Marc Fabels | **168h**

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For everything I want to do, make or try, I better get some kind of deadline or other incentive in place – or I will procrastinate. I used project 168h as such an incentive to take a full week to experiment with different forms of layering in my drawings.

These drawings always show natural and manmade patterns that are similar but never the same, and recognisable on a primal, rather than cognitive, level. If layering in the drawing itself had been an innate desire, I would already be doing it, so is my conviction – it's not something I feel I should force. Whereas stacking, transparency, height differences and combining materials has stayed in the back of my mind for quite a while now.

So the plan was: combinations of different papers and other materials, eventually going for a third dimension, pushing myself to work beyond the limits of (standard) paper sizes, looking for new and hopefully surprising images.

Depending on the result of the experiment and the time, I wanted to add yet another layer: music and/or sound. This research coincides nicely with a budding project plan for a musical theatre piece, for which I'm gradually writing the music and lyrics. In this piece, I see a significant role for drawings as a backdrop, helping to shape the story, and thus needing a more spatial approach. So, I hoped to make small discoveries that I may one day use on a larger scale.

And furthermore, about halfway through, triggered by a song lyric I wrote, I came to think about the issue of originality and authenticity. I tried to put my thoughts on the matter into words at the end of this document – as an addendum.

Some time ago, wrapping a sold artwork triggered an appetite for more of this effect...

Marc Fabels | **168h** | day 01

I started with a different image than intended, and chose a different barcode thingy from my collection of codes and number sequences than I thought I would. This happens all the time: me deviating from any preconceived idea from minute one... But I stuck to the overall plan: layering. Transparency to start out with.

Found out that I should not use my regular pencils on the transparent layers, since the graphite is way too shiny and gets in the way of the intended effect. Next day, I went out and bought matte graphite pencils (also something I had postponed for quite some time).

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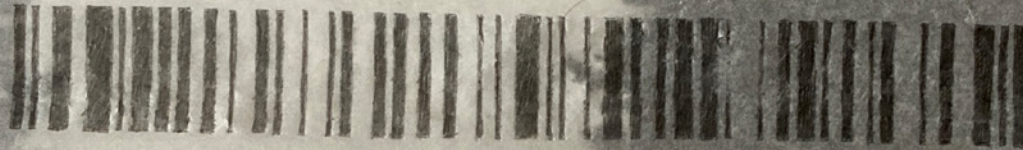
Marc Fabels | **168h** | day 02

Finally put some stuff from my vast collection of cardboard boxes and other shit to use. Not entirely happy at first - just something to build on. I didn't like the tracing paper plus plastic as a layer, didn't seem to make sense - intuitively, visually. But then again: you are not the best person to assess your own work, especially when working late (which I don't often do anymore).

...But it was good to finally see a longstanding idea materialise, especially the threedimensionality. So there's the gain of this fun exercise.

In the morning, I liked what I did the day before better. Knowing I had only little time today, I just executed a plan: expanding on the 3D-ish thing, this time using a tree drawing from the archive, and reusing the barcode and numbers layer from day 01.

I also made new layer combinations with the first drawing; most of which I didn't record, fortunately. Except for the lyrics overlay below.

I could say I don't ever want to scribble song lyrics over drawings again & this time for real – but then I turned it into some kind of proto-music video, using the music of those lyrics – see next page.
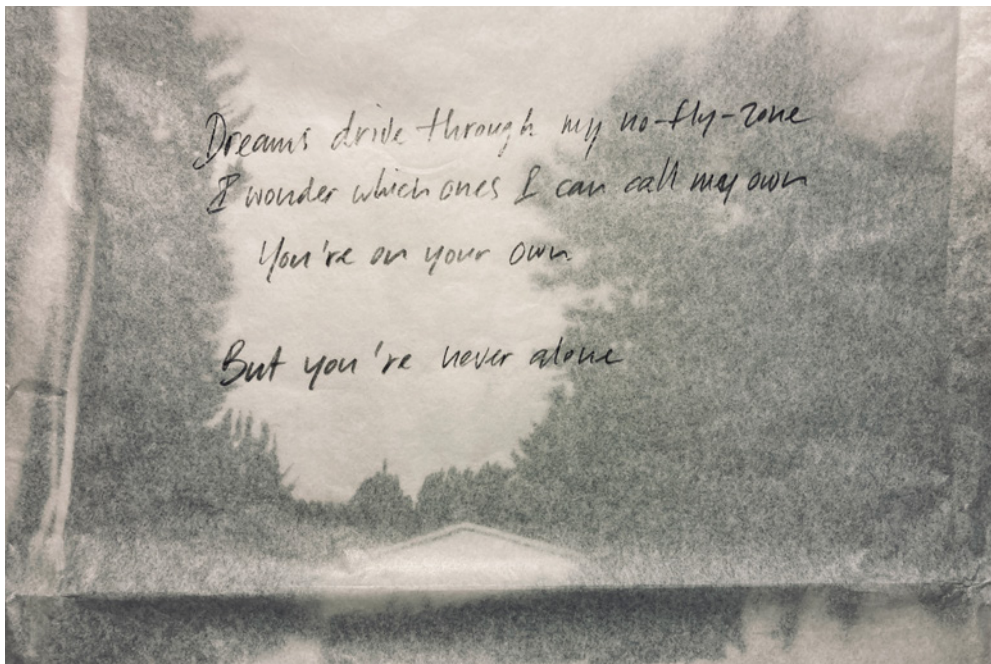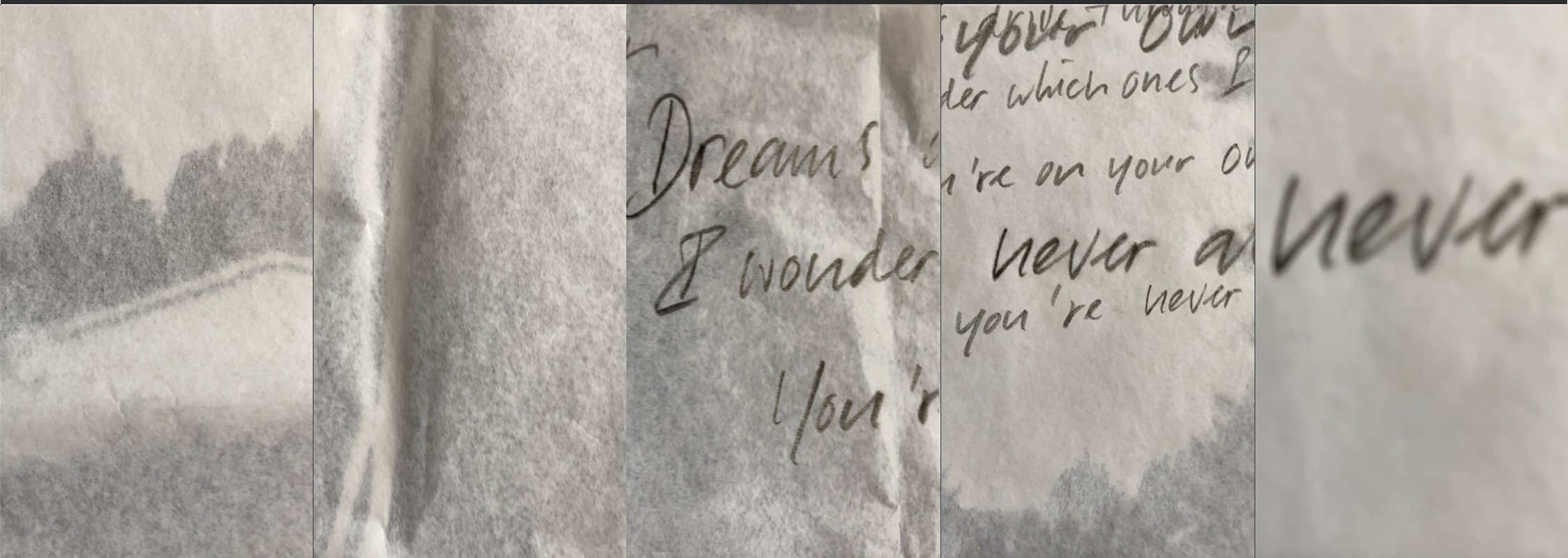
Two layers — oh yes — in this short clip, both 'reels' shot with my phone. No preparation whatsoever, but discovering effects that I can use for future projects.

Marc Fabels | **168h** | day 04

So far, it's been fun! For me, the deadlines and the art of this temporary community-of-sorts are working like a charm.

On day 4 I didn't get to what I really set out to do. I needed new drawings for it, I couldn't use what I have in stock. A combination of particular images took shape in my head, so I had to draw those first. Shown here are details of the first drawing in progress.

I'm drawing from photos, in the case of the trees taken by myself. But I never trace them, I draw by looking at the photo on a MacBook screen. So it's never a perfect rendering of the shapes, there's room for the drawing itself to take over where needed.

I did the other drawing. And I was fairly sure I was going to cut it into two or three parts, that I was going to combine with the first, pink, drawing.

Still didn't have the nerve. I'm a coward. Also, when I just placed them next to each other (next page), I already liked how it worked. I could see it in a frame like this.

Never tried two or more drawings on different materials together, so there's the gain, I guess. In any way, now I feel like doing more of those combinations. Also interesting (to me) is that I did only two layers of pencil, whereas I usually do three. I stopped on time! Some day I'll manage to stop halfway stage one – the first photo below – since that makes for a good drawing too.

Marc Fabels | **168h** | day 06

I planned on doing something quite different, but I couldn't get my hands on the material needed (except for some wallpaper samples that I wanted) – but the plan is there, and I will pursue it later.

So that left me with the 'contingency plan', which was basically continuing with the transparent layers. Duh. New combinations with the first drawing: a new tree on a transparent paper, and a crow that is wáy too befitting to my taste. I don't want to be anecdotal.

In the afternoon I started making more combinations with everything I made this week, basically to document it in a way that seemed appropriate. I quickly realised I was making a kind of sequence, so the earlier video snippet sprang to mind. I wound up with a series of some thirty photos, that I then turned into another video – stop-motion this time. Thirty photos is 1,5 second of film at best, so I put it in a loop – and then had a go at more layering, now putting the same reels on top of each other at slightly different speeds. I added an old piece of guitar noise for flavour. I love how it looks and feels very handmade – a few more photos wouldn't have hurt, though…

The resulting video is by no means a 'final work', but rather the start of something new to explore and expand – especially since I'm always looking to merge my different endeavours whenever I can. And once again, an element I didn't like at first (the crow) turns out to be the key...
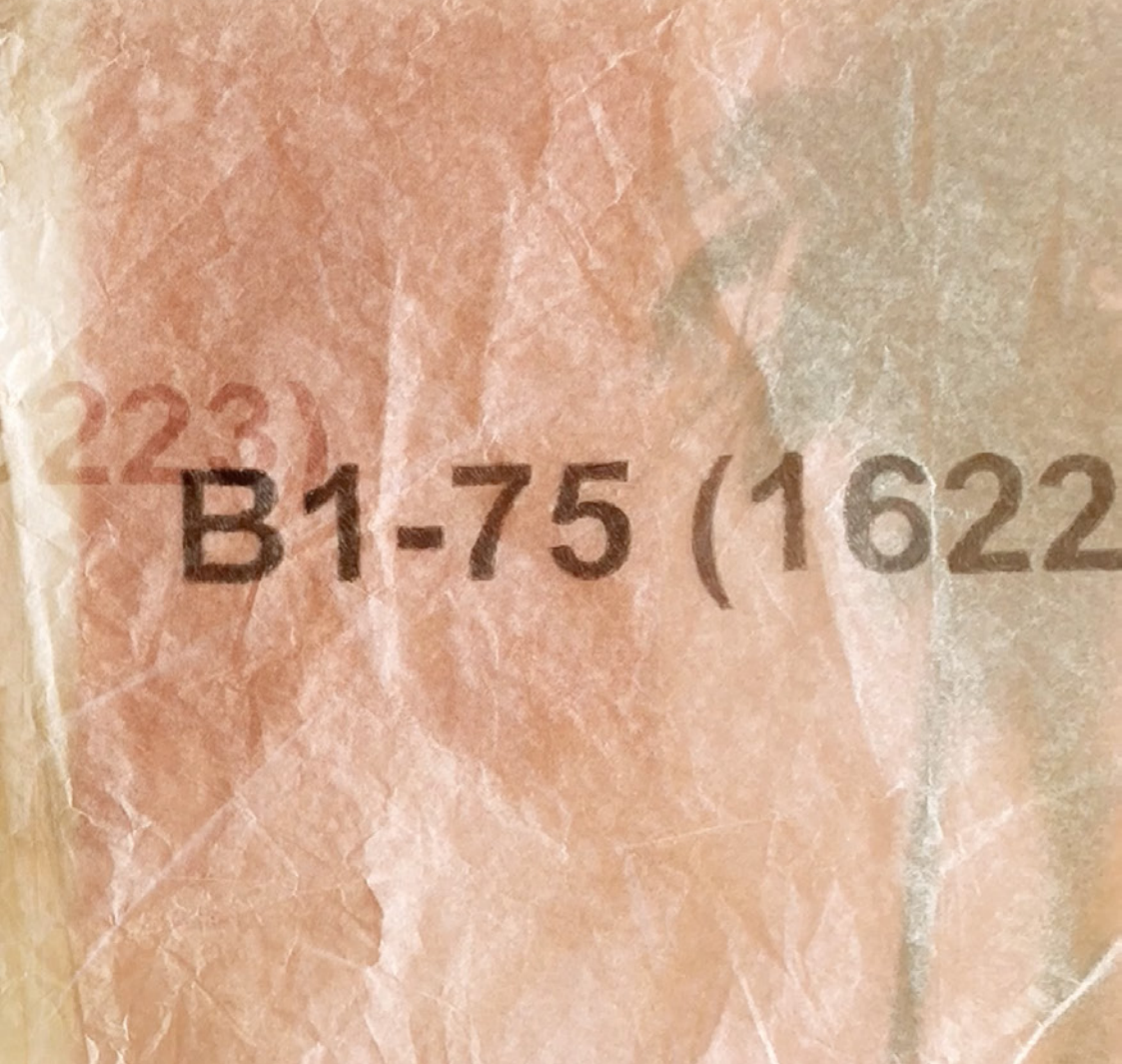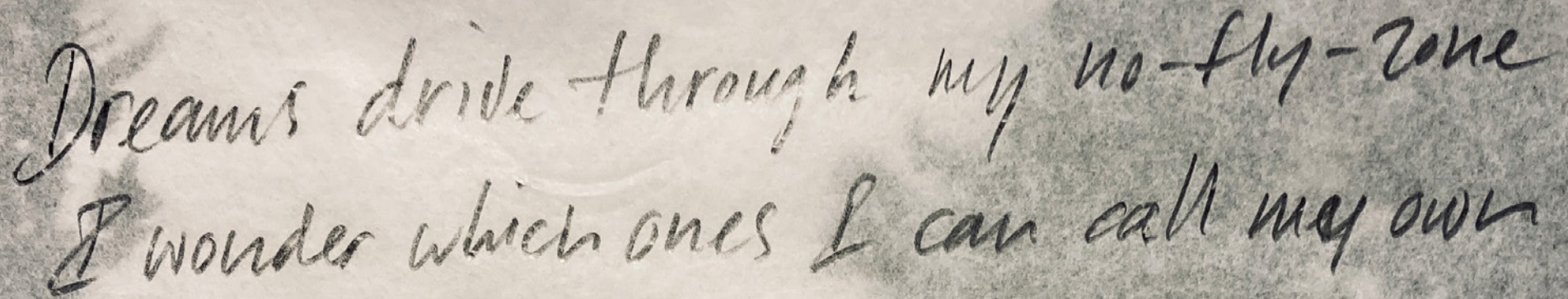
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Dreams drive through my no-fly-zone / I wonder which ones I can call my own

The above lines of a song lyric I wrote that I used over a drawing and in a short filmclip with the music to it, popped into my head seemingly out of nothing. It continues, stating: *you're on your own / but you're never alone.* **It is about the impossibility of creating something original or even authentic.**

That is a well-known fact of course – we're all standing on the shoulders of giants, and it's okay. In fact, in my teaching years, the first class I gave to new students dealt with that subject in a very tangible way: I let them take photos of *contrasts* in or around the academy. Mostly formal, since it was about recognising concepts. They went out of their way to find original takes on the subject, but inevitably some students had photographed the same subject or situation – which provided me with an opportunity to debunk the myth of originality. As they were sometimes pretty bummed they 'hadn't been original', I could also point out that the subject may be the same, but the picture itself wasn't. Different distance, different angle – just not the same. So I stated: don't

try so hard to do something original, because you will be automatically: you can't help it. I tried to loosen them up a bit, and not be wasting energy on something that goes a lot better if you don't think about it too much.

And yet, for the artist, the issue is always lurking in the background, or rather: overhead. The entire formal training at art academies is focused on developing *one's own voice*, and I am the last person to argue against the importance of that. In fact, it was central to everything I tried to convey to my own students, backed up by self-proclaimed *bad-ass* and guru James Victore. Basically, what we're doing is *ignoring* the issue of originality, or even authenticity for that matter, once students start making work that stems from a certain inner drive or fascination. Yes, originality and authenticity are all we ever talk about when discussing good art, but always from the assumption that it already *is* original and authentic – it simply has to be, because we deem it art. And yes, we're also perfectly capable of seeing it in relation to other or earlier art, and

even using that to mistify its eventual lack of originality: it borrows, pays homage, places itself in a tradition, or even 'questions' earlier art by doing all that, but with a reversed intent. What you cannot say out loud about art that has been established as such, however, is: I've seen this a thousand times before. Or: a lot of other artists are right now doing what you are doing. Or: you fit the current *trend* perfectly. And I believe that a lot of artists, if not all, must have thoughts like that themselves. I know I have them. But is it a bad thing?

Not necessarily. It drives you forward, provided the mere thought of just 'adding to the pile' doesn't block you. We are taught to convince ourselves and others, say: an audience, that we're true to ourselves and can't do it any other way. It has all the bearings of a silent agreement. Or even a belief system. But if it works, it works. And we need art, let me be very clear about that.

Maybe it's my age, maybe it's my eye for patterns – but I can't help but seeing a lot of art looking very similar – basically just *looking like art*. I'm not doubting the sincerity of any artist, but it does raise questions, not so much about originality (overrated), than it does about *authenticity*. The personal is universal, and I stand for that – but in this visually interconnected world, the universal seems to increasingly become the 'personal'. Oftentimes I can't help but wonder how personal exactly an artwork is, or if artists are just taught very well to convince themselves it's really all theirs, a true expression of their innermost selves? And how can you know? In my view, many artistic endeavours don't differ much from the 'personal desire' of a lot of people to 'start a

nice little bookstore with a coffee corner' or 'a camp site/B&B in France', or to have a 'little house with a garden, dining with friends on a long wooden table in the tall grass under the apple tree'... Can you really call dreams like that your own, even if genuinely desired?

The language used to describe or interpret a work of art or art practice doesn't help either, since it underwent the same process of universalisation. Just like knowing how to make art look like art (even if subconsciously), artists learned how to talk about their work in a way that builds on and contributes to the belief system, rather than being authentic. *Making it sound like it's art*, so to speak, using all the right *trigger words* instead of their own voice. (Since not all artists are equally equipped, or even willing to master that particular skill, this might also exclude good artists from a lot of platforms that advertise inclusivity – but that's another matter.)

So, we must assume that all art is authentic to the best of every artist's ability and knowledge, but we can't determine whether the perceived authenticity is (still) really personal. Maybe there is too much influence going on, visually through social media, but also in the form of a self-reinforcing set of unwritten rules in the realm of the arts, to be able to say that the artist's ideas, dreams and fascinations are genuinely their own.

But then again: the artist is only human, so that too is universal. But *personal* not so much – not as is taught, and thought. And to be very candid about it: I don't consider myself an exception to the rule. It's just something I've been reflecting on a lot. While making art – of course.

Marc Fabels | 168h | acknowledgements

Thanks to Eef Schoolmeesters for the beautiful 168h initiative and for providing me with a window of opportunity to work on some long desired experiments. Also thanks to the other participants for generously sharing their work and thoughts.

Marc
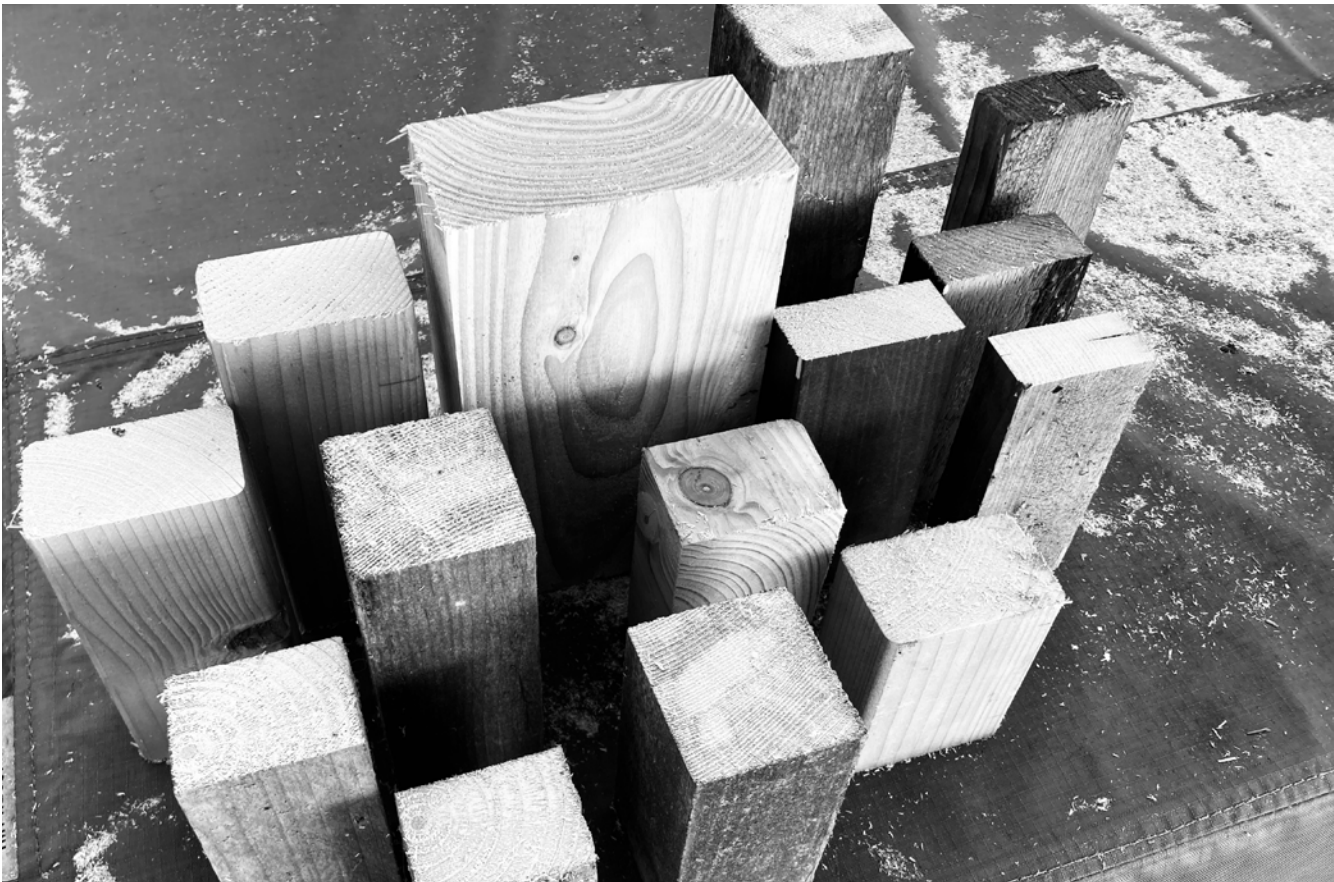
There they are: A few days after the 168h project week I was able to get my hands on the blocks of wood needed for more 3D stuff...

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