

**This Stuff Matters presents**

# **Still Here**

**Women Making Abstract Sculpture**

**APT Gallery**

**9th - 26th March 2023**



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**Women Making Abstract Sculpture**

An exhibition at APT Gallery

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APT Gallery

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**A·P·T**  
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# **Still Here**

**Women Making Abstract Sculpture**

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**An exhibition investigating the position and relevance of women's abstract sculpture in today's contemporary art scene.**

**This Stuff Matters (TSM)** is an exhibiting group and discussion forum of four women abstract sculptors:

**Gillian Brent, Jill Gibson, Alexandra Harley, and Sheila Vollmer.**

TSM was formed in 2019 to share the experiences of the four artists and to provide and generate support and shared networks. All four artists have been working and exhibiting nationally and internationally, since the 1980s.

The exhibition showcases work which examines sculptural abstraction and considers its importance and relevance today. It is an opportunity to have a broader dialogue with audiences, including artists, students, art historians, academics and gallery visitors regarding the history and future generations of women who make abstract sculpture.

There is still underrepresentation of women sculptors working in abstraction, and TSM hope to redress this imbalance with 'Still Here', augmenting their voices and providing a showcase for women's practices.

TSM have invited two early career women sculptors

**Beatrice Galletley and Anna Reading** to join them for this exhibition.

<https://www.stuff-matters.co.uk>

**Still Here** focuses on women sculptors exploring a common experience of life as women, allowing for the circulation of feelings within a common space. I hope that every woman, and every person, will find their resonance in it and enjoy the exhibition.

*Xinjun Lin, MFA Curating student, Goldsmiths, UoL*

## **Still here - Still learning - Still connecting**

This exhibition brings together six artists connected by sculpture, abstraction and their gender. Four of these are part of the collective This Stuff Matters - a group of women who provide peer support and are impressively still here. To be making work five, ten, twenty, forty years into a career is an achievement for any artist; the art world does little to support artists. To navigate this as a woman, starting a career in the 1980s, is a greater achievement still.

Over a year ago, I chaired a conversation with This Stuff Matters. Amongst other subjects, we discussed each of their experiences at art school, how sculpture departments were largely a male domain and tutors and visiting artists were (mostly) male. While art schools today have evolved there is still a need for shows like this where artists across generations connect and support one another. This exhibition does exactly that through the collective inviting early career artists Beatrice Galletley and Anna Reading to show alongside them. This gesture works to disrupt the still limiting constructs of the arts, and specifically sculpture, creating systems of support that centre on artist-to-artist dialogue sitting outside of conventional education or career development models. This isn't a new approach but it is an approach that still matters.

*Meghan Goodeve, curator, educator, artist development*

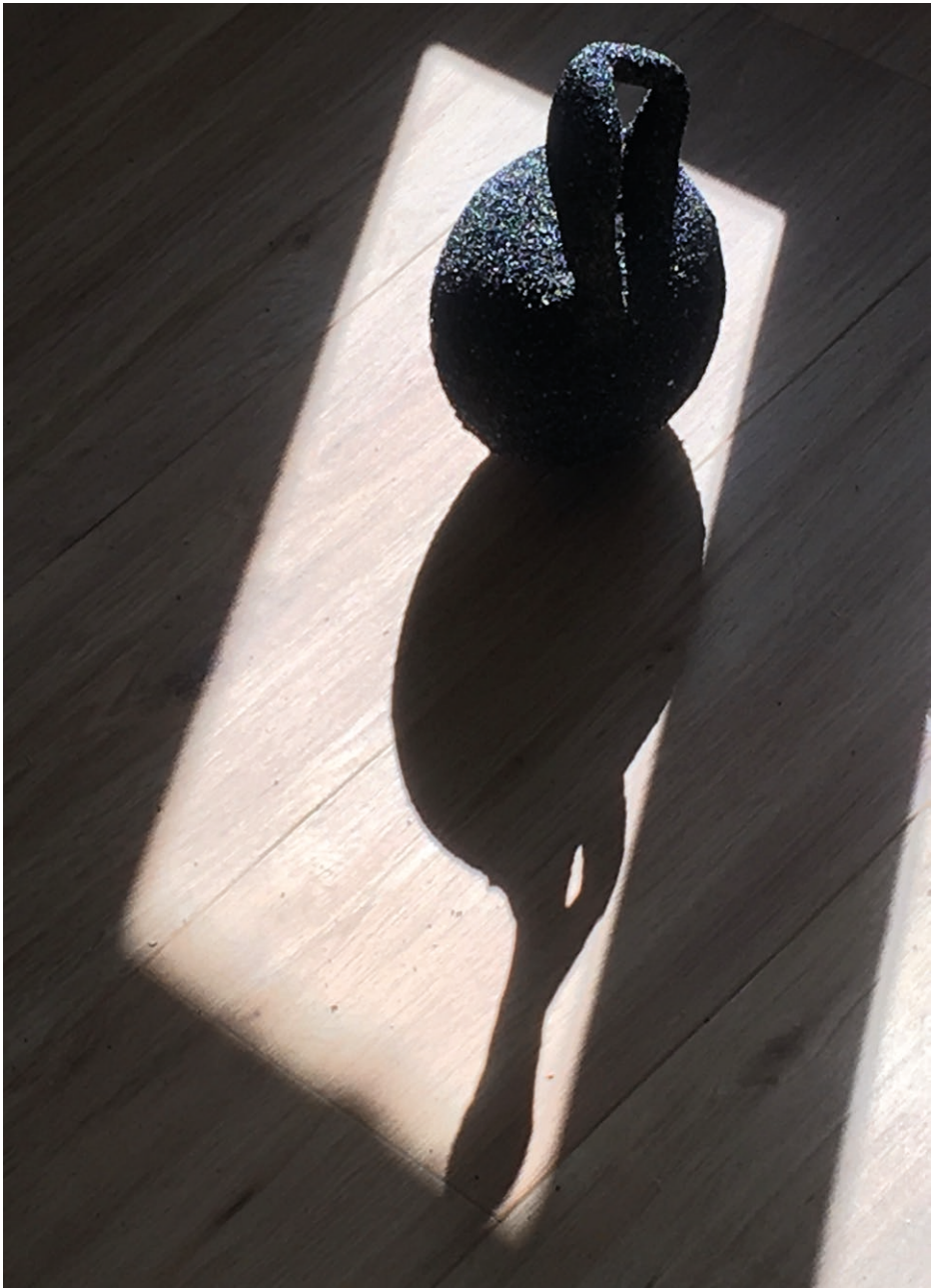
Assumptions surrounding the sculptural genre and female artists have repeatedly placed limitations upon women, from sculpture being labelled a masculine art form, to women being associated with the decorative and domestic. Ignored in conversations of innovation, experimentation and genius, women have been repeatedly categorised and dismissed. In spite of such limitations, and in opposition to the assumptions they support, women sculptors have in actuality displayed great accomplishment, demonstrated in their ability to manipulate materials and create original forms. Such responses to materiality are evident in the construction processes of the members of TSM, working confidently with form, material, colour and space. Their prioritisation of experimental creative processes, alongside exploration of the organic, flux, and stasis aligns with prominent attributes associated with sculpture by women. Their simple act of taking up space is in itself important – claiming agency of this space and making it one of togetherness continues to hold particular significance for female artists who have historically been denied it.

TSM necessitate and contribute towards this discussion of woman's place in abstract sculpture throughout their practices, from the works they produce to their acts of collaboration. Simply by creating abstract sculptural forms, they challenge assumptions and necessitate the continuation of this discussion.

*Sarah Knight, BA Art History student, University of St Andrews, Scotland*



Sheila Vollmer  
'Raspberry Crossbeats', 2023. Steel, painted and zinc coated  
Photo: the artist



Jill Gibson  
'Ladies Purse', 2022. Cast foam, coal dust, crushed shells, sand.  
Photo: the artist



Gillian Brent  
'Not an Elephant', 2022. Steel, utile, stone, Jesmonite.  
Photo: Peter Griffiths





Alexandra Harley  
'Raff', 2021. Wood, staples, string, paint.  
Photo: Dean Brannagan



Beatrice Galletley  
'Metamorphic', 2022. Ceramic  
Photo: the artist



Anna Reading  
'The Aimless Life (is a Chimera)', 2022  
Mesh, plaster, Stainless steel, Jesmonite, pigment, black sand, ballast, embroidery thread. Photo: the artist



'On the Edge 1', 2022. Steel, walnut.  
Photo: Peter Griffiths

## **Gillian Brent MRSS**

Gillian's sculpture is rooted in Modernist principles of manipulating form, space and material; she utilises these to address contemporary concerns about the affective power objects have over us, and their intrinsic value.

Gillian constructs sculpture in steel, with additional elements in other materials such as wood, stone, concrete and Jesmonite. She creates spatial and dynamic configurations that synthesise her observations, allude to function and suggest new narratives.

She has recently begun incorporating found and cast objects into her sculpture to create mass and volume and bring a new focus on subjectivity and shared experience. These objects retain their familiarity yet take on alternative roles in their relation to other materials and to the spatial dynamics of the sculpture. She is interested in how the forms can be repurposed rather than the nostalgia the objects generate, although she isn't able to control how others see them.

Gillian studied at Wimbledon School of Art and St Martin's School of Art, London and is now based in Sheffield. She has shown her sculpture in galleries and outdoor venues across the UK. She is a Member of the Royal Society of Sculptors.

[www.gillianbrent.co.uk](http://www.gillianbrent.co.uk)



It's Language Jim... 2019. Cast foam, steel rod  
Photo: the artist

## Jill Gibson MRSS

Jill Gibson is a multi-disciplinary artist, working across platforms including sculpture, video, installation, and drawing. Her practice is largely research based (often using an architectural technique called fabric forming) and is an on-going exploration of material and form. Her work considers female iconography. It is subtle and offers a nuanced observation of utilitarian, domestic objects.

Jill has worked for several years expanding the techniques and methods employed to incorporate a wide range of materials and construction methods into her practice. Many of the works partake of a commonality of materials and forms, and yet each being unique, have their own identity within a space and therefore each piece demands to be regarded separately. Each piece evokes 'a sense of the sacred, of ritual and of the erotic'.

Originally from Sheffield, Jill studied at Glasgow School of Art and Sunderland University. Jill is now based in Cullercoats, North Tyneside and the Charente, France. She was awarded the Henry Moore Foundation Research Grant to facilitate her visit to CAST at University of Manitoba in 2022. She has previously exhibited work at London Frieze, the Venice Biennale and has participated in the Future Feminist Archive Project, Sydney, Australia. She is a member of the Royal Society of Sculptors.  
[www.jillgibson.co.uk](http://www.jillgibson.co.uk)



'Viniculum', 2018. Ceramic, paint, thread, wood.  
Photo: Dean Brannagan

## **Alexandra Harley MRSS**

With a materials led practice Harley is focussed on the perception of motion, animation and flux in non-kinetic sculpture. These abstract sculptures is at the junction of stasis and an uneasy balance conveys a sense of movement through the physical interpretation of a brief fragment in time. This is a sculpture in a frozen moment, a fixed physicality contrasting with the sense of movement being articulated. Mostly using wood, ceramic, bronze and paper, each material offers challenges as the compound constructions are formed and each have significant airways through the sculpture playing as important role as the material itself. With an internal energy pulsing through the complex constructions, these sculptures evade a single analysis. Each material functions as both a starting point and a process, a core element and a guiding rhythm.

She has been awarded prestigious fellowships in Japan and the USA, and won the Brian Mercer Fellowship in 2016, spending 3 months in the Mariani Bronze Foundry in Italy. She has public sculptures in the Caribbean, Europe and the USA.

Harley is a member of the Royal Society of Sculptors, The London Group, Free Painters and Sculptors Society and the Brancaster Chronicles discussion forum.

[www.alexandraharley.co.uk](http://www.alexandraharley.co.uk)





'W-rap IV', 2022 & 'W-rap II', 2021. Steel, paint  
Photo: the artist

## Sheila Vollmer MRSS

Playing with line, form, space, rhythm and colour, Sheila Vollmer makes abstract sculpture and installations. Constructing in various materials including wood, steel, Perspex, rope and castings, she works within both a systematic and spontaneous process of responding directly to materials and making; opening and containing space, searching to express the inside/outside pull of energy and emotion to achieve an organic wholeness.

Regardless of scale, what interests Sheila is how the work and its elements touch and rest on surfaces responding to the surrounding space. Colour accentuate the lines, forms and negative spaces, which in turn add to the viewpoints, mood and energy of the work. Sheila is interested in how our visual and emotional selves are triggered by these elements of form, size, colour and rhythm within a sculptural form or installation; in search of that 'otherness' - a balance of order, chaos, mood and meaning.

Vollmer studied at University of Guelph Canada and St Martin's School of Art London. She is a Royal Society of Sculptors member and is Program Manager Sculpture at Morley College London. Her studio practice is at APT London where she **was** a founding member.

[www.sheilavollmer.com](http://www.sheilavollmer.com)



'Mischievous', 2022. Ceramic  
Photo: the artist

## **Beatrice Galletley MRSS**

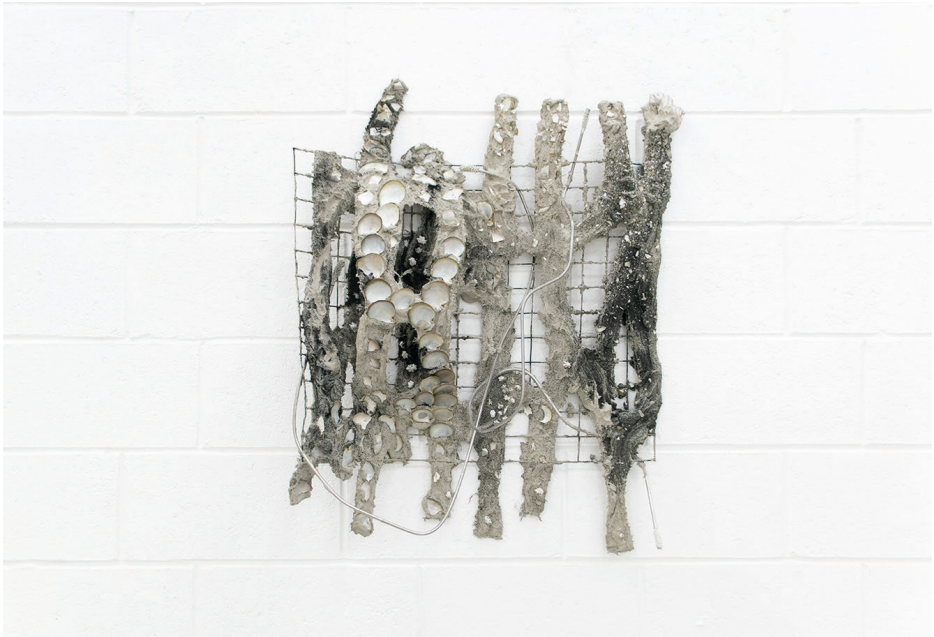
Beatrice's ceramic works engage with her direct and intuitive approach to her practice. Rooted in her deep fascination with objects in a state of flux, these works challenge our existing perception of the world by defying our need to categorise things and thus allowing objects to be seen in a new light. The ambiguity of these works defies boundaries and categorisation. Beatrice achieves this through merging opposing forms; including geometric and organic, playing with scale, manipulation of context, and colour, to create works that are suggestive and act as prompts.

Using process-based abstraction; she is able create playful and intriguing forms using techniques such as slab building and coiling. Whilst creating these forms the artist moves with the work, changing and pushing the material to its limit, giving a performative component to the sculptures.

Beatrice studied at Newcastle University and Royal College of Art, receiving her MA in 2020. At the RCA she become particularly inspired by objects that are multi-dimensional; they defy boundaries both physically and metaphorically. She is based in London. She is a Member of the Royal Society of Sculptors.

[www.beatricegalletley.com](http://www.beatricegalletley.com)





'Atlas Asparagus, 2021.  
Wire, stainless steel, pewter, hardboard, shells, black sand  
Photo: the artist

## **Anna Reading**

Anna Reading's (she/her) work celebrates forms of growth and survival within inhospitable environments, across human and non-human worlds. Rooted in experiences of vulnerability and exposure, the works emulate natural forms of protection and shelter.

Combining mixtures of surplus materials, she uses modified shell-grotto techniques to clutch, wedge and bind matter into new embraces. Commonly the works hold excess items from industrial processes, such as oyster shells surplus from pearl farming, quarried slate and lumps of asphalt extracted from road surfaces. Layers of protection are built up on the works, akin to exoskeletons, drawing this industrial matter into the skin. Processes of layering and combining materials are left visible for the works to exist in a state of becoming. Shell-like forms are a recurring subject matter, offering a portal into an interior world, a space of retreat, of both aggression, and defence.

Reading studied at Central St Martins and Slade School of Fine Art, receiving her MFA in 2017. She is an Associate Lecturer at Camberwell College of Art and was the winner of the Mark Tanner Sculpture Award in 2018.

[www.annareading.co.uk](http://www.annareading.co.uk)



View of 'Opening Matters',  
pop-up show by This Stuff Matters, 2020 at Unit 3, London.

From left to right:

Sheila Vollmer 'Stretch', 2019.

Gillian Brent 'Not a Table 2', 2020.

Alexandra Harley 'Clymdych', 2019.

Sheila Vollmer 'Cirque 2', 2019

Photo: Peter Griffiths

**This Stuff Matters** is very grateful for the time and support given by:

**Peter Griffiths**

**Meghan Goodeve**

**Sarah Knight**

**Xinjun Lin**

**Camilo Salazar and Morley Radio students**



**This Stuff Matters**  
**2023**