

# Corpus

Sue Freeborough

2012

## Introduction

*'The sense of touch perceives only bodies; the sense of sight only surfaces. What then is beauty for the sense of touch? It is not colours! Nor is it light and shadow. It is bodies!'* Johann Gottfried Herder

Herder's observation on the centrality of the body to aesthetic experience was written in 1769 but his words encapsulate something we still take for granted today - that knowledge of the world stems from the body's ability to intervene physically in the three-dimensional environment.

Herder's philosophical meditations were grounded in a profound curiosity about sculpture and its relation to the human body. The nature of that relationship remains one of culture's most enduring preoccupations, as Sue Freeborough's rich and varied body of work demonstrates.

From a sculptural point of view, the body can be immediately apprehended - it can be observed, drawn, carved, modelled, or cast. But these processes simulate only the body's surface and volumetric mass. It is the deeper mysteries within - and more importantly the unfathomable relationship between the body and the self inhabiting it - that provide such a potent source of inspiration for Freeborough. She uses sculpture as a prism through which to refract a range of ideas relating to our common humanity, our interaction with each other and with the wider world. Taking the body as her subject also allows her to express in a personal and emotional way what it is for her to be alive, here and now, and to reflect on the experiences and relationships that have helped form her aesthetic sensibility over time. Communicating with the viewer, providing a meaningful point of connection through the work, is of paramount importance to her.

Freeborough came relatively late to sculpture, but brought to it a wealth of earlier experience - most notably in nursing, dance, music

and motherhood - all of which has enriched her work. Underpinning her sculpture is an openness to ideas from across a broad range of disciplines, from art history to anthropology, from contemporary French philosophy to cell biology. Much of her work begins with a thought or an idea that seems susceptible to transposition into sculptural form. She allows her intuition to guide her towards the most appropriate material to use and there follows a process of research and exploration which informs the outcome of the work. The diversity of her intellectual interests is reflected in the broad range of materials she uses. Drawing remains an important part of her artistic discipline and an abundant source of ideas for sculpture.



Mythical concepts recur in her work, occasionally evolving from a visual encounter with an object or object type that stimulates her into developing her own interpretation. She seems particularly drawn to forms with an archaic or primitive resonance. In some of her figures we can see traces of Cycladic sculpture; in others there are faint echoes of the prehistoric Willendorf Venus. The famous cult statue of Artemis by the ancient Greek sculptor Endoios, versions of which Freeborough saw in Rome and at Ephesus, prompted her into making her own *Artemis* - one in bronze, another in ciment fondu.

The result is a curious totem formed as a cluster of globular elements bound into a column, which rephrases the symbolic power of the original using a contemporary voice. Some scholars have

ARTEMIS detail  
1990  
Ciment Fondu  
Unique  
96cm high

interpreted the ancient Artemis's bizarre, dangling appendages as bovine scrota, vestiges of some lost sacrificial ritual. Freeborough, however, prefers an earlier reading that viewed them as breasts symbolising motherhood and fertility. Her re-working of the ancient statue represented a pivotal moment in her creative development, marking a transition from one life phase to another - from that of full-time mother to that of sculptor.

Doublings and divisions, positives and negatives, absence and presence are other recurring themes in Freeborough's sculpture. The work entitled *Mythos* was inspired by seeing an ancient Mexican



clay mask incorporating two faces - one on the interior, the other on the exterior. Using this as a starting point, Freeborough took a British Museum replica of Aphrodite's face and re-cast it in glass, applying an impression of her own face on the interior. Just as in Greek legend Aphrodite was born from the moment when Heaven was separated from Earth, so Freeborough's *Mythos* incorporates the duality of a heavenly ideal and an earthly real. That creative tension is at the heart of both classical and neoclassical sculpture, indeed is arguably classicism's most enduring legacy.

MYTHOS  
2000  
Cast Glass &  
Stainless Steel  
52cm high

Freeborough's work encourages us to see the body in both its expressive and receptive capacities. She reveals it as the instrument with which we interpret and celebrate our cultural and emotional





CHROMOSOMAL  
DANCE  
2009  
Copper & Tin  
Series of 5  
41.5cm high



JUDICIOUS  
JUGGLER  
2004  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
13cm high

lives - through dance and through communicative gestures such as linking, touching and embracing. The works entitled *Double Take* and *Judicious Juggler* both exemplify this line of thought. But her work also offers a reminder of the body's ineffable origins. She is fascinated by genetics and cell biology, translating her interest in various branches of scientific inquiry into sculptural forms that in some cases retain the physical traces of her experimental curiosity.

*Chromosomal Dance*, for example, was inspired by David Bainbridge's writing on chromosomes and human sexual difference. Freeborough took Bainbridge's concept of the 'chromosomal dance' that takes place in cell division and rehearsed it in the foundry using the two metals that combine to make bronze - copper and tin. The conjoined male and female figures embody the union of the two molten metals as they fused after being poured simultaneously into a half-mould. The finished work has a raw, primitive beauty that recalls the work of Germaine Richier.

In November 2011, Freeborough completed a short residency at the Ruwenzori Sculpture Foundation in Uganda, a charitable project established by Pangolin Editions in 2004 to foster and nurture a tradition of metal-casting in East Africa and to promote cultural and educational exchange with the UK. The residency was the most recent fruit of Freeborough's long collaborative association with the Pangolin Foundry in Stroud and she used her time in Uganda not only to work alongside Ruwenzori's artists and

technicians but also to engage with local life and culture. The current exhibition includes work inspired by her time there, some pieces incorporating indigenous materials sourced locally.

The lissome figure entitled *Inner Skin* is one of Freeborough's most numinous creations to date. Covered in a 'skin' of Ugandan 'bark cloth' formed from the compressed bark of the Mutuba fig tree, this epicene dryad might stand as an emblem of humanity's reliance on, and absorption of, the natural resources that surround us. It also reminds us that some of the most ancient sculptures ever made were wooden xoana - forms hewn from a tree. Herder would have appreciated the strange power of Freeborough's standing figure: *'The blind man who was healed saw human beings as if they were trees.'*

Tom Flynn  
March 2012

INNER SKIN  
2012  
Polystyrene  
& Ugandan  
Barkcloth  
Unique  
178cm high



LET THERE BE SPACES IN  
YOUR TOGETHERNESS  
1986  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
119cm high





REBIRTH  
1990  
Ciment Fondu  
Unique  
39cm high







ARTEMIS  
1990  
Ciment Fondu  
Unique  
96cm high





LINE OF LIGHT  
1991  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
34cm high



PUSHING SPACE  
1991  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
40cm high





POINTS OF CONTACT  
1991  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
16cm high



TOUCHING THE INSIDE  
1996  
Sterling Silver  
Edition of 10  
13cm high





MYTHOS  
2000  
Cast Glass  
& Stainless Steel  
Unique  
52cm high





CARDINAL POINTS  
2002  
Sterling Silver  
& Stainless Steel  
Edition of 10  
16.5cm high







DOUBLE TAKE  
2003  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
58cm high







SHADOWS OF MNEMOSYNE  
2004  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
68cm high





MEMORY VOWS  
2005  
Bronze, Mild Steel  
& Stainless Steel  
Unique  
75cm high







I ONLY KNOW THAT I AM  
2005  
Wax  
Unique  
55cm high





CHROMOSOMAL DANCE  
2009  
Photographic print  
Edition of 5

CHROMOSOMAL DANCE *detail*  
2009  
Copper & Tin  
Series of 5  
41.5cm high





DOUBLE TASK  
2009  
Charcoal on paper





TOUCHING  
2010  
Fired Paper Clay  
Unique  
13cm high



THREE SISTERS  
2010  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
30cm high





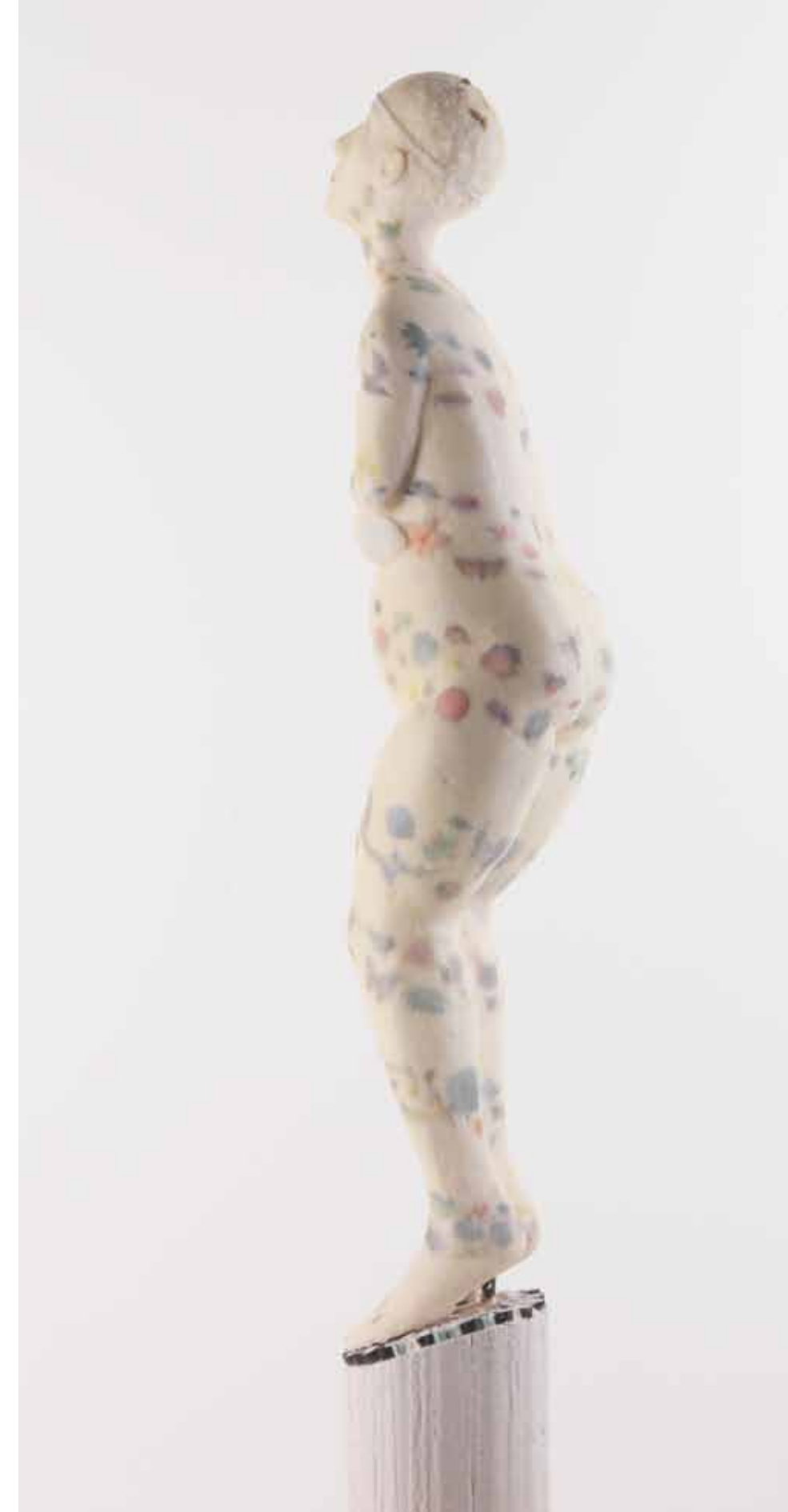


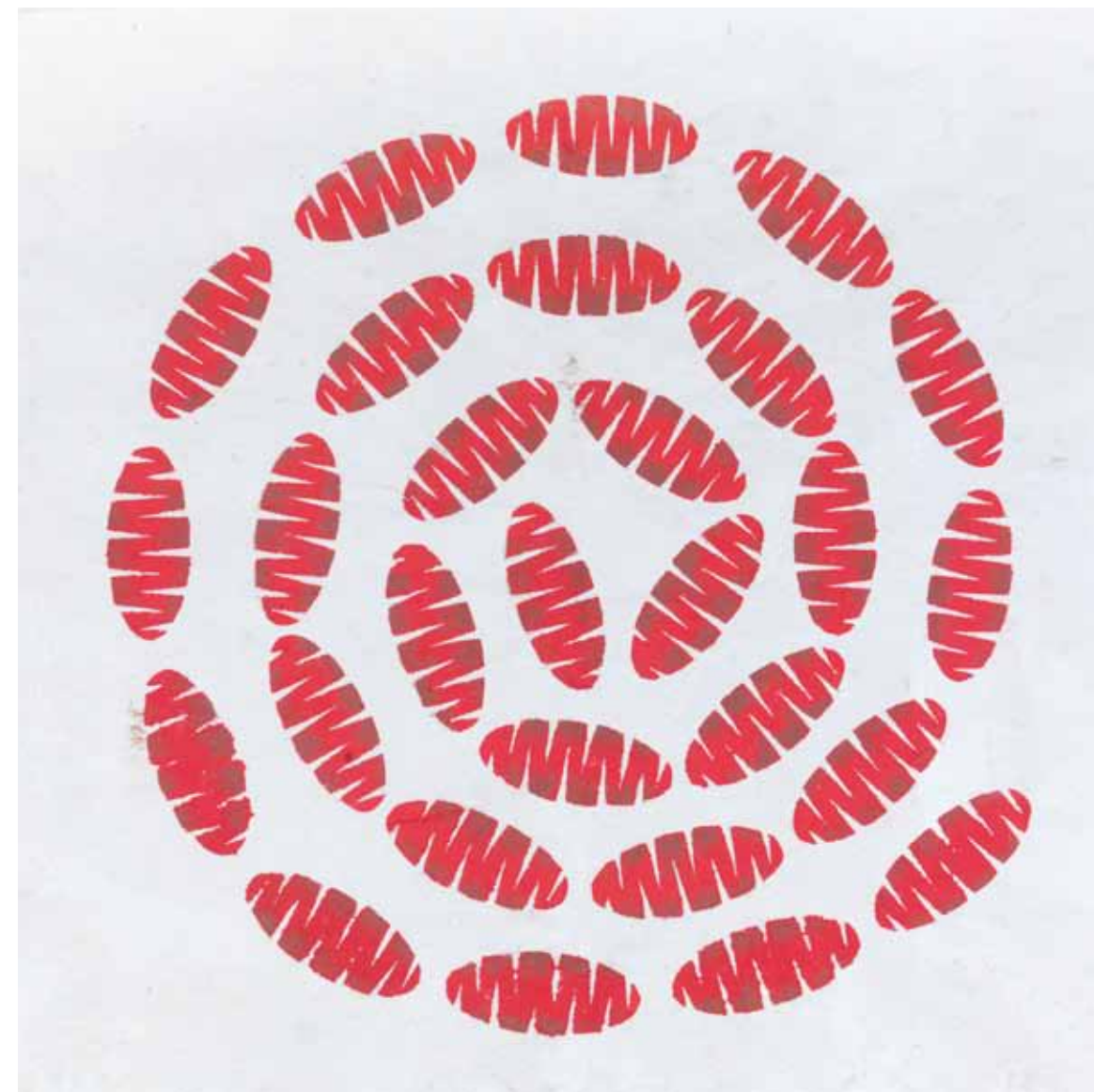
MENDEL'S THEORY OF INHERITANCE  
2010  
Monoprints  
Unique





MITOCHONDRIAL EVE  
2011  
Plaster, Wax & Prints  
Unique  
166cm high







INNER SKIN  
2012  
Polystyrene &  
Ugandan Barkcloth  
Unique  
178cm high





RITE OF PASSAGE  
2012  
Plaster, Mild Steel  
& Aluminium Wire  
Unique  
51cm high





## Afterword

Always intriguing and never predictable, Sue Freebrough's work gently probes the human condition, subtly commenting on our relationships, our physical and emotional selves and the landmarks which punctuate our lives. Her ingenious use of materials and thoughtful approach create work which stimulate and challenge the viewer whilst eliciting recognition and empathy.

Gallery Pangolin first exhibited Freeborough's work in the late 1990's and she has since been a regular participant in mixed and themed shows. We are delighted to present this long-overdue solo exhibition which follows her artistic evolution and development, bringing together early works shown for the first time with the most recent, specially-made sculptures and works on paper.

We would like to thank Sue and Chris Freeborough for their longstanding support and their help with the planning of this exhibition. We are extremely grateful to Tom Flynn for his sensitive and perceptive introduction, to Steve Russell for his excellent photography and as always to the team at Pangolin Editions for their craftsmanship and invaluable assistance.

Jane Buck  
Claude Koenig

Catalogue design: Gallery Pangolin  
Printing: Healeys Print Group





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