

Artist Statement

Anna Gillespie

Anna Gillespie's new work is a departure from what she has been known for until this point in her career. Replacing the organic tree materials, and the sense of absorption in the natural world, is a harder edge - a more alienated, individualised experience, expressed in a riskier, rawer form. Retained is the human figure, though now in plaster - a material more often associated with the artist's studio. Thus is its use significant, marking a preference for experimentation and frankness over the pretensions of the bronze edition.

'Solid Bronze' is almost never so in sculpture - it is predominantly hollow - and the shift away from this material has hollowness to be accentuated both in terms of the sculpting process and raw emotion in the finished figures. Where moulds are used on smaller works the marks and holes remain. The larger figures can, literally, be seen through.

Gillespie was trained as a stone mason and her first bronze sculptures were moulded from masking and packing tape originals. Her work has always hinted at the combination of personal *and* political. Here the hints are more forceful. The work may allude to a particular stage of life, or the way in which, disconnected from the natural world, the human experience is hollow in spite of material well-being.

The solitary figures convey a sense of isolation, although Anna is also work in series of *multiples*, where individuality merges into a mass of humanity, thereby becoming largely unrecognisable and valueless.

This human paradox - individuality versus insignificance - is acute in the contemporary world. Related to this, and dealt with in previous work looking at mass movements of people, is the idea of how one can recognise the individual within the mass; of how little it takes to distinguish a human being.

There is an echo too here of previous environmental 'Gathering Project' work where the individual beauty of each acorn cup or beech nut was highlighted but also contrasted with an awe of nature's seeming boundlessness in reproducing itself. As with leaves, so with humans; we are each individual and yet part of a mass in which our presence is unnecessary.

A further contradiction explored is the contrast between strength and vulnerability. In sculptural terms mass and fragility co-exist through the device of hollowed out forms. These opposing forces can be seen in the drawings, inspired largely by the figures of Michelangelo, where muscular strength and human beauty was taken to the extreme, yet co-existed with a sense of humanity as being fatally flawed.

Gillespie does not intend her work to be a refuge from political or personal emotional complexity. But there is joy to be found too. The work reflects a glee in direct making; it is resolutely figurative and sensual. The layers within any artwork can be physical – often in plaster upon plaster, built up, knocked back, dripped, flung and placed, pigment clinging to the depths of the texture. Beyond this are dimensions unseen – layers of process, emotion and narrative, the passage of time.

Bodymapping

In this work traditional life-drawing merges into a process akin to mapping the landscape. Chalk and water, substances of the earth itself, are the mediums. The gallery wall on which the drawing was created is only meters from the Thames, the length of which I walked the previous year, and the drawing itself unfolded as a river, flowing through the space with eddying and repeating patterns.

The symbiotic relationship between myself and the model Deb Pearson, is evident in the video with us both alternating turns on the 'plinth' and both of us physically challenged and exposed to view.