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Bronze

Emily Tobin profiles contemporary artists working in this metal

OVER THE COURSE of more than 1,000 years, Greek and Roman artists created many hundreds of bronze statues: gods, sportsmen, politicians and philosophers were all cast in bronze, raised on pedestals and erected as public memorials, or as offerings to temples, oracles and sanctuaries. This impressive body of work continues to be a major influence on artists today. Bronze is typically an alloy consisting primarily of copper, with tin as its main additive, although lead sometimes plays a part: it is hard, strong and durable and when heated at over 1,000 degrees, the molten metal takes on a life of its own. In 2012, the Royal Academy condensed 3,000 years of sculpture into a single exhibition plucking examples from across the world in a colossal manifestation of creative genius. While there has been a decline in the use of bronze in recent history, a taste for small-scale bronzes in domestic interiors developed in the late nineteenth century – a proclivity that still exists today.

DOMENICA DE FERRANTI operates from a rather chilly studio in south-east London, where shelves and table tops teem with bronze, plaster and wax maquettes depicting beasts, birds and humans contorted into all manners of complicated forms. Despite their hefty weight, the bronzes surge with energy, movement and expression; a large-footed Minotaur is frozen, elbows flung skyward, head thrust forward as if mid dance. 'I'm interested in depicting wildness and natural states of joy or fear,' explains Domenica. 'When we're in those moments our most animal self appears.'

Her repertoire also extends to more traditional subjects: handsome bronze portraits and figures from her travels through Oman and Tanzania demonstrate an ongoing concern with texture

and anatomy. One particularly ambitious project depicts a life-size boy, paddling a 6.5-metre-long canoe; this enormous bronze has just completed its two-month journey to South Africa, where it will take up residence in the middle of a lake.

Domenica works using the lost-wax technique: a method of metal casting in which molten bronze is poured into a mould that has been created using a wax model; once the mould is made, the wax model is melted and drains away. The detail is then chased back in and the piece is polished and finished with a patina. This element of the process is carried out at a foundry in Basingstoke. 'I work closely with the foundry,' she says. 'There is a lot of trust involved; they're like family.' Prices start at £1,000; www.domenica-deferranti.com



HALIMA CASSELL was born in Pakistan, brought up in Manchester and now lives in Blackburn. She cites her multicultural background combined with her interest in architecture and mathematics as key influences. Though ceramics are her 'first love', Halima's bronze sculptures bring a different dimension to her work. They consist primarily of faceted surfaces and, as such, seem to shift and change as light and shadow move across the ridges and scores. These abstract forms and patterns of zigzags, chevrons, grids, triangles, hexagons and stars are reminiscent of traditional Islamic art and populate Halima's sketchbooks and preliminary drawings. Unlike her work in clay, she has more control over the finish of her bronze pieces; the final touches take place at her foundry, Pangolin Editions in Stroud, where she is able to patinate the surfaces of her sculpture, determining the colour and tone, and polishing the edges according to her specific requirements. Prices start at £1,500; www.halimacassell.com □



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP HALIMA CASSELL. 'Acapella', 40.6 x 30.4cm diameter; and 'Crystalline', 15.24 x 30.4cm diameter. DOMENICA DE FERRANTI 'Canoe Study II', 21 x 50 x 7cm; and 'The Acacia Tree', 60 x 110 x 55cm