THE INFLUENCE OF ZEN PHILOSOPHY AND AESTHETICS ON THE WORK OF ARTISTS
ANDY GOLDSWORTHY, ANISH KAPOOR AND PETER VOULKOS

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted for the degree Magister Technologiae: Fine Arts at the Tshwane University of Technology is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other institution. All sources quoted are acknowledged by the list of references appended hereto.

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Poorvi Bhana
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to artists, like myself, who feel that rather than expressing themselves, they bring to expression, elements in our daily lives that allow art lovers and ordinary people to view the world around them with a fresh perspective and gain insights into issues that affect us all at one time or another.

During the course of this study, often as an outsider looking in, I was forced to learn how important this change in perspective is for our daily functioning, as we interact with one another.

I have always believed that nothing should come between an artwork and the viewer, so many of my own pieces remain ‘untitled’.

Whilst this study has been documented and published in partial fulfilment of an academic course, it is my sincere hope that art students too will gain a new perspective and be encouraged to pursue their careers with open minds as individuals, who are part of the vast human fabric that we all know binds and unifies us.
ABSTRACT

The topic for this study was sparked when a colleague observed that many of my artworks expressed certain Zen philosophies. As I examined the works of artists who influenced me, the Zen principles were highlighted and thus began a process of examining these principles.

The study follows the spread of Buddhism from India, where it originated, to China, where it later spread, and finally to Japan, where Zen philosophies are still practised today.

Confronted by words in foreign languages and new philosophical terms, this study seeks to clarify and demystify complex Eastern traditions, rituals and practices in order to explore Zen principles, such as dualism, spontaneity, non-action, the interconnectedness of all phenomenon and beauty in its natural form.

The study begins with an introduction to Buddhism and proceeds to explain the link to Daoism, highlighting the aforementioned Zen philosophies and practices like the tea ceremony and demonstrating their influence on Andy Goldsworthy, Anish Kapoor and Peter Voulkos, through an analysis of a selection of their artworks.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the work of three twentieth century artists and the way in which their work exhibits influences of Zen philosophies and aesthetics.

In order to accurately portray this and highlight these influences, it is necessary to sketch a background on Buddhism, from its origins in India, to how it spread to China, evolved as it entered Japan and to highlight its relevance today in the context of various examples of modern art.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 An Introduction to Buddhism

Siddhartha Gautama was a prince of the Nepalese Sakya tribe. In approximately 544BC, at the age of twenty nine, he left his home to contemplate the suffering prevalent at the time. After six years of arduous yogic training, he abandoned the way of self-mortification and instead sat in mindful meditation beneath a bodhi tree. On the full moon of May, according to Nancy Wilson Ross (1981:14), with the rising of the morning star, Siddhartha Gautama became the Buddha, or 'Enlightened One'.

For forty five years, the Buddha wandered the plains of North-Eastern India, teaching the path or Dharma\(^1\) he had grasped at that moment of enlightenment. A sangha\(^2\) or community of monks, and later, nuns, drawn from various tribes and segments of society, developed around him, all devoted to practicing this path. In approximately 486BC, the Buddha died. His last words are said to be, "Impermanent are all created things, strive on with awareness" (Hope & van Loon, 2005:45).

Buddhism may be described as a process of committing no evil, cultivating goodwill and purifying one’s mind (Kaviratna, 1980:73).

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\(^1\) Dharma in both Hinduism and Buddhism refers to the natural order of things, which determine a person's duty (Cross, 1996:124).

\(^2\) A sangha is a fellowship / group of Buddhists (Keown, 2005:10).
1.1.2 Zen Buddhism and Tea Ceremony

Buddhism entered China around the time of Christ, where it fused with Chinese Daoism to become Ch’an. Only later as it spread to Japan (Ross, 1973:139), did it come to be known as Zen – the form in which this teaching is familiar to most Westerners.

The difficulty associated with defining Daoism (which influenced Zen Buddhism) is first evident when a Westerner picks up the *Dao de Jing* (the classic text of Chinese philosophy) and starts reading. The poetic nature of the text makes it simply too vague to relate to in a practical manner. At the very least, the *Dao de Jing* makes it very plain why defining Daoism is such a challenge. The text begins by stating, "The Dao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Dao. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name" (Thomas, 2010).

Zen suggests that enlightenment may be attained through direct intuitive insight, rather than faith alone. In essence, it is asserted by C. Scott Littleton (1999:116), that Zen is taken to mean contemplation and embodies the teachings of Daoism, the alternative to the Confucianism of Northern China, prevalent since communism.

Zen, like Daoism, exemplifies the worship of relativity (Ross, 1973:140). Truth can be reached only with an understanding of opposites. The *yin-yang* symbol (Figure 1) in Daoism demonstrates this, with two nestling commas in black and white, symbolising two principles of change, *yin* being the passive female principle and *yang* being the active male principle (Yamamoto, 1982:53). In Buddhism, the term dualism is often used when contemplating the conflict between good and evil, mind and body, earth and sky, etc. Zen, like Daoism, encourages introspection, contemplation and reflection, for nothing exists except that which is in the mind of the seeker.

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3 Daoism is a philosophical system developed by Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu advocating a simple honest life and non-interference with the course of natural events (Griffiths & Keenan, 1990:132).
Japanese followers of Zen are deeply appreciative of the beauty in nature and in the simplicity of everyday tasks. It is out of this reverence for the beauty in activities, often taken for granted and relegated to the mundane, that the tea ceremony was born. The entire principle of Teaism\(^4\) is a précis of the Zen approach to the importance of beauty in commonplace activities (Dumoulin, 1990:143).

Zen, according to Ross (1973:143), suggests that all human beings are capable of attaining enlightenment through disciplined individual effort through the contemplation of seemingly ordinary activities. Jane Turner (1996:335) points out that drinking tea may be an ordinary experience, but the focus on elements within the activity itself, elevates the simple act of drinking tea to ceremonial status, encouraging introspection and presenting new pathways for discovery to participants.

In the tea ceremony, bowls are not commercially fashioned, but handmade instead. They are practically fashioned and appreciated for their beauty, inherent flaws and uniqueness. A particular penchant for irregularity occupies participants in the tea ceremony, who contemplate the oddity of a flaw in a bowl, for example, and translate it into an appreciation of the joy of self cultivation and living in harmony with one's surroundings. Seasonality, according to Turner (1996:342), is as important to participants in this setting, as utensils are changed and variations applied to the ceremony.

\(^4\) Teaism is a term used by Kakuzō Okakura (1991:3). It is more commonly known as ‘the tea ceremony’ and emphasises a unique aesthetic experience which integrates the ritualism of Zen and the beauty of art in simple everyday activities. It occurs when participants come together to partake in tea drinking and guests and hosts conduct themselves according to the strictest code of etiquette in an atmosphere of spiritual discipline and harmony.
1.1.3 Zen Aesthetics

The notion that art resides in the mind of the viewer, rather than in the mind of the artist or in the artwork, is a parallel drawn by John Grande (1994:60) with Buddha’s realisation that suffering resides not in events or objects, but in one’s mind. Similarly, art influenced by Zen Buddhism afford the viewer an opportunity to explore non-dualistic ideas in a direct and intimate way. The distinctive philosophies of Buddhism, such as fluidity, detachment and spontaneity could also be argued to be evident in the works of artists like Andy Goldsworthy, Anish Kapoor and Peter Voulkos. This study examines how Zen ideals and aesthetics are revealed in their works.

Zen aestheticism is partial to uneven, coarse surfaces through the use of natural and commonplace materials. The rough surfaces may imply, as suggested by Ou Baholyodhin (2000:160), a disciplined approach to the purification of the mind and body. By illustration, the vessels used in a tea ceremony (Figure 2), were of coarse pottery, often irregular in shape, with uneven surfaces and free from adornment.

Figure 2: Kōetsu Hon’ami (1558-1637), Japanese Raku ware red tea bowl known as 'Seppō', Momoyama period (beginning of the 17th century), Hatakeyama Collection, Tokyo (Fahr-Becker, 1999:574).
These utensils were, according to Turner (1996:341), admired for their natural forms, textures and weight, rather than their conformity or apparent refinement in a Western sense. The appreciation of accidental effects, irregularity and asymmetry, is nowhere more clearly reflected than in these utensils, reflecting the potter’s individuality and free spirited approach to finishing, a paradox which is discussed in chapter two.

Tea bowls, suggests Sanders Herbert (1982:228), were respected and treasured by collectors, not simply because they were old and valuable but because they reminded their owners of the fragility of life. They were and still are symbols of the uniqueness which guests might perceive in themselves or that others might perceive in them.

Zen philosophy encompasses a complex assortment of incorporated terms that include words like shibui, wabi, mu and miyabi. Kakuzō Okakura (1991:124) highlights the fact that these Japanese terms are not easily translated into English. However, one is able to obtain an understanding of them through a short discussion. Shibui means a lack of pretence or the absence of adornment. The accurate reflection on the nature of shibui might bring about enlightenment, as it leaves the viewer to experience aesthetics through reflection and appreciation of natural beauty, rather than through suggestion or distraction.

Wabi, according to Okakura (1991:156), is the feeling of detachment and simplicity, which Japanese tea masters looked for in objects associated with the tea-ceremony. Wabi implies solitude, suggesting the Zen and Daoist concept of liberation from material and emotional strife. It is the supreme submission to the non-existent. This non-existence is known as mu. Turner (1996:336), describes the significance of the elements used in the tea ceremony as follows:

The experience of the wabi tea ceremony is often expressed in terms of Buddhist ideas: the stepping-stones in the garden, so willing to be trodden on, and the water in the basin, so willing to take away defilement, and teach humility; the emaciated hut is a reminder of both transience and endurance, and the simplicity and small scale of the whole, represent the insignificance of size and showiness. The garden path itself is said to lead to a world beyond the mundane.
At the heart of Zen is an aesthetic characterised by the word *miyabi*, which is used to indicate the sedate pleasures or aspects of beauty, appreciated only by the so called refined or cultured sensitivity for pale colours, fragile petals and textures (Baholyodhin, 2000:84). This is in part, the awareness of gestures – or a stroke of the calligrapher’s brush (Ross, 1973:143). When one responds to such nuances, one is receptive to the transience of material things and also, the experience of spiritual or soul consciousness. When an artist adopts an introspective approach, creativity and spontaneity are allowed to emerge more easily, differing from alternate beliefs that creativity is inspired by outward or worldly searches. The consequent result in expression is one of simplicity, work produced without interference from the external physical world. It can therefore be said that Zen believes in the inherent beauty of an object, in its rudimentary state without theoretical framing, or an appreciation of the unambiguous reality or inner nature of things (Yanagi, 1982:120).

Zen philosophy prizes the purity of natural objects and seizes the value of the grain of wood, the entwinement of matting and the seeming irregularity of natural rock (Stanley-Baker, 1992:861). Nevertheless, because there is no actual separation between the external and internal worlds, Zen also finds splendour in the accomplishment of man-made artworks. Neither natural nor synthetic can be proclaimed to be superior, and indeed, Zen’s fundamental purpose is often an endeavour towards fusing the two, as opposed to highlighting the distinction between them.

Ornamentation in the Western sense, has little place in Zen traditions as it stems from the superficial, prettifying elements in the mind – the part that sees nature and arrogantly seeks to improve or challenge it. To be truly artistic is to pay homage to, rather than enter into a contest with nature (Dumoulin, 1990:243).

The works of artists Andy Goldsworthy, Anish Kapoor, and Peter Voulkos can be argued to exhibit Zen influence. In order to shed light on this connection, it is important to determine which aspects of Zen manifest in their works.
1.2 Andy Goldsworthy

Using materials from nature, Scottish ‘land artist’, Andy Goldsworthy (1956), allows the elements to constitute his creations, as his original patterns of wood, leaves, stone and ice, move and erode over time (Goldsworthy, 1990:11). He pays close, patient and almost relentlessly devoted attention to nature’s rhythms, cycles and phases.

The artist creates temporary structures, made out of natural materials found on location, which he then leaves for nature to reclaim and transform. What takes these natural materials into the realm of high art (Figure 3, 1987), is that they show some creative intervention, yet they leave the viewer in awe of how they came to be, albeit temporarily. A finished work can last for as long as a few days or as briefly as a minute, before a breeze or an ebbing tide picks it apart. The lack of permanence and accord with nature can be said to be Zen. This rationale is analysed in chapter three, as are other aspects of Goldsworthy’s work that confound viewers about their formation.

Figure 3: Andy Goldsworthy, Bright sunny morning, 19 December 1987, (Frozen snow scraped away with stick), Izumi-Mura, Japan (Goldsworthy, 1990:S.p.).
1.3 Anish Kapoor

British artist Anish Kapoor (1954), explores the concept of the void in his sculptures (Figure 4, 1996). He cuts deep into blocks of stone, sometimes coating the exterior surfaces with a rich pigment, transforming the void into a charged, dark space. He also works with reflective surfaces, which appear to engulf the viewer and the surrounding space. His evocative sculptures provoke an intense spiritual and physical response (Kapoor, Bhabha & Tazzi, 1998:11). In diverse religions one finds expressions of ‘emptiness’. Mystics have often used the notion of emptiness to allude to their experiences of God or the Divine (Foreman & Winston, 2008:44). It is in religions of the East where this notion is far more explicit, particularly within Buddhism and Daoism. The Hindu deity *Brahma* is one such illustration, whose form is believed to exist eternally without beginning or end. The immediacy of Kapoor’s sculptures cannot be ignored and are said to allude to nothingness or immateriality, a distinctive trait of Zen philosophy (see 3.2).

![Figure 4: Anish Kapoor, Untitled, 1996 (Concrete), Location and size unknown (Kapoor, Bhabha & Tazzi, 1998:52).](image)
1.4 Peter Voulkos

Peter Voulkos (1924–2002), an American artist, renewed the tradition of ceramics, with his own wood-fired work. He is known for his abstract expressionist ceramic sculptures (Figure 5, 1984), which are widely believed to have crossed the divide between ceramic crafts and fine art (Savitt, 2002). In vigorous form, one sees a free spirit with the discipline of a Zen master. Working with the primary material (clay) and basic form (the pot), he projected new challenges and sparked new meditations on the meaning of art (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:11), growing the scale and volume of works to a level previously unsurpassed. Amongst his most novel acts is a lack of rationality and the use of the aesthetics of destruction in his creative progression, underscoring Zen characteristics. Voulkos was able to incorporate Zen principles throughout the ceramic process and approached his work with energy and vitality.

Figure 5: Peter Voulkos working at Lake Lotawana, 1984, Kansas City (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:123).
1.5 Research Aims

The influence of Eastern thinking and aesthetics on Western art is seldom analysed, nor used as an interpretive strategy. This study aims to examine the influence of Zen philosophy and aesthetics on artists Andy Goldsworthy, Anish Kapoor and Peter Voulkos. This study will examine the media with which they work, the themes they address and how Zen ideals manifest in their work, in order to draw conclusions about the interacting factors influencing their respective works.

1.6 Research Methods

**Qualitative researcher**: “Many people these days are bored with their work and are….”

**Quantitative researcher** (interrupting): “What people, how many, when do they feel this way, where do they work, what do they do, why are they bored, how long have they felt this way, what are their needs, when do they feel excited, where did they come from, what parts of their work bother them most, which….”

**Qualitative researcher**: “Never mind.”

(Van Maanen, 1983:7).

This study’s research design comprises qualitative research, concerned with meaning rather than measurement, which requires a high level of interpretation throughout the research process (Van Maanen, 1983:10). This research focuses mainly on theories being sourced from various books and documents, taking an interpretive approach to determine a particular reading – thus making it exploratory and theoretical in nature.

A literature survey is proposed, in order to establish a theoretical framework for Zen philosophy and aesthetics. This is being obtained from publications, journals and various internet sources – making use of analogy (similar results that can be cross referenced and correlated, by link or association) (Newman & Benz, 1998:8-9). This involves primary sources, such as Lao-tzu and secondary sources from Zen scholars and critics such as, D.T. Suzuki, Sōetsu Yanagi and Kakuzō Okakura, researching Zen philosophies and aesthetics, and the historical origin of Zen and its philosophic
principles. Furthermore, the investigation identifies, for analysis, disparate works of artists, who can be said to be influenced by Zen philosophy. This is being done to assess their respective approaches to incorporating Zen ideals in their art and subject matter. The aforementioned stipulations require historical research, which involves the identification of an area of study; and the collection, organisation, validation and analysis of information gathered, the sequence of which could lead to a new understanding of the past and alter its relevance to the present and future (Newman & Benz, 1998:3).

The artists chosen, for the purpose of this study, have been selected due to their varied backgrounds, unique styles, diverse forms of art and varying art media. The selected artists are varied in their beliefs and media of expression, but do however, have a noteworthy similarity, in the manifestations of Zen aesthetic principles in their work, whether intended or unintended.

1.7 Summary of Chapters

Chapter two establishes a theoretical framework for Zen philosophy and aesthetics. In this section of the study, a number of issues are covered including: Zen origins and key influences, Daoism and Buddhism, the background of Zen philosophy and aesthetics, and the underlying significance of the tea ceremony.

Chapter three constitutes, through discussion and analysis, the application of the theory to selected works of Andy Goldsworthy, Anish Kapoor and Peter Voulkos. Their works, the study argues, reflects a strong element of Zen philosophy and aesthetics.

Chapter four concludes the study, drawing inferences from the research undertaken. In the following chapter, the study explores the origins of Zen and the spread of Buddhism across Asia.
CHAPTER TWO: ZEN

The Perfect Way knows no difficulties
Except that it refuses to make preference:
Only when freed from hate and love,
It reveals itself fully and without disguise.
A tenth of an inch’s difference,
And heaven and earth are set apart:
If you want to see it manifest
Take no thought either for or against it.
To set up what you like against what you dislike –
This is the disease of the mind:
When the deep meaning [of the Way] is not understood
Peace of mind is disturbed and nothing is gained.
[The Way] is perfect like unto vast space,
With nothing wanting, nothing superfluous:
It is indeed due to making of choices
That its suchness is lost sight of.
When the mind rests serene in the oneness of things
Dualism vanishes by itself


In this chapter, the study examines Zen philosophy and aesthetics, its origins and influences. In order to do this, it is necessary to take a closer look at Daoism, Buddhism and the deeper significance of the tea ceremony, as Buddhism spread from India through China and into Japan.

2.1 Daoism

Daoism was a primary religion and philosophy of pre-Buddhist China along with Confucianism. These two philosophies (namely Confucianism and Daoism), are said to embody the two facets of the Chinese character (Suzuki, 1993:42), the practical and the mystical – advocating faith and belief in humankind's inherent good sense and an 'instinctive wisdom', that only needs to be tapped into, for guidance and support.

At the core of Confucianism is the belief that human beings are able to learn and
improve, through personal and communal endeavour, focusing on the cultivation of virtue and maintenance of ethics (Littleton, 1999:97). Daoism is in many ways the exact opposite of Confucianism. Confucians value people’s integration and participation as components of society, while Daoists value people’s growth as individuals through introspection, which is understood from many ancient, albeit indistinct, texts. It also differs from Confucianism by embracing the spirit-world and the occult, and it diminishes Confucianism’s emphasis on the formally ritualistic and the ceremonial (Suzuki, 1993:42).

The Tao, in its nature is from the outset perfect and self-sufficient. When a man finds himself un-halting in his management of the affairs of life, good or bad, he is known as one who is disciplined in the Tao. To shun evils and to become attached to things good, to meditate on emptiness and to enter into a state of amadhi – this is doing something. Of those who run after an outward object, they are the furthest away [from the Tao] (Suzuki, 1996:108).

2.1.1 Principle Teachings of Daoism

To Daoists, life is in a continuous state of flux, where nothing is permanent. The Dao has a controlling influence over everything and functions in a way that the Dao De Jing describes as a reversal. If anything is taken too far, it will be returned by the Dao to its previous state.

The Dao De Jing or The Way and its Power, is a book of Chinese philosophy. According to tradition, Daoism was originated by Lao-tzu, who is said to have written the classic Dao De Jing, sometime between the fourth and seventh century BC. The concept around which all of Daoist mystical philosophy revolves, is the infinitely mysterious one of the Dao. The Dao is the ‘way of final reality’, which is described as the ‘Way of the Universe’, the rhythm, creative force, and subtle dance of nature and the ‘Way of Authentic Human Life’ (Harvey, 1998:17).

Written in the third century BC, the Book of Zhuang Zi along with the Book of Lie Zi, compiled some 500 years later – are, with the Dao De Jing, considered to be Daoist classics (Littleton, 1999:123). The Dao De Jing’s central teaching is a way to live in
harmony with nature, through the practise of *we wei* (*non-action*). It can therefore be said that the way of Daoism is to leave things to take their natural course, through non-action. Additionally, one should not try to manipulate the thoughts of others, but leave them to find their own way to enlightenment, through their faith in the Dao. Daoists are also encouraged to take care of their physical health, in order to be in harmony with the Dao. This means working with rather than against nature, which in the Daoist view, will only lead one to the reversal of anticipated outcomes. Thus the *Dao De Jing* proposes that a wise person or leader may accomplish much by not doing anything in particular and may achieve a great deal through silence.

Daoists strive to become one with the Dao. This cannot be achieved by trying to understand the Dao intellectually. The more proficient one becomes with the Dao, the more one realizes that the peace-of-mind, tranquility and liberation from everyday strife, sought by its followers, lies within one's self. This requires an intuitive understanding, which the Chinese philosopher Chuang-tzu (in Hoover, 1977:99) describes as follows:

> The Dao may be known by no thoughts or reflections. It may be approached by resting in nothingness, by following nothing and pursuing nothing. The Dao is thus realized by abiding in silence and the way to silence is found by 'letting go': To search for knowledge means to acquire day after day; to seek the Dao means to let go day after day.

Daoists honour balance above all else. According to Chuang-tzu, this balance is reached through silence. It is in this steadfast observation of stillness, that all inner and outer activities come to rest and worldly limitations fade.

In Chinese cosmology, two forces operate throughout the universe: *yin* and *yang*. *Yang* encompasses the qualities of brightness, hardness and masculinity, while *yin* represents darkness, softness and femininity. Daoism is seen as a *yin* philosophy, passive, gentle and content to leave things as they are. Its power is obtained from nature and it is understood by following the laws of the natural world (Littleton, 1999:121).

After the arrival of Buddhism in China in 67 A.D. (Morgan, 1942:91), the early
Chinese Buddhists made use of Daoist vocabulary to express their Buddhist ideas and saw the Dao as the way to nirvana, striving for liberation from desires, release from limitations of the physical world and the effects of karma. Attaining this level of consciousness is said to awaken one to the actual world, in contrast with the illusionary world of samsāra (Keown, 2005:4). The Zen saying, 'The wondrous Dao consists of carrying water and chopping wood' emphasises respect for simplicity, non-action and working in silence (Schumacher & Woerner, 1999: 357), confirming the influence of Daoism on Zen beliefs as Buddhism spread through China and into Japan. Religious Daoism was strongly influenced by the spread of Buddhism to China in the second century CE, thus making the influence of Daoism on Buddhism mutual. As a result, the philosophy of Daoism embraced the Mahāyāna character and was associated with teaching methods of the time (Littleton, 1999:134).

2.2 Buddhism

Buddhism was founded in North East India by Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha or ‘Enlightened One’. It then spread through Asia, influencing and mixing with many cultures along the way. Buddhist ‘mysticism’ began with the Buddha’s own enlightenment in Bodhgaya (Littleton, 1999:65), in approximately 528 BC. The term ‘Buddha’ is formed from the Sanskrit root word buddh, which means both ‘to wake up’ and ‘to know’ (Harvey, 1998:65).

Buddha taught that the material world was simply an illusion, and that pain and suffering were rooted in desire. Suffering ended when one reached a state of nirvana. Liberation from the continuous cycle of life, death and rebirth was attainable

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5 Nirvana / moksha (spiritual liberation) is the ultimate goal of a Hindu. True knowledge of the self, is explained as the identification of one’s own atman (soul) with the world Brahma (which brings freedom from attachment, desires and ignorance, as well as from the cycle of rebirth (Littleton, 1999:30).

6 According to the universal law of karma, every action has a reaction. The law in itself is neither moral nor retributive, but a feature of the constitutive elements of samsāra (Littleton, 1999:78).

7 Samsāra is a Sanskrit word meaning continuous motion, which Buddha used as a metaphor for reincarnation or the process of birth, death and rebirth (Ross, 1973:87).

8 Mahāyāna or great vehicle in Sanskrit is one of the two main branches of Buddhism and a term used for the classification of Buddhist philosophies and practices (Littleton, 1999:78).
by giving up wants and worldly ties. So unshakable was his faith, that he devoted the rest of his life to instructing others on how to accomplish this, leaving his followers to propagate his values long after his death (Klostermaier, 2002:47).

The Buddha’s vision of reality as ‘empty’, as devoid of any inherent permanence or meaning, permeates the whole of Buddhist philosophy and practice. Insights or flashes awaken the student’s consciousness, who in turn, passes it on to future generations. In this way, practices like meditation, based on oral tradition and taught by the Buddha thousands of years ago, have remained firmly in place despite the fact that the ancient narratives and wisdom of the Buddha were not written down until many centuries after his death (Klostermaier, 2002:48). In Buddhist practice, teachings are not handed down academically. One teacher lives through the truth of the teachings and passes it on as motivation to younger disciples (Cantwell, 2010:94). The Buddha encouraged individual experience and urged his followers to put everything he said to the test and thus, through the ages, his disciples have learnt to trust their own instincts, rather than interpret unreliable and ancient manuscripts.

Buddhism divided early in its history and today two main schools of thought survive: The Mahāyāna (greater vehicle), which spread to China and Japan, and the Theravāda (or Hinayāna) which is the lesser or smaller of the two traditions. The Theravāda or School of Elders (Ross, 1981:20) accentuated the importance of meditation and monasticism, and became the principal religion of Southeast Asia, including countries such as Burma (Myanmar), Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Cambodia (Cantwell, 2010:182). The Theravāda is the more restrained, following strict discipline in meditation and slowing down the rate of the mind’s disorientation. It allows for straightforward and unwavering experiences of the mind. It thus stresses the benefits of discipline.

On the other hand, the Mahāyāna, which continued through the centuries as the main school of Buddhism, held a more flexible attitude toward its following and is referred to as the greater vehicle because its approach opened the way of deliverance to ordinary people, as opposed to monks exclusively (Hope & van Loon,
Regardless of doctrinal differences, all forms of Buddhism share the same roots, and all are motivated by the quest to attain a long-lasting state of contentment through mental, spiritual and moral effort (Hope & van Loon, 2005:53).

2.2.1 Central Teachings of Buddhism

The philosophy and thought of Buddhism has a strong practical base, the essence of which can be termed the Four Noble Truths (van Loon, 1989:1). The first truth, *duhkha*, is suffering – the result of life’s torment and misery. The second truth, *samudaya*, is the origin of suffering, namely desire. People are increasingly discontent because of an insatiable desire for self-gratification. The third truth, *nirdhā*, alludes to the end of suffering and asserts that people long to trust and believe, but there are fixed ideas to which they cling. Release from suffering is therefore secured through the liberation from all forms of desire. This end of suffering, or ‘attainment of enlightenment’, is meant to be experienced directly. The fourth truth, *marga*, is the path that leads one to abstaining from activities that cause suffering and which reveals the way to true liberty and enlightenment. These four truths comprise an eight-step path, incorporating the right outlook, a quiet resolve, appropriate speech, precise action, accurate livelihood, dedicated effort, truthful mindfulness and focused meditation (Keown, 2005:5). The key components of Buddhism may therefore be summarised as *prajña* (insight), *sīla* (morality) and *samadhi* (meditation).

Buddhist teachings incorporated complete salvation and a host of quasi-divinities called *Bodhisattvas* (Keown, 2005:141). Due to Buddhism’s appeal to a wider diversity of the population, worship and art flourished, as a result of its more liberal approach towards realising Buddha’s truths. In this growth phase, Buddhism quickly became a trans-cultural faith and was able to coexist with native ways of life and practices throughout the region, especially in East Asia (Littleton, 1999:57).

According to Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki (1996:290), when a mind is free from
interference and sees no distinction between Buddha and sentient beings, the Buddhist life is complete. This state of mind or consciousness is referred to as a state of mushin.\(^9\) More or less time and effort may be required in striving for the state of mushin, but once attained through the disciplined approach, the power of one's realisation is heightened. In the end, nothing worldly or tangible has been gained. \textit{Mushin} is simply an experience of the universal truth.

The Buddha (in Suzuki, 1996:115) refers to the sands of the Ganges thus, as a metaphor for mushin:

> These sands are trodden upon and passed over by all the Buddhists, Bodhisattvas, Sakrendra and other devas, but the sands are not thereby gladdened, they are again trodden on by cattle, sheep and insects and they are not thereby incensed either; they may hide within themselves all kinds of treasures and scented substances, but they are not covetous; they may be soiled with all kinds of filth and ill-smelling material, but they do not loathe them.

\textit{Mushin} can therefore also be taken to mean a state of mind free of material or worldly attachment.

Buddhists believe the word ‘freedom’ to be used rather carelessly and prefer instead, the word \textit{muge} (literally, liberation, being free from impediment). \textit{Muge} refers to the absence of that impediment arising from relativity. It also means a state of liberation from all duality, a state where there is nothing that one is restricted by.

Among Buddhist sects that advocate the way of relying on oneself to attain enlightenment, the most typical is Zen Buddhism, the doctrine of which is thoroughly individualist, commanding its disciples to discipline themselves by relying on their own powers until enlightenment is reached (Suzuki, 1993:9). In summary, the central teachings of Buddhism are to continually strive toward enlightenment, to be free of worldly attachment and to practise disciplined restraint through meditation.

\(^9\) \textit{Mushin} may be described as a state of ecstasy, in which there is no sense of a person consciously doing anything to attain this state which is simply experienced (Suzuki, 1996:290).
2.3 Zen Buddhism

Zen, or Ch’an (as it is known in China), is a school of Mahāyāna Buddhism which developed in China in the sixth century. Zen Buddhism, which was brought to China by an Indian monk, Bodhidharma (who lived during the fifth and sixth centuries and was known as Daruma in Japan), is a combination of Buddhism and Daoism. Much of Zen philosophy thus highlights the teachings of Daoism (Hope & van Loon, 2005:88). The word Zen has its origins in the Sanskrit word Dhyana, which means meditation. It lays claim to the fact that salvation and self-realisation may be reached through the path of consecrated meditation (Blyth, 1977:28).

Zen is not a religion, but rather an indefinable, incommunicable channel to a meditative state, free from names, descriptions and concepts. Zen can only be experienced by each individual (Okakura, 1991:67). In this sense, Zen is not bound to any religion or to Buddhism per sé. It foregrounds experience of the primordial perfection of everything that exists, referred to by various names, experienced by many great sages and founders of the religions of the world.

Two distinctive schools of Zen were introduced to Japan, both of which originated in China, from the philosophy of monks whose ancestry have been traced to Bodhidarma and, ultimately, to the Buddha himself (Littleton, 1999:87). These are Rinzai and Soto Zen.

Rinzai Zen spread as a tradition to Japan through Eisai (1141-1215), a Buddhist monk at the end of the twelfth century, and is predominantly recognised for its use of the koan10 to stimulate satori (or realisation) (Ross, 1981:190), in the form of a conundrum with no apparent answer. It is used to guide the mind more rapidly en route to enlightenment.

The Buddha himself can be said to be the creator of koans, so popular in Zen. The tale of a Buddha’s use of a Zen koan may be illustrated as follows:

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10 A koan is an irrational theme for Zen meditation which typically consists of a question, story or statement, the meaning of which should not be rationalised but sought through intuition (Hope & van Loon, 2005:94).
When he was teaching at Vulture Peak Mountain, a large assembly of people who had come to hear him preach, had gathered from near and far. Remaining silent, he sat amongst them, finally lifting a flower he had. Nobody understood the gesture, and were all mystified by his gesture. All except Mahakashyapa, who upon looking at the blossom in his master’s hand, smiled to himself. He alone had grasped the meaning that transcends language and understood that words were not a substitute for the living flower. He perceived the quintessence of the Buddha’s teaching at that very moment and with this, the first communication from one mind to another took place (Hope & van Loon, 2005:87).

Each *koan* directs one towards the nature of authenticity of a specific aspect of life. Paradox is necessary, as it transcends conceptual or logical thought, thus forcing the seeker to enter a state of hyper-awareness, exclusively focused on the *koan* (Ross, 1981:22). Students are accustomed to structure logical conceptual answers to questions raised. When none can be found to address the question, they are baffled. The nature of the *koan* is specifically to defy logic. The study of the *koan* is expressly and deliberately intended to shorten the intellectual progression in order to experience reality directly.

This line of transmission which commenced with Buddha’s lesson, is of primary concern in Zen, since the legitimacy of the experience, or enlightenment, can only be passed on by an enlightened teacher, rather than through logic. This transfer of knowledge from teacher to apprentice, akin to the guru / disciple relationships so prevalent in India, have kept Zen alive and dynamic through the ages (Cantwell, 2010:96). As an example, a monk asked Hui-Neng how to get rid of ignorance, to which Hui-Neng replied: “Cease running after things, stop thinking about what is right and wrong but just see, at this very moment, what your original face was like before your mother and father were born” (Hope & van Loon, 2005:95).

*Soto Zen*, the second form of Zen introduced to Japan, originated from the master Dōgen (1200-1253), who was considered the most original thinker in Japan. Encouraging an austere life for both monks and ordinary people, Dōgen advocated a form of meditation called *zazen* (formal sitting meditation), through which enlightenment could be realised progressively, instead of instantaneously, as taught by the Rinzai school (Bancroft, 1979:19). Dōgen found that all of Buddhism could be merged into one practice in a sanctified technique or combination of practice and
enlightenment. To achieve this, one is expected to cast aside all attachment and cease all worldly activity.

Through conscious breathing, the intellect transforms the body. The mind and body are then transformed into a state of non-dual consciousness. Dōgen (in Rao, 2004:31) referred to this as ‘exertion without end’. His philosophical works are indispensable to Zen ideals and his school of Zen shows veneration for sutras. Stressing obedience, self-control and meditative customs, it is perhaps the more philosophical and creative of the two Zen schools (Ross, 1981:22). Zazen meditation was fundamentally comparable to practices taught elsewhere, yet it was with Zazen that ‘Buddha-nature’ or traits of the Buddha were translated into the direct individual assertion of truth (Ross, 1981:154).

Zen is not an intellectual philosophy or quest. It emphasises daily life practice, along with intensive periods of meditation (Okakura, 1991:22). Group participation is an integral part of Zen practice. In explaining Zen Buddhism, Japanese Zen teachers have made the point that Zen is a ‘way of life’. DT Suzuki (1870-1966) emphasised a life of humility, labour and service as well as a life of gratitude and meditation. Zen emphasises that seemingly tedious, everyday tasks, like drinking tea, present opportunities to experience truth. This natural and reverential simplicity of dealing with everyday things finds its consummation in cha-no-yu (hot water for tea), an art form that lies between the everyday and the artistically artificial, based on the act of drinking tea (Varley & Isao, 1989:235).

2.3.1 Zen Philosophy and Aesthetics

According to Littleton (1999:86), Buddhism is practised in various forms in Japan, however, Zen appears to be the most familiar to Westerners - perhaps because Zen

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11The sutras are texts claiming to report the discourses of the Buddha, or of his immediate disciples. Sutra means “thread,” and the allusion is doubtless to the threads of words woven together to form the fabric of the Doctrine (Saunders, 1977:35). Each sutra, complete in itself, usually takes the form of a dialogue in which a personage comes to visit the Buddha and interrogates him on a specific question.
is characterised by art and humour, making it more appealing to cultures weary of religious inflexibility. There is however more to Zen than this and this study has identified a number of Zen ideals and principles, which are present in tea ceremony protocols as well as works of art analysed in chapter three.

In 1.1.2 the concept of dualism was introduced and the aim of Zen Buddhists is to attain freedom from duality: good and evil, true and false, beauty and the unattractive, the self and others, life and death, the conscious and sub-conscious. All such dualistic forms must be discarded according to Zen belief. Day in and day out, Zen Buddhists undergo rigorous training to achieve this, for as long as they are trapped in the polarised world, they are unable to attain Buddhahood or peace of mind (Suzuki, 1996:116).

The Daoists’ idea of non-action discussed in 2.1.1 has significantly influenced many theories of action, such as martial arts like fencing and wrestling. In jiu-jitsu\textsuperscript{12} for example, a participant attempts to diminish his opponent's force through non-resistance, while preserving his own strength for victory in the closing struggle (Suzuki, 1996:291). Zen continues this belief in non-action, but links it to the natural laws of nature, suggesting that a harmonious relationship with one's surroundings and others is important and that the balance ought not to be disturbed, but left to its natural flow.

The principle of non-action or detachment is carried into the void. The doctrine of the void\textsuperscript{13} according to Suzuki (1996:26), is a means of escape from worldly attachment and asserts that things have no self, that is to say, they are empty. The void therefore, signifies and communicates the all-inclusive, thereby negating dualism. It is a place where emptying out and filling up are synonymous. The reality of a room, for example, could be found in the unoccupied space, rather than the restrictive walls, roof or floor. Similarly, the usefulness of a vase resides in the emptiness within, that might hold water, not in the shape of the vase or the substance out of

\textsuperscript{12} Jiu-Jitsu is a Japanese martial art form, consisting of defensive techniques to disarm an attacker (Rao, 2004:29).

\textsuperscript{13} The void or Śūnyatā in Sanskrit, is a Buddhist term that translates into emptiness or openness and refers to the absence of inherent existence in all phenomena like the Buddhist concept of the non-self (Foreman & Winston, 2008:44).
which it was fashioned. The formless void is a powerful metaphor because it is all encompassing. Without the internal emptiness, according to Zen, the outer form would be useless. With this in mind, it stands to reason that any person who perceives the void, into which others may liberally enter, may become master of all situations, for the whole always dictates the parts.

The value of this belief is replicated in art and is demonstrated by the importance of suggestion (Okakura, 1991:67). In allowing something to be incomplete or unfinished, the viewer or critic is provided with an opportunity to complete the idea, which is how a work of genius beguilingly enthrals its beholders until they seem to become an essential part of it. The artist thus does not strive for completion. This idea is discussed in more detail in chapter three.

According to the Dao, the void is a portal through which one may enter to replenish aesthetic sentiment, for all forms emerge out of the void and those who comprehend, are rewarded with power and enlightenment. The notion of the void, non-dualism and non-action are therefore intertwined.

Buddhists believe that there is a connection between all phenomena (Baume, 2008:131). This concept, known as *Indra’s net*, puts forward the notion of entirety and stresses the importance of selflessness. Zen glorifies beauty, and free-spiritedness is understood to be the beauty of liberation or freedom from impediment (Suzuki, 1993:6). It should be noted that freedom here, is not restrained even by the idea of freedom. Moreover, freedom does not mean selfish or lawless behaviour. True freedom must therefore mean liberation from both one’s self and others. It is not a form of bondage, nor should it be restricted by others. Everything beautiful is, from a Zen perspective, a manifestation of this unique brand of freedom.

The concepts of transience or impermanence, spontaneity and flexibility or adaptability are important Zen ideals too and are discussed in more detail in 2.3.2. Zen places emphasis on the journey rather than the destination. The Japanese Tea Ceremony is pivotally linked to Zen Buddhist ideals and the concept of beauty. It

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*Indra’s net is a metaphor used by the Mahāyāna Buddhist school (see 2.2) and symbolises the connectedness between all phenomena (Baume, 2008:131).*
does not merely consist of drinking tea, but endeavours to appreciate the true meaning of beauty in Zen terms. The discussion continues in the following section.

2.3.2 The Tea Ceremony

When tea is made from water drawn from the depths of the Mind
Whose bottom is beyond measure
We really have what is called cha-no-yu


The tea ceremony, also known as cha-no-yu, evolved from the time it was first used in China during the K'ai-yuan era (713-741), and has been constantly adapted throughout its history (Varley & Isao, 1989:233). Tea was also taken to keep monks awake during extended periods of meditation at temples. Its wider propagation is generally ascribed to Eisai (1141-1215), who introduced its use as *matcha*¹⁵ (powdered tea) to Japan in the early *Kamakura* period, although tea was known in Japan even before the *Kamakura* era (1185-1333) and was taken for its medicinal properties.

Eisai was a Zen teacher, who came to be known as the father of tea cultivation in Japan. He brought tea seeds from China and then cultivated them in the grounds of a friend’s monastery. However, it was not Eisai who originated the tea ceremony. The Zen monk Dai-ō (1236-1308) ritualised the tea ceremony, approximately half a century later (Suzuki, 1993:272).

The ceremony evolved and influential tea masters such as Sen no Rikyū (1522-1591) emerged, improving upon the ritual and putting finishing touches to what is

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¹⁵*Matcha* or powdered tea was transmitted from Sung China and developed independently as *cha-no-yu* in Japan. At first, tea was moulded into cakes and boiled. However, the advent of Zen in the late *Kamakura* period (1185-1392) brought to Japan a very different way of preparing tea, with the leaves crushed into powder and then whisked in bowls of hot water. The evolution of Tea may be divided roughly into three core stages and the periods in which they existed: cake-tea which was boiled (*Tang* dynasty), powdered-tea which was whipped (*Sung* dynasty) and leaf-tea which was steeped (*Ming* dynasty) (Okakura, 1991:26).
now known as cha-no-yu, literally translated 'tea ceremony' or 'tea cult' (Suzuki, 1993:272). These iconoclasts' understanding of tea and deep perceptions of beauty led to their designation as tea masters.

One of the earliest explorations into the real meaning of the Japanese tea ceremony was by Okakura (1862-1913), a Japanese scholar and author, who defined and praised the tea ceremony as the religion of aestheticism, the adulation of the beautiful and as a work of art. He placed its origins in Daoism, more specifically under the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu (Turner, 1996:336). According to Okakura, tea masters studied Zen and tried to introduce its practices into their daily lives. As stated by Okakura (1991:69): "Zen and tea are one." The ideal of the tea ceremony is a result of the Zen concept of seeing greatness in the smallest of life's incidences. It can be said that Daoism provided the foundation for this aesthetic and Zen elevated it to an idealistic stage.

Nothing used in the tea ceremony was selected for its conformity or perfection of form. A cursory inspection of the ceramic utensils used in the ceremony, confirms this. Their shapes are irregular, the surfaces dry or sandy and the glazes of uneven thickness. Pieces placed in the kiln remain unglazed where the pots rested upon one another and even fire cracks are accepted. These characteristics are not merely tolerated or overlooked, but are accepted as an integral part of pot making and therefore potentially beautiful (Yanagi, 1982:119).

Tea masters formulated and refined the ceremonial aesthetics of cha-no-yu and thus set the protocols for the ceremony as an aristocratic fancy but the tea ceremony also spread, to be adopted by the general population of Japan. Utensils to be used in the ceremonial serving of tea were selected by the tea masters who rejected the extraordinary and favoured unpretentious items of everyday life with no connection to tea (Yanagi, 1982:180).

The tea masters saw and appreciated unusual beauty in commonplace, simple and ordinary utensils. They were connoisseurs who selected items that the Japanese describe as shibui – literally, 'tastefully astringent', better described by Sōetsu
Yanagi (1982:184), as having a "profound, unassuming, and quiet feeling". The tea masters were among the earliest people to consciously appreciate the beauty of irregularity and take it as the principle underlying the tea ceremony and this is immediately confirmed upon inspection of the bowls used in the tea ceremony, not one of which fails to show irregularity in one form or another.

Rikyū, who later became the most celebrated tea master in Japan according to Suzuki (1993:280), understood the dual character of the everyday and the artistic in cha-no-yu and felt obliged to explain how ‘ordinariness’ could exist within ‘artistic artificiality’. The reason why Rikyū is regarded as the quintessential tea master is because he strove to develop his understanding of tea’s duality from the very beginning in a resolute and dynamic manner.

Rikyū viewed the tea ceremony as an intimate gathering, in which a few people would enter a small, plainly furnished room, to partake in a ceremony where tea was meticulously prepared by the host in the presence of guests. In this calm, elegant and peaceful setting, conversation was kept to a minimum, with a focus on the ceremony itself. Rikyū envisaged an aesthetic of humility, elegance, and rusticity that allowed the sukiya (tea room) to serve as a haven, safe from the hustle and bustle outside. The term ‘abode of vacancy’ best describes the tea room (Okakura, 1991:74). Rikyū also put forward the notion that tea and Zen have the flavour and aesthetic of wabi (see 1.1.3).

Once all the guests have arrived, a gong is sounded, and the host appears quietly to beckon guests into the tea-room. Each guest in turn stops at a water basin to rinse their hands and mouth. Guests then enter the room through a nijiriguchi, or crawling-in entrance, a low doorway which requires them to bend in order to pass through, symbolically separating the tranquil tea room from the outside world (Stanley-Baker, 1992:148) and forcing guests to bow in humility.

Seated on the floor in silence, guests sit, drinking kiocha (a pale jade green liquid made with matcha and hot water) whipped with a bamboo stalk. The host and guests observe, with meticulous precision and prescribed protocol, the handling of
everything they touch. They talk in muted tones and avoid discussion about worldly affairs. Conversation, whilst kept to a minimum, may cover the historic significance of an old or valued object in the host’s possession, the season being experienced, or a *kakemono*.

Silence is therefore an integral part of the tea ceremony, enabling those present to attune themselves to the sounds of a crackling fire, or the hymn of a kettle on the hearth, a pine bough brushing the roof, or the rhythmic dripping of water from a bamboo tube into a stone basin outside. This experience of tranquility and detachment is best described by the Japanese words *wabi* and *sabi* (Suzuki, 1993:284) (see 1.1.3).

Although fashioned from the finest available materials, the impression in the tea room is one of rusticity and simplicity. Ironically, this created aura of simplicity and non-materialism associated with the tea room, can only be achieved at considerable expense. This aesthetic is however, an outstanding creation of Zen ethics and culture. Stressing artificial poverty in the ceremony became an embodiment of the Zen association with non-materialism (Turner, 1996:337).

The ‘worship of the Imperfect’ as seen in tea ceremony utensils, does not imply a formal aesthetic category. The respect for simplicity and one's ability to see beauty therein, according to Okakura (in Yanagi, 1982:115), is the larger issue and it is here, that the foundation for aesthetic expression in cha-no-yu exists. Authentic beauty, according to Zen principles, may be realised and experienced by one who completes the incomplete mentally (Okakura, 1991:95). The essence of Zen beauty rests in that potential for growth, as this study will show in the examination of work by Peter Voulkos in chapter three.

The question of why imperfection is favoured in the tea ceremony, begs to be asked. Yanagi (1982:120) argues that perfection carries no overtones and confesses nothing. Perfection is static and regimented. Human imperfections are repelled by perceived perfection, since everything is apparent from the outset and there is no

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16 A *kakemono* or 'hanging' in Japanese, is a Japanese scroll painting with silk edges on a flexible backing, for easy storage when rolled (Herbert, 1982:35).
suggestion of anything beyond. Beauty requires room and an association with freedom, according to Eleanor Bosch, who writes on *Mind, Meditation and Art*, (in Baas & Jacob, 2004:37): "If you depict a bird, give it space to fly."

Dissatisfied with Okakura’s theory, the aesthetcian Shin’ichi Hisamatsu presented another idea. Hisamatsu declared that imperfection does not constitute beauty and that the imperfect is merely a negative concept. According to Hisamatsu beauty in the tea ceremony, in order to achieve progression, must be positive, to the point of positively rejecting the perfect. This idea goes one step further than Okakura. For example, Hisamatsu’s idea of ‘rejecting the perfect’ is well illustrated in Raku tea bowls (Figure 2) (Yanagi, 1982:121). The shape is deliberately distorted by not using a production wheel and the surface is left coarse.

These subtleties of Zen aesthetics may be interpreted generally as *qi*.\(^{17}\) In art, *qi* is that which merges the self and the mind completely with what one is doing. The space between subject and object is diminished (Beittel, 1989:23). This harmonious union of the mind and the body is the aim of ceramic practice from a Zen perspective. It is not easy to achieve and is not accomplished by an act of will, or by taking someone else's work as a standard. It is woven into the very fabric of the tapestry of life. Zen in the art of pottery is no more or less than the centring of the body and mind. It is a meditation in action, in which the humblest bowl and the largest sphere arise from the same deep space, where one’s best forms and decorations, seem no longer one’s own but appear as though they were already there to begin with and all one needed to do was complete this union of body and mind to reveal it.

The enlightenment of Zen Buddhism has it that chopping wood and wedging clay are the same, a holistic participation of the body and mind. Centring and meditating are one and the same. The trick is to use no tricks and be completely present-minded in the activity occupying one (Beittel, 1989:35). The Zen approach is different from that of other cultures, for example, the Greek search for perfection, hence the great antithesis between East and West in matters of beauty. In the field of ceramics,

\(^{17}\) *Qi* or *chi* is the circulating life energy that in Chinese philosophy is thought to be inherent in all things (The Conceptual Scheme of Chinese Philosophical Thinking - Qi, S.a.)
Western pots are almost always patterned and perfectly finished. The beauty of the plain pot was almost unperceived, and shapes were rooted in symmetry (Yanagi, 1982:124). The ideal of Greek beauty scarcely permits irregularity or asymmetry, for it was founded upon the symmetry of the human body. By contrast the Eastern practitioners found irregular beauty in nature, outside the human form. The utensils and behaviour of participants in the tea ceremony had no individualism about them. In that respect, utensils were different from objects made today by craftsmen in search of self-expression, although there is a superficial likeness. The flaws can be said to be born, not made, unlike the deliberate distortion prevalent in Western art today.

The key issues emerging from the overview of Zen Buddhism include, but are not limited to, a particular penchant for simplicity and reflection, living in harmony with one's surroundings and nature and being aware of the natural flow of events. Zen encourages spontaneity and self cultivation, as illustrated by the tea ceremony and possesses a unique and deep understanding of the concept of beauty. Furthermore, there emerged from the research, a number of subtleties that are not easily translated from Japanese to English. Words like wabi-sabi communicate the depth of many of the concepts and Zen's favouring of incompleteness, as the importance placed on suggestion shows. Reflection on concepts such as simplicity is encouraged. Zen's vision of reality is communicated in the phrase avatamsaka sutra which conveys the belief in the connectedness of all things (Baas & Jacob, 2004:63), as is the concept of qi. Finally, the respect for unity beyond the physical world of dualism surfaced repeatedly in the research and will be expanded in chapter three.

In the following chapter these concepts are applied in discussion, as the study proceeds to examine three artists and a selection of their works which reflect the aforementioned ideals. For the purposes of clarity and understanding, the artists and their works are analysed and interpreted separately, with pointers in areas where there are overlaps between what the artists profess or what their works reveal in terms of Zen ideals.
CHAPTER THREE: ZEN ASPECTS IN THE WORKS OF ANDY GOLDSWORTHY, ANISH KAPOOR AND PETER VOULKOS

In chapter three of this study, a selection of artworks by Andy Goldsworthy, Anish Kapoor and Peter Voulkos are examined. The analysis is preceded by a short biography of each artist, followed by a discussion of the work highlighting the Zen beliefs, practices and ideals that manifest in their artwork.

One of the issues that surfaced in the research into the lives of the artists, is that of the 'self-made object'. All three artists, at some point in their careers have admitted to either not knowing what their artworks are, that is to say, leaving viewers to experience it in the case of Anish Kapoor, or open to a wide variety of interpretation in the case of Peter Voulkos. Andy Goldsworthy's art on the other hand, comes across as always having been there, and Goldsworthy speaks of the journey toward the inevitable object, discussed in more detail in 3.1. This study suggests that when an artist adopts Zen principles, for example meditating on the concept of connectedness or oneness with nature and submits to that notion, the artist is then able to act as a vehicle for the energy harnessed in that state of submission and allow creativity to ascend in a spontaneous way. Where this phenomenon surfaces in the analysis, it is specifically referenced to the Zen ideals discussed in chapter two.

3.1 Andy Goldsworthy

Andy Goldsworthy lives and works in Scotland. Goldsworthy combines his skills as a photographer, sculptor, and environmentalist to create location specific land art and sculptures. He was born in Cheshire and grew up in Yorkshire. He worked as a farm labourer in his youth and has likened the rhythmic activities associated with farming to his sculpting. Goldsworthy studied fine art at the Bradford College of Art in 1975 and Preston Polytechnic in 1978 (Goldsworthy, 2001:8).

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18 Land art is an artistic movement which emerged in the 1960s and is conveyed by artists who wanted to take art out of galleries and museums (Lailach, 2007: inscription on rear cover).
Inspired by Joseph Beuys and Yves Klein, two conceptual artists of the time, Goldsworthy considers his artistic career to have begun in 1976, when he was still a student and snow was the only available medium with which to work. Although he concedes that he was not the first to work with snow, his early snow pieces date back to 1977, writes Judith Collins in her introduction to *Midsummer snowball* (Goldsworthy, 2001:9). In 1993 Goldsworthy received an honorary degree from the University of Bradford and is currently professor-at-large at Cornell University.

Goldsworthy is interested in the nature of things, in their colour, form and composition, in their taste and smell and in their place within nature. He works remotely (although some locations allow people to interact with his work), and factors seasonal cycles and weather conditions into his projects, which range in scale and size. Obtaining colour from leaves and flowers or icicles, he is able to form star or snake-like sculptures that sometimes last a few moments before they begin to melt. Using a variety of materials ranging from driftwood, stone, leaves, wilted fern stems, sticks, mud, pinecones and thorns, he is able to express himself in a unique way in complete harmony with nature (Lailach, 2007:48). Photography is key factor in Goldsworthy's art, as many of his works have a finite lifespan. Consequently much of his work is exhibited in galleries in the form of photographs, either depicted as a series of images or of the works at the height of their completion (Figure 6, 1997).

![Figure 6: Andy Goldsworthy, *Sand holes for the incoming tide*, 1997, Rockcliffe, Dumfriesshire (Friedman, 2000:29).](image)

From a Zen perspective, the themes that surface in Goldsworthy's art have to do with harmonising with nature, experiencing the oneness with everything Buddhists refer
to, transience or lack of action (see 2.3.2), harnessing the energy or qi and the union of opposites which goes beyond dualism.

In one of Goldsworthy’s earliest snow works (Figure 7, 1979), the artist created an illusion of a black void on a white void, by completely covering a metre high snowball in black peaty soil and placing it in the centre of a frozen pond. Goldsworthy often erases footprints and other evidence that his artworks were made, adding to the mystique that characterises his artworks and allowing them to act as a media for deeper thought. In the case of Mud covered snowball (Figure 7, 1979), he was pleased that the pond surface appeared undisturbed upon completion of the artwork. The artwork therefore appears as if there was no human involvement in its making and placement, contradicting the supposition that it must have been placed there by someone (Goldsworthy, 2001:12), yet no evidence to support this is visible. This notion is a recurring theme in much of his work, as is the depiction of the void, which was later to feature more prominently in his work.

Figure 7: Andy Goldsworthy, Mud covered snowball, February 1979, (Snowball covered with mud, placed on frosted lake), 100cm x 100cm, High Bentham, Yorkshire (Goldsworthy, 2001:11).

Many of Goldsworthy's snow works include a trail left by the rolled snowball, which picks up debris along the way. He contrasts the white snowball with the dark trail left behind, and the flat pathway with the spherical ball.
It is worthwhile pausing momentarily to give attention to memory and transience, discussed in 2.3.2. While Goldsworthy is able to travel to remote parts of the globe and experience the results of his labours using natural materials and leaving his work to the elements, he has had to record his work mechanically, in order to share it with others. The photographs give permanence to his completed but temporary artworks, making him one of a select group of artists who take fine photography seriously. This process is also in line with Zen ideals, as he addresses the opposites of permanence and impermanence by creating art in harmony with nature, yet is able to extend their longevity and share them afterward with the use of modern photographic technology. This use of technology allows Goldsworthy to record his art over a period of its lifecycle, as opposed to his work in progress, leading to completion. The photographs capture his work either decaying, being reclaimed by the ocean, melted by the sun or blown away by the wind, leaving powerful and striking images that portray incompleteness and leave space for one to complete the picture in one's mind. As discussed in 2.3.2, this is a strong Zen ideal and may be compared with some of Peter Voulkos's artworks, discussed later in this chapter.

![Figure 8](image.jpg)

**Figure 8:** Andy Goldsworthy, *Untitled*, 21-22 November 1987, (Japanese maple leaves stitched together to make a floating chain), Ouchiyama-mura, Japan (Goldsworthy, 1990:S.p.).

The desire for his audience to experience an emotional response in nature (Cempellin, S.a.) has inspired the *Untitled* work (Figure 8, 1987), featuring a floating
chain made up of stitched maple leaves. In an approach similar in some ways to some of Kapoor's early works featuring the void (see 3.2), the scene engages the viewer at once and requests a second, more reflective look. Buddhism encourages practitioners to awaken their potential within themselves according to Marcia Tucker (in Baas & Jacob, 2004:72) in the same way. The leaves, stitched together with grass, form a series of concentric circles around a small opening, suggesting the Mahāyāna Buddhist vision of reality or avatamsaka sutra (the Buddhist technical term that describes the intertwined fates of all beings referred to in 2.3.2).

Figure 9: Andy Goldsworthy, *Early morning calm*, 20 February & 8-9 March 1988, (Knotweed stalks pushed into lake bottom, made complete by their own reflections), Derwentwater in Cumbria (Goldsworthy, 1990:S.p.).

Seeing Goldsworthy produce *Early morning calm* (Figure 9, 1988), in the documentary *Rivers & Tides* (Reidelsheimer, 2001), allows one to appreciate the effort, patience and courage required to produce art outdoors. The film records the process and resilience required to undertake such a feat, manipulating the offerings of the earth, to create the improbable, out of what most would overlook. In *Early morning calm* (Figure 9, 1988) Goldsworthy is able to bridge the gap between the earth and the sky by simply inserting stalks into the lake bottom and allowing the water surface's reflective properties to complete the illusion of a circle. The web-like
structure around a central portal again references the interconnectedness of all things, discussed in 2.3.2.

One of Goldsworthy's more permanent works titled *Wall* (Figure 11, 1988) continues the dialogue between wood and stone, which characterises many of his works. Asked to re-construct a dilapidated wall, Goldsworthy traced its foundation through the local woods. Rather than stick to man-made boundaries, he opted to follow an edge naturally set by the trees instead, accepting fully that they might someday, destroy the wall.

![Image of Wall](image)

*Figure 10: Andy Goldsworthy, Wall, March 1998, (Wood and stone), Storm King Art Centre (Goldsworthy, Baker & Thompson, 2000:48).*

Completely immersed in its surroundings, the wall changes character and appearance with the seasons, as snow and ice cover the stone, as it meanders its
way through the trees in a river-like manner, creating the illusion of movement
accompanied by an energy that would otherwise be lost, had a straight wall been
built (Goldsworthy, Baker & Thompson, 2000:89). The Japanese words wabi-sabi
come to mind during an examination of the Wall, which is completely at one with the
environment, the loose rocks balancing their material strength with the flexibility and
fluidity required to coexist with the trees beside them in a simple and detached
manner (see Figure 1).

The dry stonewall was constructed with stone quarried from the surrounding areas
and where possible, included dead tree trunks as well as live root material to
maintain its structural integrity. This allows a natural and harmonious interaction
between the trees and the wall: as tree growth occurs, the wall recedes in places,
whilst restricting growth at the same time (Goldsworthy, Baker & Thompson, 2000:
10). The result, according to Goldsworthy, is a wall as an enclosing gesture, rather
than a physical barrier.

Furthermore, the wall takes on a life of its own, requiring attention each time it
suffers, as a result of adverse weather conditions, human intervention or new growth
from the forest, and gives continuity to its relationship with its surroundings. In the
work a compromise between risk and fragility is highlighted, which mirrors the
creative tension between the wall and its surroundings (Goldsworthy, Baker &
Thompson, 2000:77). Goldsworthy’s consideration of the surroundings within which
the wall is constructed, is very relevant in the context of the Zen aesthetics
discussed in 1.1.3. Also noteworthy is Goldsworthy’s admission that the end point of
the wall remained unknown, until it was almost completed. The Zen-like manner in
which potential for growth is left, as well as the apparent incompleteness of the wall
in places further highlights the influence of Zen thinking on the Wall.

Goldsworthy enjoys transporting some of his work into new environments and
utilises the contrasting context to good effect to draw attention to his work (Friedman,
2010:27). One of three rocks (Figure 12, 1988) shows no evidence of human
intervention or the complexity associated with its creation. Nor will it show any sign
that he was ever there, when the work is finally reclaimed by nature. All Goldsworthy
did here, was suggest that the viewer look at the rock from a fresh perspective and not see it as merely one of many along the shore. This allows the artwork to engage with viewers directly in a silent and submissive way, not unlike practices in the tea ceremony, where ordinary everyday items are given prominence by using them as a medium for reflection.

Goldsworthy notes the vibrancy and strength of the red of the Japanese maple leaf and uses it to effect in *One of three rocks* (Figure 12, 1988), featuring a rock completely covered with red maple leaves. Red, according to Goldsworthy represents the vein of the earth due to its iron content, as does human blood. The word *shibui* (see 1.1.3), best describes Goldsworthy's presentation of the contrasting red rock with its naturally coloured neighbours. It is a striking image of something simple in a natural setting, that would otherwise be overlooked.
The artworks by Andy Goldsworthy examined here show Zen ideals in action, as they incorporate key Buddhist elements, including harmonising with one’s environment, being aware of the interconnectedness between all phenomena and that a simple unity exists beyond worldly dualisms. Some of Goldsworthy’s works reflect a spontaneity when he conceives them, however their construction requires patience, perseverance and a knowledge of how various elements work together, in order to work successfully with the elements in nature. They also show the same flexibility and adaptability across various terrains across the world, not dissimilar to the way in which Buddhism spread from India across Japan. The themes however remain true to Zen teachings, with his works showing humility, remaining unsigned, leaving no formal legacy and little or no trace that he was ever there.

In the next section of this study, the works of Anish Kapoor are examined and whilst some similarities are expected, Kapoor’s work is in many respects much bolder and exhibits different aspects of Zen philosophies.

**3.2 Anish Kapoor**

Anish Kapoor was born in Mumbai in 1954 to a Jewish-Iraqi mother and an Indian father and admits that inspiration for his sculptures is drawn from both the Middle East and India (Brown, 1996:151). He moved to the United Kingdom in 1972 where he studied art at Hornsey College of Art (1973-1977) and later at the Chelsea School of Art and Design (1977-1978) (Foreman & Winston, 2008:32). He works with a variety of media, including coloured pigment, stone, steel, glass, fibreglass, concrete and PVC. Reaching prominence through his sculptures, installations and public art (Foreman & Winston, 2008:9), his early works dealt with the concepts of infinity, place and history, all of which have recurrently featured throughout his career.

In 1990 Kapoor was chosen to represent the United Kingdom at the Venice Biennale. A year later he won the Turner prize and in 1999 he was elected as Royal Academician. His place in British art was recognised with an Honorary Doctorate.
from Leeds University and the London Institute (1997); an Honorary Fellowship from The Royal Institute of Architects (2001) and a CBE (Commander of the Order of the British Empire) (2003) (Hawksley, 2010:135). Kapoor has exhibited across Europe, Asia, North America, Australia and Scandinavia and his high profile commissions include Turbine hall at Tate Modern, Cloud gate at Millennium Park Chicago, and installations at the Rockefeller Centre, New York as well as Olympic Park in London.

Kapoor’s artistic career began with his first solo exhibition in Paris in 1980, after returning from India, where he was struck by mounds of pigment for sale in street markets and their use in temple rituals (Anfam, 2009:92). The series entitled 1000 names depicted bold shapes, curved forms and Kapoor’s departure from the norms of art on the international art scene at the beginning of the eighties, through his use of brightly coloured pure pigment as a prominent feature of his sculpture (Chapman, 2011:5). This was to characterise Kapoor’s work throughout the eighties.

In the first of Kapoor’s installation pieces (Figure 12, 1981), examined in this study, Kapoor uses wood and plaster covered in raw red and yellow pigment, to create five sculptures grouped on the floor. The geometric, ovular, curved and sharp surfaces dissolve into the powdered pigment surface on the floor (Bracewell & Renton, 2011:12). The shapes immediately compel the viewer to question their materiality as they have a fragility about them, being covered in powder. Speaking to Interview magazine in 1990, Kapoor described pigment as, "colour in its rawest form with incredible materiality" (Brown, 1996:152). In one of Kapoor’s early expressions of materiality (see Figure 12), the term mushin (discussed in 2.2.1) manifests. The use of powdered pigment disrupts the relationship between the surface of the object and its volume, reflecting the in-between state of mind.

The visual drama around the objects is skilfully suggested by Kapoor, fuelled by his need to address the viewer at a deeper level of consciousness (James, 2010:77) and it draws viewers into the artwork by engaging them mentally, and using the effects of the organisation of time and space.

This installation piece, states Kapoor (in Kapoor, et al, 2009:172), allowed him to
enter the realm where the hand of the artist became absent or irrelevant, as simplicity is harmonised with complexity and materiality contrasted with immateriality. The Zen-like setting of this installation, almost akin to the tea ceremony with its otherworldly setting, conveys a feeling of transience, with objects appearing partially submerged and free of materiality.

Figure 12: Anish Kapoor, *To reflect an intimate part of the red*, 1981, (Mixed media and pigment), 200cm x 800cm x 800cm, Artist's studio, London (Baume, 2008:20).

According to Kapoor (in Foreman and Winston, 2008:33), the singular, pure and non-verbal qualities of raw pigment allow the viewer to perceive the symbolic objects directly as the objects awaken in the viewer a high state of awareness, with their optical intensity, as they dissolve volume into an illusory colour (Baume, 2008:15). This dissolving and illusory quality has characterised Kapoor's work as their physical status is always brought into question. Throughout his career, Kapoor has been acclaimed for his exploration and expression of matter and non-matter by exploiting the properties of pigment and for his use of the void. The void, according to Kapoor, as stated by Kethan Brown (1996:152), represents a vast emptiness, yet also contains everything and draws the viewer into another state of mind via a passageway. Kapoor has spoken of the space in his works being "bigger than meets the eye." In a conversation between Kapoor and Homi Bhabha, Bhabha (in Kapoor,
et al, 2009:173) explains that the "sudden disappearance of the surface into a deep dark hole literally cuts the ground from one's feet".

In the late eighties, Kapoor began working with quarried stone, featuring carved apertures and cavities. This medium served Kapoor's desire to express duality in new ways, as many of his works hint at the relationship and connection between the earth and the sky, matter and non-matter, darkness and light, etc. In Kapoor's own words about the dualism: "The most creative words I know are, I don't know. If you know, then there is no yearning and no art. Because knowing is finite and false. Not knowing and yearning is infinite and truth revealed. Yearning is Art" (Kapoor, Bhabha & Tazzi, 1998:29). This statement leads one to believe that Kapoor understood the Buddhist concept of incompleteness and utilised this as a key element in his work. The Buddhist metaphor for emptiness discussed in 2.3.2 is present in free standing sculptures as well as his more ambitious installation pieces. It is therefore imperative to review Kapoor's work in the context of the Buddhist concept of emptiness. "There is a fullness to Buddhist emptiness," writes Mark Epstien (in Baas & Jacob, 2004:34), "a spaciousness that both saturates the physical world and expands to allow access to the dimension of intermediate experience."

Kapoor's 1989 work *Adam* (Figure 13, 1989), features a solitary sandstone block, inset with an oblong area of blue pigment and stands approximately two metres high. The pillar has an archaeological, mystical yet industrial feel. Similar to Kapoor's pigment pieces, *Adam* develops the concept of manifestation, taking the work beyond form, implying a sense of presence and place in a space beyond the gallery space. The disappearance of the rock's surface into an open dark space highlights the Buddhist notion of the void (Baas & Jacob, 2004:72) with a play on materiality and non-materiality (Brown, 1996:152). Furthermore, according to Kapoor (in Baume, 2008:50), *Adam* introduces an additional complexity to the problem of space, as it deals with darkness, in a way that is introspective and evocative. The use of sandstone evokes universal forces in nature, according to Michael Bracewell (in Bracewell & Renton, 2011:17), and asserts an existence beyond eternity.
Unlike classic sculpture which deals with volume in space, the non-object comes to life in the presence of the viewer and in the context of his/her perceptions. Kapoor's work in the nineties explores the notion of the non-intrusive as well as his interest in the expression of the presence and absence of his works. While many of Kapoor's works recede or fade away into nothingness, a striking example of the use of space and convex forms is evident in his 1992 piece *When I am pregnant* (Figure 14, 1992). In this quiet sculpture, the title of the artwork connects the artist's male body to that of a female (Kapoor, et al, 2009:4). The illusion of a protuberance from behind the wall, waiting to burst out is created through the deployment of the same material, texture and colour over the swelling, leaving the possibility that there is nothing behind it. The materials used create a surface so smooth, that the feeling one gets is that the bump has just grown out of the wall, that no starting or end point exists, thus suggests the same concept in the work *Adam*. 

![Figure 13: Anish Kapoor, Adam, 1989, (Sandstone and pigment), 236cm x 119cm x 102cm, On loan to Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield (Bracewell & Renton, 2011:41).](image-url)
The artwork may allude to 'going home', or returning to the womb. The emptiness generated in many of Kapoor's works featuring the void, manifests as a fullness in this artwork, addressing the dualism of emptying out and filling up, and transporting the viewer to a space beyond the two parts to experience wholeness or completeness (Kapoor, et al, 2009:67).

*When I am pregnant* marks a turning point in Kapoor's career, when his work began to take on an energy of its own (Anfam, 2009:88) and possess a sense of becoming. This era (1990-2000) in Kapoor's career is characterised by his move from a male energy to a female energy and is evident in his artworks exhibiting distinctly smoother, whiter, cooler qualities, ovular shapes and shadows (Bracewell & Renton, 2011:17). Kapoor's artworks in this era are softer and more feminine.
When I am pregnant implies reproduction and birth through the swelling in the wall, often present in nature in the form of an expanding pod or a growing belly. The limitless process of generation and regeneration is suggested in this artwork, as tension is built up - then released in an explosion of life that contains its own unique blend of energy, to continue the cycle of birth and rebirth (Baume, 2008:126).

The cumulative progression of Kapoor’s work throughout his career builds, consolidates and progresses. In Cloud gate (Figure 15, 2004-2006), Kapoor finally transcends the physical world by dramatically exploiting the reflective properties of stainless steel, to present a work that is neither male nor female, without boundaries.

Many of his works in this period distort reflections and the space around them, providing an engaging experience from different angles and perspectives. In Cloud gate (Figure 15), Kapoor’s sensual form and reflective surface feature prominently, this time as the centrepiece at AT&T Plaza in Millennium Park in Chicago. Cloud gate, with a mass of one hundred and ten tonnes, is made up of one hundred and sixty nine stainless steel hand rolled plates (Foreman & Winston, 2008:91), welded together using plasma technology with no evident seams, and hand rolled and polished.

Distortion plays an important role in Kapoor’s work, often engaging viewers and bringing an immediacy of awareness of the environment, as the piece merges with the environment. The distorted images defy definitions such as up or down, right or left and in or out and dissolve these forms of dualism. It can therefore be argued that what appears to be real is just an illusion as Kapoor presents a physical embodiment of non-dualism, just as the tea ceremony does, as discussed in 2.3.2.
Kapoor’s public artworks draw thousands of visitors due to their scale and anthropomorphic forms. *Cloud gate* reflects *Indra’s net* (see 2.3.1), enabling a dual state of reflection and offering multiple levels of experience. This is reflected in the brief and transient outward appearance by the viewer, other people and objects reflected in its surface. Kapoor (in Baume, 2008:131) notes that in using the artwork as an object of devotional practice, deeper thought may be cultivated. *Cloud gate* is thus about the self and beyond the self. The distorted images, even though transient, allow viewers to experience the interconnectedness of everything around them.

In the words of the artist (in Brown, 1996:152): "My work has to do with the coming to immateriality. One of the most important questions that has arisen for me as an artist, is the question of the status of the object, the uncertainty of the object."

This study’s research into Anish Kapoor's work suggests that while some of his earlier works come across as modern day visual koans, his larger and more
ambitious pieces transcend into objects of devotion, or conduits, through which one may connect to the space beyond the physical, without distraction by the artist. The Japanese term *shibui* discussed in the section on Zen aesthetics (see 2.4), is noteworthy as many of Kapoor's works not only communicate beauty, but do so by harmonising the complexity associated with their materials and construction, with very simple shapes and forms in their final presentation.


Kapoor's quest for the self-made object, a key Zen teaching, to allow things to happen, rather than to make them happen or force a result, is most evident in *Svayambh* (Figure 16, 2007), which, translated from Sanskrit, means 'self-generated' or 'auto-object' as Kapoor calls it (Bracewell & Renton, 2011:32). Here the archways between rooms in a gallery act as moulds for a block of red wax which moves on a track set up to record the motion.

Kapoor's work, as this study has already shown, exploits the use of raw powder pigment to create illusory objects, polished metallic surfaces for reflection and distortion, and cavities and fissures, which hint at something beyond the tangible world. All these works act as media to spark higher level mental activity. In *Svayambh* Kapoor transports the viewer into a space beyond the physical world. Unlike previous artworks such as *When I am pregnant*, which show a distinctly
feminine quality, the blood red work has no gender and is physical to the extent that it presents the physical space one has to break out of, in order to undertake the journey into the space beyond physical space.

What the viewer sees from the rear is a stark scene of the block's original form being destroyed as it squeezes through the archway, contrasted with the emergence of the block in a shape of the archway on the other end. The viewer is left with feeling that attachment to the physical world must be destroyed before one is able to reach out and tap into the cosmic force that energises the process of creativity, so often talked about by Kapoor.

At the beginning of chapter three, the idea of objects making themselves was touched upon. This study suggests that when artists concede that their work is not their own, they are indeed at a point where they have committed to a journey of discovery toward the inevitable object. The analysis of Kapoor's artworks has shown this time and again as Kapoor balances simplicity with complexity through various media. In the next section of this study, the works of Peter Voulkos are examined to pursue the idea further, where viewers are able to experience the artist's journey captured in the making of the object, rather than the object as a final product,

3.3 Peter Voulkos

Peter Voulkos, an American artist, was born to Greek parents in 1924, and died of an apparent heart attack, after teaching a ceramics class at Berkeley University in 2002. He is known for his abstract expressionist ceramic sculptures, which are widely believed to have crossed the divide between the ceramic craft and fine art (Savitt, 2002). Best known for his innovations in the field of ceramics, where he exploited traditional techniques to create new forms of sculpture, he also experimented with bronze, collage, painting, lithography and monotypes.

Voulkos first studied painting and ceramics at Montana State College in Bozeman, where he earned a degree from the California College of the Arts. As a student,
Voulkos won first prize for pottery at the Montana State Fair, which was the first of many awards he was to receive, after completing his master's degree in 1952. He was influenced primarily by art critic Sōetsu Yanagi, and potters Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada, whose use of the accidental, as a positive aspect of the art making process, impressed Voulkos. During this phase of Voulkos's life, he continued to enter competitions, receiving numerous awards, including the Rodin Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Distinguished Artist Award for Lifetime Achievement from the College Art Association, and honorary doctorates from four American art schools (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:7).

In stark contrast with the two previous artists examined in chapter three, Voulkos used destruction, mythology and ancient cultures as themes throughout his career, to create bowls and plates, clay stacks, ice buckets and large ceramic sculptures. They show a certain brashness and youthful exuberance as well as discipline (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:9) and his quest to reach the space beyond the gallery space, referred to by Kapoor in 3.2, is always evident. His works have a spontaneity about them, as he journeyed toward the realisation of the inevitable object, something evident in the work of Goldsworthy and Kapoor as well.

Influenced by the Abstract Expressionist movement\(^\text{19}\) of the 1950s, Voulkos gradually moved away from his utilitarian art background and changed the way he worked with clay. His work was characterised by mass and weight; the cutting and tearing of clay; and a bold, painterly use of glazes, thus he gained valuable insights into the characteristics of clay, in particular, its viscosity and how its properties changed during each stage of the ceramic making process (Savitt, 2002).

To understand the work of Peter Voulkos, one needs to examine his place in the annals of history. His work in the fifties is considered by many, to be intellectually challenging and advanced to the point where they broadened the horizons of an entire generation of artists who chose to work in ceramics, to produce entirely new expressions through this medium (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:97). Attempting to

\(^{19}\)In the early 1940s, mainly in New York, a small group of artists created a diverse body of work that introduced radical new directions in art that shifted the art world's focus. They were known as 'Abstract Expressionists' (Cooper, 1988:188).
categorise Voulkos would therefore be an exercise in futility. With complete disregard for convention, Voulkos moved seamlessly between paintings and ceramics, forcing the viewer to question and re-evaluate accepted premises about art. He also admitted freely to adapting ideas of other artists in an adventurous way, however, the final expression was always uniquely his own.

It is this superior technical knowledge combined with his innovative approach and creative intellect, that allowed Voulkos to inspire the generations of ceramicists that followed. For Peter Voulkos, the journey was always more important than the destination (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:14). Voulkos was recognised for his wheel-work and surface decoration, while his thrown pieces exhibited a superior quality of speed, form and touch, which was to characterise his later works (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:37).

This can be seen in his *Untitled* plate (Figure 17, 1959), where Voulkos treats the ceramic surface as a literal and blank canvas. The surface decorations are alive and feature abstract painting, a clear departure from traditional decorating methods (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:113). The broad and unrestrained strokes of colour fuse together with the coarse surface and ignite into a fiery explosion of *qi* (see 2.3.2). In other words, they show how Voulkos was able to present a work of art that speaks for itself, without any ornamentation.
In 1959 Voulkos travelled to Berkeley to commence his appointment as head of the design and decorative department, tasked with setting up a ceramics program for the institution. Soon after, Voulkos was selected to stage a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which featured six of his larger ceramic sculptures and six abstract expressionist paintings (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:51).

At the height of his fame during the 1960s and 1970s, Voulkos experimented with bronze mainly because of the limitations of clay, as his work was getting more sculptural and larger. He decided that clay was no longer a viable medium and saw bronze as a new way of expressing his ideas. Voulkos approached bronze in the same way he had approached clay (Figure 18), attempting to retain the fluidity that characterised clay as a medium in so many of his works.
Made up of several individually cast bronze slabs, *Lady Remington* (Figure 18, 1962) was continually re-arranged to constitute its final assembly (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:104). The bronze material allowed Voulkos to create a spacious and expansive sculpture that he was unable to achieve with clay, yet the sculpture shows clear signs of his familiarity with clay and also marks a departure from the traditions associated with bronze. For reasons that remain unclear, Voulkos’s bronze work hardly attained the same level of popularity as his work in ceramics and by the end of the 1970s, he switched back to clay. His works in bronze however, retain the same feeling of spontaneity, space and scale, emphasising unfinished and formless form. This process of creating art where the artist does not know what the end result will be, not only reflects the spontaneity of Voulkos but also his ability to experience simultaneously, the process of seeing possibilities and finding ways for the eventual object to emerge (Baas & Jacob, 2004:165).
In 1978, a young ceramist named Peter Callas constructed the first anagama\(^{20}\) in the United States (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:106) and Voulkos experimented with it, creating works that exploited the spontaneity and unpredictability of the wood-fired process. It is worthwhile pausing at this junction to highlight the importance of this association, as Callas had developed a knowledge of medieval ceramics and ancient Japanese firing methods on an earlier trip to Japan and was quick to recognise that Voulkos's rugged clay forms were compatible with the earthy qualities resulting from the use of these ancient firing methods. Amongst Voulkos's earliest works to be fired in the anagama, were his plates and tea bowls.

Voulkos's admiration and appreciation of the Japanese tea ceremony is evident in his *Untitled tea bowl* (Figure 19, 1990), where he pays homage to the simplicity, irregularity and non-conformity of the ceremonial tea bowls. Despite his preference

\(^{20}\) *Anagama* is a Japanese term meaning hole (in a mountain) or tunnel kiln (Peterson, 1981:234).
for larger works, the medium sized, wood-fired pieces like Asturias (Figure 20, 1990), which Voulkos termed 'ice buckets', allow him to take the aforementioned tea bowl characteristics he admired, to a new level and to bridge the gap between his smaller and larger artworks.

Figure 20: Peter Voulkos, Asturias, 1990, (Stoneware, wood-fired), 30.5cm x 34.3cm, Collection of the Sam Jornlin, Oakland (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:150).

In Japanese ceramics, the foot and the rim of the bowl are considered crucial as they mark the beginning and end of the process. Voulkos's ice buckets accentuate these two components as key characteristics of the artwork, leaving the space in-between to take care of itself. This is considered by Voulkos to be as close as he can get to the self-made object, by remaining unrestrained and keeping to the trueness of the object (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:121). In the words of Peter Voulkos: “The ideal form is no ideal form. The clay and its colours signify an endless potential for possibility” (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:121).
In yet another example of Voulkos's ability to express Zen ideals across a variety of media, he used discarded material from his unsuccessful monotypes (Figure 21, 1985), to create paper collages, complete with pushpins, which mark and record the process from beginning to conclusion (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:117). Voulkos shows his versatility across media and always remains true to the process, trusting it to deliver an end result that connects with the viewer directly in a manner that is evocative.

![Figure 21: Peter Voulkos, King's chamber, 1985, (Paper collage with pushpins), 114.3cm x 94cm, Collection of the artist, Oakland (Slivka & Tsujimoto, 1995:138).](image)

In 1985 Voulkos retired from his teaching position at Berkeley and began working privately fulltime. If anything, his creativity and productivity seemed to accelerate in his later years, as he focused on clay. Voulkos's influence on the field of ceramic art and sculpture is difficult to overstate (Smith in Peter Voulkos, S.a.). Describing the
magnitude of his impact Smith states, “few artists have changed a medium as markedly or as single-handedly as Mr. Voulkos.” Voulkos is often credited with contributing to the demolition of the traditional hierarchies between the fine arts and craft, and the elevation of ceramics out of the decorative arts, to which they had been consigned.

In Zen terms, as discussed in section two, it is all about the journey within, in order to be at one with everything external. The image one is left with is of the figure facing the wheel, in balance, perfectly centred and the hand, working with the heart, firmly connected and transmitting energy and infusing it into a finished work of art. Not afraid to experiment, Voulkos's work reveals a restlessness with the confines of his craft, according to Richard Marshall and Suzanne Foley (1981:13). In the words of Peter Voulkos in his article titled, Shiho Kanzaki (Voulkos, S.a.). "I have always had a Zen attitude toward my life and art and have felt a strong kinship toward Japanese art and artists". Armed with a consciousness of spontaneity and the courage to achieve his goals, Voulkos was able to create a formidable body of ceramic work. King's chamber (Figure 21, 1985), like many of the artist's stacks and ice buckets, shows a free spirited approach, with little regard for convention, leaving the piece open to a wide interpretation, engaging the viewer but sharing the process of creation and leaving the possibility for further exploration. All three artists thus far have shown the spontaneity associated with Zen, but Voulkos's art displays his total commitment to the process of breaking through the physical barriers and toward the acceptance of the end result, no matter what the outcome.

As his pieces evolved from vessel to sculpture, so did the assembled forms, as he put new ideas on stacking and cantilevering to the test and grew the size of his sculptures. In these pieces (Figure 5, 1984, page 10), Voulkos was able to explore several definitions of sculptural form (already discussed on page 51).

As the study has shown in chapter two, there is no special doctrine or Zen philosophy, and no formulas or central concepts. Zen seeks only to liberate one from the cycle of birth and rebirth, by means of specific intuitive modes of understanding. It is flexible in adapting itself to almost any philosophy, as long as one remains true
to its intuitive teachings (Suzuki, 1993:63). Peter Voulkos was able to adapt these Zen principles to the ceramic process, from cutting through to positioning, modelling, spinning, building, firing and waiting. The entire process was a meditation in action, in which he listened and spoke. The end result was an explosive expression, reaching the simplicity beyond opposites discussed in 3.2. Usefulness vs. uselessness, functional vs. non-functional, beautiful vs. ugly and complete vs. incomplete are all aspects present in his work.

To reflect on Voulkos’s ability to extract inspiration, absorb information, and reconstitute ideas, in order to produce entirely unique work, is akin to the Buddhist thought of the unknowing mind, which cultivates an awareness of and values the intimate and immediate, the obvious and the spontaneous. These Zen ideals together with the Buddhist assertion that no difference exists between illusion and reality, allow the viewer an insight into the world as seen by Voulkos himself. Unlike Kapoor and Goldsworthy, Voulkos was not trying to destroy the line between illusion and reality or even blur it, he was merely observing that there was no line separating the two.

As Roberta Smith (2002) explains about this period, in her New York Times obituary of Voulkos:

The extreme unpredictability of the process in which temperatures could not be maintained evenly, and fire and ash frequently discoloured the glazes - dovetailed with Mr. Voulkos’s love of accident and spontaneity. The resulting works - large stacked pieces and plaque-like plates that he treated as paintings - were his roughest and most exuberant and, in the eyes of many, his best.

This study has already defined qi and underscored its relevance amongst Zen traditions (see 2.3.2). In chapter three this study revealed how Goldsworthy, Kapoor and Voulkos were able to immerse themselves into an environmental space and assist, via their media of expression, with the birth of a work of art. Goldsworthy undertakes this remotely in a non destructive manner, leaving his unsigned work for the environment to reclaim. Kapoor, on the other hand, does it on a grand scale over a period of years, sometimes waiting to exploit technology and the properties of specific materials, as modernisation accelerates. Voulkos took clay and elevated it from its humble use for pottery, to abstract sculpture and gave it a place in fine art
galleries around the world.

A number of issues have emerged from the research conducted in chapter two and the analysis undertaken in chapter three. These will now be summarised and used as a reference point for concluding remarks in chapter four. They include, but are not limited to:

- The view that a creative and sublime space exists beyond earthly forms of dualism, as is depicted in the *Yin Yang* symbol (see Figure 1).
- The belief that purports life as a continuous state of flux where nothing is permanent, and where balance, above all else, is honoured, as discussed in 2.1.1 and therefore requiring a spontaneous approach to this state of flux. This is a belief where incompleteness is not frowned upon, but accepted and even embraced as a natural part of the state of flux.
- An approach to life that is based on insight, morality and meditation (see 2.2.1), which highlights the importance of undertaking the journey, rather than reaching the destination.
- The notion of non-action, subject to the universal laws of nature detailed in 2.3.1, as well as the idea of the interconnectedness of all worldly and other-worldly phenomenon.
- A specific stance on aesthetics that favours beauty in forms that are natural, simple, personal and associated with freedom, as discussed in 2.3.2.

An adoption of the aforementioned beliefs constitutes the unique approach by Zen practitioners and is believed to bring about the harmonious union between the body, mind and soul, that allow one to break through the physical barrier and enter the space beyond physical space referred to by Kapoor in 3.2, where one experiences *nirvana* and is able to bring to fruition objects that appear otherworldly to viewers.

It is with this in mind that concluding remarks are presented in the following chapter before determining areas for additional research to be undertaken in the future.
CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the influence of Zen philosophies and aesthetics on the work of Andy Goldsworthy, Anish Kapoor and Peter Voulkos and began by sketching a background on Buddhism. The study followed the spread of Buddhism across China and into Japan, where having been influenced by Daoist teachings, it finally became known as Zen or Zen Buddhism.

In chapter one, research aims and methods for this study were determined, in order to obtain an essential understanding of Buddhism and Daoism before introducing the artists. The study highlighted Zen aesthetics and, in particular, the Japanese tea ceremony. A number of key issues surfaced early in chapter one, including the notion that truth is revealed with an understanding of opposites, according to Buddhist teachings, and that enlightenment may be attained through direct intuition. Introspection and reflection are encouraged, as nothing exists except that which is in the mind. Amongst the notions introduced early on in the study was the fact that Zen Buddhists hold an admiration for simplicity and beauty in nature and common place or everyday activities (see 1.1.2).

In 1.1.3, Zen aesthetics were introduced and the idea that art resided in the mind of the viewer, rather than in the object or the mind of the artist was expanded, showing how this notion encouraged artists to be fluid and spontaneous in order to allow viewers an opportunity to engage with an artwork directly and intimately. The result of this unique approach to the art making process was an admiration for imperfection and irregularity, as well as a commitment to the art making process, rather than the production of objects of art. The concepts of wabi-sabi and shibui were referenced in chapter one and demonstrated how aesthetics are experienced through reflection and appreciation of natural beauty, free from distractions and artificial adornment.

The study presented the idea of detachment from worldly affairs in order to reach a state of mushin or ecstasy (see 2.2.1) which honours balance, and freedom from opposites through the practice of stillness. Zen, as the study showed in chapter two, is a Chinese / Japanese branch of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Nowhere within Zen's
teachings is faith in a God demanded, nor are there any sacred texts or revealed scriptures that give one step-by-step instructions on its practices. The emphasis is on direct intuitive experience and Zen holds the conviction that penetration to the heart of life’s meaning is not brought about by the mind alone but should be incorporated into one’s lifestyle (see 2.4). Zen is therefore not a religion, but a channel to a meditative state, free of description and bonds to any philosophy, including Buddhism. Japanese Zen teachers emphasise that Zen is a way of life and that opportunities for truth may be found in life’s seemingly tedious activities. The principle of non-action (we wei) was discussed in chapter two and demonstrated that the concept of detachment carried forward into the doctrine of the void, the Buddhist metaphor for emptiness equates emptying out with filling up. The Buddhist belief in the connection of all phenomena was also examined in 2.3.1, stressing the importance of selflessness.

An examination of the Japanese tea ceremony in 2.3.2 demonstrated Zen beliefs in action, where the simple act of drinking tea is elevated and accorded ritualistic status, cultivating an aura of simplicity, beauty, peace and tranquility. The simple ceremony lays a foundation for aesthetic expression and provides participants with the space to reflect on life's simplicity contrasted with the complexity often taken to be an inescapable reality. The Japanese concepts of wabi-sabi and shibui provided insights into Zen aesthetics and upon closer analysis of the behaviour of participants in the ceremony and the associated rituals and utensils, one is able to appreciate the nuances and subtleties which are often lost in the direct translation of the words.

A number of issues emerged from the research conducted in chapter two of this study and formed the basis for the analysis undertaken in chapter three, where selected works of Goldsworthy, Kapoor and Voulkos were examined. One of the issues that continually surfaced was the spontaneity and willingness, on the part of the artists, to accept an end result that was perhaps not fully crystallised in the mind of the artist at the time of conception.

The artists explored in this study draw on mysticism, poetry, Daoism and Zen Buddhism. More especially Kapoor’s artworks in the form of modern day koans act
as objects of devotion and as media for deeper thought. Goldsworthy's creations, on the other hand, show a special interest and appreciation for nature and allow those who experience his work directly to experience the self, as part of the human fabric. As the tide came in and swept away one of his works, Goldsworthy (1990:45), noted, "The very thing that brought it to life, will bring about its death," demonstrating detachment from the material world and accepting the natural flows and rhythms of life, that carry one to the point beyond success or failure. Finally, Peter Voulkos, through many of his abstract pieces, reminds us that the journey toward the point of breakthrough is as important as reaching it, in order to experience this oneness, according to Suzuki (in Ross 1973:137).

Goldsworthy's works may be more expressive of the 'leaving of potential' discussed in 2.4.3, as he captures their life spans on film, and parallels may be drawn between Kapoor's highly polished reflective sculptures and Voulkos's bronze works which possess the fluidity and playfulness characterised by clay. These works engage the viewer and transport them through this journey of creation, toward the inevitable object.

That these artists possess some understanding of Zen principles is unquestionable, as unreferenced footage, in interviews and quotations used in this study confirm. This study has also revealed Zen's remarkable ability to be applied, across various cultures, doctrines and media. At the end of chapter three, the study concluded that concepts of beauty and aesthetics reside in the mind of the viewer, rather than in the artist or artwork. Goldsworthy, Kapoor and Voulkos do not claim to be expressionists or exhibitionists, seeking inspiration and bringing to fruition something that came from inside them, as part of their creative makeup.

Their work is neither utilitarian nor functional. Instead, their works often confound one and provoke a powerful experience. When the viewer makes a choice to look again or understand, the artworks recede and can act as channels for reflection and contemplation.
Indeed the works examined in chapter three go beyond words like *miyabi* (see 1.1.3). Unlike the tea ceremony, works by Goldsworthy, Kapoor and Voulkos may be reached by anyone, rather than a select few. In the words of Yanagi (1982:87), who writes in *The unknown craftsman*:

> It is my belief that while the high level of culture of any country can be found in its fine arts, it is also vital that we should be able to examine and enjoy the proofs of the culture of the great mass of the people, which we call folk art. The former are made by a few for the few, but the latter, made by the many for many, are a truer test. The quality of the life of the people of that country as a whole can best be judged by the folkcraft.

The artists examined in chapter three produce works of art that reach out to viewers across boundaries, irrespective of their qualifications, without regard for their religious affiliations, age, race, rank or gender, because they retain the ability to cultivate deeper thought for all who experience them directly. This is the very essence of mindfulness and Zen in action.

Having researched, analysed and assimilated the Eastern philosophical terms associated with Zen teachings, they are presented in this study, in partial fulfilment of a masters degree in fine art, in the hope that, to a certain extent, they clarify and demystify what is often sketched as complex and dense. Terms such as beauty, artistic quality, creativity and originality, talent, skill may be viewed in the context of what Zen masters consider to be *shibui*.

As works of art continue to be presented to modern audiences with humility, with the artist acting as a facilitator rather than an expressionist, a direct connection occurs, which this study has shown to be more important than personal expression. Whilst Peter Voulkos may have erased the subtle line separating art and craft, all three artists chosen for the purposes of this study, push the traditional and accepted boundaries to an extent that confirm that these separations are only present in the mind, irrespective of what they are.

By way of conclusion, and having examined numerous texts, printed copy and web pages, video footage and archive material, it is suggested that Zen philosophies and
aesthetics materialise when an artist submits to the universal laws that govern humanity. They manifest in works of art, architecture and landscapes when one changes perspective and reflects on the interconnectedness of all phenomenon, including coexisting with nature. Zen teachings have no religious affiliations and therefore all of humanity may benefit from them, by attaining a deeper understanding of the teachings. Zen traditions and practices such as the Japanese tea ceremony, demonstrate how beauty may often be found in simple everyday activities taken for granted, or relegated to the mundane.

Andy Goldsworthy impressed with his unique approach to the arts, constructing works from natural materials and recording the process of decay, as his works are absorbed back into their natural settings, leaving little trace of his intervention. Anish Kapoor, working across various media, showed a commitment to delivering a finished work of art, acting on something he felt spontaneously at a point in time, even when confronted with adversity and technological constraints. And finally Peter Voulkos reminded us, before his death in 2002, that the journey is always more important than the destination, demonstrating how leaving potential for growth in many of his works allows viewers to not only connect with his artworks, but to complete them in their own minds.

These approaches to art by the artists, whilst different, all remain true to Zen teaching and philosophies. Against the backdrop of the topic of this study, there is strong evidence to support the notion that Goldsworthy, Kapoor and Voulkos possessed some understanding of Zen teachings and practised them, allowing their artworks to accurately portray the claimed benefits of putting these teachings into practice.

While this study has raised questions about qi and the mystique it is shrouded by, the body of evidence suggests that much further research is required into this field. For if the space beyond physical space is indeed the place from whence creativity stems and is still frequented by artists such as Anish Kapoor and Andy Goldsworthy today, it warrants further investigation, as no formal texts were to be found during the course of this study, documenting the process of tapping into this energy and
breaking through the barrier in one’s mind, that separates the physical from the non-physical. It is with this concluding thought that the Zen teachings, philosophies and beliefs presented by this study may now be contemplated, and rather than conclude this study, this process of understanding and incorporating these values should begin.
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