

One of Many Fragments

Edward Allington

Nika Neelova

11 September – 20 November 2021

NewArtCentre.



Edward Allington was born in Cumbria in 1951. He studied at Lancaster College of Art (1968–71) before moving to London to attend the Central School of Art and Design (1971–74). Allington first began to receive national recognition for his work in the early 1980s, having been selected for two important exhibitions – *Objects and Sculpture* at the ICA, London and Arnolfini, Bristol, in 1981, and *The Sculpture Show* at the Hayward Gallery, London, in 1983. His work then found an international audience through his participation in the acclaimed *Prospect 86* at Frankfurter Kunstverein, as well as through further exhibitions in Europe, America and Japan.

He was championed by both critics and curators as a key figure in a group of sculptural object-makers that came to be known as the ‘New British Sculpture’ movement – alongside artists such as Anish Kapoor, Antony Gormley, Bill Woodrow, Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Richard Wentworth, Shirazeh Houshiary and Alison Wilding. He was awarded the John Moores Liverpool Exhibition Prize in 1989, became Gregory Fellow in Sculpture at the University of Leeds from 1991–1993 and was Research Fellow in Sculpture at Manchester Metropolitan University in 1993. His open and experimental approach to sculpture saw him become Professor of Sculpture at the Slade School of Fine Art in 2006. He died in London in 2017.

Allington is represented in many public collections, including the Arts Council; Tate; The British Council; The Victoria and Albert Museum; IMMA Dublin; The Weltkunst Collection of British Art and Fondation Cartier, Paris.

Nika Neelova was born in Moscow in 1987 and currently lives and works in London. She studied at the Royal Academy of Art in the Hague and at the Slade School of Fine Art in London, where Edward Allington was her tutor.

She has been awarded several major prizes, including the Kenneth Armitage Young Sculptor Prize (2010), the Saatchi Gallery New Sensations Award, (2010), the Land Security Prize Award (2011) and the Royal British Society of Sculptors Bursary Award (2012). Recent solo exhibitions include *She Sees the Shadows*, curated by Olivia Leahy and Adam Carr, for DRAF & Mostyn (2018); *EVER* at The Tetley, Leeds (2019); and *Glyphs*, curated by Domenico de Chirico, at Noire Gallery, Turin, Italy (2019) – and she has an upcoming solo show, *SILT*, opening at Brighton CCA in October 2021. Selected group shows include *Seventeen. The Age of Nymphs*, curated by Daria Khan, at Mimosa House London (2019) and *Silence is so accurate* at Geukens de Vil, Antwerp (2020).

Neelova’s works can be found in a number of important collections including PERMM – Perm Museum of Modern Art, Perm, Russia; Museum Biedermann, Donaueschingen, Germany; DRAF – David Roberts Art Foundation Collection, London; Saatchi Gallery Collection, London; Beth de Woody Collection, New York; Jason Martin Collection, Portugal; Beckers Collection, Sweden; Levett Collection, London and other private collections in Britain, Germany, France, Russia and The Netherlands.

Edward Allington



Allington in his studio, photographed by Edward Woodman

Edward Allington – *Making Poetry with Solid Objects*

In an interview with James Roberts in 1993, my father, Edward Allington, described the engraving that accompanies Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* that 'depicts a sculptor's yard which is supposedly filled with all things beautiful. They are also stacked up like an architectural salvage yard. You imagine all the possible things the objects could be attached to, or how the fragments might be completed'.¹

I've often thought of this quote as a key to his artistic practice and sculptural imagination. Always with a sketch book and pencil in the pocket of his coat, a pot of ink and brushes on the kitchen table, my dad's mind was filled with sculpture and his hands were always making, be it drawing on antique ledger paper or modelling in wax – he was constantly engaged by the possibilities of three-dimensional forms, and the many ways sculpture can inhabit space and the world: as he wrote, 'Sculpture is looking at real things by making real things. It is making poetry with solid objects'.²

The architectural fragment was of particular interest to him. As with the objects in Hogarth's salvage yard, sculptures such as *One of Many Fragments*, with its impasto terracotta forms, or *Curved Pediment* and *Fallen Cornice with Dentils*, with their shining metal edges, each offer up classically inspired architectural parts that

playfully prompt the viewer to imagine what surfaces they could become a part of and what structures they could complete.

In doing so, they also engage with the notion of '*taxis*' as explained in Aristotle's *Poetics*. *Taxis* is one of the three essential parts of classical composition (the others being the *genera* or the elements, and *symmetry* or the relations), and refers to the orderly arrangements of parts to form a coherent whole. As my father explained, 'It is this notion of coherently organised elements which gives rise to the myth that from a given fragment of a classical building it should be possible to reconstruct the whole'.³

It was the pleasure of such myths that led him to visit Athens for the first time in the summer of 1970, after a childhood cherishing a particular image of Ancient Greece. Upon arrival, he was shocked to discover that this ideal was to a large extent an invention, that was simultaneously substantiated and altered through repetition. In his own words: 'The pride of Ancient Greece was available as the design on a tea-towel or in a plastic snow-storm. The building [of the Acropolis], devoid of the original bright colouring, blanched like the dead bones of a once iridescent animal, was largely false'.⁴ This visit and discovery was the turning point that established his future as an artist. He became determined to explore what he termed 'the many

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to answer in one sentence, I'd say it was about memory

Edward Allington, interview 1993



absurdities of our age'.⁵ The central absurdity being that our identities and values are so often built upon 'false worlds ...that we imagine existed once'.⁶

The selection of works in this exhibition all evidence my father's critical and inventive engagement with classical culture and its continued presence in contemporary life. The architectural fragments offer a means to contemplate how the persistent idea of classical culture has been largely constructed from partial remains. *Aphrodite Ad Infinitum* and *Aphrodite Debased in Red*, meanwhile, do so through their inclusion of mass produced models of ancient sculpture, and are key works from a series my father began making in 1986, exhibited in the influential exhibition *Prospect 86*.⁷ In these works, he explores his belief that sculpture isn't dependent upon being unique – we know of the work of the ancient Greek sculptor Polykleitos, for example, only by copies of works *after* Polykleitos.⁸ I remember the mischievous joy my father expressed when telling me about his encounters in the workshops that made reproductions of classical sculpture, including those sold in museum shops – also recounted in his essay 'Venus a Go Go, To Go'.⁹ Such reproductions were of interest because they question notions of originality. They are sculptures, but they are also replicas, they are fakes, but they also contain a version of truth. In sculptures such as *Aphrodite Debased in Red*, he made 'unique' works with copies of other sculptures, and in doing so played with notions of authenticity, while breaking down traditional 'highbrow' notions of the classical world in modern society by calling attention to how the afterlives of such revered artworks are often dependent upon reproductive techniques and mass-produced motifs.

This was – for my dad – what most fascinated him: how the past that we cling to, in individual and collective identities, actually never existed, being, instead, largely an invention – reproduced, re-told and altered through the act of retelling. He once said that:

If someone asked me what my work was about and I had to answer in one sentence, I'd say it was about memory. That is why I find the Classical, as it is found in the modern world, fascinating...It keeps being remembered and copied, in the same way that people reiterate stories and develop collective memories – all of which are warped versions of some original occurrence.¹⁰

Sculpture was a way to think through this issue.

Accompanying the sculptures are a selection of my father's drawings, including some of the final remaining large canvas works in the estate's collection. These drawings all contain his signature use of antique ledger paper, which he liked to use for multiple reasons: for one, the information draws the viewer's attention to the surface of the paper and the picture plane, while offering historic records of everyday life – the paper is itself a relic of the past. In so being, in Allington's words, 'a contradiction [occurs] between my illusionistic style of drawing and the paper. If you want to read the writing on the paper, you have to ignore the drawing, and if you want to read the drawing, you have to ignore the writing' – such playful tension and oscillation is a quality also found in his sculptures.¹¹ Drawing was a way of him thinking through sculpture: of creating possible works – both real and imagined, devising their multiple components, and the many spaces such sculpture could occupy.

My father stated in 2003 that ‘I have always strongly believed that artists do not make art by themselves, and that art is and should be a social activity’. He felt strongly, too, that it was ‘very wrong for an artist to be didactic about the works saying well this work is going to say this kind of thing to these people...I think that anybody has the capabilities to look at anything and make up their own minds about it’.¹² This attitude informed his teaching – which in turn became as important a part of his sculptural practice as drawing or writing. As such, I know that he would be absolutely delighted to see his work being shown alongside – and in dialogue with – the work of one of his students from the Slade, Nika Neelova.

Thalia Allington-Wood, September 2021

¹ Edward Allington interviewed by James Roberts, *City of the Eye*, Théâtre le Rex, Paris, 1993, n.p.

² Edward Allington, ‘A Method for Sorting Cows’, *A Method for Sorting Cows: Essays 1993-97*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997, 11

³ Edward Allington, ‘It’s In The Corners That You’ll Find It’, *Cell: Cella: Celda*, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, 1993, n.p.

⁴ Edward Allington, artist statement: *Sculpture*, Lisson Gallery, London, 1984, n.p.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Artist quote from Edward Allington, *A Sculptor at Work* (film), 1993

⁷ Peter Weiermair, *Prospect 86: Eine internationale Ausstellung aktueller Kunst*, Frankfurt-am-Main, Frankfurt Kunstverein and Schirn Kunsthalle, 1986, 22–24

⁸ See Edward Allington, *A Sculptor at Work* (film), 1993

⁹ Edward Allington, ‘Venus a Go Go, To Go’, *Sculpture and its Reproductions*, ed. by Anthony Hughes and Erich Ranfft, London, Reaktion Books, 1997, 152–67

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

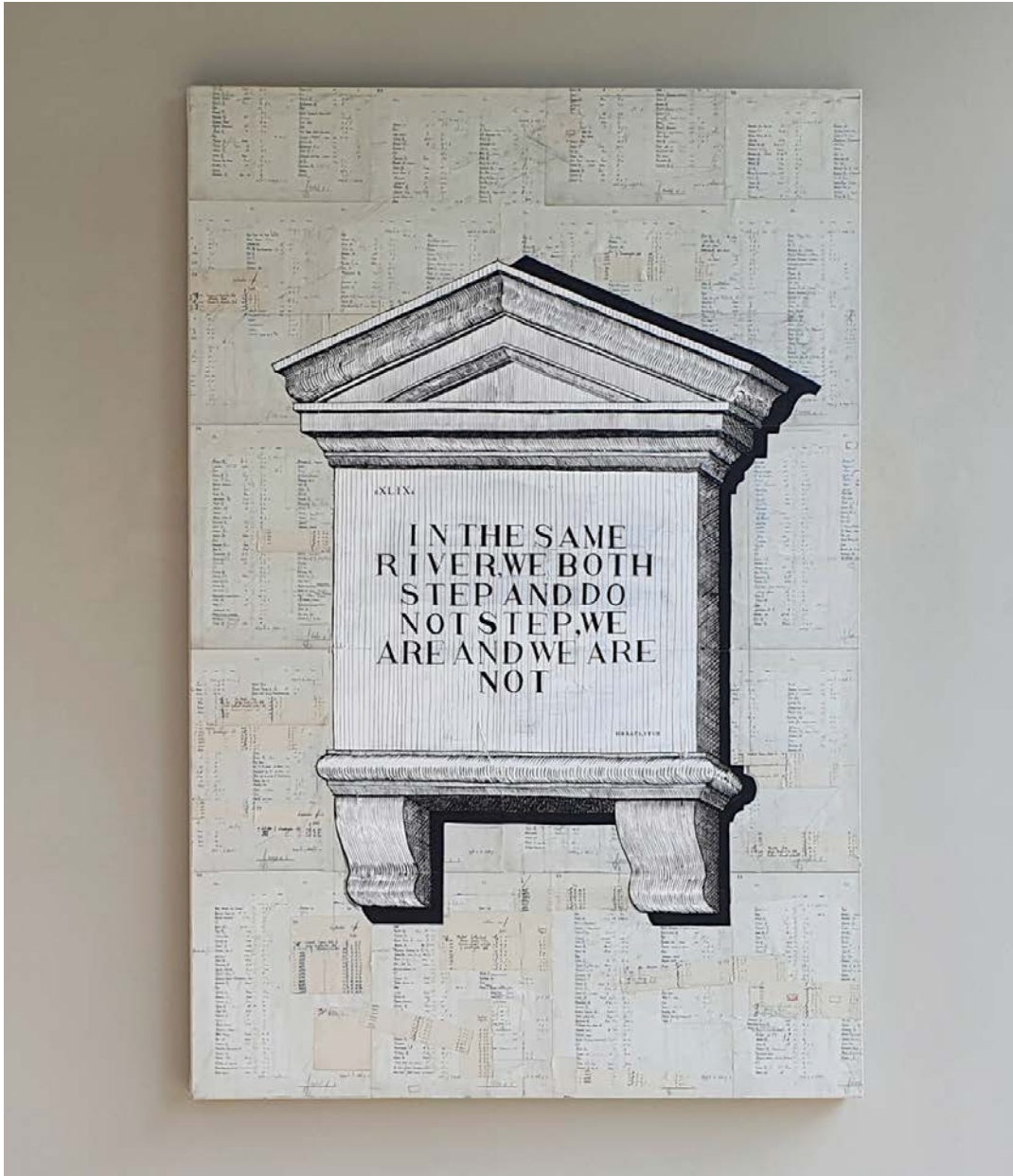
¹¹ ‘Artist Edward Allington on how he draws’, *The Guardian*, 19 September 2009

¹² Artist quote from Edward Allington, *A Sculptor at Work* (film), 1993





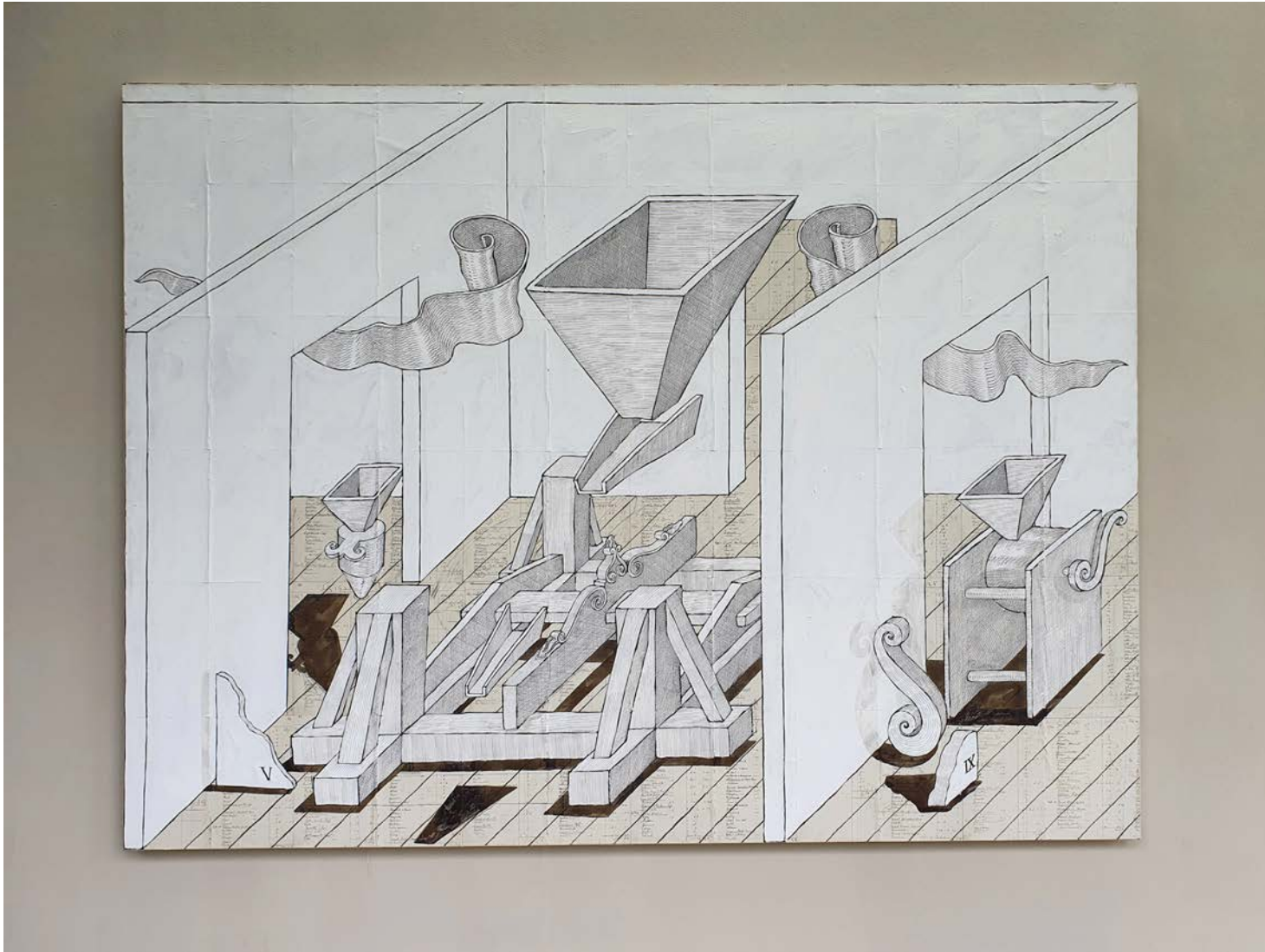
Curved Pediment 1990
Zinc sheet and MDF
90 x 186 x 38.5 cm
35 1/2 x 73 1/4 x 15 1/4 in



Heraclitus DXLIYA 1992
Signature, title, date on reverse
Ink and emulsion on ledger paper on canvas
183 x 122 x 6 cm
72 x 48 x 2 1/3 in



One of Many Fragments 1988
Painted wood and plaster mouldings
87 x 103 x 51.5 cm
34 1/4 x 40 1/2 x 20 1/4 in



Economie Rustique I 1989

Title, signature, date and inventory on reverse

Quink and emulsion on ledger paper on canvas

183 x 244 x 6 cm

72 x 96 x 2 1/8 in



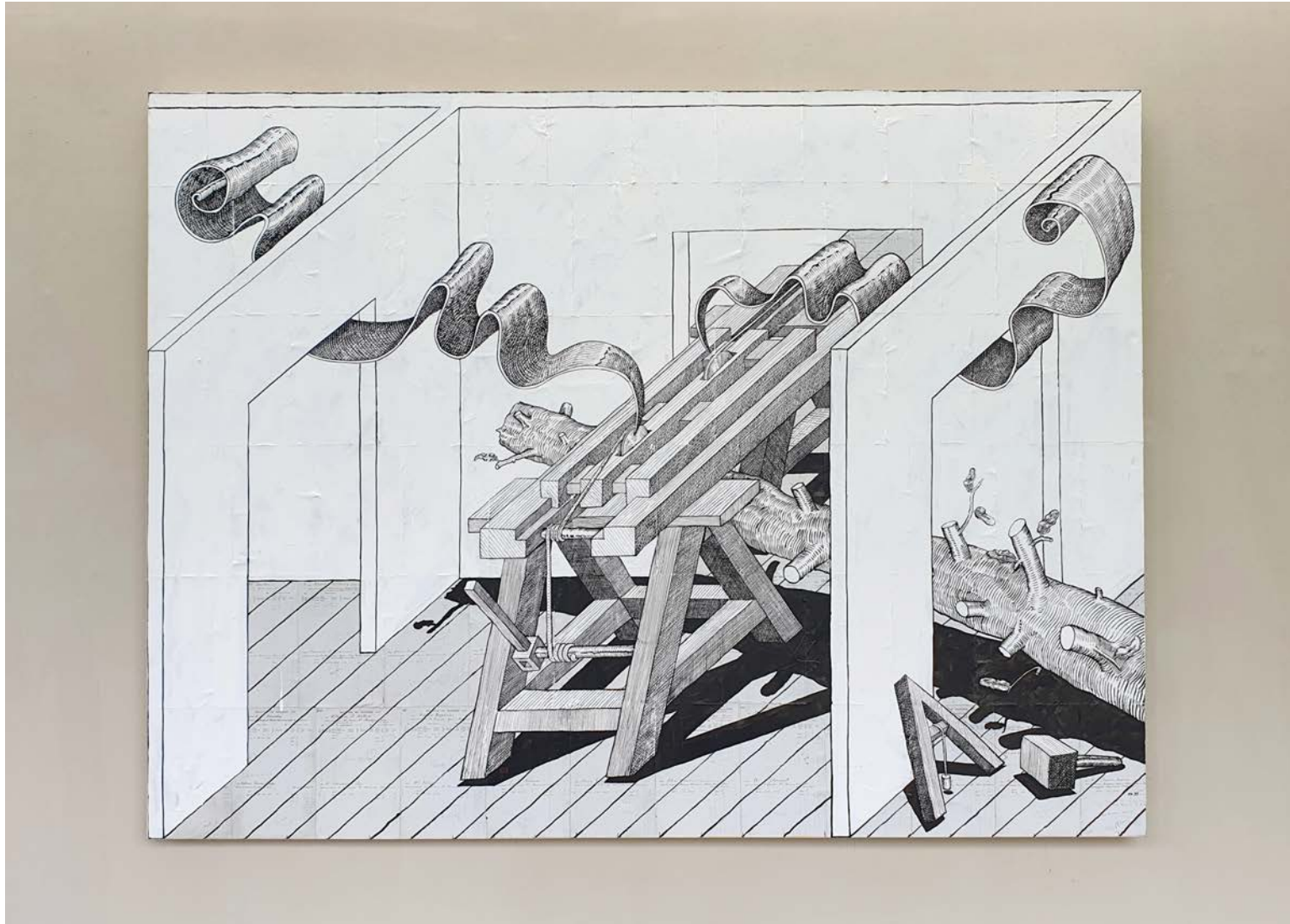
From the Sex of Metals II 1989
Galvanised steel
108 x 160 x 230 cm
42 ½ x 63 x 90 ½ in



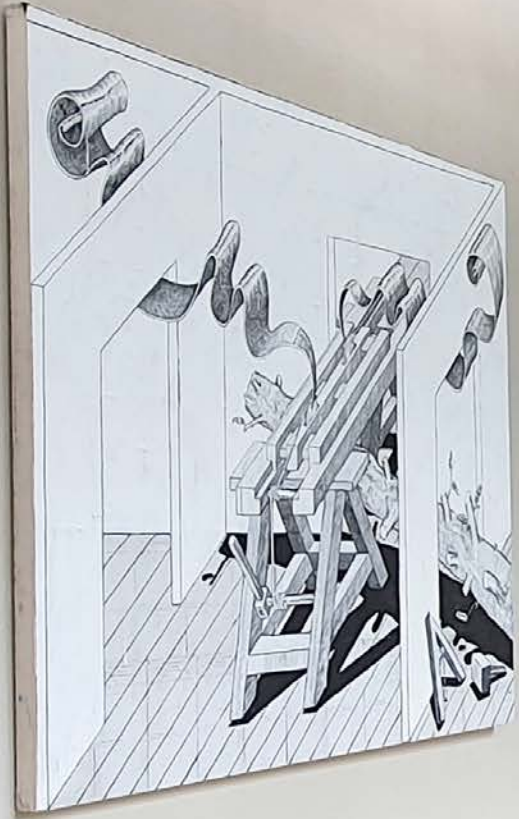
Fallen Cornice with Dentils 2012
Copper and plywood
33 x 148 x 41 cm
13 x 58 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ in

Aphrodite Ad Infinitum 1986
Stuccoed wood, plaster figures
58 x 280 x 135 cm
23 x 110 ¼ x 53 ¼ in





Sculpture et Gravure IV 1990
Signature, title, date on reverse
Ink and emulsion on ledger paper on canvas
183 x 244 x 6 cm
72 x 96 x 2 1/8 in



Aphrodite Debased in Red 1986
Wood, plaster, paint, painted marbelene figures
109 x 67 x 67 cm
43 x 26 1/2 x 26 1/2 in





Decorative Forms Over The World (3D) 1996
Acrylic on MDF
62 x 26 x 6 cm
24 1/2 x 10 1/4 x 2 1/3 in

Edward Allington was an incredible force at the Slade sculpture department, he knew how to challenge and inspire. He was always sympathetic towards his students, he knew and understood us personally and professionally and I am grateful for the privilege to have studied under him.

Edward was a remarkable teacher. He was both critical and supportive. He encouraged the wildest projects, he was very attentive, caring and very generous in sharing his immense knowledge of the practice of sculpture. He navigated three-dimensional space with what looked like immense ease, he understood the grace and beauty of objects and brought up brilliant references from the widest and most unpredictable spectrum of topics.

He really believed in teaching. With his tutorials I have learnt to appreciate techniques and materials, to value the tools that I use, to discern the qualities and properties of things. I have learnt to look at objects.

Nika Neelova, London, August 2021



Nika Neelova



Nika Neelova in her studio in London, 2020
images courtesy of the artist

Nika Neelova - *A Future That's Already Happened*

Nika Neelova's sculpture utilises tactics that the artist herself describes as 'reverse archaeology' to interrogate and reimagine the meaning of unearthed and recovered artefacts. Recalling the fragmentation and repetition of classical motifs in the work of her tutor at the Slade, Edward Allington, Neelova's *Lemniscate* series uses reclaimed materials to explore the historical memory embedded in architectural forms, presenting an alternative reading of human history. Presented in the eighteenth-century orangery at Roche Court, they establish an active dialogue within the space, filling it with both a sense of presence and absence.

In the *Lemniscates*, Neelova creates deft abstract configurations through the reimagining of recognisable forms – in this instance wooden bannisters rescued from old English houses awaiting demolition. As the artist writes, "I am interested in working with the notion of the ruin – as the site of simultaneous accord and conflict between culture and nature, where objects are liberated from their forms and meanings."

Influenced by the dystopian visions of Andrei Tarkovsky's films *Solaris* (1961) and *Stalker* (1979), these works intuitively imagine a world separated from the present. The use of reclaimed materials allows one to travel across time, allowing the viewer to unearth something from the distant or recent past. This playing with a sense of time finds its parallel in the form of a lemniscate – the term, in mathematics, for a curved line or plane with a distinct figure-of-eight consisting of two loops that meet at a

central point. While the sculptures in this series don't necessarily adhere strictly to this form, the concept of the infinite loop is present in all of them.

In this beautiful, subtle group of sculptures, the hands of the craftsman that made the original bannisters intimately connect with the hands that clutched and brushed them over time and in turn connect with the hands of the artist and, ultimately, the viewer. As such, these works become a kind of collective portrait, one in which time is understood through material and space, pushing the viewer to consider what Domenico de Chirico referred to as a 'future that has already happened and a past that is yet to come.' The relationship between wood and skin further recalls the connection between a building and an inhabitant. The handrail's continuous interaction with human skin preserves the memory of these human bodies and the identities which they hold. The sculptures carry the story of a past life, as they record the connection between the human body, architecture and space.

Giacomo Prideaux, September 2021





Lemniscate IX 2020
Mahogany reclaimed handrails,
two flights of stairs
310 x 130 x 70 cm
122 1/8 x 51 1/8 x 27 1/2 in



Lemniscate XI/II 2021
Hardwood reclaimed handrails,
two flights of stairs
280 x 130 x 60 cm
110 ¹/₄ x 51 ¹/₈ x 23 ⁵/₈ in







Lemniscate X 2020
Hardwood reclaimed handrails,
two flights of stairs
50 x 210 x 120 cm
19 ³/₄ x 82 ⁵/₈ x 47 ¹/₄ in



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