

PRESS RELEASE

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Breathing New Life

The Elisabeth Frink Woolland Studio Reimagined

18 October – 17 November 2023

Messums London



The Elisabeth Frink Studio, Messums Wiltshire

Marking the 30th anniversary of Elisabeth Frink's death in 1993, aged 62, this presentation at Messums London continues the legacy and ongoing reappraisal of one of the twentieth century's most significant sculptors. It acknowledges her enduring impact on artists through to contemporary generations, particularly informing and inspiring a growing number of female artists interested in exploring the power of narratives within the sculpted form.

In keeping with the emphasis at Messums of 'making as dialogue' Frink's Woolland studio, which was rescued from collapse and revived as an exhibition space in 2019, will now be reimagined for the first time in Cork Street. The representation of her working studio and ephemera will open the mind and curiosity around the making process in plaster that underpins Frink's working practice. Bronze sculptures by the artist will be presented within the context of her original studio environment while the space will offer the backdrop for her legacy to be explored. Running concurrently alongside this will be an exhibition of work by contemporary artist, Christie Brown, presenting drawings and sculpture inspired by the human and animated mythological presence.



Christie Brown, *Tableau*, 2021

A celebrated edition of *Life Magazine* published 18 October 1963 (extraordinarily, sixty years to the opening day of this exhibition) launched, for the first time, a wave of new British designers to an American audience. Captured by Norman Parkinson on the streets of London, there were images that epitomised the iconoclastic optimism of fashion in Sixties Britain. This included an image of an artist's studio in Chelsea, and in the foreground is a drawing on a glass panel which on closer inspection appears to be a preliminary drawing by one of the most celebrated female sculptors of her time Elisabeth Frink. It is in fact her Studio at Fleming Close. In the photograph below, Norman Parkinson has signed the copies he sent to Frink. The artist moved to this Chelsea studio in 1959. She described this as a period when "we were all immensely cheerful, busy getting on with what we wanted to do".



Model in the Frink Studio, photograph by Norman Parkinson

Frink graduated from Chelsea School of Art in London in 1953, eighty years ago. During her first solo exhibition in 1952 at London's Beaux Arts Gallery, the Tate purchased 'Bird', a deeply textured, angular and foreboding piece that encapsulated the horrors of war. This was a defining moment for her career and reputation. Her expressive work continued its progression during the 1960s when she furthered her fascination with the human form evidenced through a series of falling figures and winged men, later followed by the threatening monumental 'goggled heads'.

In 1969 Frink was awarded a CBE and in 1971 she was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy. During the decade of 1982-1992 she was awarded a DBE, had a solo exhibition at the Royal Academy and was awarded a Companion of Honour. She is especially well known for her public commissions, for example 'Risen Christ' in Liverpool Cathedral, installed a week before she sadly died from throat cancer in 1993.



Frink working on Risen Christ 1993, photograph by Mick Csaky

Frink's blue door studio was once at the heart of her creative process. Her artistic context resides within the studio and this exhibition celebrates her legacy. When Messums rescued the studio, the intention was for it to provide insight into her creative process and form a backdrop to a programme of events exploring creative environments, to inspire creative minds by nurturing established and new ways of working. To date, presentations in the recreated studio have included the performative dance of Anthony Matsena, poetry of Gommie, ceramics by Korean artist Lee Hun Chung, and work by a number of twentieth century and contemporary artists including Thiébaud Chagué, Frank Dobson, Laurence Edwards, Sir Terry Frost, Bridget McCrum, Henry Moore, Albert Paley, Ti Parks and Brian Taylor among others.



Recreation of Frink Studio, Messums Wiltshire

BREATHING NEW LIFE

It is little known that life drawing has been integral to the practice of internationally renowned ceramicist Christie Brown. For this exhibition, Brown presents a new body of work which includes a series of large-scale drawings which integrate characters derived from her life drawings over many years. These figures then take on narratives of their own, extending beyond the original life studio context. For Brown, the allure of mark-making is every bit as physical and tactile as making objects in clay. Overlaid, rubbed out, worked over and collaged together, creating pentimento effects, her drawn figures appear and disappear, pushing and pulling at the picture plane. In some images, figures are pared down, abstracted, and reduced to fragmentary shapes and traces, offering a sense of countless glimpses but denying the possibility of ultimate revelation. The figure may be part absent, but the essence of the figure's presence is always retained. The work prompts questions – who are these seemingly connected but disconnected figures, caught in apparent existential moments?

The relationship between Brown's drawing and her figurative sculpture adds a further layer of dynamism and complexity which has become an important aspect in her work. She has long been interested in the relief as some kind of metaphor for the gaps, the liminal spaces where changes can take place. The sculpture and drawing presented in this exhibition takes that concept further, exploring this intersection between two and three dimensions, an aspect offering new challenges and potential for Brown's practice.



From Christie Brown, *The Corridor*, 2023



From Christie Brown, *The Portal*, 2023

Biography: Christie Brown

Christie Brown is an artist and Emerita Professor of Ceramics at the University of Westminster in London. She graduated from Harrow School of Art in 1982 and set up her north London studio that year. At Westminster she taught on the BA, MA and PhD programmes while maintaining and developing her sculptural practice. She was Principal Investigator on the AHRC project Ceramics in the Expanded Field, awarded to the University's Ceramics Research Centre-UK in 2011, which included her solo exhibition *DreamWork* at the Freud Museum in London in 2012.

Recent major exhibitions include *Icons of Uncertainty*, Messums Wiltshire (2022); *Untold Forms of Life*, Messums Wiltshire (2021); *AWARD*, British Ceramics Biennial (2021); *Cultural Icons*, The Potteries Museum (2019); *Beyond the Vessel*, Mesher, Istanbul (2019) and Messums Wiltshire (2019-20); *Dream On*, V&A Museum of Childhood (2018); *Humanism*, Clay Arch Gimhae Museum, Korea (2018); *Material Earth 1 and 2*, Messums Wiltshire (2017 and 2018) and *Marking the Line*, Sir John Soane's Museum (2013).

As an Emerita Professor she remains a member of the CRC-UK in an advisory role, where dialogues develop around the expanded field of ceramic practice and continue to open up global conversations through lectures and conferences. Brown is a member of Royal Society of Sculptors and her work is featured in private and public collections in Europe and the USA, including the Victoria and Albert Museum UK and the Mint Museum USA.

Brown has been represented by Messums Wiltshire (Messums West) since 2017.

PRESS

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MESSUMS LONDON is a 2,000 sq ft exhibition space on Cork Street behind the Royal Academy. It hosts a rolling programme of exhibitions for our contemporary artists.