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# RaY

Research at the University of York St John

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*introduction*

from damage to 'risk'

biking and breaking

risk and restriction

breaking the body

experiencing risk

making and breaking 'risk'

references



from damage to 'risk'

The artwork to the left, *risk* 2011, and a later version *Celebration* 2015 are the central focus of this exposition. They are made of glass wax cast into the form of 8-foot-tall drinking glasses (shown here filled with water but in the later version filled with champagne). *risk* 2011 was exhibited at Rickshaw House Gallery in London and *Celebration* 2015 was exhibited at Unit 24 Gallery in London. This exposition is split into six short sections that each reflect on different experiences leading to the development of these artworks.

**'from damage to risk'** questions why my aesthetic preferences changed when I returned to my studio after a year recovering from injury. Before injury I was creating mesh sculptures made from coke cans. These were influenced by my experiences of working in Reading Prison and focused on boundaries and the restriction of movement. When I returned to my studio after breaking several bones I could only relate to my previous sculpture by breaking it. Developing these new aesthetic preferences further I started to work in bone china as I was attracted by its propensity to shatter. This started a process of questioning the role of risk in my artwork. The work in bone china proceeds the development of risk which is then described in the final section.

**'biking and breaking'** reflects on my experiences of injury contrasted with my experiences of risk taking in downhill mountain biking (this is how I injured myself!). I question what motivates certain people to choose to take risks that others would consider foolhardy. I also explore how our judgement of risk changes in different circumstances. Lastly I look at what is gained from risk-taking and compare this to experiencing the sublime.

**'risk and restriction'** explores my experience of being in plaster. In addition to the supportive function of the plaster I contemplate a darker side of restricting movement and weakening what it supposedly seeks to support. I use Sylvia Plath's poem 'In Plaster' and Norbert Elias's concepts of the civilising process to explore being in plaster as a metaphor for relationships between the self and society. I reflect on Plath's skiing escapade (in which she broke her leg!) and raise questions over whether there are different motivations for men and women in risk-taking.

**'breaking the body'** describes the alienation I felt towards my broken arm, which is perceived as dead although ambiguously still attached to my body. Using Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection I propose this experience disturbs order and moves us to deal with uncertainty. I compare facing uncertainty when it is imposed on us rather than when we choose to take risks.

**'experiencing risk'** looks at Doris Salcedo's *Shibboleth* 2007, where she created a crack running the entire length of the Tate Modern turbine hall floor. I contrast this with Gordon Matta Clarke's *Splitting* 1974 in which he sawed a house in two. I contemplate the space created by the fracture and the risk this presents to the viewer and to the artwork. I question what is being risked and explore physical, psychological and social risks.

**'making and breaking risk'** recounts the development of my artwork as, for safety reasons, I change from using bone china to glass wax. Glass wax enables me to build much taller and precarious forms that meet the experience of physical risk I was looking for. This leads to creating *risk* 2011 and following this *Celebration* 2015.