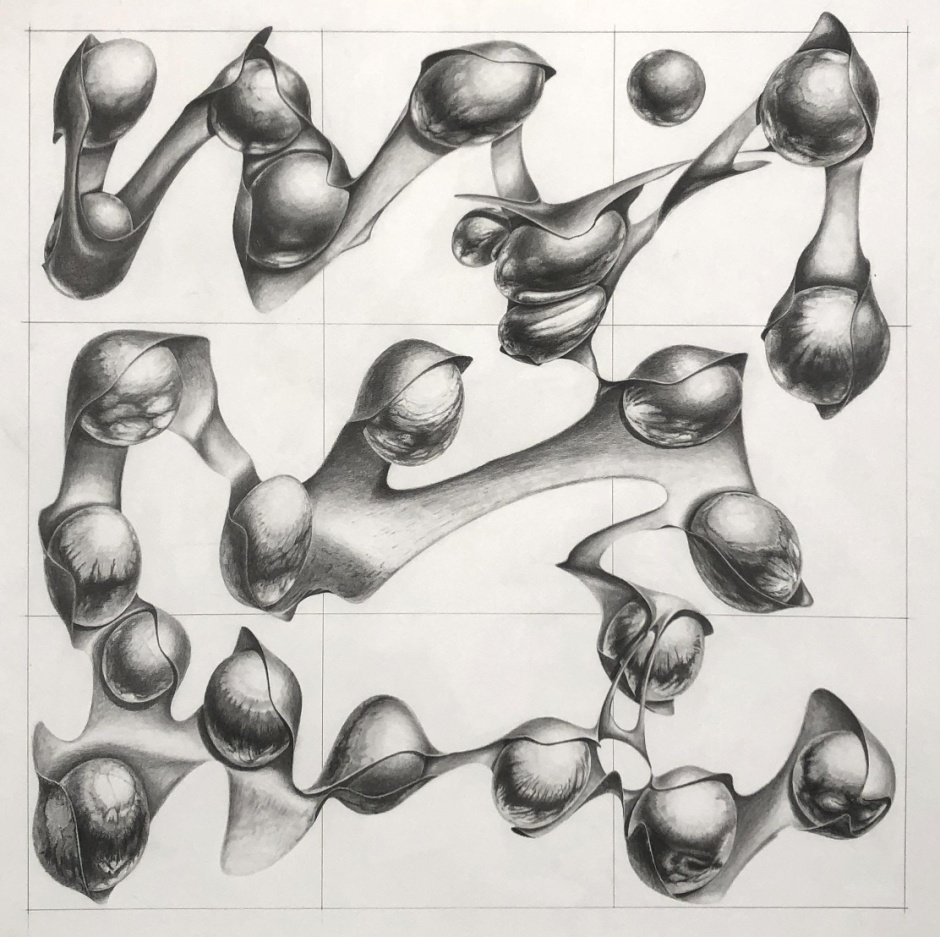
Ben Lincoln: Immersions 2019



“This is Just to Say”, graphite on paper

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| |  | | --- | | ***“Electromagnetic technology requires utter human docility and quiescence of meditation such as befits an organism that now wears its brain outside its skull and its nerves outside its hide. Man must serve his electric technology with the same servo-mechanistic fidelity with which he served his coracle, his canoe, his typography and all other extensions of his physical organs. But there is a difference, that previous technologies were partial and fragmentary, and the electric is total and inclusive.                                                                -Marshall McLuhan*** | |

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| |  | | --- | | The quote above is from Marshall McLuhan’s 1964 book Understanding Media. Central to his thesis is that the essential function of any technology is to extend some capacity of the human body or mind - the car for example extends the feet and legs, allowing us to travel farther and faster. In the book McLuhan proposed that the mass media of his day, and to an even greater extend the digital media of ours, extends the brain and central nervous system outside the body. In my last newsletter I showed you a still life, this time around I’m presenting a drawing and I’ll zoom out a bit here to bring the larger project I am working on into view. In August of this year I’ll be presenting a body of new work in a solo exhibition at the [Littlefield Gallery](https://benjaminlincoln-art.us18.list-manage.com/track/click?u=ccb3a585740336288b6932744&id=98b87de618&e=95af1a27f1) titled “Interface” in which I’ll be considering the effects of this extension of mind and how I visualize that in my art. | |

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| |  | | --- | | I think one of the single biggest features of this extension is a change in the relationship between the internality of the self and the externality of the objective world. I’m not a sociologist or neurologist, but it seems apparent to me that some of the deepest internal processes of mind are now manifesting externally. To illustrate my point, the next time you decide to get a candy bar when you’re in the checkout aisle of the grocery store consider what is happening in your brain. Separate neural networks, each corresponding to a different candy bar choice, battle it out in a high stakes winner take all contest for survival. Not only do these networks compete head to head, suppressor neurons in each camp actively try to undermine and sabotage the competition. It’s a hot, fast paced game involving a kind of  neural hyperbole, fake news, and disinformation… sounds a lot like a political campaign on social media. It’s not that these kinds of social phenomena are new, they’re not, it’s the speed and totality with which they manifest today that is qualitatively different.  Thinking about this idea of internality has led me to a somewhat different approach to my own work as well. For most of my career I have tended to to take inspiration from external sources and then created my own imaginative twists on those themes. Now though, I am looking inward to the relationship I have to form and shape that is always present in my work no matter the subject matter I am working with. | |

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| |  | | --- | | *"Sometimes a shape will say only that it is round, or flat, squiggly or straight, shiny or matt - and I am satisfied with that. After many years I can finally say that I don't need a shape to relate to something external."* | |

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| |  | | --- | | With that I’ll turn back the clock about twenty years or so to the beginning of my career when my relationship with form began to take shape. Throughout college and the early part of my career I developed what I thought of as a somewhat peculiar language of shapes and organized my work around different scientific concepts. Anatomy, genetics, physics and chance operations all inspired me at various times: | |

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| |  | | --- | | Throughout this period though a troubling question persisted in the back of my mind that finally broke into a full blown confrontation; strip all the external ideas away and what do my shapes mean, what if I just painted them on their own? I made numerous attempts, but trying to paint my “shape language” without an external source of meaning invariably led me to the edge of cliff with giant frightening nothingness beyond… so I continued to organize myself around external ideas. | |

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| |  | | --- | | A couple of years ago though an urge to work with my shape language on its own terms again began to build in me. At about this time I also re-acquainted myself with the experimental composer John Cage, I had first listened to his work in the late nineties when I was making a series of aerator drawings using coin tosses to determine the orientation and relationships between the various elements in the compositions: | |

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| |  | | --- | | Cage had made extensive the use of chance operations in his musical compositions for many years, and when I renewed my interest in his work I came across an interview he gave shortly before his death in the early nineties: | |

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| |  | | --- | | Finally, I have come to realize that I feel the same way about my shape language. Sometimes it will manifest itself in forms that relate to the external world, a still life for instance… but not always. Sometimes a shape will say only that it is round, or flat, squiggly or straight, shiny or matt - and I am satisfied with that. After many years I can finally say that I don't need a shape to relate to something external, what I am most interested in at this time is my internal experience of form. | |

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| |  | | --- | | For me it’s different, I’m not so much trying to suppress the conscious mind as stand beside it, I think of it as more meditation than trance. I find that drawing or painting beside myself in this way engages a different kind of observation, one that allows a glimpse of the interior. | |

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| |  | | --- | | I think of “This is Just to Say” as a kind of poem - I actually borrowed the title from one of my favorite poems by William Carlos Williams. If my drawing is a poem, it’s a poem without meaning. For a long time I was afraid of the meaningless emptiness this work brings me to, but now I think bringing me to that void is its purpose. I think the only way to reach “inner” language is to give up the meaning of “outer” language. | |

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