

EXPLORATORY DRAWINGS

Opening Day: Saturday 15 January, 11am – 6pm
Exhibition Dates: 15 January – 26 February 2022

Maximillian William is proud to present *Exploratory Drawings*, an exhibition featuring drawings and photographs from sculptors and filmmakers. Though these artists are best known for their interventions in space, this exhibition offers a different perspective on their practices by presenting inventive works in the two-dimensional plane. These are not designs or documentation but autonomous works of art which are inextricably linked to the artists' better-known pieces through the reiteration of themes across mediums.

Donald Locke's sculptural ceramics draw from his lived experience, from his childhood in what was then the colony of British Guiana to training as an artist in Britain and ultimately leaving to find new opportunities in America. Likewise, his series of *Pork Knocker* drawings stem from personal and cultural history, telling the stories of prospectors – among them Locke's father – on the hunt for diamonds and gold on the alluvial plains of Guyana. While it was a way to make a living in a Guyana emerging into independence, this goldrush was not without its dangers – represented in Locke's foreboding drawings – and indicative of a wider history of colonialism and its legacy. Equally unafraid to take on the inheritance of colonialism, filmmaker Michelle Williams Gamaker presents a vitrine filled with various objects – scripts, drawings, archival and original photography made in collaboration with Ellen Jane Rogers – that relate to her film *The Bang Straws* (2021), which reimagines the casting process of Sidney Franklin's *The Good Earth* (1937), a film notorious for a white actor's racist portrayal of a Chinese character. Mixing stills from *The Good Earth* with ephemera from the set of *The Bang Straws*, Williams Gamaker centres the process of filmmaking, encouraging the audience to question the deliberate choices made by the original filmmakers.

Deconstructing and retelling stories is an approach shared by Huma Bhabha. A sci-fi and horror movie enthusiast, Bhabha often confronts real monstrosity in her work which explores themes of colonialism, war, and displacement. Plucked from Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, the figure in Bhabha's *Untitled* drawing is captured in the midst of the iconic howl. In her version, the figure is accompanied by a small cat, revealing Bhabha's central preoccupation with the equivalence and empathy that can be found between humans and non-humans. Empathy is also central to the work of Emii Alrai, an artist who thoughtfully considers the fate of artefacts held in museums to the point of anthropomorphising them. In her drawings, amorphous ink spots evoke animal-shaped vessels which fill museums, their torsos, legs and arms rendered in bodily browns and blood reds, as well as a rich aquamarine akin to the oxidised copper of an ancient artefact. They are punctured with arrows, referencing the romanticisation of wounds by the Pre-Raphaelites as well as calling to mind ancient gravesites and the inherent violence of conservation within the context of colonial collections.

TARWUK's sculptures interrogate trauma, violence, and loss. While their graphite, coloured pencil and watercolour drawings may seem formally more delicate, they are in fact just as visceral. A duo, TARWUK have found methods for collaborative drawing, either working on the same pieces simultaneously or passing them back and forth. Art

history echoes across the page: the abstractions of Hilma af Klint are occupied by a lone silhouette and a caressing group of folded subjects speak to Gustav Klimt's intertwined figures.

The shapes of Lydia Silvestri's sculptures reconstruct the body and expand the limitations of identity. Working in a range of materials, she had a particular mastery over gres, its flexibility allowing Silvestri to fashion sensuous organic forms which appear flecked with light, giving the illusion of more precious materials such as marble. These *Piccolo Incontri* drawings are a study of light and dark in relation to her figures. Their ambiguous bodily forms are the basis for studies of depth, opacity, and relationality.

Rosanne Robertson's drawings were made *en plein air* in the Cornish countryside. Working outside is fundamental to Robertson's multidisciplinary practice, capturing the feelings of belonging and freedom the artist finds in nature through performance, sculpture, and drawing. The muted colours and undulating abstract forms of these drawings represent fleeting moments – the movement of wind, water and earth, and the artist's relation to these elements. Similarly, Thomas Houseago seeks to capture the sublimity of nature on paper. Taking up the mantle of the European landscape tradition, Houseago's recent works on paper are suffused by an almost divine light: land and sea are bathed in a dazzling array of colours as the sun sets. Houseago's drawings are deeply personal and sincere, stemming from a period of healing; the subtle vulnerability of his monumental humanoid sculptures is writ large on paper.

The sculpture of Barbara Hepworth has become ubiquitous across our public spaces, inspiring multiple generations of sculptors – including many in this presentation. Hepworth's *Labyrinth (Project for Metal Sculpture)*, 1957, was made over a period of two years when the artist was creating notably looser drawings. Perhaps inspired by Tachisme, Zen Buddhism or calligraphy (some popular influences of the St Ives' set at the time), the drawings culminated in the creation of Hepworth's first bronze commission *Meridian*, 1958 - 60. The curved open form of this sculpture echoes the looser forms of her drawings.

An influence on Hepworth, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska was an artist whose prolific talent resulted in a vast and beautiful oeuvre of drawings and sculptures, despite his tragically early death. The subjects of his sculptures include dancers and animals ranging from naturalistic to extremely stylised in their depiction. Likewise, Gaudier-Brzeska's drawings give the impression of a young artist experimenting with styles ferociously, working through reams of paper to define his voice. At the beginning of his career and with little money, drawing would have been more accessible to Gaudier-Brzeska than sculpture. For this reason, the drawings provide an intimate insight into where his work might have advanced to.

Notes to Editors

The exhibition will be accompanied by a newly commissioned text by Isabel Seligman, Curator in the department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum.

Emii Alrai (b. 1993, Blackpool, United Kingdom) is a Leeds-based contemporary artist. Focusing on ancient Middle Eastern mythologies alongside personal oral histories of Iraq, Alrai interweaves narratives by forging artefacts and visualising residues of cultural collision. Often working at a large scale, Alrai creates sculptural installations that recall museological displays. Alrai obtained a BA in Fine Art and an MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies from the University of Leeds. Alrai has upcoming solo exhibitions at Eastside Projects, Birmingham and The Grundy, Blackpool, and has been commissioned by iniva and the Hepworth Wakefield to make a new work which will be accessioned by the Hepworth Wakefield this year as part of iniva's Future Collect programme.

Huma Bhabha (b. 1962, Karachi, Pakistan) is primarily known for her figurative and often monumental sculptures using striking combinations of materials. Employing a distinctly personal visual language, she explores the human figure, conjuring up a wealth of references: ancient artefacts, modernism and expressionism, sci-fi and horror movies and current events. In 2020, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art mounted her first major survey in Europe. Her work can be found in numerous public collections including MoMA, New York; Hirshhorn Museum, Washington DC; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, Ekebergpark, Oslo and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Michelle Williams Gamaker (b. 1979, London, UK) is a moving image and performance artist. Her work explores the fiction-making machine of 20th Century British and Hollywood studio films. Williams Gamaker's key focus is the development of 'fictional activism': the restoration of marginalised brown characters as central figures, who return in her works as vocal brown protagonists challenging the fictional injustices to which they have been historically consigned. Williams Gamaker obtained her PhD in Fine Art from Goldsmiths College, University of London in 2012. In 2020, Williams Gamaker was a joint winner of the Jarman Award. Her film *The Bang Straws* was selected for the 2021 BFI London Film Festival, Experimental Programme.

Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891 – 1915, b. St. Jean de Braye, France) was a sculptor best known for his rough-hewn style of direct carving. Arriving in London in 1911, with extraordinary speed he developed a personal style of abstract sculpture in which shapes are pared down to essentials. Although his career lasted only four years, and his work was appreciated during his lifetime only by a small circle, he is now seen as a significant influence on other 20th century sculptors. His work is held in the collections of Kettle's Yard, Cambridge; Tate, London; V&A, London; MoMa, New York and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Barbara Hepworth (1903 – 1975, b. Wakefield, Yorkshire) is one of the most important figures in the development of abstract sculpture in Britain, with a career that spanned five decades. A leading practitioner of direct carving, she combined a sensitivity to organic materials with a formal lyricism, evolving a radical new language of abstraction that explored relationships in space, colour and texture, as well as the human figure in the landscape. She studied at Leeds School of Art, continuing her studies in sculpture at the Royal College of Art. Her home and studio have been preserved at the Barbara Hepworth Home and Sculpture Garden, run by the Tate, and her work is held in numerous international collections including the Hepworth Wakefield; MoMa, New York and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Thomas Houseago (b. 1972, Leeds, UK) is a sculptor whose works have a striking ability to simultaneously convey states of power and vulnerability. The artist uses materials associated with classical and modernist sculpture such as carved wood, clay, plaster and bronze, as well as the less traditional steel rods, concrete and hessian, to emphatically reveal the creative processes that drive his practice. Houseago studied art at London's Central St Martin's college in the early 1990s before moving to Amsterdam to study at De Ateliers. His work was the subject of a major survey exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 2019.

Donald Locke (1930 - 2010, b. Stewartville, Guyana) was a sculptor, ceramicist, and painter. He studied in Britain at Bath Academy of Art and Edinburgh College. Following receipt of a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1979, he moved to America. Continuing to work across the Atlantic in Britain, America and Guyana, Locke was part of the creative set who shaped art after independence in Guyana, using the language of modernism allied with traditional motifs to help mould a new International style. His work is held in international collections including Tate, London; V&A Museum, London; Guyana National Collection, Georgetown and Studio Museum in Harlem, New York.

TARWUK (b. Dubrovnik and Zagreb, Croatia) is formed of New York-based artists Ivana Vukšić and Bruno Pogačnik Tremow who have been working together since 2014 under a shared name which signals an entwining of identity towards a common purpose. Working across drawings, sculptures, and paintings, their work interrogates trauma, violence, and loss. TARWUK's art calls to mind myriad sources, including dystopian science fiction, and the duo's experiences living through the Yugoslav Wars. Their first solo exhibition in Italy is currently on view at the Collezione Maramotti in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Recent solo exhibitions include Matthew Brown, Los Angeles; Martost Gallery, New York; 15 Orient, New York and Lauba, Zagreb.

Rosanne Robertson (b. 1984, Sunderland, UK) is a contemporary artist based in West Cornwall. Working across sculpture, performance and drawing, their multidisciplinary practice seeks to reinsert Queerness into the natural environment. Their sculptures often feature forms which are cast from distinct environments combined with corten steel elements - complicating the history of abstract sculpture with organic natural forms. They obtained their BA in Fine Art from the Manchester School of Art in 2010. In June 2021, Robertson unveiled their first public sculpture, commissioned for the 10th edition of Sculpture in the City and installed at London's iconic Gherkin skyscraper until Spring 2022. In June 2022, Robertson will take part in Yorkshire Sculpture Park's *Summer of Love*.

Lydia Silvestri (1929 - 2018, b. Colico, Italy) adopted the language of abstraction in order to rethink the tradition of sculpture, which over the centuries has codified and regulated society's representation of gender and the aesthetical canon. Silvestri used different materials - from gres, to terracotta, bronze, marble and crystal - to explore identity both in the sculptural medium as well as in sexuality. Through figures from biblical or mythological sources, the artist deconstructed the binary vision of male and female, proposing figures in transition, melting couples or hermaphrodites. Silvestri's sculptures and etchings were presented at the 2020 Art Quadriennale, Rome.

Maximillian William began with an itinerant model which allowed the gallery to gradually form a roster of contemporary artists. An impulse to expand alongside the advancing careers of these artists led to the establishment of a permanent gallery space in Fitzrovia in 2019. The gallery is artist-centric, collaborating closely with those it supports to build their platforms. On occasion, the gallery seeks to produce exhibitions that highlight those

who have influenced its creative community, with the aim of presenting pivotal figures to a new generation. Alongside exhibition making, the gallery is committed to publishing, producing a range of publications from artist books to exhibition catalogues and monographs. The distribution of literature is key to the gallery's commitment to improving accessibility to contemporary art. Publications by the gallery are held in the archives of MoMA and Tate.

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