

NewArtCentre.

# NOW OPEN

## **Matt Rugg**

Early and Late Works

November 2022 - February 2023

Roche Court Sculpture Park,  
East Winterslow, Wiltshire, SP5 1BG



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The New Art Centre is delighted to present an exhibition of work by Matt Rugg. Known for his incessant experimentation, this exhibition presents early works from the very beginning of Rugg's career, alongside later works from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, offering a deep insight into his explorations of form, colour, and material. From painted wooden reliefs, many of which were shown at the New Art Centre on Sloane Street in the 1960s, to recent galvanised steel wire sculptures; the exhibition is complemented by drawings that capture the symbiotic relationship of drawing and sculpture in Rugg's pictorial practice.

For much of his career, Rugg focused on teaching, having a complete commitment to art education, very much a tenet of the New Art Centre and Roche Court Educational Trust to this day. After graduating from King's College, University of Durham in Newcastle with First Class Honours in 1961, he was awarded a Hatton Travelling Scholarship, offering an additional year of funding whilst at University, when he visited the Netherlands, Belgium and France, extending his lifelong interest to abstraction. In 1965, Rugg moved to London to the then new Chelsea School of Art, initially as part of their Painting School, working alongside, John Hoyland and Prunella Clough, Ian Stephenson among others; before progressing to the Sculpture School when it was run by George Fullard, where he taught with Phyllida Barlow.





Matt Rugg, *Anatomy VI*, 2012, galvanised steel wire, 335 x 135 x 190 cm / 132 x 53 x 75 in.

In the 1960s, Rugg was included in the Arts Council's *Young Contemporaries*, where he was awarded the Arts Council Prize in 1961, showing the new wave of young British artistic talent. Seven painted wooden reliefs from this decade are included in our forthcoming show, exploring Rugg's initial experiments in two and three dimensions.

A series of suspended sculptures made from twisted wire – titled *Anatomies* – date from the 21<sup>st</sup> century and act like colossal drawings in space. Rugg expressed the obsessive winding of the wire as a way that the works 'make themselves'; and that which Phyllida Barlow describes as: 'nameless, robust, heavy, but paradoxically elegant and seemingly light... taut with potential energy.' These works are close to drawing with materials: fleeting yet intrinsic, industrial and tempered.

Drawing, therefore, plays a vital part in Rugg's work, and this show at the New Art Centre includes a diverse selection: incredibly free drawings, exhilarating in their execution, are shown alongside uncompromisingly solid images, graphic and painterly in their finish. Each drawing – in Conté crayon, oil paint, pastel or mixed media - evokes Rugg's sculptural language: looped forms protrude from the paper, intense lines appear to contextualise space, and indents of colour heighten their monochrome base.

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From September 2023 to January 2024, a full career retrospective will be held at the Hatton Gallery, Newcastle University. A short documentary film about the radical changes in art education in Newcastle and Chelsea as a context for Rugg's work will be screened at the retrospective. A monograph to accompany the exhibition is now being researched and written by Michael Bird, for publication by Lund Humphries.

This is the first in a series of exhibitions which illustrates the New Art Centre's commitment to the exciting and emerging art in Britain from the 1960s.

**Phyllida Barlow RA observed in her speech at the opening:**

“In this remarkable exhibition, so beautifully curated, we can witness the exacting craft of Matt's 1960s reliefs. The assemblages of cut and honed wood, ...render flatness as a physical presence in thrall of its materiality.

The much later series, titled the 'Anatomies', contrast near collapse, the enforced suspension, the visible tactility of the handmade, the repetitive coiling of the unyielding wire, with the culmination in something gravity defying, ineffably elegant, and, ultimately, as if this spectral thing had made itself.

At Chelsea School of Art the glorious opportunity to witness an artist offering with such authenticity and generosity all that they were investigating in their own work – this was first and foremost an artist at work, not a teacher.”

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### **Notes for Editors**

Matt Rugg (1935-2020) completed National Service from 1953-55, before studying at King's College, University of Durham in Newcastle. He was appointed Studio Demonstrator – the role given to the top graduate of each year – before commencing his first teaching post at Newcastle University. In 1965, Rugg moved to the Chelsea School of Art initially as part of their Painting School, working alongside Ian Stephenson, John Hoyland and Prunella Clough, among others; before progressing to the Sculpture School when it was run by George Fullard, where he taught with Phyllida Barlow. Rugg's work has been acquired privately and commissioned publicly; and is represented in numerous public collections, including: Arts Council England, Hatton Gallery, Newcastle; Leamington Art Gallery and Museum, Tate Britain and the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. Selected group and solo exhibitions include: *Young Contemporaries* (a prize winner in 1961); New Art Centre, London, 1963, 1966 and 1970; *British Sculpture in the Sixties*, Tate, 1965; *Silent Notation*, Chelsea FutureSpace, 2011; *Pioneers of Pop*, Hatton Gallery, Newcastle University, 2017; *Notations – between drawing and sculpture*, 2017 and *Notations – passages and intervals*, 2022, both The Cut Arts Centre, Halesworth. A comprehensive retrospective of Rugg's career is opening at the Hatton Gallery, Newcastle in September 2023, alongside a monograph of the artist researched and written by Michael Bird, for publication by Lund Humphries.

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The **New Art Centre** was established in Sloane Street, London in 1958.

From its inception, the gallery championed young and emerging artists, and this remains a core ambition – alongside continuing to show those artists, now in mid- or late- career, who first exhibited with us decades ago.

In 1994, the gallery moved from London to its current location at Roche Court, East Winterslow in Wiltshire. The house was originally built in 1804 for the family of Admiral Nelson.

The park and woodlands which surround the house enable us to focus on exhibiting outdoor sculpture making the New Art Centre a pioneer of the commercially run sculpture park in the UK.

Since moving in 1994, we have commissioned Stephen Marshall to add four indoor exhibition spaces that have won several international architectural awards. This expansion has enabled us to stage a closely curated exhibition programme of modern and contemporary painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, and textiles.

From the outset, the New Art Centre has been interested in education and has got a strong programme encouraging people of all ages to look, think and speak about art. Recently, our initiative, Articulation, has been taken on by the National Gallery, London and will now be implemented by them.

The Matt Rugg exhibitions is the start of an exciting series of exhibitions looking back at the artists which the New Art Centre has shown over the past 60 years.

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