

Clare Iles

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awingsculptures

This catalogue was published to accompany the exhibition *multicolouredrawingsculptures* by Clare Iles, shown at The Minories Galleries from 11 January to 22 February 2014.

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above, right and previous page:  
*Womb / Loss*, 2013 (four aspects)

Clare Iles' *multicoloured drawings sculptures* consists of a group of brightly coloured sculptures that have developed from similarly intensely coloured drawings in sketchbooks that have in turn been inspired by journeys and the experiences connected to them. The journeys have included research trips to Jerusalem and India; travels to the studio to make the work; and journeys connected to personal events that change inner workings, both physical and psychological.

Some of the encounters made on the journeys have influenced Clare's way of engaging with and seeing the world. Her journey to Jerusalem was a voyage to explore some of the relationships between her family history and a distant land. Family photographs show her great-grandfather in Jerusalem, and in an effort to discover the exact location she encountered various people and places that have had a strong influence on her; in particular an encounter with a former shoe-maker called Hassan in a tent that was on the site where a house once stood that had since become a shrine to a Palestinian man who had died a few days earlier. The objects that were with Clare in that space (her grandfather's tripod, wrapped banners, boundary stakes and photographs) combined with a vivid blue light that was filtered by the tent's material to create an intensely charged atmosphere.

Whilst travelling in India Clare developed an awareness of, and interest in, the importance of colour for nomadic groups and tribes. Textiles that are passed down through generations are used to define connections and relationships that gave a stability or constant to the seeming endless uncertainty of a lifestyle of nomadism and wandering by creating fixed points or 'knowns'.

Personal experience of loss that occurred later caused these memories (and others) to be conjured up due to various connections and associations. The structures, forms, colours and atmospheres found in those memories were translated into drawings in sketchbooks that also pulled on sensations and impulses from within. These drawings were then developed into the physical forms of the sculptures.

The process took the energy of absence, the departed, the distant, and the idea of a journey as exploration to create physical manifestations and new entities.

The sculptures are mostly under a metre tall and take on forms that are developed from the drawings. A structure is constructed that is wrapped and coated with plaster. Previous works have allowed chance encounters with materials in no-man's land, where a journey to a lay-by or similar marginal site results in the assembling of fly-tipped items into a sculptural form. This element of chance has been retained in Clare's work through the use of plaster and allowing the fluidity of the material to enter the process of making. The resulting form is then drawn upon, painted and varnished. As formal entities, although they can be viewed in the round, they have what could be defined as a 'front' and a 'back' (and therefore 'sides'). This means that we are inclined to view them anthropomorphically, adding perceived characteristics and moods to the work as part of that process.

In the exhibition at The Minorities the group is displayed standing under a low roof, within an environment that invites the viewer to engage with the work on an intimate level by sitting, stooping or crawling to view the works. When viewed from above the work appears diminutive or almost childlike, but when met on its own terms and at its own level (which is the level from which it was constructed) it's scale changes and the engagement is direct.

The title of the exhibition simply describes the nature of the work and its development. The fusing of the words represents the impulsive and almost automatic nature of their making. Allowing things to roll off the tongue (as in an intuitive or impulsive process) or come from within is a way of working that can produce fluid and lively outcomes.

*Kaavous Clayton*  
*The Minorities Galleries Curator*



above and left: drawings from sketchbook

X

A series of questions formulated by Iris Boudier and Clare Kyle (The Minorities Galleries Curatorial Research Interns), and Kaavous Clayton (The Minorities Galleries Curator) and answered by Clare Iles.

X

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X

*Question: How did your new sculptural works come about?*

Answer: They came about at the end of a journey, which was one of many where I had travelled to distant places in search of people travelling on the land with their animals. Journeys that came about from finding a photograph of Rabari nomads travelling with their homes on top of camels in a book called 'The Last Wanderers' and from a little photograph of the Bedouin nomads in my grandfather's archive. On the 26th October 2010 I was in a tent in the Al-Bustan neighbourhood, Silwan, East Jerusalem. I sat there for many hours talking with an old Palestinian man called Hassan (originally a shoemaker). The Palestinian tent was on a site where a house once stood; wrapped up banners, boundary stakes and photographs occupied the space. A young Palestinian man had died a few days before and the tent had become a memorial to his death. The atmosphere was sombre; there was a stillness, which was enhanced by the vivid blueness inside the tent. People were telling me their stories and stories of the British occupying Jerusalem. In the same space stood my grandfather's tripod and camera, I had been walking the streets of Jerusalem retracing footsteps from little photographs of my ancestors in the First World War found in my grandfather's archive after my grandparents had died. Whilst I sat in this tent I was thinking about how these materials and objects occupied the space and how they became symbols of our own individual stories.

The memory of being inside the vivid blue tent where boundary stakes, banners and other materials occupied the space as a memorial was a trigger for my own sculptural work when I was recovering from my own experiences of loss – a traumatic time – losing something that is part of you, part of your body, your being.

I began sketching almost daily; a feeling, a moment, a breath, movement of the hand, connection to the body, eyes closed, within, deep, dark, quiet, space, internal, listening, awareness, intuition, still, silence, breath, movement of the body, breathing in to the stomach and breathing out, awakening, pen to paper, contact, energy, truth, self, internal space, bodily.

The sculptures are made at the end of journeys, walking to my studio, arriving. In the making of the sculpture I connect materials together on the floor, layering, transforming the materials into something else; the materials stand or in some cases almost, the materials become alive through touch, action; the pouring of the plaster, the changing qualities of plaster from a liquid to a solid material connecting the materials together and keeping something of the spirit of the maker. The black line, a riot of colour, the front and backness of the sculpture a reminder of the drawings in my sketchbook: a memory of where it came from. The original drawings are the ancestors of the drawingsculptures.

*Question: The sculptural works seem to all have a very particular scale and size (mostly not exceeding 1 metre high). Was this a conscious decision? And if so what was the reasoning?*

Answer: No, it was not a conscious decision at all. I think how you work in the space and the size of the space you work in establishes the parameters of the work. I occupy the space by mostly sitting on the ground or low on the floor, when I sit on my knees on the floor I am about a metre in height. I am up close to the sculptures where they appear bigger than they actually are. I don't see the sculptures as small.

X The first sculpture I made is taller than the rest (about a metre and a half) and looks over all the others. I made this sculpture whilst standing due to the height, weight and balance of the boundary stakes that I was working with.

I carried the sculptures to and fro from the studio to home, backwards and forwards. The sculptures are varying weights. Some of the sculptures are very heavy – I can barely lift them on my own – whilst others are very light. I think this is important in relation to the times when I have made the sculptures, the weight of the mood becomes the weight of the sculpture, some have many layers inside and others don't. Some of the sculptures reference internal organs of the body; in reality they are very exaggerated in scale, size, form and weight. These are not conscious decisions but observations after the making of the sculptures.

opposite:  
*Clown / Intense*, 2013



X

*Question: Your works are all very bright and seem to explode with colour. Can you explain your use and choice of colours?*

Answer: In 2005 I went on a journey to find nomads and gypsies living and travelling on the land in India. I became interested in how colour is used to express the identity of different families/nomadic groups through a system of colour; colours, materials, shapes, patterns and the imaginary. The textiles the nomads live with and the clothes they wear express a way of life that is passed down through generations. I have a collection of textiles from my travels which were given to me or exchanged for something.

X

Colour and line identify the sculpture – what it is, where it comes from. In the multi-coloured sketchbook drawings I use colour intuitively, which expresses a feeling. This informs how I use colour and line in sculpture where I use the same coloured acrylic paints, and in the same way straight from the tubes with no palette, using the brightest of colours; cadmium and fluorescent paints – red, orange, blue, yellow, green. I am interested in how colour within sculpture enhances and unifies the form; how the surface and materials come alive with colour; where the texture is enhanced so you can see more clearly the trace of the maker and a story is revealed. The sculpture has more presence with colour. Colour is not permanently connected to the surface of the plaster; it is independent from it as it easily chips off through time whereby the sculpture could return to its former skin. Controversially archaeologists in the 19th century removed the traces of coloured paint from the sculptures known as the Parthenon Marbles (also known as the Elgin Marbles), because they thought they looked more beautiful without colour. These pure classical Greek white sculptures are on display in the British Museum. Originally they were very brightly coloured, ‘a riot of colour’, to attract attention to communicate the story from the architectural features of the Parthenon in Athens, Greece. There has been a lot of debate about these sculptures returning to Greece where Lord Elgin originally took them from. Perhaps another story of how we take from other cultures and how that becomes part of our own identity – a search for otherness.

X

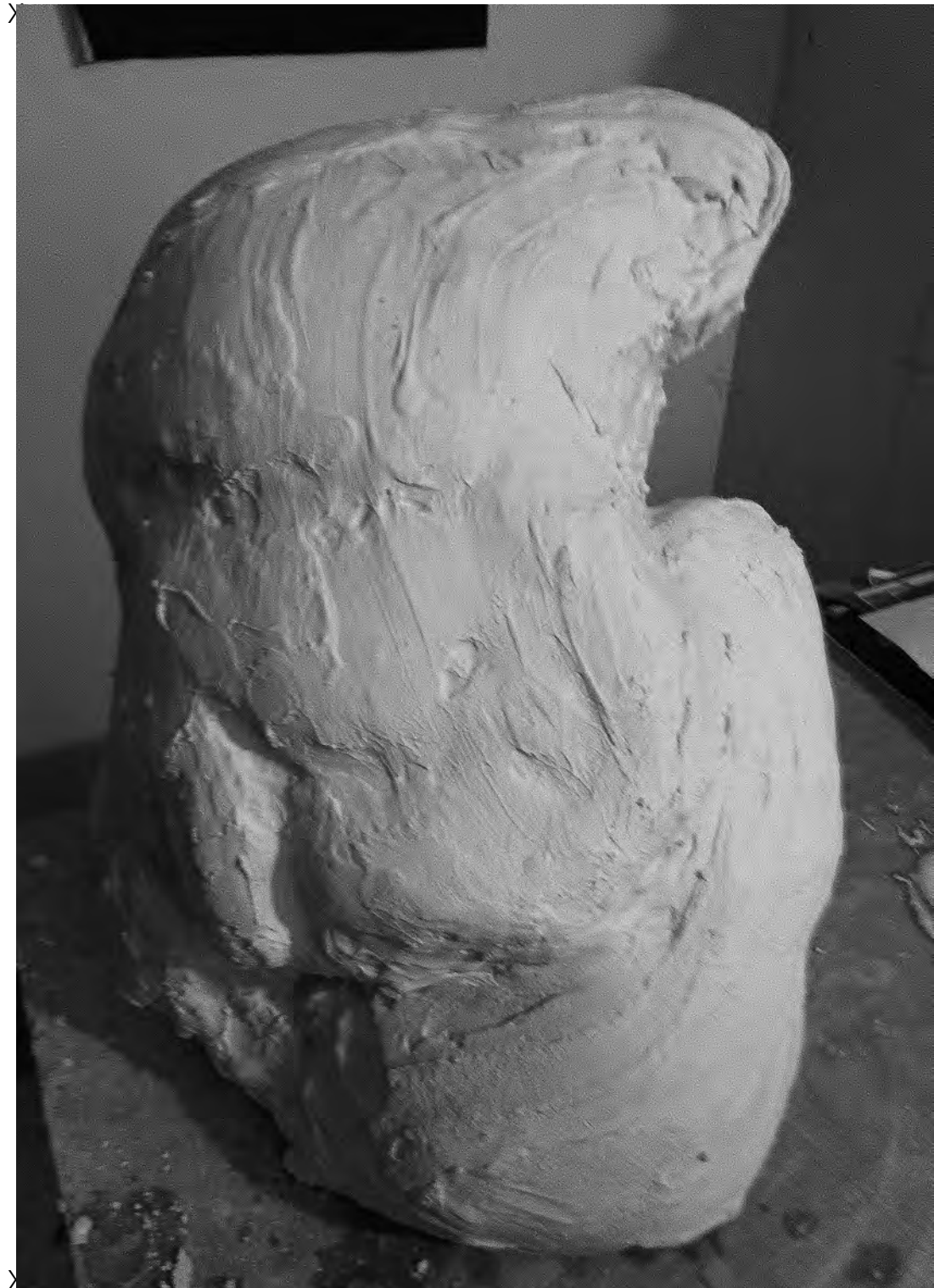
X



*Question: You have been using wood to create your sculptures for some time, but for this group of works you have changed medium from wood to plaster. Can you elaborate on this development please?*

X Answer: I like that wood breathes but plaster changes. There are limitations with what you can make with wood that is interesting to challenge in terms of how you can capture energy and create more of a sculptural form with a flat sheet of wood. However I think working with plaster is more about what you can do more directly with your hands, with wood you need saws and other man-made tools to help cut the wood, meaning you become slightly removed. I like the changing properties of plaster from being a powdery substance made up of lots of miniature parts to becoming a liquid to a solid material, the sculpture becomes something; it changes through metamorphic process; changing in form. There are many different possibilities which I think enables you to express yourself more freely, more directly. That isn't just about limitations of materials. I think working with plaster there can be more presence/energy of the maker in the work; plaster is good with traces of things. Also it is more unpredictable – less controllable – but there is the time factor working before the plaster cures. It forces you to work quickly which captures the moment, the touch. It is fun. But also you have to have patience, you have to wait for the plaster to dry. The process you have to use working with casting plaster is very involved and lots of things wouldn't happen without that engagement, which enables you to adapt to your own intentions and personal expression more directly.

opposite: work in progress



*Question: Nomadism feels like it might be important to the way you work. You have talked about the discoveries you have made during journeys and travels, and the journey to your studio. Can you say a little bit about the studio – its importance to you and making, perhaps in relation to the way in which you used to make things from found objects at the roadside, something that didn't involve a studio.*

Answer: It wasn't until one day I heard about a studio available for rent that I decided I really wanted one. Until then I had tried different ways of having a studio at home, in the attic or outside or in the garden shed. However, what works best for me is working at home whenever and wherever I feel like it although this was difficult when I used to have lots of people living in the house and not practical as I ended up almost trashing my rugs and stinking the house out with varnish. I have always enjoyed working and being outside, where I have worked on lay-bys and other unknown sites; marginal spaces that are more about the ownership of land within the context of the city. At this time I was interested in challenging where and how I could make sculpture and the limitations within sourcing, selecting, balancing, and building up and arranging materials and objects. Working outside in this way there is a lighter touch of the artist's hand. At the time this was more liberating because I could remove myself from the work. I was interested in creating sculpture using found objects because of their history – where they came from, what they were used for, who had lived with them. The sculptures were left on the roadside and became part of the cycle of rubbish. I wasn't working in isolation, it felt important to feel part of a network; on the lay-by I intervened with everyday life where I engaged with bin men, passers-by and people living in the neighbourhood.

I currently really enjoy working in the studio. At the moment it feels right. The journey, arriving to the studio initiates creativity in the same way as stopping at a lay-by on the roadside and finding, selecting, sourcing materials to make something – whatever comes. It is important to mention that the work outside on the street developed from working in a studio at art school. For me the studio is very important. The seeds of an idea often come from time spent in the studio, an engagement and connection with what is inside myself (internal space), inner cycle, sourcing materials, materials bought/ recycled from home, allowing, spending a concentrated amount of time, focusing on what is important, a private and intense time, occupying a space with whatever you want, silence, making a noise, trying things out, whatever comes, instinctive, play, make a mess, leaving the space as you want it and returning to it as you have left it, working within/challenging your own boundaries, working from your own experiences. Equally I feel it is important to look at what is around you in life and to make connections with others, being part of a network, working alongside with other people/artists. It has taken me a while to understand how all this works for me and at the moment it feels exciting. I think working in the studio is getting the balance between the inside and outside and the relationship between art and life. How I work in the studio, home, and outside changes at different times.

*Question: As well as the sculptures there is a low ceiling or roof that sits above the work. Can you say a little about this device please.*

Answer: The idea of the low ceiling came about from a conversation with Kaavous and Claire Kyle. It was interesting how they responded to the sculptures, which are approximately a metre in height, by getting on their knees and crouching low as if speaking to a child or an animal. The low ceiling brings the scale of the room to the height of the sculptures so the audience has to crouch, bend, crawl and become close to the sculptures. A bit like Alice in Wonderland – after she fell down the rabbit hole and when she shrinks small. The ceiling forces the viewer to be small, or become part of another place in the world of the multicoloured drawings sculptures.

opposite:  
*Cat / Twin*, 2013

next four pages:  
*Squashed / Sister*, 2013 (front and rear view)  
*Little Girl / Dancing*, 2013 (front and rear view)





