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Thinking is Making

Objects in a Space

THE MARK TANNER SCULPTURE AWARD



Thinking is Making

Edited by

Emma Benyon and Michael Taylor

Thinking is Making

Objects in a Space

THE MARK TANNER SCULPTURE AWARD

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The Generation of Sculpture

Conditions and Tendencies

Jon Wood

Holly Hendry
Slacker
Courtesy Yorkshire Sculpture
Park, photo: Mark Reeves
2019

“We know sculpture when we see it.”¹

Of all the qualities that we might associate with the idea of sculpture, it is perhaps its persistence that is most striking. For despite the ever-changing landscape of media, materials, processes and technological possibilities, and the jostling cultural discourses and pedagogical frameworks within which art is discussed, sculpture (and its attendant adjectival “sculptural”) always somehow manages to find a place. Sculpture’s long and ever-present history has played an important role in this – both for its advocates and detractors – serving as a foundational gauge from which new developments and points of departure can be considered. Its familiar genres and modes are all there to see, from the statuette to the monument. So too is sculpture’s real-life-in-the-world-ness – its ability to be more than a two-dimensional, illusory image, and to offer and occasion real-time encounters and experiences. In the flesh, in the round and occupying space, sculpture gives artists the opportunity to make physical works that can meet their viewers one-to-one: works that are themselves the outcome of direct engagement between artist and material.²

Sculpture is thus always an old and new art. It is also both an empirical and emotional one: an art of life and death, as well as of materials, spaces and interactions. The term “sculpture”, in all its inevitable openness, is still very helpful because of (and in spite of) its changing multiplicity of applications and associations. It offers at once a liberating range of options and possibilities, whilst also connecting to the past – to histories and traditions and anti-traditions, to questions and challenges. Through this, some artists cherish calling themselves “sculptors”, while others with “sculptural practices” stand more removed, resorting to “sculpture” from time to time and to the material and spatial opportunities it can offer in order to realise their work. Because of this, today the field of sculpture-making in Britain is a diverse and exhilarating one. This short text looks at a selection of its studio practices, exploring some of its current tendencies, dynamics and coordinates.

Trajectories

Every decade or so an exhibition is staged that endeavours to set out recent manifestations in sculpture. Names are listed and enlisted, and with them accompanying sculptural practices that stand on their own and in dialogue with and contradistinction to others.³ The history of sculpture in Britain since the end of the Second World War is full of such endeavours.⁴ One of the most influential – and the armature of the idea of “British Sculpture” – has been the tale of generational succession that is widely seen as running from Herbert Read’s Geometry of Fear group and the new “Aspects of British Sculpture” display at the 1952 Venice Biennale, to the New Generation sculptors affiliated with Saint Martin’s School of Art in the 1960s, to the New British Sculpture of the 1980s and the sculptors of the YBAs from the 1990s onwards, into the neoconceptualist sculpture, fabrications and diverse re-materialisations of the 2000s.⁵

It is a story of promotion by critics, galleries and institutions. It is also a narrative underpinned by changing materials, processes and technologies – carving, modelling, casting, construction, assemblage, bricolage and diverse ways of working with found objects and pre-existent, preformed materials, through to installation and more dispersed, multimedia arrangements. Each generation is read as working through and against the sculptural approaches and sensibilities of their precursors, finding their own voices materially and technically as sculptors. As such, it is additionally a story about conversations with sculptural practices abroad, notably Europe and North and South America, as well as those conducted within art schools in Britain – art schools that have themselves been instrumental in creating the microclimates for such generational manifestations over the decades.

Together they offer a compelling, if of course highly selective and problematic account of sculpture in Britain – often of endings as much as beginnings – and one through which many individual and collective artistic trajectories have been mapped, at the same time as others have been left out. It is also a narrative that foregrounds youth, newness and innovation, highlighting the forces of absorption and reaction and the creative, productive tensions that can charge the spaces between practices, artistic groupings and generations.

One of the many interesting moments within this schematic history was the exhibition “The Condition of Sculpture: A Selection of Recent Sculpture by Younger British and Foreign Artists”.⁶ It was staged at the Hayward Gallery in London in 1975, with works selected by William Tucker (b 1935), a sculptor and writer, who was associated with the New Generation Sculpture of Saint Martin’s School of Art. 1975 was also the year, germane to this publication, that the young Mark Tanner (1955–98) began attending the School and began making welded metal sculpture there that was informed by the work of Tucker and his colleagues, as well as by American artist David Smith (1906–65). Tanner’s time at the school came in the immediate aftermath of one of the most lively and controversial decades in its history, witnessing a radical rethinking of sculpture and making in the 1960s and 1970s.⁷ These richly experimental years, which are very much of interest to artists making work now, provide some of the coordinates that placed sculpture in relation to other pre-existent, found and readymade objects, as well as in relation to other media and art forms.

Tucker’s exhibition presented sculpture as a living language, the forms of which were there to be developed and extended. The “condition” of the exhibition worked in two ways. First, it pointed to an ambition to account for the “present health” of sculpture (a report on its state of play or review of the field at that time). The sculpture aesthetic of Saint Martin’s played an important role in Tucker’s selection: metal, welding and construction were perhaps inevitably the dominant material and processes.⁸ Second, it argued for its primary condition in the world – the factors and limits upon which it is contingent and that give it its situation, such as light and gravity. These in turn provide sculpture with its boundedness, visibility, free-standing character and, through this, its freedom to remain independent, inconvenient, obtrusive and challenging.⁹

The basic conditions of sculpture that Tucker outlined haven’t changed. Light and gravity remain, and “free-standing” continues to be a widespread characteristic of sculpture today when site-sensitivity and site-specificity, ideas that for Tucker jarred with sculpture’s liberated life, are also much valued. This means that Tucker’s conditions are always being loosely worked through, rather than being the inherent formal factors focussed on from the outset. This might make them less serious and advanced to some critics, certainly less modernist, but nevertheless with connections into the present, haunting much free-standing contemporary sculpture, both abstract and figurative. Continuities flow in other ways too, since many of the artists Tucker selected in the early-mid 1970s are still making sculpture today. As well as continuing to write – his influential book *The Language of Sculpture*, 1974, was translated into Chinese in 2016 – Tucker himself also makes sculpture today, including a recent group of heads, portraits and masks.¹⁰ Construction and steel have been exchanged for modelling and bronze casting, while the body has renewed importance too, extending Tucker’s re-engagement with figuration that began in the 1990s. Parts of the body are given new life, caught between abstraction and figuration, between a rock and a character, taking on personalities of their own.

One of Tucker’s new works is called *Mask for Pierre*, 2022. It is one of a group of *Masks for...* works that for the artist “conduct a conversation between the sculptor, an individual character and the spectator.”¹¹ This body of work started with Tucker taking apart a large plaster horse’s head he had



William Tucker
Mask for Pierre
Bronze, ed. 3 of 6 in bronze or resin, 34.5 × 17 × 33.5 cm
Photos: Jens Ziehe
2022

made and, struck by its individual parts, he continued modelling them, while keeping their sectional quality as part of the new work. Pierre, here, is Pierre Menard, the subject of Jorge Luis Borges’ short story, *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*, 1939.¹² *Mask for Pierre* is a sculpture born out of reworking and translating, subjects that in turn relate to Borges’ text. It pulls the past into the present, transforming one form into another and combining different moments of artistic authorship.¹³ Like Tucker’s other recent masks, *Mask for Pierre* faces directly, with a thin front that confronts viewers and a back that has an “against the wall” quality. Despite the title, it remains free-standing, not hung on the wall, nor worn over the face; it is a non-functioning mask in the form of a portrait-homage, while implying a second skin that shares the same surface as the subject.

This body of work might bring to mind rocks and their weathered surfaces, but also the heads of post-war French artists Jean Fautrier (1898–1964) and Jean Dubuffet (1901–85). Tucker’s mask works also sit well alongside the recent works of a number of younger artists. There are correspondences with the modelled figurative work of Nick Evans (b 1976), Emma Hart (b 1974), Benjamin Orlow (b 1984) and Rebecca Warren (b 1965). We also see connections with the stone carved heads of Daniel Silver (b 1972), the carved wooden masks of Simon Starling (b 1967) and the assemblages of John Summers (b 1974). All these artists explore the expressive and associative power of the head released from its anatomical coordinates. Modelling in clay and plaster brings liberation as well as direct manual engagement. They are materials that can be reworked over time, while offering a reciprocity and responsiveness to touch. The mask and its dynamics, simultaneously concealing and revealing its subject, have received increased attention by artists in recent years coinciding in part with the Covid-19 pandemic. This gives a new edge to questions such as: what might it take to turn an amorphous lump of material into a head or a form into a face? And what is the relation of a mask to a face and head; what are the limits and layers of mask-ness, face-ness and head-ness?

Sculpture’s conditions

A retrospective look at a sculpture exhibition such as “The Condition of Sculpture” – appearing four years before Rosalind Krauss’ essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” in 1979 and its influential account of contemporary North American art – is useful in highlighting differences and changes, as well as reminding us that contemporary sculpture is also subtly informed by attitudes that were championed over 50 years ago.¹⁴ The generational succession tied to the conceit of a national movement no longer has the currency that it did during the last decades of the twentieth century. Today we find a co-existence of different generational attitudes within the broader field of contemporary sculpture. Sculptors’ contributions and their longer artistic developments are perceived in tandem and simultaneously, which makes for a very multifaceted and intergenerational sculpture present, crossing practices and overlapping in the here and now.

The three artists who also contributed to this book – Phyllida Barlow (1944–2023), Hew Locke (b 1959) and Mike Nelson (b 1967) – are generations apart, but their sculpture coincides, sharing concerns within the same cultural, sculptural zone. The work of all three users both made and found elements and takes an installation-orientated approach to sculpture, deploying multiple elements within a single work. We might also say their sculpture defies photography or frustrates any attempt to document sculpture from a single fixed point of view. Film thus becomes a more appropriate medium for documentation. Viewers are turned into visitors as the movement and experience of the audience takes centre stage in different ways, as each of their impressive presentations within the Duveen Galleries demonstrated. Colour, surface texture and narrative take on important roles. There are also notable differences: Barlow was very much concerned with object and object ensemble making; Locke with assemblage, configurations of the human body and social history; while Nelson has a reputation for working with architecture, interior space and the forms and structures of enclosure and containment, and the narratives that these compelling staged object-set-pieces might be given.¹⁵

This intergenerational sculpture scene today is also witnessing simultaneous developments in the work of many artists, all swimming in the same waters, but all having jumped in at different times. The generation of Anthony Cragg (b 1949), Antony Gormley (b 1950) and Anish Kapoor (b 1954) were all reacting in the 1980s both to the welded metal sculpture of Anthony Caro and his “heavy metal sculpture” followers, and to the austere and industrial geometries of American minimalism. Instead, these artists looked to create new, imaginary forms, often introducing poetry, narrative and allegory, drawing upon a broad range of images, materials and objects, often found and recycled. They made sculpture at a time when painting was again in the ascendancy, finding new ways of using colour as a material, exploring two and three-dimensional relations and creating objects that could be displayed both on the ground and the wall, often simultaneously.

Across the oeuvres of these prolific sculptors, each with over 50 years of making behind them, we see a turn in recent years not only towards larger outdoor works, but also towards an intensified concern with longstanding passions such as geology, architecture and painting, respectively. We find Cragg’s deep-seated fascination with stratification, sedimentation and material layering presented as raw material and then cast into bronze anthropomorphic “rock-scapes”. His recent *Stack* body of work gives good insight into this, as we find stacked columns that dance together, sliding into each other like shifting tectonic plates. *Stack* was recently shown in Florence where it was installed in the courtyard of Brunelleschi’s Hospital of the Innocents, placing this dynamic sculpture in dialogue with Renaissance architecture. We find Gormley’s ongoing rumination on “being” as subject, and the body as a dwelling that can be frequented, moving from bodies formed



Tony Cragg
Stack
Bronze, 380×263×202 cm
Photo: Michael Richter,
Cragg Studio
2018

in lead to solid iron casts and aluminium structures. And we find Kapoor’s long-standing interest in the poetry of pigment and in the ways in which colour and form can coincide in more expansive, symbolic ways, melding oil paint, silicone, wax and Vaseline. For all three sculptors, the studio is a creative space of making and experimentation and, for all three, drawing and the small-scale model still play important roles in and alongside the other software and digital tools at their disposal for envisaging their sculpture. Such tools do not replace making, rather they help these sculptors – and many others today – work through the different stages of a sculpture, envisioning shifts between dimensions, speeding up renditions and catalysing transformations, from its production to its eventual display.

Such developments say much about the dialectical sculptural imaginations of these artists. In different ways, all three sculptors deal in opposites, forces pushing against and pulling towards each other, with the resulting internalised tensions between forms and ideas held in balance, in different kinds of reconciled or unreconciled states. We are met by ruminations on hybridity and industrial nature, on insides and outsides turned inside out, on bodies as landscapes and as buildings.¹⁶ The terrain of contemporary sculpture more broadly is charged by similar forces – by variety, diversity, hybridity, cross-fertilisation, transdisciplinarity as well as a creative un-disciplinarity that inhabits the spaces between things, constantly resetting relations and generating further frissons. Sculpture appears both in constant pluralistic flux while also exploring dialectical tensions between: the unique and the reproduced, the handmade and digitally rendered, two and three dimensions, the haptic and the optical, single forms and multiplicities, parts and wholes... We also see all those more expected dichotomies of qualities and attributes associated with sculpture, such as soft and hard, inside and outside, hollow and solid, structure and surface, material and immaterial...

This studio-landscape of creative tensions and contradictions has become a norm, charging an increasingly diverse and pluralistic scene. Further animating this dynamic environment is a broader sculptural imagination that is also fuelled by commercial imperatives, as galleries continually stage exhibitions of their artists’ works within an increasingly expanded international art market.¹⁷ The internet and social media add another edge to these tensions and tendencies, as artists travel beyond their computer screens to find their own voice and shape their own distinct contribution to the contemporary field, and to a world that is populated by more concerns than ever, at the same time as it is engaged with by more artists than ever before.

Objects & Figures

It is perhaps not surprising that installation-orientated approaches to sculpture have a particular resonance and currency today, offering material environments into which viewers can enter, experiencing sculpture in diverse and group formation. Multiplicity of form and perspective abound, with different points of attention and depths of focus, as do types of materials and production processes. The studio as a space not only to make, but also to stage and dress rehearse ensembles, plays a significant part in this. Across these modes of sculptural installation, the body of the viewer has a heightened presence, meeting figures and objects in numerous ways.

We find artists making constellations of interconnected objects of different kinds: made and found, designed and fabricated, often part-sculptures, part-objects, that sit more in more ambiguous realms. Many of these ensembles – which sometimes read as expanded still lives and at other times like larger object landscapes – sit directly on the floor, creating new worlds which viewers can either look at or enter into, frequenting them as temporary visitors. Often works draw upon the poetry of the word “fabrication”, exploring the fictions and impersonations that can orbit material objects. Such work is made by several sculptors today including Claire Barclay (b 1968), Oliver Beer (b 1985), Karla Black (b 1972), Sonja Boyce (b 1962), Michael Dean (b 1977), Anne Hardy (b 1970), Holly Hendry (b 1990), Lucy Skaer (b 1975), Helen Marten (b 1985), Katrina Palmer (b 1967), Saad Qureshi (b 1986), Magali Reus (b 1981), Frances Richardson (b 1965) and Veronica Ryan (b 1956).

Anne Hardy’s *Falling and Walking*, 2017, is an ambitious installation, first shown in Leeds Art Gallery and now in its collection.¹⁸ Its diverse components were all placed on a carpet. Building materials, such as cement and breeze blocks, feature in the work and give the idea of a work in the making to be completed in the mind of the viewer. It toyed with the idea of a construction site as a creative

space, full of possibility and potential, and used disparate and dispersed ensembles to create the idea of fragmentary components that we are in the process of becoming. Viewers (who were asked to take their shoes off prior to entering) walked around the work at the same time as hearing sounds which charged the whole space, creating an object-soundscape. Sculpture’s traditional stasis, obdurate materiality and silence has always given it a special and dynamic relationship with sound, and especially music. Opposites attract, and scope for the exploration of the synergies and creative potentialities between them is ripe for exploration today, as the work of other artists such as Oliver Beer, who investigates the resonances of objects and their inner acoustics, demonstrates. We can listen to sculpture – because of, as much as in spite of, its muteness – in actual and imaginary ways.

Holly Hendry’s *Slacker*, 2017, was the central work in an exhibition called “The Dump is Full of Images” staged at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in 2019–20. It was a well-made, mechanical sculpture holding a conveyor belt-like sheet, depicting stratified forms, objects and images, which went round continuously on a loop. The sculpture invites rumination on the underneath, creating correspondences between what lies both beneath the surface of the ground and the skin of the human body. It connects to Cragg’s stacked work in this respect, whilst also to a broader sculptural fascination with geology and the body as landscape that we can see across much of 20th-century sculpture in Britain. It also combined a message about the importance of recycling with a feeling of playfulness. Hendry commented in relation to the work, “For me the cartoon world is a place where life exists in objects, and bodies are freed of real-life rules ... Unreal things can do the things we can’t as humans ... in their world pain is fleeting and death is reversible”.¹⁹ Magali Reus’ sculpture is smooth, well-defined and enigmatic. Tight and hermetically sealed, it often comprises different materials – such as metals and plastics – beautifully locked together with an engineered precision. It has the measured quality of Hendry’s – well-made and well-connected objects, like cogs in a machine that looks like it can be activated, but whose purpose and function is unclear. Reus’ recent exhibitions reveal her fascination with the materialities of manure, sand and soil, exploring the shape-shifting journeys of materials as ingredients used in a variety of products and processes. In conversation recently with Jonathan Watts, she reflected, “I am interested in the transformations that, say, manure enacts or sand undergoes – their propensities. It’s alchemy. Where sand is conjured into many shapes through alchemical processes, a like trajectory awaits edible ingredients destined for consumption”.²⁰ Once again we find artists resorting to sculpture as a fitting means of reflecting upon and articulating ideas about the complexity of materials and their place in the world.

Figuration has an important place in sculpture in Britain today and we find many artists setting up figurative groupings and conversations and encounters between sculpture-bodies and their viewers.²¹ The recent sculpture of Hew Locke is a good example of this, as is the figurative work of many others, including Simeon Barclay (b 1975), Mel Brimfield (b 1976), Matthew Derbyshire (b 1977), Laura Ford (b 1961), Kira Freije (b 1985), Ryan Gander (b 1976), Brian Griffiths (b 1968), Lubaina Himid (b 1954), Nick Hornby (b 1980), Rachel Kneebone (b 1973), Michael Landy (b 1963), Emily Speed (b 1979), Tim Shaw (b 1964) and Cathy Wilkes (b 1966).

The figurative ensembles of Tim Shaw and Kira Freije manifest different sculptural tendencies, whilst sharing skills for creating mysterious and enigmatic set pieces. The subjects of Shaw’s sculptures range from the mythical and otherworldly, to the deeply troubling and all-too-brutally and politically present. *Soul Snatcher Possession*, 2014, presents a thuggish group of interacting figures made out of rags, clothes, pillows and tights strapped onto steel armatures. *Casting a Dark Democracy*, 2008 and 2014, and *Tank on Fire*, 2008 and 2015, are powerful and haunting sculptures recording the atrocities of war, as witnessed during the recent Iraq war. Shaw’s figurations are always charged with



Holly Hendry
Slacker
 Courtesy Yorkshire Sculpture
 Park, photo: Mark Reeves
 2019



an extraordinary dynamism, and so it comes as no surprise to find him extending his work in recent years into performance and live art, moving from the gallery into the outdoors, where his sculpture is in its element. One of the most striking recent demonstrations of this is his *Lifting the Curse*, 2022, in which a multi-part wooden sculpture was ceremonially burned (and photographed, creating the *Burning Lifting the Curse* photographs) and then its charred remains displayed in the Royal Academy as a form of sculptural exorcism.

Freije has always relished the power of the line fabricated in three-dimensions. Her figures and objects are drawn in space, their volumes articulated with curved welded metal strips, whilst the air inside these frames fleshes out the inner body. Sometimes these welded metal figures are partially cloaked in bright fabric, the colours of which contrast with the silvery and grey metal palette of much of her work. It is a palette that is also animated by the brown and black scorch marks of the welding. In her recent sculptures, shown in her meteorites exhibition at The approach, Freije has created nicely interconnecting ensembles of figures and lamps, using walls, floors and ceilings, from which she suspended works.²² The overall effect is that of some unspecified dramatic or epiphany-like event. Figures stand reflectively – or kneel or crawl in shock. Heads and hands are either articulated in welded metal or rendered as partial life casts in aluminium, spinning between realism

Kira Freije
meteorites
Installation view at
The Approach, London
Courtesy of the artist and
The Approach, London,
photo: Michael Brzezinski
2022

and cartoon, between the lifelike and the robotic. These characteristics, along with their mask-like metallic qualities and their dominant frontalities, might bring to mind the work of American sculptor HC Westermann (1922–81), combining the playful and the sinister in comparable ways.²³ In the case of Freije’s meteorites exhibition, it is the series of lamps that helps bring the whole ensemble to life: each piece of coloured glass has been mouth blown, bulging bulbously out of its lantern frame. These sculpture lamps help hold the figurations together whilst punctuating the overall group with illuminated points, like a constellation.

& Sculpture &

Sculpture’s relation to painting has always historically been a debated matter, from that earlier *paragone* debates of the Italian Renaissance into the twentieth century when painters regularly turned to sculpture.²⁴ When the Whitechapel Gallery staged an exhibition about painting and sculpture in 1986, it was called “In Tandem: The Painter-Sculptor in the Twentieth-Century”.²⁵ Coming a decade after Tucker’s expressed concern about the influence of painting and the relief on sculpture, it was an exhibition that invited direct consideration of the painter-sculptor trope across 20 artist case studies.²⁶ It was a fascinating show and one that begs the question: what would such an exhibition look like today? In the 2020s, such interrelations of course continue, but there is also a rich and intensified cross-fertilisation between sculpture and other two-dimensional media and approaches, including drawing, printmaking, photography, collage and montage. Two- and three-dimensional exchanges are widespread and complex, as artists look to ways of rupturing the certainties of images, puncturing their laminations, rematerialising their pixelations and re-texturing and re-layering the connections between objects and referents, between real and virtual realms.

Today we find more sculptors painting, as we also find painters turning to sculpture. High profile examples of these turns include Bruce McLean (b 1944) and Sean Scully (b 1945). McLean has alternated between sculpture and painting over the decades, while also doing performances, films and working with photography. Today he thinks of himself as “a sculptor painting”, rather than as a painter, because the idea of sculpture resides at the heart of his physical activities as an artist – in its material applications, dynamic, spatial interplay and choreographing of bodily movements. Perhaps unsurprisingly, his recent mini-retrospective of painting was mischievously called “Five Decades of Sculpture”.²⁷ It is a telling demonstration of the creative tension within his practice, an internal conversation which itself charges much of his work. Scully’s sculpture making has increased markedly over the last decade. He takes the blocky compositions of his paintings and extends them off the wall, translating them into stone, metal, wood and glass.²⁸ These often large, outdoor works still converse with the poetry of the paintings, extending his familiar insets and windows into holes – revisiting that famed feature of much modern sculpture – whilst intensifying the idea of compression as a compositional device. Scully’s new arrangements take things elsewhere, towards architecture, turning viewers into visitors who either enter or walk around the sculptures looking in from the outside.

Kapoor’s turn to painting is of a more expressive order and this sensibility can also be found in the work of other sculptors making paintings, such as Thomas Houseago (b 1972). Houseago made several large paintings during the lockdown period and while staying in Malibu. These expressive paintings introduce a wide variety of colour after the characteristic plaster whiteness of his previous sculpture and the black and white works on paper he had been making. They both tap into his long-standing admiration for historical Northern European painting (such as Bruegel and Munch) and his experience of the light, night and landscapes of California where he now lives. They share the emotional rawness of his sculpture, taking it into a terrain that is at once more liberated and confined. When talking about these

paintings recently, he comments, “I know that this isn’t really the landscape, but with my sculptures I don’t know that. My sculptures are really *that*”.²⁹ It is a striking comment: Houseago’s paintings relate to views, whereas his sculptures *are* the views.

Artists making sculpture and painting together, either in parallel or as part of the same work, also stand out on the contemporary scene. The recent work of Cathie Pilkington (b 1968), for example, deploys sculpture and painting in ways that enable her to stage and narrativise her hybrid forms to great effect. Part animal, part doll, part human, her compelling surrealist figurations sing their mysterious songs in dialogue with painted backdrops – part-pattern, part-landscape – that echo the designs found on the figures.³⁰ References to earlier artists abound too, whether the dazzle ship camouflage designs of the Vorticist artist Edward Wadsworth or poses taken from Henry Moore’s reclining figures, their sculptural awkwardness further intensified. The dialogues between two- and three-dimensional objects found in the work of Keith Coventry (b 1958) are of a different order, inviting consideration of a single object’s profiles, outlines and silhouettes in conversation with their full materialised form. We might think about signage in relation to material objects, what each in turn reveals and how we might know things through outlines. Black and bronze converse in his *Kebab* and *Sapling* works, as images read as the shadows of objects.

Like Pilkington and Coventry, Neil Gall (b 1967) makes paintings and sculptures, although his paintings are based on models that always have a sculptural quality either as reliefs or as small ensembles of handmade objects. These models are made of overlapping, intermeshed and collaged sheets, rather like the multi-layered relief sculptures that have recently been made by artists working outside Britain such as Frank Stella (b 1936), Ebony Patterson (b 1981) and Jorinde Voigt (b 1977). The work of Sara Barker (b 1980), consisting of carefully assembled wall works combining painting and metal construction, is also relevant here. Barker also uses the resulting shadows from the thin tubular space frames to develop connectivity between dimensions. Relations in Gall’s work are also triangulated, this time between model, painting and sculpture, as Gall has commented recently, “Going back and forth is elemental for me of course, because I can’t have a painting without a sculpture in the first place! But that’s only the condition if you consider my ‘sculpture’ as props or as a three-dimensional source for a flat work... When I think of these things as ‘sculpture’, things in themselves, as I do, sometimes for months on end I’ll just make sculpture without thinking they will lead to a painting. Then the relationships between sculpture and painting are trickier”.³¹

Occasionally Gall displays the sculptures (sometimes former models) and paintings together. This was the case with *Studio Craft*, 2020, and *Tumbler*, 2021, which together enact a deceptive play and frisson between negative and positive space. “It feels like it brings the two practices together,” Gall reflects, “like they justify each other. It has allowed the paintings to get flatter, or to deal with more shallow space and for the sculpture to get really bulbous and really sculpturally obvious. The sculptures are almost cartoonish”.³² The idea of sculpture being a cartoon or a quasi-caricatural image of itself – as it becomes a sculpture – is a recurrent idea that we find elsewhere in the work of Holly Hendry, mentioned earlier, and also Paul McDevitt (b 1972).

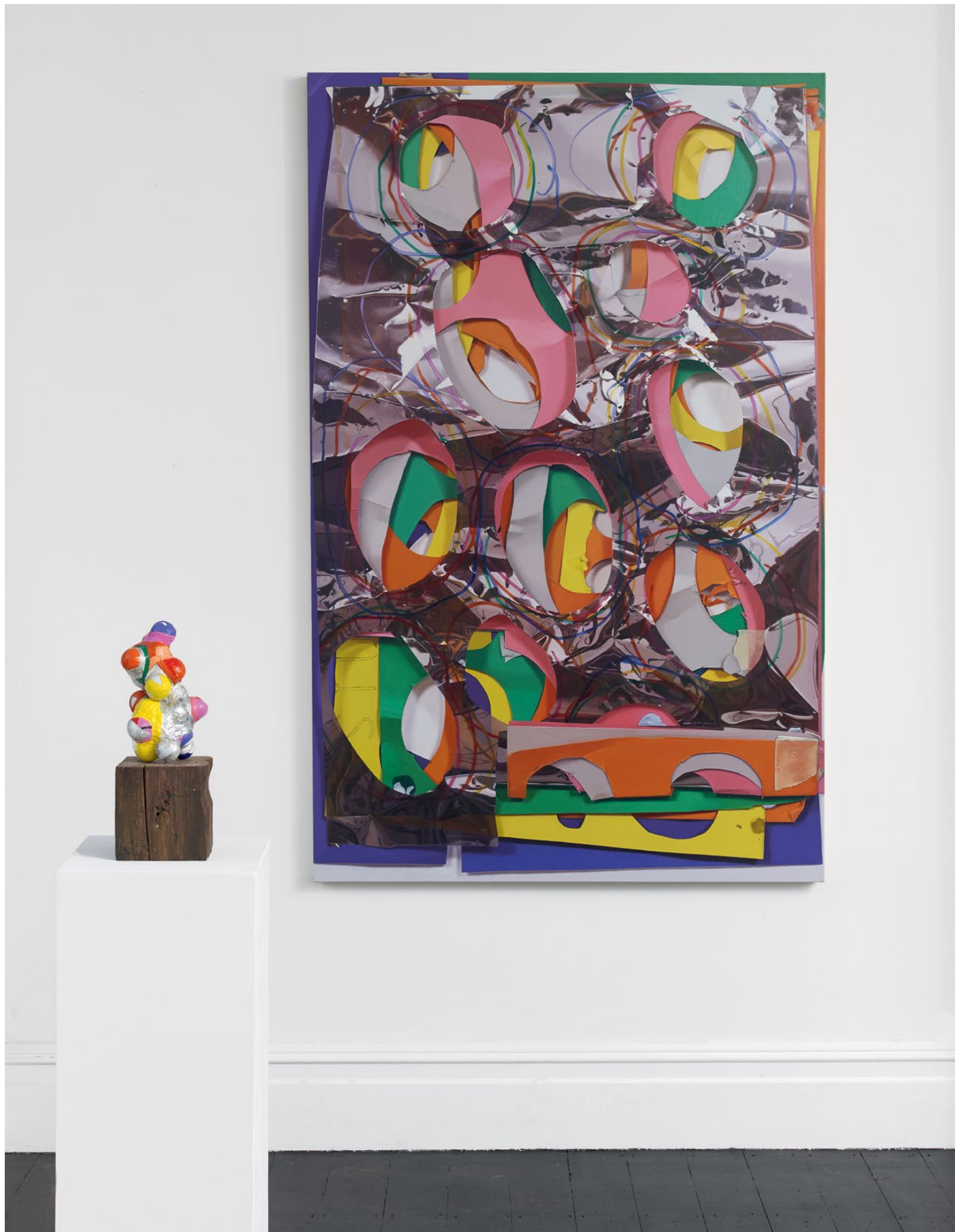
Gall’s work deploys collage, montage and assemblage alongside paint, and these play significant roles in the works on paper that the sculptors Bill Woodrow (b 1948) and Richard Deacon (b 1949) made together between 2019 and 2021. This group was the latest in an ongoing series of joint-sculptures that they first started in 1990. Made before and during the Covid pandemic, their articulations of the natural world undergo shifts from the terrestrial to the aqueous and airborne, as we find the animal kingdom recalibrated from larger to smaller individuals *en masse*. In one of the larger drawings,



Cathie Pilkington
Epic
Velvet, felt-tip, linen and acrylic paint, 290 × 210 cm
Estin Thalassa
Resin, oil paint, steel, velvet, and felt-tip, 85 × 50 × 32 cm
Courtesy Karsten Schubert
London, photo: Perou
2021

Shroud, 2020, such shifts in scale are taken further down to more microscopic and molecular levels as we face what might be read as a series of explosions. Che Guevara also puts in an appearance, courtesy of one of the artists’ old T-shirts. These new shared works enjoy a rich sculptural life. The construction-based approach of their joint sculptures has been exchanged for layering and over-layering as each artist takes it in turn to tell their side of the story, building up out of the surface of the paper, piece by piece, drawing/painting by painting/drawing. Most employ collage, with cut-out paper and fabric, and alongside more familiar art materials such as ink, paint, graphite, wax crayon and oil stick, we find more surprising constituents such as coffee and natural dyes, such as oak gall, sloe berries and red wine.

The exploratory hybrid life that Woodrow and Deacon’s shared work has always had – at once for them as artists and us as viewers – shines powerfully through these drawings. So too do the energies and pleasures of actual making as, time and time again in these new drawings, we find motifs sparking off each other: soft against hard, spiky geometries combining with watery and cloudy forms, and subtle washes contrasting with powerful colour clashes. What both artists are taking on and exploring with these joint works is not just the established idea of the individual artist, but also



Neil Gall
 left
Tumbler
 Acrylic on cast Jesmonite,
 23×17×14 cm (top part),
 15×14×15 cm (bottom part)
 2021
 right
Studio Craft
 Oil on canvas, 166×105 cm
 Courtesy of the artist,
 photo: Andy Keate
 2020

unsettling the long-standing idea of “sculptors’ drawings” as a meaningful artistic category. Their new works on paper give them greater freedom to make what they want outside expected frames and viewing habits.

Alongside these large works, both artists also made a series of unique prints, highlighting the making of such works more generally by sculptors nowadays. Two striking examples are to be found in the work of Olivia Bax (b 1988) and Jeff Lowe (b 1952), both of whom have close connections to Anthony Caro – Lowe as a former student and Bax, more recently, as a studio assistant in Caro’s later years. In her own sculpture Bax deploys several processes simultaneously constructing, welding and modelling, and using the metal armature both as an inner supporting structure and as an active component of the final sculpture itself, pushing through and out of the modelled paper pulp. Her multipartite and yet all-of-a piece ensembles read as sculptural contraptions and she has a preference for conduit forms, such as pipes, funnels, tubes, chutes and hoppers, that suggest ideas of passage and transferral while carrying directional energies with them. As well as construct and model, Bax also paints, but rather than being applied at the end, her paint is mixed into the pulp (and other materials, such as PVA glue and plaster), from the very start. This means that she works with colour both as a painter and as a sculptor might, modelling colour as one might clay. Her monoprints carry these ideas onto the single sheet. Soaked with colour, they suggest many of the real and imaginary sculptural contraptions that she enjoys making, placing them within a domestic setting and to be found amongst the pipes and tubes “under the sink”. Lowe’s monoprints, which he has been making at the Cambridge Print Workshop over the last few years, have a different relationship to the circular interlocking and painted metal sculpture he makes. Rather than make prints of sculptures, Lowe uses the processes of printmaking to push the possibilities of two and three dimensions further, making complex overlapping images that will often find their way later into three-dimensional forms, generating a new body of work. Lowe is an interesting example of a sculptor who never makes preliminary drawings, but who finds ideas for sculptures emerging indirectly through the processes and stages of printmaking.

Blurring the clear-cut distinctions between object and image, allowing ideas to flow between dimensions, is something that can be discerned in the use of photography by several artists, including Becky Beasley (b 1975), Michael Dean (b 1977), Alice Channer (b 1977), Anthea Hamilton (b 1978) and Anne Hardy. Their works have coincided with heightened art historical and art critical attention more generally to the relationship between sculpture and monochrome photography and to their correspondences and connections.³³ A photograph can document, frame and contain sculpture – as an independent art work – at the same time as highlighting its forms, demonstrating its concerns and sharing its conditions, from its direct engagement with the material world to its reproducibility and continued life beyond the moment of making. This makes it a particularly rich terrain for exploration and poetic consideration, charging the spaces between two and three dimensions like no other medial combination. In some of Beasley’s recent photographs we are faced with intimate and atmospheric acrylic boxed spaces that draw us into them, at the same time as shutting us out. As she recently stated in an interview, “A photograph is always an imaginary space, an inhospitable, uninhabitable space”.³⁴ Dean’s photo-sculptures also live uncanny lives between dimensions. We find still lives that suggest paper cut-out, concrete relief and raw meat simultaneously. There is a relishing of material impersonations at stake here as slabs of veined meat are cast as marble or marble-looking concrete.³⁵

It perhaps comes as no surprise to find that Beasley and Dean are writers as well as sculptors, turning to words as other ways of communicating, with urgency, ideas and feelings that they want to share. Beasley and Dean are part of a growing number of artists who have been doing the same, including Katrina Palmer (b 1967) and Brian Catling (1949–2022). Palmer’s work includes *The Fabricator’s Tale*, 2014,



opposite
**Bill Woodrow
 and Richard Deacon**
Shroud (2020)
 Paint, oil stick, graphite, fabric,
 collage, paper, 160 x 150 cm
 Photo: Stuart Whipps
 2020

right
Michael Dean
yes (Working Title)
 Digital c-print, 70 x 52 cm
 Courtesy of the artist
 and Herald St
 2011



and *End Matter*, 2015.³⁶ *End Matter*, commissioned by Artangel and BBC Radio, was a site-specific audio walk on Dorset’s Isle of Portland consisting of recordings titled *The Loss Adjusters* and a publication also titled *End Matter*. The latter is a work made up of written words, spoken words, and across various architectural and geographical locations, all found on Portland, an island which is literally disappearing; its valuable Portland stone is quarried and lost to the island, often, somewhat paradoxically, for the purpose of memorialisation. Palmer’s work is a rumination on loss and the use of stone to deal with bereavement.

The novels of Catling are also good examples of how writing can be a way of giving form and sound to sculptural and material imaginings. Catling studied at the Royal College of Art and worked as Professor of Sculpture at the Ruskin School of Art in Oxford University for many years, a university department in which Palmer also worked. His extraordinary work moved between sculpture, performance, painting and writing – the sculpture always raw, corporeal and tool-like, about the symbolic potential energy of instruments, like a loaded gun or a bow pulled tense to release. His turn to writing harnessed these sculptural imaginings, providing them with new visceral realms within which to operate. In novels such as *The Vorrh*, 2016, which begins with the lines “The bow I carry with me, I made of Este”, the voraciousness and capaciousness of his sculptural imagination is released, and its uncanny materialities are given life in his subsequent books *The Erstwhile*, 2017, and *The Cloven*, 2018, which stand as Part 2 and Part 3 of the trilogy. In his final book, the macabre novella *Earwig*, 2019, Catling’s sculptural imagination is given full voice.³⁷ The novella’s words read not only as if spoken, but also as if they were held in the mouth for a long time – sucked and savoured, chewed and swallowed or spat out. The book begins with the mouth of Mia, a mysterious young girl who wears ice teeth which are made out of her own frozen saliva, carefully syphoned off and decanted into rubber casts and stored on green glass trays in her noisy fridge. New sets of ice teeth must be inserted regularly and this is the job of Earwig, her principal carer and the main character of the story. *Earwig* is the stuff of nightmares, and an extraordinary visceral piece of writing, in which the material world is ruthlessly opened up and rematerialised in urgent and fantastical ways: not just seen differently, but smelt, tasted, touched and heard differently. It is a body work, as much as a book – a sculpture text, as much as a sculptural one.

Catling and Palmer are part of a fascinating history of writer-sculptors.³⁸ Sculptors have turned, turn and will continue to turn to writing – and to different kinds of writing – for different reasons and with different effects. The idea of sculpture is perpetuated too through such writings – word-objects from the study as much as the studio. William Tucker, with whom I began this essay, started writing about sculpture both as a teacher and as a sculptor, enabling him to understand and share more completely the history and possible future of his chosen field of creative activity. For all these writers, like the other sculptors and generations of artists whose work I have discussed here, materials are at the heart of what they do: thinking and making with them, in their heads and in their hands.

Dr Jon Wood is an art historian and curator, specialising in modern and contemporary sculpture. He worked for many years at the Henry Moore Institute, working on the research programme and curating exhibitions. He was an editor of the *Sculpture Journal* and his co-edited sculpture anthologies include *Contemporary Sculpture: Artists’ Writings and Interviews* (2019), *Sculpture and Film* (2018) and *Modern Sculpture Reader* (2012). Recent publications include *William Turnbull: International Modern Artist* (2022) and *The Sculptural Imagination of Seanie Barron* (2022).

1. This phrase was regularly used by the art historian and Leeds University lecturer Ben Read (son of the art writer and poet Herbert Read) in conversations about modern and contemporary sculpture, making indirect reference to the views expressed about defining sculpture by some of the tutors at Saint Martin’s School of Art. Phillip King is the most likely source of this quotation. He also used to quote Anthony Caro’s often celebrated statement: “Sculpture can be anything, but not anything can be sculpture.”
2. For a recent publication offering a survey of space in modern and contemporary sculpture, see: Weibel, Peter, *Negative Space: Trajectories of Sculpture in the 20th and 21st Centuries*, ZKM Karlsruhe, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2021.
3. Interesting examples of the published survey include: Beers, Kurt (ed.), *100 Sculptors of Tomorrow*, London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2019 and Pedrosa, Adriano et al, *Vitamin 3-D: New Perspectives in Sculpture and Installation*, London and New York: Phaidon, 2009.
4. Insightful overviews on the “British Sculpture” question in the post-1945 period but written in the 1980s and 1990s can be found in the late Paul Overy’s essays “The Britishness of Sculpture” (*Studio International* in 1987). Also: Hudek, Antony, “The Break-Up of New British Sculpture”, *Henry Moore Institute Essays on Sculpture*, no 45, Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2005.
5. Artists associated with the New Aspects of British Sculpture at the Venice Biennale in 1952 were Robert Adams (1917–84), Kenneth Armitage (1916–2002), Reg Butler (1913–81), Lynn Chadwick (1914–2003), Geoffrey Clarke (1924–2014), Bernard Meadows (1915–2005), Henry Moore (1898–1986), Eduardo Paolozzi (1924–2005), William Turnbull (1922–2012). Artists associated with the “New British Sculpture” movement included Anthony Cragg (b 1949), Edward Allington (1951–2017), Richard Deacon (b 1949), Antony Gormley (b 1950), Shirazeh Houshiary (b 1955), Margaret Organ (b 1946), Peter Randall-Page (b 1954), Richard Wentworth (b 1947), Alison Wilding (b 1948) and Bill Woodrow (b 1948).
6. The Condition of Sculpture: A Selection of Recent Sculpture by Younger British and Foreign Artists, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1975. The exhibition ran from 29 May to 13 July 1975. It included the work of 42 artists. All were born in the 1930s and 1940s, apart from Jeff Lowe, Emma Park and Brian Thompson who were born in the early 1950s.
7. This is discussed in several recent publications, including: Strang, Matilda, “The Proof is in the Pudding: The Legacy of Saint Martin’s Sculpture Department”, *Thinking is Making: Presence and Absence in Contemporary Sculpture*, The Mark Tanner Sculpture Award, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2013, pp 30–37.
8. Although his selection did also include carved, modelled and assemblage works by Robert Hudson (b 1938), Paul Neagu (1938–2004), Nicholas Pope (b 1949), Lucas Samaras (b 1936) and Jacqueline Winsor (b 1941) – American, Romanian, Australian, Greek and Canadian-born, respectively.
9. Tucker, William, “Introduction”, *The Condition of Sculpture: A Selection of Recent Sculpture by Younger British and Foreign Artists*, London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1975, pp 7–8.
10. “William Tucker: Portraits and Masks”, Buchmann Galerie, Berlin, 3 September–29 October 2022.
11. William Tucker to author, 8 October 2022.
12. Other works in the *Masks for...* group include: *Mask for Edwin* (Edwin Avrill), *Mask for Hannah* (Hannah Arendt), *Mask for John Vincent* (central character in Jorge Luis Borges’ *The Shape of the Sword*).
13. Jorge Luis Borges’ short story, *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* is included in Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*, London and New York: Penguin, 1970, pp 62–71.
14. Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field”, in Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, London and Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1986, pp 276–290.
15. Interestingly, Nelson’s recent exhibition at the Duveen Galleries witnessed a turn away from installation and the fabrication of environments and towards the presentation of free-standing objects and assemblages.
16. This has been observed a number of times by commentators over the years, including Peter Noever, who remarked on the occasion of the artist’s exhibition at the MAK in Vienna in 2009: “Kapoor is the creator of complementariness. His work addresses the interplay between polarities, the universal interweave of oppositions such as immanent-transcendent, material-immaterial, concrete-abstract, visible-invisible, full-empty, light-dark, concave-convex, female-male/ Yin-Yang, conscious-unconscious, presence-absence, order-chaos, stillness-motion, surface-space etc.; hence his interest for ‘bodiless’ bodies, ‘weightless’ mass or ‘fluid’ solidity.” Peter Noever, “Worauf Zielt Diese Unternehmung Eigentlich Ab? What is this all about?“, *Anish Kapoor: Shooting the Corner*, MAK Applied Contemporary Art, in conjunction with Hatje Cantz, 2009, pp 7–8.

17. For a useful short account of the impact of the commercial art world, see: Stallabrass, Julian, *art INCORPORATED: The Story of Contemporary Art*, Oxford University Press, 2004.
18. The full title of this work is *Falling and Walking* (phhhhhhhhhhhphosshshhh crrhhzzzmnhuaoogh).
19. *The Dump is Full of Images*, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 21 September 2019–19 April 2020, exhibition text.
20. Jonathan P. Watts and Magali Reus in conversation about XII, press release for exhibition at The approach (gallery), London, 17 September 2022, <https://theapproach.co.uk/exhibitions/magali-reus-5/press-release/> accessed 4/06/2023.
21. For a useful recent exhibition and exhibition catalogue on contemporary figurative sculpture, see: Rugoff, Ralph (ed.), *The Human Factor: The Figure in Contemporary Sculpture*, London: Hayward Publishing, 2014.
22. Freije, Kira, “meteorites”, The approach, London, 27 May–2 July 2022.
23. See, for example, his metal sculptures in *HC Westermann*, exh. cat. Serpentine, London, Arts Council, 1980.
24. Tucker also refers to this in his introduction to *The Condition of Sculpture*, p 8: “The pressure on sculpture to adopt the painting-directed role of relief has been enormous throughout the modern period, whether the ground of relief has been the wall or the floor, or recently the surface of landscape itself.”
25. “In Tandem: The Painter-Sculptor in the Twentieth Century”, Whitechapel Art Gallery, 27 March–25 May 1986.
26. These were Richard Artschwager (1923–2013), Jennifer Bartlett (1941–2022), Georg Baselitz (b 1938), Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916), Francesco Clemente (b 1952), Edgar Degas (1834–1917), Jean Dubuffet (1901–85), Alberto Giacometti (1901–66), Jasper Johns (b 1930), Alex Katz (b 1927), Ellsworth Kelly (1923–2015), Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938), Willem de Kooning (1904–97), Roy Lichtenstein (1923–97), Henri Matisse (1869–1954), Joan Miró (1893–1983), Barnett Newman (1905–70), Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), Julian Schnabel (b 1951) and Cy Twombly (1928–2011).
27. Bruce McLean: “Five Decades of Sculpture”, Bernard Jacobson, 26 April–29 June 2019.
28. See *Sean Scully: Sculpture*, Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2019 and *Sean Scully: Insideoutside*, Berlin: Kewenig Gallery, 2021.
29. Thomas Houseago talking with Michel Draguet on the occasion of the exhibition “Vision Paintings” at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium, 22 April–1 August 2021.
30. See the recent exhibition, “Estin Thalassa”, at Karsten Schubert in London, 1 June–9 July 2021.
31. Neil Gall to author, 4 October 2022.
32. Neil Gall to author, 4 October 2022.
33. There have been many publications and exhibitions looking at the relationship between sculpture and photography over the last 30 years, including: *The Original Copy: Photography of Sculpture, 1839 to Today*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2010.
34. “Still Life: Beck Beasley interviewed by Mark Prince,” *Art Monthly*, no. 454, March 2022, p 2.
35. See *Michael Dean: Selected Writings*, Mousse Publishing and Henry Moore Institute, 2012, p 29.
36. Palmer, Katrina, *The Fabricator’s Tale*, London: Book Works, 2014 and *End Matter*, London: Book Works, 2015.
37. Catling, Brian, *The Vorrh*, London: Coronet, 2015 and *Earwig*, London: Coronet, 2019.
38. The historical extent of this writer-sculptor field can be gauged in recent anthologies on sculpture including: Wood, Jon and David Hulks et al, *Modern Sculpture Reader*, Henry Moore Institute and Getty, 2012; Wood, Jon and Julia Kelly (eds.), *Contemporary Sculpture: Artists’ Writings and Interviews*, Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2019; and Dreishpoon, Douglas, *Modern Sculpture: Artists in Their Own Words*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022.

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cover image
Olivia Bax
Portal (detail)
Steel, chicken wire, newspaper,
UV resistant PVA, paint,
plaster, milliput, screws, bolts,
255 × 200 × 176 cm
Holtermann Fine Art, London,
courtesy of the artist, photo:
Ollie Hammock
2020