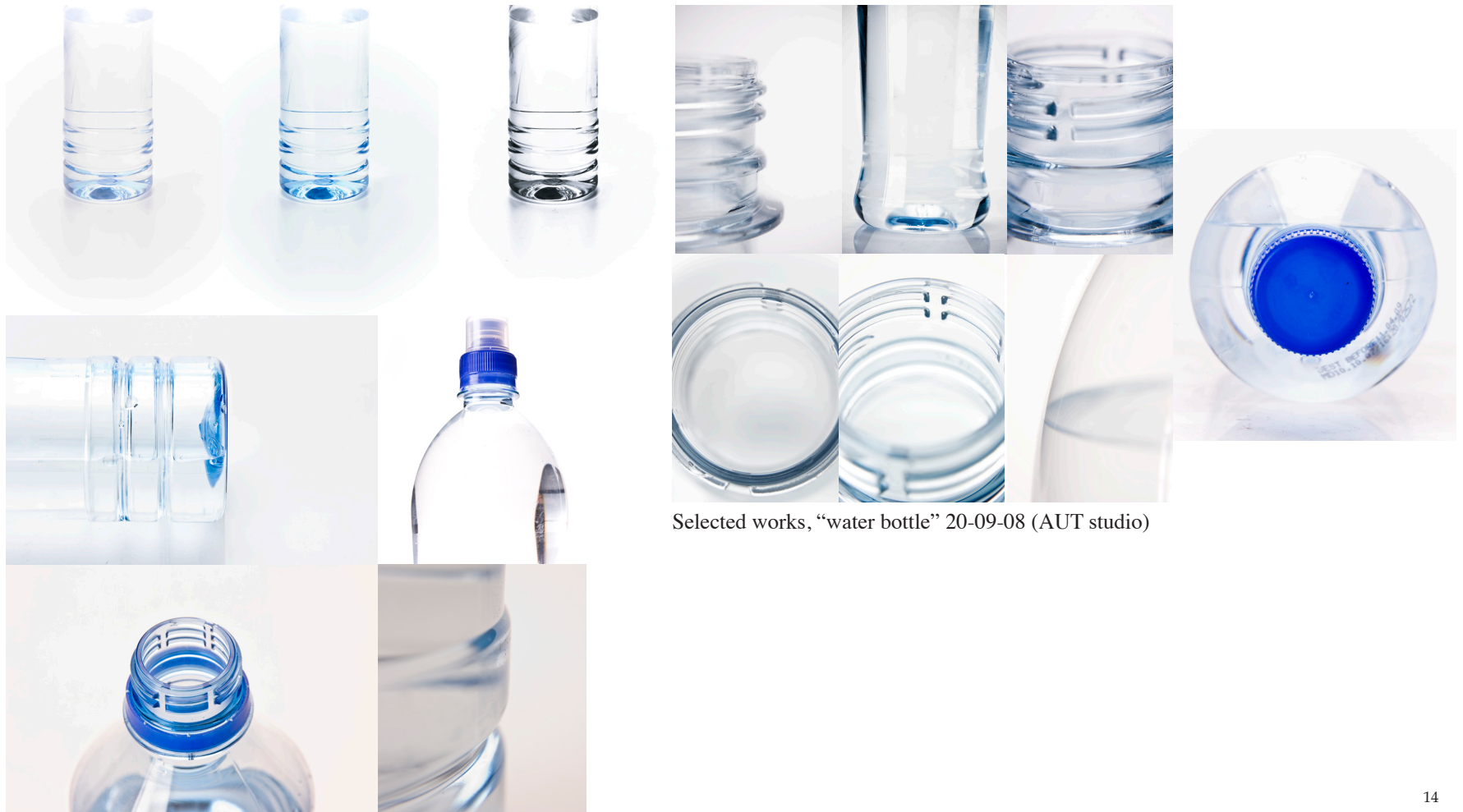


Selected works;  
20-09-07(Waiuku)

### 5.1. water bottle (point of view)

- In this experiment, I used an **everyday** item but altered the colour and **view**; the idea being that these changes would alter the viewers' feelings from the usual. To do this I captured the same bottle of water but from different angles.

- **Yugen**, an element of Wabi Sabi, is applied to this experiment in an attempt to make the viewer **see things differently**.



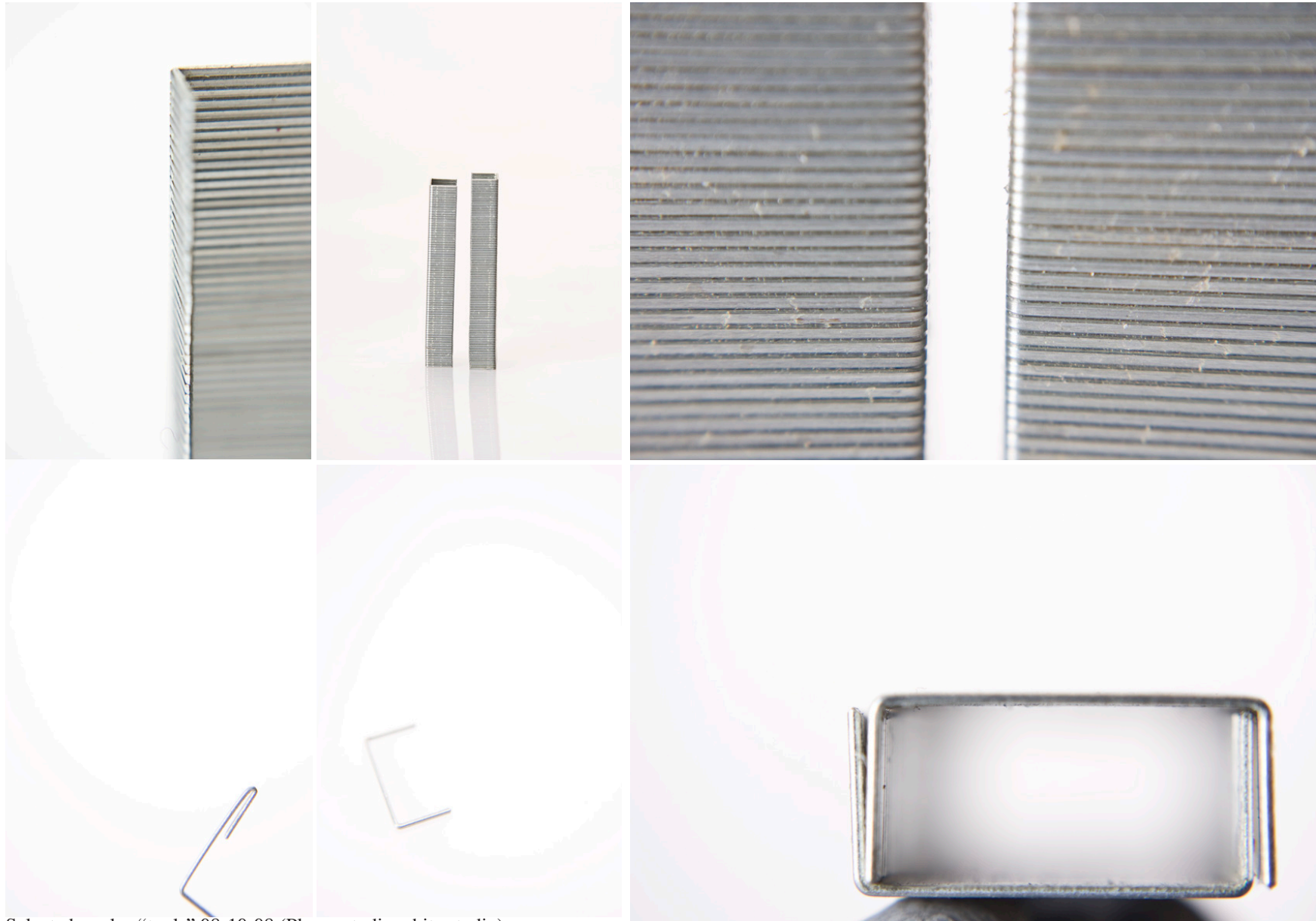
Selected works, "water bottle" 20-09-08 (AUT studio)

## 6. point of view

- After the experiment with the water bottle I began to use tools to express the **mundane**. This experiment required **super macro photography**. I used a lens extension to capture close up photography of the objects but realised I was not engaging with the underlying philosophy. I was merely taking close up photography. From this I considered what the **final image sizes** would be.
- Once the spectator views the object close up, they realise there are scratches, marks and decay that were previously unnoticed. How and why these came about are some of the **questions created by looking more closely at the object**.



Selected works, "tools" 08-10-08 (Plump studio white studio)

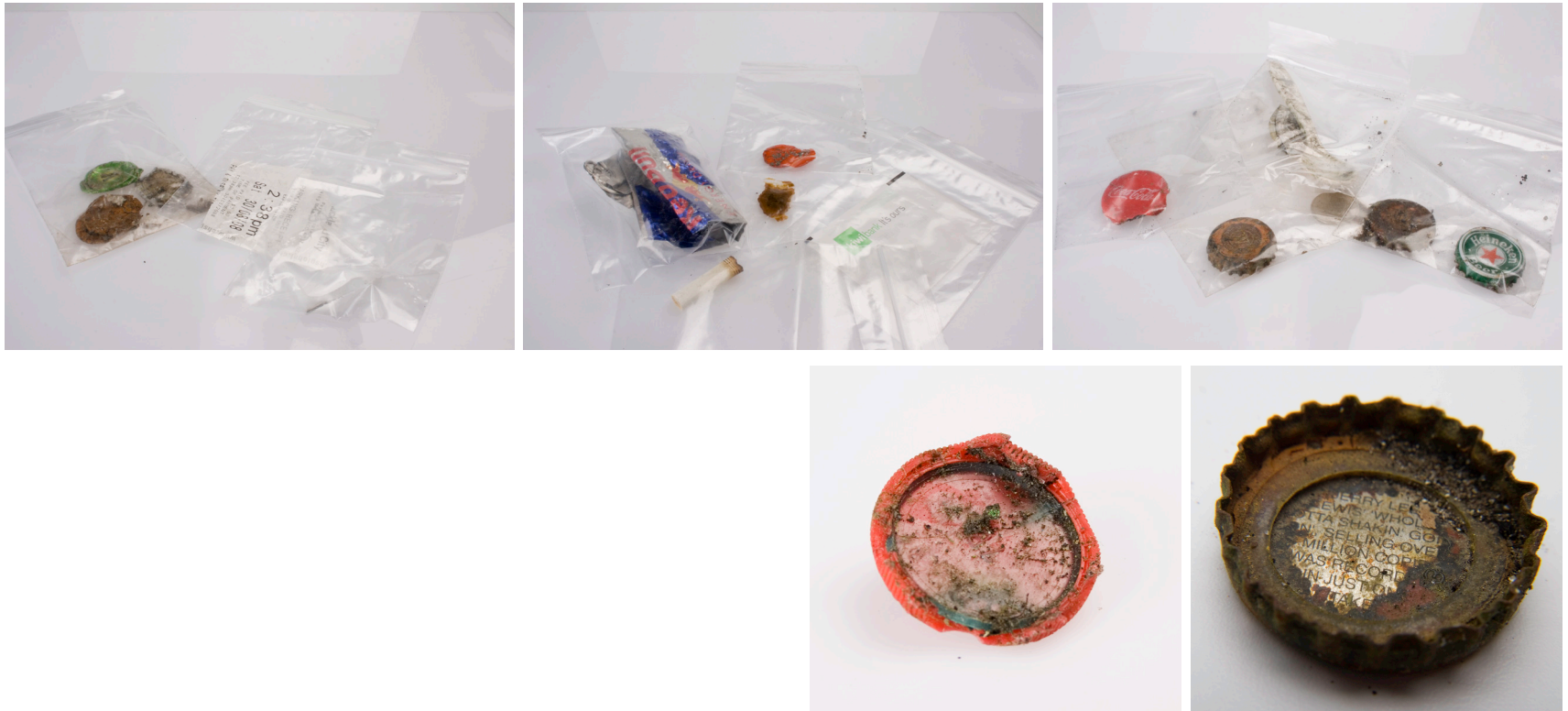


Selected works, "tools" 08-10-08 (Plump studio white studio)



## 7. Rubbish

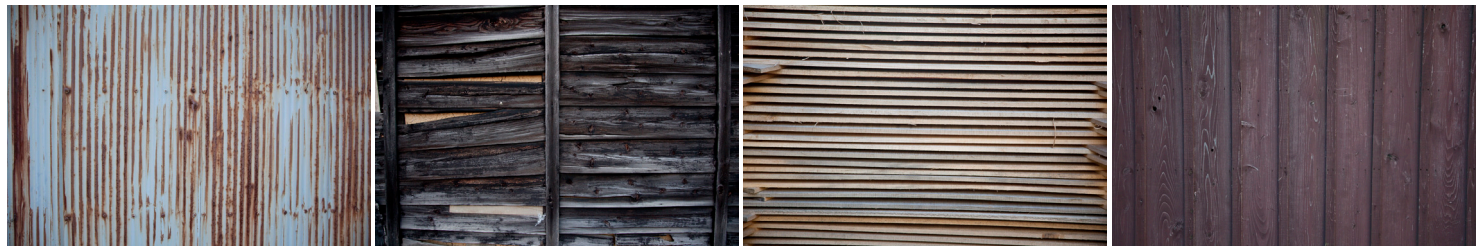
- I was looking for items which are usually **forgotten** about and **ignored** so I chose rubbish. When people use a product, that product has meaning; however once it has been used, it is discarded and **decays**.
- Wabi Sabi tries to see the **beauty of a minus point**. Rubbish is a good example with which to see the negative as it has Wabi Sabi elements of **age** and **decay**. Everything is impermanent, and to photograph a single part of that **impermanence** is one of my strategies to show the **value of the mundane**.



Selected works, "rubbish" 16-10-08 (Plump studio white studio)

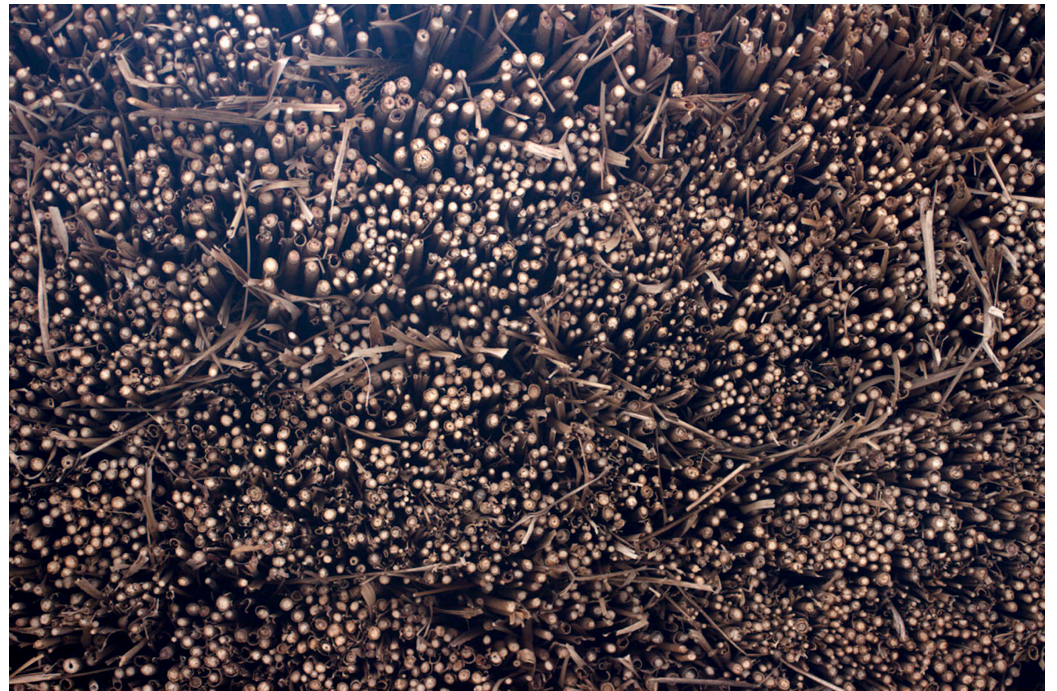
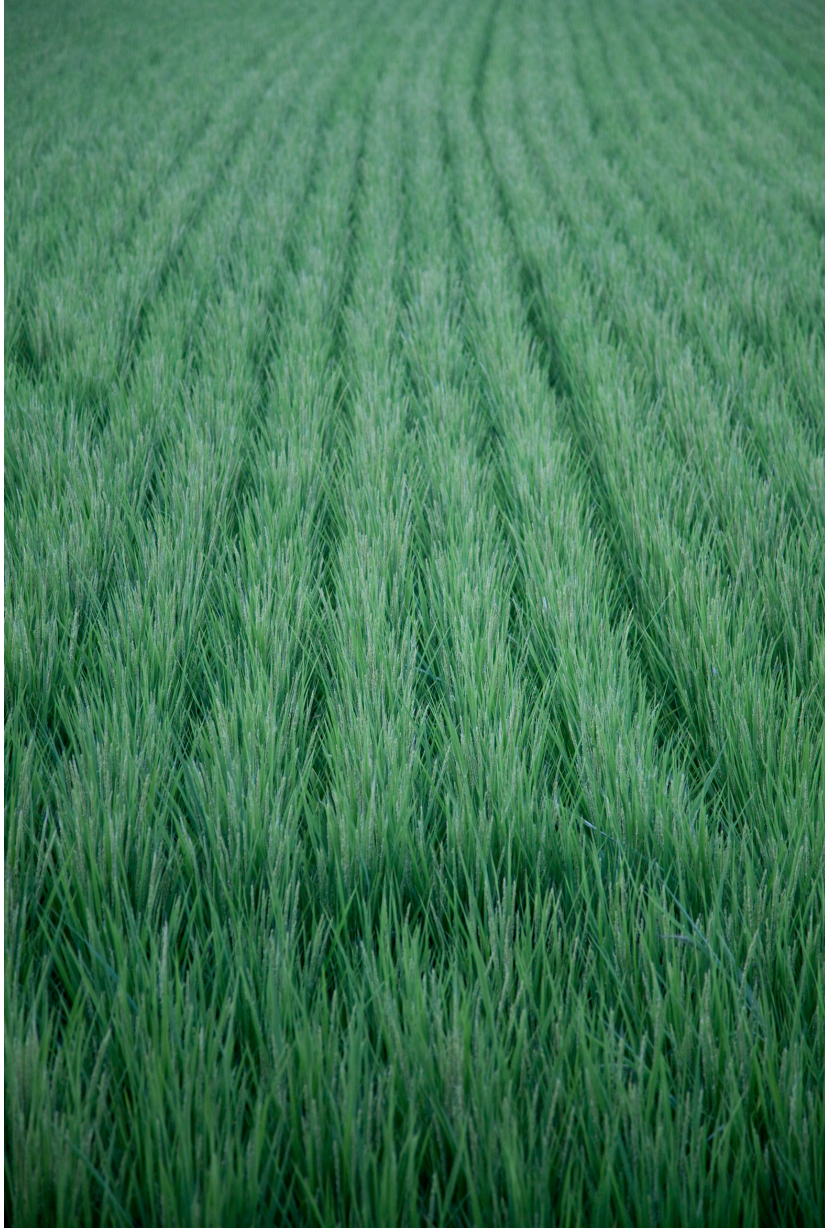
## 8. Pattern

- In this experiment I tried to find Wabi Sabi in random patterns. Individual **different parts** make one pattern which is **inconsistent**, but they also have a sense of harmony to them. Some are dirty and others are rusted but they have a **pattern created by age**. Once you realise this you begin to appreciate the time that has passed.
- This experiment also shows the beauty of inconsistency created by **natural decay** and age. This, I think, is Wabi Sabi's basic form.



Selected works, "patterns" 20-03-10 (Japan)





Selected works, “petterns”; left 19-08-10 (Japan), right 20-03-10 (Japan)



## 9. Dry leaf

- Everything ages and I believe that everything is impermanent. Dry leaves are everywhere around us but I tried to show that even similar leaves have their own vein structure which could also be said about humans.
- I made the images either black and white or **desaturated** to clearly show the **veins**. I also added more contrast.



Selected works, "dry leaf" 05-07-08



## 10. Shadow (“Nothing is something” experiment)

- Shadows are created from no light or nothing, which then becomes something when in contrast with a positive space and thus conforming to the Wabi Sabi Buddhist idea of “**Nothing is something**”. Black shadow space creates a frame for the image inside so I took photos from within a small tunnel in response to the idea of using **negative space to create positive space**.



Selected work, 05-05-07



Selected work, 05-05-07



Selected work, 05-05-07



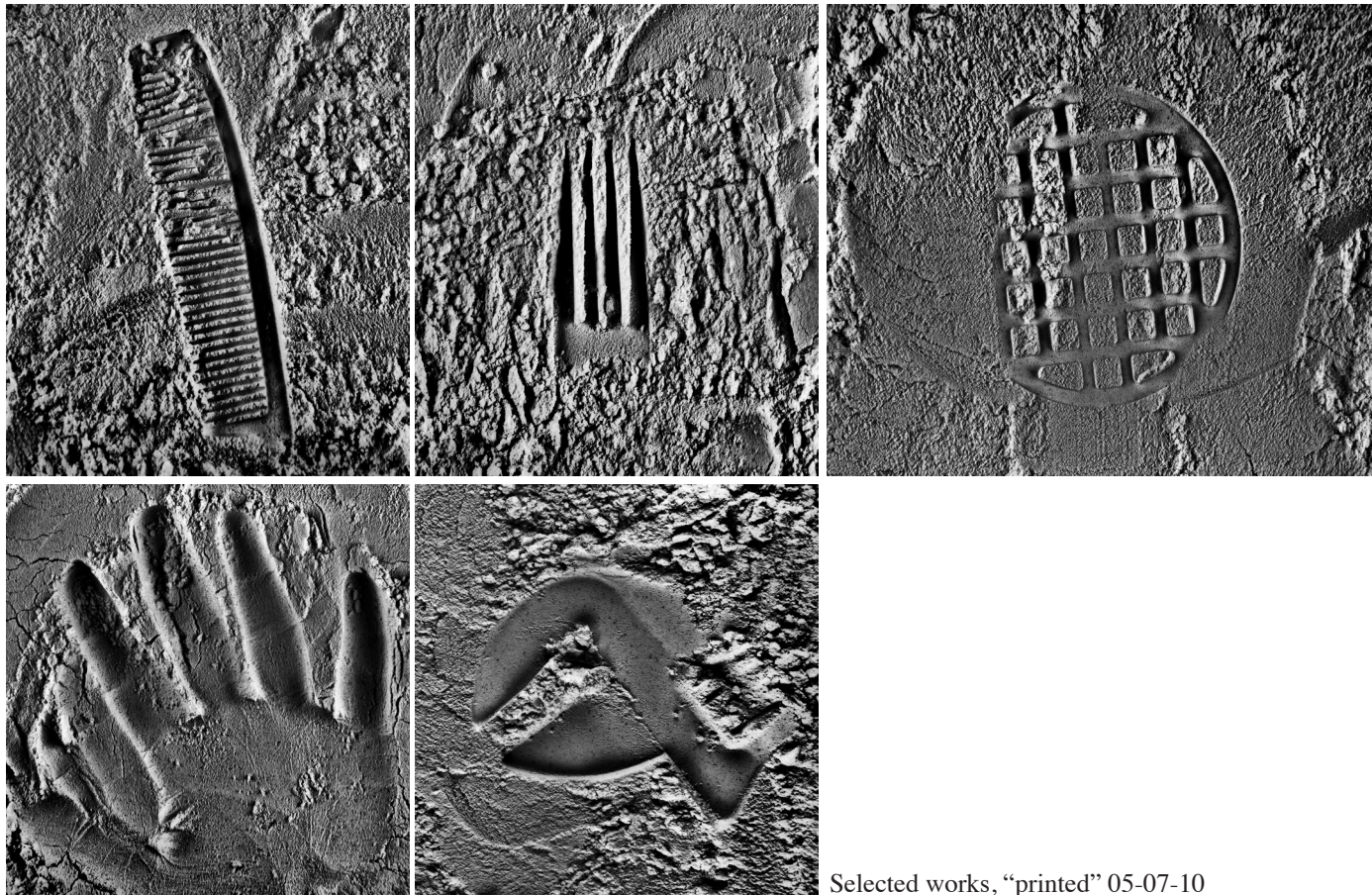


Selected works, “finding shadows” 08-10-07 (from AUT to Waiuku town)



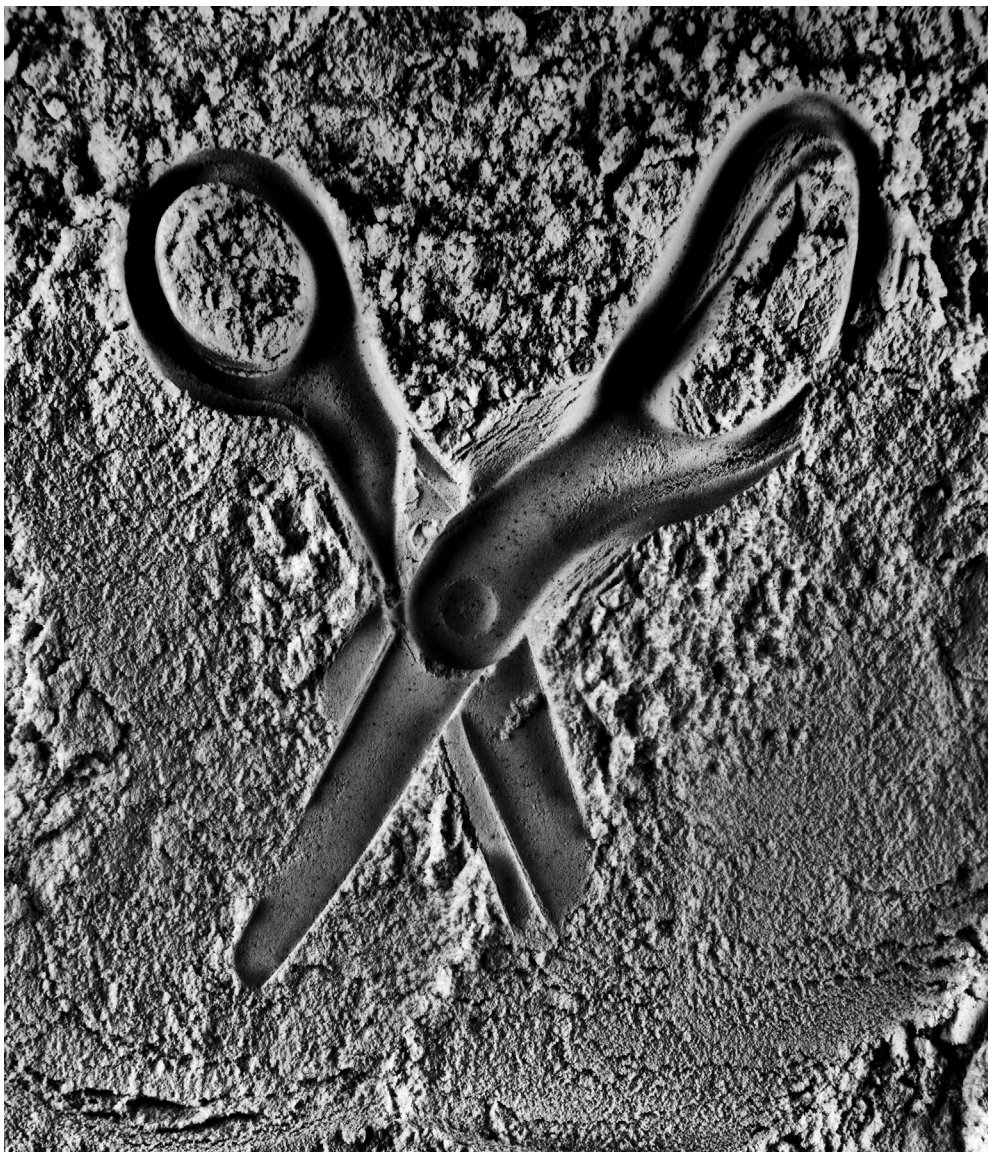
## 11. Print

- This experiment was influenced by **Kenya Hara's exformation**. I called this experiment thr “Kenya Hara What If” experiments”; I used flour to print different objects and see what they looked like. When people use these objects they wouldn't consider what each object's surface would look like if it were soft. This idea came from a coffee stain I saw on the floor and thought it could be a message, something left behind, while also reminding me that someone was previously there to drink coffee even though I did not see that person there now.



Selected works, “printed” 05-07-10





Selected works, "printed" 05-07-10





## 12. Broken new

This experiment is 'broken', has 'scars', is 'old', and has 'missing' parts. Yet each 'scar' constitutes a new moment **carrying past information and memories**. How and what was it before? How could this happen? We answer these questions by using our own memories and **experiences to fill in those past 'new' moments**. Is this broken bowl new? **Is broken new?**



Selected works, "broken bowls" 05-08-10

### 13. Burning

-In this experiment, I wanted to capture moments of impermanence. I burnt plastic, polyester, glue stick and wood to see how dramatically the shapes change.

-I tried to capture the burning objects in a sequence that shows **impermanence and Ichigo-ichie**.

-I used a macro lens to show the small objects' unnoticed forms as they were being burnt.



Selected works, 09-10-07



Selected works, 09-10-07



#### 14. Shoes and walking

- In this series of photographs, I chose objects that I **use everyday** that are also usually unnoticed; the soles of one pair of shoes and a pair of jandals. I wore them for 60 days to see what the result would be. Each day they had some **minor changes** which, without recording them through photography, I would not have noticed.
- Noticing the mundane moments of everyday life is to **appreciate the time** that I am spending on them.



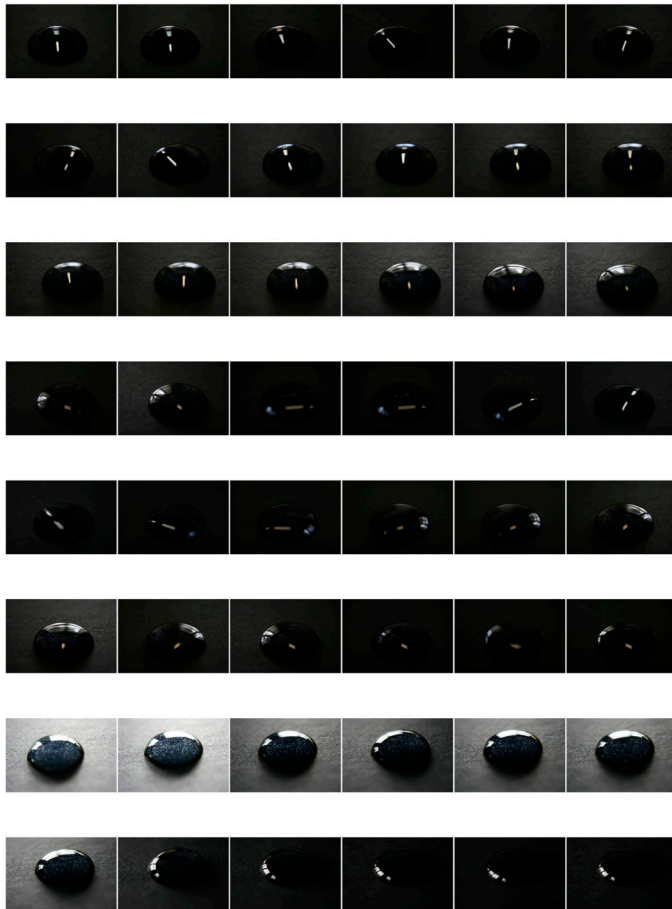
Selected works, "jandal" 08-08-08 to 08-010-08

Selected works, "jandal" 09-02-10 to 09-04-10



## 15. Water lighting

- I chose to research water because water has one of strongest potentials with which to explore **Wabi Sabi impermanence** as it changes with every moment. In this experiment I walked around with a bead of water to see how it appears.
- Even though it was the same water drop, **lighting, wind and subtle movements led to different results.**



Selected works, “water drop lighting” 03-07-07

## 16. Wabi Sabi inconsistency

- Each drop of water moves inconsistently which is impermanent. I cannot follow every water bead but once each bead is captured by photography it is a water bead moment.

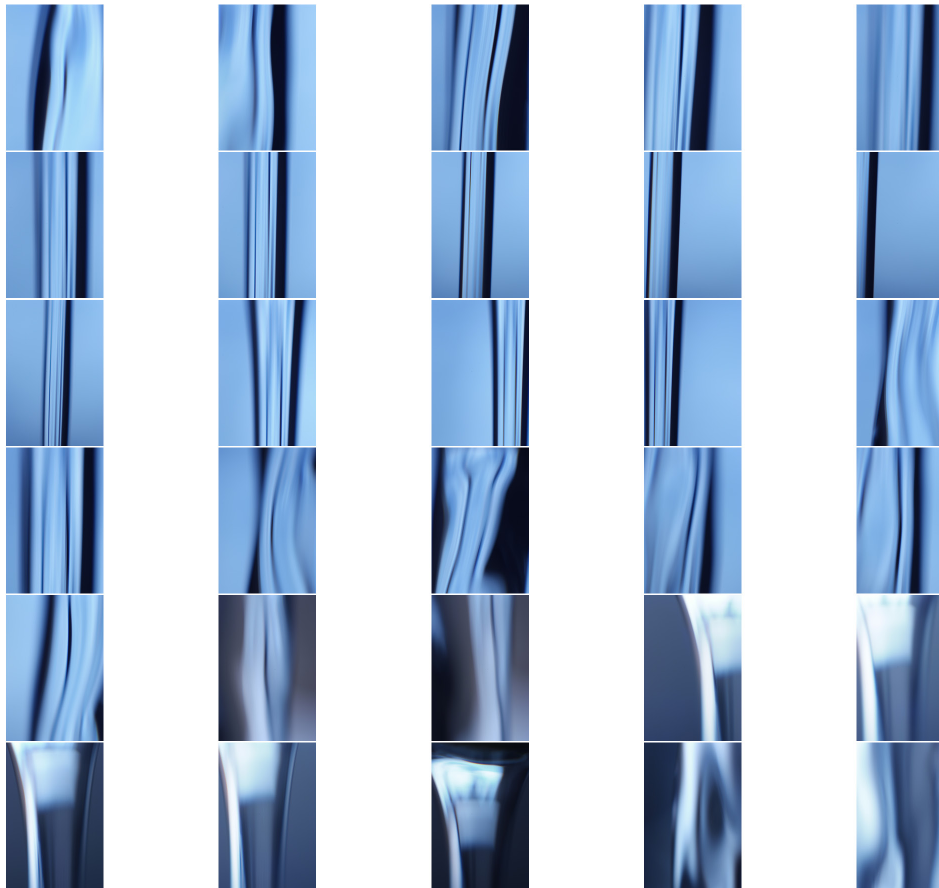


Selected works, "inconsistency moment" 01-02-08

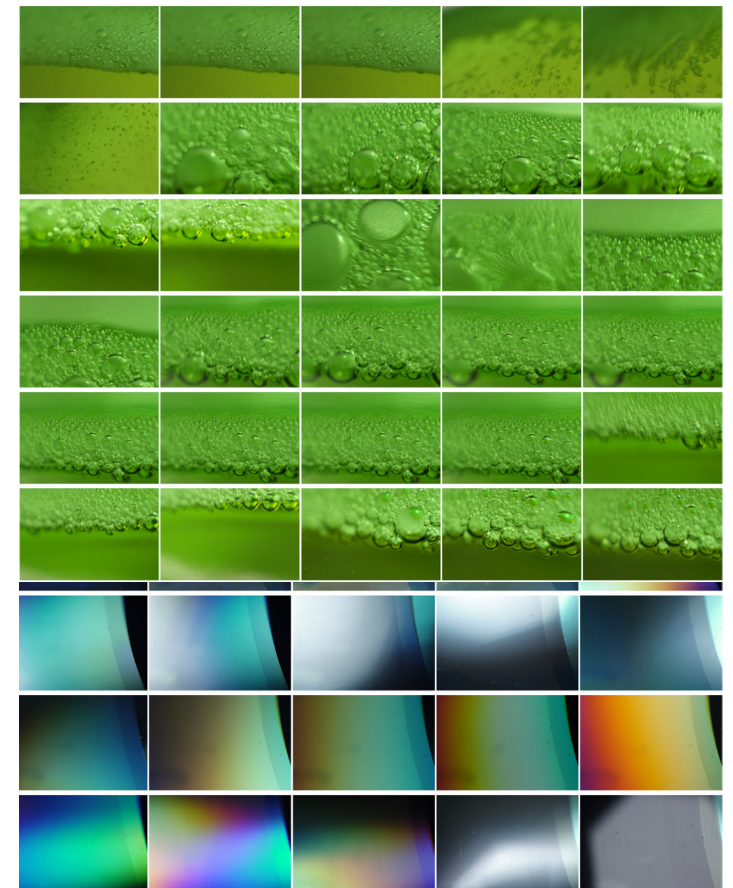


## 17. Water tab, energy drink, CD

- Each of these experiments had a different approach but they all captured an **Ichigo-ichie moment** in the impermanence time line. In the flux of mundane life interesting changes occur at every moment. Water from a tap changes shape every time I turn the tap on. Bubbles in a drink disappear in a different way each time, while a CD changes colour depending on its angle and the light. All are different and all are expressions of impermanence.



Selected works, “water tab” 03-10-07



Selected works, “lift plus” “CD” 03-10-07

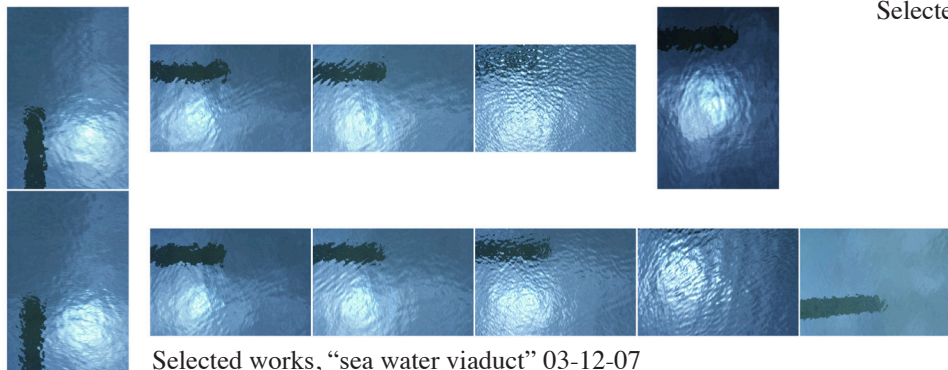
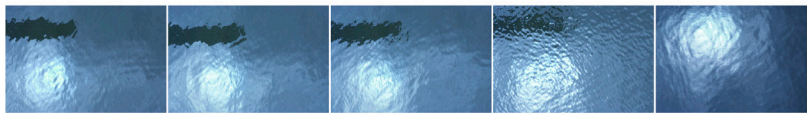
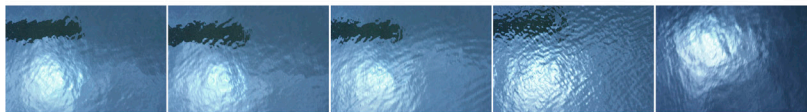




selected works “water tab” 03-10-07

## 18. Seawater

- Seawater is also changing **each moment** depending on the wind. I wanted to capture the atmosphere of sea water. The images below show two different moments of seawater; the one on left hand side is quietly changing with each moment while the right hand side shows aggressive change. Geisha practice shows **each moment is a performance**. I think this could also apply to the water's appearance.



Selected works, "sea water viaduct" 03-12-07



Selected works, "sea water on the ferry" 03-08-10

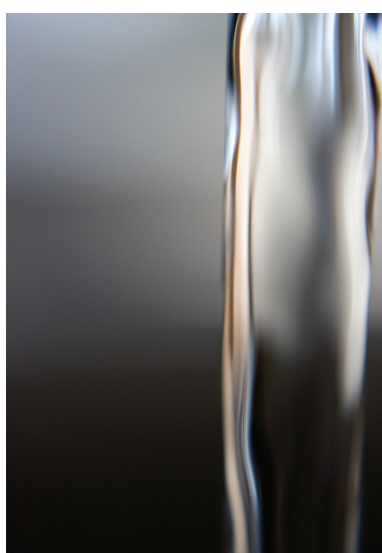
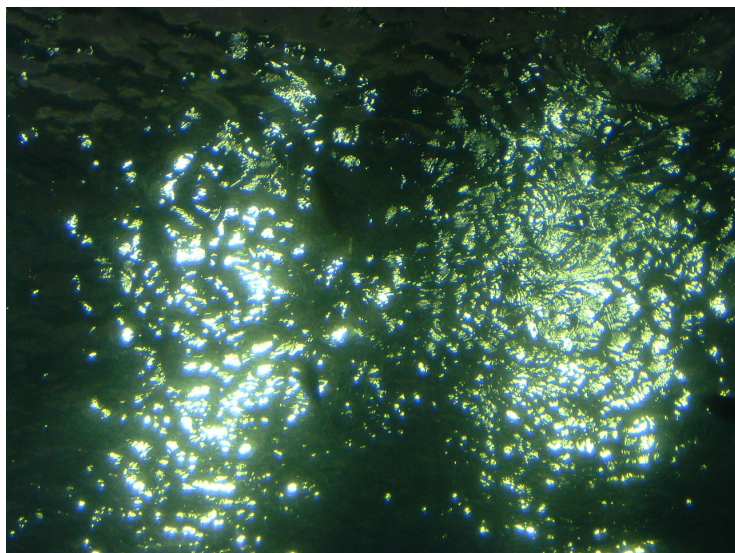
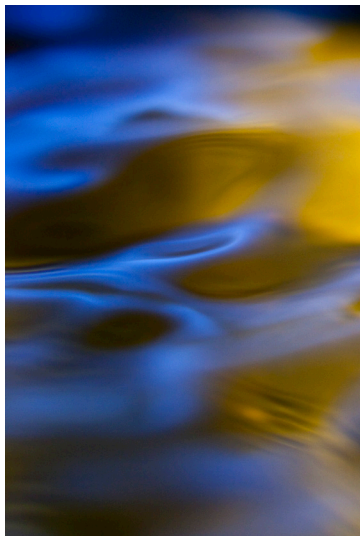


## 19. River water

-The current of river water is faster than that of seawater. Therefore I opened the shutter for 18 seconds. to capture the moment of impermanence. I tried to not capture **abstract images** so you can still tell it is water from a river. I also included the stone as a reference point.



Selected works, "rever water current" 07-08-10

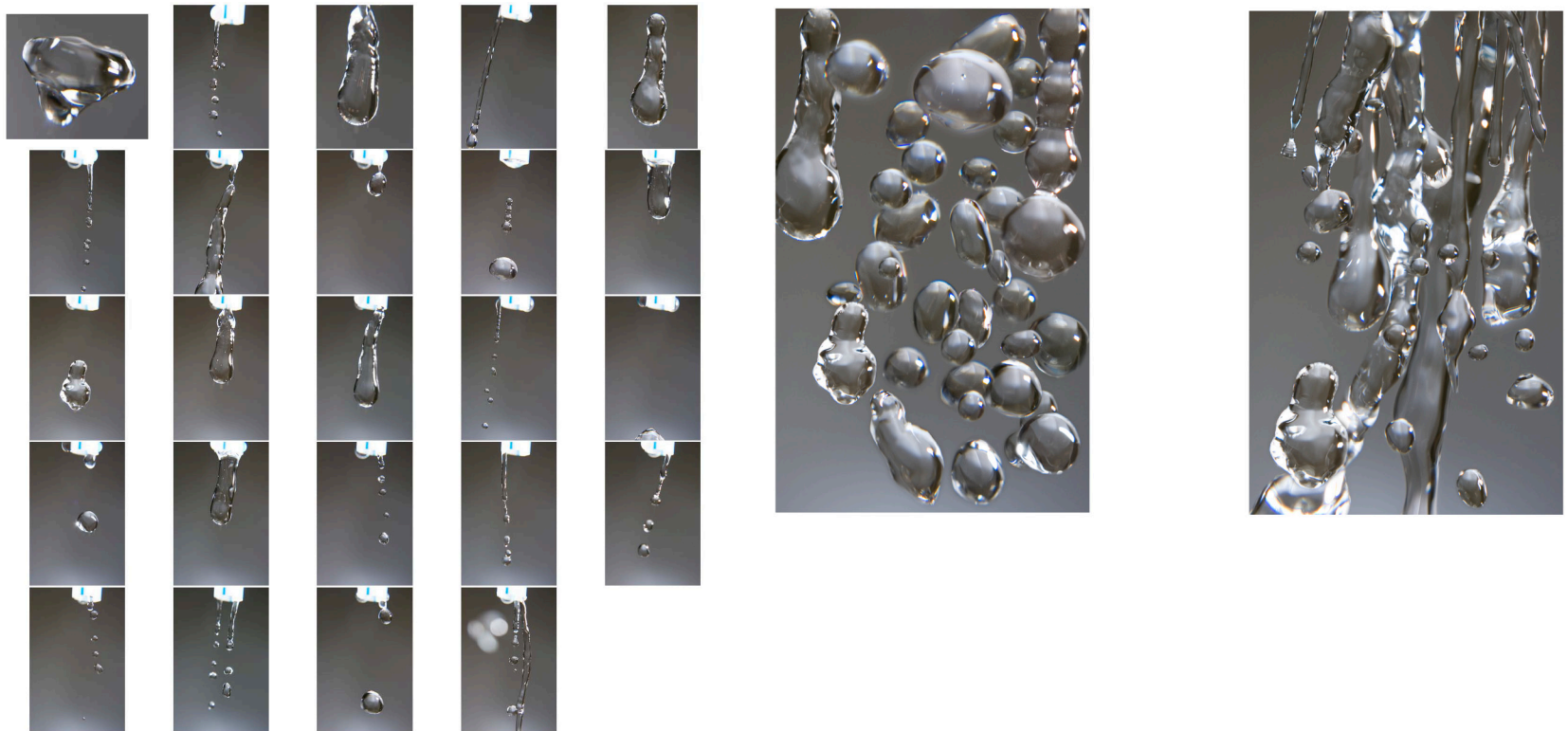


Selected works, "from 2007 impermanence experiment " 03-12-07



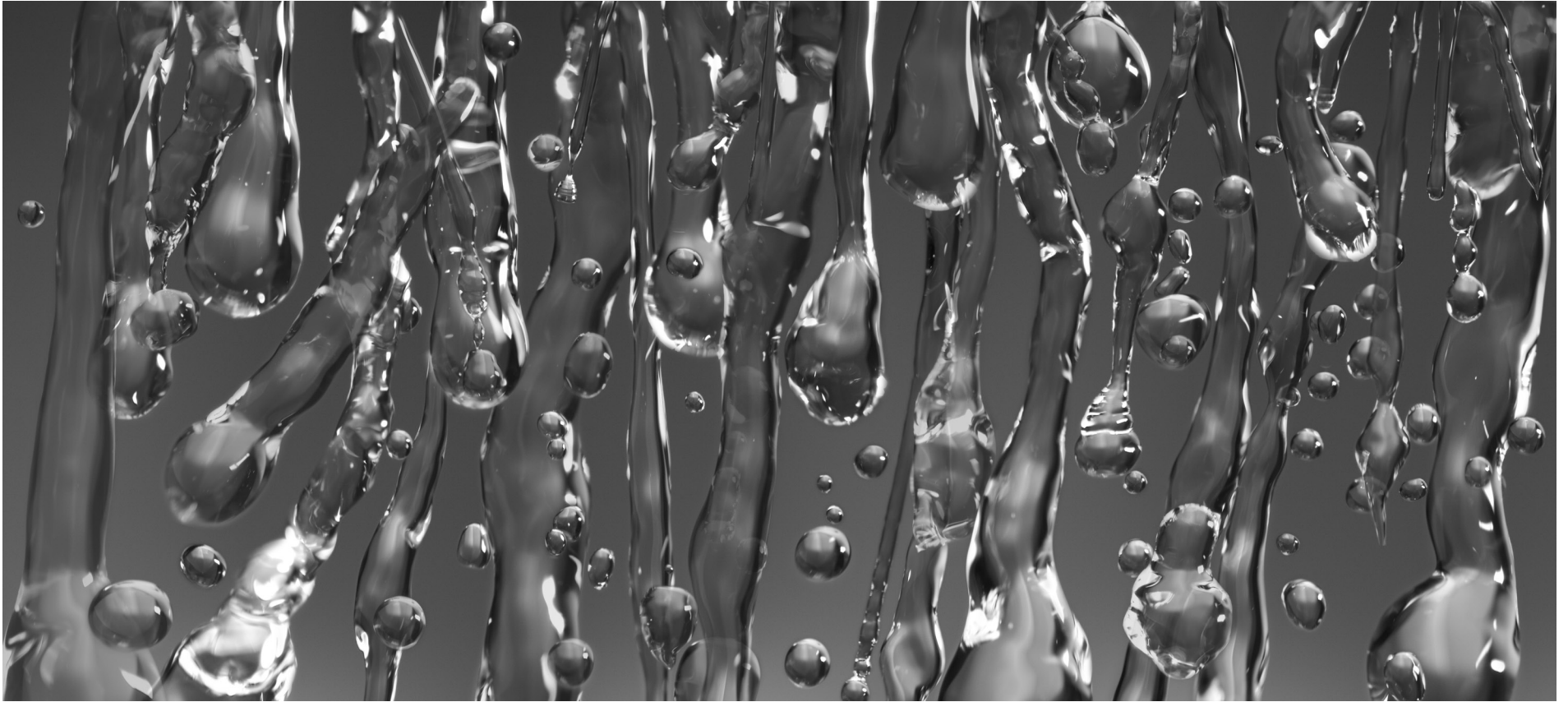
## 21. Water drop

- In the previous water experiment I thought about ways in which I could effectively express **impermanence** and **Ichigo-ichie** in the Wabi Sabi philosophy. I would need to have an object or subject of everyday use which possessed **simplicity** while being able to **change dramatically**. For this I chose water drops. I took 480 water drop photos and merged them together to create a single image. This image looked **chaotic** rather than simple, however simplicity appears within the chaos.



Selected works, "water drop" 03-10-07

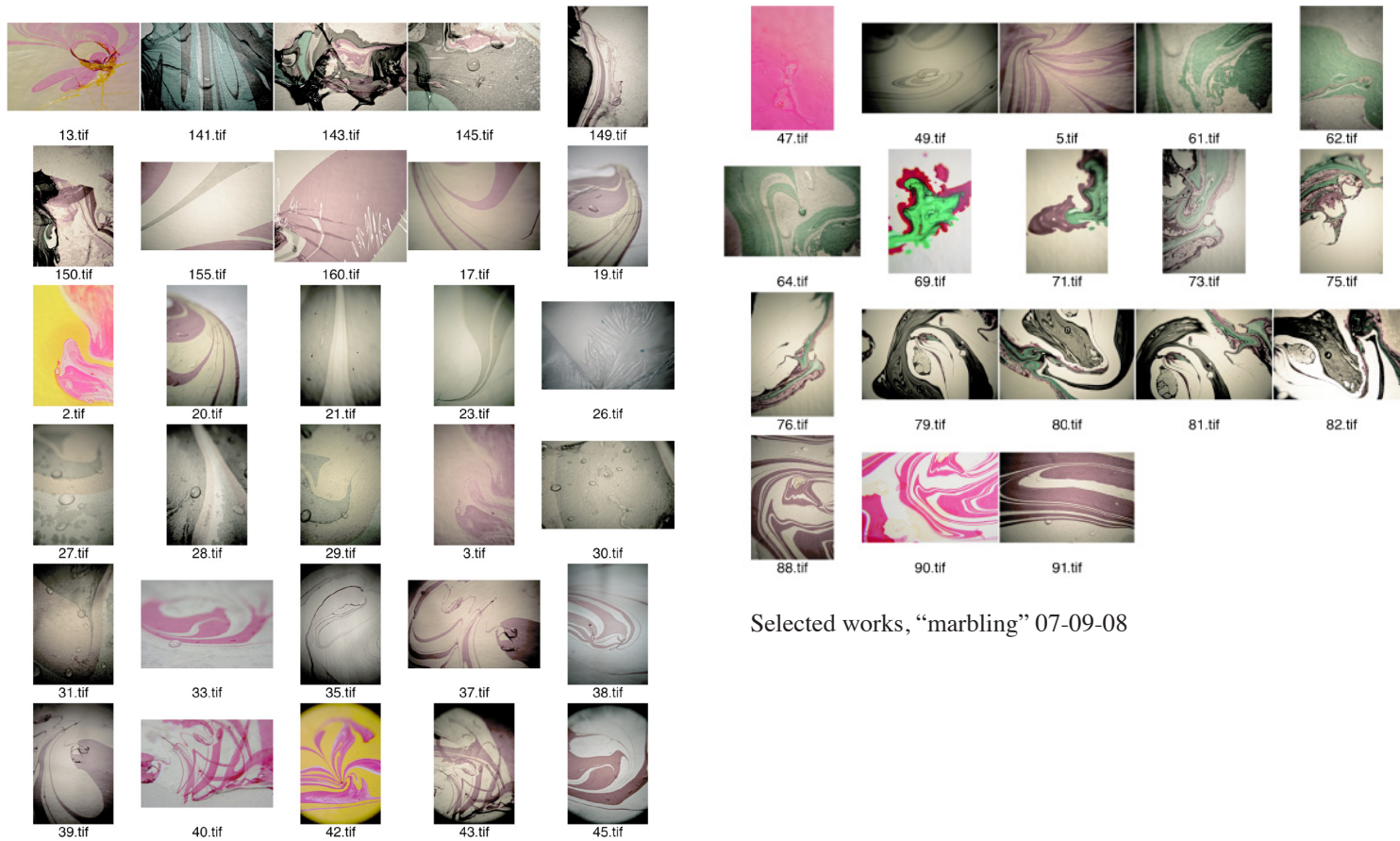




Selected works, “water drop” 03-11-07 1100mm x 500mm

## 22. Marbling

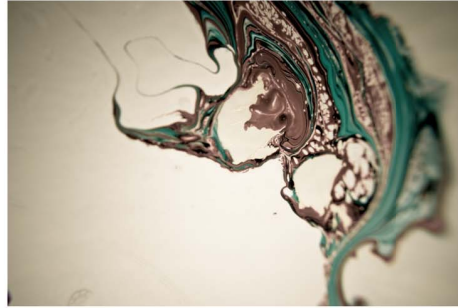
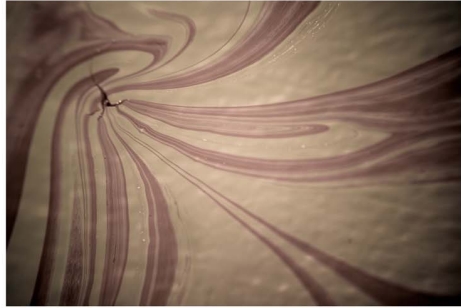
- I used this experiment to show the **Geisha's ichigo-ichie philosophy** in the terms of many layers to create one. Each layer represents the **disciplines of Geisha** so the final work is the **Geisha's performance**.
- The aesthetic works well, however it doesn't show the mundane.



Selected works, "marbling" 07-09-08



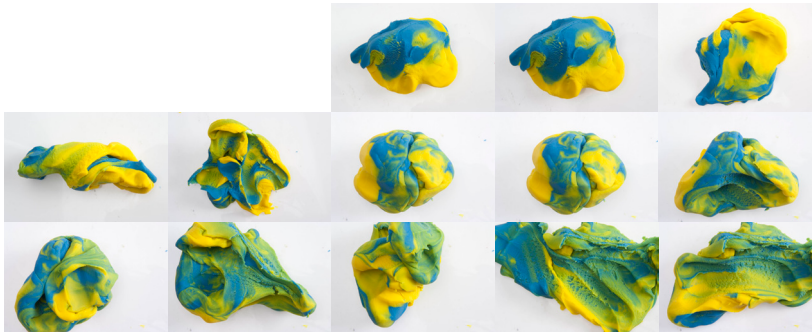
Selected works, "marbling" 07-09-08



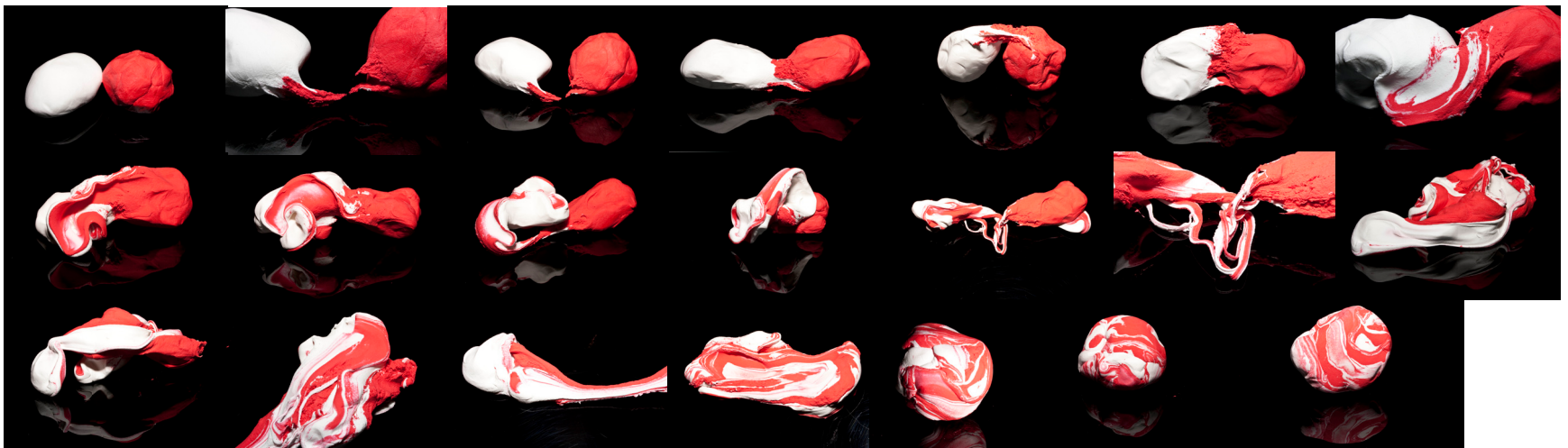


### 23. Clay

- In this experiment, I have a sequence of **ichigo-ichie moments**, using two colours to express them merging.
- Each time I squeezed the clay, changing its shape the resulting mix of colours was different. I kept squeezing to merge the colours until finally getting one colour; that is an expression of **Geisha performance**.



Selected works, "clay" 07-05-08





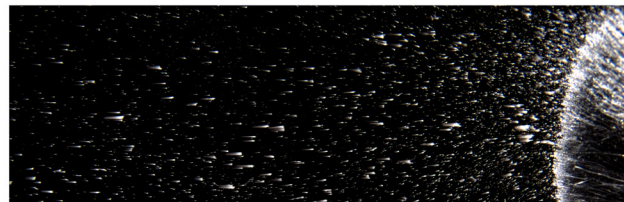
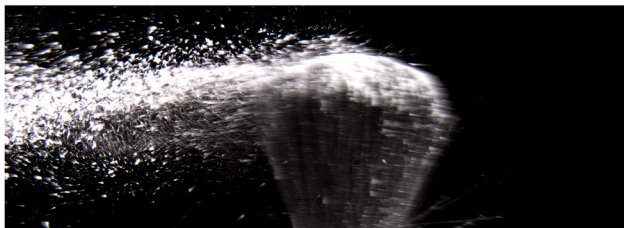
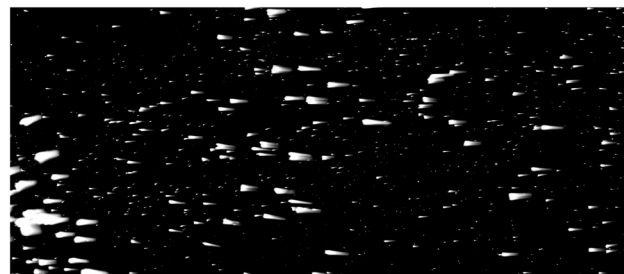
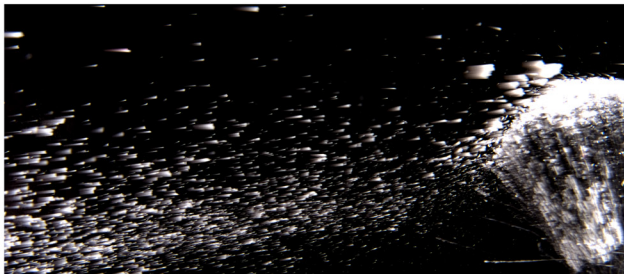
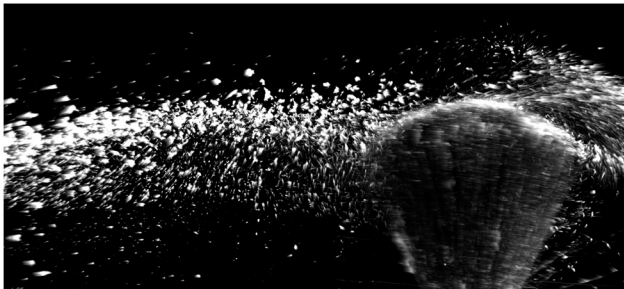


Selected works, "clay" 07-05-08



## 24. Powder

-The **inconsistency** of the powder also shows Wabi Sabi Ichigo-ichie. Shooting the movement of the object captures a moment of performance; however, it is too descriptive an experiment and it doesn't represent a mundane life to everyone.



Selected works, "powder" 07-06-08

## 25. Paper

- I tried to use everyday objects to show **inconsistency**. I used same paper and dropped it without intention, just letting it fall where it may. The paper itself is performing and each time **different shapes** are created.



Selected works, "paper" 07-06-10





Selected works “paper” 07-06-10

From all the experiments, I chose to use each of the works to express the value of mundane. Choosing motifs is one of the difficulties I have met because everyday products aren't always used by everybody (experiments 5, 5.1, 6, and 7). Also using colour was an issue with expressing simplicity because they were no longer simple.

(experiments 5. 5.1, 9.1, 10, 11, 13, 16, 17, 21, 22 and 25).

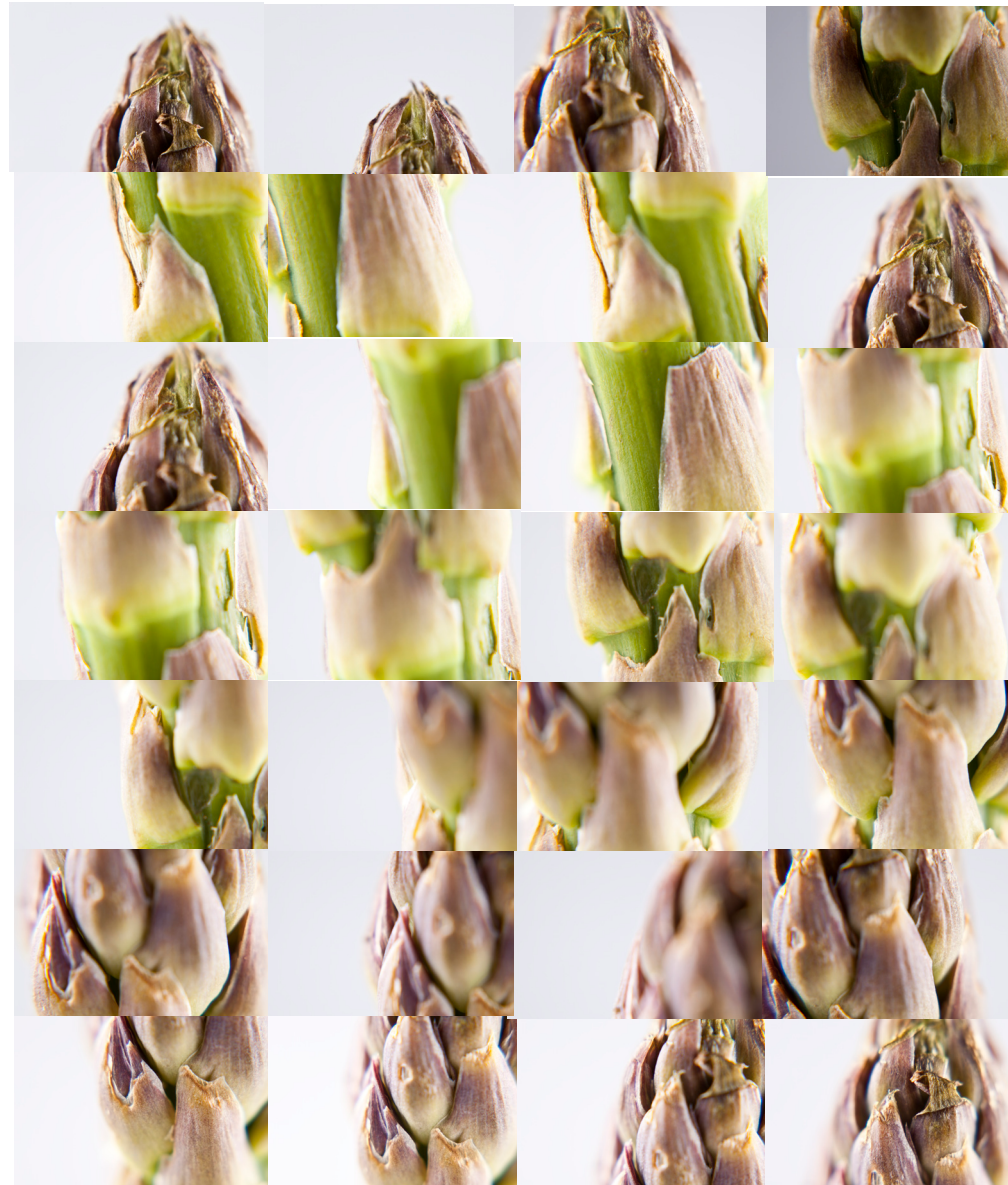
After completing all the experiments, I concluded that macro photography did not connect to the Wabi Sabi philosophy, therefore I chose to use the stitching photography to express each moment which is Ichigo-ichie.

As can be seen in the final images, the images are not all sharp and some parts are really blurry, which is the effect of stitching photography.

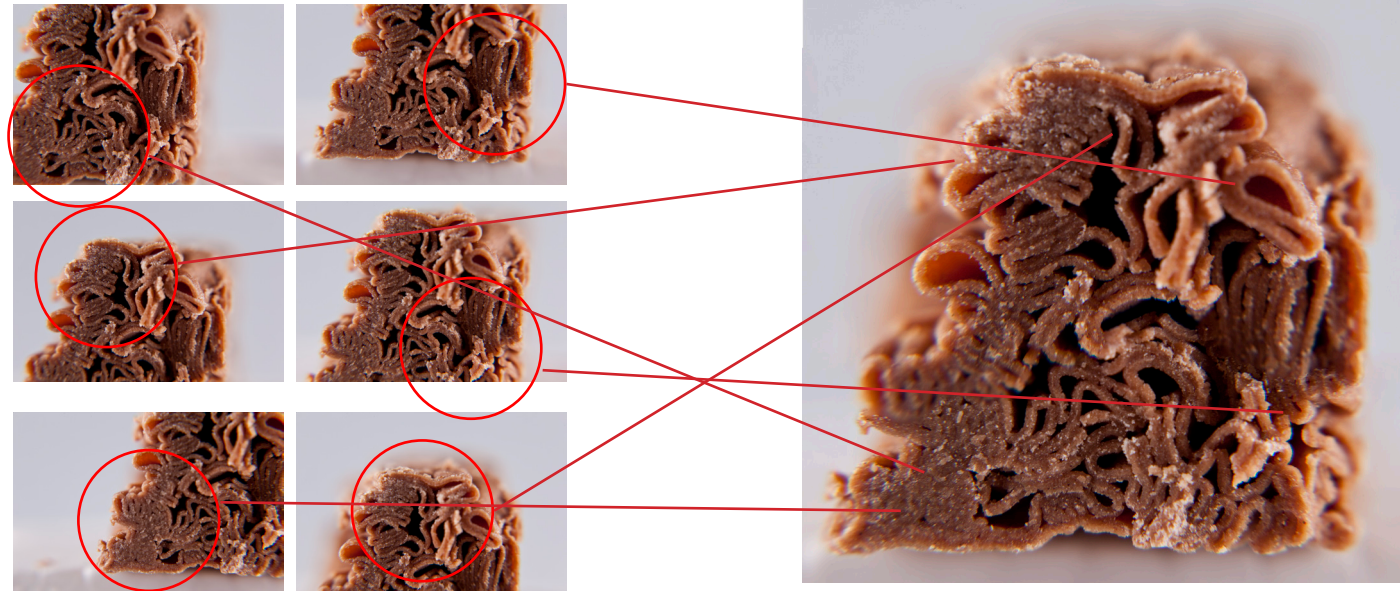
(experiments 13, 14, 22, 23 and 24).

I have chosen food as the motif because we consume food everyday. However, when I took just the aspect of food by itself it did not work as there is no performance aspect. To overcome this I chewed the food I had chosen so that the food is being consumed, which is a representation of the performing moment of food.

The space around the final work was carefully considered. If there is no white space around the work, it becomes too dominant and controls the viewer. I want the spectator to realise “mundane life” by themselves without having to inform them (experiments 5, 5.1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 19, and 25).



Selected works, macro stitching 18-10-10

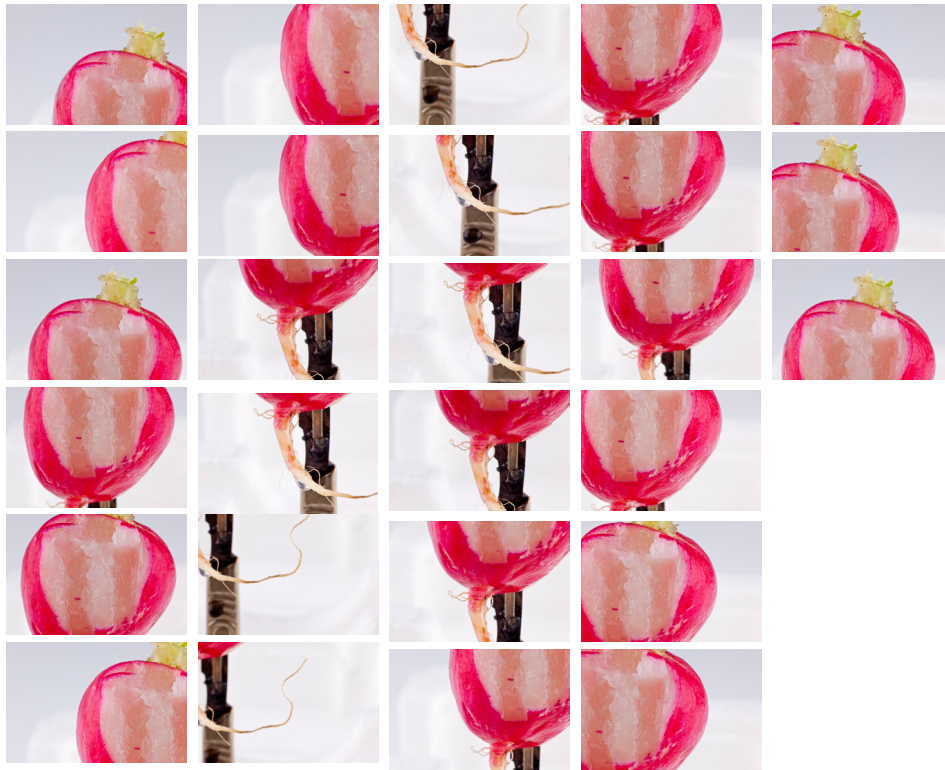


Selected works, macro stitching 18-10-10



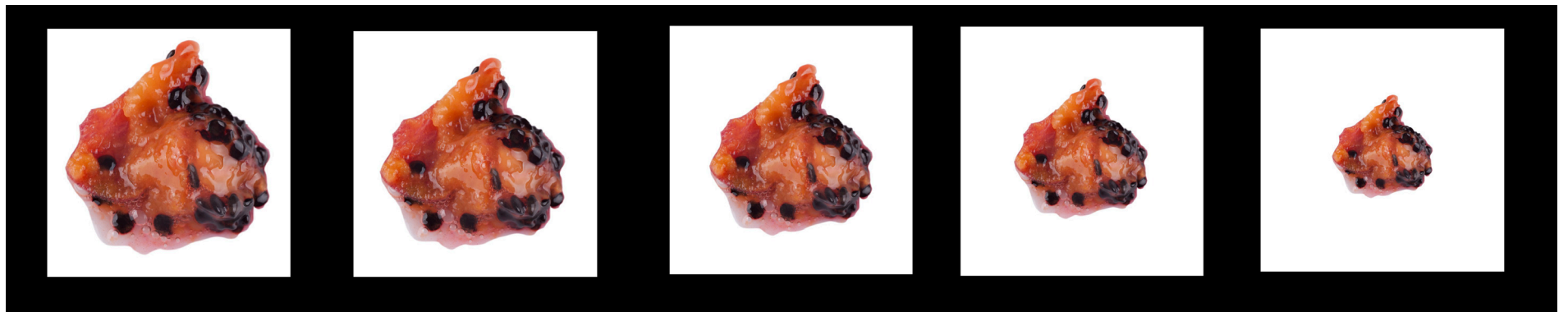
Selected works, macro stitching 3000mm x 500mm 18-10-08





Selected works, macro stitching 18-10-10





Selected works, size experiment 20-10-10



Final exhibition work, 1100mm x 1100mm banana





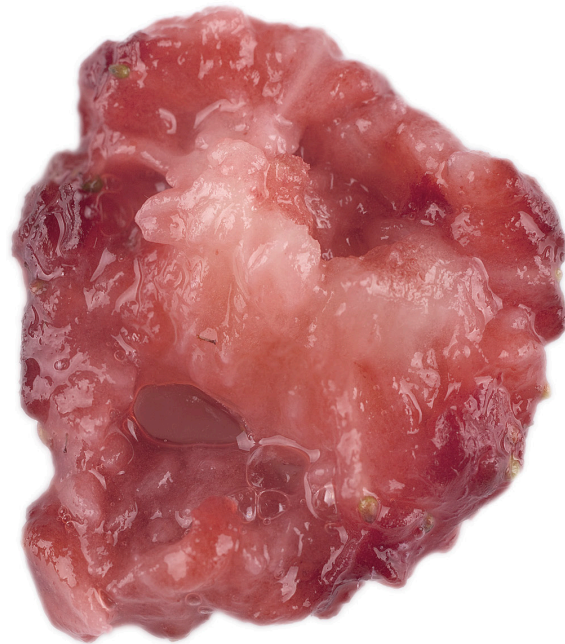
Final exhibition work, 1100mm x 1100mm cucumber



Final exhibition work, 1100mm x 1100mm chips



Final exhibition work, 1100mm x 1100mm chocolate and marshmallow



Final exhibition work, 1100mm x 1100mm strawberry



Final exhibition work, 1100mm x 1100mm passion fruit



