

The Garden of Forking Paths

“Destiny takes pleasure in repetitions, variations, symmetries”.

- Jorge Luis Borges

This collection of work by seventeen artists, showing diverse and unique methods and interests, is waiting for an infinite tapestry of connections to be woven across it. Beneath the surface, however, I would ask (contentiously) if an art work can have any subject equal to the basic fact that it has been made? I have brought this work together mainly as an account of what I consider to be a definitive characteristic of the making process – impossibility. The writer Paul Valéry is often paraphrased as having said that a poem is never finished; only abandoned.

“A work is never completed except by some accident such as weariness, satisfaction, the need to deliver, or death: for, in relation to who or what is making it, it can only be one stage in a series of inner transformations.”

In the introduction to *Slaughterhouse 5*, Kurt Vonnegut tells us:

“As a trafficker in climaxes and thrills and characterization...I had outlined the Dresden story many times. The best outline I ever made, or anyway the prettiest one, was on the back of a roll of wallpaper. I used my daughter’s crayons, a different colour for each main character. One end of the wallpaper was the beginning of the story, and the other end was the end, and then there was all the middle part, which was the middle. And the blue line met the red line and then the yellow line, and the yellow line stopped because the character represented by the yellow line was dead. And so on. The destruction of Dresden was represented by a vertical band of orange cross-hatching, and all the lines that were still alive passed through it, came out the other side.”

We can easily imagine how Vonnegut’s “outline”, the sketch of his story, would have promised so much more than the finished work could deliver. Similar to the idea as it is conceived and held in imagination, the sketch maintains its potential, it feigns perfection through the double-edged advantage of being incomplete.

The title of this show is borrowed from Jorge Luis Borges. *The Garden of Forking Paths* is a beguiling story about an impossible book that is also a labyrinth. Borges was famous for condensing complex, paradoxical ideas into incredibly short fiction, much of it expressing his attraction and/or frustration with the “muse of impossibility”. He considered the composition of huge books “an impoverishing extravagance” and chose instead to maintain the ambiguity and potential perfection of his ideas, by writing commentaries on imaginary books. Even with such a solution, the inevitable failure to realise an idea before it transforms into a new one, keeps us starting afresh. Our ideas occur so much faster than the process of realising them. From the first step out of imaginary space, they have to contend with unforeseen practicalities and suffer the inconvenience of existing unambiguously. By the time we finish/abandon them, influenced by manual discovery, they are rarely the same idea. Looking back over our finished/abandoned works, we often see that each one contains the seeds and reflections of so many others, made and unmade. Borges explained:

“I truly think that I am the same person that I was when I published my first book... Everything I was going to write in the future was included in that book, but it was written between the lines and only for myself. It’s like a secret literature mixed with the public one, everything is there, but only I can see it. So what I have done since then is just to rewrite that first book over and over again, extended or enriched”

In Borges’ story, *The Aleph*, he gives us the idea of an eponymous point in space that contains all other points! When you catch sight of the Aleph, you can see everything in the entire universe and from every possible angle simultaneously. His main character is using the Aleph to write an epic, all-encompassing poem called *The Earth*, which he is continuously revising.

“Stupidity is the desire to conclude” – Gustave Flaubert.