



BRYAN KNEALE  
THROUGH THE ELLIPSE



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PANGOLIN LONDON



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## IN CONVERSATION

**ALGERNON MITCHELL:** You've been making art for over five decades now. I'm interested to hear your perspective on how the art world has changed since you were starting out.

**BRYAN KNEALE:** It has changed enormously. The possibilities for a young artist in my lifetime were more or less non-existent, except for one or two things. There were hardly any galleries in London which were willing to show young artists, and I was incredibly lucky - partly through my own arrogance as a student in deciding what I wanted to do and announcing to all and sundry that it was time I put myself under the public gaze. I was lucky enough to force myself on the Redfern Gallery, who were very encouraging. I showed them one or two things I'd done, and they said to me, 'Well, if you could show us a couple of hundred paintings that you've been doing over the years...' Which, of course, didn't exist. So, I then shut myself away and produced a hundred paintings, and luckily I was able to survive on a small allowance from my father. And when I'd made my paintings, I went to the gallery and of course, they'd totally forgotten me. I'd lived this crazy dream of going in and showing my work to them, and then I found that reality had struck, and there I was with my paintings... But, to my enormous relief, they decided to give me my first exhibition. I owe the beginnings of my career to luck and, I suppose, self-belief. I was very lucky to have found a sympathetic gallery in the Redfern.

**AM:** Jumping ahead to the present day, how would you say your practice has changed in the last ten years?

**BK:** The main thing is that I had a massive stroke in 2014, which rendered my body, to some extent, paralysed, and so I am now dependant on working and living in a wheelchair. But other artists have managed.

**AM:** Matisse, for example.

**BK:** Yes. Lots of people have managed, but it makes things a bit difficult at times. I've been lucky enough to have a good studio and I'm able to work from home, straight across the garden into the studio. Particularly in my paintings, I make use of a painting knife, which means I can manipulate directly onto the surface with my good arm. The stroke did mean the end of my physical ability to weld or cut metal, or use machines, so I've found other ways, and other people to work with.

*Dhoon*  
2021, Polyurethane  
and bronze sphere  
Unique  
122 x 90 x 33.7 cm

**AM:** I've noticed a lot of tools and materials in your studio that I'd normally associate with making scale models – you have a desktop vacuum former, texture pastes, and you're painting on styrene sheets.

**BK:** The reason I'm using styrene is because I wanted to have a perfectly smooth surface to work on, which would allow me to manipulate my painting knives. It started with the idea of working on canvas, to bring the canvas surface to an immaculate smooth surface, and then I thought, 'Well, why don't I use something which has got that quality anyway?' So that brought me round to using styrene, which of course I had used in model making for quite a long time. Small models for large sculptures were usually made with bits of plastic and styrene.

**AM:** There is an enormous tonal variety between the paintings as well. What kind of decision-making process informs the choice of colour, if any?

**BK:** It's just whatever comes out of the tube that I use. The colour does come into it – not so much as the colour itself, but as a single means of creating form.

**AM:** So based on what you've said, whilst they are clearly separate, do you see the painting and the sculpture as having an intrinsic link?

**BK:** Yes, I think the paintings are obviously much more instantaneous. Because I use form in the paintings, they are, in fact, three-dimensional. There's one particular piece, which I called *Miracle*, which is where I finally broke through to make a three-dimensional and lively piece, which I was lucky enough to be able to manage. Because I can still paint, though I can't sculpt. To make things by manipulating machines like I used – it's out of the question.

**AM:** The new sculptures obviously also have this large elliptical void in them, which inspired the title of the show. That's a form I've noticed in some of your other sculptures, and it also shows up in some of the paintings as well. I was wondering if you could tell me about what your interest in that void space is – if that's the right way to even characterise it?

**BK:** Well, I've thought about this quite a bit. It sounds rather melancholic, which is not surprising when you're 92, to have some thoughts of a melancholic nature, especially when one's friends seem to be departing this world in an ever-increasing number. One of the things I've never forgotten is in the Père-Lachaise cemetery in Paris, which of course holds the graves of many famous artists, like Delacroix, Oscar Wilde, all sorts. At the end of the cemetery is a thing like a wall, with a large void space in the centre, which a series of figures, men and women, are moving endlessly toward, which of course is the end of life. I thought it was

*Miracle (Blue)*  
2021, Giclée print  
Edition of 100  
64.4 x 64.4 cm



Anna Kuleva  
AP



Paul-Albert  
Bartholomé's  
*Monument aux  
Morts du Père-  
Lachaise*, 1899

very affecting, and very memorable, so to some extent, I suppose, so too are these things I've made myself, they resonate for me with that piece. It sounds rather pretentious, but it's probably true. I think this series of works will probably be my finale, whereas in the past, all of my sculptures led on, one endlessly into another. They're mostly about how forms interact with each other, how shapes can be conceived and constructed, so that they have a life of their own.

**AM:** You mentioned the last time that I was here that you saw these pieces as the culmination of your practice. Is this what you meant when you said that?

**BK:** Yes, yes, I think so. Obviously, being confined to a wheelchair has affected me considerably, being in my earlier days a very physical sort of chap, who was always half-blacksmith, half-sculptor. I remember something a critic once said about my work, that I had become like one of those things which are half-horse, half-man.

**AM:** A centaur?

**BK:** Yes. He said I had turned into a centaur: half-man, half-metal. And I thought that was the nicest thing anyone had ever said about me! But my work now has obviously been limited to using other people to physically make things for me. I've luckily been able to find people who can help me with that. A lot of it is the accumulation of knowing what can be done, and knowing the possibilities of



the different techniques which can be used in metalwork. All my machines and tools that I had accumulated over a lifetime – and I had many tonnes of it, because I used to make everything myself – I gave to Uganda, where I found they were setting up a foundry.

**AM:** The Ruwenzori Sculpture Foundation, you mean?

**BK:** Yes. I knew that they could use my equipment better than anyone else, because I know what Rungwe Kingdon was attempting to do, repaying his childhood because he grew up there, so Uganda seemed to be the best place to send it to. Somewhere where it would really be of use and help to a collection of young sculptors, rather than breaking up my collection. I know it has a future there. I was told a story, for instance, of someone out there who was making a piercing saw out of the spokes of a bicycle wheel. I thought, 'Well, that shows determination, to say the least.'

**AM:** Could you tell me a bit more about the development of your most recent work?

**BK:** Well, it started with a series of drawings and paintings I've been doing, so it

*Michele*  
2021, Acrylic on  
styrene with foam  
Unique  
131 x 68.5 cm



evolved from these. My first thought was how to incorporate some of the ideas I've been using in two dimensions into the third, and these paintings are what I've come up with. And then scale came into it, and so I asked Steve Furlonger to come and see me, and I said I wanted him to make what is now the black sculpture because, I said, 'This is exactly the sort of thing I've been searching for.' I'm particularly indebted to my friend Barry Goillau of Benson-Sedgwick, who has made a considerable number of pieces for me, and he's also made quite a few other things, like William Pye's beautiful fountains. We've worked together for many years, so I knew I had someone who could help me translate my work into reality.

**AM:** When I was at your studio a few months ago, there was only the black sculpture you just mentioned, *Dhoon*. Since then, that idea has obviously progressed to these two much larger pieces, *Centurion* and *Coral*. Could you tell me a bit about where these works came from?

**BK:** I can't remember, really. Because I no longer have the ability to make sculpture myself, I worked out a way of making my ideas come into three dimensions by really using my imagination. I was working on the piece which is now made of black polyurethane, and I realised that I'd found what I thought was the perfect solution – just incorporating both two dimensions and three dimensions in a single piece, by using the space which the sculpture would take, and that it would affect anyone looking at it in the same way as I was imagining it myself. Of course, when you make a piece of sculpture like this, it comes as an accumulation of thousands of different thoughts on sculpture: sculpture in the past, and sculpture which I'm thinking about making in the future. I was particularly interested in the idea – because I am fairly obsessed with the place I came from, the Isle of Man, which is mountainous and by the sea – that it would be wonderful to make something which would work in that landscape, and also in the studio. In particular, I imagined a piece of sculpture landing in a place called Scarlett, which is where a volcano came up millennia ago and left great, flat plates of limestone down by the sea, and I can just imagine a piece of sculpture which would work extremely well there, because it would incorporate both the land and the sea and do something rather than just stand isolated.

**AM:** I'm curious as well about the reflective spheres. What prompted you to add these elements?

**BK:** It was always my intention to use the spheres with the simple forms and the space within, so I think they actually help to bring the whole thing to life in a very straightforward manner. I'm very interested in using them as part of the sculpture, while retaining their separate identity.

**AM:** I've noticed, especially in some of your older works like *Sloc* and *Falcone*, many of the sculptures have two elements that seem to be caught in a moment that's as harmonious as it is tense. Where does that interest come from?

**BK:** Well, I've always found in all the years I've made sculpture – I've been making sculpture now for half a century or so – each one brings on another set of possibilities. I always felt that the reality of the process which goes into making something needs to be shown in the sculpture itself. The sculptures basically came from the idea of hanging, pulling, twisting and manipulating the form. I used that sort of reality by simply handling bits of steel, bronze, whatever, and also learning how to use my increasing technical knowledge over the years to be able to make decisions which come from my understanding – I mean, I was a great hunter of scrapyards, where I found infinite possibilities amongst the bits of broken metal. Including, I might say, using explosives to actually cause forms to happen in an unexpected manner. I've had a lot of fun out of making things which surprise me.

**AM:** Is it too soon to ask what you'll be working on next?

**BK:** Having an exhibition always has an element of finality about it. I find it's a necessity for me to be able to make things, paint things, to create something, which would surprise and delight me. I will continue to work for as long as I live.



*Falcone*  
1968, Bronze  
Unique  
95 x 57 x 36 cm

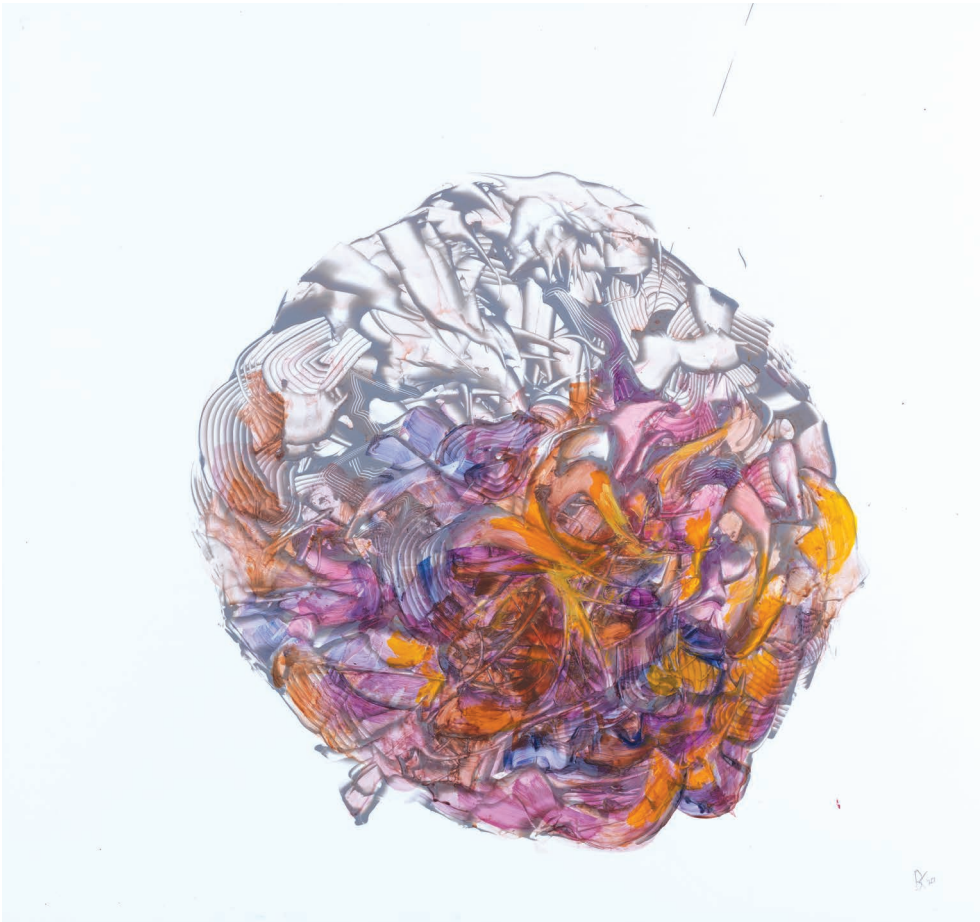


# CATALOGUE





*Centurion*  
2021, Stainless steel  
Unique  
181 x 130.5 x 54.5 cm



(ABOVE)  
*Star 1*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
65.5 x 71.1 cm

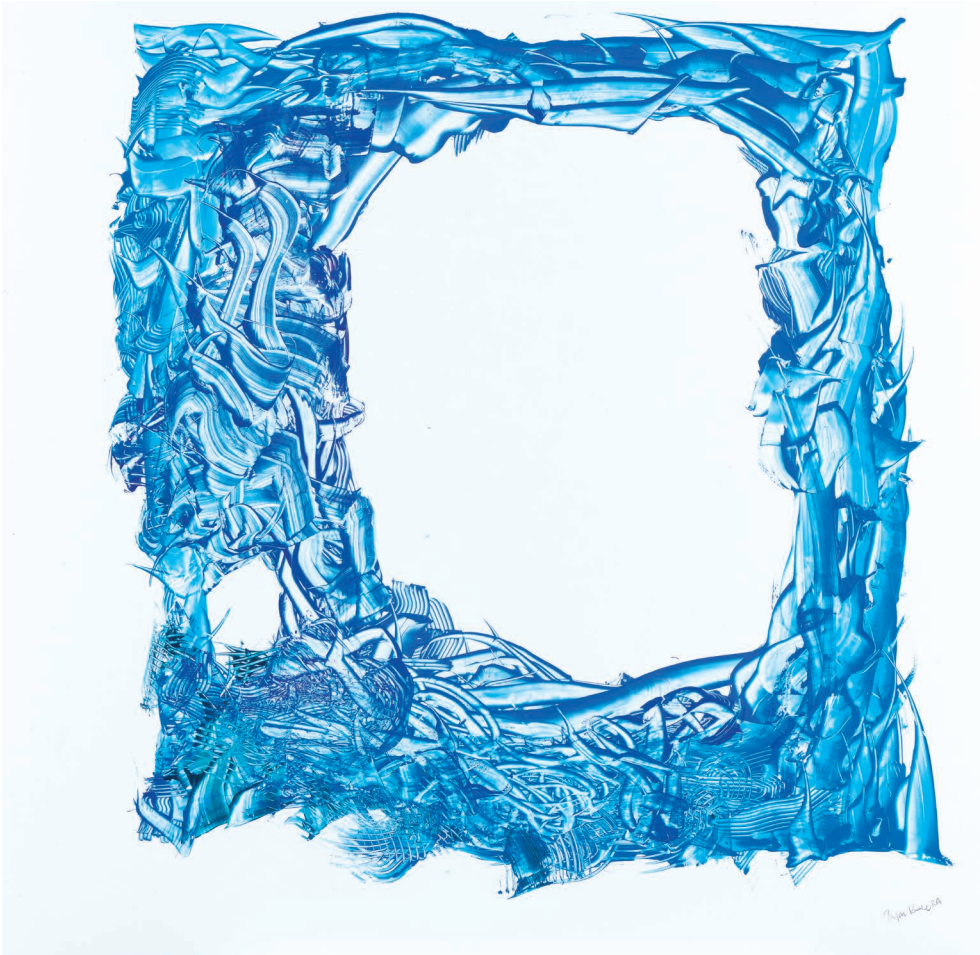
(RIGHT)  
*Star 2*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
71.2 x 57.6 cm





*Coral*  
2021, Bronze  
Unique  
181 x 130.5 x 54.5 cm







(ABOVE)  
*Untitled 5*  
2019, Acrylic  
on paper  
Unique  
50.9 x 40.6 cm



(BELOW)  
*Untitled 2*  
2018, Acrylic  
on paper  
Unique  
50.9 x 40.6 cm

(LEFT)  
*Frame*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
100 x 100 cm



*This is what I think is so good about the physicality of sculpture – sculpture cannot be conceived slowly, in the head – it has to be done through the hand, and through the eye.*

BRYAN KNEALE

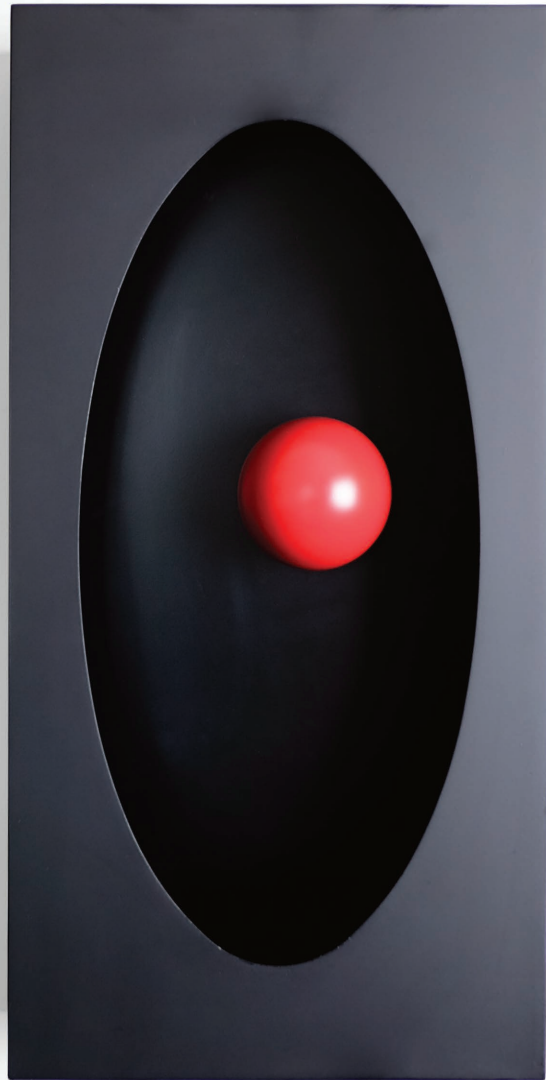
*Duma*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
65 x 64.7 cm

*Column*  
2017, Acrylic  
on canvas  
Unique  
103 x 79.6 cm





© 2004





(LEFT)  
*Mannanan*  
2022, Aluminium  
Unique  
64.1 x 31.2 x 13.2 cm



(ABOVE)  
*Nemi*  
2022, Aluminium  
Unique  
86.8 x 43.8 x 14 cm

(BELOW)  
*Lhen*  
2022, Aluminium  
Unique  
86.8 x 43.8 x 14 cm





(LEFT)  
*Axel*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
69 x 47.5 cm

(ABOVE)  
*Haze*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
63 x 56.2 cm



*The darkness deepened, and the voice of the sea began to moan through the back of the cave, the gorse crackled no longer, and the turf burned in a dull red glow. Night with its awfulness had come down...*

HALL CAINE, from *The Manxman*, 1894

*Abacadabra*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
66 x 127.5 cm



(ABOVE)  
*Star 3*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
48.4 x 45.5 cm



(BELOW)  
*Star 4*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
64 x 66.5 cm

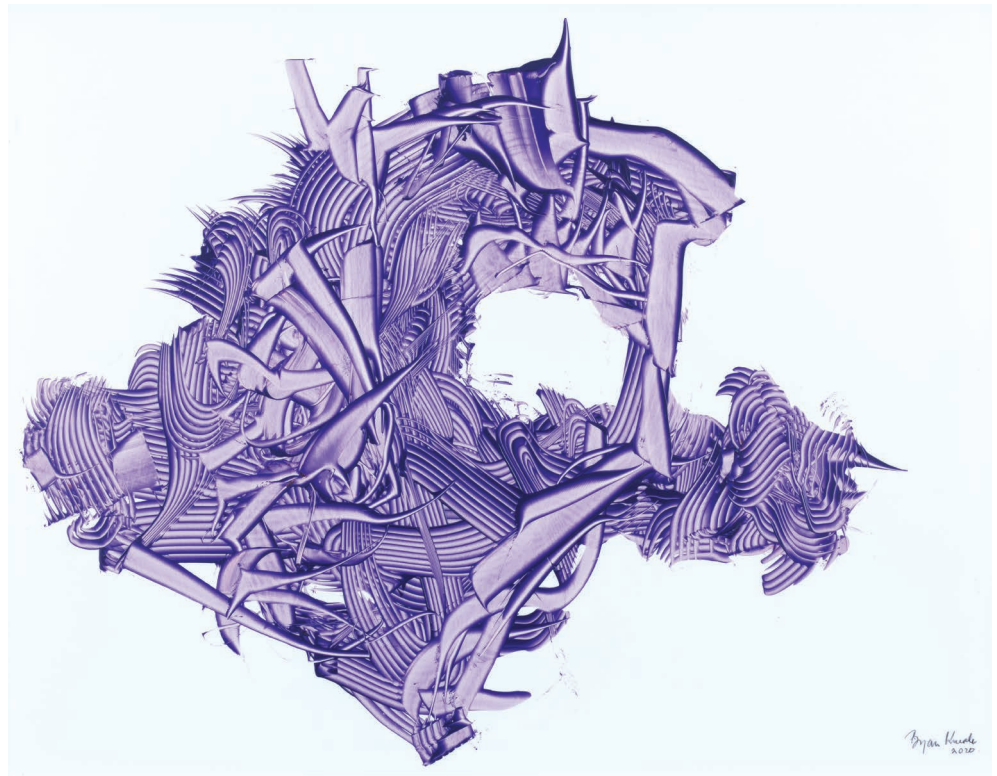




(ABOVE)  
*Falling Star*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
88.2 x 94.7 cm



(LEFT)  
*Grayling*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
61.5 x 34.3 cm



(RIGHT)  
*Journal*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
47.2 x 60 cm



*Floatation*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
70.7 x 58.1 cm





*Sunbeam*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
60 x 52.7 cm





*"This is thy life: indulge its natural flow,  
And carve these forms. They yet may find a place  
On shelves for them reserved. In any case,  
I bid thee carve them, knowing what I know.*

THOMAS EDWARD BROWN, from *Opifex*, 1893

*Land*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
100 x 100 cm

(ABOVE)

*Uno*

2020, Acrylic  
on styrene

Unique

32.2 x 63.3 cm

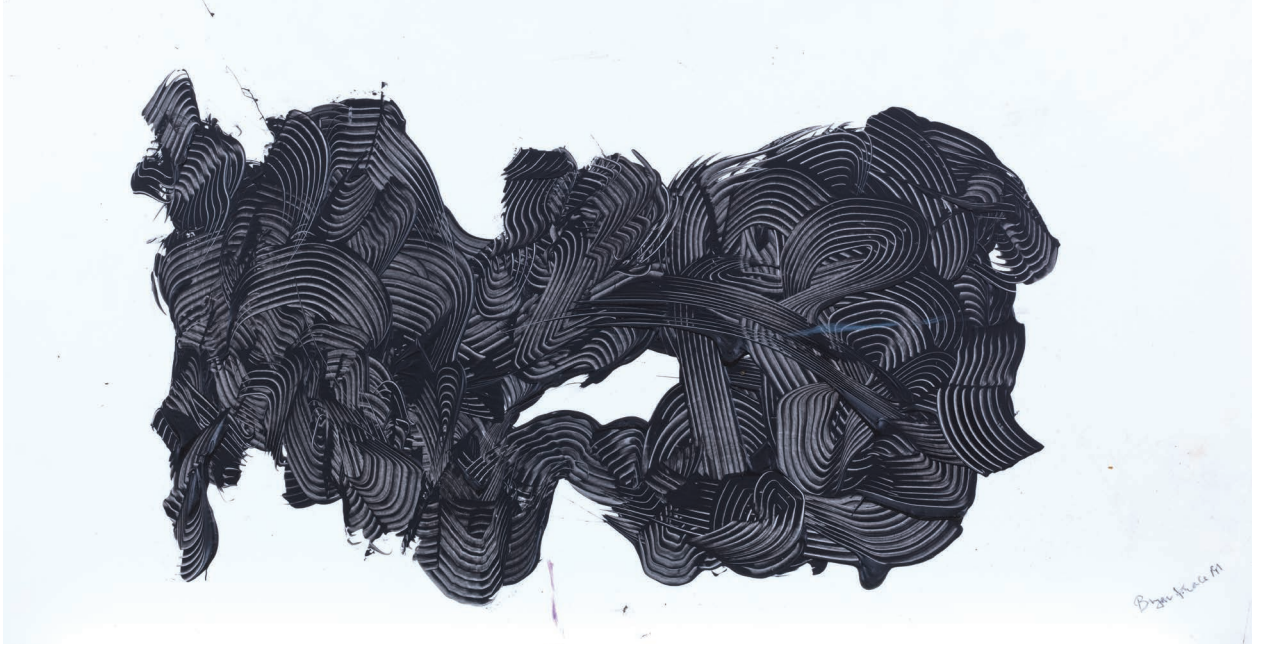
(BELOW)

*Due*

2020, Acrylic  
on styrene

Unique

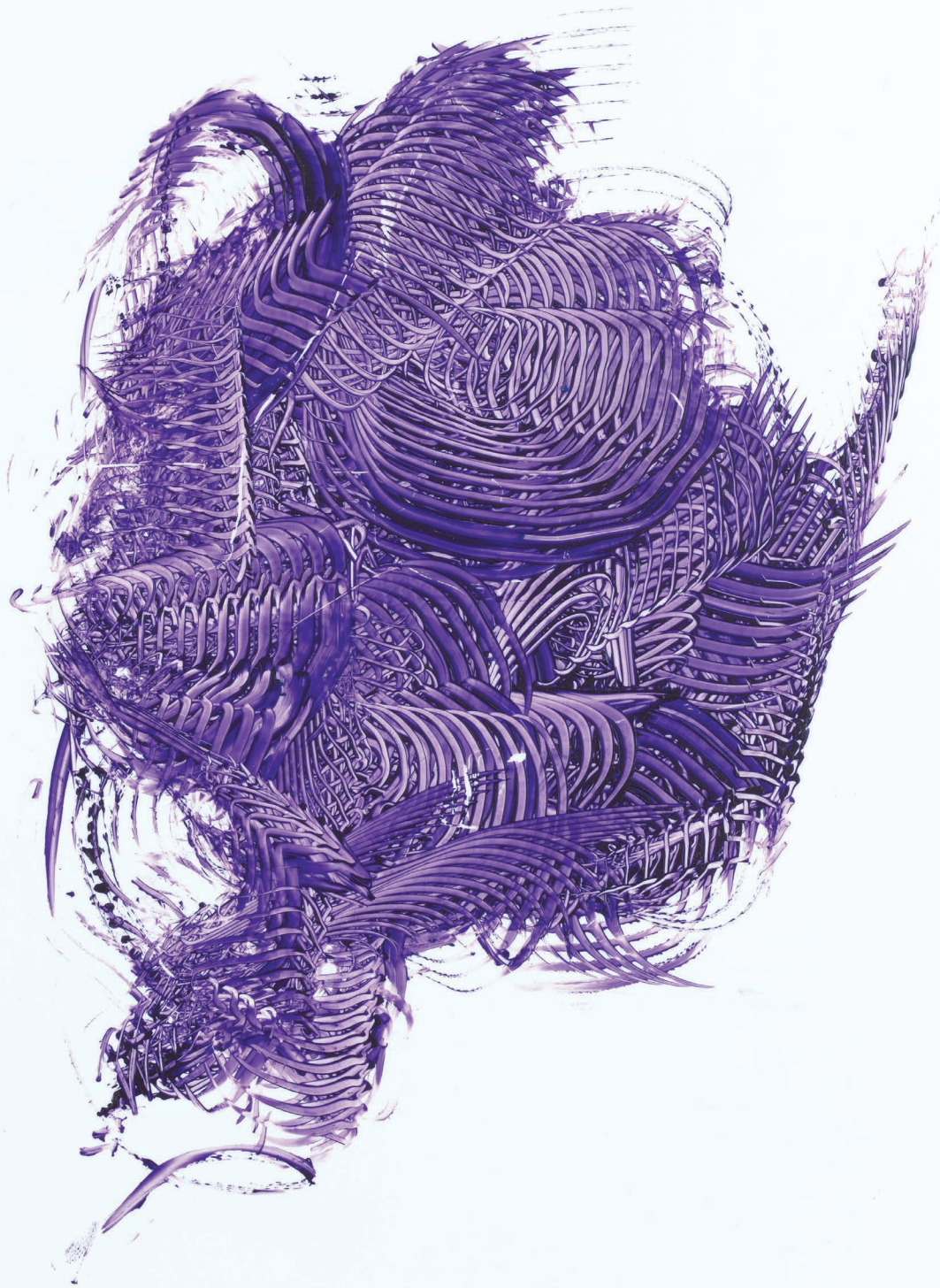
34.5 x 61.5 cm





(ABOVE)  
*Float*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
97.8 x 97 cm

(RIGHT)  
*Vesper*  
2020, Acrylic  
on styrene  
Unique  
68.6 x 66 cm



# BRYAN KNEALE

## BIOGRAPHY

1930	Born in Douglas, Isle of Man
1947	Attends Douglas School of Art
1948	Attends Royal Academy Schools Awarded Rome Prize
1949 - 51	Rome Scholarship
1952	Leverhulme Prize Tutor, Royal College of Art
1968	Head of Sculpture, Hornsey College of Art and Design
1969	Arts Council Purchase Award
1970	Elected A.R.A
1972	Curated 'British Sculptors' Exhibition, Royal Academy
1974	Elected Royal Academician
1977	Curated Jubilee Exhibition of British Sculpture, Battersea Park
1980-85	Senior Tutor, Royal College of Art
1980-86	Professor of Sculpture, Royal Academy Schools
1985-90	Head of Sculpture, Royal College of Art Senior Fellow, Royal College of Art
1990-95	Professor of Drawing, Royal College of Art

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2018	<i>A Brimful of Grace</i> , Pangolin London, London
2015	<i>Five Decades</i> , Pangolin London, London
2011	Beaux Arts, London
2009	Royal British Society of Sculpture Hart Gallery, London
2007	Hart Gallery, London
2005	Cass Sculpture Foundation, London
2004	Hart Gallery, London
2002	Hart Gallery, London
2000	70th Birthday Exhibition, Roche Court
1995	Retrospective, Royal West of England Academy
1991	Drawing Retrospective, Natural History Museum
1990	New Art Centre, Salisbury
1987	Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
1986	Retrospective, Henry Moore Gallery, Royal College of Art
1981	Taranman Gallery, London Compass Gallery, Glasgow 51 Gallery, Edinburgh
1978	Serpentine Gallery, London
1977	Taranman Gallery, London
1972	Dartington Hall, Devon
1966	Whitechapel Gallery, London
1954 - 86	One man shows, Redfern Gallery

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2009	Summer Exhibition, Royal Academy Courtyard
2007	Summer Exhibition, Hart Gallery, Nottingham
2000	Bronze, British Contemporary Sculpture, Holland Park The Eye of the Storm, Mandria Park, Turin
1999	Bryan Robertson Exhibition, Kettles Yard, Oxford Exhibition Animaux, Paris
1998	Pallant House, Chichester, Drawings for Goodwood Figurative Art, Flowers East
1997	Lewes Festival
1996	Goodwood Sculpture Park
1993	Chealsea Harbour Sculpture Show
1988	Sala Uno, Rome Chichester Festival
1981	Whitechapel Gallery, London Bath Art Fair
1977	Jubilee Exhibition of British Sculpture, Battersea Park
1975	New Art, Hayward Gallery, London
1974	Royal Exchange Sculpture Exhibition
1973	Holland Park
1972	Sculpture in the Cities, Southampton British Sculptors, Winter Exhibition
1968	Open Air Sculpture, City of London
1967 - 68	New British Painting and Sculpture
1966 - 71	Arts Council Tours
1966	Battersea Park Sculpture British Sculpture in the 60s, Tate Gallery
1965	English Eye
1964	Profile III, Bochum, Germany
1963	Battersea Park, Sculpture International Art d'Aujourd'hui, Paris

## SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Arts Council of Great Britain  
Bahia Museum, Brazil  
Beaverbrook Foundation, Frederickton  
Birmingham City Gallery  
Bradford City Gallery  
British Museum  
Contemporary Arts Society  
Fitzwilliam Museum  
Glasgow City Gallery  
Leicester City Art Gallery  
Leicester Education Authority  
Manchester City of Art Gallery  
Manx Museum, Isle of Man  
Fitzwilliam Museum  
Glasgow City Gallery

Leicester City Art Gallery  
 Leicester Education Authority  
 Manchester City of Art Gallery  
 Manx Museum, Isle of Man  
 Middlesborough City Gallery  
 Museum of Modern Art, New York  
 Museum of Modern Art, Sao Paolo, Brazil  
 National Gallery of New Zealand  
 National Gallery of Victoria, S. Australia  
 Natural History Museum  
 Nottingham City Art Gallery  
 Oriel College, Oxford  
 Sheffield City Art Gallery  
 Tate Britain  
 Unilever House Collection  
 Wakefield City Gallery  
 Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool  
 West Riding Education Authority  
 Yale Museum  
 York City Art Gallery

#### SELECTED PUBLIC COMMISSIONS

2008	Rio Tinto Building
2005	<i>Captain John Quilliam</i> Sculpture, Isle of Man
2004	<i>Three Legs</i> , Noble Hospital, Isle of Man
2000	<i>Three Legs of Man</i> , Airport, Isle of Man
1999	Sculpture for Westminster Cathedral
1998	Sculpture for Westminster Cathedral
1997	Bronze Doors for Portsmouth Cathedral
1996	Sculpture for Manx Government Building
1994	Sculpture for Perse School, Cambridge
1979	Monumental Sculpture, Manx Millenium
1977	<i>The Watcher</i> , Manx Museum, Douglas, Isle of Man
1972	Sculpture for King Edwards School, Totnes
1965	Sculpture for Camberwell Library
1962	Sculpture for L.C.C., Fenwick Place, Lambeth

Bryan Kneale with  
*Polyphemus* in 2015





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To learn more about the Ruwenzori Sculpture Foundation, please visit [ruwenzorisculpture.com](http://ruwenzorisculpture.com)

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Photograph of Paul-Albert Bartholomé's *Monument aux Morts du Père-Lachaise*, 1899 (p.6) by JLPC / Wikimedia Commons. This image is distributed under a CC BY-SA 3.0 Licence - for more information, please visit [creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en)

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