



CARL PLACKMAN
OBSCURE TERRITORIES

PANGOLIN
LONDON

PANGOLIN

An artist's artist is a significant title, one often employed to describe Carl Plackman, whose work lies at essential crossing points in the multifarious developments of late-20th Century sculpture.

RICHARD WENTWORTH



Bachelor of Arts
1977, Mixed media
Unique
172 x 220 cm

SCULPTURE IS WHAT MAKES LIFE MORE INTERESTING THAN SCULPTURE

Sculpture has an important place in the cultural histories of the West Country and of Yorkshire and Carl Plackman, who was born in Huddersfield to German-Jewish parents in the middle of World War Two and spent his youth in Bath and Bristol, made works that have subtle connections to both these districts.¹ At the same time, however, the poetic and philosophical co-ordinates of Plackman's works lie elsewhere and are broadly speaking Franco-Germanic in sensibility. Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Beuys were the artists who preoccupied him most, and Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett the authors, and these existentialist, post-surrealist exemplars quietly imbue much of Plackman's *oeuvre* and his approach to art, fuelling at once its rigorousness and its generosity, its hope and its sadness, its freedom and its restraint. Such art and writing also charged Plackman's grasp of the role of art and of artists. The French Fluxus artist Robert Filliou's maxim - 'art is what makes life more interesting than art' - Plackman would have likely agreed with, but 'sculpture' would have been the term at stake and under discussion, something he believed in passionately throughout his life, as a way of understanding, valuing and communicating one's being in the world.² When asked, for example, at the end of an interview in 1986 "*what would you like to have as an epitaph or – possibly any regrets or even unfulfilled ideas?*" Plackman replied: "*I just want to make a good piece of sculpture. I still think I haven't done it. The trouble is trying to say what that could be – it's very difficult...*"³

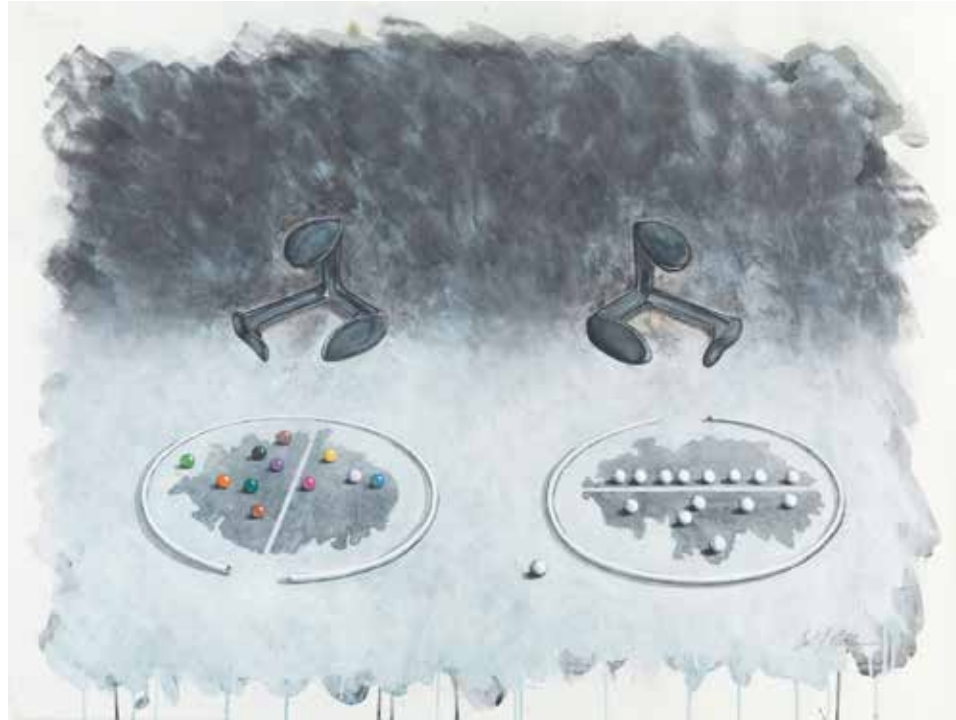
His contribution to sculpture in Britain and to its educational life, across three decades from 1970, is striking and has been well documented in *Carl Plackman: Sculpture, Drawing, Writing* (2007), a publication which comprises testimonials by many artists, curators and writers who were familiar with him and his work.⁴ The list of contributors makes fascinating reading as the extraordinary reach of this artist's contribution is demonstrated, text by text. The art school was where Plackman spent much of his time, when not in his studio with his own work. In and between both, he explored the relationship between painting and sculpture, between floor and wall, between word and image, and re-imagined the life and potential of the object, whether made or found, relentlessly exploring the complexities between object categories and their symbolic associations and narratives. In *Bachelor of Arts*, 1977, the artist deals, as many of his generation were doing, with the legacy of Marcel Duchamp and his ready-mades, recently replicated about a decade earlier and at a time when Richard Hamilton was reconstructing

Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors. Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23, exhibiting it at the Tate Gallery as Duchamp's own work.⁵ Plackman's *Bachelor of Arts* reroutes and anglicizes the erotic charge of Duchamp's bachelors (test driven by Duchamp as *Nine Malic Moulds* in 1914-15) recasting them as a team of tin plates, welded together as one might sew sections of cloth from a pattern book and suspended from a wooden curtain rail. Duchamp's enigmatic two-part painting-glass sculpture becomes at once a relief sculpture and university qualification, as Plackman solidifies and flattens the tubular volumes of Duchamp's body parts, exchanging glass's translucency for metal's opaqueness and substituting symbolic currents for strip lighting and a standard British three-pronged plug wall socket.

Bachelor of Arts is one of many floor and wall works, with their integrated combinations of vertical and horizontal components, executed by Plackman.⁶ His *Aspirations vs Temperament*, 1979 is a good early example of such work. It explores the right-angled life of the corner through four stepped, staircase-like structures, in wood and metal. They point up and across in systematic order, but any belief in their well-behaved, minimalistic rationality is punctured by our awareness of the smaller objects they support: bars of soaps, bits of slate and pieces of chalk. What is striking about these and so many of the objects that Plackman incorporated in such works is how humdrum and everyday they are. Rarely do we find precious, pre-loved antique items; nor do we find objects with considerable age to them, patinated with dreams and encrusted with memories, then salvaged and recycled into new work. Rather we are presented with objects acquired directly from the hardware store or from larger home and garden stores: bought objects as much as found objects, especially later on. Wood is freshly cut pine, not beams salvaged from old buildings. Such characteristics can take some getting used to in today's more retro-aware times, but it is important to remember that Duchamp again is crucial here. For Duchamp, as for Plackman, the local hardware store is the repository for the hardwired forms and ideas of daily life, as well as for its replication. Being mass-produced and widely available added to the charm of their symbolism. They were not irreplaceable items and their ubiquity underscored their resonance and relevance. Such elements were also to be read both individually and within the ensembles that housed them. Some, like *Well*, 1998 (p.11) are smaller and self-contained. Here a poetic rumination on vessels and their inverted, sonic lives. Others are more elaborate, expansive and installational. As Stuart Brisley insightfully stated about such larger works: "I recall Carl's work as structured layouts or webs of disparate entities and objects, to be intuitively sensed and considered as visually articulated three-dimensional text in space, imbued with an inherent lyricism."⁷ Plackman's *Any Place to Hang Your Hat: Wedlock*, 1978, in the Arts Council collection, again composes such object-narratives against the wall, as

(DETAIL)
Aspirations Vs Temperament
 1979, Mixed media
 Unique
 210 x 100 x 98 cm





we are faced with a work that might recall a family wedding photograph, with two central seated figures flanked by a team of hat-stand-like vertical supports, all united by two horizontal poles, one wood, the other metal.

The seemingly quotidian, muted palette of Plackman's work is striking here too. We find variations of the gun metal grey of *Bachelor of Arts* throughout his works, and especially in his works on paper and in his later still life and ensemble paintings, such as *Diplomacy Closing the Circle*, 1984, *What I Say: Not What I Do: Not What I Am*, 1986 and *More or Less*, 1986 (p.8,44,22). In these works Plackman's tongue-and-groove sculptural imagination comes to the fore, reminding us that he has an eye and mind for pairings and juxtapositions, for fits and misfits, as well as for surrogates and substitutes. Telephones and crania, handsets and jaw bones find themselves poised in everyday/very un-everyday equivalence and analogous relation. Cobblers' lasts, that outmoded favourite of many a British sculptor in post-industrial times, echo their three-dimensional, figurative thoughts, rotating feet impossibly on and off the ground whilst

Diplomacy: Closing the Circle
1984, Charcoal, pencil and gouache
Unique
76 x 101 cm



Still Silent Moving (The Temptation of Eve)
1987, Gouache, charcoal, chalk and Conte crayon
Unique
76 x 101 cm

asking us to ruminate on the simultaneous asymmetry and stability of the tripod. The constant use of grey and the many shades of grey between black and white might point to his interest in photography, film and the silver screen and the capacity of such a colour scheme to create at once dreamscapes and diagrammatic visions is remarkable indeed. And we might recall the almost monochrome, Muybridge sepia palette of Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, 1912 and the related paintings too. For, drained of colour and roughly bordered by the unpainted blank paper itself, Plackman's images are glimpses into places in which fact and fantasy, objectivity and irrationality coincide. They have a fictional/non-fictional quality to them and this neutrality in turn supports the authorial mood of level-headedness, balance, impartiality and indifference, because of (as much as despite) the oddness of their subject matter. Plackman's grey works on paper might also remind us of *grisaille*, monochrome painting, executed usually in shades of grey, popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, which was often used in large, wall-bound decorative schemes in imitation of relief sculpture. Again the interior – real

and metaphorical - is where Plackman's imagination ruminates and takes its bearings.

Across all these associations, there is a single-minded sculptural imagination at work – one that knows exactly what it is looking for and why, especially when the objects under consideration withhold their mysteries with resistance. As Lynne Cooke commented, "*Plackman's best works are like distilled, immutable emblems with nothing wayward or random about them; they have a haunting eloquence.*"⁸ Interestingly she could be talking here as much about his drawings as his sculpture. Like his grey painted works on paper ('sculptor's paintings' as much as 'sculptor's drawings'), his pencil and paper works offer compelling and stunningly beautiful, tentative and unreal scenarios, with a gentle, but certain and precise graphite line and stand today as some of the most remarkable and enigmatic aspects of his *oeuvre*.

JON WOOD
Henry Moore Institute

NOTES

¹ As Richard Wentworth has speculated recently: "*There's a theatrical scenographic line which goes off through Carl's extreme confidence in 'room sets' - bear in mind that Carl and Richard Long were Foundation students together... It would be interesting to know what it was in West Country lore that made Carl and Richard Long so confident at being 'arrayers'.*" Richard Wentworth, email to author, 15 April 2015.

² Robert Filliou, 'Interview' (1970), quoted in *Robert Filliou: Génie sans talent*, exh. cat., Villeneuve d'Ascq: Musée d'Art Moderne Lille Métropole, 2004, back cover.

³ Tony Evans interview with Carl Plackman (1986), *Carl Plackman: Sculpture, Drawing, Writing*, Huddersfield Art Gallery, 2007, p. 142.

⁴ *Carl Plackman: Sculpture, Drawing, Writing*, Huddersfield Art Gallery, 2007.

⁵ *The Almost Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, Tate Gallery, June-July 1966.

⁶ Richard Wentworth has called these 'flall works'. Richard Wentworth, email to author, 15 April 2015.

⁷ Stuart Brisley 'Carl Plackman', in *Carl Plackman: Sculpture, Drawing, Writing*, Huddersfield Art Gallery, 2007, p. 80.

⁸ Lynne Cooke, *Carl Plackman: Sculpture, Drawing, Writing*, Huddersfield Art Gallery, 2007, p.153.

Well
1998, Mixed media
Unique
49 x 105 x 105 cm



CATALOGUE

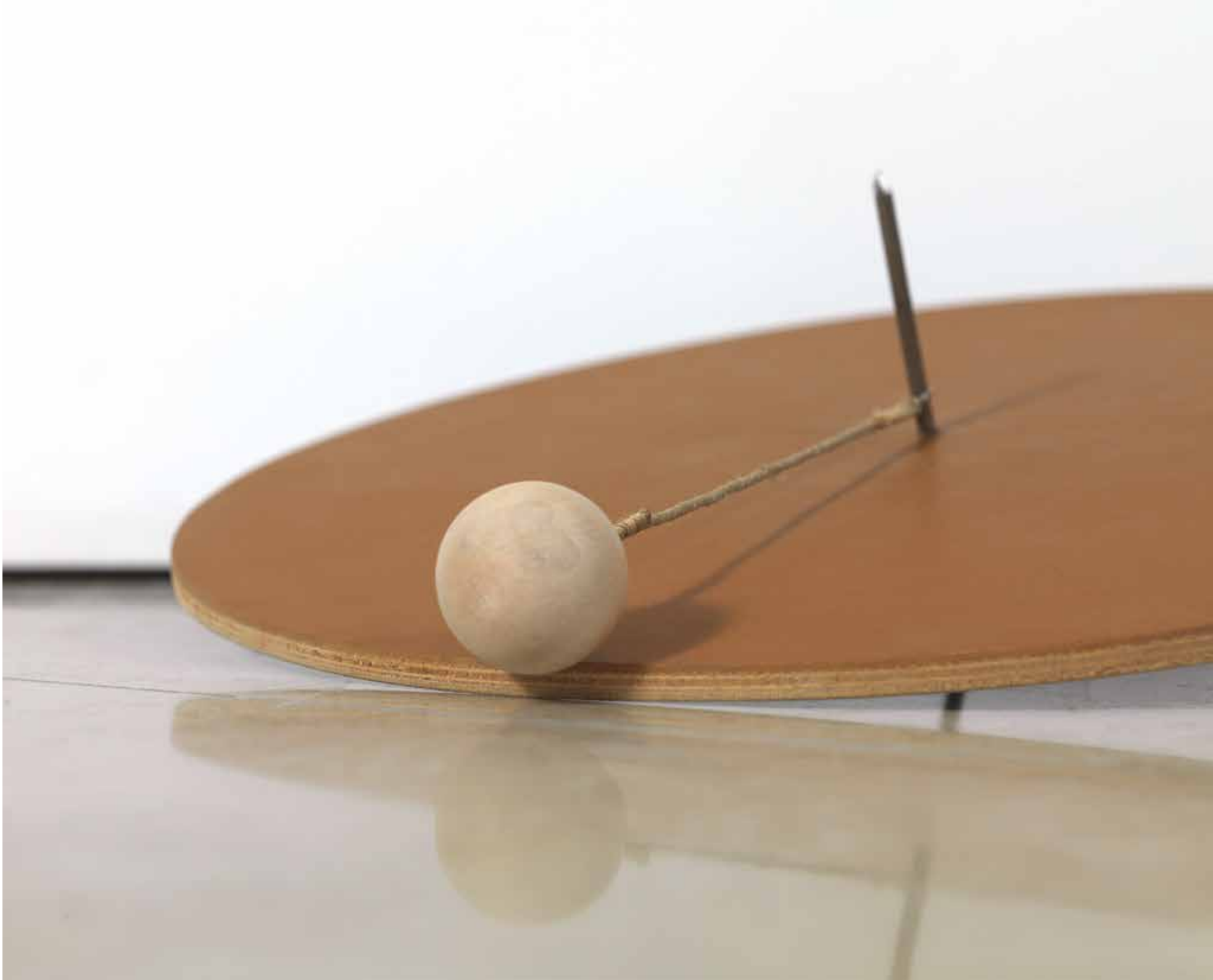




I believe he lived a rich interior life of which we were privileged to be offered glimpses through his work. These views themselves are cryptic and require some decoding. The clues take the form of numerous fairly mundane objects, most of which we are all familiar with but which have been wrenched from their usual context and rearranged as an architecture of metaphors. It is their relationship and juxtapositions that turn on the light and reveal their creator to have been a stoic, a philosopher, a democrat and a seeker after truth. The work speaks of great humanity.

NIGEL HALL

Decoy
2000, Mixed media
Unique
110 x 146 x 133 cm

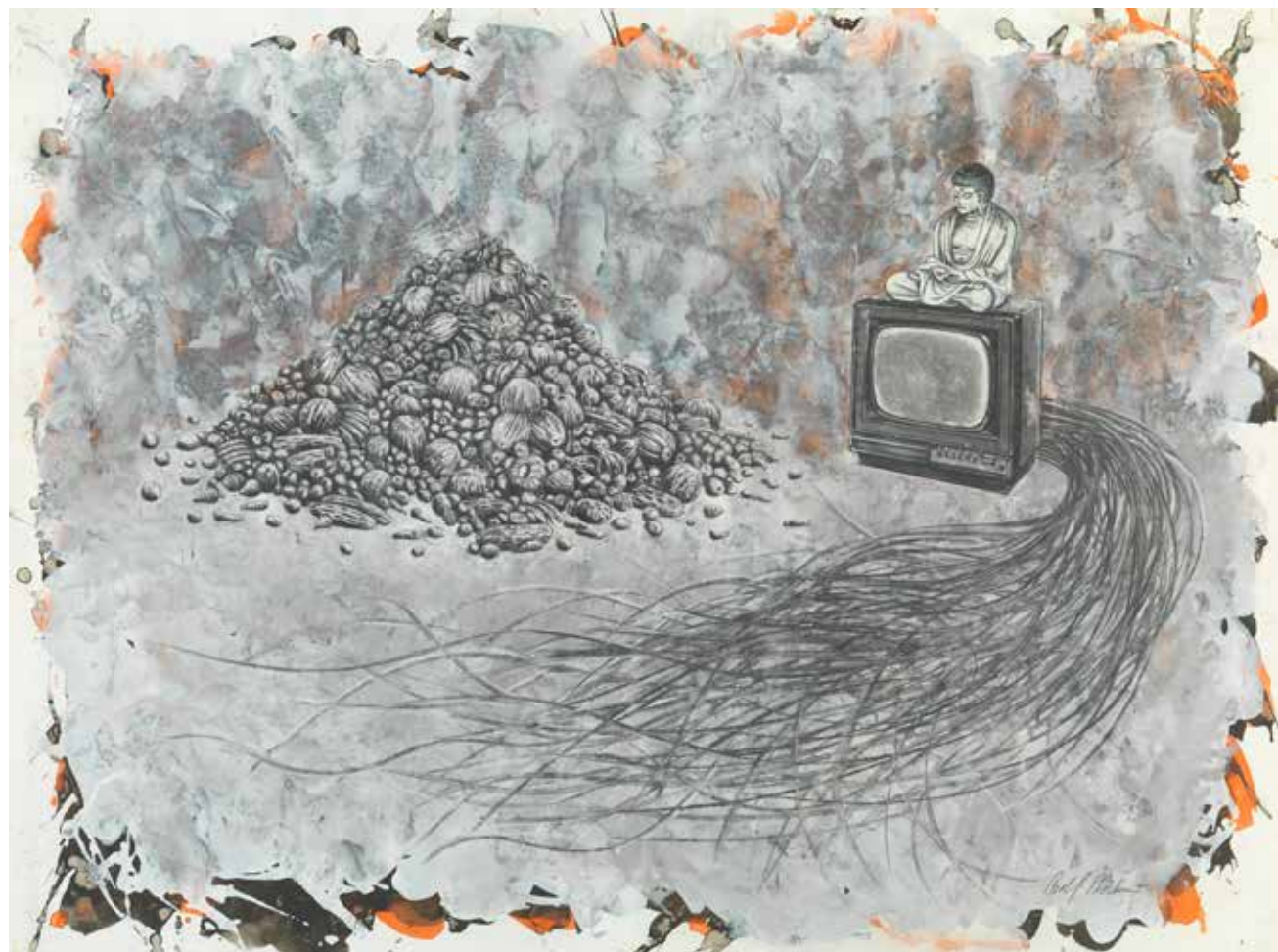




Sunrise: Sunset
2000, Mixed media
Unique
244 x 122 x 61 cm



Bachelor of Arts
1977, Mixed media
Unique
172 x 220 cm



More or Less
1986, Gouache, chalk
and charcoal
Unique
76 x 101 cm

At the time I was making collages like Kurt Schwitters and Carl said to me in a tutorial, "So you're interested in the action of the world on things?" and then he put his hand in his pocket and he pulled everything out of it and showed it to me and picked out a little ball like thing and said to me: "Do you know what this is?" I looked at it carefully. It looked like a very, very, old, small, smooth sphere, maybe made from wood but with very strange grooves on and around it. It looked old, but I just couldn't work out what it was. It looked like one of those really old antique golf balls, the ones that sometimes go for a lot of money in auctions, but it was too small. He then said: "It's funny what you keep in your pockets isn't it? This was given to me by my son as a present and so I couldn't throw it away it's been in my pockets for a few years now with my keys and change and I've transferred it with all that stuff as I've changed my trousers and over the years its worn smooth." "What is it?" I said. "It's a walnut." He replied. It was just the oddest thing, almost worn spherical, and not looking like a walnut anymore. **The action of the world on things.**

DAMIEN HIRST



My Inheritance
1979, Mixed media
Unique
66 x 85.5 cm

Morning
2000, Mixed media
Unique
240 x 122 cm





In each case with Carl's art, we are allowed to read every part of a work as part of a populated terrain of relationships, as well as a collection of individual elements where the apparently essential quality of an object or relationship is rendered fuzzy through the way he forces us to accept that both their individual elements and the conceptual core remain dependent on each other in terms of the generation of meanings. Such an achievement requires careful thought and precise placing...

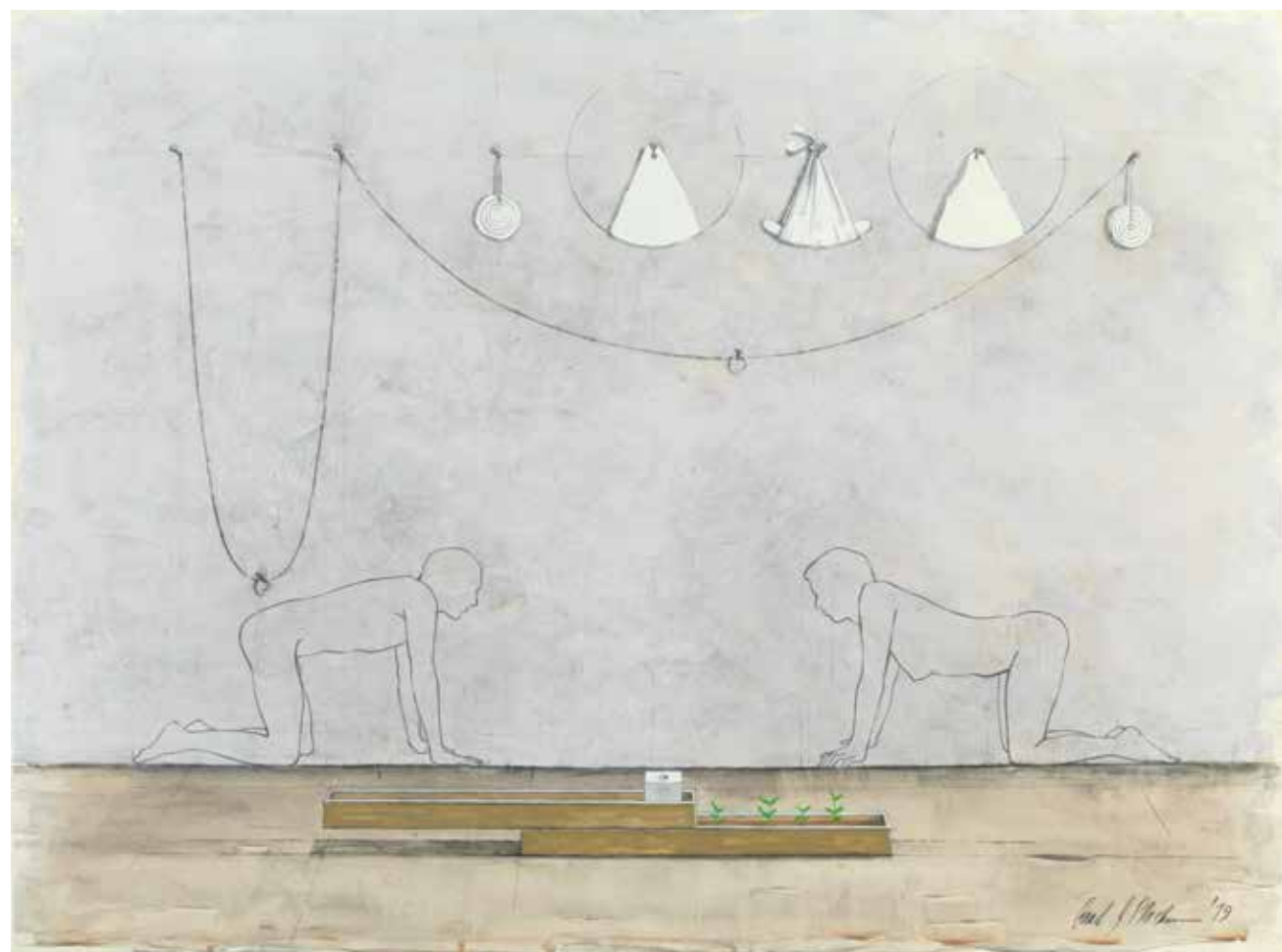
Some things in a room. Some objects in relationship to each other. A set of propositions. A sequence of statements. Carl made art that resisted an easy set of solutions whilst at the same time showing you a collection of objects that always retain their objectness.

LIAM GILLICK

Aspirations vs Temperament
1979, Mixed media
Unique
210 x 100 x 98 cm



Trois Couronnes
2002, Mixed media
Unique
153 x 52 cm

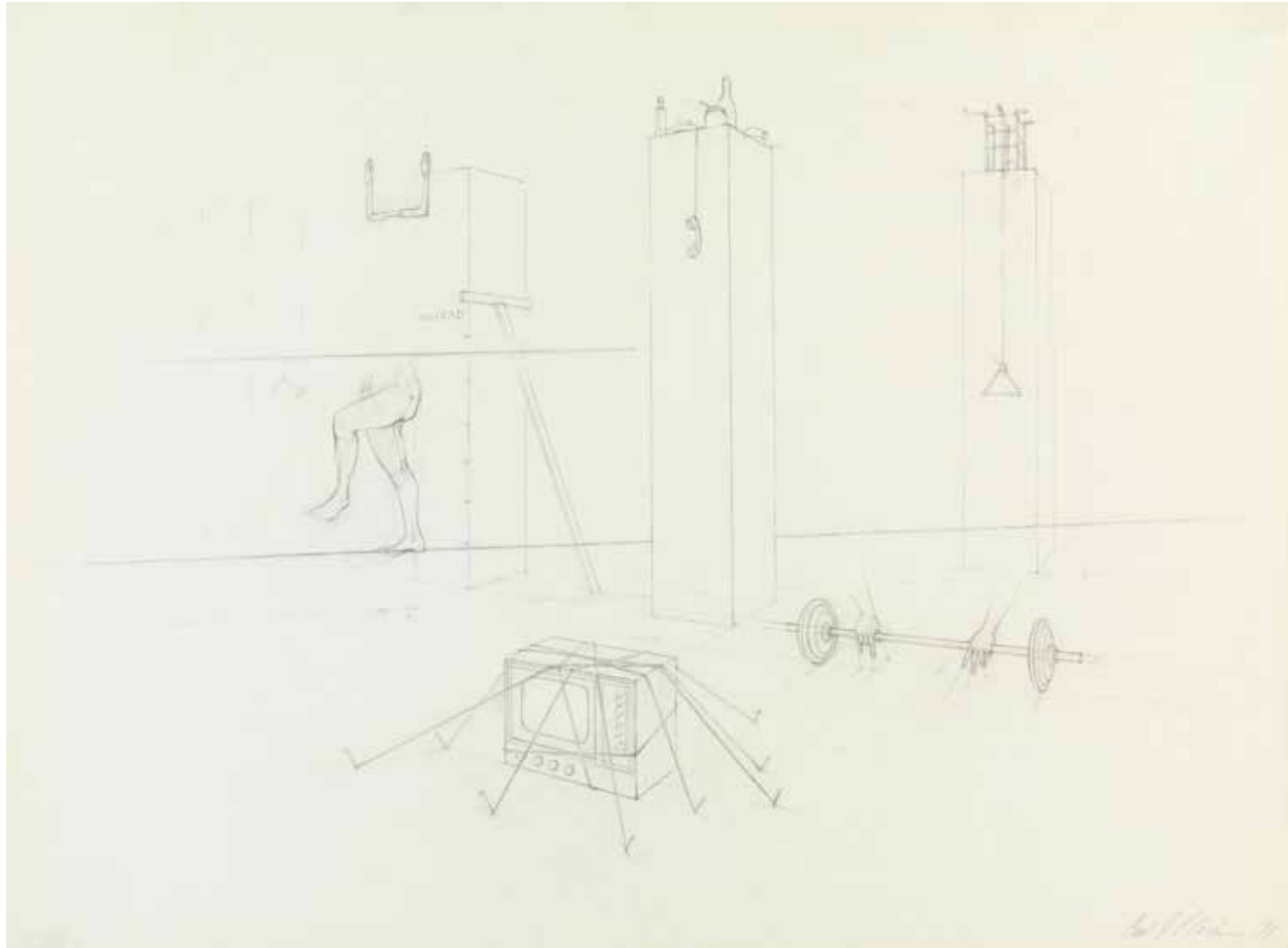


*The Pendulum:
Advance and Retreat*
1979, Mixed media
Unique
71 x 93 cm



Territory
2000, Mixed media
Unique
224 x 112 x 30 cm





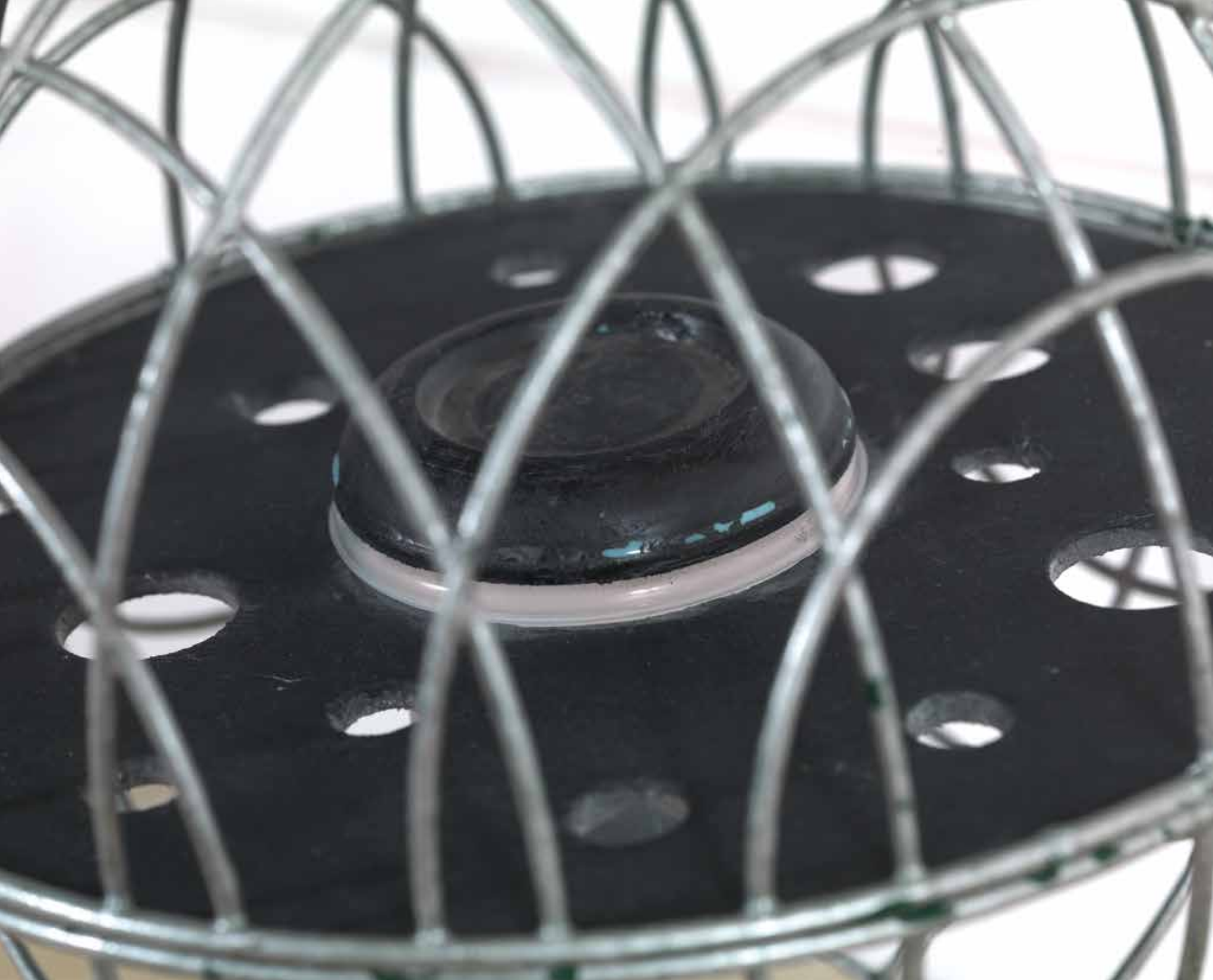
*For Those of us Not
Living on the Moon*
1971, Pencil on paper
Unique
62.7 x 83 cm

His sketches are not blueprints but suggest a mood or atmosphere which may then be explored in a three dimensional context...Many are illusionistic, and to that extent, unlike traditional sculptor's drawings, yet he is one of the few sculptors whose drawings extend rather than merely recapitulate in graphic terms their plastic concerns.

LYNNE COOKE



The Last Straw
2002, Pencil on paper
Unique
62 x 78 cm



After meeting Carl, meeting his sculpture for the first time was a tough but enriching encounter. Nothing was immediate, the need to stay with and be in the sculpture was essential. I suppose it was my first experience of an 'installation'.

ALISON WILDING

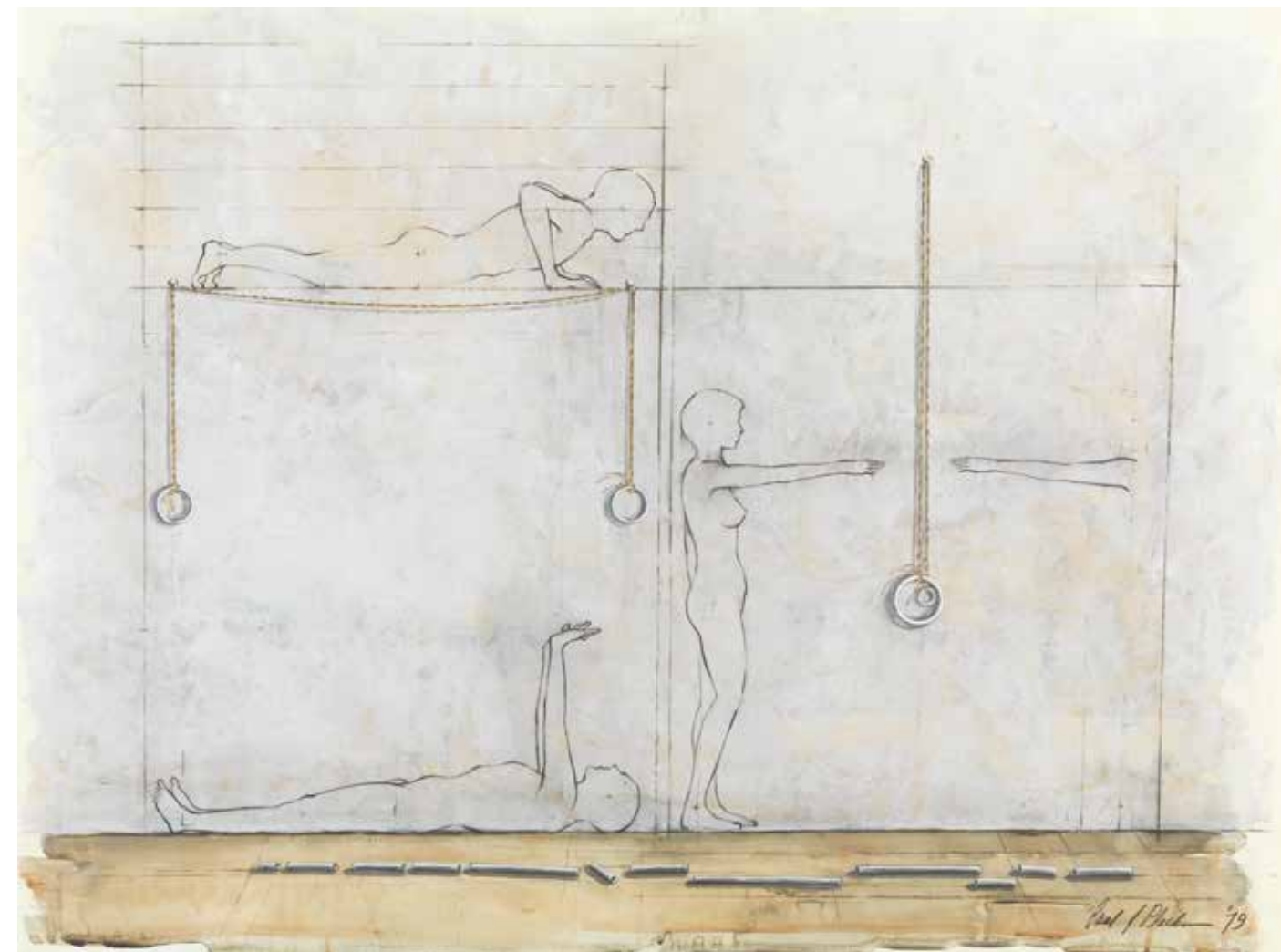
Rise and Fall
2003, Mixed media
Unique
222 x 88 cm

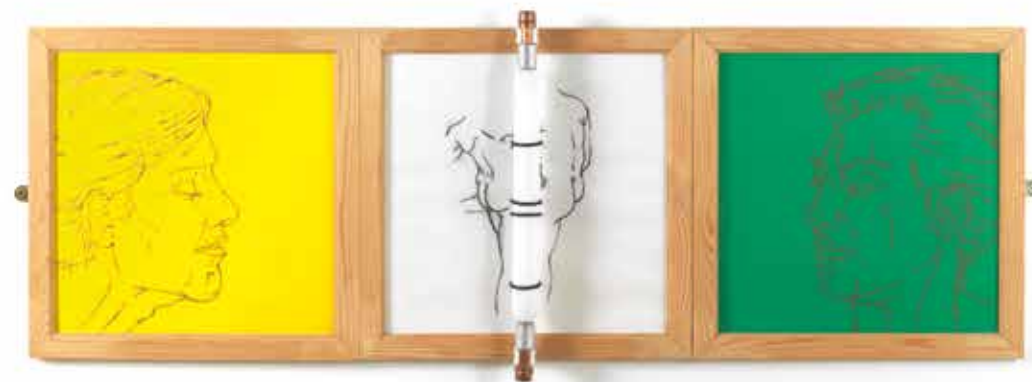
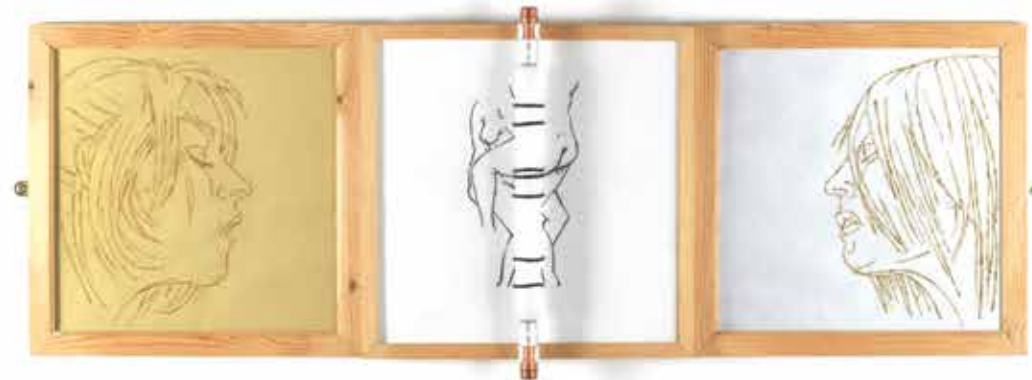
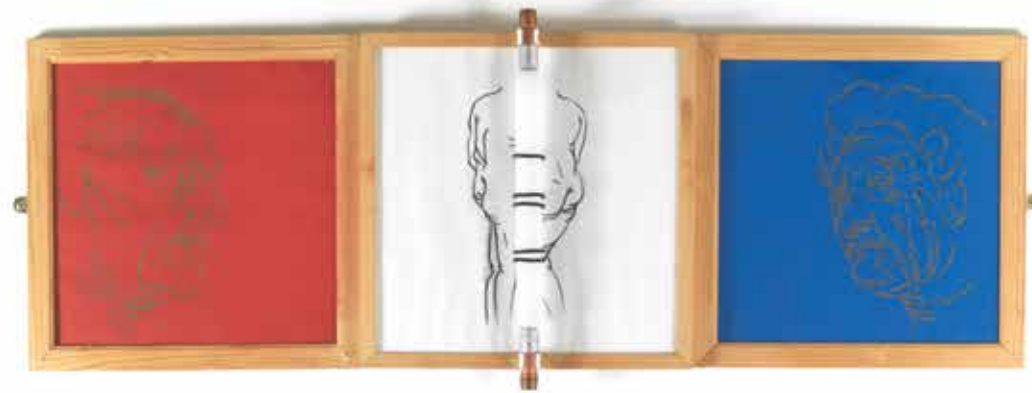




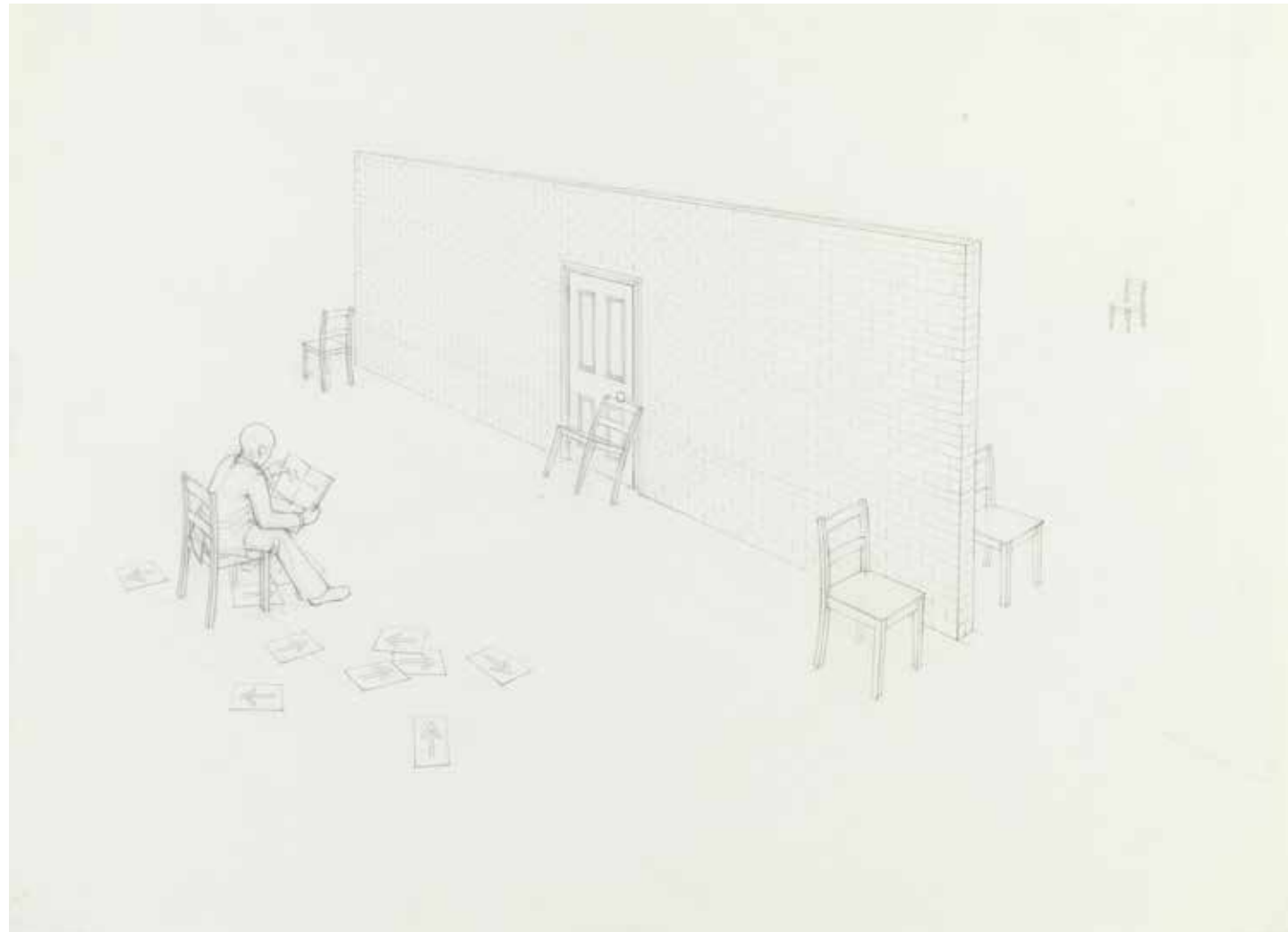
*What I Say: Not What
I Do: Not What I Am*
1986, Pencil
and charcoal on paper
Unique
76 x 101 cm

*The Pendulum: The Other
Side of the Door*
1979, Mixed media
Unique
71 x 93 cm





The Morality of Light
Man to Woman
Woman to Woman
Man to Man
 2002, Mixed media
 Unique
 116 x 98 cm



His was a private world, both as an artist and a man, he shunned group allegiances and the artistic 'security' that came with them, he chose the far more difficult path of making art of real integrity driven by his personal ideas and vision.

KEN COOK

Untitled
1973, Pencil on paper
Unique
63 x 83 cm

CARL PLACKMAN

BIOGRAPHY

1943	Born in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire
1947	Family moves to Bath
1959 - 60	Begins architectural apprenticeship, Bath
1962 -67	Attends West of England College of Art, Bath
1967 - 70	Attends Sculpture School, Royal College of Art, London
1968	Awarded Walter Neurath Drawing Prize (R.C.A)
1970	Awarded Sculpture Drawing Prize (R.C.A)
1970 - 99	Senior Lecturer at Goldsmiths College of Art, London
1971 - 81	Lecturer at Ravensbourne College of Art
1980	Part time lecturer at St Albans College of Fine Art (until 1990), Camberwell School of Art (until 1990) and visiting lecturer at Slade School of Art (until 1986), Reading University, (until 1983), Cardiff College of Art (until 1985) and Central School of Art (for the year).
1982 - 84	Sits on the Sculpture selection panel at the British School of Rome
1983	Visiting lecturer at the Art Institute of Chicago, USA
1983	Selection Panel of Northern Young Contemporaries, Manchester
1984 - 95	Part time lecturer at Royal Academy Schools Sculpture department
1984 - 86	Visiting lecturer at Chelsea School of Art
1985	On selection panel for SOGAT Sculpture Prize Camberwell School of Art; Eastern Arts Exhibition, Laing Gallery, Newcastle and Tolly Cobbold Eastern Arts, 5th National Exhibition.
1986 - 90	Appointed Co-opted Governor to the Board of Governors at Falmouth School of Art and Cardiff School of Art
1994	Fine Art Co-ordinator at Goldsmiths College of Art, London
2002	Begins artist residency in Alayrac, near Cordes, France
2004	23rd January, Carl dies at the age of sixty

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1977	Felicity Samuel Gallery, London
1978	Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol
1979	Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff
1980	Felicity Samuel Gallery at Seven Dials Gallery, London
1987	Chisenhale Gallery, London
1987-88	Huddersfield Art Gallery, West Yorkshire
2001	Woodlands Art Gallery, London
2003	<i>Crooked Light</i> , Royal West of England Academy, Bristol
2007	<i>Beyond Appearances</i> , Huddersfield Art Gallery <i>Beyond Appearances</i> , Stanley Picker Gallery, Kingston-on-Thames
2011	<i>Alternative Universe</i> , Hales Gallery, London

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1969	<i>Young Contemporaries</i> , Whitechapel Art Gallery
1970	<i>Three Sculptors</i> , Royal College of Art <i>New Sculpture '70</i> , Arts Council Travelling Exhibition
1972	<i>British Sculpture '72</i> , Royal Academy <i>British Sculpture '72: Drawings</i> Redfern Gallery <i>Sculpture in the Open Air</i> , Holland Park, London <i>3 Sculptors</i> , Serpentine Gallery Museum of Modern Art, Oxford
1973	<i>Magic and Strong Medicine</i> , Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool 8th Paris Biennale, Musee d’art Moderne, Paris
1974	Critic’s Choice, Tooth’s Gallery, London <i>British Sculpture - Attitudes to Drawing</i> , Sunderland Art Gallery
1975	<i>British Art of the Mid-70’s</i> , Frankfurt & Cologne, Germany <i>Contemporary British Drawings</i> , XIII Bienal de São Paulo <i>Body and Soul</i> , Walker Art Gallery <i>New Work I</i> , Hayward Gallery
1976	<i>Arte Inglese Oggi 1960-1976</i> , Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy 1st Sydney Sculpture Biennale, Australia
1976-78	<i>Recent British Art</i> , British Council touring exhibition (Europe)

1977	<i>Works on Paper, The Contemporary Art Society's Gifts to the Public Galleries 1952-77</i> , Royal Academy, London
1978	Artists' Market, London Felicity Samuel Gallery, London <i>Scale for Sculpture</i> , Serpentine Gallery <i>20th Century Drawings</i> , Chelsea College of Art
1979	2nd Tolly Cobbold Eastern Arts National Exhibition
1979	Felicity Samuel Gallery, London <i>Sculptor's Drawings</i> , The Minories, Colchester
1980	Whitechapel Open Exhibition, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London
1980-81	<i>The Human Factor</i> , Arts Council Touring Exhibition
1981	<i>British Sculpture of 20th Century Part 2 'Symbol & Imagination' (1951-1980)</i> Whitechapel Art Gallery
1982	Whitechapel Open Exhibition Plackman/Kardia recent sculpture and drawings, A.A. Gallery, London <i>Not the Tate Show</i> , Graham Paton Gallery, London <i>Working Drawings</i> , Midland Group, Nottingham <i>British Drawing</i> , Hayward Annual 1982, Hayward Gallery
1983	<i>Drawing in Air</i> , Sculptor's Drawings, Sunderland Arts Centre <i>The Sculpture Show : 50 Sculptors</i> , Serpentine and Hayward Gallery, London <i>Sculptor's Drawings</i> , Air Gallery, London
1984-85	<i>Sculptor's Drawings</i> , Scottish Arts Council Touring Exhibition
1985	<i>Sculptor's Drawings</i> , Chelsea School of Art Gallery Cleveland (U.K.) 7th International Drawing Biennale <i>Artists against Apartheid</i> , Royal Festival Hall, London
1987	Leeds City Art Gallery, Mayor Gallery Athena Art Exhibition Barbican Centre
1988	<i>Fire and Metal</i> , Goldsmith's Gallery, London <i>House Works</i> , 8 Installations, Bristol Whitechapel Open Exhibition, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London
1989	<i>A Spiritual Dimension</i> , Arts Council Touring Exhibition
1990	<i>It's a Still Life</i> , Arts Council Touring Exhibition
1991	<i>Art for Amnesty : 30th Anniversary</i> , Bonhams, London <i>Bodylines 3 Artists - 3 Installations</i> , Chisenhale Gallery, London <i>The Green Contemporary Art Exhibition</i> , Phillips Fine Art, London Leicestershire Art Education Exhibition

1991-92	10th Cleveland (U.K.) International Drawing Exhibition
1992	<i>A Marked Difference</i> , International Drawing Exhibition, Maatschappij Arti et Amicitiae, Amsterdam
1993	<i>Flesh and Blood</i> , Proteus Artists Network, International Exhibition, Lancaster Morgen Gemaakt, International Photographic Exhibition - Maatschappij Arti et Amicitiae, Amsterdam
1996	<i>Life Drawing</i> , The Space, Isle of Dogs, London
1996	Cheltenham Open Drawing Exhibition Whitechapel Open Exhibition, WhiteChapel Art Gallery, London Open Studios in conjunction with Whitechapel Open
1996 & 97	<i>Sculptor's Choice</i> , Royal Academy
1997 & 98	<i>Drawings for Domestic Spaces</i> , Derbyshire Arts Festival
1999	<i>Paperworks</i> , Royal West of England Academy, Bristol <i>Heart & Soul</i> , Long Lane, London
2000	<i>Live in Your Head (Concept & Experiment in Britain 1965-75)</i> , Whitechapel Art Gallery <i>Summer Exhibition</i> , Royal Academy <i>Heart & Soul</i> , (British Art) Sandroni Rey Gallery, Venice, California, U.S.A.
2001	Arts Festival Hamburg, Germany <i>Summer Exhibition</i> , Royal Academy
2001-02	<i>Out of Line</i> , Drawings from the Arts Council Collection - Touring Exhibition
2002	<i>Summer Exhibition</i> , Royal Academy
2003	<i>Open Sculpture</i> , Royal West of England Academy, Bristol <i>Summer Exhibition</i> , Royal Academy
2004	<i>Summer Exhibition</i> , Royal Academy <i>Open Studios</i> , Chisenhale Studio, London
2006	<i>Important Mischief</i> , Leeds Art Gallery
2008	<i>Anxious Object</i> , Store Gallery, London <i>Prospects and Interiors: Sculptor's Drawings of Inner Space</i> , Leeds Art Gallery <i>7 Types of Ambiguity</i> , Store Gallery, London
2009	<i>Open Studios</i> , Chisenhale Studio, London
2010	<i>From Floor to Sky</i> , P3 Gallery, London
2011	<i>United Enemies</i> , Leeds Art Gallery
2012	<i>Sculptor's Drawings</i> , Pangolin London
2015	<i>Sculptor's Prints and Drawings</i> , Pangolin London

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Tate Collection, London
 Arts Council of England
 British Council
 British Museum, London
 Henry Moore Institute
 Huddersfield Art Gallery
 Victoria and Albert Museum
 National Museum of Wales, Cardiff
 Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia
 Eastern Arts Association
 British Medal Society
 The Courtauld Institute, London
 The Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester
 Bury Art Museum, Lancashire
 Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry

Carl Plackman
 in his studio, 1978



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Pg. 48 Damien Hirst text extracted from essay in *Carl Plackman: Sculpture, Drawing, Writing* (Huddersfield Art Gallery 2007), published on the occasion of the exhibition, 'Beyond Appearances: The Sculpture of Carl Plackman 1943–2004' at Huddersfield Art Gallery, 27th January – 7th April 2007 © 2015 Damien Hirst

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