

Margarine toast to sculpture: An exploration of the liminal influences of margarine

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Abstract

Food art, and in particular margarine sculpting, is becoming a niche skill and art form. Food art has a long and rich history but is in decline because of changing food fashions and economic imperatives in the commercial food industry. The focus of this dissertation is to express, through sculpture, 30 years of the writer's personal experiences as a margarine artist. Auto-ethnographical and heuristic methodologies are used to capture this unique perspective. The influence of liminality and the everyday-ness of the medium are two themes that have emerged in this study and which were used to guide the sculptural interpretation. This study contributes a rare insight into an understanding of the artist's mind in relation to the marginal world of food art, particularly margarine sculpture.

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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 (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Margarine toast to sculpture: An exploration of the liminal influences of margarine

Introduction

This exegesis seeks to express the artist's personal experience of liminality through margarine sculpture. Liminality is experienced as a space that is transitional, of being in-between, a journey (Turner, 1969). It is my personal interpretation of experiencing the dual liminal journey of being both the participant and the reflective artist which informs this work.

The use of a variety of foods used as culinary sculpting mediums is revealed, including the medium of fat for sculpting (tallow, butter and margarine). These artistic culinary mediums are well documented throughout history and are also historically well embedded as part of culinary competitions worldwide. Margarine is the artistic medium of choice in this paper. Although it has a long and diverse fat sculpting history, margarine has slowly fallen out of favour – a victim of changing culinary fashion. Additionally, an examination of margarine as an artistic medium outside the culinary arena reveals that its use is not well documented.

The question of whether food can be art or just food is also addressed, as there are many views on what sculpture is. This view has altered over time with artists stretching ideas about what is considered to be sculpture as well as what it is to be considered art. However, the question of whether food is to eat or if food is art is answered by the intention of its creator and the intent of the food artist is to make art.

In short, this is the artist's recollection of 30 years of short, recurring conversations and additionally, over the same period, a reflection on the life of the margarine sculptor's artistic liminal journey. In addition to the reflective liminal journey, comparisons are explored between the slow decline of this art form and the erosion of the traditional family gathering over food.

Chapter 1. Artist's positioning statement

The space that a sculpture commands, the encounters of shape and form, the interplay of light and shadow captures my attention and imagination. I see and create in the round as whole forms. Sculpting transports me to a deep tactile meditational state that is not bound by time or space. I strive for total immersion and the connection that it provides to the sculpture. This allows me to respond to the form on an almost subconscious level, continuously adapting, changing and discovering new aspects without the barrier of thought.

The human face and form is a common theme of my work. I am drawn to the life, movement and expression of the human form. I have found that the true joy of sculpting is the journey and discovery to encapsulate the infinite emotions and stories told within the human body. I work in natural and man-made mediums. Due to my culinary background as a chef, I primarily use pastry margarine. The margarine I use has a plastic quality which is eliding and silken; this allows an effortless translation of thought. When I sculpt with margarine I need only to think and it moves to my will. Working with an ephemeral medium is very liberating in a new work as there is no ghost of past works.

My first serendipitous encounter with margarine sculptures was 30 years ago; as a young chef I was helping co-workers transport and set up their entries in a culinary competition. During the previous weeks, I had witnessed with interest the chefs working on their entries and I remember being excited by the idea that food could be expressed so artistically.

Being my first time at a culinary competition, I was very eager to look around and after helping set up the chefs' displays, we began looking at the other pieces of work on display. Coming upon the margarine sculptures I was transfixed as the others moved on; I studied the



Figure 1. Paul Hamilton. The Statue of Liberty, (1985), (Buffet showpiece, silver). Details: wood, pastry margarine; 90 x 30 x 30 cm

workmanship, the detail and contemplated the construction technique. I remembered feeling uneasy about exposing all that margarine out in the open and it seemed a little excessive, to the point of wasteful. However, this did not put me off and I thought that I could do better than what was on display. Two weeks later, inspired by what I had seen, I sculpted a Statue of Liberty. The results were mixed; the sculpting was good, but the armature construction was very bad as it fell apart, on the buffet, during dinner service.

The next year I entered my first culinary competition with a second (redeeming) Statue of Liberty sculpture (Figure 1; action research, in action). It received a silver medal, and from that point forward I was addicted. I competed in many more competitions and received three Gold, four Silver and two Bronze medals. I also constructed many more sculptures for hotels and restaurants around Auckland.

Once I started teaching culinary arts in 1994, I began tutoring culinary students in margarine sculpting to enter into competitions. In later years, I stopped competing and began judging, most recently at the 2015 National Culinary Competitions.

I also presented a paper at the Art and Food Symposium, Dunedin, New Zealand, 24 August 2012, and displayed a margarine sculpture in the accompanying exhibition. Additionally, I presented a poster at the CAUTHE 2013 conference, Christchurch, New Zealand (11th – 13th



Figure 2. (Photograph). (2013). *Margarine Sculptures: The Power and Grace*, AUT St Paul Gallery 3. 'Chasing Cheetah' (foreground) by Paul Hamilton, and three students' sculptures (background). Details: steel, wood, pastry margarine. 60 x160 x 40 cm.

February) where I received an award for the most innovative poster display. Later that year, I curated a gallery exhibition, *Margarine Sculptures: The Power and Grace*, at AUT St Paul Gallery 3. The exhibition featured on the TV One Seven Sharp programme and combined the work of two culinary schools. The exhibition included work from me and another tutor; however, the majority of pieces were collated from student competitors in the national culinary competitions which had been held a week prior.

During the five day exhibition, I sculpted a margarine cheetah (Figure 2) frozen in full running stride. People seemed to enjoy having a sculptor sculpting within the exhibition, as the majority of the hundred or so people who viewed the exhibition were very interested in margarine and the art of margarine sculpting.

1.1 Epiphanies

There are moments in life that are pivotal but we only recognise these moments and their influence much later. Each of the two sculptures below has an epiphany moment attached to it; each occurred in similar circumstances.

After installing a competition sculpture for judging it was not unusual for competitors to remain in the display area to protect their entry from any accidental damage before judging. While standing back from the 'Neptune' sculpture (Figure 3) I overheard two very senior chefs walking past who casually commented "that's been done hundreds of times, it's an old idea". It only confirmed what I already knew, but I thought that my craftsmanship and artistic skills would be enough to merit a high award. The result was not what I wanted. I began to understand that an original idea is a powerful artistic tool.



Figure 3. (Photograph). (1995). Neptune, (Buffet show piece bronze). Details: wood, steel, copper, pastry margarine;
195 x 60 x 60 cm

The second 'Hongi heads' sculpture (Figure 4) was created some years later. Again as I was hanging back, two girls quickly passed me, one pointing to the 'Hongi Heads' and saying to the other 'that's not food, that's art". This generated an immediate ego boost but more profoundly, it was the first time I had even considered myself to be producing art. Until then, I had always thought of myself as just being a chef and that fleeting moment put a seed in my head that I could be something else, maybe even an artist. Later, I made enquires at a foundry to see if it was possible to get the two life-size heads bronzed.

This was the first and only time that I tried to immortalise any margarine sculpture. The verdict was that it would be too hard to do and far too expensive.



Figure 4. (Photograph). (2005). Hongi Heads, (Buffet show piece – gold).Details: wood, steel, pastry margarine; 40 x 30 x 30 cm

1.2 Release from confined thinking

Up to the commencement of writing this dissertation, my sculpting life had been expressed within the narrow confines of acceptable culinary practice. These restrictions never bothered me until recently – in fact they were metaphorically a kind of security blanket. There was no need to defend or explain what I produced as long as it met the criteria of acceptability and construction standards. I conceitedly thought that with the experience I carried forward I could deliver a masterful piece of art as I had done a number of times in the past.

I was about to do what I had always previously done.

However, I had a revelation when I started this dissertation; all of those comforting and familiar culinary confinements no longer adhered to me or this project. Baptised with a new-found freedom I was discovering a fresh voice as an artist. At the same time, I have also discovered that freedom does not come without its difficulties. It has taken some serious time and effort to decipher what I want to say and how I want to say it.

I embark on this project as a self-taught artist with no formal art training or qualifications. It is not the intention of the researcher to explore the medium itself as part of the project. As previously stated margarine is not a new material to me and the research for the best margarine, through trial and error, has long ago been discovered. Because of my extensive experience with margarine sculpting, an aspect of the research is to explore methods, themes and display spaces that have not yet been used and to investigate the medium's potential outside the context of the culinary domain.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to food art

Can margarine be simultaneously a food and a sculptural art medium? Although it is common to be familiar with a tub of margarine for domestic consumption, margarine and a number of other foods also have a long and rich culinary history as sculptural media.

The traditional purpose of food art is to embellish the food and eating experience. For example, in a large buffet, ice sculptures may be displayed for visual consumption only (i.e. as art form) or small edible vegetable or fruit carvings offered as plate garnishes (i.e. as utilitarian form; Ferguson, 2003). Food art is an entrenched skill in the culinary profession, and a major component in culinary competitions (e.g. New Zealand Culinary Fare, IKA International Culinary Olympics, Expogas Villeroy & Boch Culinary World Cup, and The International Catering Cup). At these competitions a wide variety of everyday food items are included in cold kitchen sculpting categories and can be divided into two main categories: pastry and larder. Food art from the pastry section includes pastry, bread dough, salt dough (not for consumption), blocks of baked salt (also not for consumption) and sugar. Art from sugar was produced firstly from sugar blocks (Sonnenschmidt & Nicolas, 1993) then later after granulated sugar was introduced, molten sugar, pastillage (a paste used on cakes made from icing sugar with gum or gelatine and corn flour and wedding and novelty cake decorations. The larder section includes vegetable and fruit carvings, ice carving (ice is not considered food but is used for culinary display; *Garde manger: Cold kitchen fundamentals*, 2012; Leto, 1989; The Culinary Institute of America, 2000), along with fat sculpting in tallow (Michelle, 2011), butter (Simpson, 2007) and margarine (Hill & Hill, 1988). Although these food media have a respected genealogy as food art, the question arises concerning its identity. Are food sculptures food art or mainstream art and is the difference material?

2.2 Food to eat or food as art?

The question of whether food art is art or food is not the focus of this paper, but is worthy of a brief discussion. Whether food art is crafted to be eaten or just for display purposes, it can have multiple meanings to the viewer.

The *New American Oxford Dictionary* (2015, p.1535) defines sculpture as: "The art of making two or three-dimensional representative or abstract forms esp. by carving stone or wood or by casting metal or plaster". This definition provides guidance as to what a sculpture is, but does not acknowledge the blurred boundary that occurs between food and sculpture and, therefore, food and art.

Lydiate's (2012) review of the landmark Copyright Law judgement of the United Kingdom Supreme Courts, July 2011, *Star Wars* case: *Lucasfilm vs Ainsworth*, helps with an understanding of the art-sculpture nexus. The ruling judge in this case summarised by saying that it is the intention of the artist that defines something as a sculpture and therefore, as art. The intended purpose is paramount and the judge offered this example as part of an explanation; the intention of the artist placing each brick to construct a pile of bricks in the middle of an art gallery floor is a work of art, whereas the same pile of bricks on a construction site is intended as a construction material (i.e. utilitarian and not art; Lydiate, 2012). There are many views on what sculpture is and this view has altered over time, with artists always stretching the boundaries of what is considered to be sculpture as well as art. Food to eat or food as art is therefore determined by the intention of its creator and the intent of the food artist is to make art.

2.3 Sculpting in fat

A variety of foods are commonly used as culinary sculpting media and include the medium of fat for sculpting (tallow, butter and margarine). Margarine is the artistic medium of choice in this dissertation and is a relatively recent addition to a long and diverse fat sculpting history.

One of the oldest forms of fat sculpting that has been recorded is by the Tibetan monks using coloured yak butter in the Tang dynasty (618-906 AD; Cooke, 2010). Simpson (2007) reveals that dairy butter was sculpted extensively as early as 1536 as banquet centrepieces for Pope Pius V. Furthermore, North American dairy companies commissioned gigantic butter sculptures to promote their product, which reached the height of its popularity between 1900 and 1930 (Simpson, 2007).

Tallow is also used to sculpt and is a culinary fat product unlike butter or margarine. Modern sculptural tallow is made from food products (animal fats and wax), but differs in that it is specifically designed for modelling and not intended for consumption.

By comparison margarine is a new addition, as during the time that tallow and butter sculptures were being made, margarine seemed non-existent (Steel, 2005). Although the French had invented margarine (Oleo) in 1869, it did not become commercially available in small amounts until the 1900s (Dupré, 1999). Worldwide, governments legislated to either significantly inhibit or exclude margarine from the marketplace (Dupré, 1999). New Zealand in this respect, was no different; however, in 1971 New Zealand's restrictive margarine trading laws were eased (Steel, 2005). Subsequently, the previously hard to source and expensive margarine rapidly grew in popularity and manufacturing was started in New Zealand soon after. This lowered the price considerably, making it a relatively economical artist's medium (Steel, 2005). Food

sculpture is food and, therefore, it is ephemeral, fleeting and temporary, as the following section explains.

2.4 Ephemeral art

Food can be both food and art and as explained in section 2.2, the intended purpose determines how it is to be categorised. If the determination is as art, what art genre does it fit? An inherent aspect to all food art is that it decays and rots; it putrefies, it has a best before date, a use by date, and, inherently, a limited life. Art made from food is therefore fleeting, temporary and transient and in this way, it is therefore ephemeral. As an art genre, the term 'ephemeral art' is used to describe art that is short-lived, as opposed to those artworks that, if cared for, will last several lifetimes.

There are limitless construction media for ephemeral art, which include vulnerable organic materials found in nature, such as twigs, leaves, wood, stones (Metrick, 2003), sand to create the intricate mandalas of the Navajo people and Tibetan monks, (Krippner, 1997) or fanciful beach sand drawings (Denevan, 2015) and sculptures (Pattnaik, 2015), or ice (Azevedo, 2015), also used for sculpting. These natural materials are generally displayed in and made from the natural surroundings, then left in situ to decay, degrade or wash away over time (i.e. become recycled).

However, there are innumerable artistic interpretations of the ephemeral. In 'Framing the Ephemeral' (2009), Purpura discusses a variety of ephemeral art, such as Oscar Munoz for Memorial (2005) painting faces on a smooth hot pavement with water, only to evaporate before the face is even finished, and Zoe Leonard's work *Strange Fruit (for David)* (1992-1997) where saved fruit skins were repaired with treads, wire and buttons, displayed and scattered on a gallery floor. Purpura (2009) suggests that artists that engage in ephemeral art "explore vastly different circumstances featuring objects, artists and artworks that resist easy categorisation" (p. 11).

One aspect true of all ephemeral art work is that the artist of the ephemeral sets out with the intention and knowledge that whatever is created, no matter how much time, complexity or effort is required, the resulting art work will always be temporary. The fleeting, short-lived, anti-art (non-permanent) nature of ephemeral art sets it apart from more traditional notions of art, but it is this nature that also holds some of the fascination and attraction to this art form. It is a fleeting presence somewhat akin to looking at a rainbow – one cannot defer the pleasure by intending to look later because, later, it will be gone.

Although margarine is man-made (Steel, 2005), once sculpted it has a limited shelf life of only four to six months. Moreover most food art works are never intended to be eaten and are

therefore considered as waste, which is normally recycled in some way. Food used for art is temporary by nature and, therefore, positioned within the category of ephemeral art. As an ephemeral medium, margarine art is well established as a culinary norm but not necessarily used and accepted in the mainstream art world.

2.5 Fat as art

As discussed, the use of margarine as an artistic culinary medium is well documented throughout history and established as part of culinary competitions worldwide. However, margarine as an artistic medium outside the culinary arena is not so well documented

The prolific contemporary artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) used fat as a recurring material. For Beuys, fat (tallow) represented “change, freedom, change of state, fluidity and chaos, from warmth processes through cooling form, order, containable structure (Tindall, 1998, p. 288). Beuys says of working with fat “that it is a supremely alchemical material ... it is almost living quality...it symbolizes different stages of awareness” (as cited in Tisdall, 1998, p.288).

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 5. Joseph Beuys, *Fat Chair*, 1964-1985, wood, glass, metal, fabric, paint, fat and thermometer, 183 x 155 x 64 cm. The Tate Modern Museum, London, UK.

These stages of awareness are emphasised in Beuys' 1964, 'Fat Chair' (Figure 5). Beuys placed a wedge-shaped piece of fat on the seat of a wooden chair and allowed it to degrade and putrefy over time. The resulting sculpture was displayed in a sealed temperature controlled vitrine (glass cabinet) until 1985 – a period of 21 years – by which time it had finally degraded to the point of disintegration (Borer, 1997).

Taylor (2012, p. 12) comments on Beuys' work:

It's all about the fat: the way it looks, smells, feels – the way it oozes and seeps, jiggles and ripples, moulds and melts – the way it is stored and burnt ... Beuys made art fat. Real fat. Fat is one of the most unlikely materials with which to make art. Traditionally associated with excess and waste, fat is supposed to be slimmed, trimmed, and eliminated; it is unseemly, inelegant, and ugly. There is something gross, even grotesque, about fat. Far from aesthetically appealing, fat is undeniably abject.

Taylor's observation and the way in which Beuys uses and displays fat in sculptures clearly illustrates a contradiction to its use in the culinary world, where it performs as an artistic

beautification and adornment of food. Conversely, the grotesqueness of fat that Taylor alludes to could also account for the difficulty in finding other artists using fat. Beuys had infinite freedom to express his ideas through art, unlike the restrictions that are imposed on culinary margarine sculptors, who work in a commercial sponsored environment (Hill & Hill, 1988). Beuys' artistic use of fat (Taylor, 2012) has no such culinary restriction. This project work is neither sponsored nor produced for commercial purposes and is therefore beyond the confines of the historical constraints of culinary sculpture. This allows the project carte blanche to fully explore and express a liminal interpretation through the medium of margarine.

2.6 Liminal space

Liminality is experienced as a space that is transitional, of being in-between, or in a journey (Turner, 1969). Arnold van Gennep wrote *The Rites of Passage* in 1909 (van Gennep, 1960). He suggests there are three stages of liminality: separation (i.e. from the norm); transitional (positioned outside of the norm, suspended from society); and incorporation (that moment of re-entering normal social space). Turner (1969) drew on van Gennep's foundation work to propose that liminality was a modern social experience that expressed the idea of 'being' in in-between states. Turner named this state of being as 'betwixt and between' socially recognised or established categories. Moreover, Turner (1969) suggests that the three stages of van Gennep's liminal space are based on a stable and predictable society and adds that society is in continual flux in which post-liminality is not experienced and where perpetual liminality can exist.

Liminality as an art subject has infinite scope for interpretation. The following are two diverse sculptural examples of liminality.

Andrea Eimke (2010), a Dutch woman living in New Zealand, investigated being between the two cultures of birthplace and country of residence, of being of one culture while living in another. Eimke expressed her personal experience of liminality through a sculptural installation of hanging fabric made out of paper mulberry tapa, cotton-polyester thread, soluble interfacing and free-form machine sewing. Eimke described walking through the interactive liminal spaces between the hanging cloth as a transitory place of light and shade as the cloth moved in the breeze blocking and opening differing paths as her reflective expression of the liminal.

James Marshall (Thomson, 2007) offered a different interpretation of the liminal through the medium of ceramics. Marshall used shape and form, glaze textures and colours to reference his study and practice of Zen Buddhism meditation and the liminal space between silence and thought.

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Figure 6: James Marshall – Leaf Green #334 (2009)
Details: glazed ceramics; 23 1/2 x 27 x 4 inches.

Although the sculptural examples are different, the connection with the work of both Eimke and Marshall and most other artistic expressions of liminality (including this project) is that the artists are trying to express to the viewer/audience their personal experiences of the state of being; of betwixt and between. One aspect of this project also seeks to express a personal experience of liminality, which is that margarine sculpting and the artist (me) sit in a perpetual liminal space of discovery.

2.7 Summary

A description of food art and the history of fat sculpting has merely been outlined in this review. The restrictions that governed prior culinary works do not apply to this particular endeavour and have a limited influence on this project, allowing creative freedom. Any similarity to preceding liminal works is merely a coincidental expression of the artist's personal experience of liminal space. However, this artistic interpretation differs from that of previous applications as it incorporates twin aspects of the same experience. In short, this expression reflects the artist's recollection of 30 years of short, recurring conversations and additionally, over the same period, interpretations of the artistic liminal journey, resulting in a two-fold insight into the artist's liminal experience and being. This dissertation proposes that food art (or more specifically margarine sculpting) lies in the domain of ephemeral art. In support of this, the infinite artistic variations that ephemeral art can encompass, such as Joseph Beuys' numerous

fat sculptures, have been reviewed. Only one artist who has used fat (tallow specifically) as an art medium could be sourced, illustrating the rarity of the use of fat as a medium in the art world. Moreover, the absence of examples of margarine used as an art medium outside the culinary arena is further confirmation of the uniqueness of this medium in the art world.

Although an exhaustive search of the body of knowledge in this area is beyond the scope of this exegesis, a number of elements of liminality and aspects of ephemeral art previously used by other artists have been identified. However, the combination of an auto-ethnographic, dual liminal interpretation through the ephemeral use of pastry margarine has not been identified. Taking these factors into consideration, it is evident that there is a gap within the literature that requires more research and that this work, therefore, has an original contribution to make to the wider body of knowledge.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The methods and techniques used to explore the liminal aspects of this research are informed by practice-lead research using heuristic (Moustakas, 1990) and auto-ethnographical (Denzin, 2014) methodological approaches. This practice-lead research (Piggot- Irvine, 2009) is informed by the data that the auto-ethnography develops; these data are processed using heuristic methods to inform action-based research. Although it may seem necessarily complex and cumbersome, the three methods complement each other as each has similar cross-over elements.

The following will explain each of the methods individually then discuss how they complement the research.

3.1 Heuristic research

Heuristics enable a person to discover or learn something for themselves; it is a hands-on or interactive heuristic approach to learning (Abate & Jewell, 2001, p. 799).

The six phases of Moustakas' (1990) heuristic research consists of initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis – a deeply reflective process (Schön, 1991) that enables the researcher to clarify the question and then deeply internalise the problem/question to find solutions. This internalisation is aided by the intrinsic abilities of the inner thought process, mixed with life experiences and intuition. Moustakas suggests that a large part of the heuristic process is being able to let information macerate in the subconscious until there is either an epiphanic moment, illumination, insight, or a seed of an idea, as connections and clarity start to form. These initial ideas can then be further developed and clarified or discarded until a shortlist emerges that has the strongest representation of a creative solution to the research question.

3.2 Auto-ethnography

Auto-ethnography is a sub-discipline of ethnography, which is defined as the art and science of describing a group or culture (Fetterman, 1998). Denzin (2014) describes auto-ethnography as being personally focused on the recording of a person's life and all its particularity in a historical moment. It is an interrogation of historical, cultural, and biographical conditions that brought the person to the events being studied. These conditions are turning points and moments of epiphany that sharpen the memory and become part of a person's life story (Denzin, 2014).

This research is a physical interpretation of the significant moments of my margarine sculpting life that make up my story. The research presents and considers the realisations and minor moments of epiphany that may not have had an influence for some years. Also included are the recurring minor epiphanic instances that looked at in isolation seem meaningless, but when viewed cumulatively with deep reflection, gain increased importance.

The recorded data fed and informed the heuristic process to direct the development of an answer to be processed and then artistically interpreted through action-lead research into a sculptural expression of liminality.

3.3 Action research

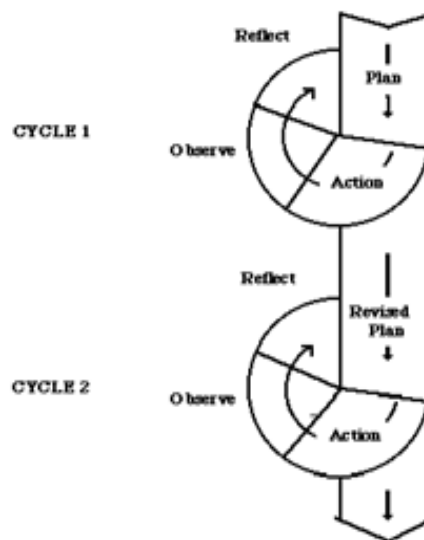


Figure 7. Action planner. Kemmis & McTaggart, (1988). *The Action planner* (3rd ed.)

Action-lead research is conducted by and for the person taking the action for the improvement or refining of his/her actions (Sagor, 2011). Action research has an iterative process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, which keeps cycling until the problem is resolved (Piggot Irvine, 2009). However, Lewin (1946, as cited in Piggot Irvine) notes that these stages may not be linear and flexibility is needed as there is an overlapping of action and reflection.

These stages are best represented in the diagram above (Figure 7). As you create the work you reflect and analyse on the results to see if it moves the work closer to answering the question of whether more work needs to be done, then plan any re-adjustments and start the process again, further analysing and refining until a satisfactory answer is found.

As a sculptor, I begin with a heuristic impression, which is like a question in my mind's eye. I then use the pragmatic process of action research to direct it to reach its full realisation.

Throughout the process, I am continually reflecting and analysing the direction of the work and its potential to answer the question I have formed. Through personal experience, I have found that a key skill to make action research productive is to be absolutely honest when observing/reflecting on information. This means that I must not hesitate to discard facets of the work which do not move the project forward, as well as to re-work what does work into the next plan. The next iteration/cycle of the plan then needs to be placed into action, relentlessly moving towards a solution.

3.4 Summary

In this research project, heuristic and action-based research is tightly interwoven. Auto-ethnography has been used to capture parts of my margarine sculpting life history and personal moments as a means of informing that intuitive, tacit knowing of the creative thought processes.

It is the intention of this research, that by using and combining auto-ethnographical and heuristic methodological approaches, a viewer will be able to explore liminal space from both external (performance work) and internal (auto-ethnographical reflection) perspectives, which will translate into an immersive liminal experience and an insight into the intrinsic influence of liminality.

Chapter 4. Discussion

This project facilitates the achievement of an important personal objective for the performance work, which is to fully utilise the opportunity to move away from the confines of culinary sculpting and approach margarine sculpting from a fresh artistic perspective.

The first iteration of this work was to melt margarine with fire as a metaphor for food consumption. The internal margarine was coloured, and as it melted and oozed from the sculpture, it emphasised both the ephemeral nature and the liminal transformative properties of margarine (Figure 8).



Figure 8. (Photograph). (2015) Burn rate and melting experiment of internally coloured margarine candles.
Details; Wood, steel, wire, candle wax colouring and wicks. Size: 60 x 40 x 30 cm



Figure 9. Hamilton, K. (Photographer). (2015) Burn rate and melting experiment of internally coloured margarine figurine. Details: wood, steel, wire, candle wax colouring and wicks. Size: 60 x 40 x 30 cm

I constructed candles of various thicknesses and began burning experiments to gauge burn rates and the melting characteristics of margarine as a candle. Before I began the margarine candle tests, I expected that margarine would melt much like candle wax; however, I observed in the experimentation that margarine does not burn or melt as wax. I discovered that the flame is influenced by the ratio between the candle girth and the thickness of the wick, which have to be adjusted to achieve an optimum burn rate. I wanted the margarine to fully melt and run off to create a new sculpture; however, it did not naturally run off as candle wax does and needed human intervention to cut gullies on the side and keep them open before the runoff process began, as presented in the centre and right images (Figure 8). I was encouraged by the texture and twisted colour of the melted margarine because I could see the potential of the psychedelic sixties swirl of colour totally transforming the classical human sculpture into a pop-art-like installation with the stunted armature raising out from the centre like a rebirthed ugly interpretation of Venus de Milo.

Once I had sufficient melting data, I utilised a small frame from a previous work for a rough mock-up of a standing man (Figure 9). This armature was chosen because I was developing an idea for the final piece of a near full-sized melting margarine figure. This experiment was to gauge the effect that the armature and the increased volume and shape of the margarine would have on the burn rate and melting effect. The effect that I wanted was a near complete destruction of the sculpture. This would show the armature as a physical memory of the liminal

threshold as the sculpture progressed through a transformative journey from a human figure, moving and melting into its unknown final form.

The result was not as I had envisioned, as the burn rate was very slow and not destructive enough to fully transform the sculpture. Before the next iteration, I needed to investigate much larger candle wicks for a more distressed and destructive result. However, I had safety concerns – that a larger sculpture and the increased volume of margarine (fat) would require a larger wick and flame size to melt the fat and I realised there was an increased danger that the margarine would catch fire.

During the wick/burning research, I learned that no open flames were permitted in the proposed gallery space in which I intended to make the sculpture burn and melt over the course of the exhibition. This new information started me on a search for new ideas. For inspiration, I began to reflect on the data collected from the auto-ethnography and then I had an epiphany. I realised that I had still been working within the old and restrictive culinary boundaries (the ones I had tried to escape from) by making a ‘culinary acceptable’ sculpture of a man as a starting point. Naturally I began to question the honesty and integrity of the representation of the original concept in light of this epiphany.

Although I knew I needed to change, I found myself resisting, as I was mentally and perhaps emotionally invested in my idea and had put considerable energy and time into the flame/melting line of thought. In the end, however, there needed to be too many compromises made to the original concept to make it work, so I knew I had to change direction.

The words of Beuys rang in my ears: “Sculpture that originates in speech ... form concepts ... form to emotion and to desire. ... If I strictly adhere to this course, then the images ... will come to meand concepts will take shape” (Stachelhaus, 1991, p. 66). Taking Beuys’ words as inspiration, I abandoned the melting margarine concept and changed to a direction that better aligned with my objective of creating work truly outside the bounds of culinary acceptability.

I had now arrived at a different line of thought. This was influenced by the people that talk to me when I am working on my sculptures, my journey as an artist and the liminal nature of margarine. The question is: Why are the reactions of people encountering margarine sculpture for the first time so similar?

4.1 Liminal space

“People act towards things on the basis of the meaning they have for them”.

(Blumer, 1986, p. 2)

This project investigates the domestic product margarine and the social and symbolic meanings that both the viewer and artist place on it when presented and discussed as an artistic medium. I seek to know how the viewer uses a domestic understanding of margarine to assess and understand margarine sculpture. It is the journey to understanding that creates the liminal nature of the encounter and by association, of myself and the sculpture.

People approached me while I worked on my margarine sculptures and naturally brought to the conversation what they knew; a knowledge base, a personal perception and, as Schutz (Wagner, 1970) suggests, a pre-constituted knowledge of the world. How people have come to have this personal perception of the world, put very simply, is a result of how we order and make sense of our place and self in this world, by acting and reacting within our community, society or world. Anthropologists suggest that people are engaging and being shaped by social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Dillon, 2010; Mead, 1934).

The social construction of knowledge is created by a community to form an objective social reality (e.g. language, things, food and tools). That is to say, we give labels and meaning to things or symbols to organise our reality in ways that make sense to us as we experience that reality (Dillon, 2010). Therefore, our world is full of symbols that we experience and interact with, but this is not done in solitude. Mead (1934) suggested that ‘symbolic interactionism’ describes the shared symbols that we give significance and meaning to. These meanings are communicated and are derived from our consciousness to manipulate, interpret and use as shared symbols. Mead (1934, p. 289) refers to the world of shared symbols as “everyday life” and Schutz (Wagner, 1970) calls it a ‘life world’. It is through this world that we share with other individuals, that we come to know that world through the everyday ways of organising reality.

It is primarily through the everyday ways of family that we have learnt to socialise, through observation and interaction, the meaning of symbols (Dillon, 2010). Furthermore, the universality of symbols means that they produce shared responses and understandings (Dillon, 2010) which can create the same meanings for all individuals of a society or social group (Mead, 1934). In other words, as a society, people have more similarities than differences between each other. On that premise it may be safe to say, that people who experience the same phenomenon or symbols have, on the whole, the potential for similar or

the same reactions (allowing for some variation). Many universally known symbols are part of everyday domestic life, so much so that people may no longer question the inclusion or exclusion of them in our family lives.

Food and food rituals are a common everyday part of domestic life that we have learnt to label and use through social interaction within our community (family). Some foods and food rituals may carry cultural and/or seasonal significance (Christmas ham, Easter eggs), whereas other foods/rituals blend into the everyday fabric of (family) life (salt, sugar, bread, breakfast, lunch and dinner). These foods and food rituals are an unquestioned part of our everyday lives. These symbols enter into, as Shutz (1962) observes, a 'pre-constituted knowledge' of the everyday.

This understanding of the symbolic nature of everyday life is important to an understanding of observers' responses to margarine sculpture. It is when viewers encountering margarine used in a way that does not fit within the universally learnt meanings and uses of margarine that we begin to question that which we thought was true. It is when presented with margarine that has been used as an artist's sculpture medium that observers are possibly entering the liminal threshold of discovery. And the new discovery may, in a small way, alter the manner in which they look at the unquestioned every day after encountering the unfamiliar and unknown art of margarine sculpting.

Using these encounters as a basis, I started to think about what references people may use to help in understanding margarine sculpture. To people, margarine is a domestic product that sits in the domestic home as part of the everyday; an almost invisible product that we reach for when to make a sandwich or 'butter' a piece of toast.

My aim was to sculpturally explore the connection and coherence that margarine sculpture has with the common domestic ritual of breakfast and those pre-conceived, personal, socially constructed and pre-constituted views people bring to their first liminal encounters with margarine art.

4.2 A new direction

The new direction of my work was also in part a reference to the gathering for family breakfast at which one encounters those unnoticed everyday domestic objects and symbols that hold a connection with margarine. These shared symbols are reflected in family culture as an integral part of the family gathering at the dining table, where the day's events are shared and reconnection with the family is made. Additionally, Hammons and Fiese (2011) suggest that shared family mealtimes may have a positive effect, improving the nutritional health of children and adolescents. However, the direct interaction over food at the dining table is under

increased pressure as half of adolescents see family meal times as negative or unimportant (Gallegos, Dziurawiec, Fozdar, & Abernethie, 2011). This disinterest is reflected in the fact that the incidence of families who gather regularly to dine together on a weekly basis is diminishing (Kiefer, 2004).

Margarine is also diminishing; a victim of the vagaries of fashion. The culinary world is a business where the primary aim is to cut costs and make profit. The fashion of food and food service is continually evolving to the next trend and as it does this, there are less opportunities for artistic food displays (Hill & Hill, 1988).

I have, therefore, created sculptures depicting objects from the breakfast table as a metaphor, suggesting parallels between the demise of margarine sculpting in the hospitality industry and the change in attitude to the family gathering at the table. Both are victims of today's changing societal views; both are in an ever-changing liminal state.

While creating the work, I observed that I was beginning to experience an identifiable state of liminality. This was due to the decision to move away from soft sculpture/armature supported construction (Figure 2), which I had always used and felt comfortable with, to approach the margarine from a new angle as if it were a hard sculpture medium like stone (no armature). Although I have an intimate knowledge of the medium, I found the new construction approach placed me in the liminal state of learning a totally new set of fabrication concepts. I am now faced with problems that I have never previously encountered and as this project is moving forward I too am moving through a liminal process of learning new skills and thought processes.

The hard sculpture approach that I have moved to is to create an illusion of carving into a marble block (represented by the margarine), which reveals a piece of the domestic, of the everyday, as if captured and frozen in stone. The marble block look created in the raw untouched exterior of the margarine plays to the permanence of the fine art medium and symbolises a subconscious desire to preserve for posterity, contrasted against the slow erosion of both the family food gathering and the demise of margarine art sculptures.

Congruently, preserving a form for posterity in an ephemeral medium creates a juxtaposition, an image of futility in that one knows the pointlessness, but acts in the face of the inevitable.

Chapter 5. The process

This section describes examples from my project to illustrate the process of development during the research process. I have tried to capture a moment in time that reflects modern domestic moments moving forward; a time that has progressed from the pomp and ceremony that breakfast once was – tea served from a tea pot with cups and saucers – is now reduced to service from a cup containing a tea bag. The pre-sliced bread has emerged from the unsliced Sunday loaf, the milk jug is replaced by a plastic bottle and the sit-down meal is replaced by the meal in the hand – eating on the run.

5.1 The toaster

The sculpture is designed to look as if it is carved out of stone, providing resonances of an archaeological find. Figure 10 shows 'The toaster', a block of margarine with two simple side-by-side slots removed from the top. The overall shape and texture of the margarine is as it was cast from the factory, untouched and raw. This acts as a positioning statement within the exhibition to position the observer within the breakfast genre.

This was the first sculpture to be made and I was hesitant to start. The difficulties were that it was a new approach to sculpting more akin to hard sculpting than the soft sculpting I was used to. There were also difficulties caused by the very soft outside of the margarine that could not be touched or altered as I wanted the extruded detail to be preserved, so handling the outside



Figure 10. Hamilton, K. (Photographer). (2015). Close-up of the rough break texture of margarine toaster. Details: pastry margarine

needed to be minimalised. Therefore, I kept the original packaging on the margarine as much as possible (red plastic in the background of Figure11)

I wanted the top of the margarine to look like it had just been pulled away and a rough cut of margarine exposed. Unlike stone, which does not crack, margarine has a pliable quality which caused some problems recreating the stone break look when I initially tried to break it. Because it is such a large block of 12.5 kilos (200 x 350 x 600mm) it would not simply break by pulling it by hand. I tried a number of techniques and finally found the effect I was looking for by using wood chisels of various widths, which had the leverage strength to break the margarine.

The intention was to put the two slots on the top of the block of margarine to resemble a toaster. To achieve this I traced the opening of the toaster and used that as a stencil to cut out the area by placing the paper over the top of the block lightly with the two slots cut out. I could not draw or mark the margarine in any way as this would alter the original form that I wanted to preserve. I decided to cut across the block with some fine guitar wire around each piece of wood and as it did this, the wire twisted and created a twist notch; I used three strings before I completed the cut. Pulling the wire through was harder than I thought it would be and the cut was not straight, as I had envisioned it. After cutting the block, I wanted to use the wire to cut out a clean line for the two slots, so the next stage was getting the thin wire through the block. I had to pierce a hole and to do that I had to hold the block. Careful attention was paid to how I handled the outside of the block and how it was placed on the work bench so as not to disturb the outside and the fine cut edges. I found handling the margarine problematic in that I needed to apply pressure to make the hole, yet I could not actually hold the margarine in case I damaged it. All the crisp cut edges from the initial wire cut had to stay as pristine as possible for an invisible reattachment and the outside of the margarine had to stay as if it were extruded. The top of the block where I had broken it off with that rough aesthetic texture also needed to remain pristine. I came to the realisation that I set myself the task to sculpt this piece of work without the ability to actually hold it and that problem came up during the process of trying to carve it.

I solved the problem by just taking the process very slowly, making small incisions until I could get the wire through the hole. The next stage involved making the hole larger by using the cutting wire. Because the wire was so fine, the margarine would stick back together behind the cut and it was not as easy to pry apart as I thought it would be, although it cut cleanly which produced the effect I was looking for. After the holes were completed, I trimmed the edges with hard edged tools, chisels and knives to get a carved look in the margarine.

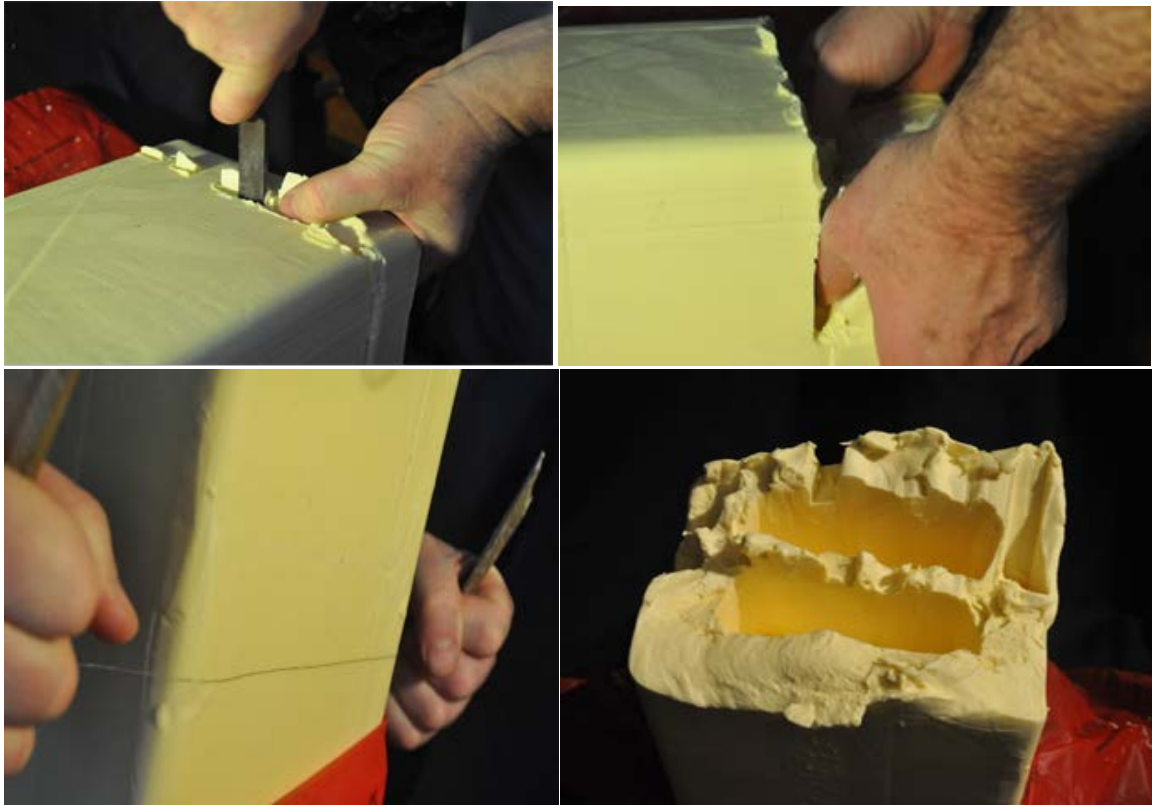


Figure 11. Hamilton, K. (Photographer). (2015). Using wood chisels to pry open margarine block (Top right).Using hands to create a broken stone effect (Right).Wire cutting tool (Bottom left). Toaster with slots and rough stone like texture (Right).Details: pastry, margarine, wood chisels, guitar wire.

Once the slots were completed, I placed it back on top of the original block. However, I found in my effort to make the holes as precise as possible, I had inadvertently touched the sharp crisp cut edges and left finger marks where it would show the carver's influence, which I did not want. I found that the major difficulty in this piece was not cutting the holes and making precise cuts, but actually attaching the two pieces together to replicate the manufacturer's extruding patterns and remove any evidence of the cut.

This new method of sculpting needed patience and the development of new techniques. Unlike soft carving, where I could make mistakes, learn by my errors and infinitely re-adjust, this method needed pre-planning, precise cuts and practice.



Figure 12. Hamilton, K. (photographer). (2015). Careful handling of the surface was required to preserve the factory extrusion markings of; longitudinal lines and repeating patterns on the face of the 12.5 kg block of margarine. Details: Pastry margarine

5.2 The plate

The empty plate – the speed of the modern breakfast is so fast that often food never sees or needs a plate.

A metaphor of the dwindling need for the plate suggests the question: ‘Is eating equipment now superseded by food in the hand?’ Has breakfast become a box, drink, burger, or burrito? Is life moving so fast that there is a need and demand to eat on the run?

The construction for this metaphor was around the idea that the plate was thrown on a potter’s wheel, except, in reverse, the instrument (i.e. the wheel) stayed still and the shaping tool moved. I first had to create a plate-shaped cutting tool. Using a standard catering plate and margarine held within paper, I pressed a length of margarine on to a plate to make a copy of the profile. The margarine was held in paper, so it did not stick to the plate and was easy to remove – in fact it created a clean shape to trace. After the profile was transferred on to paper and cut out, I copied this template to a strong aluminium sheet to make the cutting profile. After further refining and development, a good replication of the original plate profile emerged. A spike was added later to centre the cutting tool, as I found after some tests that it needed a guide to create an accurate round plate shape.

The margarine block was not wide enough to get the whole life size plate on it. I therefore considered adding the missing part of the plate, although there were some difficult construction problems to solve if I did this. For example, how would it be supported and connected securely to the block? While writing this up, I had an idea; the missing piece of the plate could be part of a broken plate fallen on to the plinth. This could figuratively speak to the final breaking of tradition of the regular family gathering over food or even that the family have no useful



Figure 13. Hamilton, K. (Photographer). (2015). Pressing paper covered margarine (Top left to right). Profile and sketch shape. Cutting tool with centre spike. (Middle left to right). Detail of plate profile in the margarine. Final shape of plate in margarine (Bottom left to right). Stone chiselled effect on end of plate block. Details: aluminium plate, pastry margarine.

purpose for it any more. I was not sure that this would fit well with the central message or theme of the demise of the family breakfast, but the idea will be something to keep in mind to develop later if it fits the main theme.

5.2 Tea cups, teabags and spoon

5.2.1 Cups



Figure 14. Hamilton, K. (Photographer). (2015). Rough model of the cups, teabag string and tag.
Details: pastry margarine.

Figure 14 shows the first rough study of stylised tea cups with tea bag, tags and protruding handles. This piece is less stylised and more detailed suggesting a reflection of the increasing complexity of life. In this piece the cups protrude too far out from the block; they need to be a more integral part of the block and partially hidden within it. Sculpted on the same piece is the handle of a plastic milk bottle. I was undecided if this should remain in the teacups sculpture or be part of a separate new block. There is a strong association between the tea and milk that would justify including the plastic bottle, but its inclusion needs more thought as I wanted the cups and the teabag as a single focus to emphasise the change.

5.2.2 Tea bag, tag and string

After some experimentation, I developed a method to make the brewing tea bag that hangs from the cup and also the used teabag. I started with an actual tea bag, tag and string, and dipped these into melted margarine as if making a dipped candle. The results were not satisfactory as the string was too thick and after coating it looked too bulky and the paper tag was not sufficiently well coated to hide the printing. After analysing the first model and making some notes, I started on a second piece and, by cutting a kitchen paper towel to the tag's dimensions and using yellow cotton for the string, it reduced the bulk of the form and eliminated the printing. The same dipping process was used and the margarine coated both the cotton thread and the paper towel well. After repeated cooling and dipping, the process resulted in a good depth of margarine and because the starting structure was very thin, allowing a build-up of margarine layers, it began to resemble the actual size of a teabag tag. The thickness of margarine is important because it will provide me with a platform to carve text on to the teabag. However, I have some reservations about whether any writing will be clearly visible on the tag, as fine details can be absorbed by the monotone yellow colour of the margarine. To make the text easily seen, lighting over the writing on the tag will be crucial and by adjusting the angle of the lighting source to cast a shadow on the text will provide a contrast for more emphasis. Additionally, after margarine is melted it cools to a brittle consistency and is very fragile which easily breaks off the cotton. For this reason, I will complete and attach the tea bag, tag and string just before the exhibition to prevent accidental damage.

5.2.3 Teaspoon

The actual presentation of the tea bag, separate from the bulk piece, is still to be decided; either the used teabag sits directly on the plinth, or lies in a container such as a side plate. As I was writing these notes I had an epiphany – as Moustakas suggests, that after incubation comes moments of illumination and enlightenment where all of the information comes together in a moment of inspiration. The result of this inspiration is that the teabag should be squeezed up, used and in a teaspoon sitting on the plinth, as if it has been just taken out of the cup. This final choice is the one I decided to use.

Alongside the cups on the plinth sitting separately, is a margarine teaspoon with a squashed strained teabag, again as a metaphor of the changing pace of life, as the tea is now not allowed to steep before it is rushed to the table. Development models of the teaspoon were

encouraging as, within six iterations, a successful piece was achieved. I was able to produce a fine sharp profile and replicate the thinness of the steel teaspoon, however due to the teaspoon's fine construction and the ephemeral nature of margarine (like the tag and string), the final construction will be completed closer to the exhibition. Additionally, also due to the fragile ephemeral nature of the fine structure of the teaspoon, I may have to make four or five replacement copies for the exhibition as I think that they will not last more than a few hours before deteriorating under gallery conditions.

The liminal aspects of margarine, my sculpting journey and the viewer's first encounter are represented in the media, the self-portrait and the genre of the subject matter and the liminal movement from simple form to complex, suggesting the increasingly complex world of everyday life. The ephemeral stone like forms are a metaphor of the hopelessness of trying to halt both parallel liminal journeys, trying to slow the decline of margarine art and the gathering of families to eat.

5.3. Future work

There are four further sculptures in the exhibition: spreads, the bread loaf, a plastic milk bottle and finally, a self-portrait of me with a breakfast drink in one hand while using a cell phone in the other, suggesting the liminal relationship between the artist, the viewer and the art media. The subject material is an acknowledgement to the possible references people use in those first liminal encounters with margarine sculptures. I include a representation of myself as an integral part of the viewer's liminal experience. The sculptures start with a simple form with the Toaster, moving to a more complex and realistic rendering. Here I wanted to reflect, through form, that life is getting faster and more complex. The marble likeness of the forms are a way of trying to preserve or capture for posterity and halt the slow erosion of both the family breakfast gathering and the demise of the art of margarine sculpting. I have always accepted that my art form of margarine sculpting is a micro-niche art genre. It has always been a niche art form to the wider public and that is part of the public's fascination, but now within the culinary environment, it is also becoming a micro-niche (lost) art form.

Chapter 6. Reflection

I embarked on this artistic journey full of confidence; how naive I was to the complexities that awaited me. A major revelation was contained in my textbook on heuristics (Moustakas, 1990). I had such an affinity with every aspect of the heuristic process which I had always used, but did not know existed. It was if Moustakas had written this book specifically with me in mind.

I have also learnt that my creative process is very intuitive and internal and that there is a skill to verbalising, capturing and analysing that process, which meant I had to investigate and carefully consider all options before moving forward. I would like to change Edison's (1903) quote and substitute 'genesis' for 'creativity' to read: 'Creativity is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration' (Rawson & Miner, p. 159. 2006). By embracing the method of action-lead research, I have realised that the act of working and doing is, for me, an important catalyst for inspiration.

The combination of action-lead research and heuristics with auto-ethnography made me analyse every aspect of how I approached and developed this project. By combining all three methods it made me consider my past, how I had got to this point, how I actually think (including how I think about myself) and how that affects my approach and view of the world.

Reflecting on this project I realised that not only was the subject matter liminal, but from its conception all aspects of this process have been in a liminal state, residing in a juxtaposition of the art and culinary worlds.

It starts from the choice of medium, margarine, with which the art world is unfamiliar, but to the culinary world it is steeped in history. My choice to do an art-based exegesis as a Masters of International Hospitality Management (MIHM) student in lieu of a dissertation is breaking new ground and has resulted in a hybrid text; a merger, incorporating elements of an artist's based exegesis and an academic's dissertation. When interacting with people from two different faculties I felt like I was being treated as a curiosity for differing reasons. The management side would ask questions about the unfamiliar exegesis process and from the art side questions stemmed from the unusual combination of a MIHM student using margarine as an exegesis art medium. Like the medium and art form, this project exists in the space between an exegesis art paper and a MIHM dissertation, which given the title, I think, is a very appropriate position to be.

Throughout the research I found that food art in general suffers from a distinct lack of research material which makes the subject of food art a rich and fertile subject for further research. This project has allowed me to delve into my margarine sculpting past and in doing so I have

discovered that New Zealand has a depth of food art history waiting to be told. The limitations of this project are both its advantages and disadvantages; the advantage is that it allows a rare opportunity to the insights of the artist's mind and, conversely, the disadvantage is that it is based on one source of data, me and my necessarily subjective interpretations of the world of margarine sculpting.

As for the future of margarine sculpting I have no answers, but I will endeavour to keep this dwindling art form alive in the bastion of culinary competitions, by training willing students and working where I can to promote my niche art form of margarine sculpting. My personal work will be forever altered by this project as it has taught me to look at the world with a new sense of creativity. It has altered the way I think about my sculpting and has deepened beyond the aesthetic. I have learnt that any future work that I do will be driven, energised and strengthened by the deeper meaning of the message that I choose to express within my sculptural works.

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