

# ISOLATION INTERVIEWS

OLIVIA BAX





## ISSUE 1

Introducing the Isolation Interviews: a new series of weekly artist profiles highlighting current concerns, accompanied by a selection of available works.

We know that these are precarious and uncertain times for everyone and with so many people staying at home, self-isolating or social distancing, we want to be able to continue sharing some of our favourite art and artists with you. The Isolation Interviews are a weekly series of conversations with artists that will explore how these new circumstances are affecting their practices and productivity. We'll hear how they are finding solutions - and even opportunities - and what their plans and hopes are for the future.

Brooke Benington is committed to supporting and creating opportunities for artists. We believe that this is needed now more than ever. Most artists are self-employed, often supplementing their income by working as technicians, fabricators, assistants, teachers and a whole host of other jobs. Now, many have very suddenly lost a vital source of income. With this in mind, we are accompanying each Isolation Interview with a curated selection of work by that artist, available for purchase.

Thank you for your continued support. Stay safe and look after one another.

Lily & George  
Directors, Brooke Benington

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The perceived idea of an artist, is that of a solitary figure working away in their studio. In these times of enforced isolation how if at all have you found your routine changed and your practice restricted?

The perceived idea of the solitary figure is mostly true for me! It goes without saying that these are very worrying times. I am aware I could be a carrier without symptoms but I am fortunate in that I can walk to my studio (keeping my distance in deserted streets) and can spend the day in isolation inside my own studio space. I feel in a privileged position. It is times like these where I appreciate how much I need the studio.

Of course, it is a shame not to be able to



meet up with artist-friends and have studio visits. But we are all so well connected virtually that there are always other ways to communicate. It is important to do so too. I will start missing being able to visit museums and galleries soon.

Material-wise, provided that newspapers keep printing, and DIY shops remain open, I will be okay for the coming months!

I do not normally collaborate or use outside fabricators and I am very self-sufficient. However, I had just asked the engineering firm Benson and Sedgwick to fabricate something in aluminum for my upcoming Mark Tanner Sculpture Award exhibition. I wanted to use the opportunity to work in a way I hadn't before. I have known B&S for 10 years (they helped me in my undergraduate degree at Byam Shaw) so I thought spending some of the Mark Tanner award on a new method of working would be a good use of the money. It now feels even more profound, knowing that something of mine is being made (in isolation), away from the studio.

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Will you be grateful for an enforced break to have the time to be playful in the studio, after having a particularly busy couple of years? Or have you found the momentum of recent production to be a positive influence?

No socialising or event-going means I can spend longer in the studio. I am hoping it will give me more time to reflect while maintaining the same intensity. I find momentum such a positive factor. The flip side is that we are all adjusting to this new norm. I have had to work out how I can keep my various and essential paid employments going through these times. I feel so sorry for art students whose degree shows are being jeopardised. I want to support my students as much as possible.



I have already noticed I have more time in the evenings to read which is a welcomed development. Truthfully, I am not using it as a break but trying to get on with as much as I can.

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Could you tell us a little bit about your current practice, and in particular your process?

At the moment, I am working on a new series for the MTSA exhibition. I am making a large sculpture which is filling my studio! I am right in the middle of the work so it is difficult to talk about it, but I am thinking about dependence versus independence; attachment versus detachment; inside versus outside. I am using horizontal planes where I am considering resting places in amongst frantic energy and dynamic forms. The work addresses funneling, distilling, changing and mutating.

My sculpture comes out of drawing or doodling. Then I draw linear forms in steel which in turn becomes the armature to build solid sections. My recent work has started to incorporate recycled foam and polystyrene in order to change the thickness of lines and planes while not adding much extra weight.



I use chicken wire around the linear structure, I cover the work in papier-mâché and then I generate my own paper pulp. The covering unifies the work and also makes it structurally strong. It also introduces colour (the colour is in the material) which is vital in giving the work the mood. The paint I use is from hardware shops; it is often the 'wrong mix' or someone has ordered it but never collected it. I like being restricted in my choice, but it is also helpful to know (like the newspapers) that it would be going to landfill otherwise.

I am always open to trying new materials and techniques. A couple of years ago I was invited to Lockbund Sculpture Foundry in Oxfordshire and enjoyed making my first bronze, lead and concrete works. I also made a small series in pewter last year with my cousin.

**You have mentioned how drawing plays a part in the development of your sculpture. Is there a relationship between this and how you approach print-work within your practice?**



Yes, my sculpture is rooted in drawing. There is such immediacy in drawing, I try and keep that same energy visible in three-dimensional work.

I have many types of drawing going at the same time – doodles in my sketch book, the drawing in steel (which becomes the armature), I often draw on my phone when I am away from the studio (I draw on top of the images of the steel armature to start considering how I might make sections solid) and I also make a lot of monoprints.

Monoprints are sculptural in that you draw on the back of the paper, so it is a surprise turning the paper around to see what marks have been picked up. I find printing a healthy parallel to have alongside the sculptural work which is very physical. It is nice setting up the monoprints on a desk

in the studio and playing around. Last year I made a series about interacting with the sculptures I was making in the studio. The surface of my sculptures show the marks of the making. I wanted to see if my prints could share the tactile sensitivity. They are more obviously figurative than a lot of my work.

**Obviously plans for the future are uncertain, but you have been working towards your Mark Tanner Sculpture Award show. Could you tell us a bit about this and anything else coming up that you are looking forward to?**

Yes, my Mark Tanner show will be postponed (details will be confirmed soon so more on that later!) I am looking forward to showing the work which feels like an exciting development. The show is touring, so I am curious to see how the work adjusts to different architectures. I am making different sections for the sculptures so they can adapt to each gallery space.

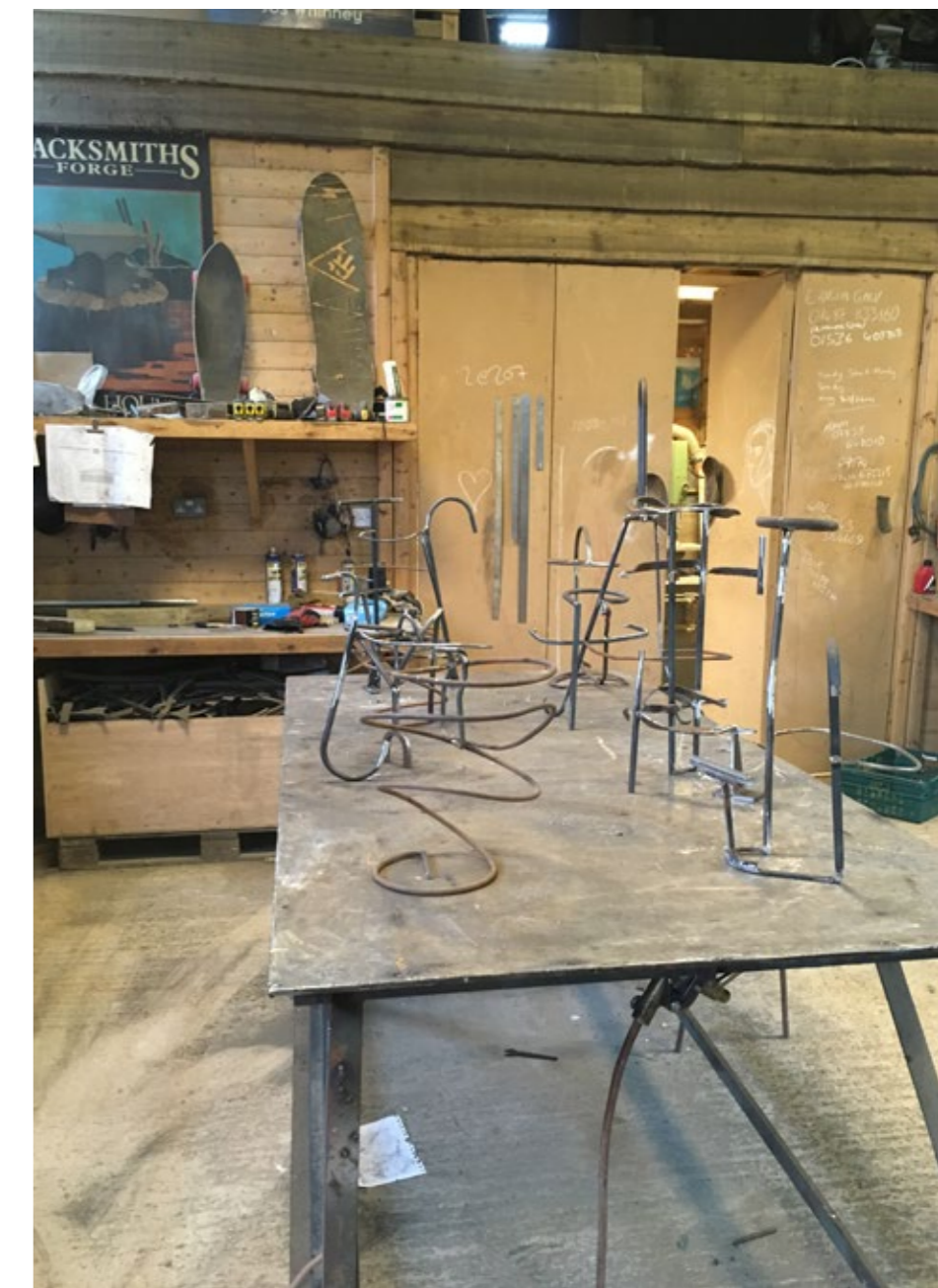
I am hoping the delay might give me more time to make a new series of drawings / monoprints. I am also keen to have time to develop a different type of text to accompany the exhibitions. I find standard press releases a bit frustrating because they (often) try to explain the work which can be restrictive. I don't think it should be 'easy' to give a verbal expression to sculpture, or any art for that matter. If it were, we would be writers, not visual artists.

Talking of writing, I have also been asked to take part in a project called Yellowfields,

a collaborative project curated by Georgia Hall highlighting contemporary artwork by emerging female artists. I have been asked to write about my current studio

work. I thought I would approach it by writing a series of short encounters which have influenced my making rather than the work itself. So there is a story about my Dad making sloe gin, my cousin's orthopedic foot cage, window grates on buildings and the idea of 'averaging'. The project will include a publication which will be released this year.

I am also looking forward to seeing how the world adjusts to this pandemic. I try and remain optimistic so I was wondering when the world recovers what benefits will emerge for us individually and as a society. There is certainly plenty scope for improvement. We'll see... For now, I hope everyone stays healthy.





## OLIVIA BAX

Olivia Bax (b. 1988, Singapore) lives and works in London. She studied BA Fine Art at Byam Shaw School of Art, London (2007-2010) and MFA Sculpture at Slade School of Fine Art, London (2014-2016). Recent solo exhibitions include: Chute, Ribot Gallery, Milan (2019/20); Roost, Lily Brooke Gallery, London (2018); at large, VO Curations, 93 Baker Street, London (2018). Recent group exhibitions include: Adieu to Old England, The Kids are Alright, Choi & Lager, Cologne (2019/20); PUNCH: Olivia Bax & Dominic Beattie, Linden Hall Studio, Deal, UK (2019); Harder Edge, Saatchi Gallery, London (2019); Olivia Bax | Milly Peck | Rafal Zajko, Three Works, Scarborough (2018) and A Motley Crew, Larsen Warner Gallery, Stockholm (2017). Recent residencies include: Artist in residence, Lockbund Sculpture Foundry, Oxfordshire, UK (2018); Artist in residence at Academy of Visual Arts, HKBU, Hong Kong (2016/17) and British Council INSPIRE exchange, Dhaka, Bangladesh (2015). Prizes include: The Mark Tanner Sculpture Award (2019/20); Kenneth Armitage Young Sculptor Prize (2016), Additional Award, Exeter Contemporary Open, Exeter Phoenix (2017) and Public Choice Winner, UK/Raine, Saatchi Gallery, London (2015).

See more at [www.oliviabax.co.uk](http://www.oliviabax.co.uk)



*Air Pocket (blue)*, 2018  
Steel, chicken wire, newspaper, glue, plaster, paint  
59 x 45 x 24 cm  
Unique



*A-OK*, 2019  
Monoprint on paper  
42 x 29.7 cm (Framed)  
Unique



*Rookery VI*, 2018  
Steel, chicken wire, newspapers, glue, plaster, paint  
30 x 29 x 18 cm  
Unique



*Vide Poche (raspberry ripple)*, 2018  
Steel, bronze, paint  
80 x 44 x 45 cm  
Unique



*How do you do*, 2019  
Monoprint on paper  
42 x 29.7 cm (framed)  
Unique



*Air Pocket (orange)*, 2019  
Steel, chicken wire, paper, paint, glue, plaster, nails  
59 x 52 x 14 cm  
Unique

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