

These sculptors form a group only in that they share a background through either having been studio assistants to Sir Anthony Caro, or having been asked to join discussions such as 'pool'. They continue to meet in order to share and exchange ideas. Beyond that, however, lies one very general connection that the name of Caro suggests. Here I think of Caro's earliest abstract work, the impression it first made and the realm of sculptural possibility - in the widest sense - that it evoked. I have in mind an open array or assemblage, in which each element stands apart from all the others, yet at the same time forms part of the collective. This array meets us on the ground we stand on, and there is a delicacy or tension or tenuousness in the relationship between its holding together and its coming apart, in the way it defines a boundary with the world around it, while remaining open and permeable. Improvisation is inherent in its constitution: the continual and vigilant movement towards an outcome as yet unseen, keeping divergent possibilities in view.

I am trying to define, in the most general way possible, not so much a kind - and certainly not a style - of sculptural practice, as a certain creative, affective and bodily orientation towards the thing to be made. The open spatial array, the sculptural formation that ambivalently lets us in while holding us back, answers, potentially, to what I will extravagantly call the dance of the self, where dance epitomizes the relationship of self and others, as individuals link hands - each one apart from the other, each a part of the whole. We can trace the origin of this sculptural compound of joining and separation to nineteenth century Europe, and to what had by then become a common modern urban experience, that of being among strangers, as a stranger oneself - apart. This abstract sense of social being gave currency in French writing of the period to the word 'milieu': ambiguously, the thing in our midst, and that which we are in the midst of. Rodin gave to this image a sculptural and affective shape, a pathos: *The Burghers of Calais*, a memorial to civic leaders who volunteered as hostages to be executed, for the sake of their fellow-citizens. This group of bronze figures, in slow and burdened movement, enact, departing the community, a community of the departed, each alone, in a dance towards death.

More recent sculpture, having the open articulation I have in mind, is essentially lighter in its bearing, and may perhaps be ludic, comprising figurally even as playful a community as Calder's circus. As well as comprising a dance, a sculpture may also preserve as a material memory the dance of its making, the rhythm of the sculptor's acts, and this in a notable way in practices of construction and assemblage. The film of Calder setting his intricate toys in motion reunites the sculptor's manipulating hand with the works of his making. The wire connections in his mobiles seem endowed with life and carry as much shaping intention as the pieces they join - though of course the sculptor's materials may not always be as amenable as Calder's, might indeed be more recalcitrant, and the sculptures themselves less immediately welcoming.

Sculpture, for its part, isn't assured of a welcome; it lacks a place, an acknowledged role. We have become used to regarding sculpture less as a thing set up than as something placed in our midst, at our level, and hence apparently ready of access, by virtue of sheer physical immediacy; yet the lack of a shared context is certainly no less concerning a factor for sculptors now than it was in Rodin's time. The sculptor's work meets no given demand, it is unasked-for: what then can it mean for anyone coming upon it? The work of these sculptors suggests that its meaning ought to arise, nonetheless, from precisely the fact of its meeting us at our level, in a bodily way, on the ground we stand on, and the evidence of its making is vital in this respect too, through bringing into play, for us, a revived apprehension both of the material world and of our own sensate materiality. Whatever their practice, these sculptors offer us a means to overcome or at least suspend the sense of distanced - or else invasive - objectivity that our commodified environment imposes; that being, for want of a shared context, our common frame of reference. We may find, in their works, still-recognizable fragments of our contemporary world, things standing apart from us and seen as such, yet drawn to our side, into the domain of feeling. The sculptors turn the world outside-in, they rework its fabric. The child psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott defined what he came to call the 'transitional object', some piece of stuff kept and held by the infant for affective assurance as it negotiates its passage from the nurturing mother to the exterior and its strange apartness, and he proposed this as a model for the work of art, for the work that art does. In adopting his analogy, however, I do not mean to suggest that a sculpture so considered might afford the illusion of a return to the womb; I mean rather that it might in some particular way enable us to revisit the transition, reopen communication between ourselves and our world - without guarantee of reassurance.

For it needn't be benign, this milieu, this formation or assemblage that opens itself in our midst. Consider some other prototypes of this approach to sculpture: Giacometti's *Palace at 4 am* is a haunted dream-space; David Smith's *Home of the Welder* looks like it sounds; Nam June Paik's arrays of old TV sets sculpt the unsculpturable; Louise Bourgeois' cells - one goes around and around, horribly fascinated. Four different ways here of tendering matter as dream-matter: a fragile space-frame; a clutter of symbols in steel; image-machines as building-blocks; the stuff of nightmare.

Things are in our midst and they surround us, abject, hostile, inert, indifferent; that is where these sculptors start, with the materials given by our time and culture. As if in pointed defiance of the stultifying maxim 'that's the way the world works', each of them, in some particular way, works to unwork the world, an activity more familiarly known as playing; *Playing and Reality* is the title Winnicott gave to the book in which he explains his concept of the transitional object. These sculptors take fragments of a given, obdurate reality and playfully tease them away into their own silence, leaving them sufficiently apart from us, still, for us to find in them a silence of our own, and so join in a liberating, experimental, dance of the unself.

Pool was conceived at Anthony Caro's studio as a name for group discussions among Caro's studio assistants and invited guests. The focus was sculpture in a contemporary context. Pool artists will present new work at The Cut.

This exhibition is part of Artist Boss - a research project which includes a publication, exhibitions and series of events about sculptural legacy.

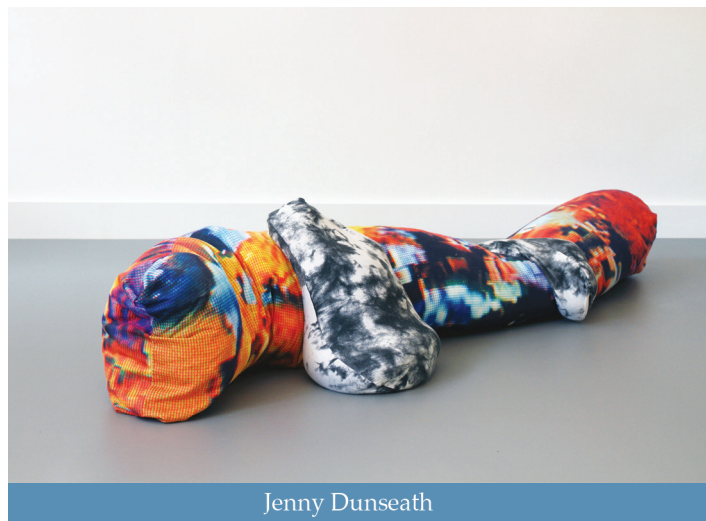
The Cut, New Cut,
Halesworth,
Suffolk, IP19 8BY

Exhibition: 30 August - 6 October 2016

Private View: Saturday 3 September,
12 - 2pm

Closing discussion with Charles
Hewlings and exhibiting artists:
Saturday 1 October, 2 - 4pm

www.newcut.org
www.artistboss.org.uk



Jenny Dunseath



Hywel Livingstone



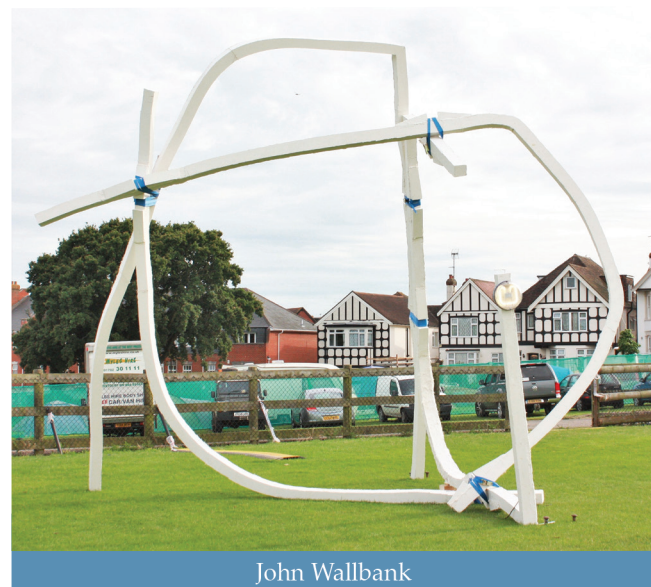
Jean-Philippe Dordolo



Claire Bailly



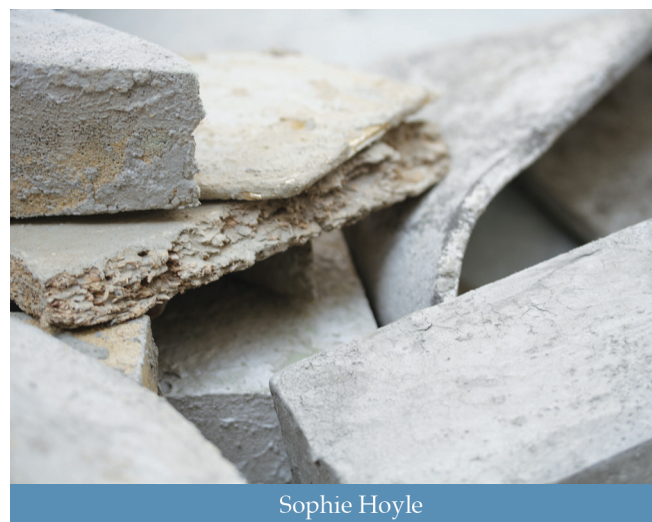
Olivia Bax



John Wallbank



Neil Ayling



Sophie Hoyle



Rafael Blasco Ciscar

pool
at The Cut



solid as spatial:

Olivia: Well, I guess when you work, it's always different and vary the planes, so I suppose that's what I find interesting. Trying to play with flatness and with the three dimension.

John: Your work is a... and the flat is in a solidity.

Charles: I see flatness as the enemy myth...

Tony: Sculpture has a range, can you from being almost 2 dimensional to being in complete three dimension.

Neil: And that's what I'm interested in. Because it's obvious that you use images but I like teasing it because it wants to be flat.... Flat is not really enemy. I don't like flat so much, I like what I can do with it. To make it flat away. That is what I find interesting.

Neil Ayling
 Claire Bailly
 Olivia Bax
 Rafael Blasco Ciscar
 Jean-Philippe Dordolo
 Jenny Dunseath
 Sophie Hoyle
 Hywel Livingstone
 John Wallbank

Olivia: I find that best. Sometimes y