

PRESS RELEASE

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Larger than Life

15 July – 30 September 2023

venue: Messums Wiltshire



Activating the lawns and landscape surrounding the barn and drawing inspiration from our summer Festival of Dance, Messums Wiltshire presents *Larger Than Life*, a group exhibition of sculpture by gallery and invited artists.

By existing in three dimensions and encountering us on the common ground of shared space, sculpture elicits a reaction: what are you bringing to this relationship? How do you respond to this proposition? What is the effect of the body seated? standing? in motion? Do we feel more still or dynamic in relation to it?

Here, Sean Henry poses these questions most economically in his use of scale. By making his three Standing Figures (two pictured top) extremely present and lifelike yet discernibly larger than life, he creates encounters which invite the viewer to reflect on internal life. This simple indexical shift and rupture in the continuum of scale resets the coordinates of viewer and viewed, creating the conditions where, in his words, we can “consider the space we inhabit and our identity within it”.

From Sophie Ryder’s *Dancing Ladies*, never exhibited before at this scale, to Helaine Blumenfeld’s pivotal *Souls* (pictured below), created in 1985 following her breakthrough exhibition with Henry Moore, the show renders the body as engine of movement in metal and stone.

Ryder’s practice is populated by hybrid creatures drawn from mythology and the natural world. Central to it is the pairing of the Minotaur, half-man, half-bull, and his female companion the Ladyhare. Ryder’s intention is “to portray a joyful moment in time between three people. Probably subconsciously my two daughters and myself. Kicking their legs and tipping their heads with carefree abandon.”

In dialogue with the programme of contemporary choreography, workshops and films inside the barn, the exhibition probes the complementary dichotomies of inner and outer, fluid and solid; contingency and constancy, fleeting and timelessness.



Jason Mulligan draws on the ritualistic uses of carved stone, beginning with the prehistoric portable sculptures that functioned both as ornament and amulet. *Pivot* (below left) takes its cue from the contours of the wishbone, a lucky charm for the Etruscans and across the ages. The abstracted form, carved in Portuguese marble, echoes the twisting motion of the rotating pelvis as the body turns on one foot. In dance, the pivot signals a change of direction, which the artist associates with personal agency.



Late one night in London, Thomas Merrett saw two ghostly figures walking ahead of him, carrying long sticks. These sinister forms revealed themselves to be inspectors, prospecting for water leaks. This surprisingly low-tech task is best accomplished at deadest of night, when the atmospherics of the city are dialled down, and their listening sticks, which amplify the gurgle and flow of water, can pick up the sound. This task and its reliance on the faculty of hearing, so strangely old-fashioned, inspired Merrett's *Listener* (above right) series. The works are a counsel to active listening, to rebalance reason and technology with other modalities of being; to use all of our senses in how we encounter and relate to the world.

Returning to Messums for the exhibition are Laurence Edwards' peripatetic *Walking Men*, (pictured below) whose earlier edition of five now stands overlooking Sydney Harbour at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Here the pair join *Shimmer* and *Hands On Hips* towards the far end of the barn. Whether in motion or contemplation, seemingly solid or in a process of transmutation in the case of *Shimmer* "from metal to gas, air, swarm, flock", Edwards feels their presence speaks to psychology. To a loss of control of an environment once mastered, and a search for a new meaning or identities to replace it.

Whether in bronze or in stone, whatever their attitude or form, the sculptures in *Larger Than Life* enact movement and stillness as the outward expression of inner states of being.

The exhibition will be on view throughout the summer months.



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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.