

# ***Sculpting Lives* podcast transcript**

## **Series 2, Episode 6: Making Sculpture Public**

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- Kate McMillan: The idea of a sculpture symbolising something is perhaps a really old-fashioned way of visualising our histories.
- Bee Rowlatt: Instead of putting a person on a pedestal in the Victorian and traditional way, this is a celebration of an idea. It represents the birth of a movement.
- Hettie Judah: There are so few women; there's so little diversity in the public sculpture. It starts to feel like the structure of the city you're living in doesn't represent you or anything you believe in.
- Natalie Rudd: It's fascinating to see, even in quite recent survey exhibitions of modern British sculpture, that women are barely represented.
- Sarah Turner: Welcome to Sculpting Lives, a podcast with me, Sarah Turner.
- Jo Baring: And me, Jo Baring. So today's episode is our bumper episode. Isn't it, Sarah?
- Sarah Turner: That's right. This episode is about the representation of women in public space, both on our streets and in our exhibitions.
- Jo Baring: And also in our debates. Sculpture over the last 18 months to 2 years has become a really hot topic, ferociously debated, and people are becoming very interested in who is represented and why they're represented. So, to start this episode off, we went to one of the most high profile sites for public sculpture and statuary in the UK, Parliament Square, where in 2018, a sculpture of Millicent Fawcett by the artist Gillian Wearing was unveiled...
- Jo Baring: We're just walking into Parliament Square now. We're here to see the first sculpture of a woman by a woman in Parliament Square.
- Sarah Turner: Yeah, it's the statue to Millicent Garrett Fawcett.
- Jo Baring: But Sarah, where is she? I can't see her.
- Sarah Turner: She is over there. Can you see? Just off that corner.

Jo Baring: Oh, she's tiny. She's much smaller. So we're just walking past the massive Ivor Roberts-Jones of Churchill, big Lloyd George, Palmerston.

Sarah Turner: Yeah. She's surrounded by these titans of British parliamentary history. We've got Westminster Abbey on one side, the Houses of Parliament behind us.

Jo Baring: It's quite a lot to contend with.

Sarah Turner: Yeah. I mean...

Jo Baring: And here she is. So, what are we looking at? We've got a figure of her. It's a figurative image of Millicent Fawcett, she's got a banner.

Sarah Turner: Yes. "Courage calls to Courage Everywhere." One of the slogans, the mottoes that was used in the campaign for suffrage, often used by women who went out on marches, these demos. Fawcett was very prominent in organising mass demonstrations in the early 20th century. These huge suffrage marches that really captured the public imagination and brought the struggle for suffrage out onto the street and used some very powerful iconography.

Jo Baring: Now, as you were up close. When you're further away from it, it does look quite similar to the other works in the square in that it's dark brown patina. It's figurative. It's on a-

Sarah Turner: On a plinth.

Jo Baring: On a plinth. Actually, now that we're up close, A, it's got the banner, which makes it different, but B, it's got these incredible photographs inlaid or on tiles inlaid into the plinth of other women involved in the suffragette movement.

Sarah Turner: Yeah. I think the photographs are printed onto ceramic tiles. We're getting this mixed media work of art here. So we see on the face of it, that it's a pretty traditional monument, and then you can see that Wearing is using different techniques and is using digital technology to disrupt the formal logic and iconographies of the monument and make this kind of perhaps more of a collective history as well. This is not just a memorial or monument to Fawcett, but we've got all these other women, these other names, some well-known or perhaps better-known within the suffrage movement: people like Charlotte Despard, and then other names that perhaps are not so familiar, like the artist Mary Lowndes who again, helped design the banners and the costumes that were often used to make these suffrage marches quite spectacular visual events.

- Jo Baring: It's interesting to think what does it say about us that it was only in 2018 that the first sculpture of a woman was unveiled here?
- Sarah Turner: I mean, it's really interesting to think about how these works of art resonate now. I mean, it's very quiet today in this square for reasons to do with the current situation with COVID. It's not as busy as it normally would be. There's us and probably about three, four other people here.
- Sarah Turner: But I think for me, the question is do these sculptures still speak to people? What difference has this work of art made? I feel it's important to honour these women in some ways, but is the mixed mode of the sculpture on the plinth, the relevant one for 2018? It's 2020 now, the very end of 2020. For the 21st century, do they still speak? Do we need them? And I think it's a really open question. I think some days I'd probably say yes, other days, I might say no and think about other ways of activating history that perhaps feels a little bit more participatory, a little bit more collaborative. I guess, in some ways they do offer a meeting point.
- Jo Baring: I think what 2020 has shown us actually is that there is still a huge place for sculpture in the public realm and that people feel that they have a role in the decision-making about that, about who is memorialised, why they are. Interesting, again, as you say about the technique. Is the plinth still relevant? Is it still important to have a figurative piece on a plinth in that kind of Victorian tradition? There are other ways of displaying sculpture now. There are other ways of commemorating, memorialising, and is that more relevant to us?
- Sarah Turner: But it feels as well that it's either when a sculpture is unveiled, like we have seen with the Wollstonecraft statue or when they're removed, that their histories are reignited and brought back into prominence. For, let's just say, 364 days of the year, they are ignored and everyone just kind of goes around them and those stones or the bronze remain silent. It's at various points in their life that meaning is made again around them.
- Hettie Judah: Hello. I'm Hettie Judah, and I'm an art and writer. So much public sculpture possibly just gets overlooked. I mean, quite often you're used to walking past monuments every day, and you only notice them if they've got a traffic cone on their head. Then you suddenly start to realise that this is the built-in environment that surrounds you. You start to question who these people are that are essentially the structure of the city that you're walking around. When you start to understand a little bit more about the history and to realise that perhaps these people had derived their money from questionable enterprises, and then you also start to realise that there are so few

women, there's so little diversity in the public sculpture. It starts to feel like the structure of the city you're living in doesn't represent you or anything you believe in.

Sarah Turner: It's interesting, isn't it, that sculpture in some ways has started to speak again or that conversations are happening around it. In some ways, it feels just very, this issue is very alive, very pertinent at the moment.

Hettie Judah: It is. What's been so interesting has been actually seeing the furore that's come up around various new commissions. While the works themselves may be controversial, what's actually been really exciting is that it's brought the figures under discussion into the public discourse. We're suddenly having heated conversations about long-dead feminists; or long-dead, unpleasant slavers as well. I think bringing historical figures into discussion like this is actually really enlivening. I think it brings history to life and it engages everyone a little more in discussion of the environment that we live in as well.

Jo Baring: I think particularly if you think about the sculpture for Mary Wollstonecraft, I think it was something like the BBC article on her engendered about a million hits. So, it's exactly what you were saying, that it does bring these people to life. I suppose if it had been a rather traditional bronze representational sculpture of her, we wouldn't be talking about her really, would we?

Hettie Judah: No, I think you are completely right. I think whatever one's personal feelings about the aesthetics of the work, it's been incredibly successful in changing the conversation, creating a kind of national conversation about Mary Wollstonecraft, who is a very important figure, but she's possibly not such a well-known figure.

Sarah Turner: Do you think sculpture can cope? In some ways, is it kind of struggling? Its traditions, its history, is it struggling to cope with this weight of contemporary discourse?

Hettie Judah: I think we've got all kinds of things that we still need to discuss about as well. I mean, I think there's this question of representation, which I think then often and becomes overly literal, so you end up with things that very literally represent one single figure. Then you get a counter argument about the aesthetics and whether this is a good piece of art. I think it's actually really important and quite exciting to suddenly have all of these questions becoming lively again.

Jo Baring: Speaking of lively debate, after we saw the Gillian Wearing statue, we crossed town to find a sculpture that made international headlines and was the subject of a sculpture storm at the end of 2020.

Sarah Turner: We met the brilliant Bee Rowlatt at who chaired a campaign for a statue to be erected to commemorate Mary Wollstonecraft, who's often described as the mother of feminism. She was an 18th century philosopher. Bee spoke to us in a very busy London square in Stoke Newington...

Sarah Turner: So Bee, tell us who you are and what your connection is to this sculpture.

Bee Rowlatt: Oh, well, nice to meet you. My name's Bee Rowlatt. I'm a writer, a journalist. I ran the Mary on the Green campaign, which was pretty unheard of for about 10 years, and then suddenly everybody heard of us. That was a bit of a shock when this Maggi Hambling sculpture was unveiled. Then we were propelled into the middle of an international media storm.

Sarah Turner: Was it international?

Bee Rowlatt: Oh, god, it went around the world.

Sarah Turner: Did it?

Bee Rowlatt: It was absolutely everywhere. We were fielding calls from all around the world. So, it wasn't just your angry journalists of North London. It went way beyond there. We just couldn't keep up. We're a small team of volunteers with jobs and families of our own.

Sarah Turner: Were you quite surprised by the reaction?

Bee Rowlatt: Well, my friends did say, "What on earth did you expect?" I mean, Maggi Hambling is not your kind of usua...l and she's not a pedestrian boring artist.

Sarah Turner: No. Some of her other, well, public sculpture, especially the one in Aldeburgh, the shell, has met with mixed reactions. So, [crosstalk 00:11:34]

Bee Rowlatt: Mixed reactions.

Sarah Turner: ... You have that history.

Bee Rowlatt: And then of course there's the nakedness thing. With the themes of feminism, there is a lot of contested ground there. So, perhaps I should've anticipated some of that. But a lot of the hate actually, sadly came from what I felt was a real misrepresentation of the artwork. We're standing here in this bustling, small but really very well-used

park in really quite Central London. There's traffic going all the way around. There's a really heavy footfall, masses of pigeons, school kids, office workers, people coming through. And there's this extraordinary work of art hanging in the middle of it, against the backdrop of the trees.

Sarah Turner: Can you just tell us a little bit about why the sculpture's here? What's the relationship between Wollstonecraft and Newington Green?

Bee Rowlatt: Yes, so going back to before. Mary Wollstonecraft lived and worked around here. She went to church there in that Unitarian chapel. She has her own pew. It's a wonderful space and it's just been reopened. She set up a school there. Do you see that green plaque? She died in Richard Price's house, which was there. It's apparently the oldest terraced house in London. This was her manor. This is where she was radicalised. She fell in with radical dissenters of London. This wasn't even London. It was a village back then, but this is where Mary Wollstonecraft became Mary Wollstonecraft and began her extraordinary career, which changed the world, effectively.

Bee Rowlatt: She was there, writing at a time of revolutions and she wrote two very revolutionary texts. One, the most famous one, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, 1792, was the prototype, the blueprint, if you like, for feminism. But two years before that, she wrote Rights of Man, A Vindication of the Rights of Man. That sets out the architecture of what we now call human rights. So she was this huge, immense pioneer and the missing piece from our political landscape, if you like, because no one had ever heard of her, which made me completely crazy. That was the spur to keeping us going on this campaign for all those years.

Sarah Turner: So you set up the Mary on the Green campaign-

Bee Rowlatt: No.

Sarah Turner: -10 years ago?

Bee Rowlatt: That was set up by Newington Green Action Group, who are the people that made this park into such a wonderful space. Then I came on board. I was in the process of writing a book about Mary Wollstonecraft called In Search of Mary available from all good bookshops. Sorry.

Jo Baring: Quiet down.

Sarah Turner: Yeah, get it in there!

Bee Rowlatt: Commercial break over... I became a fully-fledged Wollstonecraft fanatic. I mean, she's always been under my skin, but it was really the fact that people didn't know who she was.

Jo Baring: Can you tell us a bit about the process of fundraising, but particularly about commissioning this work? How it worked in terms of artist submissions and who was involved in that decision-making process?

Bee Rowlatt: From the outset, there were lots of ideas floating around. Initially, we thought perhaps to hold a public competition. We took advice from numerous sorts of arts commissioner-type people and were informed that it would be best to devise a short list and run it from that and actually pay artists for their work. We drew from the wider community in selecting ideas around just famous artists that we thought would be interested. That was about a long list of around 30, which we then whittled down to a short list.

Bee Rowlatt: That was just amongst Newington Green Action Group and the Mary on the Green campaign. That short list was then put to a panel of judges. I was chair of the judges, but I didn't have a vote. So, I sort of had to push the judges very hard on the decision. It was supposed to be a short list of three, but unfortunately one of the artists was unable to make that timeframe. So, it was only two in the end. And-

Sarah Turner: One of whom was a man?

Bee Rowlatt: One of whom was a man, Martin Jennings. Great artist. He's done some fantastic, in my opinion, very feminist and wonderful work. So both of the offers were, I thought, outstanding but very, very different, very different. Maggi Hambling's, the judges just thought it was completely pioneering. It was completely different.

Bee Rowlatt: I have to say, in the 10 years of campaigning, I personally have been on a bit of a journey because I started from the position of, "I can't believe there's all these statues of men. Why aren't there more statues of women? Mary Wollstonecraft was amazing. She should have a statue." But, I think, thinking around public art has changed a lot. I've been on a bit of a journey. I've been following thinking around public art. I think that there are so many more celebratory ways to remember an idea rather than elevate an individual. I think this is a really fascinating exploration of, instead of putting a person on a pedestal in the Victorian and traditional way, this is a celebration of an idea. It represents the birth of a movement.

Sarah Turner: Did you have a discussion about whether she should be represented in figural form?

Bee Rowlatt: Well, that was what the other artwork was. It was completely traditional. It was Mary Wollstonecraft in the dress of the time, holding a quill with some books. That was a completely traditional representational artwork.

Sarah Turner: Okay. And the title suggests that this is for Mary, not of her. Was that important to you?

Bee Rowlatt: Well, a lot of people miss that. You'd be amazed. So part of theory was-

Sarah Turner: Oh, we're professionals. You know, we're-

Bee Rowlatt: Thank you.

Jo Baring: We noticed it straight away.

Bee Rowlatt: Thank you. I had to repeat that till I was blue in the face for several days in a row. It's not Mary Wollstonecraft's body. That's really important. It's not a naked sculpture of Mary Wollstonecraft. It's a sculpture for her. It honours her pioneering spirit. She herself wrote in a letter to her sister when she was young, "I am the first of a new genus."

Bee Rowlatt: She was sort of quite transgressive, pioneering, a complete rebel writer. I think this is much more appropriate than a traditional Victorian... I mean, the Victorians hated Mary Wollstonecraft, and she wouldn't have put herself on a pedestal for starters. When you read her work, that's very much not what she's about. She wasn't writing to celebrate herself. She wrote and worked for others.

Jo Baring: Was it important to you that the artist who was successful in the commission was a woman?

Bee Rowlatt: No, not necessarily. I know it was important for other people, but I think men feminists are just as important as women feminists. I was really glad it was Maggi. I think Maggi's a wonderful artist. But no, that wasn't part of the brief.

Jo Baring: How do you feel? You said it's got an international storm. How do you feel about the furore that it's engendered?

Bee Rowlatt: It was very interesting. There was an immense gap between the online hatred and the experience of people coming into this park and actually engaging with this work of art. What people saw on their phones and on their laptops was basically a pair of tits and a fanny. They were scandalised as a result. They were like, "How could you?"

Probably, I would've felt the same way if that's all I'd seen, but then you come here and there's just groups of people, school kids, families. You approach this art; you're drawn in; you move around it; you read the inscription. The last thing you see is the quote-unquote rude bits. There's this sort of very tragic echo of what happened to Wollstonecraft in her own life.

Bee Rowlatt: When she died, she was completely hammered in the public domain. She was trashed. Her legacy was rendered toxic because of facts about her life: She attempted to take her own life; she had a child out of wedlock. I feel like some of these armchair critics that had a go at this artwork did the same thing. They got obsessed with and they zoomed in on the rude bits to the exclusion of the bigger picture, which is just what happened to Wollstonecraft.

Sarah Turner: So, in some ways it's quite appropriate that a controversial figure has a controversial statue. I mean, maybe it would do her a disservice if it was kind of fairly boring and not commented on because-

Bee Rowlatt: If it was boring and not commented on, that would've been quite sad. Actually, there is a silver lining, which is that the searches on the Wollstonecraft Wikipedia page, which is an outstanding page, went up 20 fold. A million people alone read the BBC article about Wollstonecraft.

Jo Baring: That's incredible.

Sarah Turner: That's amazing.

Bee Rowlatt: There was an unprecedented surge of new articles about Wollstonecraft. That's never happened before.

Sarah Turner: So it worked in your favour, in a way, didn't it?

Bee Rowlatt: That's what I wanted. I wanted them to know who she is.

Jo Baring: Yeah, that's exactly right. I suppose, going back to the origins of the Mary on the Green campaign, it was getting more people to know about her, more people to talk about her and think about her legacy.

Bee Rowlatt: Exactly.

Sarah Turner: Do you think that the conditions of lockdown had something to do the press reaction as well? Because we've all become... In a way, we can visit Newington Green, whether we can or can't.

Bee Rowlatt: I suppose we're literally armchair critics.

Sarah Turner: We are literally armchair critics. That's you-

Bee Rowlatt: Maybe.

Sarah Turner: -all consuming news digitally and in a way it allowed that kind of response.

Bee Rowlatt: Yeah. We've just all gone mad, haven't we? We're so angry about everything that... I did sort of think, "Blimey, people. We've just had the American elections. We've just had Corona. We've got Brexit." And you know, everyone's this angry about a work of art in a small park in London. What's going on?

Sarah Turner: But sculpture's become controversial, hasn't it?

Bee Rowlatt: Sculpture has become controversial. I, for one, absolutely delight in that. There's one other argument that's kicking around about public art, which I find really compelling. I think a lot of people thought that the government had paid for this. They didn't. The government paid for lots of... There was government money, for example, for the Fawcett statue and some of the other wonderful statues that I completely celebrate. This one, we fundraised every penny. It wasn't public money. But had it been public money, that would still be a good thing.

Jo Baring: This is obviously a very public sculpture, but there's also personal people behind it, particularly thinking about Maggi Hambling herself. Have you spoken to Maggi about the reaction?

Bee Rowlatt: Yeah. Yeah. We've been in communication. I don't want to speak on Maggi's behalf. She's a very tough woman and she's been here before, and she's seen this narrative art where people hate it and then they grow to love it. I do think that's going to be the case with this, at least I hope so.

Sarah Turner: So Jo, it's not just in the daily press or on social media feeds that the representation of women has become a really hot topic of debate, but it's also the subject of new academic research.

Jo Baring: Absolutely. Someone called Kate McMillan, who is an artist and academic at King's College, London is the author of something called the Freelands Foundation report on the Representation of Female Artists in Britain, which is an annual search project. So, we were really interested to learn more about her findings. We went to speak to her

Kate McMillan: Over the last 12, 18 months where we've seen particularly around the Black Lives Matter movement, statues becoming this real focus of public outcry for inequality. I think the idea of a sculpture symbolising something is perhaps a really old-fashioned way of visualising our histories. Interestingly, the legislation that's just been brought through Parliament around protests, there is a specific clause in there that talks about much higher penalties for defacing public sculptures. So, there is a recognition by the government that they are this focal point, that they're very, very powerful. It is really nice to see different institutions responding to this moment of perhaps self-reflection a little bit differently. Certainly at King's, where I work, the statue at Guy's Hospital came under discussion and things are afoot with that, and the Museum of London is changing the sculptures that are used at their Docklands site in London.

Kate McMillan: So, I think institutions are aware that what they memorialise in sculptures is reflective of who they're saying they are as an organisation and that there is a mismatch there with a lot of the sculptures that we have in public places. I think Britain, certainly as an Australian, I feel that Britain has really been dragged, kicking and screaming to reflect on their colonial history, which of course gender is one story in that. Certainly, in Australia, 80% of the population or 80% of the convict population were male right into the 19th century. So, the role of Britain in the gendering of Australia is another discussion. But this issue of history, of course, is really important to the debate of visual artists and female artists because we are the residue of this history today. We're attached to it; we're dragging it. We're dragging it through the public square, as it were, on our shoulders. It's very, very heavy.

Jo Baring: We're also considering representation of women in the public realm, so particularly in sculpture and sculptures by women in the public realm. It'd be interesting to hear from you in terms of both your research and your own practise as an artist about how you feel about that representation.

Kate McMillan: I'm in this unusual position where I work in a cultural industries department at King's College, London. I'm the contemporary art specialist. I don't work in an art school. So, I'm really aware of other conversations going on around gender inequality in other parts of the cultural industries. They're just so much worse in the visual arts sector, then change is so much slower. It's really prompted questions around why that is. Why is it so much slower in our sector than it is, for example, in the music industry or other areas of the CCI? I think... Well, it's quite obvious when you give a little bit of thought to it, but essentially it's to do with investment, right? You've got big museum

collections; you've got private collectors, lots of people who are financially invested in the idea of maintaining the status quo. I think you can't turn around overnight and say, "Lee Krasner's just as financially valuable as Jackson Pollock." These are huge histories that people have invested in. So, that's, I think why you really get this very slow change rate. I mean, it's going to be decades before we've reached gender parity.

Sarah Turner: The release of the report this year seems to have really hit a nerve. Why do you think that is?

Kate McMillan: It's really interesting because I think what I've been really having conversations with the Freelands Foundation doing, who have obviously been very committed over time to looking at this data, and of course data is really important, but one of the things that I've been able to, I guess, think about a lot more is the triangulation of different kind of research methods. So, the data's only interesting if it leads us to a conversation about why the data looks like that.

Kate McMillan: I also undertook a series of interviews with about a dozen female gallerists and also people like Frances Morris around the statistics that I was finding. What came up again and again in every single interview was the fact that what we're seeing, certainly an art school where 65% or 70% of artists are women and then speak to female artists in their 20s, and they're sort of like, "Great!" I can remember thinking it myself. "Great. Things are going to change. I'm getting just as many opportunities as the guys." But what these gallerists were really saying to me was that in the early 30s, often when your career's taking off, when you're thinking about representation by commercial galleries, a lot of female artists are having children. A lot of male artists are having children too, but because of the way that society is structured, where women are predominantly providing most of the childcare, this, for many galleries, is seen as a risky time to take on artists.

Kate McMillan: There is this sense of one gallerists said to me, "Well, they could just," and this was a female, very well-known female gallerist said to me, "They could just pack up shop and move to the countryside and have babies. It's a real risk for me and my business if I take on artists at that time of their career." So that really shocked me.

Kate McMillan: When we had the opportunity to commission some additional essays for this previous Freelands Foundation report, and I had been in conversation with Hettie Judah about some of the findings from these interviews, I said, "It would be really great if you could write an essay on the role of motherhood and female artists." She interviewed 50 artists from across the country, compiled it all into this extraordinary essay that she wrote around the impacts of motherhood.

Hettie Judah: Well, I've obviously spent quite a lot of the last year doing a piece of research, looking particularly into the impact of motherhood on artist's careers. I think that's a field that's not really been touched on that much. There have been a number of really excellent studies about gender and balance in the art and the lack of representation of women artists. Of course, there are all kinds of issues of structural sexism and then there's this issue of historic precedent where so many of the great works in our museums and in collections are by male artists and so many of the works that have attracted vast prices at auction are by male artists. And so there is this abiding idea that great work is by men and work by women is something else, and is it a bit of a risk? Is it something we should value in the same way?

Hettie Judah: So, I think that the conservative forces in the art world prefer to maybe play it safe with works by male artists. And it seems extraordinary to be saying this now, but we've had centuries and centuries of this being the case. There's been this barrier for women, of course, the great barrier for a long time being that women couldn't attend art school. Then even when they could start to attend art school, they couldn't study the nude figure, which is a massive problem if you're going to be a sculptor, massive problem if you're an ambitious artist and you want to do history paintings or the kinds of things that were considered great art.

Hettie Judah: I think today, it seems astonishing that there's still a price disparity of works by male artists at auction sell for far more than works by women. I think there's a sense of urgency still around young male artists. If their careers are taking off, we should invest in them quickly before they become unattainable. That still doesn't much seem to attach to female artists as well.

Hettie Judah: But I think particularly in the field of sculpture, which is obviously of great interest to you, there are really specific issues which are to do with scale and they're to do with material and the complexity of what you're working with. Quite a few of the artists I spoke with about motherhood said that when they had small children, they really had to change the materials that they were working with because they couldn't have anything dangerous around them if they had small children anywhere near them. Most of them said they'd had to give up having a separate studio space when they had children, which meant that they were working from the home. That also affected the scale at which they were working, not simply the material but also the scale.

Hettie Judah: I think if you're talking about working at scale as well, there's a lot of financial underpinning necessary for that. So, you need people who believe in you, people who are going to give you some kind of support

because you're going to need assistants, at least working with you on large projects. You're going to need a supportive gallery working with you. That's something that's afforded to very, very few women artists, I think. I don't mean having a supportive gallery, but I mean having that kind of financial stability to be able to support a large studio, to work with expensive materials and to maintain a team of assistants to work with you.

Sarah Turner: Definitely. That really resonates with a lot of artists who we've spoken to. Talking to Phyllida Barlow about the space you need to make work, a large studio often comes quite late in your career and having to juggle that with other competing demands of life, career, teaching careers, and the generational aspect as well, seems really significant with women. When a lot of artists are afforded the recognition they deserve, it often feels like it's much, much later on in their careers.

Hettie Judah: Yes. I mean, there's obviously been this kind of phenomenon of the newly-discovered older women artists that came upon us about 10 years ago. These are people that I think quite often, like Phyllida, had spent much of their career teaching to support themselves alongside a practise that was maybe ongoing but on a smaller scale. They only perhaps gave themselves the time and the space to focus on their own work once they'd either retired or their children had grown up and left home.

Hettie Judah: I think that in itself is going to become more of an issue in the next few years, that I think there are a lot of women now in their 40s and 50s who've maybe taken their career a bit more slowly while they've been looking after a family, and they're now coming back into the art world. It becomes a real struggle because there aren't actually that many residencies that are set up for middle-aged women. There isn't that much excitement about middle-aged women. We're not a sexy demographic. So, for a gallerist to go out there trying to sell a work and go and kind of tell this story about somebody that spent the last 15 years looking after children, and she's now 48. It just, it doesn't kind of have that fizz to it. I think we need to change the narratives around what we value in the way that we promote artists, in the way that we support artists as well.

Jo Baring: It seems to be that part of that is this idea that for quite a long time, any discussion of motherhood as an artist was taboo, and it would be seen as something that would be negative towards your career. If you wanted to assert yourself as a professional, as someone who was able to, thinking about a commercial relationship, able to fulfil exhibitions and provide all those things, it was something that you wouldn't necessarily be able to talk about.

- Hettie Judah: I think it's very exciting, actually. There's a new generation of artists coming through now who are much, much more open about talking about motherhood and are much more open about asserting the domestic as an interesting subject for art and motherhood itself as an interesting subject for art. I've got so much respect for them. I think it's incredibly brave to be doing this. But I think because a number of them are doing it and they're supporting one another, it's actually changing the dynamic. But there's still, as you say, this huge issue of dealing with institutions who possibly don't have the faith that an artist will continue to make interesting work or want to make exhibitions with them, will be able to fulfil commissions. I am actually working right now to present a set of guidelines for institutions and residencies about how to work better with artist parents.
- Jo Baring: Hettie raises a really important issue there about the role of institutions and institutional support, because it's absolutely key in terms of which artists get acquired for our public collections and therefore get displayed in our public institutions. Now, regular listeners of Sculpting Lives know that we love nothing more than a field trip. Don't we, Sarah?
- Sarah Turner: We do indeed. We visited the Breaking the Mould: Sculpture by Women Since 1945 exhibition, which contains work selected from the Arts Council Collection. That's going to be touring until March 2023. We spoke to the curator of the exhibition, Natalie Rudd, to tell us more about that show...
- Sarah Turner: Can you set the scene for people, maybe who've not ever been to the gallery as well before, like where are we stood?
- Natalie Rudd: Yeah. Well, Breaking the Mould is at Longside Gallery Yorkshire Sculpture Park, and we're in this beautiful cavernous space upon the hill with the amazing views of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park Estate through the windows. This is the first venue for the exhibition.
- Jo Baring: The whole exhibition is drawn from the Arts Council Collection. Can you tell us who we're looking at at the moment? So we come in, we've got Kim Lim; you can see Barbara Hepworth, Elisabeth Frink, people that we've covered in Series One of Sculpting Lives. Who else is here in the exhibition?
- Natalie Rudd: Yes. Well, we have over 50 works in this exhibition and the exhibition spans 75 years. The collection holds over 250 sculptures by women. So, this is by no means everything we hold. But, well, hopefully, it's a really great selection of work.

Natalie Rudd: It contains work of major artists, such as Phyllida Barlow, Elisabeth Frink, but also lesser-known figures such as Emma Park or young and emerging artists whose work has only recently entered the Arts Council Collection.

Jo Baring: Why, in 2021, is it necessary to have a show like this?

Natalie Rudd: Yeah, I mean, there's been so many amazing progressive opportunities, exhibitions, publications, solo projects, things like Sculpting Lives that really shed light on this subject. But there hasn't really been an exhibition overview on this subject, and we felt that this was a gap that could be further explored. It's fascinating to see, even in quite recent survey exhibitions of modern British sculpture, that women are barely represented. We felt that there was something that we needed to explore further in terms of just how brilliant their work is, their contribution over time, but also how can we counter some of these obstacles and prevent them from happening in the future.

Jo Baring: You've written a really interesting essay in the catalogue for Breaking the Mould, and within that, there are some really shocking statistics. So, as you say, it's not just an exhibition on sculpture by women, but also it's investigating and pulling those things apart more and also about collecting and about how works by women enter national collections and also the statistics around those.

Natalie Rudd: Yes. There are so many ways into this exhibition, and I do feel that there is just great opportunities for further research, but certainly this is an opportunity to see the patterns in which works were acquired for the Arts Council Collection. It's been a bit of a drip feed, but to be honest, the very first work to be acquired by a sculptor was a Barbara Hepworth work. So, the investment was there from the very beginning.

Natalie Rudd: But with the diversification of the Acquisitions Committee, there are many, many voices emerging from around the late 1970s. It's a story also of a collection growing in confidence, acquiring work in perishable materials, building increasing diversity among its objectives. So, it's quite an inspiring story too, but I think there is a wariness that there are great things happening, but let's be sure to think about this strategically and really ensure that we make sustained progress going forward.

Sarah Turner: Yeah, I guess that's a danger, isn't it? It could be perceived as a celebration rather than as a critique, and that's always a danger, I guess, of an institution looking at its own history. But, like you say, an exhibition also offers pointers to the future as well as shining a light on what's happened in the past...

- Sarah Turner: So, one of the artists we profiled in Series One was the sculptor Kim Lim, and we caught up with Bianca Chu who's now working with the estate to talk about the issue of acquisitions.
- Jo Baring: She's really interesting raising issues around when and how works get acquired for our public collections and also the quite opaque role of acquisitions committees in those decision-making processes.
- Sarah Turner: We spoke to Bianca, stood just in front of the main door to the Breaking the Mould exhibition, where you meet Kim Lim's sculpture Samurai, made in 1961.
- Bianca Chu: When we think of the word samurai, we think of a warrior. So, it seems really fitting that the first piece that you would see when you walk into this exhibition is a sculpture which is talking about power and recognising the power of female sculptors in this context of Breaking the Mould at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park.
- Bianca Chu: This sculpture was acquired in 1962, a year after it was made. Based on discussions with Natalie, we sort of know that the Arts Council was quite good, even as early in the 60s, as to acquire pieces around the time that they were made. This piece was acquired directly from Kim. At that time, there were no women serving on acquisition committees. There were actually no women on acquisition committees at all until 1979.
- Jo Baring: But actually thinking about it in 1962 is really early for her to be acquired by the Arts Council and kind of goes against that idea that she wasn't seen or that there wasn't much recognition of her work.
- Bianca Chu: Absolutely. I mean, we talked a little bit about this actually in season one of Sculpting Lives where we... Whilst absolutely there is something reemerging around Kim Lim at this very moment, it's also important to recognise that she was established and recognised in her lifetime. I think it's like, I guess it's a recognition that processes are always emerging and that they're always entangled in some way. In particular, in this context, Kim probably has never been seen alongside such a breadth of female artists and sculptors in particular. I mean, she had solo shows, but she was also primarily seen in relation to male sculptors and sculpture being a predominantly male occupation, or seen as that way, up until recently.
- Jo Baring: So this isn't just of historical interest, is it, Sarah?
- Sarah Turner: No, not at all. I mean, with the whole series of Sculpting Lives, we've looked at these issues across history, looking at the

underrepresentation of women artists who are long dead, but also exploring how these issues impact contemporary sculptors as well.

Jo Baring: Absolutely. While we were at Breaking the Mould in the Longside Gallery at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, we spoke to three artists who are represented in the show: Perminder Kaur, Katie Cuddon, and Holly Hendry.

Sarah Turner: So, Perminder, we're stood in front of your work in this show. Just because people are listening to this podcast, and might not have visited the exhibition, can you describe your work for us?

Perminder Kaur: The work is called Innocence. It consists of a small child's dress placed on a black background in a black frame. The dress is orange in colour. On it, is a blue sash, and in this is placed a knife made out of iron. It is a small, quiet work and it's a Sikh garment because the colour orange is a very important symbolic colour for Sikhs. The knife is one of the five Ks that Sikhs wear to represent their religion.

Perminder Kaur: So, in some ways, it could be seen as quite a political work, but most of my work's not. But this one is quite. It was quite strange because I made it whilst living in Barcelona. When I was in Barcelona, I didn't sort of fall under the umbrella of a British-Asian artist. I was a lot freer and I could do whatever I wanted.

Jo Baring: It's so interesting what we're looking at. As you say, it's a little child's dress within a frame, and it's on the wall. Some people looking at it might say that it's not sculpture. How do you feel about definitions of sculpture and how your work fits into that?

Perminder Kaur: I mean, I think the definition of sculpture has opened out a lot more from then, when I was making it. When I studied, I didn't study sculpture, I studied on what was then an experiment. It was a generalist fine art course. So, I tried a bit of animation. I tried photography. I tried a little bit of performance. I just tried all the mediums before settling on sculpture because I like working in space. I was never really taught in a very sculptural way. So, for me, it wasn't a question, is it a sculpture or not? I never really thought about it.

Sarah Turner: You didn't feel like you had to respect any boundaries in that way?

Perminder Kaur: No, I didn't know.

Jo Baring: You had a lot of early success. You had a lot of shows and you said earlier... We got the train up together, had a lovely little day out. But you were saying earlier that actually your career has been slightly upside down or it hasn't been straightforward. I think that would be

interesting to talk about because you had quite a long break, didn't you? Can you explain a little bit about your career trajectory?

Permindar Kaur: Yes. I took a 10-year break. From roughly 2000 to 2010, I stopped making art. I stopped going to shows. If I didn't feel like it, I wasn't going to. So, if I wasn't making work, I actually wanted nothing to do with the arts because I felt like a fraud in some way. It's quite strange. I'm quite harsh in that way.

Permindar Kaur: Then coming back to making art after that was quite difficult because I broke my trajectory and I wasn't coming back as an emerging artist. I wasn't coming back as an established artist because a lot of creators had their set of people they worked with; they're established now. I sort of didn't really fit in anywhere.

Permindar Kaur: As I was mentioning in the train, yeah, it was reversed because then when I came back, I had to somehow figure out how to get people interested in my work again.

Sarah Turner: This point comes up quite a bit in our conversations about mid-careers as well. Off on, that you were talking about, a very productive point after art school or even at art school, but careers are long and lives are increasingly longer as well. It's interesting to think about how careers are sustained over generations, over decades. I'm interested in thinking about what it means to return to a work as well, a work that you made quite a long time ago, and whether you feel its interpretations or its significance shifts as well, whether this work's acquired new meaning in the context of 2021 and the conversations that are happening in the art world about representation of Asian artists, about identity. So, I wonder whether seeing this work again here and it's sort of whether you feel like it has changed in its, for you, in its meanings.

Permindar Kaur: The work's always changing its meanings because when it was first shown in Barcelona, it was read in certain ways and seen in certain ways. Then when it was shown in the British Art Show, it was seen, the context was very different. Also, politically the context has changed because I came just after the 1980s, which saw a lot of very political black artists. I did take part in some black art shows, and I did want to break away from that. My move to Barcelona helped in that. But now there is a larger, wider audience that has an understanding of the work. That has changed. So, context does change and it's because of time as well.

Sarah Turner: As is the way in 2021, we sort of, I don't know, meet people before we actually meet them in real life because I was looking at your Instagram page. It's again, a way of, oh, I don't know, encountering

artworks especially because we've not seen them, I guess, in other settings such as galleries or in studio visits as we might do or might have done if we had done this last year.

Sarah Turner: But I was interested in posts you put recently about returning to this idea about becoming a parent and that you can't stop making works or you keep returning to that idea.

Katie Cuddon: Yeah. I think I said I can't stop making work about being a mother. I've found it a really inspirational, invigorating thing that's given me loads of ideas and has really propelled my work rather than it consuming time and energy actually. It's energised me. So, I go into the studio with all these really raw feelings and I just have to make a thing that articulates it in some way. It just feels like a whole new language and material to make work about or from.

Jo Baring: That was the voice of Katie Cuddon. We also spoke to the artist Holly Hendry, whose work is one of the most recently acquired for the Arts Council Collection.

Holly Hendry: So this is a sculpture called Gut Feelings Stromatolith. It was made in 2016 as I was graduating from the Royal College of Art where I was studying sculpture. It's made of a real mix of materials, including metal, wood, cement, plaster with pigment, jesmonite, and rock salt amongst other things I think. Yeah, the work was initially made as this, I wouldn't say series, but part with two other works that I was making at the same time which also contain materials like lipstick and chewed gum and dog chew bones. Actually, this one has a dog chew bone in it as well. So, yeah, the material list is quite low.

Sarah Turner: Can you tell us about, well, your impressions of seeing this work in relationship to other works in the exhibition as well, because it's in conversation and fairly near proximity to, well, there's a work by Rebecca Warren here behind me and then an Anthea Hamilton behind you. So, it's sort of... Yeah, in the sort of networks of materials and forms. Has it made you see it differently or-

Holly Hendry: I mean, this is the first time I've seen it today in this context. I just, I felt initially quite overwhelmed in terms of the works and the artists that I'm surrounded by.

Jo Baring: And as a young sculptor, do you think about the history of those artists who have gone before, and obviously there's historical works here by Hepworth and Kim Lim, do you think about those histories when you're making your work?

Holly Hendry: Yeah, I definitely, I think it's impossible not to, especially spending a lot of my life learning about them and seeing them and trying to be around works like that. So, I think it's important to think about that. But there's points where I kind of try and use that or ignore that as well and not think about it in a way when you can get stuck in that moment. But then the work's done and you take a step back and then it comes back again to thinking about it within the history of other sculptures and what it correlates with and what it rubs up against or what isn't happening. I think for me, that's really interesting and exciting and what you can sometimes push and pull and tweak and kind of reference or poke and prod at a bit as well, I think it's quite... Yeah, it's something I think about a lot.

Jo Baring: In one of the essays in the exhibition catalogue, Natalie Rudd, the curator of this show, finishes off with a quote about your work, which I actually find really interesting. It relates back to Hepworth. It's saying that when Hepworth was making work, she got really annoyed when people would comment on the work by saying, "It's this very slight, small woman who looks so frail, she can't possibly produce work like that." And then in a recent review of your work, they finished up basic with the same comment by saying, "This kind of mild-mannered..."

Holly Hendry: I was fuming.

Jo Baring: Yeah. I bet you were fuming. I wanted to talk about that actually because we're here in this exhibition and your work takes up space. It's ambitious. There's a variety of materials. It's big. And yet, how annoying it must have been to have a review about it finishing off by saying, "And all this from a young woman who's so mild-mannered, it looks like she couldn't possibly even..." What was it? Like, "Take the skin off a rice pudding"-

Holly Hendry: [crosstalk 00:51:15]

Jo Baring: -or something really insulting actually. Tell us about how that feels.

Holly Hendry: I think they were trying to tie it in conceptually, and it just became a massive insult. But, yeah, it happens all the time, every single time I'm around my work. People say, "It's so big," and I'm never sure, really-

Jo Baring: What are you supposed to say to that?

Holly Hendry: -what to say to that. Yeah, I've talked about it quite a lot and I've talked about my practise and my frustration and fury with it sometimes because you see male artists, architects stand with their works, talk

about their work and those things never come up. It shouldn't be about your ability, your body size, your-

Jo Baring: Your own physicality.

Holly Hendry: -your physicality, really, unless you're directly engaging with that in a way that is important or relevant. To me, I'm so excited about that, the way that sculpture can take up space, can claim space, can talk about space and change space. If it's reduced to what my body is like, I just-

Jo Baring: It is kind of astonishing, isn't it?

Holly Hendry: I think it's boring. I think it's just boring. I'm really bored by it.

Sarah Turner: Would you say repetitive as well?

Holly Hendry: Yeah.

Sarah Turner: Yeah. It's tropes of explanation, which is [crosstalk 00:52:30]

Holly Hendry: Yeah.

Sarah Turner: ... or not. Like you said, they're not that interesting. But something you said there connects to a theme that Jo and I have been working through, through doing the podcast. It's about sculpture and its relevance or its future, the idea of it as a space to think with. I'm just curious about your feelings about that and whether you see your work as sculpture. I mean, it's here in a show that is explicitly labelled as being about women who work with sculpture. But do you see this as sculpture and as yourself as a sculptor, or do those categories and boundaries not really exist for you?

Holly Hendry: No. I definitely see this as sculpture and myself as making sculpture, as somebody who makes sculpture. But I think the term of what sculpture is, is what I find really exciting and interesting, what it can be. Maybe, I think, in a lot of senses, my work is quite traditional in a sculptural sense. It uses stuff. There's some amazing artists that make sculpture that don't use anything, then they reference sculpture. So I think that's maybe... Yeah, I totally see myself in line with sculpture, but sometimes those sculptures are spaces too, and I'm excited by what sculpture can do in that sense, I think.

Sarah Turner: What I was thinking after walking around this exhibition and talking to some of the artists here in it, is this is not perhaps the image I conventionally had of what a sculpture show, what sculpture since 1945 might look like.

- Natalie Rudd: No, I would agree. I think there's an openness across generations, which has been interesting to look. So, artists have expressed the influence of other artists, not always in terms of making, but perhaps as a role model or mentorship. I think that that's something that we really want to nurture going forward. Thinking about that moment after art school, where it can be quite vulnerable. Could contact with an artist in the collection help younger students emerging? Can we support one another, really, through dialogue and through sharing experiences?
- Jo Baring: What I love about the show is exactly that, is that it's not didactic in any way, actually. It is just a jumping off point, and it's a really exciting way into a subject that hasn't really been covered, has it, in this type of way before?
- Natalie Rudd: Yeah. Well, I'm glad that the playfulness has come through because I think what we didn't want to do was to ghettoise the work or to typecast that this is the kind of way that women work, because really what we've discovered is that there are no limits. Women make as diverse work as anybody else. So, I think that's perhaps where this diversity has emerged in the selection, wanting to not typecast.
- Sarah Turner: Yeah. And, talking about that, I think conversations about gender and the way in which the categorizations around it. You talked in the catalogue actually about how you think about working with non-binary artists or artists who identify with other genders or other positions, other identities, and how you actually deal with that as a collecting organisation and the responsibility of that for the future.
- Natalie Rudd: Yeah. I think this exhibition has actually opened up some gaps in terms of representation of non-binary artists, particularly in terms of sculpture. I hope that this exhibition enables us to continue to broaden our acquisitions. So, that's an area that we certainly hope to develop.
- Natalie Rudd: But really, we see this as one of a number of voices. It's starting a conversation, and it's really challenging some of those exhibitions where you saw 30 men and one woman represented to try and put an end to that culture and to try to make it much more open.
- Sarah Turner: These issues around categorization and terminology concerning gender and representation keep coming up in our conversations throughout Sculpting Lives. It feels very much like this is an evolving conversation. I think it's really interesting that something like sculpture, that was one seen as something so static, is actually been set into motion by these debates and by these issues.

Jo Baring: I love that idea of it being set into motion as you describe it. An artist who deliberately engages and questions boundaries around this topic is Rosanne Robertson. We spoke to them in front of their sculpture Stone Butch, which is newly unveiled. It's a newly unveiled public sculpture right in the heart of the city of London beside The Gherkin. The title Stone Butch was inspired by lesbian and trans activist Les Feinberg's novel Stone Butch Blues.

Rosanne Roberts...: Personally for me, I should probably start with gender and my work. I identify as nonbinary myself and also as queer. My work, it looks at nonbinary gender and situates itself within queer history. It's looking at a particular queer history, so that the work itself and the title Stone Butch, it comes from basically looking at relationships between masculinity and femininity and looking at moving away from these rigid understandings of gender. So, stepping out of the gender binary. It's really important to look at women in sculpture because of the gender-based oppression that women have faced. But I think it's also useful in an intersectional way to look at a wider understanding of gender, so a more diverse understanding of gender.

Rosanne Roberts...: It started as quite a personal investigation with the landscape. I was an associate of Yorkshire Sculpture International at the time in 2019. That began as a material investigation, literally looking at the materials of stone and water. I was looking at the natural landscape, and I was making a journey from my studio up to a set of stones called the bridle stones. Literally, looking at this contradiction within the materials of stone and water, how we've come to associate masculinity with stone and this hardness and this unyielding-like nature of stone and perhaps femininity more with the material of water, something that is more yielding and softer.

Rosanne Roberts...: But the contradiction of course, within those materials, is that water erodes stone, that water shapes landscape, that stone isn't unyielding. If you look at it over a million years, and the time that it's took to get the natural formations that we see in the natural landscape, if we look at that over a sped up period, stone is continuously changing shape. So, I see it as more of a fluid structure. I think, as an extension of that, I was basically if there's a massive, big contradiction in the middle of how we understand materials and how we understand masculinity and femininity and how we understand gender as a binary structure, then everything is up for grabs. It becomes that there's so many possibilities and that the whole project became about possibility and freedom and that... Yeah, looking at something that is less rigid.

Jo Baring: We're recording this in October, 2021, when a major new public artwork by the artist Veronica Ryan has just been unveiled. It's actually

the first permanent artwork which honours the Windrush Generation in the UK to be unveiled. And it's in Hackney.

Sarah Turner: Yeah. They represent three Caribbean fruits, a custard apple, a breadfruit and a soursop. They're made from marble and bronze. They don't sit on plinths, but they're on the streets, right on that street level of Hackney. We're going to give the last words to Veronica, who tells us why public sculpture still matters.

Jo Baring: I suppose when you started thinking about this sculpture, it was perhaps before there'd been this whole furore around public sculpture.

Veronica Ryan: Of course.

Jo Baring: So, we're in Bristol, with the Colston statue. All that is swirling around at the moment when there's going to be this big unveiling. Is that in your mind when you're creating and thinking about putting something out there into the public space?

Veronica Ryan: Yes. I'm very aware of this whole conversation about which monuments we want to see in public places, how they got there in the first place and what we want to see in public spaces. I think I'm a bit concerned about symbolic gestures, but I think one way to address and overcome some of the issues is just to have a variety of public works, involve artists in making works, which just has different kind of representation. I think that's a way to think about it. So, the fact that I'm making fruit and vegetables might seem a bit odd, but it's one way to represent cultural difference, to represent familiarity within the community in Hackney that you see evidence of yourself.

Sarah Turner: Thank you to all our contributors to this episode, Hettie Judah, Bee Rowlatt, Kate McMillan, Bianca Chu.

Jo Baring: Natalie Rudd, Perminder Kaur, Katie Cuddon, Holly Hendry, Rosanne Robertson, and Veronica Ryan. To see any of the artworks that we discuss in this episode, please visit our Instagram page [@sculptinglives](#).

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