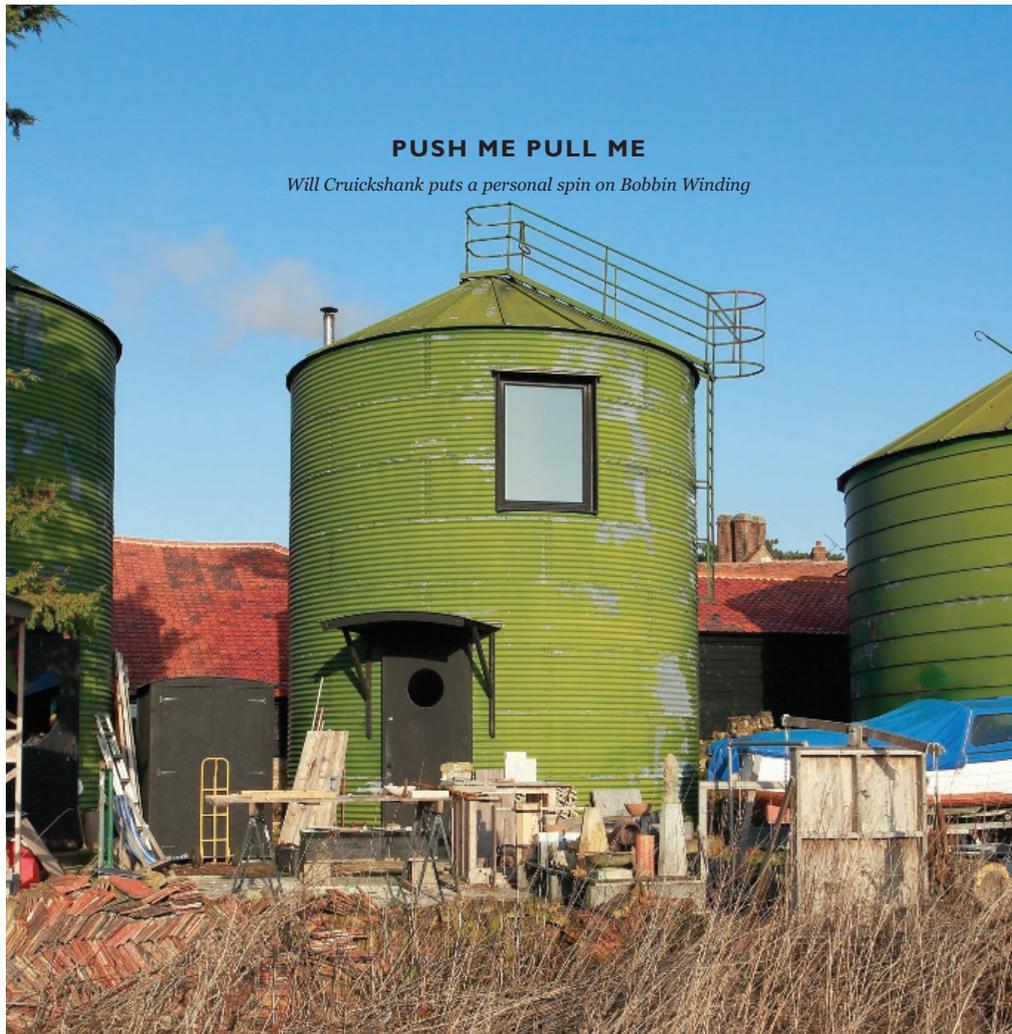


PUSH ME PULL ME

Will Cruickshank puts a personal spin on Bobbin Winding



Will Cruickshank is a master of spin and rotation; everything he creates is centred around these two actions. Stepping into his world, is to step into a place full of movement, animated by threads that zip through the air.

Trained as a sculptor, Cruickshank has spent the last decade and a half making site specific, kinetic, and often participatory works for galleries and festivals. The desire to work alone and develop a studio based practice drew Cruickshank to a trio of sap-green silos nestled on the edge of an Essex farm. Reflecting the circularity of his work, these buildings have become the ideal place for his artworks to dwell as they take shape. Inside one of the silos a mezzanine floor floats overhead. It is filled with several of Cruickshank's thread-wrapped sculptures. Looking at this group, it is possible to see the progression of finesse and technique. The evolution is clearly visible, and viewed together these works have a strong sense of harmony. Cruickshank throws nothing away, and all aspects (both successful and unsuccessful) of his creative journey are documented. This archival approach to his practice is revealing and engaging in equal measure.

His approach to making sculpture is process and technique based. One thing leads to another, allowing an organic way of working with plenty of opportunity for creative flexibility. Loosely inspired by wood turning, Cruickshank explains how he experimented with unorthodox approaches, 'attaching a log to the wheel of a



Previous Page Left: Silo studio, Essex.

Previous Page Right: The potters wheel winding machine and the cement mixer winding machine.

Below: Upstairs in the silo studio. Woodcarvings, wound forms and lino prints.

Opposite: Cut spool studies. Mixed yarn on wood.



lawn tractor and turning it with a chain saw, unfortunately this proved to be a slightly unreliable way of working'. Indeed, there is a glorious freedom to his approach and he delights in telling me how much he enjoys attacking ideas as 'a complete novice with all the wrong equipment'.

Cruickshank christened his new silo-studio by building on the idea of these earlier wood sculptures, which carry a coarse and rough edge (there's only so much precision one can achieve turning wood with a chainsaw!). This quickly led him to the notion that as the wood spins it is natural to wind something back around that spinning object. That something became thread and one can't help feeling this is the moment when everything changed for Cruickshank.

His recent solo show *Push & Pull* at Aspex Gallery in Portsmouth (UK) helped Cruickshank to pause and review his progress. He explains, 'the idea was to explore the relationship between the material, the machine and me, all three of us have things that we want to do. It's a negotiation. Push and pull implies a conflict, but really it's not a conflict between the three of us but more a tender relationship where you respect each other and allow for unexpected outcomes.' The introduction of thread created a new tension between materials and gave Cruickshank the unusual position of being a weaver without a loom. Perhaps more 'windings than weavings' these pieces feel comfortable with their textile nature.

Staying with, and expanding on, the spinning drum used for wood turning Cruickshank began adapting it to create his monumental winding machine. This is a giant, vertically rotating drum around which he can twist and wrap thread in diagonal shifting formations. Once clamped, these thousands of intersecting and overlapping threads are trapped and can be cut free from their armature and hung against a wall. The transition from three dimensional drum to flat artwork is exciting to see. These pieces are like woven structures; reminiscent of master weaver Peter Collingwood, but with only warp and no weft. They are logical in their evolution, and yet utterly original. The type of thread used and colour of these works, are characteristically random, focused around recycling and what people have given to Cruickshank. This openness to improvisation and found material breathes life into his work.

Another important element of Cruickshank's practice again evolved from his experimental approach to material, when he began exploring a way to make his own plinths to display his wooden thread-bound sculptures. Concerned that these sculptures might not be successful sitting directly on the floor, he began making vast blocks of plaster which he then spun and turned, and cut into with a grinder, before water blasting their contours. The forms that emerged were beguiling in their own right and he began exploring ways of softening their hard edges by throwing short, cut threads, the off-cuts from his wound textile works, into the wet plaster. The ▶





Left: Detail from colour field wall hanging.
 Right: Image from Push & Pull exhibition, Aspek Gallery, Portsmouth. Carved plaster and thread sculptures with colour field wall hanging.

result is a fibrous solid material, closer in feel to fibreglass than plaster; hard, soft and furry all at the same time. These vessels are now massive in scale and sit comfortably alongside the bobbin-like wound wood sculptures and wall pieces.

Cruikshank's method of meandering enquiry and his continuous reaching out towards different materials and processes sets him apart in some ways from other craft based makers or artists. Most of us find our tools and techniques and stay relatively close to their limitations, challenged by their restrictions. He is the opposite; utterly unconcerned by traditional boundaries between materials or processes and brave enough to adapt and invent the machinery he needs as he goes.

For now, his triptych of cathedral-like silos, both echo and inform his work. In fact, the silos seem to even enhance his work. Seeing them in situ there is a magical experience. Such is their close relationship, that one feels sure that as his practice grows in confidence and depth the surroundings will change accordingly. The space and the work are connected; much like the spinning threads that fly around wood and sink into plaster. Wood, thread and movement are things that happen to be inspiring Cruikshank right now; tomorrow the materials and machine could be entirely different, but I feel sure they will still spin, and I hope very much they will be textile. ••• **Ptolemy Mann**
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