



Discovered in the Making
Katherine Gili
Sculpture

5 May – 2 June 2018
Felix & Spear, London

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Tuesday-Friday 10.30-6.00
Saturday 11.00-3.00

Foreword

This is the second opportunity for Felix & Spear gallery to show the work of sculptor Katherine Gili. Following the success of her first exhibition with us “Looking for the physical”, she has chosen to show a particularly exciting and innovative grouping of work that demonstrate a range of approaches and sensitivity. We are especially delighted to be presenting this work to mark the beginning of her seventieth year.

We would also like to extend our thanks to Robert Persey for contributing an interesting and insightful essay for the catalogue that accompanies this exhibition.

Cameron Amiri
Director, Felix & Spear

Discovered in the Making

For any “thing” to be made it must somehow be imagined. For Katherine Gili imagination is not a linear matter of idea first and manufacture second. Yet sculpture is a made thing rather than a manufactured thing and though imagination may be sparked from some impulse gleaned from one’s physical experiences it can gain an impetus, a transposition and clarity as it is applied through the process of working with a material. Katherine’s attitude has always been characterised by the deliberate discipline of discovery through making. Not composing, not arranging and not collaging but constructing with fashioned elements in a search for an expressive structure. A structure whose components are defined and connected, one bearing upon another, articulating to create their own space, to enhance the space of its neighbour and the whole thing simultaneously and with an intensity that resonates. A structure made only to be seen and felt in a journey from the senses to the mind and back again.

Magnificent though our eyes are they do not on their own give us a completely accurate grasp of reality. External, physical reality has no ideas, no reasoning abilities; it does not know what we require of it or how we need to use it. We have to develop a pretty good understanding of it if we are to survive. Perhaps the consideration of sculpture suffers from the perception that as it is art and as it is visually presented it must be interpreted in the same way as painting. But our brains need more than retinal images; they require an activation of a sense of substance, related to touch and sometimes referred to as haptic. Without a sense of space we could not function in the labyrinth of objects that surround us. Without a kinaesthetic sense we could not work against gravity, nor move amongst the angles and axes of the labyrinth nor prime ourselves for any

such movement in the first place. These senses tell us that what we see is not just a series of images cascading in layers in front of us. And like all things related to our innate capacities they can be sharpened and developed.

Artists have shown and science confirms that absolute rest and absolute identity do not exist; they are mental abstractions with “no counterpart in external nature”.¹ Everything exists in relationships. When it comes to the appearance of things they only exist when they are perceived. It is the artist who trains his or herself to pay attention to those retinal and kinaesthetic sensations that would otherwise pass us by and in picking them out and in making them manifest in some other material context some response is stirred up in consciousness. What making sculpture means; is “perceiving harmony amongst numerous relationships and transposing them into a system of one’s own by developing a new original logic”.² It is the making of relationships not hereto recognised whereby new appearances are introduced into reality.

Katherine’s ambition for her sculpture is predicated on a search for full three dimensionality, beyond the creation of a simple shape or form, beyond rotundity or intimidating spread across space. It is important to note that there is a dual nature to sculpture, (as there is to painting although they differ in significant detail). Sculpture consists of structured matter in real space; it is a physical fact but it conveys an illusion which is put there by the artist through a very particular, harmonious relationship of volumes however compressed, attenuated or marginal. It is real and illusory at the same time. Whatever is initially intended, whether through impulse or some conscious desire, the quest to

find this harmony requires constant reappraisal. The sculpture develops in stages, outgrowing itself and demanding radical remaking as the sculptor becomes aware of the vagueness of the original conception, the shortcomings of the initial construction and thus the necessity of radical alteration becomes acute. Somewhere in this process of intense observation, application and deployment of judgement insight happens. Rather than following a plan or theory with an absolute moral purpose, which is invariably reductive, what is required is a flexible but ultimately synchronous progress of interleaving elliptical observations, thoughts, feelings and the courage to follow it. It sometimes entails sailing very close to some dangerous, artistic winds. In the words of Cezanne again "It proceeds from the artists own particular way of feeling and expressing himself...we can judge the artist's elevation of spirit and conscience by the manner in which an artistic idea is rendered".³

The volumes from which the basis of the sculptural idea is rendered are enacted by forces travelling through them. We know of, tensions, compressions and torsions as well the fundamental effect of gravity, all made things and living things are subject to them. In the worlds of engineering and architecture these forces and the mechanisms derived from them are accommodated to a point of invisibility. But in the animate world mechanisms with multiple degrees of freedom and pliability, react and change visibly. They are robust yet vulnerable, transitory and elusive. We can sense their individual and structural nature, can identify and empathise with their qualities because we are part of that world. The point at which sculpture departs from its commonalities with other visual art forms is in its

potential to harness these qualities, to reimagine their context, give them substance, to create an illusion of forces acting in combination through a material and to exploit their emotional character, to make them felt.

Yet feelings and forces per say have no dimensions and they do not translate of their own volition into material form. It is the sculptor's task to make that transposition. But therein lays a trap. A sculpture requires material to be fashioned and materials have properties and limitations that have to be accounted for. Tools and technologies generate their own fascinations and it is easy to be seduced by the aesthetics that surround them. So the sculptor's desire has to be strong enough to demand a certain ruthlessness.



In Katherine's case where the bulk of her making experience has come from using steel which comes preformed, she has had to overcome its amazing strength and sheer presence. These qualities encourage metaphorical thinking in which an element can have the resemblance to some sensation such as "reaching", to take one example and only describe it in a kind of sketch or shorthand; a surrogate for experience. Whereas such an

action has come from somewhere contained, it has a generating impulse from a grounded or held position; it has both an outward motion and a tension with its origin. It has an attitude in relation to this tension, its component parts, their freedom of movement and the space it moves in to. Every point along it contributes to and contains latent emotional power. The sensation amounts to more than visual juxtaposition. To get at and invent such sensation in a new context Katherine has channelled her making energies towards all

manner of steel making methods to literally bend it to her will. There is no specific starting point for any sculpture but the employment of forging, either under her own hand or by mechanical striking of yellow hot steel enables the material to be shaken out of its preformed state and begin to take on an imprint of the initial impulse much like a note in music. But unlike musical notes the forged elements need actual connection to set up their relationship. That connection has spatial implications and may need to be in some other direction with the junction literally welded. That is to say fused tight or loose or all stages in between, whatever the evolving structure begins to demand. For making requires action and acting is thinking, mind and senses work together. Life provides the passion that nature lacks and the hand can reveal more than the mind can know.

The “flow” for sculpture making, if it exists at all, exists in a different concept of time as well as space. Making sculpture takes time, much more time than minutes or hours; it takes days, weeks, months, even years. The “flow” is circumspect, the sculpture has to grow in front of you and within oneself, be followed, chased or teased out. Nothing is instant, to move a part is a perilous act, a slight tip here or an angle change there, or to move a piece away from its neighbour if only by a couple of centimetres has consequences multiplied by itself three times, let alone consequences for the spatial relationship with all the other parts in the work. The sculptor needs a discipline of continued involvement. To hold a feeling in one’s whole being, to grasp that working on one part belongs to something bigger than itself and to something that is not yet fully revealed or understood.

So how one may ask is it possible to know when a sculpture that has neither a given structure nor any utilitarian function to provide it with a blueprint to achieve unity does in fact reach a unity. How does the

sculptor recognise a point of arrival? For Katherine sometimes the harmony makes itself known in the build-up stages of making and other times it creeps up to reveal itself. It comes from a life affirming reaction to the made structure that matches those perceptions and feelings inside her that are innate and those that she has nurtured through her years of experience of making as well as looking at external reality. It has been noted elsewhere that Katherine has worked with life models in a variety of ways that enabled her to sense as well as think about what constitutes physicality without considering herself as mere observer of natural forms. It stems from a long way back.

As a young girl she used to spend the summer months with the Catalan branch of her family in Spain. Like them she took part in the local cultural traditions and became particularly involved with a social dance called the Sardana. This is performed in a circle with all participants, arms outstretched at the shoulders, with hands held at head level. During its progress others may join in and enlarge the ring which only breaks when too large at which time new and separate rings are formed. Men and women usually alternate in the circle but the basic dance pattern for each individual is a series of long and short steps to the accompaniment of music which is slow in tempo but builds in stages; developing a certain buoyancy. There is generally a leader who determines the long and short sequencing and communicates with hand squeeze signals which are passed around the circle. Although the dance frequently occurs as a spontaneous event prompted by itinerant bands of musicians performing in a public square there were formal groups or clubs, to which Katherine belonged, that met to develop the skills, practice together and even perform in competitions.

The Sardana is a dance of control, not just of keeping the circle together but each participant must centre

their own body movement in a precise manner lest the whole ring lose its structure and descend into a visual cacophony of dragging elbows, wobbling hips and swaying torsos. The expressive power of the dance depends on this centredness and in the synchronicity of movement of the limbs with the rhythm of the music. The body's posture must remain essentially vertical with a firm centre of gravity as the transitions of movements carried by the limbs increase in tempo and the body insinuates itself rhythmically without overt show into the immediate and limited space around it. The dance is an equilibrium of motion. For whatever reason, it captured her imagination and Katherine determined to be good at it.

Katherine's interest in dance has been noted elsewhere and a certain myth may have been created that her work is based in it. This I would dispute but in raising the early significance of the Sardana I too run the risk of consolidating the myth. But sculpture should never be seen as frozen dance or as an illustration of it in any sense at all. If it were to be so then it would remain at best a surrogate and secondary art form, a condition sculpture has found itself in far too often. No, I raise the issue because it relates to insight into the physical nature of experience, a sculptor's perception of it, the ability to grasp the emotional potential of it and the ability to engage with means outside oneself to construct emotional experience in another form. The meaning of the dance comes from within it; as does the expression. In learning to dance the Sardana Katherine acquired three, possibly more, valuable insights that prepared the ground for her sculptural interests and career. The value of persistence in spite of physical difficulty (holding hands at head level for a considerable length of time is difficult and tiring). Being aware of what is happening to the whole through one's senses other than sight and perhaps most significantly matching an external unity to one felt within one's own body. For although the music supplied the timing, one

aspect of the training Katherine received, involved performing the dance without music but keeping the rhythm constant. Of course Katherine has immersed herself in many more complex experiences of a physical nature since then and one may well consider this as just reminiscence. But then what is memory if not the place from which we extract out the lessons of the past in order to help us to better structure the future?

Our kinaesthetic sense enables us to respond to sculpture. It is one of our fundamental senses but not often recognised. We do not need to know or even fully understand Newton's laws of motion in order to undertake even the simplest of actions nor do we need to be schooled in the mechanics of human anatomy and its nervous system to recognise the feelings we experience or empathise with and as to the quality of the indescribable pulse from which a movement is initiated. Who is to tell us that impetus does not exist? Sculpture of course does not literally move nor describe the path of movement as such, it has a quality in its form that is really a potential; like the moment when every muscle and sinew of the body is powered up before the release of an arrow from a bow. The sculptor has to find a way of making the structure feel like it has such a quality, a quality that coincides powerfully with our own senses. It has to find connection through the gamut of sensory perception and then achieve a bit more than the routine success that the brain makes in accessing the tangibility of reality and resonate with the kinaesthetic patterns structured within us.

Robert Persey 2018

¹ Philosophy of Impressionism_ Roger Fry

² Paul Cezanne_ Le Dimanche avec Paul Cezanne by Leo Languier

³ Paul Cezanne_ ibid



Katherine Gili in her studio



Escapade 2017-18

Forged and welded mild steel, waxed

H. 81 x 100 x 65 cm



Kyanite 2017

Forged and welded mild steel, zinc sprayed and patinated

H. 63 x 84 x 58 cm



Meril 2014

Forged and welded mild steel, zinc sprayed and patinated

H. 64 x 83 x 50 cm



Jacaranda 2011-2017

Forged and welded mild steel, waxed

H. 49 x 56 x 61 cm



Graven 2017

Forged and welded mild steel, patinated

H. 49 x 32 x 49 cm



Twyblade 2017-18

Bronze - edition 1/5

H. 48 x 49 x 37 cm



Spindrift 2017

Bronze - edition 1/7

H. 25 x 23 x 19 cm



Crossover 2003

Fired paper clay
H. 23 x 38 x 24 cm



Huddle 2003

Fired paper clay
H. 21 x 33 x 20 cm

Katherine Gili

Katherine Gili was born in Oxford in 1948; graduated from Bath Academy of Art in 1970 and then studied for two years at St Martin's School of Art. She subsequently taught at a number of art schools; most notably St Martin's and Norwich between 1972 and 1985.

Her sculpture was exhibited for the first time in 1973 and well over a hundred times since. Gili's career is marked by solo shows in London and New York and by contributions to seminal survey exhibitions at major venues such as the Hayward Gallery. In recent years she has regularly shown in the Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions and notably in 2013 her sculpture "Ripoll" won the Sculpture Prize.

Katherine Gili's work is represented in the Arts Council Collection and other public and corporate collections in the UK, Switzerland and the USA. Lord Foster selected one of her pieces to stand alongside the Cranfield University Institute of Technology Library which was designed by Foster Associates in 1992.

Her sculptures can also be found in many private collections in Britain, Spain and the USA.

Solo exhibitions

Serpentine Summer Show 2, London 1977,

Salander O'Reilly Gallery, New York 1981,

A Career Survey, Poussin Gallery, London 2011.

Artist of the Day, Flowers Central, London 2014

Looking for the Physical, sculpture and drawings by Katherine Gili, Felix & Spear Gallery, London 2016

Discovered in the Making, Katherine Gili Sculpture, Felix & Spear Gallery, London 2018

Selected mixed exhibitions

The Condition of Sculpture; Hayward Gallery, an international exhibition selected by William Tucker, 1975

Silver Jubilee Exhibition of Contemporary British Sculpture Battersea Park 1977

Annual Stockwell Depot Exhibitions of Painting and Sculpture 1974-79

Hayward Annual 1979,

Have You Seen Sculpture from the Body? Tate Gallery 1984

Escultura Nueva Reino Unido, Centro Cultural del Conde Duque, Madrid 1988

Moving Into View: a major display of the Arts Council Collection, South Bank Centre selected by William Packer, 1993

British Abstract Art, Part 2, Sculpture. Flowers East Gallery, London 1995

British Figurative Art, Part 2, Sculpture. Flowers East Gallery, London. 1998

Steel, Canary Wharf, London. 2006

The Royal Academy Summer Shows 1996, 1997, 2009, 2013-16

Awards

Elephant trust 1994

Elected Fellow of the Royal British Society of Sculptors 1999.

Jack Goldhill Award for Sculpture, Royal Academy 2013

Selected Public Collections

Arts Council of Great Britain

City of Lugano Switzerland

Cartwright Hall Museum Bradford

General Electric Corporation, USA.

Henry Moore Institute

Private collections

The Leo and Eileen Herzel Collection USA.

Lord Peter Palumbo, at Kentuck Knob, Pennsylvania, USA

Several collections in Britain and Spain,

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