

KATE HENDRY *Private Conversations* – exhibition essay

KATE HENDRY has always described herself as a sculptor. Of all the things one can be accused of being, it is far from the worst, even in the world of art. It also boasts the advantage of ringing true. Notwithstanding that the majority of her artworks – especially the ones in this current exhibition – occupy the gallery space in low relief, they remain the visions of one who happily succumbs to the seductive allure of form. It's an easy virtue that many sculptors share.

In the current exhibition *Private Conversations* HENDRY has unhooked the lyricism of line from drawing, and repurposed and entangled it to body forth volume and space. As one journeys through the gallery space, individual works thicken and curve and unfold, revealing within themselves sudden depths and cavities. And then, as shadows, they again become line.

HENDRY's works strive for quiet and reward contemplation. The titles in the current collection describe imagined and invented meetings between seminal art historical figures from past and present who have influenced HENDRY's practice. There is a forthright nod to the constructivists, for whom aesthetics was inextricably bound by universal absolutes. There is also an arch nod to Duchamp. And yet, HENDRY's hand is everywhere evident in every work. Each work is fashioned through methodical and laborious process, akin to mark making, a motion repeated again and again. Private conversations can grow heated even as they occur.

Ben had not met Eva encapsulates the idea of an initial conversation, at the moment when the subjects remain unsure whether their minds will meet, or merely clash. Will a generous and open exchange ensue? Ben and Eva are Ben Nicholson and Eva Hesse, two artists whose practices are separated by decades, a world war, and a conceptual chasm. Nicholson's paintings are formal, distilled and quiet. Meanwhile Hesse's works are often regarded as 'anti-form'; visceral, accusing and yet playful. *Ben had not met Eva* searches for a thread between the two. It muses about this potential meeting, a conversation realised in a hard, prickly, humming circle.

Private Conversations provides an invitation to consider the conversations not merely between competing and connecting theories, but about art making and its process. *Julie with Marcel's Bride* stakes its presence in the intersection between drawing and sculpture, a single point granted playful form and extension. The relief nature of the work reveals itself upon closer inspection, coyly rewarding one's glance through the stark angles that dissolve into curves reminiscent of a spinning top, or Duchamp's whirling bride in the pane of glass. Are we in fact mired in the conceptual landscape? If so, we're free to refuse, and free to take flight.

There is a pervasive sense that HENDRY would prefer to unbind her works from the wall. Perhaps they'd do it themselves if they weren't restrained by nails (practical nails, I should stress, connoting nothing biblical). Two of them, the free-standing *Sentinels*, have made it all the way to the floor, though they'll presumably get no further, having discovered density. Yet they too derive their frozen form from line. Space like line is an infinite aggregation of points, and no journey is more than an endlessly divisible series of moments.

In addition to the tension that inheres within all dialogue, this exhibition invites the viewer to consider the strain within the private conversations that the artist holds with herself about her practice, and by metonymic extension all practice; the concepts that drive or retard a work, the mechanical process that sustains or cripples it, and the aesthetic that nourishes or starves it. *Private Conversations* is, of course, a personal show. Each work recalls a singular meditation on a theme, whether Puckish or expansive, turbulent or grave. And through being privy to the private conversations of another we might in turn wonder at the ones we hold with ourselves.

Jesse Pentecost