

SUSIE MACMURRAY
MATERIAL THOUGHT

PANGOLIN LONDON



Susie MacMurray
Pangolin London,
2024

MATERIAL THOUGHT

SUSIE MACMURRAY IN CONVERSATION WITH ROSE GLEADELL, OCTOBER 2024

Let's start with *Material Thought*, which is your title for this exhibition. I understand that you have moved away from thematic concerns in this new body of work, so that it is very much about the materials and how they interact, both with each other and with your imagination.

Looking back, I am reminded of how life affirming it was to explore the physical nature of 'stuff' when I very first understood that I was a sculptor. In a sense it is going back to fundamentals of thinking materially. This kind of making is a slippery process where a preverbal response of some kind is triggered before an idea is formed. There is also something about accepting that losing oneself in exploration might be enough justification in and of itself.

I have decided to revel for a while in materiality, and to share my delight in that. With all that has been happening in the world recently, I have become aware of a subliminal anxiety, quietly humming away in the background. There is so little I can do to affect the world, other than to try to be kind in my everyday life. I am making work that satisfies something in me at the moment, and not worrying about where it fits.

You are an artist who explores the potential in materials that come to hand. Could you tell us about your choice of materials in *Material Thought*? Ducting hose, for example, which we have not seen you use before.

My materials can choose themselves in as much as it could be a chance encounter or an unexpected opportunity that arises. Sometimes stuff sits in the studio for years before I know what to do with it. In the case of ducting hose there was a discarded length, coiled up and spilling seductively over the side of the skip in my driveway during renovations to my kitchen. I thought, 'that's literally the guts of my house'.



There is usually a ‘what if?’ moment; then, either it’s a non-starter, I see immediate possibilities that I must throw myself into, or I file it in the back of my mind to revisit later. However, in spite of always trying to push forward and find new materials with potential, I have loved working with wax for a long time. It is a material that I keep returning to and I am gradually evolving new conversations to have with it.

On the other hand, sometimes a certain genre of material could be the jumping off point. Often this is because of a site-specific context, such as my recent collaboration with Lacoste for their Paris Fashion Week catwalk show. The suspended installation needed to evoke a very particular scenario. This kind of clearly defined parameter can sometimes become a catalyst for a more extensive line of enquiry within my wider practice.

At the heart of it I’m looking for something intangible but also very exact. If the balance between all the constituents isn’t right the whole thing falls down like a house of cards and the work won’t sing.

***Bride* is a significant piece in this exhibition for dovetailing your celebrated series of ‘garment sculptures’ with this new body of work. Can you elaborate on how your garment sculptures speak of womanhood?**

Susie MacMurray
Drift
Paris Fashion Week,
September 2024

Most recently I have been interrogating materiality from a more formal starting point, but I find it difficult to detach a material or an object from the various cultural associations and contexts it might have. The first piece I developed for this new body of work was *Bride*, which very much follows in this vein.

She is the latest in a series of occasional ‘garment sculptures’ I have now been making for over 20 years. I called them garment sculptures because they are not dresses. People do seem to refer to them as my ‘dresses’, though I’m not sure either *Medusa* or *Stalker* could be easily confused with a frock! I suppose that confusion rather illustrates the complexity of how we signal, receive and describe our identity and that of others.

In one sense these pieces have all been self-portraits. They are not as simplistic as to be autobiographical, but they all spring from questions I have asked myself about who I have been, who I am and who I might be brave enough to be. They explore facets of female identity and experience, including my own ambivalence. Using this form is a pragmatic way to evoke the body and to feel embodiment in the work. The starting point for *Bride* was the unwanted, dirty, white domestic ducting hose I found thrown in the skip. Somewhat intestinal it was literally the discarded guts of my house. Deconstruct, reconstruct. Discard, remake and transcend.

You have said that at the root of your work is a desire to consider the power that can be found in vulnerability. Is this coupled with an impulse to challenge binaries? Thought-provoking pairings abound in your exhibition – materials associated with force alongside those with connotations of softness.

Yes, the word binary could be perceived as somewhat black and white. It’s so much simpler that way, but the world never is. Perhaps current trends in that direction are a spur for me. I like your description of pairings better than the idea of opposites.

Although I’m looking for strong tensions between things, they are not simplistic. Hopefully when they work they have a clarity which comes from grappling with the complexity of options. There are so many ways to put things together, so many ways of seeing. Materials can be in opposition without being poles apart.



Medusa
2014, Handmade
copper chain mail,
fibreglass & steel
183 x 244 x 244 cm
Series of 2
Photo: Ben Blackall

Following on from that, working in bronze has been an exercise in grappling with a less familiar dimension for me. It is a good challenge. I see myself as a novice with this material as I have not done enough looking yet. I am at the beginning of exploring its subtlety and the great depth of its possibilities.

I am curious about the role of drawing in your work. Could you tell me about these large-scale charcoal on paper drawings which I understand you made whilst on a residency at Marchmont House, Berwickshire, earlier this year.

My drawings are a way for me to clear my head of unnecessary business. Like many artists I use it as a kind of meditation. I found the three-dimensional forms I could make with the ducting hose quite seductive, and it was a refreshing change from my finely detailed pen and ink drawings to be able to use large chunky sticks of charcoal in a loose, gestural way. It was all part of addressing unhelpful tightness of thought in my practice. They are an exercise in blowing the cobwebs away. Unusually for me I also experimented with responding to the forms I was making with wire dipped in wax. I rarely draw a thing I have already made. I am usually more interested in getting to know the nature of the material than describing an existing object.

For those unfamiliar with your work, it feels significant to mention that you were a professional musician before you turned your hand to making sculpture. What do you think about the haptic connection between sound, vibration and touch, which I have heard you speak about. Do you consider sound as sculptural?

I'm not sure I find sound sculptural. I do think it is no accident that I moved from a place where I was immersed in sound, at the centre of a symphony orchestra, to trying to make work that calls on the physical senses of the viewer. I think there is a connection between the sensation of drawing your hand over a surface, and the experience of being dissolved in live music, where you feel the sound in your body as much as you do through your ears. Installation provides the possibility of immersion and I am always hoping to make something that will pull me in. Being in the middle of a full orchestra would sometimes feel almost like I had swallowed the music and it was inside as well as outside me. I suspect I will always be searching for that activation in the things I make.

Is your process more spontaneous and playful than it is pre-thought? Or more improvisational than it is scored, to use musical terms.

My process as I have described above certainly begins playfully. It is full of instinctive shifts and leaps. The challenge is to stay in that dreamlike state long enough, and not to succumb too quickly to trying to understand what I have done, what it means and what I can do with it. With this recent work I've made an effort to do more of this for longer.

I am struck by the importance of community in your making process. Historically, women artists have embraced working in collectives, which have often enabled them to make new languages; your practice reminds me of this vital tradition.

The collective part comes only when there is something to begin to share, but that doesn't mean that the work and the ideas don't go on evolving. I am interested in the myriad traditions of communal making and the touch of many hands, particularly female ones, although they are not the subject of my work. It is particularly human to create things together that no individual could do alone. From weaving and spinning and folk tales, to building skyscrapers and coding the digital world. It is fundamental. I find the sense of collaboration, the companionship, the dialogue and the sharing of the process very affirmative, particularly when it's an installation.

In a conversation we had earlier this year, you spoke of 'a desire to feel consumed by your work' – are you any closer to this feeling?

No I'm not, but I keep trying.

Eve
2013, Wax & handmade
aluminium rings
Unique
Dimensions variable
Photograph: Ben Blackall



CATALOGUE



Bride
2024, Ducting hose, wire & canvas
Unique
140 x 120 x 120 cm
Photograph: Adam August



Carapace VII
2024, Bronze
Unique
5 x 13 x 12 cm





Drop
2024, Wool & wax
Unique
204 x 31 x 12 cm





Clutch,
2024, Mussel shells & wax
Edition of 7
7 x 5 x 6 cm (approx.)



Horizontal Drop
2024, Wood, wax
& wool
Unique
34 x 110 x 12 cm



Entwine
2024, Domestic ducting
hose & saddlery thread
Unique
60 x 58 x 58 cm





Carapace VI
2024, Bronze
Unique
12 x 24 x 23 cm





Marchmont Series no II
2024, Wax & wire
Unique
13 x 23 x 18 cm

En Pointe
2024, Wax, ostrich
feather & found wood
Unique
16 x 16 x 12 cm





Heart
2024, Deer antlers
threaded on canvas
Unique
29 x 29 x 12 cm



The starting point for Bride was the unwanted, dirty, white domestic ducting hose I found thrown in the skip. Somewhat intestinal it was literally the discarded guts of my house. Deconstruct, reconstruct. Discard, remake and transcend.

SUSIE MACMURRAY

Study for Entwine II
2024, Charcoal
on paper
Unique
135 x 121 cm





Mischief
2023, Domestic
ducting hose & wire
Unique
48 x 46 x 35 cm





LEFT:
Lichen I
2024, Bronze
& antler
Unique
15 x 5 x 4 cm

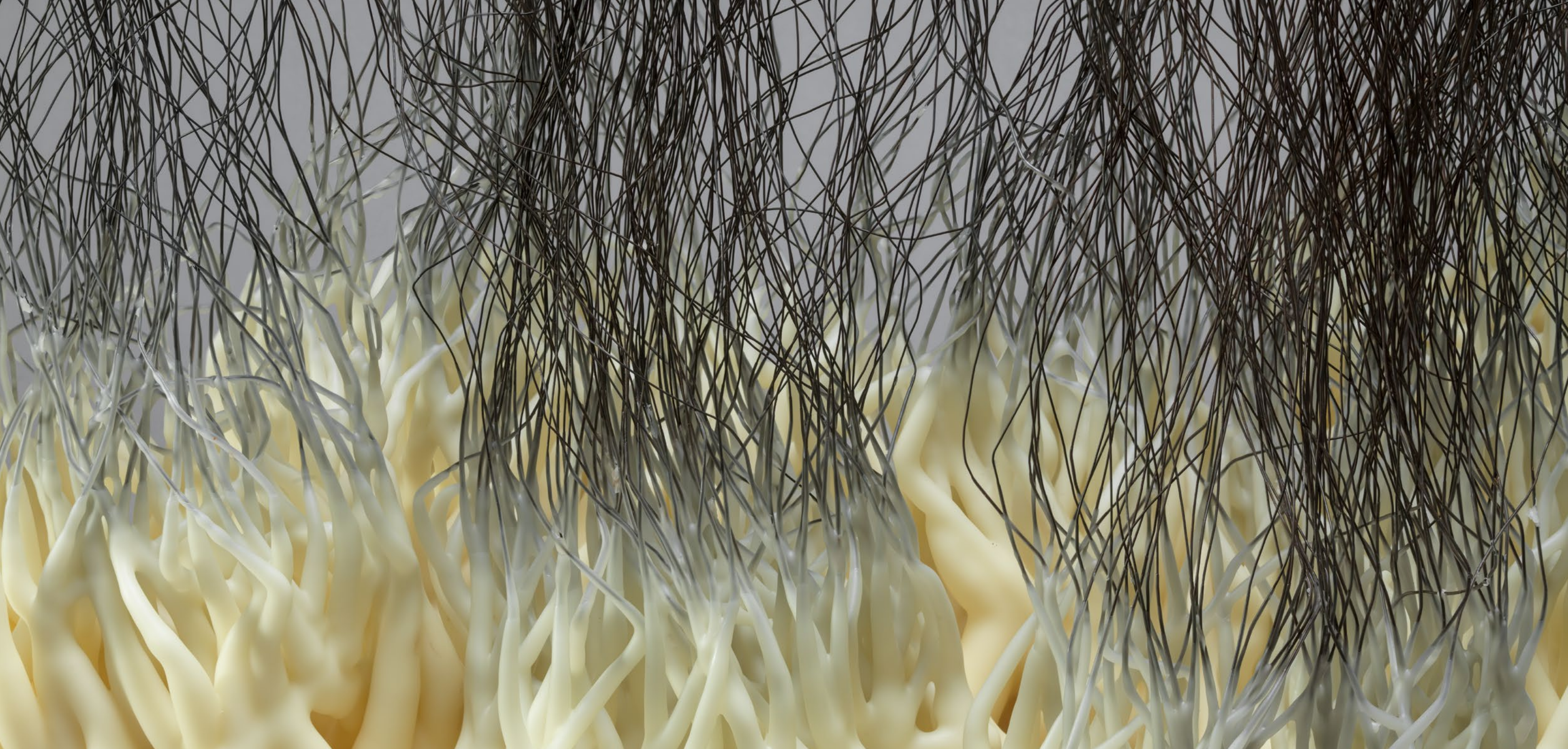
RIGHT:
Lichen II
2024, Bronze
Unique
6 x 9 x 6 cm

FAR RIGHT:
Lichen III
2024, Bronze
Unique
5 x 16 x 8 cm



Marchmont Series (wall)
2024, Wax & wire
Unique
25 x 15 x 12 cm





Anima,
2024, Wire & wax
Unique
90 x 84 x 60 cm





Huddle
2024, Mussel
shells & clingfilm
on linen
Unique
32 x 32 x 10 cm





Swimmer
2024, Wax & Herdwick
sheep's wool
Unique
20 x 14 x 12 cm



Skip
2024, Feather & wax
Unique
12 x 11 x 11 cm



LEFT:
Wax & Wool Series III
 2024, Wax & Herdwick
 sheep's wool
 Unique
 48 x 15 x 14 cm

RIGHT:
Wax & Wire Study
 2024, Charcoal on paper
 Unique
 143 x 135 cm





LEFT:
Cat O'Nine Tails
 2024, Wax & Herdwick
 sheep's wool
 Unique
 62 x 25 x 16 cm

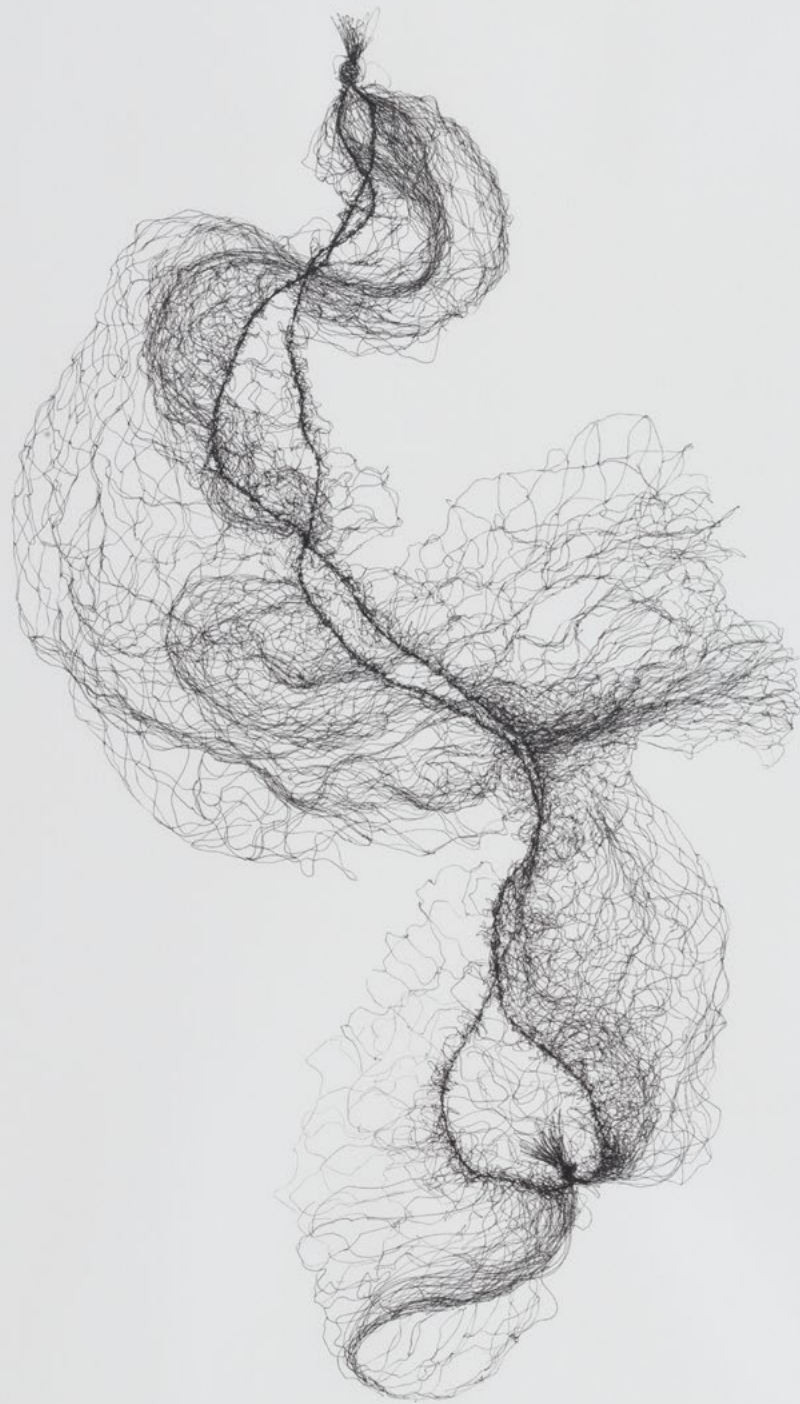
UPPER RIGHT:
Wax & Wool Series II
 2024, Wax, Herdwick
 sheep's wool & wood
 Unique
 20 x 10 x 7 cm

LOWER RIGHT:
Refuge
 2024, Wax & ducting
 hose
 Unique
 14 x 24 x 25 cm



Marchmont Series no III
2024, Wax & wire
Unique
13 x 42 x 22 cm





LEFT:
Small Hairnet Drawing I
2024, Ink on paper
Unique
83 x 63 x 2 cm

RIGHT:
Small Hairnet Drawing II
2024, Ink on paper
Unique
83 x 63 x 2 cm





Hart
2021, Sliced deer
antlers, canvas & model
Unique
48 x 50 x 50 cm



SUSIE MACMURRAY, FRSS

b. 1959, UK

2000-2001 MA Fine Art. Manchester Metropolitan University
1997-2000 BA Sculpture. Manchester Metropolitan University
1996-1997 Foundation in Art and Design. Manchester College of Arts & Technology
1982-1983 National Centre for Orchestral Studies, Goldsmiths, London
1979-1982 Fellowship, Trinity College of Music, London

SELECTED SOLO AND GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2024

Material Thought (solo show), Pangolin London, UK
Pattern: Rhythm and Repetition, Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, UK
Drift, Collaboration with Lacoste for Paris Fashion Week, Paris, France
Suppose You Are Not Here, Arter Museum, Istanbul, Turkey
Summer Exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK
Presence: The Figure in British Post-war & Contemporary Sculpture, Messums West, UK
Sculptors Drawings, Messums West, UK
Rogue Women III, Rogue Studios Gallery Space, Manchester, UK
- 2023

Cure3 Fundraiser, UK
Rogue Women II, Rogue Studios Gallery Space, Manchester, UK
- 2021-2022

Drawn In, The Turnpike Gallery, Leigh, UK
Cure3 Fundraiser, UK
- 2020

Murmur (solo show), Pangolin London, UK
Cure3 Fundraiser, UK
Fabric: Touch and Identity, Compton Verney, Warwickshire, UK
- 2019

Gathering, site specific commission, Tatton Park Mansion, Cheshire, UK
Parallel Lines: Drawing & Sculpture, Royal Society of Sculptors, London, UK
Rogue Women, Rogue Studios Gallery Space, Manchester, UK
- 2018

Strange Fruit (solo show), Akbank Sanat, Istanbul Turkey
Doubt, site specific commission, Southwark Cathedral, London, UK
Masquerade (solo show), St Albans Museum and Art Gallery, UK
- 2017

Susie MacMurray, Recent Work (solo show), Mall Galleries, London, UK
- 2016

Hinterland (solo show), Danese/Corey, New York, USA
Susie MacMurray, A Retrospective (solo show), Atkinson Gallery, Somerset, UK
Dangerous Beauty, Maier Museum, Virginia, USA
Bedazzled, Lehman College Art Gallery, Bronx NYC, USA

Goodby To All That, Manchester Art Gallery, UK

- 2015

Cloud, site specific commission, Winchester Great Hall, UK
Halo, site specific commission, York Art Gallery, UK
Watershed, Hall Place, Bexley, Kent, UK
- 2014

Summer Exhibition, Danese Corey, New York, USA
Finding the Value, York St. Mary's, York, UK
Winfield House, (American Ambassadors Residence) Regent's Park, London, UK
- 2013

Summer Exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK
Beastly Hall, Hall Place, Bexley, Kent, UK (Artwise Curators for Bexley Heritage Trust)
Walking on the Rim of Night (solo show), Danese/Corey, New York, USA
Summer Exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK
Resonance, site specific commission, Fabrica, Brighton, UK
Siren (solo show), Thomas Williams Gallery, London, UK
Beastly Hall, Hall Place, Bexley, Kent, UK (Artwise Curators for Bexley Heritage Trust)
- 2012

Sculptors Drawings, Pangolin London, UK
Unnatural 'Natural History', Coates & Scarry/RWA, Bristol, UK
Resonance (solo show), Rochester Art Gallery, Rochester, UK
Pandamonium, Hyde Park, London, UK (Artwise Curators for WWF)
Stratum, site-specific commission, Islington Mill, Salford, UK
House of Beasts, Meadow Arts, Attingham Park, Shropshire, UK
- 2011

The Eyes of the Skin (solo show), Agnew's Gallery, London, UK
The Power of Making, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK
Compulsive Obsessive Repetitive, Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne, UK
Wedded Perfection, Munson-Williams-Proctor Art Institute, Utica NY, USA
Stratum, site specific commission, Islington Mill, Salford, UK
Platform, Agnew's Gallery, London, UK
Aware: Art Fashion Identity, GSK Contemporary, Royal Academy, London, UK
- 2010

Wedded Perfection, Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio, USA
Promenade, site-specific commission, Keddleston Hall, Derbyshire, UK
Frangetta, site-specific commission (permanent), Warehouse 112, Venetian Arsenale (Spazio Thetis) Italy
Repurpose, Reuse, Recycle, City of Brea Art Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
Dead or Alive, Museum of Art and Design, New York, USA
Widow, Platt Hall, Manchester Art Gallery, Gallery of Costume, UK
- 2009

Here Come the Girls, site-specific commission, Manchester Art Gallery, UK
Widow (solo show), Queens Hall, Hexham, Northumberland UK
Salon09, Matt Roberts Arts, Vyner St, London, UK

	<i>Re-Addressing Identities</i> , Katonah Museum of Art, NY, USA <i>Lost & Found</i> (solo show), Islington Mill, Salford, UK <i>Upcycling</i> , Museum of Architecture & Design, Los Angeles, USA <i>Time/change</i> , site-specific commission, Nottingham Castle, UK
2008	<i>Second Lives</i> , Museum of Art and Design, New York, USA <i>The Baltic Frame</i> , Arena Gallery, Liverpool, UK <i>Drawn</i> (solo show), UH Galleries, University of Hertfordshire, UK <i>Miasma</i> , site-specific commission, Florence Nightingale Museum, London, UK <i>Object as Muse</i> , Crafts Council, Touring Exhibition 2008/09, UK <i>Body Space</i> , Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, Carlisle, UK
2007	<i>Unbound</i> , Turnpike Gallery, Leigh, UK <i>Drop</i> , commission for collection, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, UK
2006	<i>Shell</i> , site-specific commission, Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, UK <i>Echo</i> , site-specific commission, York St Mary's, York Museums Trust, UK
2005	<i>Jerwood Drawing Prize Exhibition</i> , Jerwood Space, London, UK (touring exhibition) <i>Susie MacMurray</i> , <i>Garment Sculptures</i> , Castle Gallery, Nottingham, UK <i>Conversations on the Subject of Feminism</i> , Cornerhouse, Manchester, UK <i>Art Frankfurt</i> , with Philips Contemporary Art Gallery <i>Flock</i> , York Art Gallery, UK <i>The Nestingbox Project</i> , Borgloon, Belgium <i>Knit 2 Together</i> , Crafts Council Galleries, London, UK (touring exhibition) <i>International Open Exhibition</i> , Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast, NI
2004	<i>Air</i> , Vespolate and Novara, Italy (touring exhibition) <i>Fili Spezzati</i> , Como, Italy <i>Argus</i> , Firstsite@the minorities art gallery, Colchester, UK <i>Robe / Rêve: Rêve de Robe</i> , Musee des Beaux-Arts, Calais, France <i>Caryatids</i> , Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester <i>Plastica d'Artista</i> , Palazzo Mantica, Pordenone, Italy <i>Flock</i> , Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester
2003	<i>Bagutta Life</i> , Manhattan, New York <i>Thermo 03</i> , The Lowry, Salford, UK <i>Art 2003</i> , With Philips Gallery, London, UK <i>Designersblock</i> , Milan, Italy <i>3 English Women in Paris</i> , Maxalto, Paris
2002	<i>Art Take Away</i> , Cornerhouse, Manchester <i>Ladies Only</i> , Liverpool Biennial, Collect Gallery, Brundel St Warehouse, Liverpool, UK
2001	<i>All Colours Will Agree In the Dark</i> , Cornerhouse, Manchester, UK

AWARDS

Royal Society of Sculptors Residency
 Hugo Burge Foundation, Marchmont Estate, UK, 2024
 RIBA Regent Street Windows 2016 People Choice award, Knox Bhavan Architects & Molton Brown
 Shortlisted, NMWA, Women to Watch 2012, Washington DC
 Nominated, Northern Art Prize, 2011
 British Council Travel Grant, 2010
 Professional Development Award, The Arts Council England, 2008
 Nominated, Northern Art Prize, 2007
 Abbey Harris Mural Fund Award, 2006
 Shortlisted, Jerwood Drawing Prize, 2005
 Research and Development Award, The Arts Council England, 2004
 Shortlisted, Bury St Edmunds Art Gallery, Textiles on Site Commission, 2004
 Shortlisted, Crosby Homes Art Prize, Manchester Art Gallery August, 2003



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our thanks go to Susie MacMurray for all her hard work in bringing this exhibition together. We would also like to thank Janet Durbin and Jenny O'Brien for their help with the installation, Steve Russell Studios for their photography, and to the team at Pangolin Editions for their skill.

Please note that the dimensions of the works on paper are unframed sizes except for framed works on pages 54 & 55.

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RIGHT:
Feather, 2023, Charcoal on paper; Unique, 142 x 53 cm