

Immovable Objects, Unstoppable Force
Maskull Lasserre

Text by Rachel Anne Farquharson



Extinct / Aluminum, polycarbonate, hardware, wiring, light
40 W x 3 D x 9 H inches

FOREWORD

Predictive power: a key force in describing how human beings, slow in speed and weak of muscle, have outpaced every other animal on the planet. Our minds, within fractions of seconds, evaluate the shape of an object, its meaning and relationship to us even while accepting input from all our senses. The work of Maskull Lasserre surgically exploits this delicate phenomenon, illuminating what Professor of Philosophy and Chair of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Edinburgh, Andy Clark calls predictive processing. A theory of the neurological process of material recognition requires that an individual must involuntarily reconcile their sensory input with their mind's predictive capacity.

Lasserre's pieces live in that intersectional space in the mind, one between the sensory and the predictive, that gives us pause. His works expand out that brief moment, forcing us to explore the vast territory within the brain dedicated to memory, experience and sensory perception. Lasserre's exhibition *Immovable Objects, Unstoppable Force* is a personal investigation into the familiar, mediated by past understanding of physics, the natural science of matter. Guided by predictive processing, the force of Lasserre's work unlocks new ways and possibilities for how we see the world around us. Using both natural and industrial materials, primarily wood and steel, Lasserre shapes our interaction with the sculptural objects he creates. Serving as the conductor who marshalls the orchestra and not each individual piece, Lasserre opens himself up to feeling and interpreting how length, width, depth and time all balanced the scales of *Immovable Objects, Unstoppable Force*. This revelation, the tuning of objects towards their own frequency while simultaneously asking them to bend in another direction invites participants into a deep and personal intellectual reflection that is, at its centre, intrinsically human.

Jeff Erbach, Executive Director
Art Gallery of Grande Prairie

¹ Andy Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty: Prediction, Action and the Embodied Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016)



Culling a truth. Forging a fib.

by Rachel Anne Farquharson [NL]

*"It's not facts and rules. It's black cats in dark rooms"*¹

--Stuart Firestein

What does it mean to weigh respect for any individual species against the desire to play with its intrinsic nature? This pursuit of understanding is the story of not only curiosity, but also of the limits of science and the science of creativity's limits. The sparring between truth and fiction is a dance that has held purchase over creative practice since making and doing became a formalized and acknowledged act of A•R•T. Such choreography extends to materials and their representation—an invitation into the philosophical realm that juggles allegiances and disavowals between creator, viewer, and artwork. From the ways through which we distinguish surrounding|self to signifiers—line|image|object|word—this byway challenges our perception of natural versus man-made. It is one of imaginative solutions based on a single point of origin. TRUTH.

Immovable Objects, Unstoppable Force turns and faces this condition, unbridled. Mechanical function meets natural prescription and, in so doing, Maskull Lasserre presents a family of artefacts that are in the process of (de)forming in real time and space. His is an anthropology that is necessarily process-based and populated at once by image and object, truth and fiction, axis upon axis upon axis. Our experience as viewers begins with the artist's contrast of such nodes, resulting in a deep and abiding respect for materials within the environment they populate for themselves.

¹ Stuart Firestein, *Introduction to Ignorance: How It Drives Science*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

< *Ouroboros* / Steel, brass, hardware, vice, miscellaneous workbench contents used in work's creation / 84 L x 50 W x 42 H inches

(above right)

Ouroboros / process image / detail



1.0 The world is all that is the case.²

Universal statements such as the one above are a source of perplexity that intrinsically challenge sculpture, a discovery that pervades the experience of *Study of Cord Progression* (2016-2017). Standing approximately four and a half meters tall between the straddle of a steel-beamed gantry, the slender, corrugated body of an ash tree hangs in the balance. Its trunk is cinched at the waist, articulating a braided rope whose warps and wefts bear an uncanny yet natural affinity to the rhythm of the tree's knotty outer husk. The rope's fray snaps, gnarls curling from outside in. Jeopardy. Binding in and pressing out, the dual direction of this creative arrow reappears, like a hereditary gene, throughout the exhibition.

Study of Cord Progression offers up recognizable forms of industry, natural world, and quotidian object while confusing the truth of any of the three. This goliath at once operates on a legible human scale while igniting curiosity that trips one's understanding of material and mechanism. Nature is said to be governed by reliable 'laws' that separate the possible from the impossible³ and yet here we find a joinery of both. It is worth reconsidering Wittgenstein's unyielding statement above with respect to these observations. "The world is all that is the case" isn't a definitive answer, in fact, but a question.

The materials native to *Immovable Objects, Unstoppable Force*, in both their fact and fiction, are better equipped to make queries than any creator: What does the world consist in? Facts, properties, relationships, and all that lies|lies just below the surface.

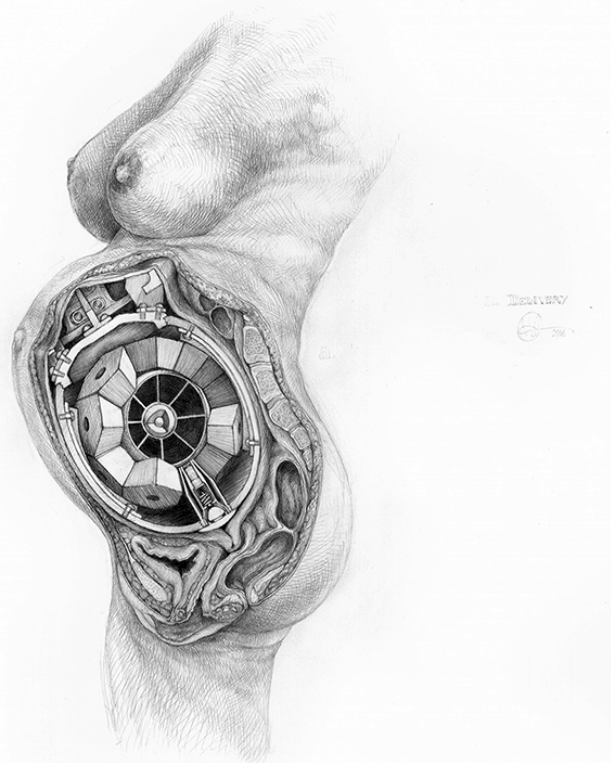
Climb the ladder. Only then kick it away.

² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 5

³ John D. Barrow, *Preface: Impossibility: The Limits of Science and the Science of Limits*, London: Oxford University Press, 1998, VII.

< *Study for Cord Progression* /process image

Study for Cord Progression / Ash tree trunk, gantry, rigging hardware
132 H x 28 W x 27 D inches



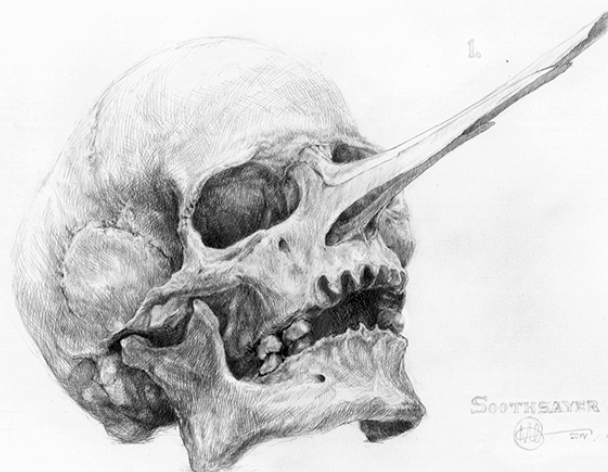
1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things.

A suite of seven anatomical drawings accompany the three-dimensional works of *Immovable Objects*, *Unstoppable Force*. Each scribe the bracket human hands can build between mechanical and cultural interests. Framed and tilted at an angle toward the viewer, the axes of their planes contrast with the horizontal, all but confessing to an existence between the flat and the thick. *Delivery* (2016) picks up the thread of fact versus fiction sutured through this exhibition. An impregnated female form is offered here and, with it, the origin of existence. The body's central cavity is halved, revealing spine, intestines, uterus, and a crowded womb. Here is our truth, but HALT. Upon closer examination, a curious, beady-eyed inhabitant of mechanical structure is nestled within. "Sci-Fi" filmmakers couldn't have constructed such a chimera. Unlike the spatially collapsed world of the silver screen, *Delivery* demonstrates a natural linkage between biological and mechanical construction that is seated in a believable volume of this world.

If the world is not a sum of things but a totality of facts, then the plausibility of each of the seven draughted physiologies in *Immovable Objects*, *Unstoppable Force* is irrefutable. Lasserre's cranial slices, hovering whales, and biological annotations compel provocative enquiries across the bounds of line-image-object-word, towing our minds to new places.

The consciousness of the human organism is carried in its grammar.⁴

⁴ Joan Didion, *A Book of Common Prayer*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1977, 234



< *Delivery* / Graphite on paper / 18 H x 24 W inches / 2016

Soothsayer / Graphite on paper / 18 H x 24 W inches / 2016



1.2 The world is determined by the facts, and by their being all the facts.

The Question (2016) is a vermillion coloured anvil with a face that betrays use, its surface pocked with scars from horn to heel. A ball peen hammer lies prostrate, comfortable on its flat, hard bed and bears two handles as if the head had sprouted wooden legs. It is a fiction. Employing materials commonly used to craft these ancient utilitarian tools, Lasserre presents an alternative truth, a distortion that becomes the world due to the facts identifiable. *The Question* is as much an object as it is an image but, wherein the combination of unusual facts in our minds would turn the work into narrated fantasy, Lasserre's process compounds them. As if in a crucible, they manifest immutable physical certainties bound to human dimension.

A ballerina's backbend, the swell of a wave, the arcadia of travel by sea-faring vessel.



< *Anvil Study #1 –The Question* / Steel, wood, hammerhead, paint, hardware
10 D x 24 W x 34 H inches

Anvil Study #1 –The Question / process image



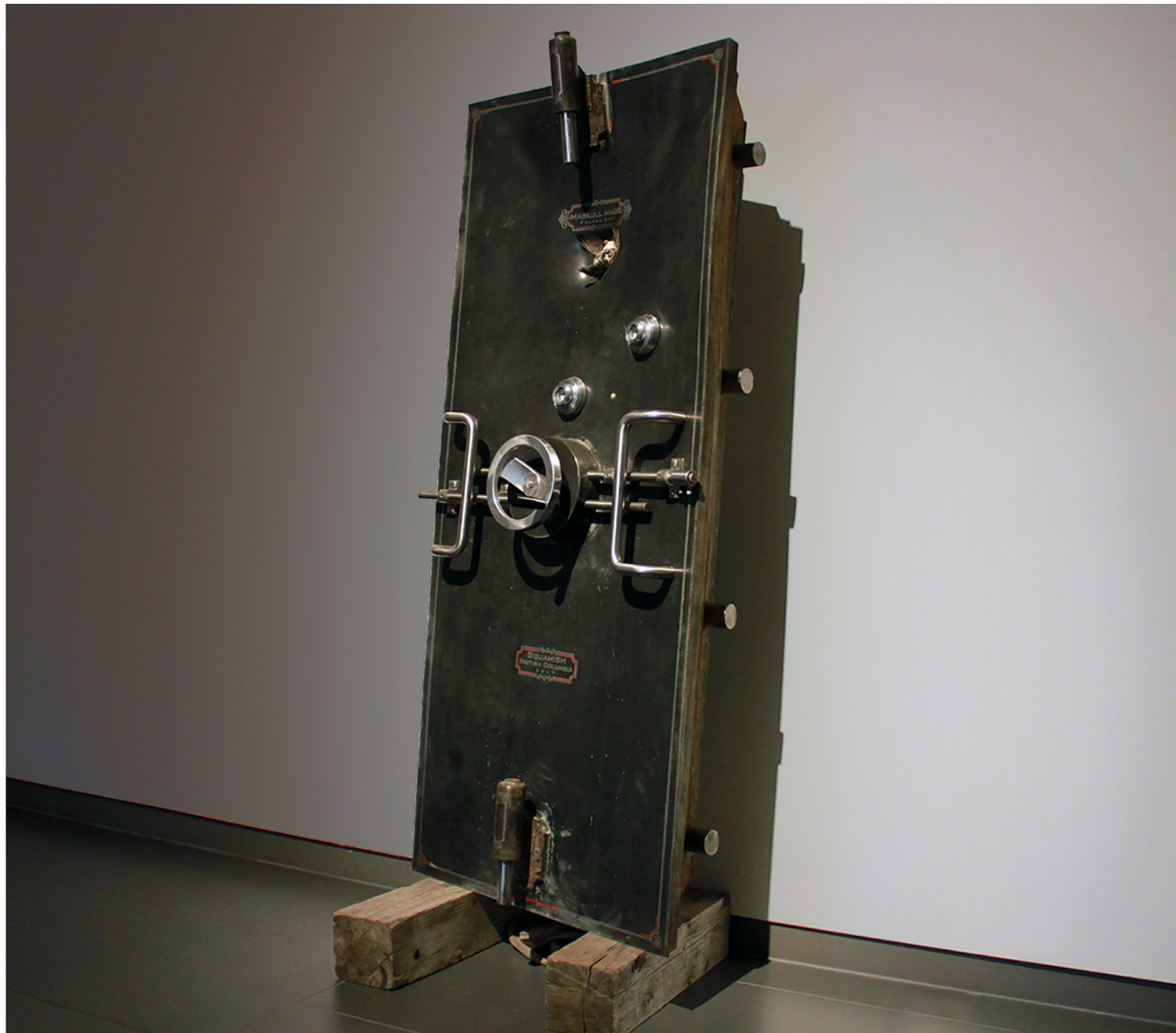
2 What is the case—a fact—is the existence of states of affairs.

Instantiated possibilities play a large role in *Immovable Objects*, *Unstoppable Force* as they are the pivot upon which the exhibition's objects turn. The sum of these instances lands firmly in the mouth of *The Memory Palace* (2017), Lasserre's reverence to the bright yellow, labour-force grade buckets most often attached to industrial diggers branded CAT or Case. The metallic cup's toothy underbite is crooked, its other sides crimped inward. Light catches a rhizome of taut threads hovering in the middle, somewhat elevated, over a scoop of air housed in the bucket's void. It is a spider's web, strands volunteering themselves responsible for setting the bucket into deformed compression. These tears place the insect's silk on the same material weighbridge as their steel victim, an equation that dissolves usual perception, turning fact into fiction and fiction into fact. Like Lasserre's drawings, the planarity of the web supersedes the power usually afforded to the three-dimensional realm. The familiar expectations of steel's strength and utility are confounded and the origin of the spider's web moves from one of this world to a place of mythological might. Taken together, the work comes into being as a scientific totality freed from expected fact, which is, in the artist's conception, ART.



< *The Memory Palace* / Steel, paint, nano-silk, hardware, wood, grease, pressure
33 W x 46 D x 46 H inches

The Memory Palace / process images



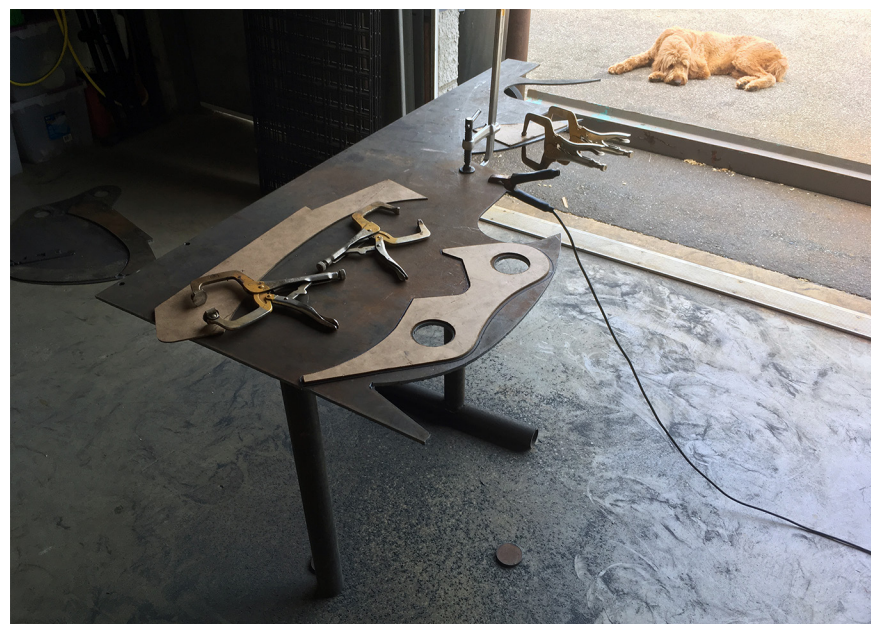
Fallen Sky (2017) reinforces the leveling of energies and their relationships seen in *The Memory Palace*, a convergence of strengths that dismantles the concept of relative size until both entities meet in a messy middle. The work takes the form of a robust black vault door that would make any room impenetrable. As a replica, it is more faultless than its real cousin, perfection that only actually exists in the human mind. As if careening down with reckless abandon, a small taxidermied bird refutes the door's impenetrability and, having supposedly collided with the barrier, creates a deep impression that follows the topography of its beak and body. *Fallen Sky* represents an important part of Lasserre's practice as a process-based performance. The dye cast to deform the safe door is one that won't be seen in action, but its impression will make a mark. It is this remainder that produces the reverse transubstantiation consumed by viewers. One wherein an artefact of recognizable provenance and physicality, through the actions of the artist, emerges as conceptual forgery. *Fallen Sky* is perhaps the answer to the attendant drawings, but in volumetric dimension. Inscription is an old art.

There's no law that says life needs to get more complicated.⁵

⁵ Lizzie Harris, "Cellular", American Academy of Poets: Poem-a-Day, accessed June 21, 2017. URL

< *Fallen Skys* / Steel, hardware, paint, European tree sparrow, wood, recovery straps, pressure / 32 W x 18 D x 72 H inches

Fallen Skys / detail



2.01 A state of affairs (a state of things) is a combination of objects (things).

Objects are simple and they make up the substance of the world. This is the calculus that defines not only Lasserre's process, but also the alphabet with which he spells his trajectory. Nearly sixty "letters" complete *Immovable Objects*, *Unstoppable Force*, a taxonomy of materials, widths, shapes, and forms that repair the gully between art and industry. From paper cartoon to Masonite draught, the process by which he constructs his fib is pronounced. The natural progression between line|image|object|word thereafter reveals its truth. The object lesson here is that we learn a lot about materials by how they fail and this truth can carry a weight no lie can counterfeit. It seems, at times, that Lasserre trades places with the wood, metal, or technologies that populate his days, impersonating a spider or trying to anticipate a piece of wood's fracture. They give him guidance. He gives them voice. *Immovable Objects*, *Unstoppable Force* is an attempt to stand on the shadow of a bird circling overhead, a hop scotch that demands constant movement. As much a performance as material and philosophical enquiry, the works are remainders of conversations the artist has with his community of things. Philosophical thought pervades art's history, sometimes to its detriment, however. These conversations reside on a plane of rigid academic rigor, too soon binding the mind in corsetry to allow sensual experience. Theory is beautiful, but experience will eat it for breakfast.

JOKING ASIDE: IT IS A GENESIS

The artist's work has been hosted in spaces of various shapes and sizes—upon dilapidated carnival grounds and installation sites as well as more formal gallery and museum settings. What strikes one is how native each work seems in space, an echo of the homeostasis that seems expressed from the beasts themselves. In the end, Maskull Lasserre's creations mouth the sublime vernacular, an endeavor that Hephaestus attempted in his own mythological time. The former's alphabet doesn't rise with the day nor does it sleep with the night. There is no systole or diastole here and, in becoming, there are no longer any pendular movements. Lasserre simply succeeds in asking his village, both tools and their progeny in this exhibition, to show him the laws of exception in which they find their home and, like Pinocchio, become real. Their compasses point true.

< *The Alphabet* / Masonite, MDF (patterns used for creation of objects / Dimensions variable

The Alphabet / process image



Anvil Study #3 (Lyres Paradox) / process images

*Anvil Study #3 (Lyres Paradox) / Steel, wood, violin components, velvet, sand,
potential sound / 25 W x 34 H x 9 D inches*



*Anvil Study #2 - Truth of Fiction / Steel, wood, paint, pressure
36 W x 36 H x 34 D inches*



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Cover image

Study for Cord Progression (detail)