

## PRESS RELEASE

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### The Elisabeth Frink Studio

#### *Breathing New Life*

18 October – 17 November 2023

Messums London



The Elisabeth Frink Studio, Messums Wiltshire

Marking the 30<sup>th</sup> 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 reimaged 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.



Recreation of Frink Studio, Messums Wiltshire

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.

For this exhibition at Messums London, we are inviting contemporary artist Christie Brown to present a new body of work in the studio including a series of large-scale drawings that explore the relationship between life drawing and figurative sculpture. The permanence and robustness of her ceramics speak to and contrast the ephemeral drawings, which see the figure drift through space, time, and memory.

Christie Brown is well-known for her whimsical and mischievous ceramic figures that hover in the tricky intersection between art and craft. Her examination of human nature, of in-built tendencies and shared psychological experience is a cornerstone of her work, demonstrated in figures that are not there to be observed but to provoke an internal dialogue with the viewer. However, it is little known that Brown's practice has, for her entire career, been rooted in life drawing, not as preparatory sketches but as an exploratory exercise into the psyche.



Christie Brown, *Tableau*, 2021

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MESSUMS WILTSHIRE is a leading multi-purpose gallery and arts centre set inside a restored thirteenth-century tithe barn and surrounding buildings with exhibition space, sculpture garden and restaurant.

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.