LINDA ALOYSIUS
ERIC BAINBRIDGE
JONATHAN BALDOCK
SIMEON BARCLAY
BEAGLES & RAMSAY
JOSEPH BUCKLEY
CHILA KUMARI SINGH BURMAN
ANDREW COOPER
JAMIE COOPER
PENNY GORING
BRIAN GRIFFITHS
EMMA HART
LEE HOLDEN
DEAN KENNING
JOSIE KO
ROSIE McGINN
REBECCA MOSS
JANETTE PARRIS
ANNE RYAN
ALED SIMONS
LAURA YUILE

ORGS

above left: *Teen*, 2019
Recognised worktop, cotton string, armature wire, metal oval discs, metal nails, metal joining plates, metal screws, drywall screws, calico, upholstery foam, chipboard, dried sealant, dried glue, scratches, cuts, stains, holes and dirt particles, 170.5 x 108 x 81 cm

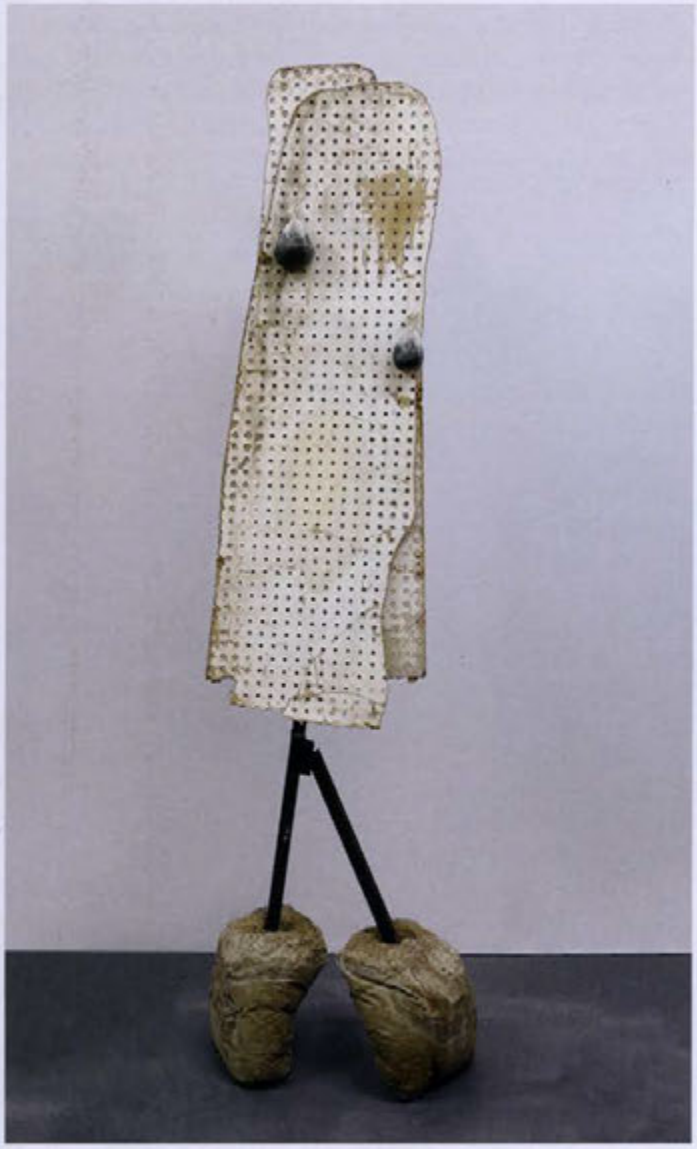
above right: *Fresh*, 2017
Recognised worktop, shelf supports, cotton tape, gutter brush, cotton string, wooden chair parts, metal joining plates, metal fragment, drywall screws, metal screws, dried sealant, scratches, cuts, stains, gashes, holes and dirt particles, 190 x 80 x 58 cm

opposite: *Perforated*, 2015
Recognised peg board, household emulsion paint, cotton string, nylon voile, sterilised compost, metal street sign part, postcrete, scratches, cuts, stains, indents, scuffs, holes and dirt particles, 203 x 56 x 49 cm

LINDA ALOYSIUS

Dean Kenning (DK): Your figures are constructed using materials that have been salvaged from the street. How would you describe the relationship between the materials and the figures you've constructed?

LA: The way I work with the materials is an intuitive thing. I've been working with stuff that I find in the streets for a very long time, and that dates back to childhood. I grew up in Mansfield, a former mining town. My parents moved there from Edinburgh when I was two and at that time it was normal for me and other children to play out in the streets. I found the streets absolutely fascinating, and very early on developed a strange love of pavements and things like crumbling tarmac and the moss between the paving slabs. Whether it was natural elements like leaves that had fallen off trees, or bits of rubbish.



And there was this need to make that's deeply ingrained into my life. I grew up in a family that was both quite puritanical and very dysfunctional, to the point of what might be described as underclass dysfunctionality. There were lots of issues that meant there was no sense of warmth or intimacy and no reliable affection or physical contact or psychological nurturing between my parents and me and my elder sister. So this intimate contact with stuff became an indirect way of feeling loved, because it was a consistent thing amidst the chaos. Weirdly, making things was encouraged, even though my parents wouldn't have understood the first thing about art galleries or museums. It wasn't because they had any ambitions for me to be an artist, it just kept me busy.

DK: Could you talk about intimacy in terms of the experience of confronting the sculptures in the exhibition or the process of making the sculptures?

The way that the sculptures became figurative was unexpected. I'd never made figurative sculptures until halfway through my PhD at Goldsmiths. For various reasons I felt like I was in some sort of fight for my practice to continue. I felt so marginalised as a working-class single mother on that course and also prior to that on my MFA course at the same college. There was a sense in which there was a distillation of all the working processes that I might have engaged in until that point and these figures, almost of their own accord, started to emerge from the materials that were just hanging around in the studio. People sometimes talk about paralysis through analysis. I was reading so much on that course, which was meant to be practice-led and there remains a question about whether I had appropriate supervision, and it did get to the point where that paralysis was kicking in. Something happened when I started to work intuitively and that's when these figures began to emerge. It took me some time to map that theoretically and to understand what was taking place. But it was definitely a confrontation that I was insisting upon, where everything in the background of my life that wasn't being spoken about, not just for me, but for other women as well, was coming to have a voice through the materials that I was working with, and that was forcing a level of intimate debate that wasn't taking place around things like coming from a working-class background and being a single mother.

DK: One of the questions we have for artists in Poor Things *is how to enable more working-class people, and maybe, more working-class women or working-class mothers to become artists. Do you have any thoughts about that?*

LA: There's two questions there. There's working-class people, working-class women and there's working-class mothers and single mothers. But there's also another issue, which is

whether people have come from dysfunctional families. Some people who are from working-class backgrounds have highly supportive families, and I see that support as a kind of privilege. If we're talking about things like how to get a working-class single mother into college, obviously financial support for women should be available. But it's also the conversations that take place in the classes, and also the behaviour surrounding those languages. There's an unwritten rule that to engage conversationally you have to behave in a particular way that I associate with middle-class behaviours. When I first started my MFA and then my PhD, I expected people to be almost physically fighting, because I assumed they would be so impassioned by what they believed in with regard to their work. There's a sense in which I thought that artists, particularly at a college like Goldsmiths, were obliged to behave badly – I really thought that would be par for the course. So I was very sensitive to how quickly that was neutralised, and for a long time quite confused. And what then happened was that people became very good at concealing aggressive behaviour, and I found that dishonest. I was able to do it, to talk how they wanted us to, but then I'd also kick out against it in different ways. Trying to rupture that normalisation, even though that came at a cost to me.

DK: That's interesting, because the way that those concerns around getting people from disadvantaged backgrounds into education tends to be set in terms of being supportive – not triggering people, creating safe spaces. You seem to be suggesting that if you get rid of antagonism you're repressing something and making people who are not confident or familiar with a certain environment and way of behaving feel like they're not allowed to say things which are important for them to say.

LA: One thing I have noticed is that, generally, working-class people, whether they're from a dysfunctional background or not, tend to feel that their authenticity is at stake if they don't speak up at the moment when something's not right – and that's very different for people who have been brought up in middle-class backgrounds. They're effectively taught to suppress their emotions so that they're much less spontaneous and there's a different level of refinement of their emotions, meaning that when they are eventually expressed it is in a very mannered or stilted way. There are, therefore, very dangerous silences around things that then never get spoken about.

DK: Would a response to that, within art education, be to make the discussion of class more explicit?

LA: Yeah, I think it could be part of it. One of the main issues that needs to be addressed is language. We have to understand that written and spoken language are limiting and have repressing effects on people who don't have voices. It's a big demand to ask an artist who has the pluralised languages that are available through materials in art practices to learn to become fully articulate and fluent in a relatively one dimensional written or spoken language. And to evaluate and judge people based on how good they are at the latter makes no sense in an art college, except that it prepares people in a way that's similar to a finishing school, so when you go out into the world and have conversations with people in positions in galleries and museums, what you say is pre-sanitised or already palatable. I think there needs to be a huge rupturing of the way that languages are engaged with in art colleges.

DK: Are you talking about the languages of art theory, and the instrumentalisation of that language?

LA: It's not only the written and spoken languages but the behaviours around that as well, and so it can be things like the looks that people are given or the seating arrangement in classrooms. It can be a middle-class tutor for example, who certainly hasn't brought up a child alone with no support, deliberately opting to sit next to a working-class single mother during a college debate, so that she can't see his facial gestures. And then when she's speaking he's pulling faces. Everybody else in the room can see that he's effectively undermining what she's saying by being sarcastic through his facial gestures. It's these kind of behaviours that are shocking.

DK: I want to return to the sculptures again. They are sympathetic figures, and I wonder how you think of them.

LA: What you said about not hiding anything, that's really important to me. The pathologisation that I and many other women experienced in the 1990s was life-changing. To emerge from an art school and find that you can't get rented accommodation because nobody wants to rent to a single mum, and you can't get a job. Everywhere you go you get treated with suspicion, and that feeling of suspicion never left me. Earlier when I was talking about a certain intimacy in the work to do with confronting things that are not talked about, embedded into that is the need to be transparent.

It got to a stage where everything galvanised, and it was not the first time because this had happened before that, towards the end of the MFA; both times I'd felt absolutely cornered by that suspicion. It wasn't that I put it into words, but there's a sense in which there was a kind of 'unconscious', increasingly pressing thought along the lines of: 'whatever I do, one way or another, I'm treated with suspicion and rejection. What else do I have to do to remove this suspicion around me and other working-class single mothers? I can pare this right down to the bone, and if I pare it down any further my sculptures won't exist, which will mean that I don't really exist.' So there's an honesty to the materials, and the immaterial factors embedded into that. The scars and the gashes and the cuts that are in the materials because they've been through a process of being battered that I recognise, it felt like an honest way to communicate that through the sculptures. It's not so much that it's about self-portraiture; it's about carrying the psychological burden of these prejudices and biases and knowing that other women have been doing that for decades, if not centuries, to the point where despite some more recent interest in artists who are mothers, there's still no distinction made between middle-class (single) mothers who may also have support from members of their original family and/or an ex-husband or the father of their child, and who have friends and a sense of community, and working-class single

mothers who have been pathologised to the extent that, despite the growing representation of artists who are mothers, there is no art historical legacy of works made by other working-class single mothers. And that is something that very deeply affects me. If I think about the question of personalities, it's about people that should have had a right to become artists that have not got a hope in hell, because people in positions of power have ensured that they have no voice.

DK: Some of the material you're using like chipboard worktops has connotations of predominately male work but also associations with female labour in the kitchen. Is that something that you take into consideration?

LA: Absolutely. We can think of the work as showing the effects of what I call invisible labour, forms of work that are not recognised as work which women tend to do, like domestic work. But it can be lots of other things as well, like the psychological work attached to bearing the male gaze. I am interested in how invisible labour is unequally distributed across society, with certain demographics being burdened with more than others and that having a negative effect. So the idea of using domestic materials as bodies for the sculptures – it wasn't that I sat down and thought that through; I intuitively gravitated towards these materials. And part of what the work is trying to do is show how women overcome that, or survive that just enough to have a glimpse into a life that is other than that. I am very interested in camouflage, for example, in the way one thing becomes subsumed by the other thing, and indistinguishable from it.

DK: Is that camouflage coming through in these figures?

LA: There's a way we can think of the bodies self-camouflaging as worktops, so that the two different ontologies merge together. But there's another dimension to the camouflage that's evident in the photographic works, where I photograph the sculptures outside. Some of those have a high degree of camouflage, where the sculptural bodies become indistinguishable from the background.

DK: They're endearing characters that you respond to straight away, and there's even a humour that comes across.

LA: Despite everything that I've said, when I was younger I had a very playful sense of humour, and the thing that got me through all of this was a kind of combination of being the most determined person, but also being able to laugh and love life, and love being a mother, in the face of really very extreme hardship. And as I get older I feel that sense of humour fading, and sometimes I think it has disappeared completely. But it's really important to me to try to maintain it and one way of doing that is through the making. There's a playfulness that emerges, and that is part of the conversation that I'm having with these women that I will never meet. I would love that kind of playfulness and laughter with them and that's what drives the work.

left to right: *Teen*, 2019, *Fresh*, 2017, *Perforated*, 2015