DISSECTION OF A LANDFILL

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MY PRACTICE

Extended drawing practice bridges illustration and graphic design to create resonant visual narratives. During the MA, Bea explored why climate crisis information remains inaccessible, interrogating discarded materials like plastic, aluminium, and 'the cloud'—destined for landfill—through metalwork, writing, performance, typography, and image-making. This intuitive journey investigates material amnesia and the wasted potential within landfill's archive, seeking deeper understanding through experimental methods.

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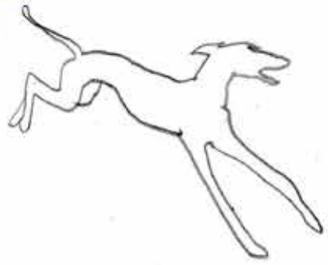
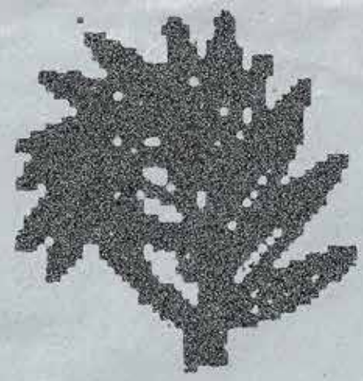


DISSECTION OF A LANDFILL:
PRESENTED THROUGH ALPHABET.

INTRODUCTION



PART 1

INFOGRAPHIC OF BAUXITE MINING IN JAMAICA

PART 2.

FUTURE MEMORIES POSTER.

PART 3

CONCLUSION

MUSINGS ON SUBJECT

A person on average touches their phone 2,617 times a day.

A person on average touches their phone 2,617 times a day. A phone is made up of lots of raw materials including lithium, copper, silicon, silver, cobalt, nickel and aluminium. We are constantly in contact with these materials and, even though I belong to a digitally native generation, I feel more disconnected than ever. I'm sure this sentiment can be shared among you, and it's particularly true for the following:

1) Those who feel they do not want to rely on tech but feel that they must.
2) Those who feel they forget these everyday items contain so many hidden pieces of valuable minerals that have been mined from the Earth.

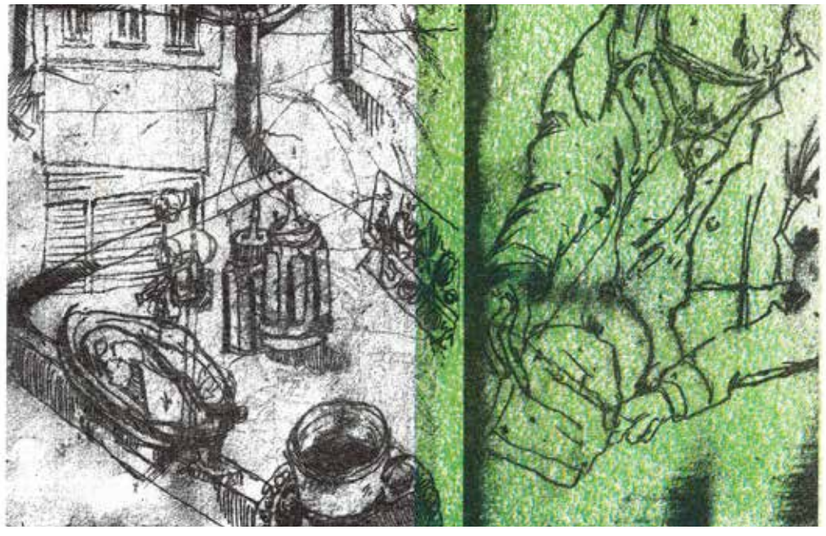
These materials are more frequently found in landfills as tech becomes more advanced, cheaper, and more disposable. These materials carry with them the weight of politics, unethical labour and extractive mining practices. They are damaging the ecosystems once they end up next to banana peels and your nan's old sofa. What a waste of space. The debate around the climate crisis is a precarious one. I like to think of it like a game of global hot potato (only the potato is on fire, mouldy, and too heavy to throw). The industry blames the consumer, the consumer blames the industry, and politicians tell you there's no hot potato.

Over the last year, I explored the properties of discarded materials. I chose aluminium because of its rich history (which you can read about in my essay), but also because of its widespread and unnoticed use. Once I started to think how many spaces it occupied, both exposed and hidden, I couldn't unsee it. Although aluminium does usually get used more than once, the fact that it ends up being disposed of at all is criminal. Aluminium is the only commonly used material that is 100% recyclable; and yet 1.8% of landfills are made up of it.

When I—a 20-something red-haired woman bound by social awkwardness—turned up to my local metal scrapyard A Smiths and Sons on my bike—clearly out of place—with a determination to buy some scrap metal, as this, I was told, was the first step to conquering my desire of working with metal. I wanted to hide, so I stood by the gate and awkwardly looked around until I caught eyes with someone working there. 'John' approached and asked if he could help, and when I told him I was looking for some scrap aluminium for a project, he lit up and started giving me a personal tour of their scrapyard. I was stepping around mud and cautiously weaving in-between heavy machinery; I was elated that I wasn't laughed at or had eyes rolled at me. I followed behind him closely—asserting my badge of don't-worry-I'm-here-with-him to the others in the yard. I chose what I thought looked interesting to work with, not really knowing too much about what I would do with it and prayed it wouldn't be too expensive (as I had no idea what scrap metal was worth). He looked at my ripped Tesco bag full of clanging metal and said that as "an act of good faith" that he would give it to me for nothing. What a legend. I thanked him and got on my rusty bike and cycled back home—with a feeling of triumph, no less—as you cannot imagine quite how much anxiety this trip was causing me. Step one: complete.

Step 2: What the hell do I do with all this metal? You may see on our collective's shelf my sculpture. A friend told me it resembled a brutalist skate park. I am primarily an image maker, so extending my existing practice to sculpture allowed me to understand how a visual language can make up for missing words. It was only once I began to work with restrictions that things got exciting. The fact that I sourced these randomly meant I didn't know what grade the metal was—which the technicians were 'thrilled' about. I originally wanted to integrate my drawing by melting and pouring into existing moulds that I had delicately drawn. How naïve. Of course, health and safety no longer permit this at the RCA (boo!). Right, what the hell do I do now? Me and this big, beautiful ,bauxite got to really know each other, I bolted it and rivetted and bent and broke some of it sort of by accident and was still stumped. My fingertips were black with dirt, and I seem to have wasted my precious slot in the metal workshop.

Part 3: Back for vengeance, I gripped my next slot a couple weeks later by the bolts and got to making. Directly working with material that was destined for the landfill, felt like a privilege and I was lucky to be working within its boundaries. Limitations after all, are a designer's best friend—depending on who you ask. I realised quite late into my project, that I was working with landfill as site. It seems obvious now but making intuitively and analysing why it happened are two separate processes. I was trying to communicate the forgotten value of 'stuff', and how we can build back a relationship and appreciation for what we have, instead of constantly needing to fill the void. I wanted to interrogate why, once these possessions are out of sight, out of mind, they lose value. What is the sentiment that is attached to possessions we deem as worth keeping vs. throwing away. After all, it is just stuff. There is an interesting guilt complex that shrouds this concept. If we can't see it, it doesn't exist, ergo, it's someone else's problem. Did you know, there is an entire landfill dedicated to old Christmas tree lights? The unfortunate truth is, everything will end up thrown away, and whether we like it or not, landfill is our biggest archive. It holds our secrets; what we eat, what we buy, what we hide. It lays there, exposed to the elements, evolving with us, growing and taking up more land. Archives are carefully preserved, institutional keys to our history. Landfills are the current, truthful, and unpreserved reality and no matter how much we push that away, ecology pushes back against it.



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I DONT CARE THAT YOU WONT TEXT ME BACK... IT'S NOT LIKE YOU TOUCH YOUR PHONE 2617 TIMES A DAY.

UNEARTHING ALUMNIUM:

ECOLOGICAL DEBT, COLONIAL LEGACIES, AND MATERIAL AMNESIA.

Introduction

Metal maybe man's greatest gift to earth: mobilising societies, industries, and governments—all the while demanding extractive practices to local communities and the Earth. There is a complex relationship between man and metal, one that can be explored through the lens of aluminium. It is no coincidence that as pressures to conform to modern society increases, resource supply decreases. We can look at consumer trends of use of aluminium as they illustrate perfectly its linear means of production in what should be a circular system on a planet that has finite resources. With aluminium being 100% recyclable, retaining all properties even when recycled. It is reported that anywhere between 3-17% of landfills are made up by metals. This is problematic for many reasons: they can be re-used but instead end up rotting, they are toxic to their environments, they do not biodegrade. And, most outrageously, we are treating a near-indestructible material like it's a single use plastic—a testament to how convenience trumps circularity. Circularity will be a theme in this essay, as it promotes the use of materials further than a single use. This model is generally considered the more sustainable pathway. Improving systems across built environments, consumer products, biodiversity technology, and business. Many examples are demonstrated by the *Ellen Macarthur Foundation*, and a report published by Gropyus (an Austrian-German construction technology company)who design affordable housing through modular construction: a true circular economy is nature-positive by design and offers a pathway to a resilient economy and better outcomes for individuals and society. Now in the case of aluminium particularly, which can be moulded to just about any formation of molecules, industry utilisation is widespread (planes, houses, cars, packaging, technology, cosmetics etc).

Aluminium carries a rich history, going from undiscovered, to precious, to abundant, in about 50 years—showing its rapid growth from totally unknown, to being present in everyday life only half a century later. It's difficult to imagine a world without aluminium as it's weaved into the foundation of modernity as we know it. It is a symbol of abundance and convenience demonstrated physically by its distinctive properties as lightweight and cheap to produce. This metal is a symbol of a material amnesia, as when something becomes abundant, it is taken for granted. Aluminium symbolises mass-production in a world that is focused on hyper consumption, and immediacy. Our cravings must be satisfied. Hyper consumption/immediacy includes porn, online shopping, food, travel, social media, and entertainment. It's no wonder things as basic as raw materials are taken for granted.

When something is so detached from its original form, we forget to acknowledge what processes are involved. There are systems that allow for immediacy of any information (AI chat, tailored social media feeds, software like The Cloud) who push curated information. This permits both the homogenising of information and decreases independent thought/references/ideas when given access to everything. There is a fatigue when faced with the option of 'all' and I argue this links with attitudes to raw materials as materials both digital and physical, have lost value.

Consumers disengage with important social causes (like the climate crisis) and are fuelled by consumer guilt, leading to a change in spending patterns. An example where companies profit from this consumer guilt is clothing brand *H&M*, who promote a sustainable line of garments called *H&M Conscious*, all the while continuing to pump out the same volume of fast fashion garments, which are ecologically damaging. This allows companies (like *H&M*)to wash their hands of those concerned about their practices, whilst increasing profits, to those willing to buy their 'eco' range. This can be described as a hidden-cost fallacy, which in this context, referrers to the obscuring of indirect costs (e.g. ecological or social in consumer culture). When we are confronted with the price of a consumer good, we are generally made to feel that the more the item costs, the higher quality the item is. What is missed when evaluating worth (monetarily), is the unspoken truths of the process that travel from raw material to consumer good. The colonisation of land is hidden and not considered. This especially difficult when learning that the UK, for example, offload their waste to other countries: where the intent is to recycle however due to the sheer volume of waste sent, a lot ends up in Landfill. This perpetuates land exploitation, from the mining of bauxite in Jamaica, to sending 'used' products which contain this bauxite, back into other countries. Only the 'consumer product'-stage is considered in the global north, where it is mined and discarded in the global south. There is also a hidden cost on the environment. And so, we need to understand and take accountability for understanding who pays the real price. This is not entirely the consumer's fault; this is all perpetuated by industries that rely on extractive practice to turn a profit. They, with our complicity, collectively turn a blind eye to the true value of the labour and the harm done to the natural land. This gets more complicated when we realise that governments too profit from industries that are linked with ecologically damaging practices, thus making policy hypocritical in nature.

In essence, to avoid sounding like a tin-foil hat wearing anarchist, I recognise that it is next to impossible—at least in my mind—to dismantle these industries. I am no economist, policy maker, CEO, author, or politician. I am just someone who cares. I believe there is power in understanding how things are made and that everyone should be able to access impartial information regarding the climate emergency, a reality between the incessant greenwashing and fear mongering from someone who has hope for a collaborative and thriving future. There is an insatiable appetite that clouds the global north, who contribute 92% of global emissions which directly erodes the global south sadly having 90% of all climate related deaths. Aluminium once represented a future of possibility, now, it is a forgotten material, one which is discarded into landfills, when so much possibility remains in its potential. Bauxite-rich Earth, where scars of aluminium mining remain, tell the story of unfair labour and disputed land ownership.

FIGURE 1

Aluminium rattle comissioned by Napoleon III for his son.

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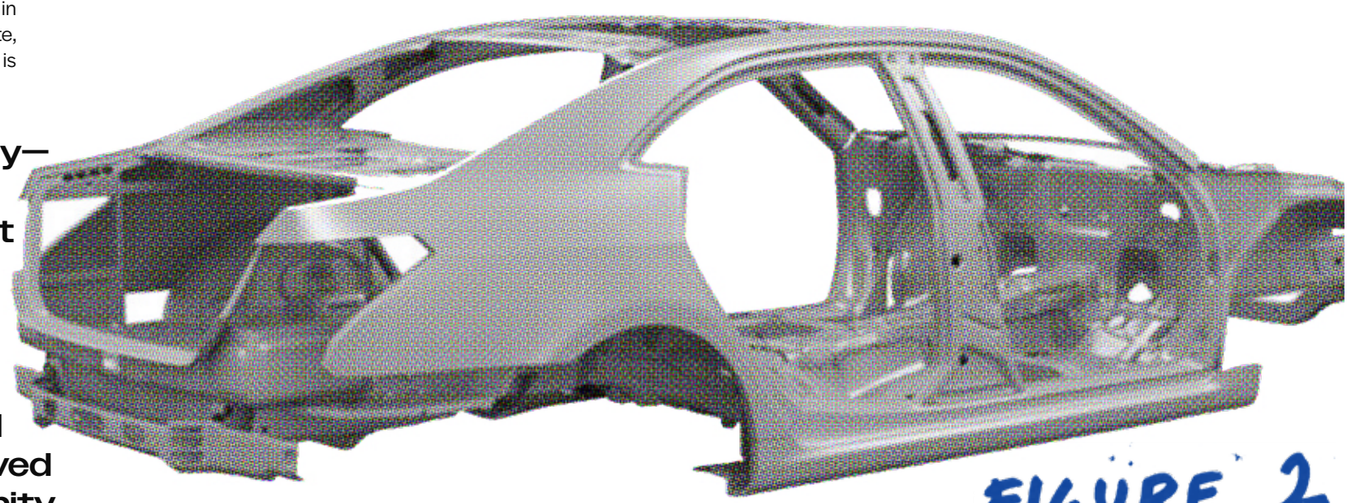

FIGURE 2

Aluminium car shell.

PART 1: THE IMPORTANCE OF ALUMINIUM + THE ROMANTICISM OF INDUSTRIALISATION

Aluminium once represented the limitless dreams of the future, now it is a common material found in all aspects of life, from transport to communications to packaging. Following its discovery in 1821, aluminium was a precious commodity. Pierre Berthier discovered "a reddish clay-like material" (Burgess 2016) now known as Bauxite (named after the town it was discovered in). Bauxite contains 50% aluminium oxide, making it the most used aluminium ore. It took just over 30 years of trial and error to perfect its process from bauxite mining to commercial success, one which remained unchanged for several decades. During this time, Napoleon III commissioned an aluminium rattle (figure 1) for his son. This, it has been argued, helped popularise the metal. At this time, it was a symbol of status (as it was still more expensive than silver). As aluminium expanded, so did the consumers' hope of what future this new material might bring. Ayn Rand (an author and philosopher) shows how burgeoning industries were romanticised in the late nineteenth to mid twentieth century. This is apparent in her book Atlas Shrugged, and, although aluminium is not mentioned by name, Rand muses on how metal became a symbol of freedom.

"Take the pounding violence of sixteen motors, she thought, the thrust of seven thousand tons of steel and freight, to withstand it, grip it and swing it around a curve, was the impossible feat performed by two strips of metal no wider than her arm. What made it possible? What power had given to an unseen arrangement of molecules the power on which their lives depended and the lives of all men who waited for the eighty boxcars? She saw a man's face and hands in the glow of a laboratory oven, over the white liquid of a sample of metal."—(Page 245 Atlas Shrugged (Ayn Rand 1957)

Rand escaped Bolshevik Russia, fleeing to America. Inarguably, her celebration of industrial triumphs is routed in the resulting culture shock. This romanticism of metal was for good reason; it was the symbol of freedom of movement in America. During developmental stages, industries grow at a fast pace; and in a few short years the 1960s entered the space age—where aluminium played no less a crucial role.

Aluminium is a symbol of development, industrialisation, and labour. David Landes explored this in his book The Unbound Prometheus. He discussed how it was that technological change occurred, and why it was so rapid in Europe between 1750 and 1969. He writes that "demand for special alloys increased to the point where users were not ready to wait on the pleasure and imagination of suppliers" (Landes 1969), foreshadowing what later unfolded: a continuation of growing metallurgy industries in direct correlation to consumer demands. He goes onto say "The Industrial Revolution gave this competition a new focus—wealth through industrialisation—and turned it into a chase... The pursuit goes on in what has become a race without a finishing line" (Landes 1969) I find this to be an accurate account of what continues today. Will the race ever end? Consequently, it is in our natural world, our indigenous peoples, who are most affected. Jamaica led bauxite exports between 1950-1971. Shortly thereafter, it was North American companies who dominated. You can see an illustrated timeline of these events on pages 14-15. My diagram depicts a story where financial hardships, and dominating powers, are overcome. However, when the profits dried up, the American enterprises withdrew, leaving Jamaica unable to continue profiting. Whilst there have been shifts in what is exported from Jamaica, and away from raw material mining altogether, it seems that the land and its people, will never shake this story.

Mimi Sheller, Author of *Aluminium Dreams* depicts aluminium as a symbol: "it unlocked a new material culture of mobility alongside a technological drive toward progressive acceleration in speed and lightness" (2014, Sheller,5) [which is perceived] in its physical properties as light, but metaphorically it embodied efficiency shown through "innovative infrastructures of transport and communication." (Sheller, 5) It would be naïve to suggest this was the only material that was revolutionary in these sectors: "iron, steel, plastics, glass, and cement all have their place in the material culture of twentieth-century modernity, aluminium demands attention...because it embeds crucial transnational processes right into everyday lives" (Sheller, 6). This is important for today's world as aluminium is crucial and embedded into modern life, and therefore taken for granted: "once you start looking for it, it is everywhere, yet often unnoticed." (Sheller, 7) What if, exploring materiality could lead to a reintroduction of worth beyond financial cost? Hypothetically, if there was a lower demand/allowance for raw bauxite mining, forcing production to work within restrictions of recycling, would any aluminium end up in landfills? Having a restriction (demonstrated within a circular economy model) can often lead to more sustainable habits, both on a small and large scale. Esther Leslie in her

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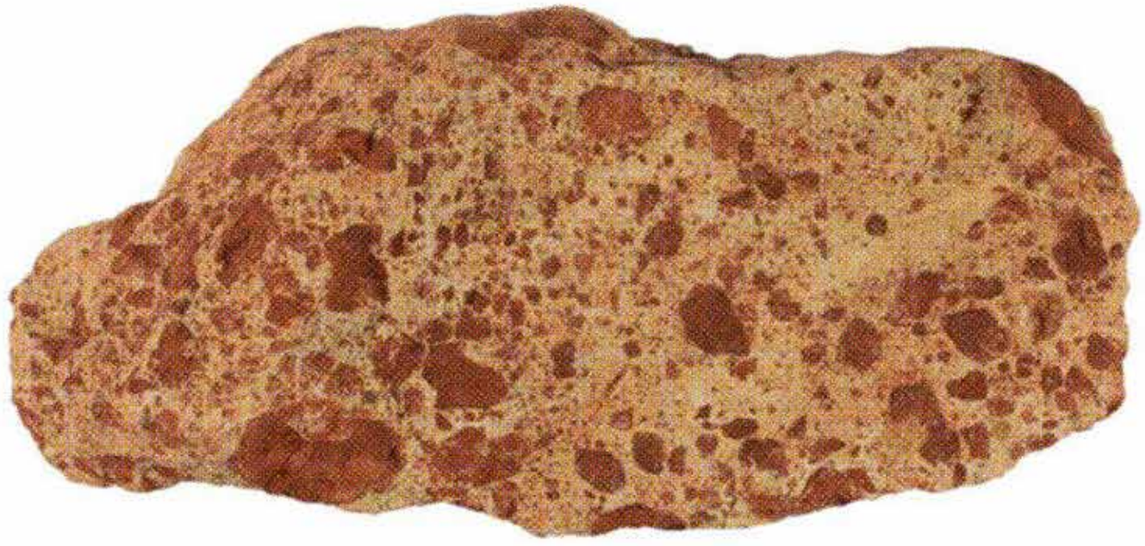

FIGURE 3

Raw Bauxite Ore mined. This gets produced into what we know as aluminium.

FIGURE 4

Bauxite mining site. This is the famous deep rust colour that is manufactured into aluminium.

book Synthetic Worlds talks with a similar attitude about “coal (being the) power of the Industrial Revolution” meaning “the belly of the Earth became a resource” (Leslie, 2005, page 24). By humanising the planet, in keeping with an indigenous ethos, this thinking allows for sympathy to be reattached with nature. This guilt, whether subconscious or not, connects back to the theme of colonisation, as it was, indeed, a pre-colonial view that the Earth was a living entity that requires a peaceful coexistence. Aluminium had many major advances from experiment, to industrial, to weapons, to smartphones. Modern examples include energy efficient buildings, lighter and more fuel-efficient transportation systems, new metal matrix materials” (Sheller, 12). As previously mentioned, aluminium and other non-ferrous metal do tend to end up in landfill. When talking about aluminium’s longevity it is important to note that “Aluminium recycling saves 95% of the primary invested energy” (Sheller, 231). Sheller’s paper stresses the need for more substantial recycling policies. Instead, we see “the illegal shipment of waste from Europe to non-OECD countries where treatment often results in environmental pollution through uncontrolled process emissions, incineration and landfill, and a permanent loss of material.” (European Commission, 2013, page 44)Electric vehicles use 85% more aluminium than petrol cars (Transport & Environment, 2023). Lithium in EV batteries, are too, a limited resource, and demonstrates that although the packaged consumer good is ‘green’, the batteries take over 10 years of use to equate the energy saved instead of using a second-hand or existing petrol/diesel car. This is a particularly damaging practice if you’re worried about water scarcity as a high volume of fresh water is used to make the batteries. In short, lithium mines are built in deserts and pull up water from the Earth, which is then evaporated to leave the lithium behind. This clearly damages water-precious ecosystems that exist there. A pattern emerges: ecological extraction causes community peril, at the behest of consumer middle class guilt (buying a new EV car, thinking it is the ‘green’ thing to do). If this private capital went into funding the improvement of public transport—both intercity and cross-national—then this problem would not exist on such a large scale. It seems that aluminium has never ceased to ‘go out of style’, as it were therefore, it remains a key throughline when assessing resource struggles. Hence, my fascination with, and application of it. Delving deep into material analysis—asking why certain metals are valued more than others—has developed a sensitivity to what it means to receive on demand. If I wanted a new sheet of aluminium, I could buy it from my campus shop and cut impressive shapes out of it using the metal laser cutter and assemble it using electric machines, in a matter of days. Instead, I have considered the ecological impact of my work by working manually, and the meaning of material, assessing where it ends up and working backwards from there. What I mean will become increasingly clear by the end of this essay.

FIGURE 5

Examples of ‘Space Age’ media. On the left, a poster for a godzilla film. On the right, interior design inspired by space travel. Aluminium mobilised transport developments, which had a big impact on cultural history.

Discovery

Bauxite mining began in Jamaica **1950**

The big three: Reynolds, Kaiser, Alcan North American developers run Bauxite mining. **1952**

Jamaica becomes the leading Bauxite Producer globally. **1957**

220 000 tonnes of aluminium is produced per year.

ALCOA starts to mine and becomes part of the big three. **1959**

Growth

1.1 million tonnes of aluminium is produced per year.

Guinea & West Africa ahead of Jamaica, Brazil enters the scene. **1978**

Australia overtakes Jamaica in Bauxite export **1971**

Jamaica government start getting reparations and aquired land back, plus 50% of the companies' mining assets to create a partnership instead of a monopoly. **1981**

1.28 million tonnes of aluminium is produced per year.

Abrupt end to Bauxite mining in Jamaica, because of Reynolds, Jamaica unable to continue profiting. **1984**

Major change in ownership, Glencore (Anglo-Swiss) bought amaican Bauxite mines, and it becomes WINDALCO. **2001**

Exchange of information: New management in Jamaica, means workers and locals had to adapt to foreign culture. Mismanagement of people and land ownership is murky. **2007**

Crash

The financial crash effects Bauxite mining in Jamaica. It falls to sixth place for aluminium exports. 3/4 of bauxite mines have closed in and the government struggle to continue profiting from these closed down mines. **2008**

Jamaica falls even further. Company Jamacco are the only ones who can stay open during this crisis. **2010**

Noranda, a major bauxite producer in Jamaica, faced declining aluminum prices, high electricity costs, and labor disputes, leading to the bankruptcy filing. **2016**

Breakthrough

2018

Government receives $3BN to develop Jamaican industrial parks. Focusing on manufacturing goods and fabrication industries instead of raw materials.

THE RISE & FALL OF BAUXITE MINING IN JAMAICA.

PART 2 : MATERIAL AMNESIA : WHY THE INDUSTRY IS BUILT ON STOLEN LAND.

It is an inherently Western ideology that the Earth is disconnected from its inhabitants. The works of Amitav Ghosh, Robin Wall Kimmerer, and Tyson Yunkaporta, have in connection, the exploration of colonial roots and ecological damage in common. They criticise industries that extract the Earth's natural resources who continue to carry out extractive practices, ignoring colonial histories. This is because policy, law, production etc. are engrained with modern society. Too much relies on the current order, explaining why a slow switch to alternative (sustainable) means, is essential. They are all intertwined, making it difficult to analyse, which is why it is so exhausting to consider alternative means of production, when the problem feels heavy, and out of control. With policies changing frequently, this means that it's difficult for a layman to keep up, further exacerbating inaccessibility of climate literacy. It seems that the working class is again left out of the conversation and excluded from decision-making for the future. While I have used aluminium as an example, other extractive mining processes that involve significant labour and ecological bare mentioning: coal, iron ore, lithium, copper, gold, diamond, uranium, nickel, cobalt, sand and oil etc. Yunkaporta's words resonate: "Guilt is like any other energy: you can't accumulate it... Face the truth, make amends and let it go" (p.196). Yet it's dangerous to absolve consumers entirely. Like those who admit defeat by saying one vote doesn't count, it is the mindset that should develop as great change requires collective action. As Matthew T. Huber argues in Climate as Class War (2022), guilt is weaponised to distract from industrial profiteering. Ghosh revives James Lovelock's Gaia theory—the Earth as a living entity (2022, p.85)—a radical challenge to Western mechanisation of nature. Scientists dismissed Lovelock as "too holistic," yet today's climate disasters (floods, wildfires) mirror Gaia's "fight back." This frames climate concern as selfish: we fear human extinction, not Earth's demise. Ghosh ties this to colonialism through language—labelling Indigenous peoples "savages" for believing in "the vitality of forests and volcanoes" (2022, p.84-87). Such misnomers enabled land theft, just as today's "sustainable aluminium" obscures bauxite mining on Indigenous lands. Yunkaporta's definition cuts deeper: "an Indigenous person is a member of a community retaining memories of life lived sustainably as part of that land base" (2019, p.12). His work reframes the crisis: "I'm examining global systems from an Indigenous Knowledge perspective" (p.16)—not the other way around.

By helping viewers understand aluminium's buried displacement stories through my sculpture, explores Western "waste" narratives, by encouraging a symbiosis of human and ecology. Sustainability's paradox is clearest in Jamaica, where US dreams of 'space-age modernity' (Sheller, p.147) relied on bauxite ore being mined, concurrent to the Caribbean people's struggles for labour rights and ownership. Sheller's 'aluminium dreams' clash with reality: a 'lightweight' material heavy with colonial harm. If aluminium is 100% recyclable, why do mines like Guinea's still expand? The answer is irresponsible demand. Finite resources are not treated as valuable in the face of neoliberal policies promoting overconsumption, perhaps keeping us so occupied that we forget to stop and appreciate what it means to need something new.

Ghosh exposes colonial violence: "The power to rename was one of empire's greatest privileges" (p.87). European cataloguers reduced land to "resources" for extraction (p.88), a practice alive in Guinea and Jamaica today. Despite Guinea's 2016-2020 pledge to redistribute $14.6 billion in mining royalties (UN, 2020), corporations ignored consultative bodies, leaving funds unimplemented. This mirrors terra nullius logic—land deemed "empty" until "improved" by extraction. Mimi Sheller's "aluminium dreams" of lightweight modernity clash with Ghosh's "bloody underside": recyclability masks fresh bauxite mined on stolen land. For whom is aluminium 'sustainable'? Not Guinea's displaced communities, nor Jamaica's postcolonial workers—but co-corporations pumping out 'green' branding while mining virgin bauxite. Bhutan's GNH(gross national happiness)model, however, asks: what if sustainability meant sustaining both people and land together? A rare counterpoint exists in Bhutan, where Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay declares: "Happiness and well-being must be the purpose of capitalism" (Campbell 2025). Their "mindfulness city" prioritises "ecological harmony" with hydro-power that harnesses rivers' natural flow—not dams. By measuring success via Gross National Happiness alongside GDP, Bhutan models Indigenous-capitalist hybridity. Bhutan offers an innovative example of regarding ecological harmony as important as keeping up with the modern world. It demonstrates that while humans are known for adaptation, there is no adapting beyond a dying planet. So, clearly it is in our best interest to care for ecological harmony.

Aluminium's "green" branding epitomises collective amnesia: "endless recyclability" depends on endless extraction. As Yunkaporta warns: Western sustainability clings to buzzwords while ignoring reciprocity and the result? A severing of action from consequence—eternal growth built on land that becomes abandoned once it is extracted from. Sheller's paradox holds: a material that could be circular remains linear, because demand prioritises new extraction over old scrap. It's damning to think that while aluminium sits in a landfill, new aluminium is being mined in its place, instead of re-suing what already exists. Metals are not biodegradable. In fact, they release "arsenic, lead, and mercury" into the environment, contributing to water pollution, and poor air quality. With access to experimental tools like Carbon Mapper (https://data.carbonmapper.org/). To conclude, it's simple, as landfills expand, more land is taken up by toxic waste. The likelihood of the global north facing consequences for their hyper consumption patterns increases.

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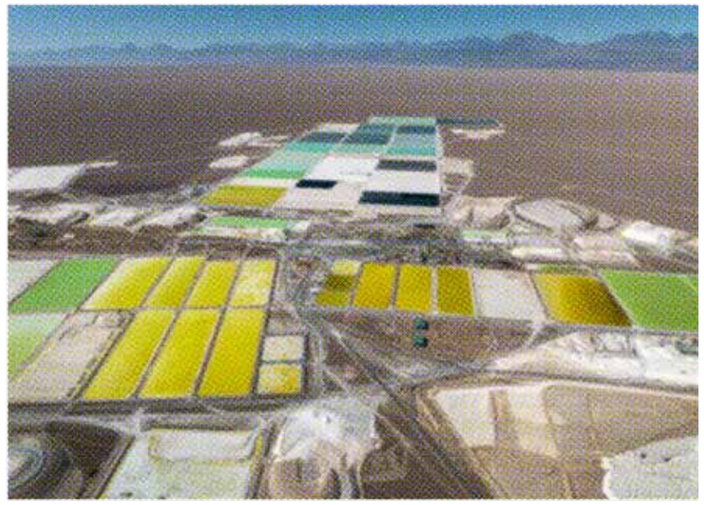

FIGURE 6

Lithium mining site in New Guinea.

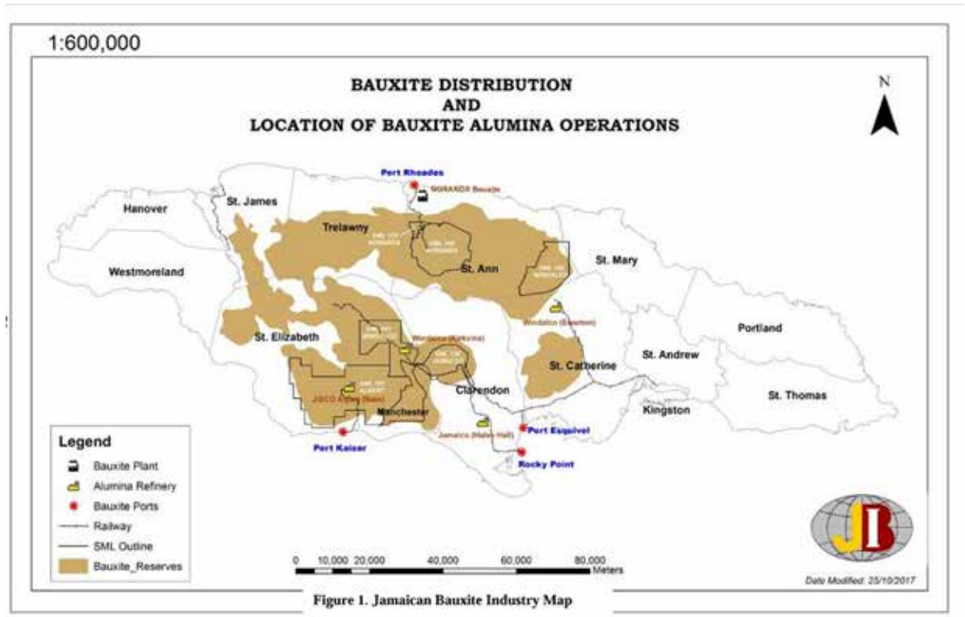

Figure 1. Jamaican Bauxite Industry Map

FIGURE 7

Future Memories
pull at a thread
They get lost in the uncertainty
that weaves them together.

Greed entangles them in their own web
and they struggle.
Wishing their memories away,
only to be left with nothing.

PART 3: SCULPTURES OF REPURPOSED ALUMINIUM.

When I—a 20-something red-haired woman bound by social awkwardness—turned up to my local metal scrapyard A Smiths and Sons on my bike—clearly out of place—with a determination to buy some scrap metal, as this, I was told, was the first step to conquering my desire of working with metal. I wanted to hide, so I stood by the gate and awkwardly looked around until I caught eyes with someone working there. 'John' approached and asked if he could help, and when I told him I was looking for some scrap aluminium for a project, he lit up and started giving me a personal tour of their scrapyard. I was stepping around mud and cautiously weaving in-between heavy machinery; I was elated that I wasn't laughed at or had eyes rolled at me. I followed behind him closely—asserting my badge of don't-worry-I'm-here-with-him to the others in the yard. I chose what I thought looked interesting to work with, not really knowing too much about what I would do with it and prayed it wouldn't be too expensive (as I had no idea what scrap metal was worth). He looked at my ripped Tesco bag full of clanging metal and said that as "an act of good faith" that he would give it to me for nothing. What a legend. I thanked him and got on my rusty bike and cycled back home—with a feeling of triumph, no less—as you cannot imagine quite how much anxiety this trip was causing me. Step one: complete.

As you've now read, I have an appreciation for what a physical material represents in its hidden labour and ecological impact, and how especially damaging it is that these materials are treated as single-use. There is debate on who should be taking the blame for this, like a global hot potato (only the potato is on fire, mouldy, and 10 tonnes). The industry blames the consumer, the consumer blames the industry, politicians tell you there's no hot potato. What I am trying to do through my practice, is understand what discarded materials can be used for, both on a small and a large scale. It is my intention to shed light onto why things don't just disappear when thrown away, some materials will live longer than five generations of a family, like plastic, which is not biodegradable and has a life span of over five hundred years.

Process of Making my Aluminium Sculpture.

With the accumulated six kg of scrap aluminium, I began to work intuitively within the constraints of my mix-graded material. It is important to note that 'play' is important in my practice, and so is working within restrictions of these materials (which is what my master's has been primarily about). I communicate the story of energy, and the wasted potential of so many materials that are thrown away. There is a strong throughline in modernities' throw away culture and the rise in waste shipped away to 'other' lands, which I have explored thus far. Ecological catastrophes are more pressing than ever. It seems that we are collectively desensitising, and that 'stuff'—from tech to make-up—has been commodified, thusly forcing consumers to fit into beauty and wealth standards invented by industries who's only goal is profit. Profiteering practices serve as a catalyst for consumer.

Detachment enables climate injustice. According to Haug et al. (2015) in a study of behavioural addictions; "a person touches their phone over 2670 times a day". Therefore, tactility plays an important role in accountability as the more we touch our phones, the less value they hold.

My project, Dissection of a Landfill explores wasted potential in 'the discarded'. This is through writing, performance, drawing and sculpture. This is foundationally an exploration of the broken relationship that exists with humans and ecology and finding a bridge visually that connects these two back together. I aim to assess what fuels this disconnect, by interrogating landfill as site, being human's largest archive. The archive that is out of sight to most, therefore out of mind. This is all in efforts to create an accessible dialogue for those that are currently excluded from the zeitgeist of climate conversations (i.e. the working class, middle class etc.). My building of a new visual language remains in progress, contains texture, grit, and dare I say, a bit of rock 'n roll.

Hopefully, this publication has clarified my fascination with discarded materials. The climate crisis is a human issue, as well as a political one and we forget that complicated problems require nuanced solutions. Not one person, company or organisation has the answers and if they are claiming has the answers. And if they claim they do, we must question their intent. Embracing a different mindset to climate related issues is important and we can learn a lot from indigenous peoples, and Bhutan's government (as previously discussed) who adapt to a world that both embrace new technologies, but also aim to live in an ecological harmony. Establishing a mindset that is outside of Western conventions, can feel insurmountable. But can lead to a greater collaboration between those that have a unifying goal: for humans and nature to co-exist for longer than our immediate generations to see. To embrace this indigenous-rooted mindset is to treat non-human entities with kindness and understanding.

Landfills are the archives capitalism tries to forget—a tactile record of consumption's collateral damage. My work excavates these stories, not as relics, but as blueprints for repair. These landfills are growing at a rapid rate, and carry stories of families, communities, products and local histories. Archives are used to preserve items and ephemera that a body of people have redeemed as worth keeping. Yet, a landfill is just as much of an archive, yet no one really cares how it looks, or what is being preserved. Landfills are othered; our discarded waste is othered; land is othered; people are othered. It is a cycle that needs to be broken for progress to be made. Let's face it, landfills are

FIGURE 8

My collection of scrap aluminium that became my sculpture.

gross, but we are the ones that have made it so. If more care is implemented at each step of the cycle e.g. choices to buy second hand, buying less in general, being cautious about food wastage, or supermarket deciding to opt out of plastic packaging, there would be less to worry about. But for now, they are unfiltered archives, telling the story of consumption patterns. From picking up the pieces of what is leftover, much like an archaeological dig, we can begin to understand what the bigger picture is: there is not enough space for everything to be flippantly discarded, and that things should be re-used creatively. I am interested in building a new visual language for climate that incorporates texture, messiness and dare I say, a bit of rock and roll. This relies on collaborative interdisciplinarity approaches to climate issues that centre around education, action, conversation, and finding sites to extend this practice to. Dissection of a Landfill will exist in the index of my visual system for climate communications (a project I hope to extend post-MA).

Sculpting serves as an extension of my drawing practice—a tactile exploration of materiality. Through a series of aluminium experiments, I've engaged deeply with the metal's physicality, even testing its malleability and sonic potential. Central to this work is the integration of touch and sound. I composed an ambient dance track by sampling recordings of scrap aluminium—hammered, bent, and scraped—then arranged these sounds in Logic Pro. Using an Arduino mini board, I created a low-tech interactive system where audience touch completes a circuit, triggering the playback of this metallic symphony. This approach, inspired by Low-Tech Magazine's ethos, merges visual communication with sustainable technology to confront climate crisis fatigue.

The interaction is deliberate: to activate the piece, viewers must physically engage, mirroring the core principle that energy must be given to receive energy. This counters the passive consumption of digital information, where overwhelming data often leads to disengagement—especially with daunting topics like climate collapse. By demanding tactile participation, the work fosters a more resonant, embodied connection to aluminium's lifecycle and ecological toll.
Currently speculative, this project is a prototype for interdisciplinary collaboration—bridging designers, coders, and 'low-tech baddies' to reimagine sustainable making. Aluminium's infinite recyclability mirrors the modularity of the system itself: reusable, adaptable, and open-source. Moving from research to 3D practice, I aim to transform climate communication into something visceral and collective, where material awareness sparks dialogue and action.
I refuse to contribute to a material amnesia that forgets the weight of labour, extraction, and consequence. This is why my sculptures force reconnection: to hold scrap aluminium is to hold the weight of colonial history, and to ask: can we mould it into something new? An example of digital waste is The Cloud. Eric Schmidt (then CEO of Google) in 2006 helped coined the term at a conference, when describing a new approach to internet services but the term has developed over time of tech industry discussions. This remote data storage solution sounds ethereal and suggests something above as a sort of 'protecting' and 'safeguarding' feature, quite literally, a backup. Something we are made to believe that will never fail and is omnipresent—but what is the cost? What is written out of the equation—therefore easy to forget—is that there are data storage units that are "down on the ground, using large amounts of water, electricity and even rare metals, placing a strain on the already depleted natural resources." (Ceara Carney, Dugoua, and Couldry 2025) This LSE IQ podcast talks about how data storage is expending precious resources, mainly water and space, in the face of global water scarcity. The podcast mainly explores the ecological impact of AI storage data centres, which is an extension of the same digital material amnesia practice. Like the cloud, which is a data centre taking up real life space, being kept by cool fresh water—sucking the resources from communities—bauxite mining, as we have been, similarly steals community resources. It begs the question: why, when large swathes of the world are amid housing crises are companies bidding for space where data storage centres can live, when that very same space could be used for community resources, or affordable housing? Within the very same podcast, the presenter interviews Ceara Carney, an activist who is protesting "Ireland's 130 proposed data centres will consume 1/5 of its energy by 2026—while 61% of citizens cite housing as their top concern". (Ceara Carney et al. 2025) What Carney suggests is a temporary solution of stopping building data storage centres for AI. Until such a time that greener approaches are possible. She further contends that priorities ought to shift away from tax break incentives for these major cooperations, ensuring that Ireland (and other countries facing similar problems) have a thriving and sustained future.

If there were caps on consumption, or if companies legally had to disclose the amount of water they used for data storage, I wonder if consumption patterns would change. We can look at tobacco as an example. Since the introduction of the homogenised packaging with grotesque images of illnesses, bans on advertising, and the rise of vaping, we can see that tobacco consumption overall has declined. I wonder if the same kind of campaign could be applied to data storage, use of AI, and products which have labour intensive processes for the sake of a sustainable and well-balanced society? Progressives might suggest that this is a great solution, meaning more government-controlled systems would create more regulations. Anarchists might say that this won't happen without a people's movement (as the government is too wrapped up economically and socially with co-operations who are causing these issues). Through this

FIGURE 9

Making a chain link out of an old aluminium air vent.

project, I am exploring what it means to be part of the culture that values items with such vapidity. We maintain our shallow consumerism despite the climate emergency, despite resource scarcity. I will finish with an excerpt from John Wedgwood Clarke's Poetry book titled 'Landfill' (Wedgewood Clarke 2017, page 18)

Clarke's book is described as "taking us behind the chain-link fence of the dump to witness the sublime mess we've made of things" and treats the landfills he has studied for this collection of poems, as a modern archaeology.

II. Cookers

Press and hold for the missing spark – as if
it might turn up those larks
singing over rubble. Rainwater gleams

where the blue buds sprang
beneath that old aluminium pan,
with its holes where the handle's rivets tore away.

Sometimes it caught drips,
Sometimes it was the world, a spoonful of cocoa
crumbling into milk as the window

hammered into sleet and trees,
the oven door open to warm us.
I press and hold – turn and walk through walls.

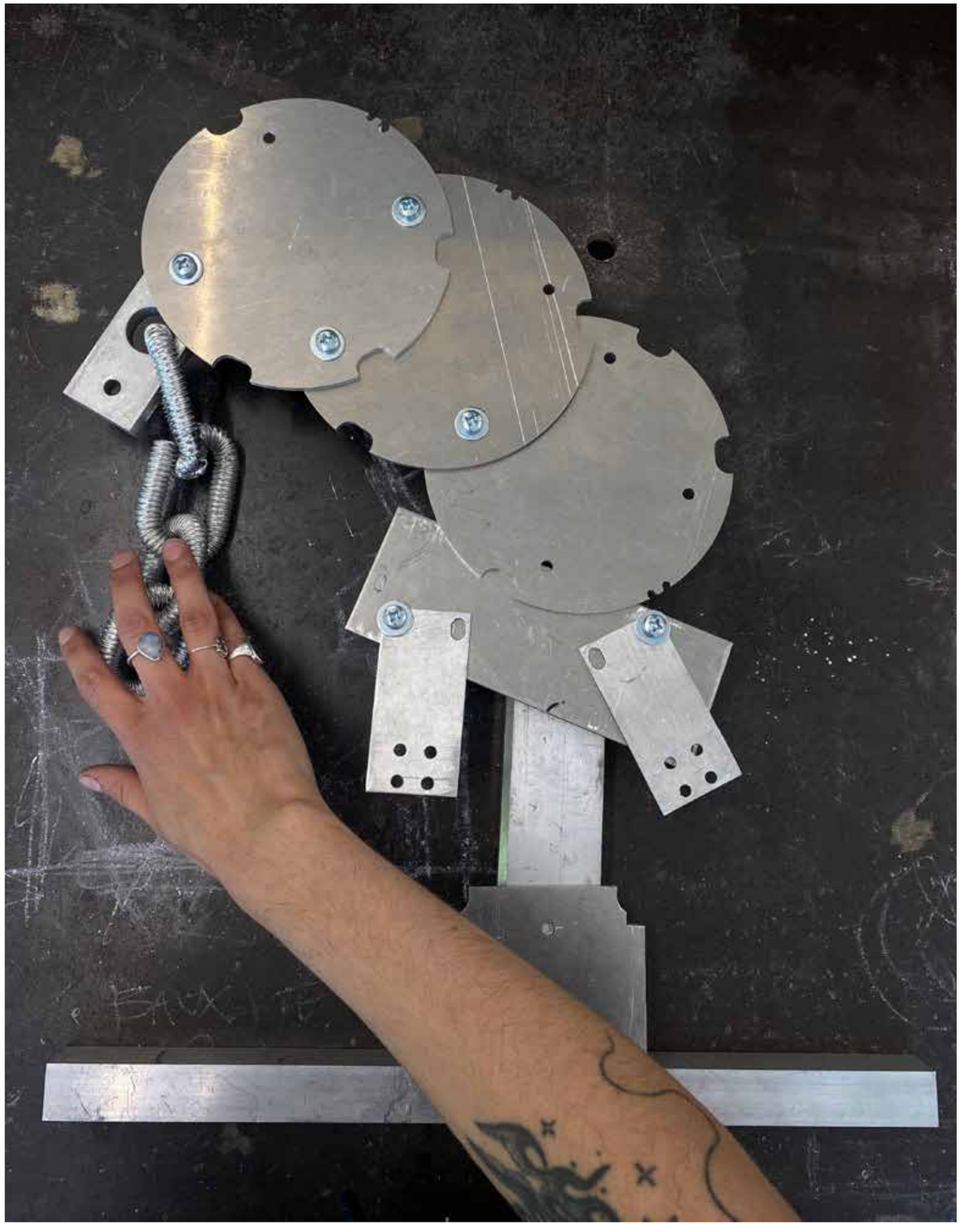

FIGURE 10

First plan sctructure for the sculpture.

CONCLUSION

While aluminium is recyclable and lightweight, it hides deeper connections with colonialism, environmental damage, and exploitative labour in countries situated in the global south. Its actual weight—the landfill toxins, its contribution to global carbon emissions—tell a story of displacement. A displacement not unlike the corporate shifting of guilt onto consumers. I have come to understand what aluminium means and what a privilege it is to be able to get the material for free and use it for my sculpture. I am repurposing something which was going to be smouldered down—causing more harm to air quality—or end up in a landfill for years. I find there is so much left unsaid, and these stories remain buried in landfills. they are our archives: a collection of material remains.

The reality is that landfills are an increasing problem in today's world, and a massive contributor to the climate emergency. It's important not to get too depressed about these situations—we have learnt that guilt does not motivate people to make healthy and sustainable changes. There are (broadly) two sides to this: you either think you are not accountable for climate change as an individual or you believe in a collective attitude. It seems the latter is more hopeful in times of political distress and, truthfully, I hope that is the future we are hurtling towards. By moulding scrap aluminium into modular forms, using what I have collected, I actualise Sheller's paradox: a material that can be circular remains linear. I aim to create a sculpture with the effect of suspension, or balance. Due to aluminium having a high melting point than domestically is impossible to achieve, with no access to a foundry, I had to embrace its rigidity in its existing form to make something wholly new. I don't want to be a buyer of wasteful resources when there is so much already available either for free or for very cheap. The expense is putting in the work to find it—to deal with the awkward encounter. This tactile, sonic sculpture forces a reckoning—not with guilt, but with complicity. The climate crisis is not a failure of technology, but of collaboration and inspiration. Bhutan's GNH metric, and the indigenous 'land-as-kin' model, proves that alternatives can exist. Most of all, we ought to be able to adapt to our environments, rather than become complicit in their destruction.

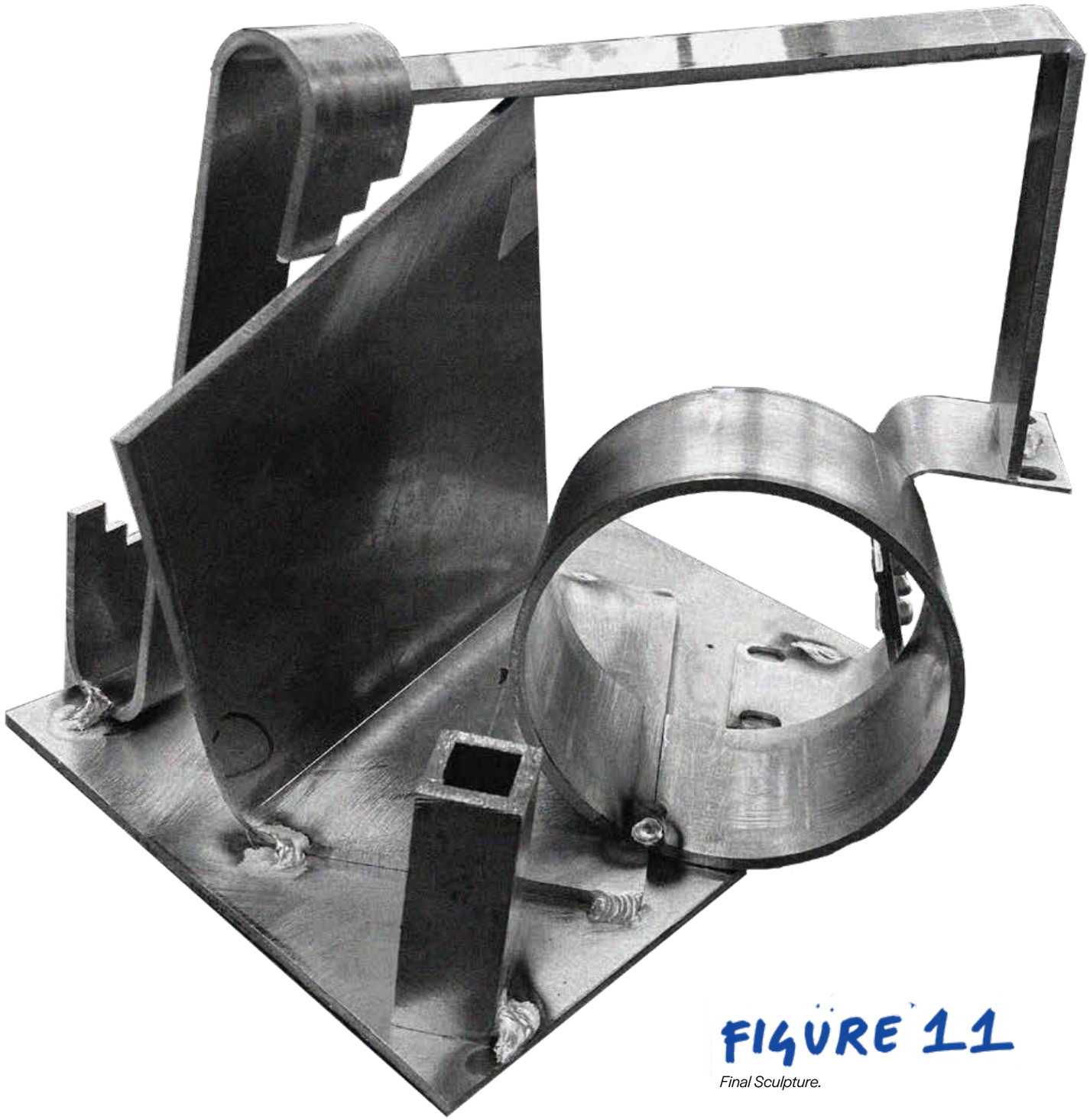

FIGURE 11

Final Sculpture.

ALUMINIUM 35%

BATTERIES (lithium) 80-95%

COPPER 20-30%

DEMOLITION WASTE 55%

E-WASTE 75-85%

FISHING NETS 85-95%

GLASS 60%

HDPE (HIGH DENSITY-POLYTHENE). 77%

INK (printer ink cartridges) 65%

JUTE SACKS 33%

K-CUPS (COFFEE PODS) 83%

LEAD 15%

90%+ MICROPLASTIC PELLETS

43% NICKEL

(used motor oil) 30-40% OIL

95% (fertiliser waste) PHOSPHOGYPSUM

76% QUARTZ

15% RUBBER

83% SILICON

85% TEXTILES

UNDELIVERABLE PACKAGES 55-70%

80% VINLY

65% WOOL SCOURING SLUDGE

70% X-RAY FILMS

25% YELLOW BRASS

45% ZINC.

Estimated percentage of material produced that ends up in landfill.

Estimated percentage of material produced that ends up in landfill.

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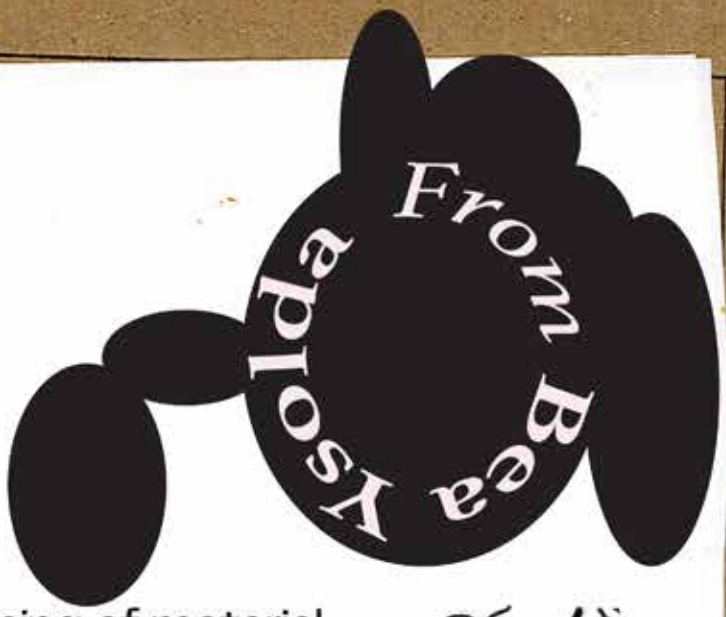

"How can a critical reframing of material and digital waste—exposing its hidden costs (unethical labour, ecologically damaging energy, freshwater exploitation)—cultivate a more holistic and accountable relationship to the climate crisis?

Materials explored: Plastic waste explored with graphic design, scrap aluminium with sculpture and sound, digital waste with performance.