

WOMEN
MAKE
SCULPTURE

PANGOLIN

LONDON



Rose Gibbs working
on *Mountain* at
Pangolin Editions
April 2011

WOMEN MAKE SCULPTURE

'The problem of women' sighed Surrealist leader Andre Breton in 1929, 'is the most marvellous and disturbing problem in the world.'¹ Certainly for the women associated with Surrealism, a movement dominated by men yet obsessed with women whilst at the same time permitting unprecedented female participation, their experience was indeed problematic. On the one hand they had to endure the role of idealised fantasy fuellers whilst on the other they enjoyed extraordinary professional freedom to make and exhibit work alongside their male peers. Now more than eighty years later, in our so-called Post-Feminist era, the world in general and the art world in particular seem very different. But whilst it is currently unfashionable to admit it, both continue to be controlled by men while for women anomalies abound, contradictions endure and their status remains complex and contested.

These days women command museum exhibitions, represent their nations at Biennales and win prominent prizes. No one is described as a 'woman artist' any more and such gender definitions are now considered hopelessly retrogressive. After all, who has ever talked about "men artists"? Then there is the abundance of prominent female curators, critics and museum and gallery directors to be found throughout the international art world, indeed this year the curatorial directors of both the Sharjah and Venice Biennales are female.

Yet on closer scrutiny, and especially among the ranks of practising artists, the numbers are still stacked heavily in favour of the male. While the winner of the 2010 Turner Prize may have been a woman, she was only the fourth to win in its twenty-six year history. Survey shows are consistently man-heavy – the recent *Modern British Sculpture* show at the Royal Academy contained work by five times as many men as women – and between 2000-2009 even Tate, the UK's most female friendly institution, devoted only 32% of its exhibitions to female artists.² In the market, this discrepancy is especially acute. The most cursory scan of the stables of the leading contemporary art galleries of London, New York, Paris and Berlin confirms that at least two thirds of the artists represented are male,³ while auction house sales reflect an overwhelming advantage for male artists dead or alive: the highest auction record for a woman stands at £6.6million for Natasha Goncharova, more than ten times less than the record £65.4 million achieved in May 2010 for a painting by Pablo Picasso.⁴

Yet too much gloomy number crunching can also skew the situation. The fact that they may not be so plentiful or command such high prices, should not distort the other undeniable fact that much of the most significant and radical work of the past decades has been made by women. And nowhere is this more evident than in the medium



of sculpture. Whether it is the multifarious psycho-sexual explorations of Louise Bourgeois, Rachel Whiteread's subjective and – dare one say domestic – reclaiming of the minimally monumental, Monica Sowsnoska's skewed architectural investigations, Isa Genzken's vibrant heterogenous assemblages or Sarah Lucas' bleakly irreverent embracing of macho culture, all these very various artists reflect a widespread desire to play with and off assumptions about what sculpture can and should be made to say and do.

Reviewing the strong showing of art made by women at the 2005 Venice biennale, an event curated by two female artistic directors, Linda Nochlin concluded that, "what I find particularly admirable about this wide array of women's art is not only the high quality of much of it, but the fact that I cannot make any striking generalisations about it"⁵ and this stands true today, both in this exhibition at Pangolin London as well as throughout the artworld at large. As Abigail Fallis, one of the participating Pangolin sculptors states, "I use my sculpture as a thinking tool,"⁶ and the ways in which each of the artists on show here use their art to express their inspirations, aims and intentions is as distinct and various as the individuals themselves.

Humour, pathos and a sense of the disquietingly absurd playfully subverts the lofty connotations of cast bronze in Dorothy Cross' family of spider crabs in which Papa crab sprouts a perky phallus from the top of his armour plated shell; whereas when Abigail Fallis casts a torso bristling with baby comforters in darkly patinated bronze

(ABOVE)
Dorothy Cross
Family
Bronze
Edition of 4

(RIGHT)
Abigail Fallis
With Strings Attached
Mixed Media
Unique
101.5 cm high





Sarah Lucas
*HARD NUD - Work
in progress*
Concrete
Unique
18.2 cm high

in *Dummy Mummy* (p.25) she transforms a wry image of faintly saucy succour into a darkly fetishistic totem. Both these barbed bodily transformations would have struck a sympathetic chord with Breton's "free and adored" females of Surrealism - as would Sarah Lucas' bawdily bulbous concrete *HARD NUD*, cast from a lowly pair of tights stuffed with Kapok to conjure up the voluptuous fleshy essence of a contorted studio nude. But in other instances sensuality of a more restrained kind is brought into play, as in Alison Wilding's wall-mounted *Tablet* (p.67), which combines knobbly bronze with a cool slab of subtly pigmented plaster to interrogate and destabilise ideas of difference, support and display.

So while there can be no cause for complacency about the lot of women who want to make art in the 21st century, there is also much to celebrate. This exhibition provides yet more confirmation of the range, the vitality and the sheer quality of what is being produced by women of all ages and artistic inclinations, each of whom have found very particular ways to negotiate and respond to the "marvellous and disturbing problem" of women in today's world. For, as Meret Oppenheim, whose *Le Déjeuner en Fourrure* fur teacup and saucer continues to stand as one of the most enduring sculptural icons made by any artist of any gender, famously declared, "you have to take freedom, no one will give it to you."⁷

LOUISA BUCK

FOOTNOTES

¹ Andre Breton, *The Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, La Revolution Surrealiste, Dec 15, 1929.

² *Women in the Art World*, Panel discussion at Tate Modern, Dec 10, 2010

³ Gagosian Gallery, 80 male 15 female; Hauser & Wirth Gallery, 31 male 17 female; David Zwirner Gallery, 28 male 10 female; Barbara Gladstone Gallery 28 male, 8 female; Marian Goodman Gallery (New York), 26 male, 10 female; White Cube, 35 male, 12 female; Sadie Coles, 28 male, 8 female; Krinzinger Gallery, 30 male, 8 female to cite but a few.

⁴ Natalia Goncharova, *Espagnole* c.1916, sold for £6,425,250 at Christie's London in February 2010; Picasso's *Nu au Plateau de Sculpteur*, 1932, sold for \$ 106.4m at Christie's New York in May 2010.

⁵ Linda Nochlin, *Venice Biennale: What Befits a Woman?*, Art in America, vol. 93, no. 8, September 2005, pp. 120-125.

⁶ Abigail Fallis, *Women Make Sculpture Statement*, April 2011

⁷ *Meret Oppenheim: Beyond the Teacup*, Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York, Jun-Oct 1996.



Deborah van der Beek
Collateral
Bronze
Edition of 5
125 cm long

CHRISTIE BROWN

Lost & Found

Bronze, ceramic and gold leaf

Unique

19 cm high





Entre Chien et Loup:
Jackal
Bronze
Edition of 5
142 cm high



Child of Glass
Sterling silver
Edition of 6
13 cm high

ANN CHRISTOPHER

In Place of Silence

Bronze

Edition of 6

122 cm high





The Edge of Light
Bronze
Edition of 6
222 cm high

Rising Line
Stainless steel
Edition of 7
56 cm high

DOROTHY CROSS

Family
Bronze
Edition of 7
Dimensions various





Finger Crab
Sterling silver
Edition of 12
6.5 cm high

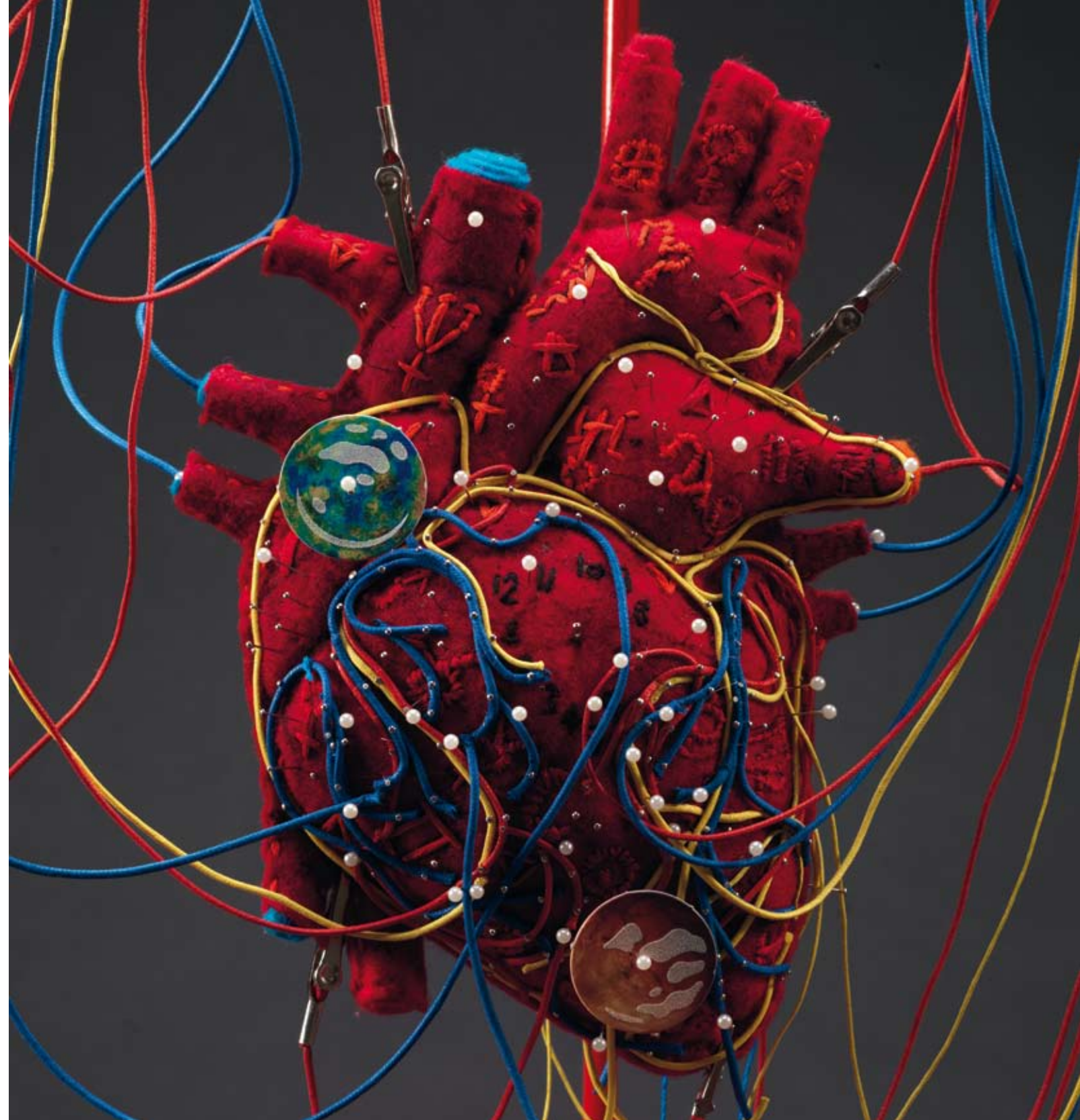
ABIGAIL FALLIS

With Strings Attached (detail)

Mixed media

Unique

101.5 cm high





Succours
Baby comforters,
paint and resin
Unique
66.5 cm diameter



Dummy Mummy
Bronze
Edition of 6
72 cm high

SUE FREEBOROUGH

Absence and Presence
Mixed media
Unique
184 cm long





Cardinal Points
Sterling silver and
stainless steel
Edition of 10
16.5 cm high

Memory Vows
Bronze, mild steel
and stainless steel
Unique
75cm high



ROSE GIBBS

Mountain
(work in progress)
Bronze
Unique
184 cm high





Mountain
(work in progress)
Bronze
Unique
184 cm high

KATE HOBBY
Bobbin and the Beast
Bronze, iron and wool
Unique
43 cm high





Spirit Creature
Cast iron and
painted bronze
Edition of 4
17 cm high

Bobbin and the Beast (detail)
Bronze, iron and wool
Unique
43 cm high



SARAH LUCAS

HARD NUD - Work in progress

Concrete

Unique

18.2 cm high





HARD NUD - Work in progress
Concrete
Unique
18.2 cm high



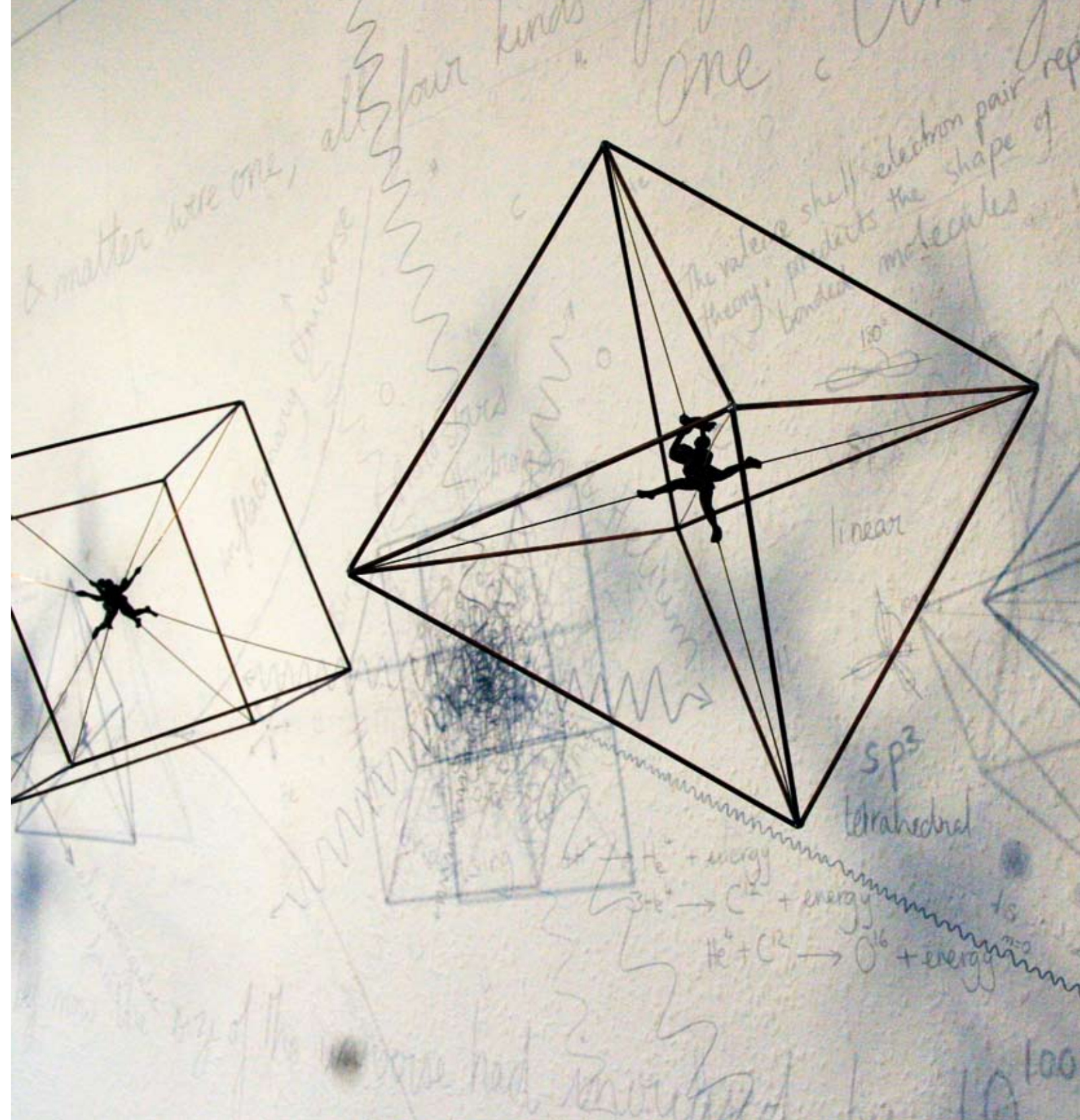
BRIONY MARSHALL

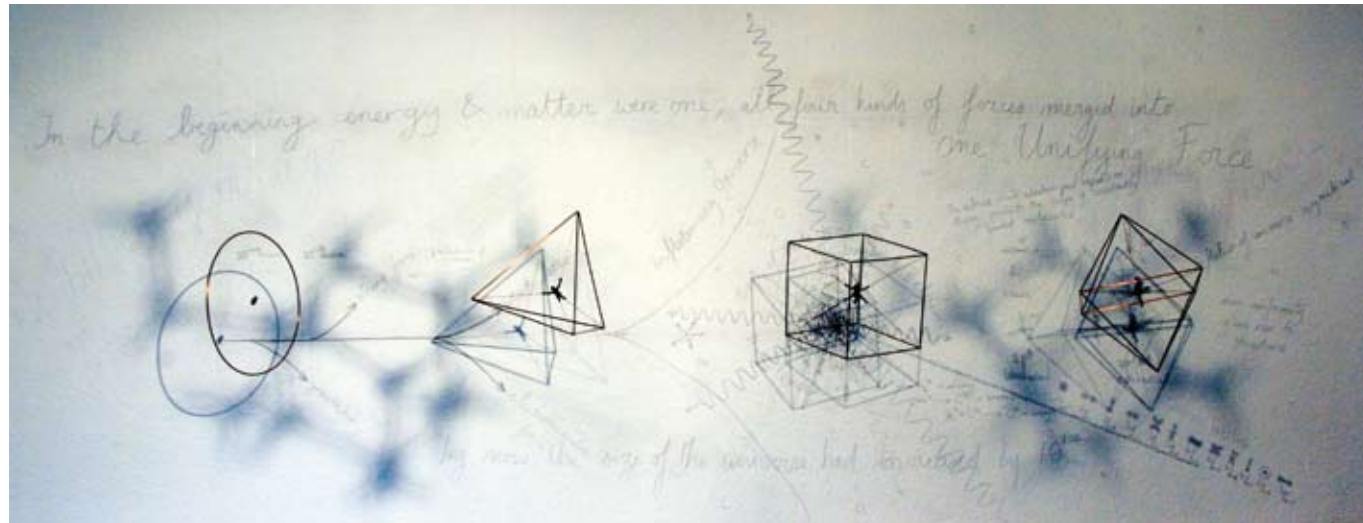
The Emergence of Chemistry (detail)

Mixed media

Unique

152 cm high





The Emergence of Chemistry
Mixed media
Edition of 8
152 cm high

*Dream of Society as
Flawless as Diamond II*
Bronze
Edition of 8
52 cm high



CHARLOTTE MAYER

Guardian

Bronze

Unique

145 cm high





Solar
Bronze
Edition of 8
106 cm high

POLLY MORGAN

Communion
Taxidermy, glass,
silver, silk and enamel
Unique
19 cm high





Communion (detail)
Taxidermy, glass,
silver, silk and enamel
Unique
19 cm high

EILIS O'CONNELL

Meniscus
Bronze
Edition of 5
65 cm long





Unlikely Monument Series
Bronze
Edition of 5
67 - 108 cm high

ALMUTH TEBBENHOFF

Yellow
Painted steel
Unique
195 cm high





Protector
Sterling silver
Edition of 5
16.5 cm high

DEBORAH VAN DER BEEK

Collateral (detail)

Bronze

Edition of 5

125 cm long





Collateral (detail)
Bronze
Edition of 5
125 cm long

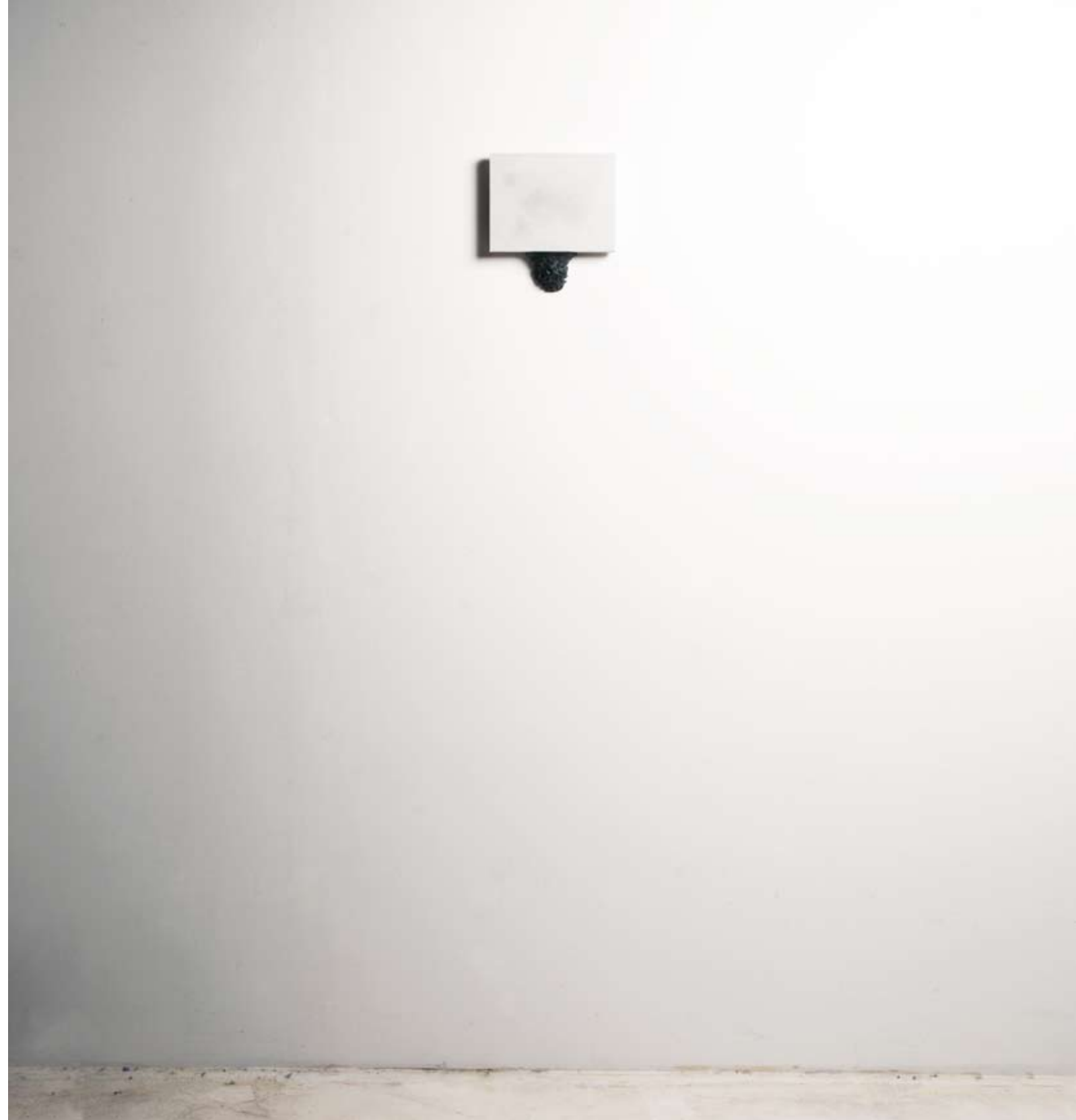


Don Quixote Maquette
Bronze
Edition of 7
29 cm high

ALISON WILDING

Tablet

Bronze and pigmented
crystal plaster
Edition of 6
29 cm high





Tablet
Bronze and pigmented
crystal plaster
Edition of 6
29 cm high



AFTERWORD

Britain is without doubt currently enjoying an overwhelming renaissance in sculpture and there are more female sculptors currently creating work and taking part than ever before in sculpture's history. Yet from a public perspective it would appear that this is not the case as, bar a lucky few, women continue to be marginalised by the art world.

Women Make Sculpture hopes to make a small step in redressing this balance and is at its heart a celebration of female achievement and creativity in sculpture. It also offers us an opportunity to step beyond the political standpoint and explore whether gender really does make a difference to the sculpture itself.

It is not a survey show by any means and many talented sculptors have unfortunately been excluded purely due to limitations of space. However the fifteen artists that have been selected offer a small glimpse of the diversity of approach and talent that is bubbling away beneath the surface of contemporary sculpture. Established artists such as Sarah Lucas and Alison Wilding show alongside emerging artists Polly Morgan and Abigail Fallis and recent graduates such as Rose Gibbs and Kate Hobby. Many tackle today's topical issues whilst others take a quieter yet no less intense look at form and abstraction. All have a lifelong commitment to working in three dimensions, to manipulating materials and getting their hands dirty - feminist or not surely that is as good a reason as any for a celebration?

POLLY BIELECKA
Gallery Director

Abigail Fallis working
in the Kings Place studio
during her residency
at Pangolin London
January 2010

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Our thanks also go to the Pangolin Editions team whose assistance has been invaluable, to Steve Russell for his patience and skillful photography and finally to everyone else who has helped in making *Women Make Sculpture* a reality.

PHOTO CREDITS

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