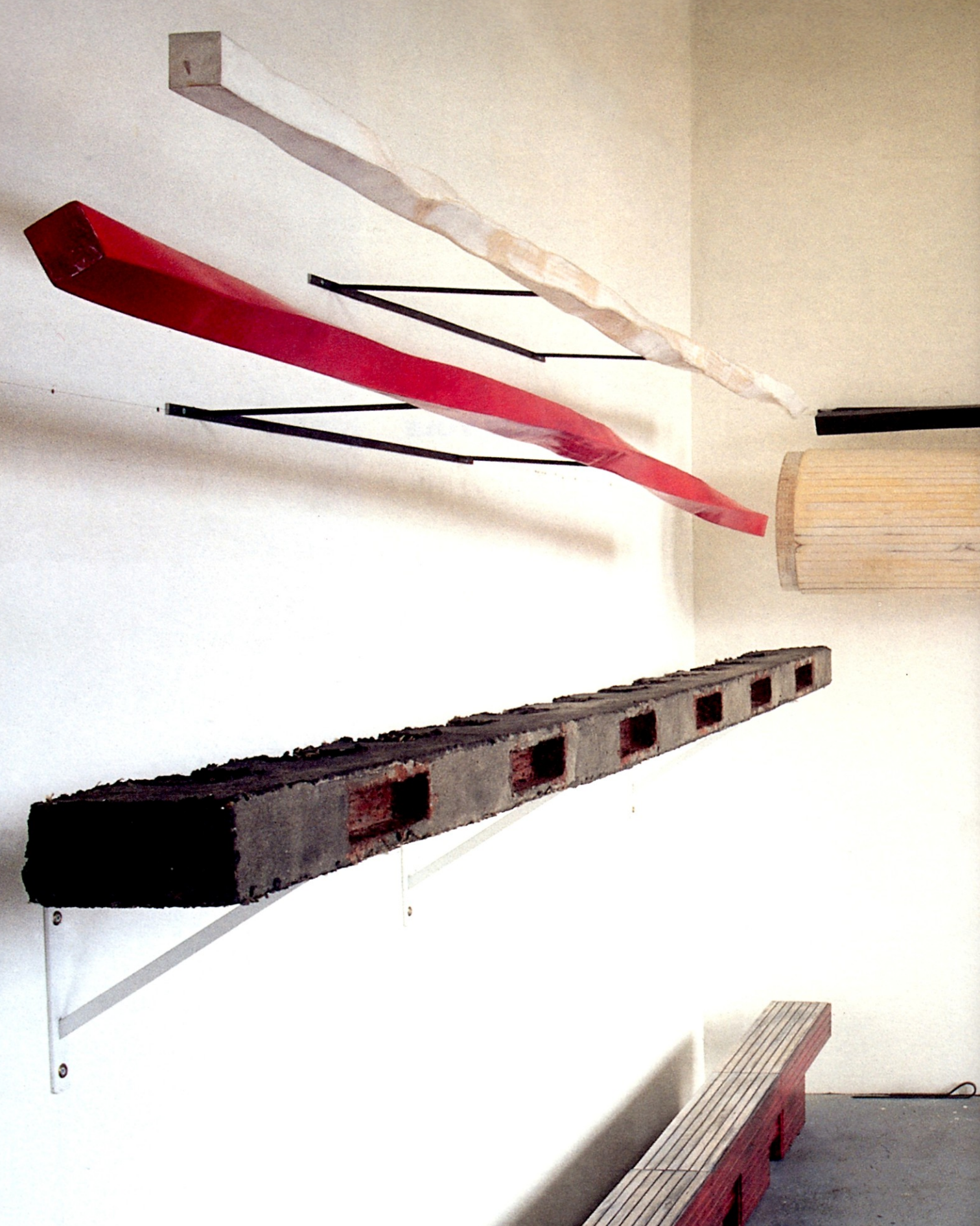


AINSLIE YULE





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TALBOT RICE GALLERY
EDINBURGH

ULSTER MUSEUM
BELFAST

AINSLIE YULE: WALL SCULPTURES

TALBOT RICE GALLERY

University of Edinburgh – 1999

ULSTER MUSEUM

Belfast – 2001

The Talbot Rice Gallery, the Ulster Museum and the artist gratefully acknowledge financial support from the Scottish Arts Council and Kingston University.

FOREWORD

Ainslie Yule left Scotland to work in the south nearly twenty five years ago. And although in those intervening decades he has continued to work very creatively and has exhibited widely, he has not exhibited very much in Scotland. Indeed the present exhibition will be his first one-man show in his native country for more than ten years. His enigmatic, but strangely potent sculpture lingers in the mind however. In that time, therefore, although his work may not have been seen very much in Scotland, it has not been forgotten, nor indeed have its central concerns changed: finding the significance that can inhabit a form, not because of any association, but simply because of an inherent, mysterious poetry that resides in shape, texture and colour. Sometimes this poetry is reached by a process of visible construction, and in this exhibition there are strange, laminated wooden objects, beautifully made, apparently almost functional, but whose function is enigma. Over the years he has been very consistent and some of these constructions are reminiscent of works that he made before he left Scotland.

In other works the construction process itself is more mysterious. Apparently improvised, these pieces reflect another continuing theme in his work. It relates to drawing, but drawing lifted from the flat page into the three dimensional world that we inhabit, showing how the hand's movement in space can capture meaning, just as gesture does in our daily communication. But this work is still enigmatic. Indeed often in these works there are areas that are half hidden, a meaning hinted at but not revealed. But then true poetry never states the obvious.

I am confident that many people will welcome the opportunity that this exhibition provides to renew their acquaintance with Ainslie Yule's art. For those less familiar with his work, Mel Gooding's essay in this catalogue will provide an excellent introduction. It is also a great pleasure to present this exhibition in collaboration with the Ulster Museum and I am much indebted to Dr Brian Kennedy of the Ulster Museum for his cooperation and support and also for the introduction that he has contributed to the catalogue.

Duncan Macmillan
Curator Talbot Rice Gallery
University of Edinburgh

INTRODUCTION

I first encountered the work of Ainslie Yule in 1977 when he was included along with Ian Hamilton Finlay, Eileen Lawrence, Will MacLean and Fred Stiven in an exhibition called *Inscape*, arranged by the Scottish Arts Council and shown at the Ulster Museum. From that exhibition we acquired for the Museum a drawing by Yule, *White Reclining Object*, which, like much of his work, is both a drawing for sculpture and a finished work in its own right. The title of the *Inscape* exhibition, borrowed from Gerard Manley Hopkins, was intended as a reference to the essential interior relationships of natural things. It was particularly apt as a description of Ainslie Yule's work and characterizes it even now, some twenty years later. As the critic Paul Overy noted in the *Inscape* catalogue, Yule's work, 'through evocative combinations of materials', alludes to and hints at, but never openly defines, the effects of man's activities upon the landscape. Yule is sensitive to the natural environment, exploring it inwardly, but never imposing himself on it. These attributes too typified Yule's work in the late 1970s and early 1980s and remain typical of it today.

Even though he is usually thought of as a sculptor, drawing is of the essence in Yule's work. But as a draughtsman he plots not so much form and structure as the ever-changing relationships between things: in his world nothing is static and things constantly change as they are juxtaposed one with another. His materials, often ephemeral odds and ends of paper, card, wire, papier mâché and the like, materials 'rescued from triviality', as Douglas Hall once described them, bear this out.



Things with Yule, like papier mâché, which has a surprising strength and durability, are rarely what they appear to be. Forms that appear massive are in fact light in weight, their bulk often denied by their being placed incongruously, say, at chest height or even eye level on a wall. This challenging of our senses and common perceptions pervades his whole ethos and was given emphasis by a visit to Japan some years ago. His most recent forms, pieces such as the Untitled series of 1996-7 and Black Twist or Red Twist of 1999, for example, with their innate solitude, contrapuntal tensions and balance, call for a meditative response from the viewer, as paradox and wit ultimately delude our interpretative skills and longing for order and categorization. Yule holds firmly to the idea that process, materials and the act of creation are more important than the finished object, the latter being ultimately transient in itself.

S.B.Kennedy

Ulster Museum



PLATE 2

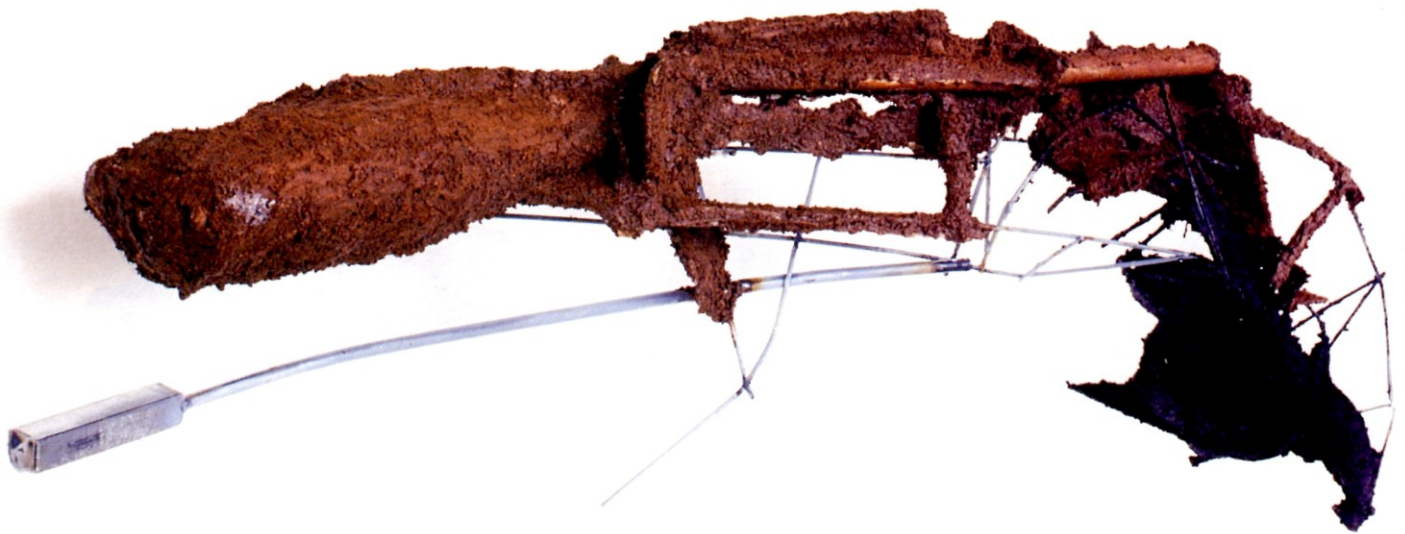


PLATE 3



PLATE 4
PLATE 5

AINSLIE YULE: RECENT WORK

Ainslie Yule's recent sculpture falls into two distinctive and contrasting modes. There are the strange mixed-media works built up in cellulose-strengthened papier mâché on wire armatures and treated with wax and pigment, a technique that Yule invented during a residency scholarship in 1996 at Takamiya in Japan. The forms of these are oddly arbitrary, their surfaces pitted, as if deteriorated by burial or immersion. They have a fragile look to them, but are in fact very tough, a visual contradiction that has much to do with their effect as objects: they are constructed to look as if fragmentary, or damaged by the accidents of time. The sculptures of the second kind, dating from 1999, are, by contrast, deliberately ordered structures of plywood laminate, whose surfaces are treated with various materials (gesso, varnish, oil paint) to create an effect of carefully crafted finish. All are designed to be wall-mounted, at just below shoulder level, each being provided with a discreet, carefully engineered bracket that holds them at a distance from the supporting wall and which gives them the appearance of being held, or floating, in space: objects for contemplation. Different in form and effect they nevertheless have an underlying thematic unity, to which I shall return. But before that I shall consider each group separately.

The sculptures in the first mode might be described, fancifully, as the findings of an imaginative archaeology. In what seems an ironic reflection on the sources of renaissance sculpture—which is to say, of the first 'modernism'—certain of these untitled objects have the look of fragments salvaged from some previously unknown pre-archaic culture whose forms and practices remain a mystery to which these



PLATE 6

found objects provide no clue. For the early renaissance scholar-artists the retrieval of classical sculpture was partly a matter of excavating and identifying fragments of the classical, partly a matter of the reinvention of a style in which the fragmentary was reconstituted whole. The excited realisation that modern sculpture could once more match the perfection of the ancients had nothing to do with originality and everything to do with recognition and recreation: recognition of an humanistic idealism at work in the art of the Greeks and Romans; recreation of forms that were at once a homage to the ancient creators and a conscious rededication to the idealism that inspired them. The new humanism encouraged a shift towards a poignant realism. Yule's fragments suggest no possibility of reconstitution, no means by which the original forms might be rediscovered in expressive and beautiful modern sculptural terms, in forms that might propose the ideal in either human or architectural form.

They may be seen as being in a similarly ironic relation to the sources, forms and conceptual bases of twentieth century sculpture in its different manifestations. Archaic and in particular African sculpture provided models of figuration in accord with the humanistic universalism that animated the sculpture of Brancusi, Moore, Hepworth and others; natural morphologies and the dynamics of energy revealed by high speed and time-lapse photography, X-Rays, microscopy and modern astronomy informed the sculptural projects of artists as different as Arp and Gabo; mathematics of number, interval and repetition, geometries of line, plane and form provided the conceptual framework of much Constructivist sculpture. The inconsequential and nondescript objects retrieved from Yule's imaginary lost world seem to register an indifference to human, organic or

crystalline morphologies, or to mathematical or geometric principles. They are neither descriptive nor demonstrative. As works of sculpture they resist any of those modernist impulses to form and meaning that find inspiration in the modern discoveries of archaeology, ethnography, physics, photography, etc. If some of them have the look of desperate contraptions, that might seem to refer to that singular aspect of the modernist project, the aeronautical engineering of Tatlin and Rodchenko, then it is as if to mock the utopian vanity of revolutionary wishes, not from the superior vantage point of the century's end but as from another, previous time when obscure ambitions—to fly? to sail?—were also mocked by failure.

The wood-laminate sculptures are formally problematic in a quite different way. They have the look of well-made objects, carpentered for purpose. They might be the product of a 'modernist' furniture factory, say, or an architectural model maker. But they take no place in the recent sculptural discourse concerned with an ironic sociology of furniture, and they present no architectural proposition of either realizable or idealist forms. (Some of them do have the look of simple architectures: of bridges and cabins.) Certain of them may seem, at first sight, to seek instatement in the lively continuing tradition of Constructivism, especially perhaps in that post-mimimalist line that finds its starting point in what Sol Lewitt laconically described as *rudimentary mathematics*, in which surprising structures are generated out of elementary arithmetical or geometric propositions, out of repetitions and reversals, and order is demonstrated as capable of many unexpected forms. In fact, Yule's carefully constructed forms have no such underlying programme: the arithmetical relations of structural feature to spatial interval are actual but arbitrary, each determined

for the object itself, and referring to nothing else. Though registered in the titles these relations have no demonstrable principled purpose.

Neither do these objects have a Surrealist provenance: their unclassifiability is not, for instance, that of Giacometti's *Disagreeable Object*. Even the oddest of them, the *Twist* works, do nothing but draw attention to the ingenuity of their making. Their forms deny the orthogonal principle, but not as the outcome of deliberately irrational procedures revelatory of the marvellous. Looked at frontally their undulations may suggest landscape or seascape horizons, but there is no rigorous logic that demands horizontality; they would be as effective, and as inexplicable, if presented in the vertical. These works, then, like those of the first group, seem to hover on the edge of sculpturality: they are a bit like things known, but they are not enough like to assume an identity, functional or aesthetic. Discovered in an abandoned workshop they would puzzle the finder: things carefully constructed to no apparent purpose. They are not so much irrational objects as objects without a rationale: in this they diverge in principle from Dada or Duchampian constructions or assemblages, in which there is always a method to the madness.

These elaborate negative definitions seem demanded by sculptures that lack describable features of style as a manifestation of either social or individual expression. Excavated by archaeologists millennia hence, among other artifacts of our age whose functions were recognisably sacred, aesthetic or utile, they would excite curiosity, but failing to accord to any category save the un-categorisable, they would be consigned no doubt to museum cupboards to gather dust and indefinitely await explanation. I suspect that Yule would be pleased by this. As it is, they are of the here and now; that they have

the look of found objects or unidentifiable constructions is a matter of intention and deliberative facture: they are, of course, sculptures. Considered now as such, their fictively ironic relation to historical sculpture can be understood as an aspect of their meaning: what they look like (which is not quite like anything else but enough like certain things to be disquieting) is a function of their essentially satiric purpose. They do not trade on the spurious poignancy of the *objet trouvé*; they appear to have no history; they are not susceptible to description as within recognisable sculptural discourses. Their ironic rejection of sculptural traditions is tacit.

They purposely say nothing at the end of a century when too much has been said; they refuse the category of image in an age saturated with meaningless imagery; they offer no ideal of order, geometric or architectonic, after the failure of too many kinds of order, of too many ideal architectures; they present no comforting morphological analogies of organic or mineralogical growth and form; they are formally governed by no satisfying harmonics. They are awkwardly silent presences: the formlessness of the first type and the inutile dumbness of the second type are contrasting terms of a satiric poetry that takes as its target the transcendent spiritual and utopian political ambitions of the modernist project itself. They have a bleak beauty that comes from denial; they offer naught for your comfort. At the millennial moment this poetry opposes the millenarian, utopian or apocalyptic, with its own unpretentious *arte povera*; making no claims, it makes something out of nothing.

Mel Gooding, October 1999



PLATE 7



above: PLATE 8
following page: PLATE 9



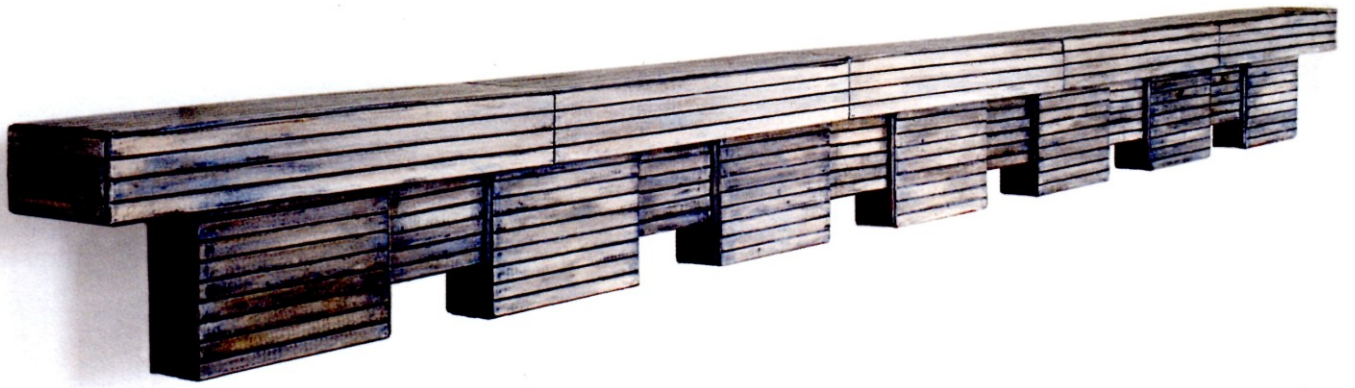


PLATE 10



PLATE 11

following page: PLATE 12



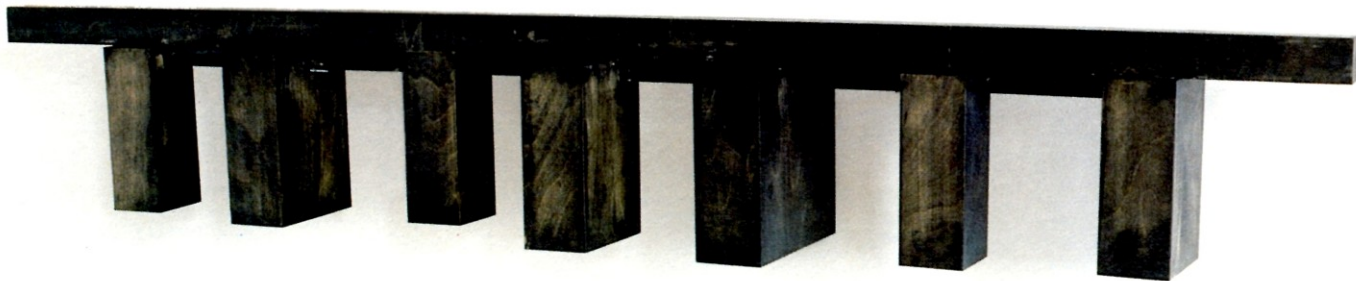


PLATE 13

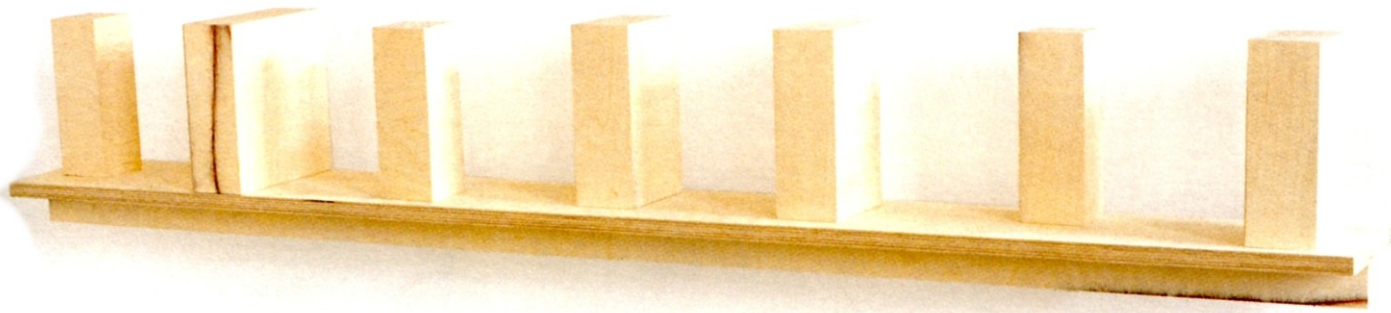


PLATE 14

following page: PLATE 15





PLATE 16
PLATE 17



PLATE 18

CATALOGUE

WALL SCULPTURES

1996-1999



UNTITLED

cellulose fibre, wax, steel
46cm/H x 22cm/W x 9cm/L



UNTITLED

cellulose fibre, wire
20cm/H x 20cm/W x 166cm/L



UNTITLED

cellulose fibre, wire
29cm/H x 29cm/W x 55cm/L



UNTITLED

cellulose fibre, wax, wire
11cm/H x 26cm/W x 55cm/L



UNTITLED

cellulose fibre, wire
12cm/H x 12cm/W x 40cm/L



PLATE 1

UNTITLED

cellulose fibre, wax, steel

30cm/H x 27cm/W x 160cm/L



PLATE 2

FIVE FIVE SUSPENDED

cellulose fibre, wire

10cm/H x 20cm/W x 58cm/L



PLATE 3

EARTH OBJECT

cellulose fibre, soil, wire

38cm/H x 35cm/W x 145cm/L



TWO ENDS

cellulose fibre, wax, wire

28cm/H x 17cm/W x 125cm/L



FLOATING OBJECT

cellulose fibre, wire

34cm/H x 31cm/W x 145cm/L



PLATE 4 *FIVE-FIVE-SEVEN*
cellulose fibre, wire
23cm/H x 23cm/W x 90cm/L



PLATE 5 *FIVE ON TOP*
cellulose fibre, wire
26cm/H x 28cm/W x 68cm/L



PLATE 6 *FIVE*
cellulose fibre, wood
26cm/H x 16cm/W x 230cm/L



PLATE 7 *LONG BLUE*
cellulose fibre, wax, wire, pigment
20cm/H x 25cm/W x 260cm/L



PLATE 8 *LONG BLUE GREY*
cellulose fibre, wax, wire, pigment
30cm/H x 20cm/W x 166cm/L



PLATE 9

ZIG ZAG

cellulose fibre, wire

20cm/H x 20cm/W x 166cm/L



FLOATING 2

cellulose fibre, wire

29cm/H x 29cm/W x 60cm/L



SIX SEVEN SUSPENDED

cellulose fibre, wire, steel

20cm/H x 25cm/W x 255cm/L



PLATE 10,11 *FIVE SEVEN EIGHT*

(GREY SIDE)

plywood, wax

30cm/H x 17cm/W x 356cm/L



PLATE 12

SEMI ROUND

plywood, wax

38cm/H x 35cm/W x 254cm/L



PLATE 13 *SEVEN EIGHT*
(BLACK SUSPENDED)
plywood, wax
25cm/H x 20cm/W x 160cm/L



PLATE 14 *SEVEN EIGHT*
(WHITE VERTICAL)
plywood, wax
22cm/H x 18cm/W x 160cm/L



PLATE 15 *SIX TWELVE THIRTEEN*
cellulose fibre, wood, pigment
9cm/H x 19cm/W x 275cm/L



PLATE 16,17 *RED TWIST*
plywood, steel, enamel
5cm/H x 5cm/W x 288cm/L



PLATE 18 *BLACK TWIST*
plywood, steel, graphite
5cm/H x 5cm/W x 288cm/L

BIOGRAPHY

EXHIBITIONS

BIOGRAPHY

- 1941 Born North Berwick, East Lothian, Scotland
- 1959- 64 Edinburgh College of Art
- 1974-75 Gregory Fellow in Sculpture, Leeds University
- 1978-79 Presentation 1st Biennial International Sculpture, Toronto
 Visiting Artist, Royal College of Art Painting School
 Elected Sculpture Faculty, British School at Rome
- 1982 Appointed Head of Sculpture, Kingston University
- 1987 Appointed Reader in Sculpture, Kingston University
- 1990 Founding Director Sculpture House, London

AWARDS

- 1960 Andrew Grant Junior Scholarship
- 1963 Andrew Grant Major Scholarship
- 1965 Andrew Grant Travelling Scholarship to New York
- 1974 Gregory Fellowship in Sculpture, Leeds University
- 1975 Scottish Arts Council Bursary
- 1976 Residency Editions Alecto, London
- 1996 Rainbow Wood Scholarship Japan
- 1997 Elected Associate Royal Society British Sculptors
- 1998 Elected Fellow Royal Society British Sculptors

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1969 New 57 Gallery, Edinburgh
- 1972 Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh
- 1973 Serpentine Gallery, London
- 1973 Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh
- 1974 Leeds University Gallery
- 1976 Park Square Gallery, Leeds
- 1977 Editions Alecto, London
Aberdeen Art Gallery
Scottish Arts Council Gallery, Edinburgh
- 1978-79 Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh
Third Eye Centre, Glasgow
Aberdeen Art Gallery
Ulster Museum, Belfast
Forebank Studios, Dundee
- 1978 Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh
- 1981 St. Pauls Gallery, Leeds
- 1982 Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh
- 1986 Kingston Polytechnic
Angela Flowers Gallery, London
Studio Exhibition, London
City Artists Gallery, London
- 1988 Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh
- 1990 Kingston Polytechnic
- 1993 Villa Foscari- Rossi, Stra / Venice Biennale
- 1995 Chelsea Arts Club, London
- 1997 Takamiya Japan
- 1997 Stanley Picker Gallery, Kingston University

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1973 *Earth Images*, Scottish Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh
Aberdeen Art Gallery, Whitechapel Gallery, London
Gubio Ceramic Biennale, Gubio, Italy
- 1974 *Three Scottish Artists*, Galleria del Cavallino,
Venice, Turin and Genoa, Italy
- 1977 *Silver Jubilee Exhibition of Contemporary British Sculpture*,
Battersea Park, London
Beograd 77, Belgrade, Yugoslavia (Represented UK)
- 1978 *Work from Belgrade 77*, Scottish National Gallery
of Modern Art
Objects and Constructions, Edinburgh International Festival
Scottish Artists in Finland, Helsinki, Finland
- 1979 *British Art Show*, Sheffield, Bristol, Newcastle
- 1983 *New Aspects of British Art*, New York, USA
Scottish Contemporary Art, Robinson Galleries,
Houston/Texas, USA
Visual Aid Print, Royal Academy, London
- 1988 *New Directions*, Sarajevo and Zagreb, Yugoslavia
- 1993 *Art Sans Frontieres*, Watermans Gallery, London
Art Machine, Nikolaj Gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 1994 *Witness of Existence*, Sarajevo, Bosnia
- 1994 *Edinburgh International Festival*, Demarco European
Cultural Foundation, Edinburgh
- 1996 *British Abstract Art 3*, Flowers East, London
- 1999 *Contemporary British Landscape*, Flowers East, London

WORK IN PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Aberdeen Art Gallery

British Museum, London

Arts Council of Great Britain

Camden Borough Council, London

Contemporary Arts Society, London

Southern Arts Association, London

Leeds City Arts Gallery

Leeds Education Committee

Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh

Dundee Art Gallery

Open University

Leeds University

Kingston University

Ulster Museum, Belfast

National Museum of Fine Art, Budapest

Private Collections in Europe, USA and Asia

AINSLIE YULE: WALL SCULPTURES

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