

CHARLOTTE MAYER
THE SPACE BETWEEN

PANGOLIN LONDON



Monumental Turning
2016, Bronze
Bicester Office Park,
Oxford

IN CONVERSATION:

CHARLOTTE MAYER & MELONIE GAULT

MG: What is your first memory of sculpture?

CM: My grandmother was an amateur sculptor, and in her house there were various pieces of sculpture. They were mainly all figurative at that time (in the 1930s) and behind one of her large pieces called *The White Lady*, there was a big walnut tree. When the walnuts were ripe, I used to love picking them up, taking off the outer shell and seeing what was inside – a strange knobbly shape. I think that had quite an effect on me – the inside being different from the outside. Also, I spent lovely times with my mother's childhood nanny, who stayed on with my grandparents as their house-keeper. She always carried around a little silver pocket knife, and when it was time for the horse chestnuts, she would show me how to scoop the inside out to make little baskets.

MG: What impelled you to become a sculptor?

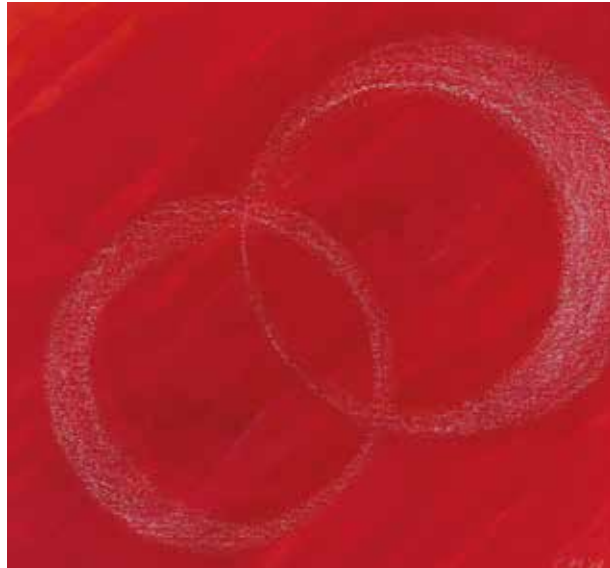
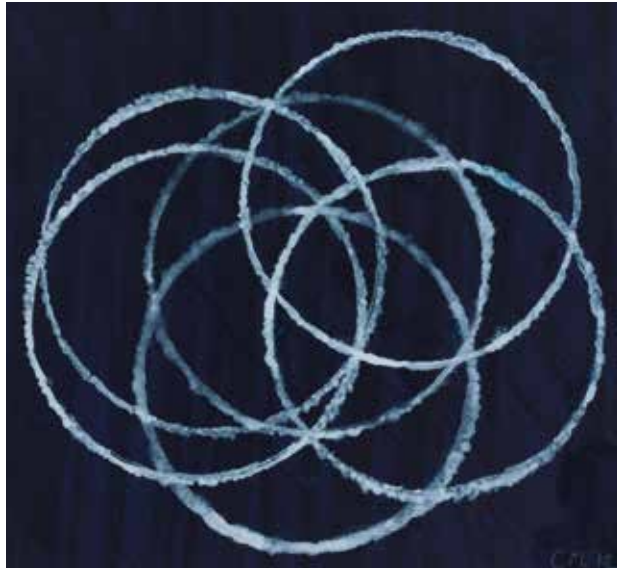
CM: My art teacher at boarding school told me I should go to Goldsmiths, she thought I ought to be doing art. This I did between 1945-49. I remember going into the sculpture studio for the first time, I had a gut feeling – I knew this is what I wanted to do. There was no question about it. The question was how to persuade my parents!

MG: What was it like to be a woman in Prague in the 1930s?

CM: There was a very different mentality in Prague, compared to other places in Europe. For instance, my grandmother worked with the bricklayers when her house (Rosel House) was being built – she wanted to know how things were made. She was also the first woman in Prague to wear trousers!

MG: What was it like to be a female sculptor in the late 1940s?

CM: There was no problem with being a female sculptor at Goldsmiths College, we were all just learning the basics of sculpture. The proportion of men to women was about 60:40. Gender didn't matter and the focus was on the teachers, who were marvellous, especially for beginners. The head of the sculpture school was Harold Wilson Parker, and he was married to an embroideress who had green hair. In the late 40s, it was quite something. After I had been there a while, I remember one day he took my arm and said: 'It's easy to model an arm. What's difficult is the elbow, the wrist – all the joints – that's what you have to watch'.



(LEFT)
Song 4
 2019, Acrylic on paper
 Unique
 24 x 26 cm

(RIGHT)
Between I
 2019, Acrylic on paper
 Unique
 34 x 37 cm

Another important teacher was Ivor Roberts-Jones (who made the sculpture of Churchill in Parliament Square), and he was a marvellous portraitist. Regardless of whether you were a man or a woman, he wanted you to get to the essence of the portrait. You had to dig deep and think carefully about the shape of the ear for instance. He was so influential that when I left Goldsmiths I thought I wanted to specialise in making portraits, and I made quite a few at the time.

After this I got a grant to go to the Royal College of Art, and I was there for three years. This was a very different experience - there were fewer women and the men were difficult. When I entered the sculpture school a burly male turned to me and said 'what are you doing here, you should be at home having babies'. That was the current attitude of the time. He was quite a well-known figurative artist, a very big, dominant Italian character. His comment really stuck with me – I didn't want to have babies, I wanted to be a sculptor. I also remember Barry Hart, who taught us letter cutting, who said to me 'you will never be a sculptor until you lose your virginity.' It made me determined to be as good a sculptor as possible.

After attending the college I was offered a teaching job in Yeovill, but I had recently met Geoffrey Salmon and the long distance wouldn't have worked out. One of the most wonderful things about my marriage to Geoffrey is that he has always supported my work. Even when we had a family, and I stopped working for about 12 years, he was extremely disappointed and that was wonderful. He always asks after my work. I respected his work (he was an architect) and he respected mine.

MG: In your eyes, how has the world of sculpture changed from the 50s until now?

CM: It has changed greatly. In the fifties sculpture was about 'truth to material'. We were very well taught – we learned how to carve stone and wood, to model clay, to cast our models into plaster and to cut letters into slate. Our work concentrated on the human figure even when abstracted. I used to love cutting letters: everybody had a little piece of slate, and we had to decide what was going to go on it. I remember once taking a bit of Shakespeare and Barry Hart showed us how to do it. I loved the feel of the chisel cutting in.

Today there is a much greater shift towards conceptual art and I must admit, I don't fully understand it. I don't want to sound critical, I just have to be unknowing. Where is sculpture now? Does conceptual art have anything to do with the solid form? I think it can be very interesting, but to me it isn't art. I understand using tools (such as 3D printing for example) to make a thing of beauty, but I don't find a bed full of condoms beautiful!

It reminds me of a lovely poem by Edward Matchett: 'Let us make a thing of beauty, that air will live when we have gone, let us make a thing of beauty, for hungry souls to feast upon.' And you may say - she's 90 and she's stuck on that. Well...I am stuck on that! I want to make things which speak to people.

MG: Your early work was mainly figurative, before you turned to abstraction after an inspiring trip to New York in the late 1960s. What changed?

CM: Manhattan in the snow is fantastic, and the architecture bowled me over. I felt I could express myself better that way than in abstracted figuration. When I returned from New York I made about fifty wooden structures, which I painted black and called *Black Cities*. I then went to visit various West End galleries, who told me they were interested in the pieces, but that I would have to convert them to metal. For this reason I ended up doing two welding courses which opened new possibilities. Both courses were at British Oxygen on the North Circular Road. I was absolutely terrified. There I was, the only woman among a lot of plumbers and so on - but I expected this. I bought all the equipment and a friend of mine who is a painter said I could work in her cellar. It had no ventilation, I nearly killed myself several times!

This was welding with oxyacetylene, and when I checked with the insurers if this was ok, they raised their hands (in horror) and said I couldn't possibly do this in a domestic setting. So I had to sell it all back to British Oxygen, and learn electric welding instead. It still produced fumes, but wasn't as dangerous and meant I wasn't risking blowing up her whole house! That gave me a lot of possibilities.

I picked up a lot of scrap metal and made whole pile of animals – I have for instance in my garden a big frog I made there. I also made smaller things too because I while at British Oxygen I had learned how to do brazing, which was much easier than welding.

MG: How does your artistic process usually start?

CM: In a very dreamy way, at best there is a sense of quiet play. I might be doing something completely different, like making soup. At the back of my mind, ideas start floating about. I would make small rough sculptures in paper, wire, bits of wood and anything lying about in the studio. The ideas are seldom drawn.

MG: What obstacles do you face when making your work?

CM: Shortly after leaving the Royal College I gave a lecture on colour for the Council for Industrial Design. There was a man there who suggested I take on a commission to make a work for the waiting room of a maternity wing at Epsom General Hospital. I thought to myself that the only thing I can carve is alabaster, so I acquired a ton of it, from the same Derbyshire quarry from which Jacob Epstein’s alabaster *Adam* had originated.

When the work, *Mother and Child*, was completed, I received great feedback from the architects. However, the members of the hospital board were quite concerned: ‘Why hasn’t it got any ears?’ ‘Why doesn’t it have a proper face?’

Some time later, a friend and I went to the hospital to see the work in situ. It wasn’t anywhere to be seen, and before long we finally caught a glimpse of it in the cellar. What happened to it from that point was a mystery, until many years ago someone decided to look into what had happened to it. After much detective work, it turned out it had been carved into blocks and given to the Wimbledon School of Art.

The obstacles are endless! Now I am involved in lighter structures, there are always issues with balance.

MG: You often craft your original models using natural materials - what have you been working with recently? Tell us about the new series of Nest sculptures you have made for this exhibition.

CM: In the past I have used apple peel dipped in wax, carved slithers of wood or umbelliferae - the latter grow beside the river and they are poisonous! Most of the works in this exhibition were originally made in balsa wood.

Regarding the new series of ‘Nest’ works I have made for the show, these are originally made in paper plates, and I used about 8 plates for each nest. The nests are spatial – they embrace and invade space at the same time.

MG: Your strong affinity with the natural world has become central to your oeuvre – did this develop over time or was it always at the forefront of your practice?



CM: My affinity with the natural world was always at the forefront. When I was a little girl, my grandmother would take me to her vegetable garden with my little net. We used to scoop weeds out of a pool and take these treasures back to the house to make slides for study under a microscope. Through the lens a miraculous world of colour and pattern instantly appeared. Beauty in all its manifestations, from the smallest thing to the largest, enchanted her – and she passed that on to me.

My love of the Devon landscapes, particularly the moor with its wide horizons has influenced my work in subtle ways. For instance it could be wind sweeping across grasses, or picking up something from the ground.

Also at that time, 1976-86, I began a series of sculptures of domestic animals which I had seen in my friend’s farm. So for 10 years I returned to figuration. I remember once making a goat while watching her goat. I made sheep, geese, cockerels, cows - I couldn’t cope with a horse!

MG: A lot of your work has both movement and stillness.

CM: I’ve been meditating for over 50 years. One realises meditation isn’t just sitting still - it’s more than that. You can have movement in stillness.

MG: In the last few months you have worked on a new body of paintings, and these are quite different to your previous works on paper. Can you tell us about how they differ and what has brought on this change?

CM: My early drawings of people and animals were studies for future sculptures. For the animal sculptures in particular I made lots of drawings - to see how they move, how they stand still, how they sit, and lie down. This new work is more expressive of feelings both in the use of colour and the forms which emerge.

(LEFT & RIGHT)
Nest 4
2019, Bronze
Unique
Height: 15 cm
Base diameter: 35 cm



The Thornflower
2006, Bronze &
Stainless steel
Edition of 12
150 x 60 x 60 cm



Song 2
2019, Acrylic on paper
Unique
30 x 38 cm

The paintings have nothing to do with the sculptures, although they have an affinity to the work – especially the spaces and the shapes. There are certain forms in nature that are everlasting and universal.

MG: What has the highlight of your career been so far?

CM: There are many - whether a commission or solo exhibition, these are all highlights. Although I must say the one that stands out is making *The Thornflower*. It is quite a story – the story of a journey from duality to unity. It is also, in part, a story of healing.

My beloved grandmother, who was the best person in my life, died in the Holocaust. She was full of courage and an amazing person. In 1940, she was transported to Terezín, then called Teresienstadt, north of Prague. This place wasn't in itself a concentration camp, but more of a show place for the Nazis. Later in 1942, she was forced onto a train that took her and hundreds of others to the infamous extermination camp of Treblinka. Here they all perished.

My mother was unable to talk to me about my grandmother's fate – it just wasn't the done thing to talk to children about horrors. It was clear to me however, that her deep distress made her increasingly ill over the years. At the end of her life she said that she felt her many illnesses had been sent to her by God because she had never experienced a concentration camp. I believe this is what

happened to a lot of survivors, because they felt guilty for being alive and living in a 'safe' country. As an only child, I carried this burden. And it has made it's way through to my own children.

For many years before I began making the maquettes (or models) of *The Thornflower*, I had been fascinated by thorns of all descriptions. I made many drawings, and I remember one occasion when sunlight caught the raindrops on the thorns of a wild rose glistening like jewels. I was filled with awe at this transformation from threat to delight.

The first sculptures deriving from these studies were small models in wood and cardboard, each taking the role of an intensely personal memorial to my grandmother. I began to think of this piece in terms of a possible holocaust memorial, and I realised that I needed to go to Terezín. I ended up going with my daughter Louise, as my other daughter Antonia had a young baby at the time so she couldn't come with us. We flew to Prague and a Czech friend of ours drove us to the town of Terezín. Before leaving London, a friend of mine from the meditation group had advised me to take a bottle of Rosewater with me to sprinkle it in those places where the greatest evil had been perpetrated. It was an extraordinary experience.

When I returned home, I asked a sculptor friend Naomi Blake, who was an Auschwitz survivor, to come to my studio and look at the sculpture I had started before the trip. She took one look at it and said it was much too beautiful and not cruel enough. She also said that the people who had sponsored the Holocaust Memorials after the war were now in their late 80s and were unlikely to sponsor another one. She also thought that their children did not want to dwell with the horrors of the past, but wanted to move on and have a new life.

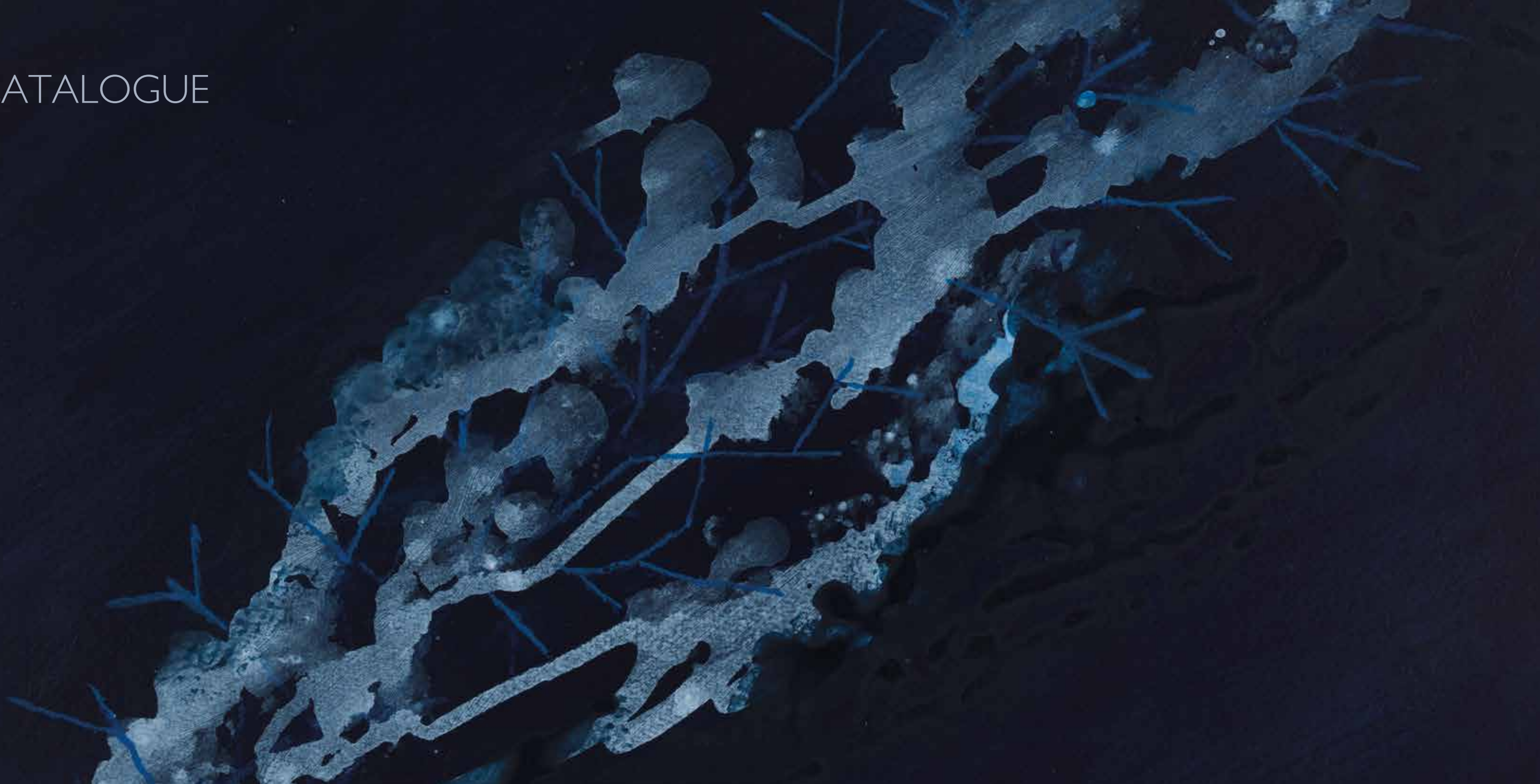
I therefore took the sculpture to bits, and let the whole thing rest. The problem was, it didn't leave me alone, it would not let me rest. So I turned my mind back to the sculpture – to a new approach. I realised that what that sculpture had to be was a uniting of the thorns and the flowers. Five thorny uprights and three flowers, making it a sculpture of eight units – the number eight consists of two circles joined in the middle. The upper circle symbolising the world of spirit and the lower one that of matter.

That was the highlight of my career, because it meant an enormous amount to me, and made me realise that it wasn't just about the holocaust. There are terrible things going on all the time – and indeed these are very uncomfortable times.

Drift 5
2019, Acrylic on paper
Unique
57 x 40 cm



CATALOGUE



(PREVIOUS)
Flume I (detail)
2018, Acrylic on paper
Unique
28.5 x 40.5 cm

(RIGHT)
Solar
2009, Bronze
Edition of 8
102 x 59 x 21 cm

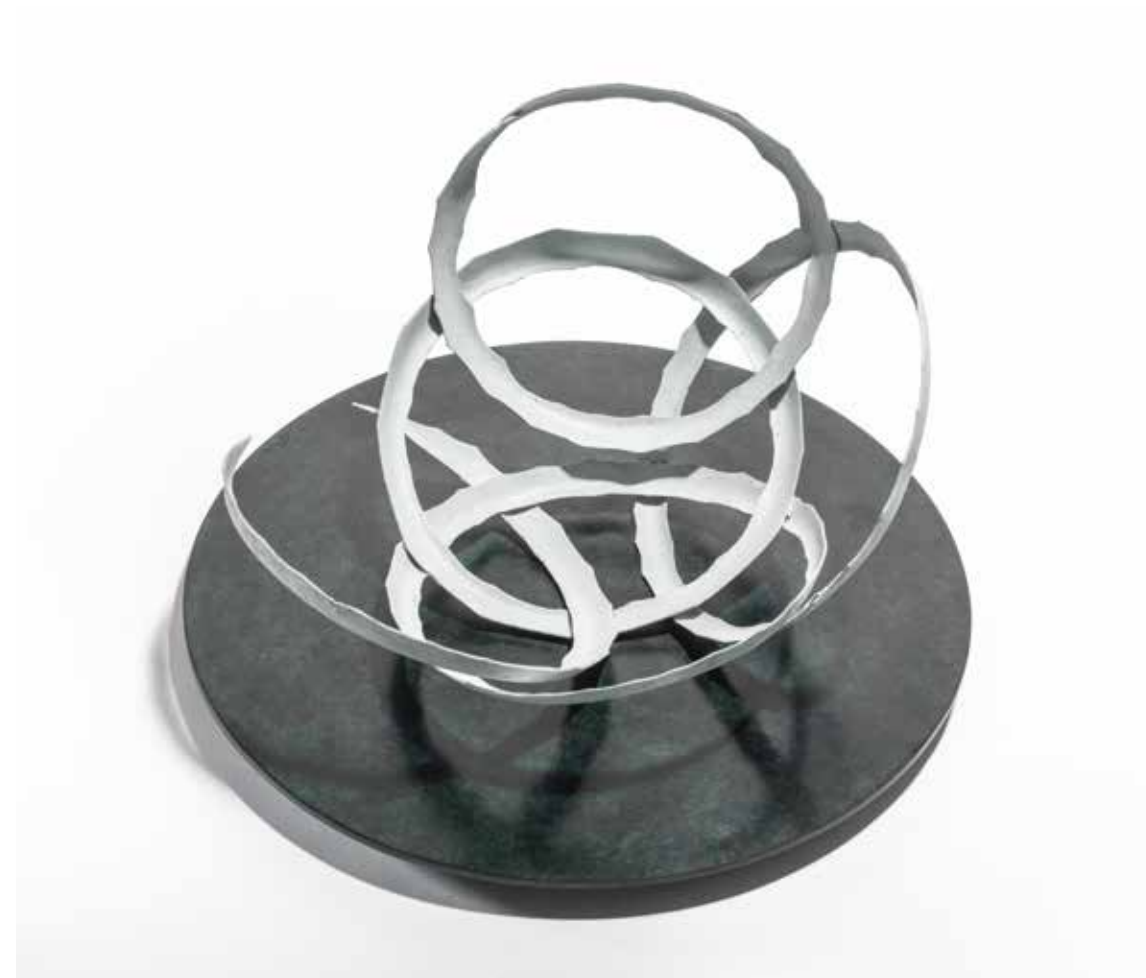




(ABOVE)
Nest 2
2019, Bronze
Unique
Height: 13 cm
Base diameter: 30 cm



(BELOW)
Nest 1
2019, Bronze
Unique
Height: 12 cm
Base diameter: 35 cm



Nest 5
2019, Bronze
Unique
Height: 25 cm
Base diameter: 40 cm



Largo
 1998, Bronze
 Edition of 6
 75 x 70 x 35 cm
 Base diameter: 36 cm

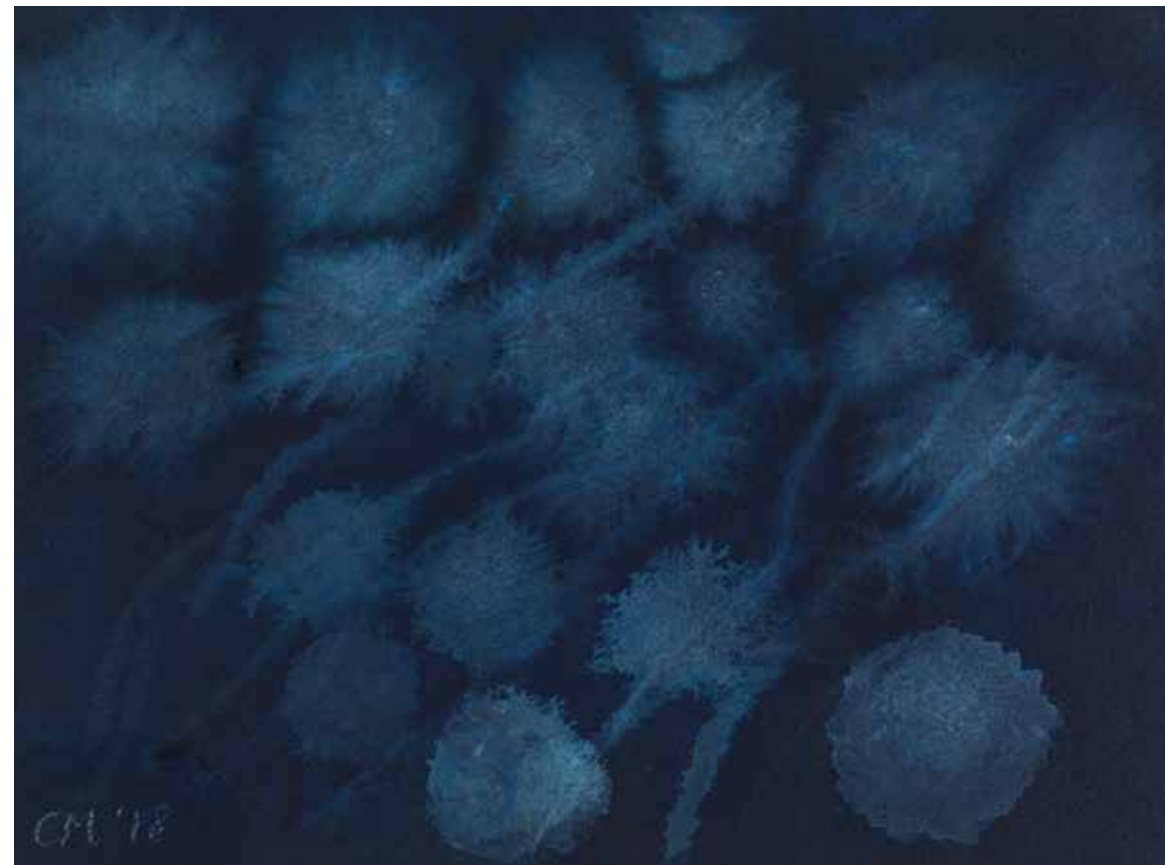


Flying Through II
2014, Bronze
Edition of 2
80 x 100 cm
Base diameter: 43.5 cm





Flume 2
2018, Acrylic on paper
Unique
20.5 x 24.5 cm



Blown
2018, Acrylic on paper
Unique
19 x 25 cm



Rising
2013, Bronze
Edition of 6
Height: 220 cm
Base diameter: 43 cm





Flight II
2013, Bronze
Edition of 8
80 x 94 x 94 cm
Base diameter: 40 cm

Edge
2019, Acrylic on paper
Unique
36 x 46 cm





Kasta
2005, Stainless steel
Edition of 6
80 x 90 x 70 cm



(LEFT)
Sentinel
 2017, Bronze
 Unique
 83 x 40 x 22 cm

(RIGHT)
Guardian
 2009, Bronze
 Unique
 145 x 92 x 71 cm





Branch
 2018, Acrylic on paper
 Unique
 25.5 x 30 cm



Slipstream 2
 2018, Acrylic on paper
 Unique
 26.5 x 30.5 cm



Wind
2012, Bronze
Edition of 8
58 x 120 x 17 cm

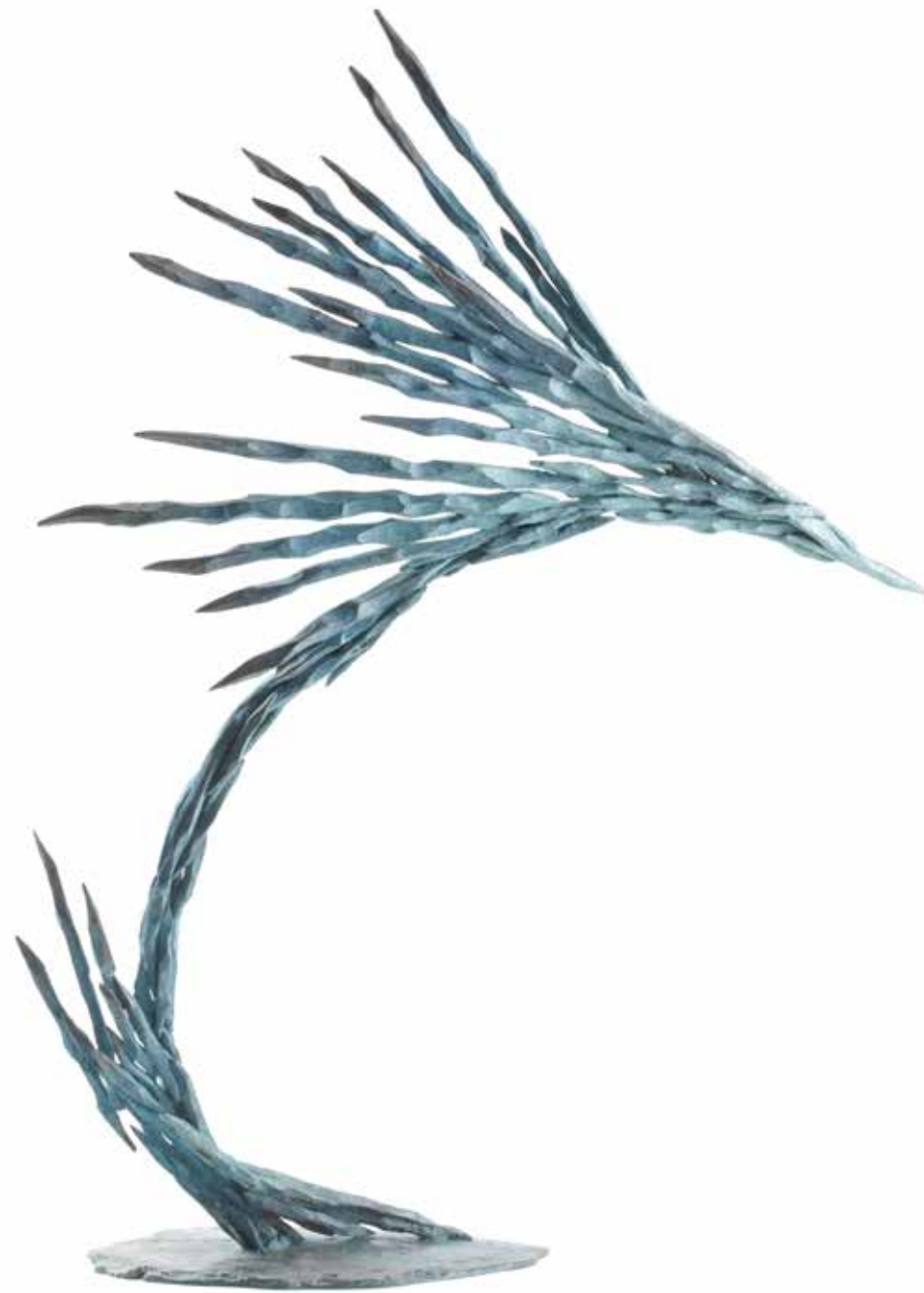


Scintilla
2009, Bronze
Edition of 8
47 x 60 x 30 cm
Base diameter: 45 cm





(LEFT)
Spray
 2016, Bronze
 Edition of 8
 26.5 x 42 x 15 cm



(RIGHT)
Storm Bird
 2012, Bronze
 Edition of 8
 55 x 44 x 15 cm



Nest 3
2019, Bronze
Unique
Height: 15 cm
Base diameter: 35 cm



Rondo
1997, Bronze
Edition of 12
60 x 63 x 55 cm
Base diameter: 53.5 cm



Reed Drift
2005, Bronze
Edition of 7
Height: 64 cm
Base diameter: 50 cm



Turning
2015, Bronze
Edition of 5
100 x 120 x 104 cm





(LEFT)
Turning II
 1998, Bronze
 Edition of 9
 24 x 27 x 15 cm
 Base diameter: 26 cm

(RIGHT)
Fire
 1997, Bronze
 Edition of 9
 30 x 20.5 x 13 cm
 Base diameter: 10.5 cm

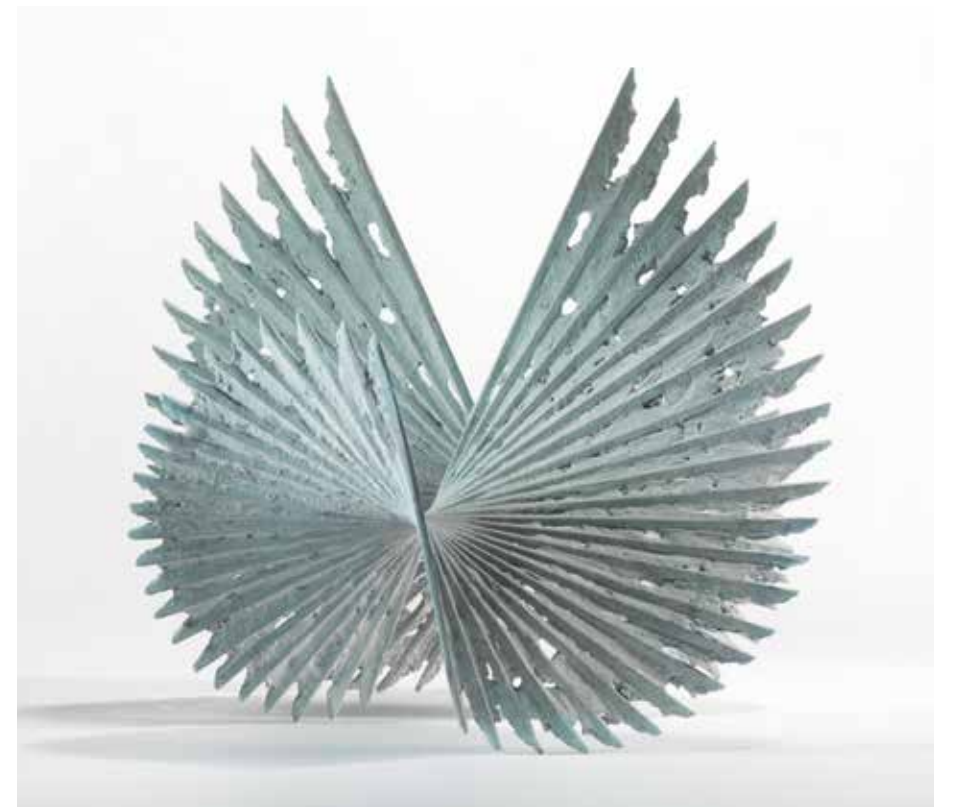


Quiver
2016, Bronze
Edition of 8
34 x 45 x 13 cm
Base diameter: 23 cm





Small Rondo
1999, Bronze
Edition of 6
32 x 39 x 23 cm



Meeting Point
2014, Bronze
Edition of 12
34 x 40 x 6 cm





Rondel
2016, Sterling silver
Edition of 8
14.5 x 15 x 14 cm





(LEFT)
Sea Scarf
 2003, Bronze
 Edition of 7
 Height: 35 cm
 Base diameter: 38 cm

(RIGHT)
Leap
 2016, Bronze
 Edition of 8
 45 x 31 x 8 cm



CHARLOTTE MAYER

b. 1929, Prague

Trained: Goldsmith’s College of Art & Royal College of Art
Elected: Fellow of the Royal British Society of Sculptors (1992)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2019 The Space Between, Pangolin London
2018 ongoing ‘The Thornflower’, Coventry Cathedral
2013 Charlotte Mayer: In Essence, Gallery Pangolin, Chalford, Glos
2010 ‘The Thornflower’, Southwark Cathedral, London
Also shown Chichester Cathedral (2008), W. Sussex
2009 ‘The Thornflower’ and other works, Salisbury Cathedral, Wilts
2006 The Garden Gallery, Hants
2004 Matara Center, Kingscote, Glos
2002 Bohun Gallery, Henley on Thames Oxon
1999 Ashbourne Gallery, Derbyshire
1999 Gallery Pangolin, Chalford, Glos
1997 Coombs Contemporary, London
1977 Crypt of St John’s Hampstead, London
1973 The Iveagh Bequest Kenwood, London
1969 Institute of Directors, London

SHARED EXHIBITIONS

2016 FE216, Morley College London
2012 Two in One: Charlotte Mayer & Almuth Tebbenhoff, Pangolin London
2011 Mayer / von Stumm, Turrill Garden, Oxford
2006 Fe2O5: Gili / Mayer / Rance / Tebbenhoff / Vollmer, Canary Wharf, London
2006 Fe2O5, APT Gallery, London
2005 Fe2O5, Darlington Arts Centre:
2003 Hubbard / Mayer, Thompson’s Marylebone, London
1999 Hodgkins / Hubbard / Mayer, Royal British Society of Artists
1970 Ten Sculptors,Two Cathedrals, Salisbury and Winchester Cathedral
1969 Frink / Mayer / Piche, Bear Lane Gallery, Oxford

GROUP EXHIBITIONS AND GALLERIES (SELECTED)

2017 Ark, Chester Cathedral
2016 Sculpture in the Garden, Pangolin London
Spring Show, Pangolin London
2014 Crucible II, Gloucester Cathedral
2010 Crucible, Gloucester Cathedral
2009 & 2010 University of Leicester
2008 Robert Bowman Modern, London
2005 Curwen & New Academy Gallery, London
2001-02 Pashley Manor Gardens, E.Sussex
2001 Cass Foundation, Goodwood, West Sussex
2001 Bohun Gallery, Henley on Thames, Oxon
2000 Bronze, Holland Park, London

1997 Berkeley Square Gallery, London
1997 Sladmore Gallery, London
1995 The Garden Gallery, Hants
1996 Foundation Helan-Arts, Bornem, Belgium
1995 & 1998 Belgrave Gallery, London
1994-2001 Richard Hagen, Worcs (annual)
1993 Chelsea Harbour, London
1992 Gallery Pangolin, Chalford, Glos
1992-93 Bruton Gallery, Somerset
1983-89 Art in Action, Waterperry, Oxford (annual)
1981 British Artists Show, London
1979 Amnesty International, London
1972 Art in Steel, London

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Barbican, City of London
Inner City, Liverpool
Giles Shirley Hall, Cheshire
Nene College, Northampton
North London Hospice
Paribas, Marylebone, London
The Cass Foundation, Goodwood, West Sussex
St Ethelburga’s Centre for Reconciliation & Peace

CORPORATE AND INSTITTUTIONAL COLLECTIONS

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Hong Kong Airport	Wadham College Oxford
JCDecaux SA France	Westhill College Birmingham
Mittal Steel London	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Space Between, Pangolin London, 2019
Charlotte Mayer: In Essence, Gallery Pangolin, 2013
Two in One, Dual Exhibition with Almuth Tebbenhoff, Pangolin London, 2012
Bronze Casting, Steve Hurst, Schiffer, London, 2005
Modern British Sculpture, Guy Portelli, Schiffer, London, 2004
The Art of Prior’s Court School, Ann Elliott, Bohun Gallery, 2002
Sculpture at Goodwood, Ann Elliott, Sculpture at Goodwood, 2001
The Alchemy of Sculpture, Tony Birks, Marston House/ Pangolin Editions, 1998
The Arts in Health Care, Charles Kaye & Tony Blee, eds., Jessica Kingsley, London, 1996
Liverpool Seen – Post war artists on Merseyside, Peter Davies, Redcliffe Press, 1992
Patronage & Practice, P. Curtis, ed., Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1989
The Mystery of Creation, Lealman and Robinson, CEM, 1983

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our thanks go to Charlotte Mayer for all her hard work in bringing this exhibition together. We would also like to thank Steve Russell Studios for their photography and to the team at Pangolin Editions for their skill and dedication.

Please note that the dimensions of the works on paper are unframed sizes.

Published to coincide with the exhibition:
Charlotte Mayer 'The Space Between'
13th March - 18th April 2019
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Designed by Pangolin London
Printed in Gill Sans
Photography by Steve Russell Studios
Printed by Healey's Printers
ISBN 978-1-9993760-1-7
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