



RBS Bursary Awards 2012

Foreword

Many years ago I studied at the Slade School of Fine Art. Located in the basement, the sculpture department was regarded as the haunt of hairy northerners (a beard was de rigeur), who had more brawn than brains. Painting students were urbane sophisticates (or so they thought) – clean-shaven, sensitive southerners (who were often well-connected). In all departments, female students were viewed mainly as decorative fodder – love interest for the boys. I'm exaggerating, of course, but there's enough truth in my caricature to highlight the prejudices pervading the London art scene of the 1960s.

Fortunately times have changed. The boundaries between disciplines have become increasingly blurred as artists shift from two to three dimensions or from one medium to another; they may paint on canvas for one project, do a performance, take photographs or make a video for another and cast an object in bronze for a third. Consequently, sculpture has become an umbrella term encompassing almost anything from made or found objects to ephemeral happenings and digital recordings.

Although traditional definitions are no longer adequate, the idiotic prejudices I recall have not disappeared so much as been inverted. The days may have gone when painting was for gentlemen and, by association with manual labour, activities like carving, chiselling and casting were looked down upon, yet there are those (with selective memories) who profess nostalgia for a time when manual dexterity was considered vital for an artist's credibility.

Some of this year's award winners relish the making process. 'I love working with materials', says Saad Qureshi. 'It gives me time to play... I'm such a materials person.' But others opt for a less hands-on approach. Myles Painter has begun using found footage in his films and recently has adopted the role of producer, inviting others to respond to television series such as 'Grand Designs'.

If judgements based largely on skill are no longer appropriate, what criteria are relevant when assessing a work of art? The most sensible course of action, I would suggest, is to set aside all assumptions and allow the artists to establish their own frame of reference and instigate a dialogue on their own terms, since the artist's intentions always inform the end product.

Pablo de Laborde describes his work as 'a subtle conversation between performance and sculpture that is suggestive of time and motion.' While a student at Falmouth, his work was primarily performance based. In 'The Weight of a Choice' sand is housed in a long tube with carved ends; resting the tube across his shoulders, the artist tilts from side to side, enabling the sand to pour onto the floor in little mounds. Since then, the balance has shifted between the performative and sculptural aspects of the work. 'Metronome' is a four-sided ladder attached to rockers. On video, two men climb the frame and rock back and forth; instead of completing the work, the performance is an optional extra, an open-ended exploration of the structure's potential. In 'Link', a segment of bicycle tire is filled with wooden blocks. Although rearrangement is possible, this latest sculpture seems content with its present form. Time and motion have been stilled – temporarily at least.

My partner collected things, like lead formers and cucumber straighteners, that are no longer useful. While he knew the identity of each item, since his death, I'm left guessing what they were for. Imagine a similar scenario a hundred years from now and you'll appreciate the mixture of familiarity and strangeness inherent in the work of Rebecca Griffiths. Made from brightly coloured plastics, resins, plywood or rubber, sculptures reminiscent of packaging and consumer goods are given titles such as 'Service Objects', 'Turbo' and 'Spray Nozzle'. Described by her as 'archetypes of modern living', they appear to be the last word in elegance, sophistication and desirability; but because they are hand-made and their function is obscure, they frustrate expectations and unsettle our relationship with the myriad products on which we increasingly rely.

The key to James Irwin's work is paranoia generated by technology that spies on us and invades our privacy. Not content simply to switch off his computer, he has created a space impermeable to Wi-Fi communication. '343,000 cubic centimeters' is a cube made from radar-absorbent material impenetrable to the internet. Hung at head height, 'Vacuum contained within a glass sphere' is a glass phial the same volume as an average human brain, similarly free from contamination. Perfect peace comes at a price, though; total isolation is lifeless and sterile. But Irwin has not given up on dialogue. Based on the Kilo Flag from the International Code of Symbols, 'Open to Communication' acknowledges a desire for contact. Split horizontally into a yellow and blue band, the panel signals a readiness to communicate, but in the here and now rather than via the world-wide web.

Do the claims made by manufacturers add up? What does it mean to measure an engine's performance in terms of horsepower? The desire for answers led William Mackrell to harness two shire horse to a Deux Chevaux and film their efforts to pull the vehicle. A torch claiming to equal the light of 1,000 candles provoked him to see how bright that would be; but 1,000 night lights burning in close proximity generate so much heat that the flames are extinguished. Futility is the name of the game, part of the attraction. '90 minutes' was inspired by the discovery that Saddam Hussein's son, Uday used torture to improve the performance of Iraq's football team. When they lost a match, he made them practice with a concrete ball. The stratagem was stupid as well cruel, since the ball caused injuries that lessened their chances. Mackrell's volunteers played until they were unable to continue. Dry humour, black comedy; these daft explorations pay tribute to human endeavour, which meets with failure as often as success.

Janne Malmros refashions found objects into exquisite new creations. In 'Outfit' the skeletal remains of a dress once patterned with flowers hangs on a wall; freed from the garment, the blossoms march across the space like triumphant wallpaper celebrating their release. 'Hirschsprung Centenary Wreath' consists of bows, cravats and bow ties

found in nineteenth century portraits from the Hirschsprung Collection, Copenhagen. Combined into a wreath, they seem to mourn the loss of elegance and frippery. In 'Shifts and Contrivances', segments cut from a repeating pattern form little boats that 'float' on the surface. The design is a blueprint; two dimensions expand into three and lay claim to the surrounding space.

Imagine a building made of fabric. Katie McGown's 'The kind of place I could build us' is a tower block made from cheese cloth stuffed with straw. Resting against the wall, the abject little model sags disconsolately as though saddened by its inadequacy, while shedding stuffing like a discarded toy. Frank Stella meets Claes Oldenburg in 'Reconfigured Folds', two triangular shapes linked by a folded length of striped material. The clean lines and hard edges of Stella's crisp geometry have been replaced by the soft contours of stitched cloth and stuffing. The industrial precision and cool anonymity of Minimalist art and architecture have been domesticated; such drastic make-overs may be more user-friendly, but risk being useless. Heroic phallicism is fun to ridicule, but difficult to oust.

A spiral staircase keels over in the corner of the room; the central pole has come adrift from the ceiling and, without a handrail to hold them in place, the spindles splay out at odd angles. The staircase leads nowhere, which is just as well since, cast in black wax, it is too fragile to climb. Titled 'The Descent', Nika Neelova's stairs suggest symbolic rather than actual movement – atrophy and decay rather than physical motion. Although the title reminds one of Duchamp's painting 'Nude Descending a Staircase', the reference is not to art history so much as to personal and collective memory. Black is the predominant colour of sculptures in which charred wood, distressed mirrors, threadbare flags and clappers separated from bells suggest mourning, and the terrible silence induced by trauma.

Myles Painter explores the urban environment as it appears mediated by film, television and the imagination. The American conceptualist, Lawrence Weiner writes instructions for actions that may or may not be carried out. 'In Search of

The Lawrence Weiner Statements' shows Painter trawling London's streets, along with Joseph Popper, for evidence of their impact. They accept a metal pole and some road works as likely responses to the statement "A removal of an amount of earth from the ground. The intrusion into this hole of a standard processed material". Weiner's influence is everywhere, it seems. The film is a spoof on Tacita Dean's 'Trying to Find the Spiral Jetty' (which shows Dean touring Utah looking for Robert Smithson's submerged artwork); with its modern jazz soundtrack, it also parodies tributes that make overblown claims about their subjects. In 'The Spectator' found footage is re-edited to follow a man making his way through Los Angeles to a ball game. When he breaks into a prohibited area, his presence immediately appears sinister, yet a caption describes him as 'a barely visible trace, merely a lonely negotiation of the space between start and finish'. The environment is both a screen and a mirror; interpretation is all.

Born in Bradford of Pakistani parents, Saad Qureshi uses paintings, sculptures and installations to explore issues of identity and belonging. 'A Sort of Loss' consists of items redolent of a time, place and culture. Black thread from a sewing machine unravels across a prayer rug in a tangled mass resembling human hair. Sprinkled over the machine like dust, turmeric fills the air with a pungent aroma. Appealing to smell, touch, taste and, by implication, sound, the installation is like an act of mourning for a vanishing way of life. Inspired by reports of a suicide bombing at a mosque in Afghanistan, 'Quicken' is a nine metre section of a ruined. The violence evoked by the charred structure is offset by the faint sound of a heartbeat recorded at an infant's birth. Order and chaos, carnage and renewal; opposite impulses battle for supremacy. 'Consortium' is one of a series of tableaux based on memories recounted by strangers. Charred wood suggestive of irrevocable loss creates an aura of melancholy tempered by the balm of nostalgia.

For David Turley anything – from shopping lists to family albums and broken bottles – is raw material. In his installations, the traces we leave behind are used to shed

light on the way we structure our lives and create meaning. 'We spend our lives', he writes, 'searching for something and dedicate every moment to the fulfilment of our dreams.' As a lapsed catholic, for him religious belief and the rituals surrounding it are an ongoing source of fascination. A pair of crutches titled 'Supports for Inadequacy' lean against the wall beneath drawings of crutches on old wrapping paper. Inspiration came from a basilica in Montreal where abandoned crutches testify to the healing powers of faith. 'I enjoyed this idea,' writes Turley, 'of replacing (physical support) with belief in a God, a mental support.... We believe in all sorts of things and hold on to hope and belief because honestly, we truly have no fucking idea. Where are we going? What will the weather be like? Perhaps I should take a coat?'

Damien Hirst, another lapsed catholic, argues that 'The only reason we do anything is to search for the answer to those questions: why, where, what, who?' Paraphrasing Gauguin, he asks 'Where do we come from, where are we going, and is there a reason?' Whether through humour, poetry or drama, the winners of this year's RBS Bursary Awards address one of more of these questions. And in so doing, their work reflects the enormous diversity of activities that come under the rubric of sculpture.

Some argue that the term sculpture is so all-encompassing as to be meaningless. I disagree; the ability to adapt to changing circumstances gives sculpture its enduring relevance. While painting risks obsolescence because of the narrowness of its definition and practice, sculpture has never seemed more healthy or more vibrant. By embracing diversity, the Society demonstrates that there is no house style dictating the choice of successful applicants and thereby confirms its ongoing relevance to today's practitioners.

Sarah Kent
October 2012



▲
Pablo De Laborde Lascaris
Link 2012
wood, rubber

Pablo De Laborde Lascaris

Concerned with the static tradition of sculpture in relation to impermanence or uncertainty in everyday life, I explore primordial artefacts, games and toys within my practice. My work aims to produce an exchange between ideas by conveying a subtle conversation between performance and sculpture that is suggestive of time and motion.

'Link,' begins with a wooden chair and a rubber tyre. The chair is deconstructed into small segments and as each piece is placed within the tyre, it causes it to expand. The relationship between the objects is caught in a balance between motion and stability, displacement and home.



Pablo De Laborde Lascaris graduated with a BA in Fine Art from University College Falmouth in 2011 and has participated in several group exhibitions in Mexico and UK since 1996. Most recently he has had a solo exhibition at Christ's Hospital in 2012. He is currently artist in resident at Christ's Hospital School, Horsham until 2013.

www.pablolab.co.uk



Rebecca Griffiths graduated with a MA in Sculpture from the Royal College of Art in 2011 and has had solo exhibitions at Flowers Gallery, London (selected by Alison Wilding), 2011 and Proctor Gallery, Cornwall, 2009. She has exhibited in several group exhibitions and undertaken artist residencies at Cornwall College and Spike Island.

www.rebeccagriffiths.com



James Irwin graduated with a MFA in Computational Studio Arts from Goldsmiths College in 2010. He has had three solo exhibitions in London including at Space in Between, 2011 and has participated in several group exhibitions since 2005. His work is also in a number of private collections.

www.jamesirwin.net



William Mackrell graduated with a BA in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art and Design in 2005 and has since exhibited extensively nationally and internationally in solo and group exhibitions including MOCA London, 2012; Dundee Contemporary Arts, 2012 and Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts, Melbourne, 2010.

www.williammackrell.com



Janne Malmros graduated with a MFA in Sculpture from the Slade School of Fine Art in 2009. She has since participated in solo and group exhibitions nationally and internationally with two major solo exhibitions in Denmark and London in 2013 and 2014. Her work is featured in several collections including the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection.

www.jannemalmros.com



Katie McGown graduated with a MFA in Sculpture from Glasgow School of Art in 2007 and has participated in group exhibitions in the UK, Europe, USA and Canada. She has been recipient of several awards including Sir Harry Barnes Award and the Glasgow Visual Artist Grants Scheme.

www.katiemcgown.com



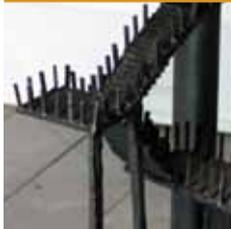
Nika Neelova graduated with a MFA in Sculpture from the Slade School of Fine Art in 2010 and has exhibited extensively nationally and internationally in solo and group exhibitions. She was Artist in Resident at Merzbarn Foundation, UK and recipient of a number of awards including, The Saatchi Gallery and Channel 4 New Sensations Prize, 2010.

www.nikaneelova.com



Myles Painter graduated with a BA in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art and Design in 2008 and has exhibited in group exhibitions in Europe and the UK. Most recently his work featured in the Young British Art II exhibition in Zurich curated by Ryan Gander and at the Whitechapel Open Screening. He was Artist in Resident at A Curriculum, Liverpool, 2010.

www.mylespainter.com



Saad Qureshi graduated with a MFA in Painting from the Slade School of Fine Art in 2010 and has exhibited internationally in group shows most recently at Armsden and Patrick Heide Contemporary Art. He is shortlisted for the Celeste Prize 2012 and was recently represented at the Vienna Art Fair by Gazelli Art House. His first solo exhibition featured at Gazelli, Mayfair, 2012.

www.saadqureshi.com



David Turley graduated with an MA in Art in Public Spaces from RIMT University, Melbourne in 2009 and has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions across Australia and Japan. He has collaborated on a number of performance projects and residencies with artist Korin Gath since 2003.

www.davidturley.com.au

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OF **SCULPTORS**