

MAKER & MACHINE



Photo: © Will Cruickshank

A recent solo exhibition at Aspex Gallery in Portsmouth garnered the extraordinary work of British artist Will Cruickshank a great deal of attention. **Ros Weaver** meets the accidental textile artist at his impressive workshop studio

If you were to be stranded on a desert island, Will Cruickshank would be your perfect fellow strandee. He would not only construct a shelter but rudimentary mechanised versions of all your domestic appliances too. And art to hang on the walls. Because Cruickshank is an artist.

His medium can be anything. 'Materials have wishes,' he explains as he shows me around his series of studio spaces created inside three silos on farmland in Essex. 'I try to be attentive and let things be what they want to be. It's a linear process of being explorative but not committing to a particular outcome.'

The eccentric idea that materials have intentions of their own means he is on a continual voyage of discovery and creation. A basic rule seems to be that if a process is required to fulfil a material's 'wishes', there's no dash to B&Q for equipment; he has to make the machinery himself, from whatever is at hand, to do the job.

The artistic journey at the silos all began with needing space to work. Studio space in East London, where he lived, was too expensive so he drove around Essex, asking farmers if they had any outbuildings they could rent out cheaply. He found the silos and turned them into extraordinary circular workspaces with a wonderful countryside view.

Cruickshank had found some big logs that wanted to be turned. After some initial experiments with a lawn tractor and a chain saw—'A lot of good things happen when things go wrong,' he says happily—he settled on an upended cement mixer to use as the basic mechanism for a rudimentary lathe. From this emerged a series of elongated wooden vase-like shapes which begged him to have something wound round them. This was the start of his textile journey.

Near Cruickshank's home is the longest street market in Europe. Here he found reels of thread eager to be used for something other than sewing and knitting. After producing a series of objects simply bound with coloured threads, he realised he needed a way to make the thread

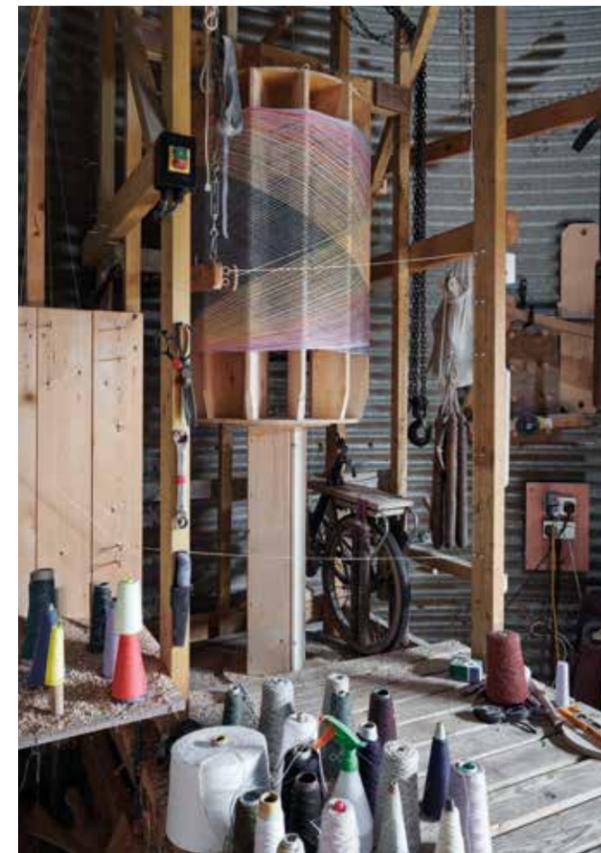


Photo: © Sylvain Doleu

01 *Buoy*, Will Cruickshank, 2018. Water carved, plaster and thread, 50cm diameter

02 *Single Phase Winding*, Will Cruickshank, 2018. Mixed thread and wood, 80 x 180 cm

03 *Winding/Carving Machine*, Will Cruickshank, work in progress, 2015-2018. Cement mixer, bike parts, wood, rope, sash weights, wheels and pulleys

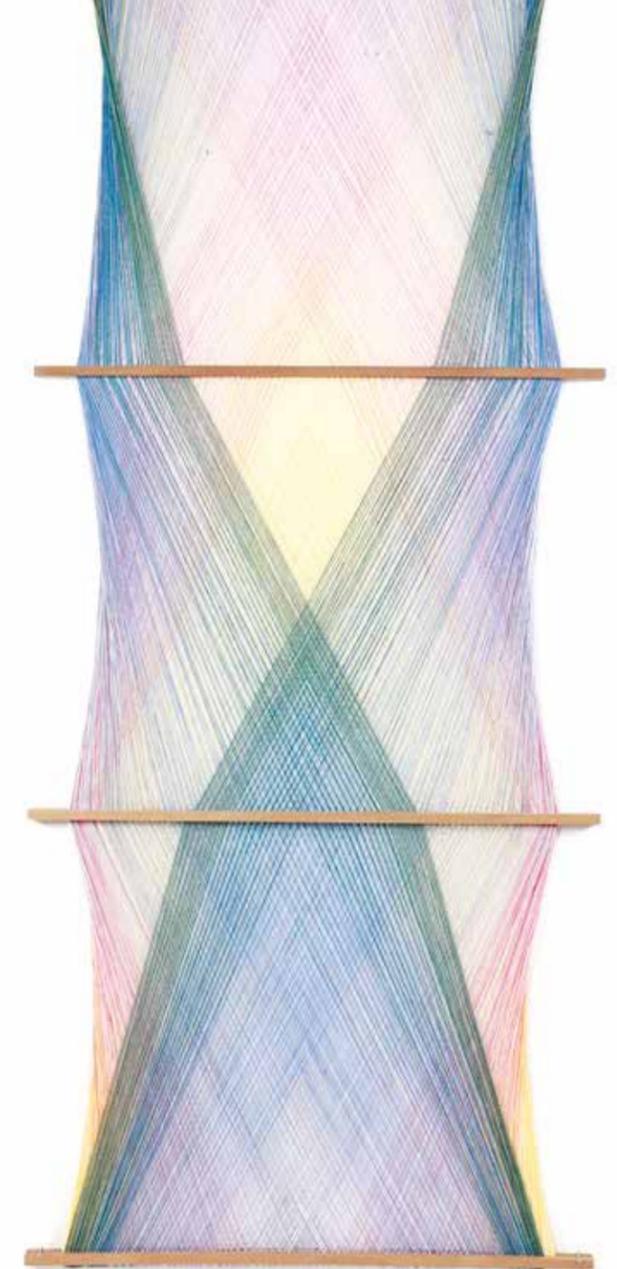


Photo: © Will Cruickshank

being fed onto the turning object go up and down, much like it was on the reels. One of the silos now contains a huge Heath Robinson style machine incorporating everyday objects like bicycle wheels that winds multiple strands of coloured thread onto a drum made from strips of wood. The mesmerising winding has become a thing of its own. Cruickshank has found a way of removing and opening out the wound criss-crossing thread using a series of wooden laths to sandwich it at intervals.

'I don't know anything about weaving,' he says as I admire the resulting subtly-coloured wall hangings. 'Apparently these are all warp and no weft.'

We wander outside to his first cement-mixer lathe, which is currently being used to carve large curved sculptures out of a strange fluffy substance. It is an offshoot of the earlier bound vase shapes. Cruickshank had decided to cast a plinth for one in concrete. Offcuts of thread got into the mixture and produced an interesting hairy effect. Now he is using plaster mixed with offcut threads to carve some very tactile sculptures.

I was astonished this inventive artist is not yet represented by a gallery. But I am sure someone will snap him up soon. It will be intriguing to see where materials will lead Will Cruickshank next.

www.willcruickshank.net