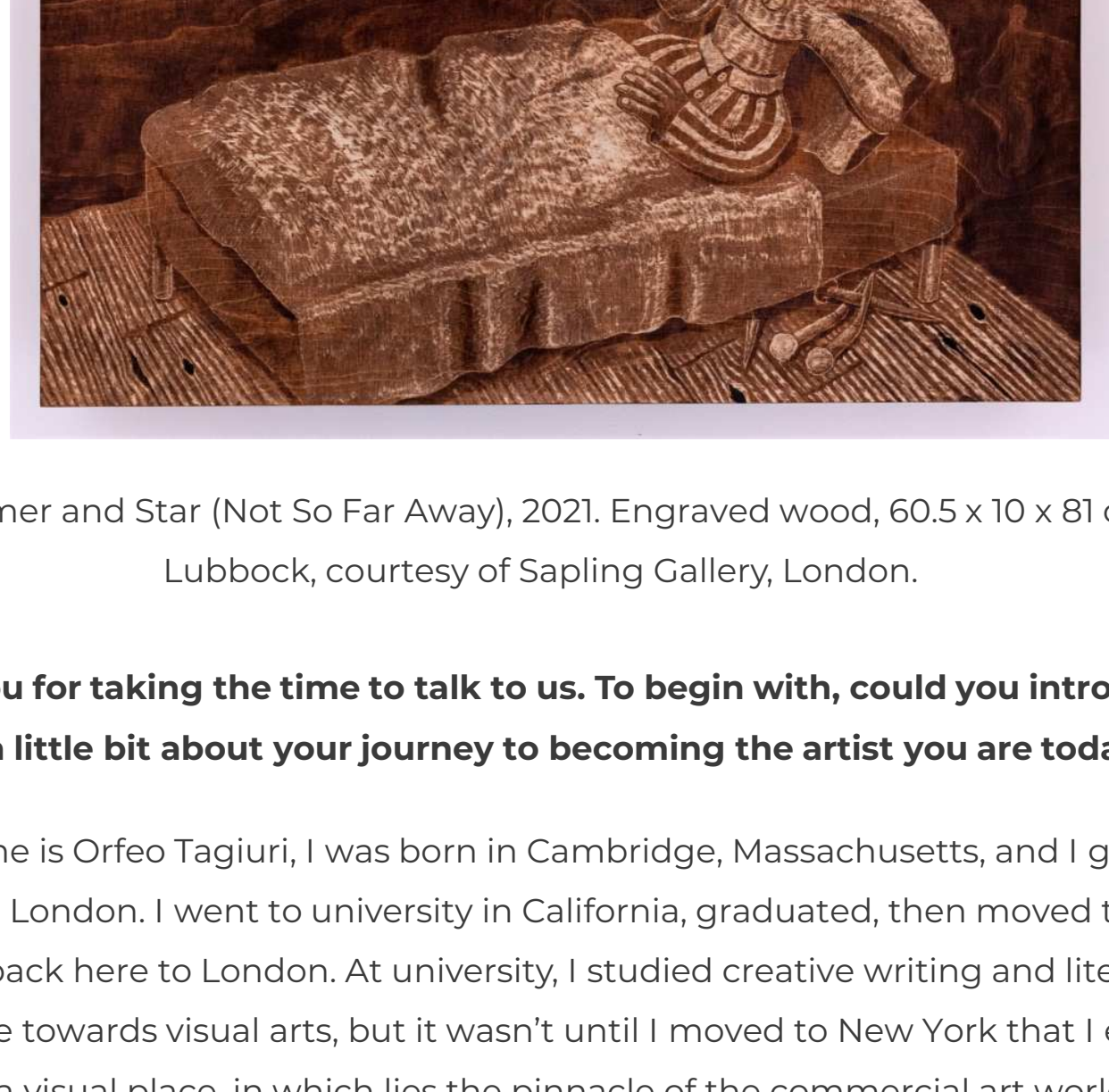


EXISTING IN BALANCE; TESTING BORDERLINES WITH ORFEO TAGIURI

By Henry Dowson, [eco-Art](#) / September 9, 2021 / [Leave a Comment](#)

Upon walking into Orfeo Tagiuri's studio, a world of narratives unfolds unto you; excerpts of his own thoughts and poems fill the wall, jostling for places with sketches, wood carvings and evidence of the post man. However, within this melee of creativity exists a flow state for the artist, a carefully curated vision of process and precision that allows him to produce art works that delve into the borderlines of society, by examining and animating the mundane. Characters run through his wood carvings, and it is possible to see both the hammer and the angel in various states of being, existing on their own borderlines, which in turn lets the viewer see them for who they are, as their opposing versions of themselves compete with each other.

Tagiuri's work addresses nature through the imbalance that his characters find themselves in. The rhetoric of nature being a force of good is built upon through meticulous working and testing of the intrinsic characteristics of that, which in doing pulls the audience away from this basic purview and elevates his work into a state of deep consideration about nature and human's interaction with it. In this exclusive interview, SuperGlue finds out about the art process and thoughts of Orfeo Tagiuri of the back of his incredible show at the [Sapling Gallery](#) in June.



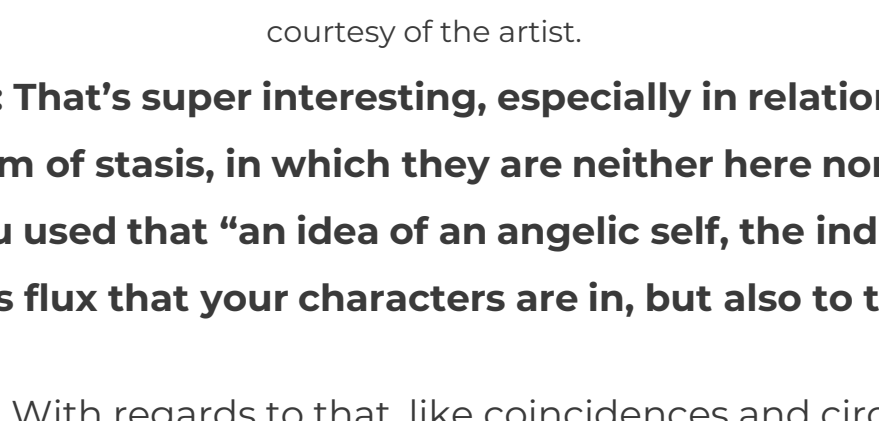
Orfeo Tagiuri, Hammer and Star (Not So Far Away), 2021. Engraved wood, 60.5 x 10 x 81 cm. Photo by Alice Lubbock, courtesy of Sapling Gallery, London.

SuperGlue: Thank you for taking the time to talk to us. To begin with, could you introduce yourself as an artist and tell us a little bit about your journey to becoming the artist you are today?

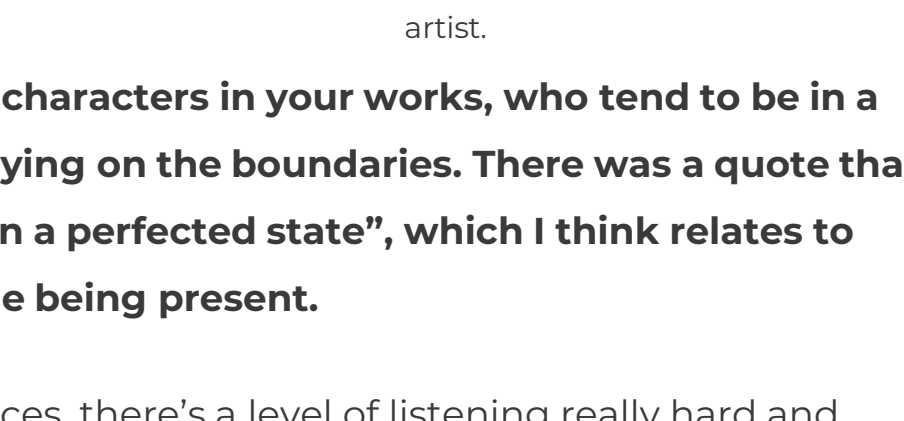
Orfeo Tagiuri: My name is Orfeo Tagiuri, I was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and I grew up half in over there and half here in London. I went to university in California, graduated, then moved to New York, Paris, and then eventually back here to London. At university, I studied creative writing and literature, which set me in motion to move towards visual arts, but it wasn't until I moved to New York that I embraced visual art. New York is such a visual place, in which lies the pinnacle of the commercial art world, with the biggest gallery's putting on the biggest shows they'll put on. Moreover, there is an abundance of visual stimulation and I could feel how potent that was, which was inspiring, but also quite daunting insofar as it makes it very hard to identify your own interests.

There is also so much trash in New York. The city is so filthy and that's inspiring too. I was there in July and I saw how people have mounted cardboard signs to their chicken wire fence or have pinned up some weird thing on their window. Even the different foreign language signs that are being put up in small hardware shops inspire me. In New York, found materials is huge. I found a box of baseball and basketball cards once, and that was the first time I used paint on anything. I didn't actually start working with wood until I finished at the Slade.

After New York, I went to France, where I worked at this bookstore called [Librairie Yvon Lambert](#). Yvon was a gallerist in Paris, and was a well-respected figure by the art community there. So, there were all these young artists and old artists coming into the bookshop, who I got to meet, whilst being surrounded by art books. I also met a woman called Mary Medec who has a gallery in Paris who I became acquainted with because her passcode was my date of birth, and it turned out that we shared a birthday; there was definitely a coincidental fusion there. Weirdly, most of the exciting changes in my life have been a product of these kind of coincidences...



Orfeo Tagiuri, The Distance A Seed Travels From Its Mother Plant (Angel Daisy Chain), 2019. Engraved wood on metal frame, courtesy of the artist.



Orfeo Tagiuri, work from The Distance A Seed Travels from Its Mother, 2019. Engraved wood on a metal frame, courtesy of the artist.

SG: That's super interesting, especially in relation to the characters in your works, who tend to be in a form of stasis, in which they are neither here nor there, lying on the boundaries. There was a quote that you used that "an idea of an angelic self, the individual in a perfected state", which I think relates to this flux that your characters are in, but also to the divine being present.

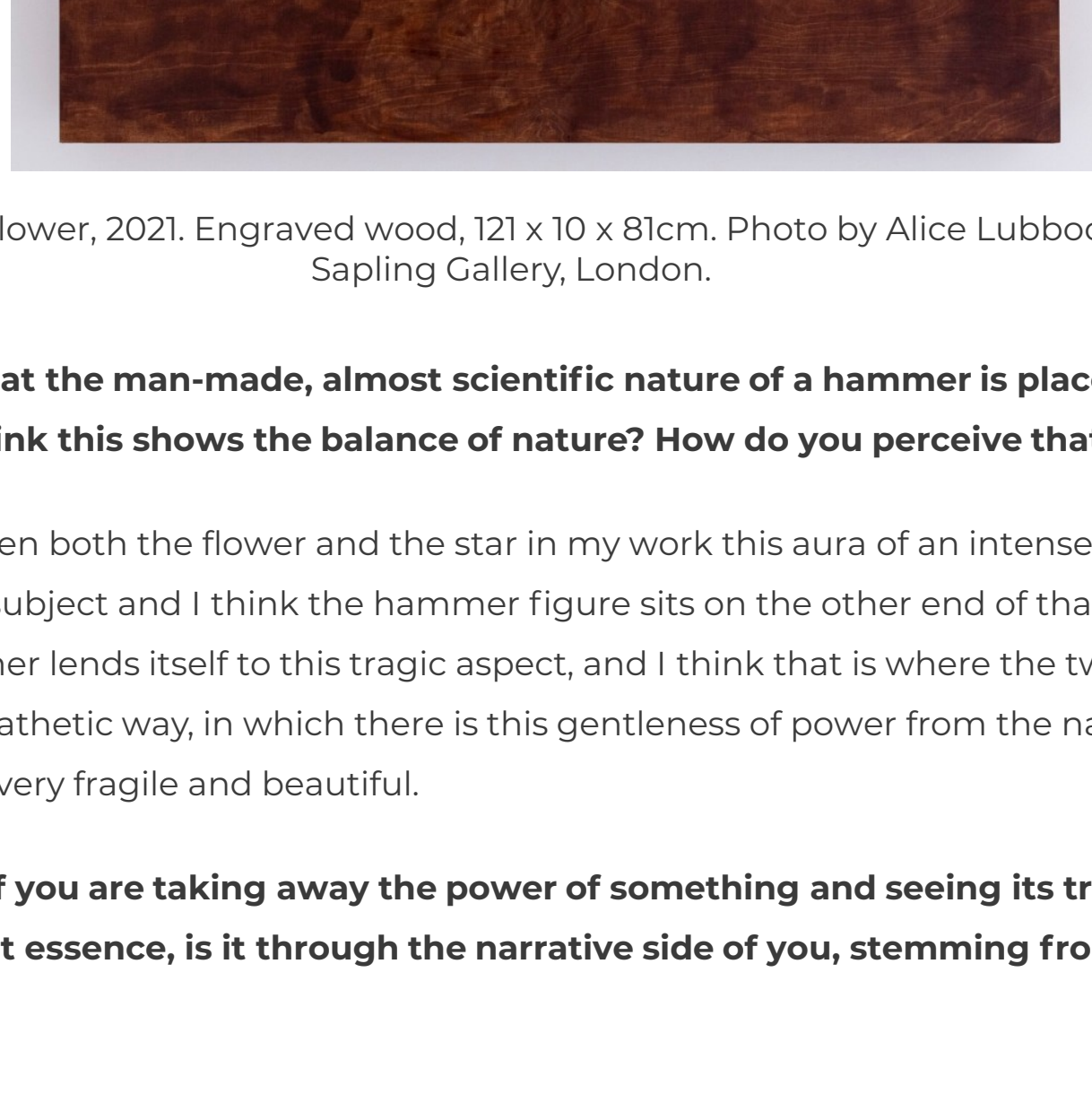
OT: With regards to that, like coincidences and circumstances, there's a level of listening really hard and listening for what the direction is going to be and I think that lends itself to things that appear like coincidences. I have also made an art practice out of pursuing things that initially seem random and arbitrary, but carry a sort of poetic potency for me. I'll pursue them to the extent that synchronistic objects appear because, for instance, the hammer would just be lodged in my brain a little bit. So, when I see someone smash a pane of glass with a hammer just in the street by accident, that is suddenly very potent, or if someone is talking to me about building something, there's these compounding layers of meaning that appear, based on me holding that symbol or idea within and allowing the things around to be attracted to it.

SG: So you almost are imbuing mundane daily things with your own subjectivity, and then they become charged objects. Could you tell me a bit more about an example of one of these objects, maybe your use of the hammer?

OT: The hammer first appeared when I was doing my show for the Sapling Gallery, back in June. There was a story that I had in mind that I was trying to illustrate, which is how my process tends to start. The story was a version of a scene from *The Prophet* by Khalil Gibran, in which the person building this vessel that was about to send someone on this great adventure and in the building the boat there was a hammer. After that I looked into the stations of the cross for Jesus, which is an extreme opposite in terms of meaning, although I guess he got sent on a pretty great adventure as well, but with a much darker side. So, those were kind of the two moments where that arose, naturally. There are specific forms that when I draw them, they have a certain simplicity and clarity, much like a letter of the alphabet.

SG: I think your style lends itself towards that, because it is never convoluted or overcomplicated, and it holds this clarity within its vision. I've noticed that in a few of the drawings of the hammer you produce, there is some sort of flaccid object, like a flopping flower or a nail, is that kind of intent. What is the intention behind that? Is it because it juxtaposes the essential qualities of a hammer?

OT: There's definitely something super phallic about the hammer, I can't deny that. For me, that allows me to be a bit more playful with the objects, giving the objects a sort of animated characteristic. But I've always liked a sort of curviness and not an overly, intense rigidity.



Orfeo Tagiuri, Dying Flower, 2021. Engraved wood, 121 x 10 x 81cm. Photo by Alice Lubbock, courtesy of the Sapling Gallery, London.

SG: Especially given that the man-made, almost scientific nature of a hammer is placed in a context of nature, how do you think this shows the balance of nature? How do you perceive that in the work?

OT: I have definitely given both the flower and the star in my work this aura of an intense purity. The flowers are always a very pure subject and I think the hammer figure sits on the other end of that scale. The floppiness of the hammer lends itself to this tragic aspect, and I think that is where the two begin to meet again in a kind of sympathetic way, in which there is this gentleness of power from the natural meeting with something that is very fragile and beautiful.

SG: So, it is almost as if you are taking away the power of something and seeing its true essence. Where do you find that essence, is it through the narrative side of you, stemming from your creative writing?

OT: Yeah, I definitely illustrate narratives. I like the fact that the symbols themselves have a specific resonance for me and that they can be combined in these various ways. But these subjects, like the hammer itself, could be broken in half or something. So, for me, there's this whole infinite Rubik's Cube of meaning that can combine various symbols. For instance, the flower with its aura and the hammer with its sort of vicious aura exist in that framework, until I overcome that bias and combine them in a new way. This dichotomy [between the flower and the hammer] to me would suggest a representation of good and evil, like man and technology as evil and nature as a force of good. Working with those two symbols is a way to gradually consider the images so that I may achieve a withdrawn or broader perspective on those subjects.

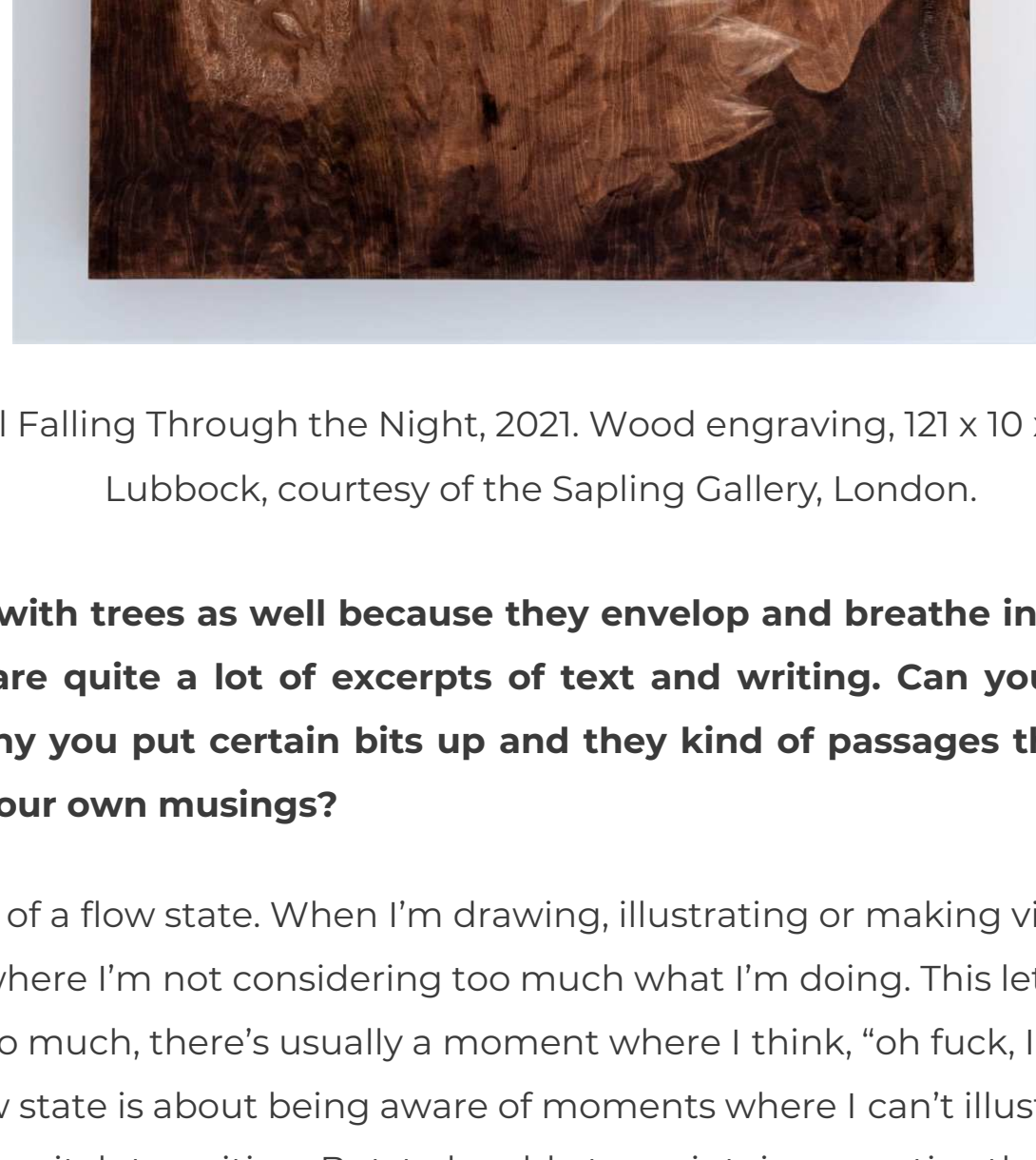
If I'm starting out with that basic view that nature is good and man evil, then through making new images of it and through working with the subjects, I usually arrive at something that feels less basic. For instance, I was working with representations of angels. Then I started showing angels falling and I feel like that again was also handling that excessively moralistic thing of "good versus evil", because I would have an angel that was terrified to fall, which seems obvious, and then I have one that looked more content with it. I suppose that goes back into what we were saying about this interesting state, where the subject is kind of in between phases.

SG: I like this idea of having two sides of a subject in a singular situation. For instance, the angels who is content with falling or the hammer that is rigid and practical, is contrasted with the other side of that being, manifesting as a terrified angel falling or a hammer that is limp. I find this borderline on which the characters exist fascinating as, for me, it begins to unravel the complex essence of the character. You have been working with wood a lot recently, I wonder if you could tell us a bit about your process for working with this material?

OT: I often buy wood from a timber store, but also I gather fallen trees and use that for some of my work. For instance, a friend had collected this wood from a fallen tree in a garden, and we're going to do something with it. It is exciting to make this step of having the history of the wood playing a big part in it because I've previously worked with whichever wood I could source. The thing is, working with a fallen tree, it is possible to see the human lifetime of tree and so the amount of life, meaning, and narrative that the piece of wood carries before I even start doing anything with it is incredible. The history of what's gone around it ends up being kind of more interesting to us as people.

In fact, the reason the Sapling show happened is because a tree fell in Hyde Park and Charlotte ([Sapling Gallery](#) founder) had contacted them to see if we could use it. She then called me and she was like "we're going to do a show with this". However, the Park's people were very slow getting it, so we just did works on different wood. But that tree would have had all the history of London that had taken place circulating Hyde Park within its trunk, and that is amazing to me. Again, if we're talking about that kind of borderline realm, this notion of the tree's existence within human history and how much it exists in the human perception of time versus its own, much grander, perspective.

In terms of talking about borders, how does the tree exist in this timeline; at what point is it born, living, or dead? It's composed of all these different aspects, so there's this endless circularity to the timeline in which nature operates, where there's no like endpoint. So there's this endless circularity to the timeline in which nature operates, where there's no like endpoint. So there's this endless circularity to the timeline in which nature operates, where there's no like endpoint. So there's this endless circularity to the timeline in which nature operates, where there's no like endpoint.



Orfeo Tagiuri, Angel Falling Through the Night, 2021. Wood engraving, 121 x 10 x 81cm. Photo by Alice Lubbock, courtesy of the Sapling Gallery, London.

SG: That really works with trees as well because they envelop and breathe in their own environment. In your other works are quite a lot of excerpts of text and writing. Can you just tell me a little bit about them or like why you put certain bits up and they kind of passages that they fits the inspire you or they are they your own musings?

OT: I really like the idea of a flow state. When I'm drawing, illustrating or making visual work, if I'm lucky, I'm in a kind of flow state where I'm not considering too much what I'm doing. This lets interesting things arise and when I consider too much, there's usually a moment where I think, "oh fuck, I'm considering too much". Part of that flow state is about being aware of moments where I can't illustrate as anymore so I switch to doing. Music or I can switch to writing. But, to be able to maintain a practice that can last for more than an hour every day, during which time I'm switched on and actually in a good state to be drawing, I believe it's important to be able to have others outlets to continue to attain a productive range, hence the writing on the wall

I'm very much a thinking over feeling type person, so a huge part of my thinking and the way I arrive at new ideas is through writing and like putting things down in words. I need writing to be able to build concrete stepping stones to move within my thoughts. If anything, the visual work is an abstraction/dream image of this writing. If you can imagine that I'm divided into these two states; one of them is producing these dream images, the other one is then invited to analyze them. That is a big part of my process. On this piece here, I have written the "gravitational pull of me on all the little ideas, but maybe the me is a black hole and I'm moving all the little ideas", which I think really speaks to this process of me being both the thing around which the ideas are kind of random they circulating.

SG: Amazing, it almost would seem like it returns to this dialectic that's working together to form this person. Thank you for taking the time to talk with us, it has been really interesting to hear about your practice.

Orfeo is currently showing his short film, *The Way Home*, at the [Museum of Contemporary Art Rome](#), along with creating some illustrations for [L'Uomo Vogue magazine](#).

Keep up to date with all of Orfeo Tagiuri's work on his [website](#) and [instagram](#).

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