

**BREAKING
THE
MOULD
SCULPTURE
BY
WOMEN
SINCE 1945**

An Arts Council Collection

**TOURING
EXHIBITION**

21 October 2022 –
16 April 2023

The New Art Gallery Walsall
#breakingthemould

Breaking the Mould is the first survey of post-war British sculpture by women. Spanning more than seventy years and exploring the work of over forty sculptors, this exhibition provides a radical recalibration, addressing the many accounts of British sculpture that have marginalised women or airbrushed their work from art history altogether.

All of the works in this exhibition have been selected from the Arts Council Collection, which holds more than 250 sculptures by 150 women. The selected works highlight the strength and diversity of a wide range of practices. Many of the represented artists have challenged ingrained notions of sculpture as a 'male occupation' by embracing new materials, subjects and approaches. Others have avoided institutional bias by producing work for alternative spaces or the public domain.

The works in **Breaking the Mould** are arranged into three loose groups exploring the figure, abstraction and found objects. These accessible themes enable a range of shared concerns to emerge across time, space and material. A number of the accompanying labels have been written by a range of contributors including fellow artists, curators and community groups. These voices highlight the need for sustained collective action to broaden representation within the field of sculpture.

Breaking the Mould is an Arts Council Collection Touring Exhibition initiated in response to *Women Working in Sculpture from 1960 to the Present Day: Towards a New Lexicon*, a research project led by Catherine George (Coventry University) and Hilary Gresty (independent).

Fragile works

The works in the exhibition are very fragile. To keep the works safe for future generations, please do not touch and please supervise young children.

Learning Resources

Learning resources are located on Floor 1 in our Long Gallery and Activity Room including free, self-led, creative activities for children. Filmed interviews with artists and a wide array of books can be found on our Mezzanine Level. Further resources can be downloaded at artscouncilcollection.org.uk - search 'Breaking the Mould'.

Catalogue

A full colour catalogue, produced by Hayward Gallery Publishing is available to purchase in our Gallery Shop on the Ground Floor for the special exhibition price of £12.99 (RRP £14.99).

Events programme

Details of related events can be found on our website thenewartgallerywalsall.org.uk and will be advertised through our social media channels.

 [newartgallerywalsall](https://www.facebook.com/newartgallerywalsall)

 [thenewartgallerywalsall](https://www.instagram.com/thenewartgallerywalsall)

 [newartgallery](https://twitter.com/newartgallery)

 [newartgallerywalsall](https://www.youtube.com/newartgallerywalsall)

[#breakingthemould](https://twitter.com/hashtag/breakingthemould)

FIGURED

The human form has provided an enduring source of inspiration to modern and contemporary sculptors based in the UK. The works on display reveal a diverse range of approaches to the body. Some of the earliest works reflect on classical ideals. They were made using techniques such as carving, modelling and casting. These traditional approaches were soon called into question and enhanced with new ways of working.

From the 1960s, artists began to introduce new materials into their work as a way of breaking away from the macho associations of manipulating stone, metal and wood. Textiles, cosmetics and hair were deliberately employed for their malleable properties and for their 'feminine' associations. These materials unleashed new possibilities for sculpture and opened up fresh ways of thinking about gender, identity and politics.

Sexualised bodies emerge in a number of these works, often interwoven with menace and an uncanny presence. These liberated forms evoke the irrational subject matter of Surrealism. Suggestions of performance are also revealed in works that appear to twist, writhe and entwine. This sense of physical engagement is reinforced through the diverse and active processes used to make the works, from stitching and welding to modelling and assembling.

Sarah Lucas, *NUD CYCLADIC 7*, 2010. Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © the artist. Purchased with the assistance of the Art Fund



Shirazeh Houshiary, *Listen to the Tale of the Reed No.3*, 1982. Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © the artist

FORMED

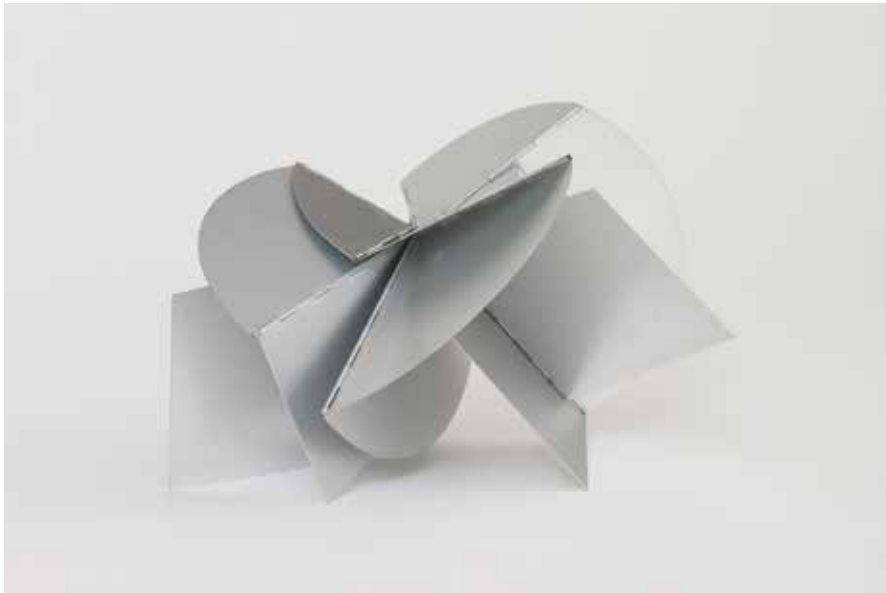
Barbara Hepworth was one of only a handful of post-war British sculptors to achieve international recognition for her extensive exploration of the relationship between form, material and context. Many other women have since pursued significant sculptural practices focusing on the interrogation of formal, geometric and abstract ideas. A number of the represented artists have worked to commission. They have found freedom beyond the confines of the gallery, producing work on a large scale for public sites or in response to architecture.

Women have pioneered the use of an ever-expanding range of sculptural materials. The works on display incorporate paper, text, ceramic, gold leaf – even movement, colour and light. Industrial materials and processes have also provided an ongoing source of inspiration. Whether incorporating ‘soft’ or ‘hard’ materials, the selected works reveal the innovative pursuit of form, whether alluring or unsettling, dominant or submissive, personal or anonymous.

Minimalism has provided a particularly rich source of inspiration for women working in sculpture. Although many of the artists associated with minimalism were male, the focus on reduced, sequential forms provided a neutral and open domain. Post-minimalism, spearheaded by the German-born American sculptor, Eva Hesse, was characterised by the introduction of a human touch and an ongoing engagement with seriality. These attributes can be found in the bodily proportions of a number of the works on display, and in the repetitive processes of stacking, folding and spiralling.



Barbara Hepworth, *Icon*, 1957.
Arts Council Collection, Southbank
Centre, London © Bowness



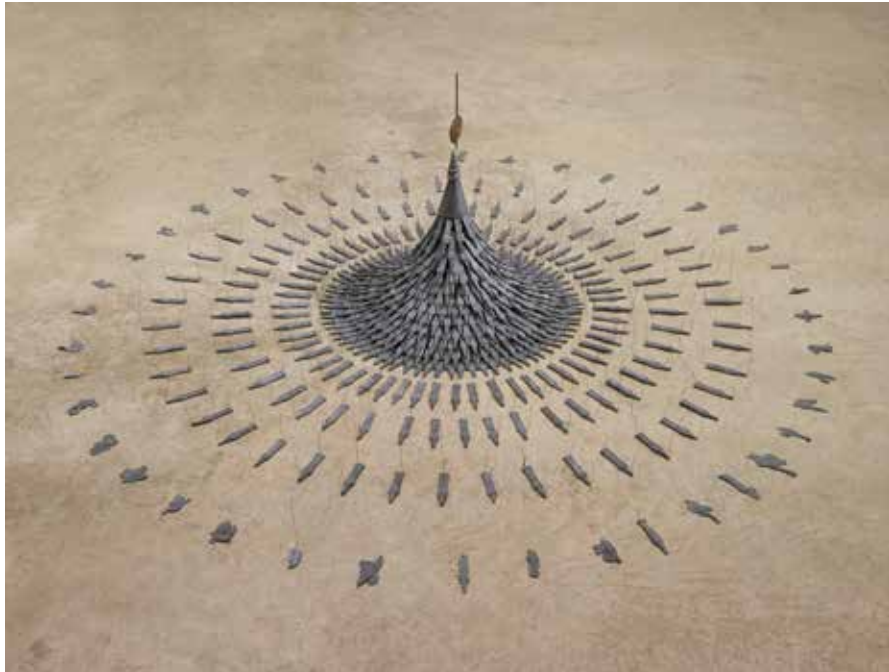
Lygia Clark, *Animal 3*, 1969. Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © the artist

FOUND

All of the works in this section reference found objects. Some of these objects are incorporated directly or used in the production process. In other works, found objects are concealed, implied or mimicked. Found objects appeal to artists for a number of reasons including cost, accessibility, and their ability to convey multiple narratives. Many of the objects featured hold 'feminine' or domestic connotations: clothing, household chairs, pegs, flowers. These items prompt new ways of thinking about sculpture and raise intriguing questions concerning the value of subjective experience.

A number of represented artists have embraced the spirit of assemblage, pursuing a hands-on approach to unite seemingly disparate objects in fresh configurations. We are encouraged to move around these works, to peer into and through them, and to forge new interpretations, bringing our own experiences and ideas to bear on these poetic and inviting accumulations.

Elsewhere, artists have employed the process of casting. Unlike carving or welding where the material is removed or heated into submission, casting is informed by the object that it meets. It brings life to invisible surfaces and negative spaces, revealing hidden histories. This dynamic exchange between artist and material has provided an attractive approach to many women working in sculpture. The process of casting also touches on ideas of presence and absence, life and death, raising the possibility of preservation and transformation.



Cornelia Parker, *Fleeting Monument*, 1985. Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © the artist



Rose Finn-Kelcey, *God's Bog*, 2001. Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London
© Estate of Rose Finn-Kelcey

We'd love to hear your thoughts about the exhibition,
scan the QR code to complete a short survey:



A large print version of this guide is available on request

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