

Sculpture at Canary Wharf:

A Decade of Exhibitions





On Showing Sculpture in the Workplace

Ann Elliott

Programme Curator (2001–ongoing)

One of the most challenging features of curatorial exhibition work is trying to be effective in non-gallery spaces. In locations where people do not in the main visit to encounter art, particular issues are raised that do not necessarily need to be addressed in a museum or gallery. In the workplace, for example, it is good to surprise but not to shock. There is a requirement to respect the function of the space and the ethos of the host company.

When Theresa Bergne invited me in 2001 to work on a programme of exhibitions at Canary Wharf and in particular the Lobby of One Canada Square, I was excited and relished the possibilities that the venue offered notwithstanding having concerns about scale, and whether or not one could be effective. I had seen Annette Ratuszniak's millennium exhibition, *The Shape of the Century*, that filled the estate far beyond the Lobby: a difficult act to follow. However, our aims were different, and with Theresa I discussed devising a programme of diverse sculpture shows beginning with *Animals in the Workplace*, a modest but varied collection of items by artists whose only commonality was that at that time they featured animals in their work. The term 'Sculpture in the Workplace' was adopted as the title for the ongoing programme.

In a career of working directly with artists I had to rely on their interest and preparedness to lend existing work, some of which had been shown many times to the public but never in a corporate space such as Canary Wharf. Some artists I approached said they would rather not exhibit here, but of those who have, many were surprised by the experience of seeing their sculptures, not in the pure, often white surroundings of a minimalist gallery, but in the lofty marble and steel entrance to London's monument to business and commerce. I am repeatedly amazed that good and carefully chosen sculpture is always able to transcend peculiarities of a wide range of locations.

Surprisingly, perhaps, we found that not all work needed to be large to cope with the height and breadth of the Lobby. The jewel-like qualities of small



Installing *Out of China: Monumental Porcelain* by Felicity Aylieff 2007

sculptures have shown strongly and held the attention of workers and visitors alike, whereas the largest works have taken the eye to the ceiling and beyond, addressing the wider reaches of the space. Considering the effect that the outside has on everything that happens inside a space such as this, in 2004 we invited Sophie Smallhorn to make the first of our very occasional interventions onto their interface: the Lobby windows themselves. Her transparent, translucent and opaque coloured bands transformed both the exterior and even more dramatically the interior of the building. The internal space was flooded with stripes of coloured light further describing the architectural features of stairs, floor and walls. This is something that we have repeated with just two other artists, and will do so again, when the right opportunities arise.

The programme is not about extremes, but is designed to introduce the workforce to contemporary sculpture, hopefully exposing a rich and enduringly fascinating seam in artistic practice that is not normally shown in the working environment. I do not for a moment think that all the thousands of people who pass through the Lobby of One Canada Square every day even consider the exhibitions. For some it is perhaps an irritant, for many a pleasure, and we have to date no formal way of measuring response. It is a matter of trust that cultural diversion may help to enrich people's lives on a daily basis, possibly only subliminally, and lead them to seek more from our galleries and museums as a result.

Looking through the list of exhibitions that now totals fifty-three during the ten years covered by this book, and the 132 artists whose work has been shown, it makes sense to take stock. But in reality I, with my Canary Wharf colleagues, now Sally Williams and Keith Watson, are continually assessing the programme and considering what has gone well and which shows may have been off the mark to some extent. In addition, there have been other changes that have made a great impact on the physical space the exhibitions occupy, in particular the extension of the building into Canada Square to the east, and the north-west adaptation of the Lobby, both of which have meant that we have needed to select and install exhibitions within newly drawn parameters. These developments have changed the light, the longer views against which sculptures are seen, and the way in which people move about the Lobby as well as the areas in which visitors are invited to sit, all of which need to be considered when selecting and installing works of art.

The way in which we engage with artists has also evolved through time. We work with professional artists, whether they are well known or emerging onto a visible career path. The fact that sculpture covers such extensive working practice means that we have wide-ranging choices of medium and technique as well as artistic scope on which to draw, much of which is still to be addressed. What has not changed is the way in which we select artists and work with them.

Exhibitions are always installed over weekends in respect for the working function of One Canada Square from Monday to Friday. I like to think that people have pleasure in seeing something new on the Monday morning after an exhibition has been installed. I hope the exhibitions signal change and signify new approaches over and above their temporary presence.

'Sculpture' has become a generic name for works of art over and above carved, cast or constructed three-dimensional objects. Artists today have vast resources to hand, including new materials, media, and previously unused subject matter in seemingly limitless combinations or permutations through which to express their ideas. In our programming we try to cover as wide a range of art as is possible within the increasingly permissive term that sculpture has become.



Installing Franz West *Verkehrtes T* 2006
Over Under: Andrew Sabin, Franz West, Keith Wilson 2007



Malcolm Ross-White in his studio, Bath Academy of Art, Corsham Court. Panorama © John Law 2010

Finding ways to show challenging or 'difficult' work relies on the cooperation of many whose work at Canary Wharf is not defined in terms of the visual arts programme. Their advice is given freely and with the aim that the project should succeed.

In the autumn of 2003 we extended the programme to hold the first exhibition of sculpture in Jubilee Park, an area within the Canary Wharf estate that has an extremely heavy footfall. The park, designed by landscape architects Jacques and Peter Wirtz, has discreet areas of grass and an undulating form perfect for showing small numbers of sculptures. The fact that the park – a virtual roof garden over the Jubilee Line station – connects a number of buildings at ground level, means that it is well used, and in fine weather provides space for workers to enjoy the open air. The first exhibition, a mixed show, tested the viability and was deemed to work. Thereafter we decided to time the park exhibitions in parallel with the spring shows in the Lobby, sometimes linking both through a theme, occasionally exhibiting the work of one artist in both venues. A further development for the Park in 2004 was the introduction of a programme of 'Winter Lights'. These installations by artists and designers have a wider curatorial base, and cheer the open spaces during the winter months each year. They also serve to extend the possibilities for artistic expression within the programme and in outreach initiatives.

Few artists have been revisited over the past ten years. Notable exceptions are Felicity Aylieff and Charles Hadcock with two solo exhibitions each, and a few others, including Wendy Taylor, Laura Ford, Alison Crowther and Peter Randall-Page, whose work featured first in a group exhibition then much later in a one or two-person show. Aylieff, whose ceramics we first showed in 2002, subsequently had an unrivalled opportunity to work in porcelain on a monumental scale in Jingdezhen, China. She was granted a sabbatical from teaching at the Royal College of Art not only to make these new ceramics, but also to ensure that the body of work would be shown, preferably in London, and that she would publish it. She asked if we might help and we readily agreed to show these new pieces in the Lobby as they exemplified a marked change in her development. Canary Wharf's involvement in showing this work became the catalyst for its subsequent success as a touring exhibition. For Charles Hadcock, whose exhibition in the Lobby in 2003 tested the possibility of showing very large and heavy pieces indoors, we showed larger and even more testing pieces in Jubilee Park in 2011, a particularly important exhibition for him, as it marked the largest number of his pieces being shown outside in London for the first time.

Unlike permanently commissioned works of art such as those located throughout the Canary Wharf estate, a temporary exhibition programme allows for greater experiment and innovation, broadening the scope for visual arts in the public realm. Without exception, every time we install an exhibition here, whether in the Lobby or in Jubilee Park, people will dispose themselves around one or more of the sculptures to be photographed. Those images – far beyond our reach – would without doubt make an amazing if alternative record of ten years of *Sculpture in the Workplace*.

Paper Tiger

An installation by Susan Stockwell

The Lobby, One Canada Square

23 June to 29 August 2008

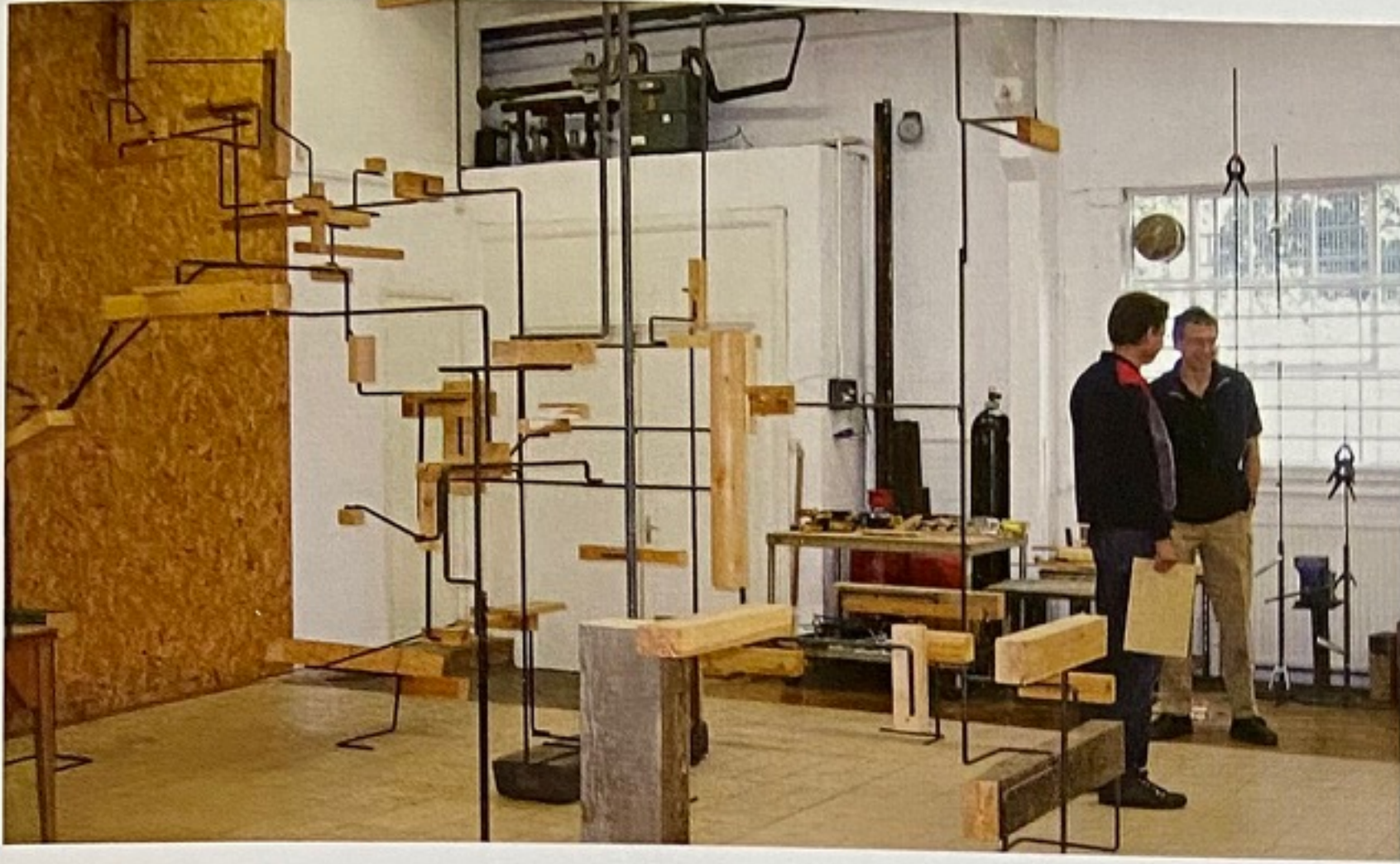
Froth and well-defined structure, political and social comment, were all present in Susan Stockwell's dresses and hangings made from paper. Old maps showing countries in the British Empire denoted in pink, were fashioned into a dress of the colonial period, whereas white gowns, extravagant creations in rice paper, spoke of excessive weddings with more than a hint of 'bling'.



above and below: installation views







Visiting Charles Hewlings' studio, 2005



Moving Sophie Ryder's sculpture into One Canada Square, 2005



Susan Stockwell installing her sculptures in One Canada Square, 2008



Kabir Hussain installing his sculptures in One Canada Square, 2008



Glenys Barton's studio, 2009

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Charles Hadcock: p.230 (top right, bottom right)

Admir Jukanovic: p.150 (top)

John Law: p.19

Courtesy Mayflower School: p.102 (top right)

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jacket

Peter Randall-Page **Big Wing** 2010 *Peter Randall-Page at Canary Wharf* 2010

frontispiece

Phillip King **Fire in Taurus** 1984 *Phillip King Sculpture* 2009