



Unsentimental Beauty

Almuth Tebbenhoff

2023



Nathan Wolf Grace for Artiq

Almuth Tebbenhoff grew up on the family farm in Fürstenau situated deep in rural north-west Germany. The remote farm was part of a Schnapps distillery and dairy run by another branch of the family. It was not until she came to England in 1966 with the aim of becoming an artist – after an unsettling teenage incident and a fairly cursory education – that she realised Britain had actually been at war with Germany. Her father had been in the German army fighting on the Russian front and that, she thought, was it. The war, the Third Reich and its effects were never mentioned, never discussed in her household. Like many German artists of her generation including Anselm Kiefer and Georg Baselitz and writers such as W.G. Sebald, coming to terms with that recent history has informed her thinking and aesthetics. Memory and metaphor, along with questions of purpose and meaning, are at the heart of her bold sculptures.

When I visited her home and studio – an old church hall in Southfields, south-west London – on the coldest day of the year, snow lay thick on the ground and the studio was freezing. Among the working clutter was *Mountain*. A table sized sculpture made of strips of fabricated steel and painted in matt oil-based paint; the sort used by sign writers. Started as a flat drawing that followed the contours of an Ordnance Survey map, the sides of her mountain were smooth. There were no grips or footholds. It was the sort of jagged, idealised mountain found in the pages of that childhood classic *Heidi* or in Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818) where a young man stands on a high peak, his back to the viewer, contemplating his insignificance amid the splendour of the natural world. Almuth used to climb mountains and this work explores a sense of coming to the edge of one's physical ability and that yearning, so prevalent within German Romanticism, of longing or *Sehnsucht* (a sense of pining for what is unknown and just out of reach) that runs, not only through the work of Caspar David Friedrich but also Goethe, Rilke and Wagner.



In contrast, her ceramic fronds of seaweed, simple undulating forms created by splicing a phallic-shaped lump of clay so that it opens out into a female genital form, suggest the subterranean depths of the unconscious from which both creativity and trauma emerge. Some of these are made in white earthenware. Others that have been hot fired have turned black in the kiln, whilst those that hit a cold spot have retained a reddish hue. Sensual and beautiful, these rippling shapes express in their binary forms a pull between male and female principles, between yin and yang.

But mostly Almuth works in steel. Sometimes it is painted in primary reds or yellows (with a nod to Anthony Caro's *Early One Morning* 1966-7) such as her wall mounted *Yellow Crack* with its play on depth and hollows. Elsewhere she has chopped and welded angled steel into irregular box shapes that, as in *The Hedge*, echo biomorphic forms. Here, the row of drooping rectangles sag and buckle under their own weight as if overcome by some great sadness, framing and containing the surrounding space like the lines of a drawing. There's a sense that if we were to enter and exit their perimeters we might undergo some psychological transformation, emerge in an altered state. Like Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain, the great Lion Gate at Mycenae or the atavistic portals of Mark Rothko's dark *Seagram Murals*, these temple-like structures have a chthonic quality suggesting gateways into the metaphysical and the sacred.

Seeds of Change 2
2021
Ceramic
Unique
20 - 33cm high



Almuth Tebbenhoff's work is undeniably beautiful but it is the qualified, mediated unsentimental beauty – one that incorporates the poignancy of human imperfection – suggested by Keats' famous words 'beauty is truth, truth beauty.' In her *Breakthrough Cube* series, carved from Portuguese Pink Marble, the rectangles have been excavated, the surfaces broken and penetrated. It is as if the artist were searching for some secret cabalistic meaning deep within the blocks only to find that with all the scraping and chiselling there is on the other side, only more space framed and surrounded by the wound of its making. The shadows thrown by the slots and holes are integral to the finished work, suggesting the unconscious shadows intrinsic within the psyche. Sensitive and intelligent, these poetic and challenging works explore both the possibilities of different sculptural materials, whilst attempting to make emotional sense of our complex existence in this physical world.

Sue Hubbard

Lightbox
2015
Portuguese pink marble
Unique
40 x 40 x 40cm



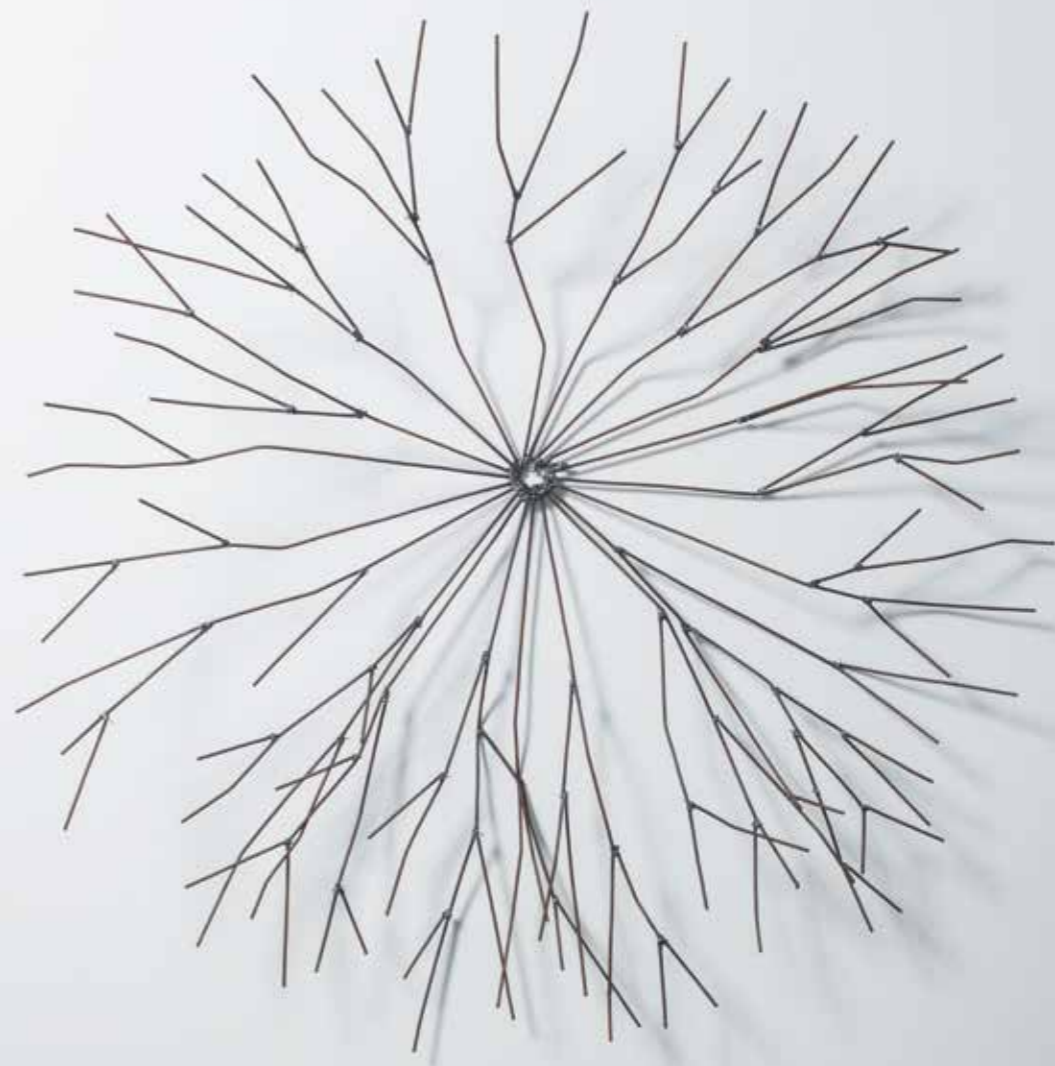


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Seaweed
and Pondweed
2022-2023
Ceramic
Unique
20 - 80cm high

Root Cube
2009
Bronze
Edition of 7
54 x 19 x 22cm



Rooter
2019
Welded steel
Unique
122 x 119 x 28cm



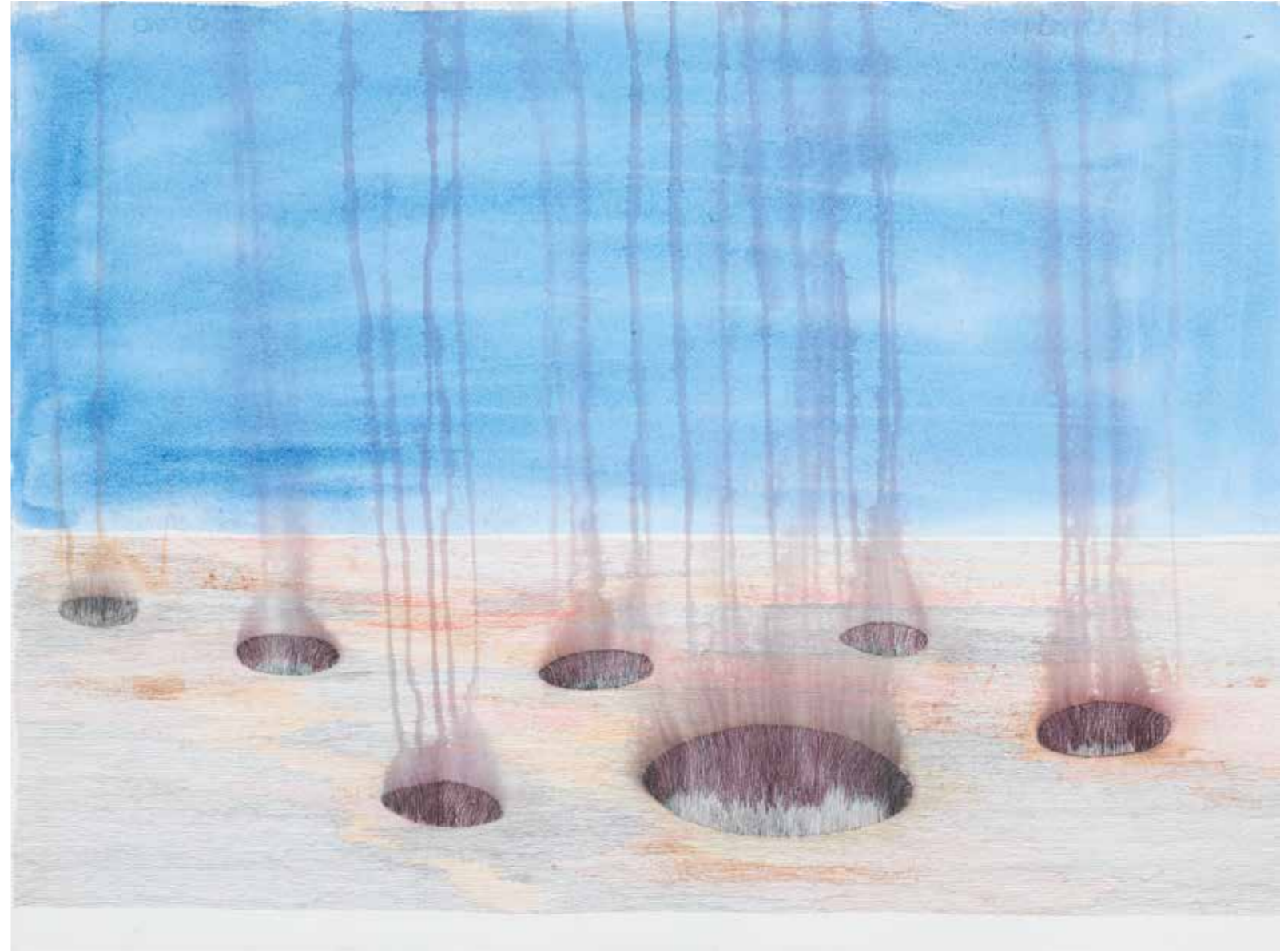
Yellow
1996
Fabricated steel, painted
Unique
195 x 150 x 12cm



Untitled Maquettes
2008 - 2010
centre:
Reels 2010
Ceramic
Unique
10 - 28cm high



Landscape with Holes
2022
Watercolour pencil and gouache on Fabriano paper
Unique
56.5 x 76cm





Pocket Universe I
2012
Bronze
Edition of 12
11 x 9.5 x 3cm



Pocket Universe II
2012
Bronze
Edition of 12
11.5 x 11.5 x 3cm

'Astronomic space is really incomprehensible because my brain is not astronomically vast, yet there is a perpetual fascination. I made a special trip to the Smithsonian to look at telescope images of the sun and other objects in space. Although I felt my brain stretching and reaching for a few moments to comprehend the back and forth dance of distances, volumes and forces, it couldn't usefully stay there. I was looking for patterns that would draw a bit of that knowledge down to my plane.

Years later I made little pocket universes that I could carry around in my pocket as a reminder of the smallness of me and the vastness of the non-me. Each one had little spheres rotating around other spheres. They were little caricatures of dummy galaxies.'



Pocket Universe III
2012
Bronze
Edition of 12
9.5 x 9 x 32cm

Deep Pocket Universe
2012
Bronze
Edition of 12
15.5 x 13 x 3.5cm

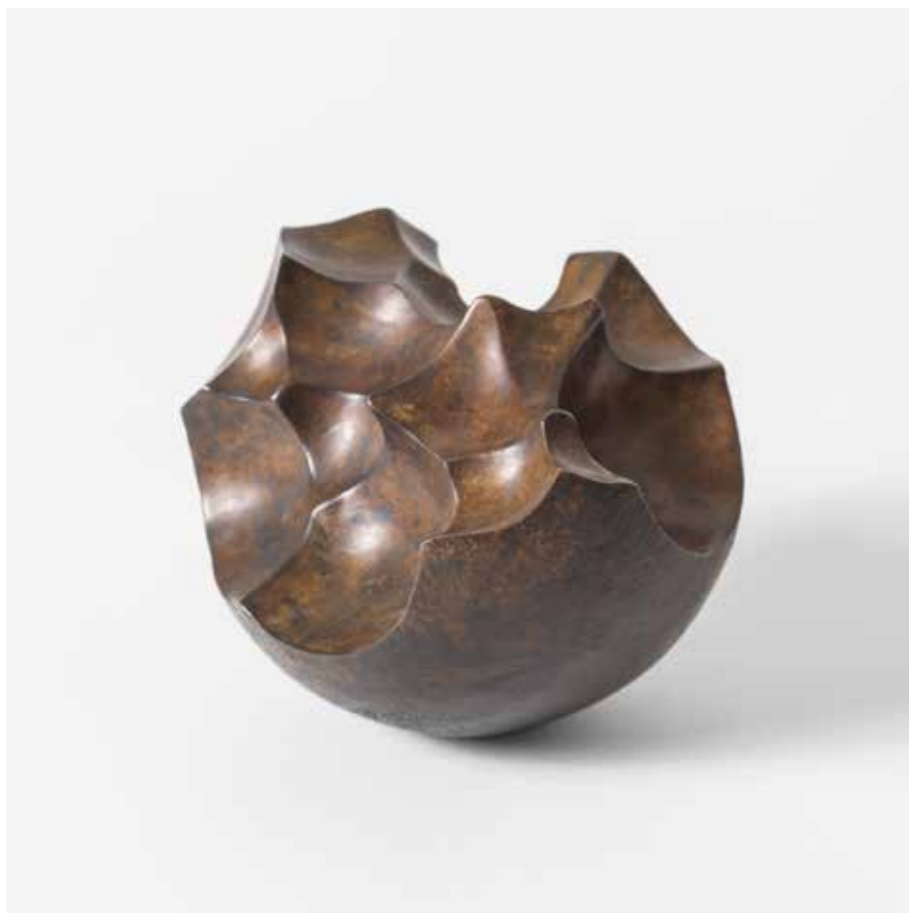


Blending Fire and Water
2022
Photographic print on Hahnemuhle paper
Edition of 11
56.5 x 76cm





Individuations
2020
Ceramic
Unique
10 - 20cm high



Empty Sphere II
2003
Bronze
Edition of 4
11 x 13 x 13cm



'Taking up the marble carving residency in Italy in 2006 was a deeply unnerving step into the unknown. I didn't know anything about stone or carving and I had to invent myself again. I knew about building and constructing but nothing about volume and subtracting material. The earliest marble pieces relied heavily on my good old handbuilding technique with clay coils.'

Lightbox
2015
Portuguese pink marble
Unique
40 x 40 x 40cm



'I always make round things, circles, spheres or ovals after I have made steel cubes - a sort of counterbalancing to the hard-edged steel. It's Clay Time.'

Full Disclosure
2014
Fabricated steel, painted
Unique
130 x 75 x 35cm



Fusion
2022
Photographic print on Hahnemuhle paper
Edition of 11
56.5 x 76cm





Indensities
2020
Ceramic
Unique
2 - 7cm high



Indensities
2020
Ceramic
Unique
2 - 7cm high

Remembered Walks, Pyrénées
2022
Watercolour pencil and gouache on Fabriano paper
Unique
37 x 46cm



Wall Fish
1997
Fabricated steel, gilded
Unique
130 x 45 x 30cm





left
Hamplemann I
2012
Bronze
Unique
32 x 22 x 10cm

right
Hamplemann III
2012
Bronze
Unique
32 x 22 x 10cm



Giocoliere
2011
Carrara statuario marble
Unique
45 x 45 x 40cm



'My hands know better what I am doing with a lump of clay than my head. If in doubt I shut my eyes and let them find the forms.
I love the smell of clay, that earthy, musty, dank smell of cellars and earth, rivers and moss.'

Seaweed and Pondweed
2022-2023
Ceramic
Unique
20 - 33cm high



'I built up my flowers and mountains out of strips of steel welded upwards from a flat plane, like the contour lines of an ordnance survey map. It is very laborious but I like the folded paper-like results. The mountain series is still open. There are always more mountains to be climbed and made.'

Mountain
1998
Fabricated steel, painted
Unique
29 x 76 x 69cm





Orpheus: Where shall I go without my love?
2012
Bronze
Unique
25 x 60 x 32cm





Seeds of Change
2022
Carrara statuario marble on granite base
Unique
41 x 60 x 40cm



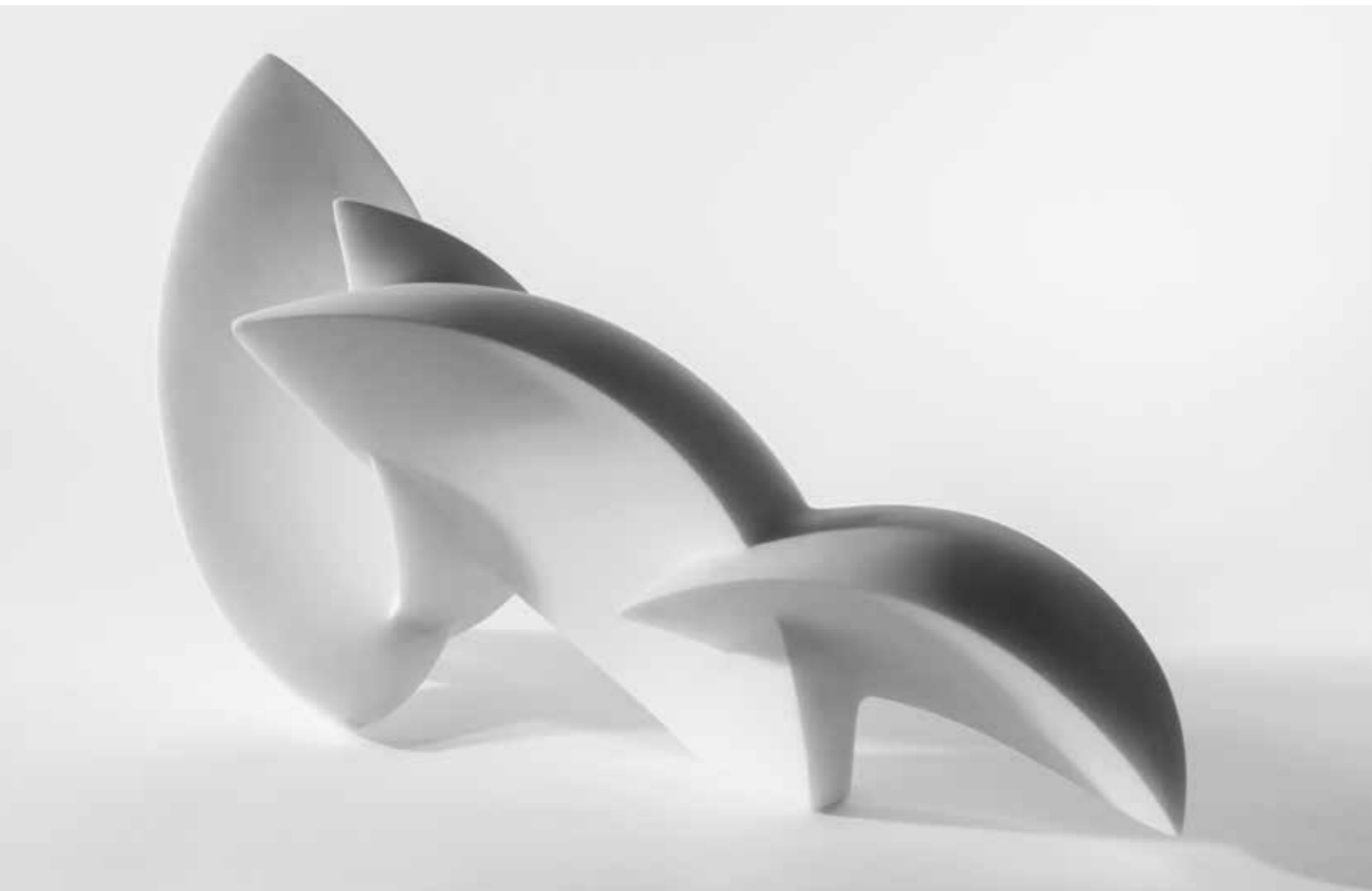
Seeds of Change
2022
Watercolour pencil and gouache on Arches paper
Unique
56 x 75.5cm





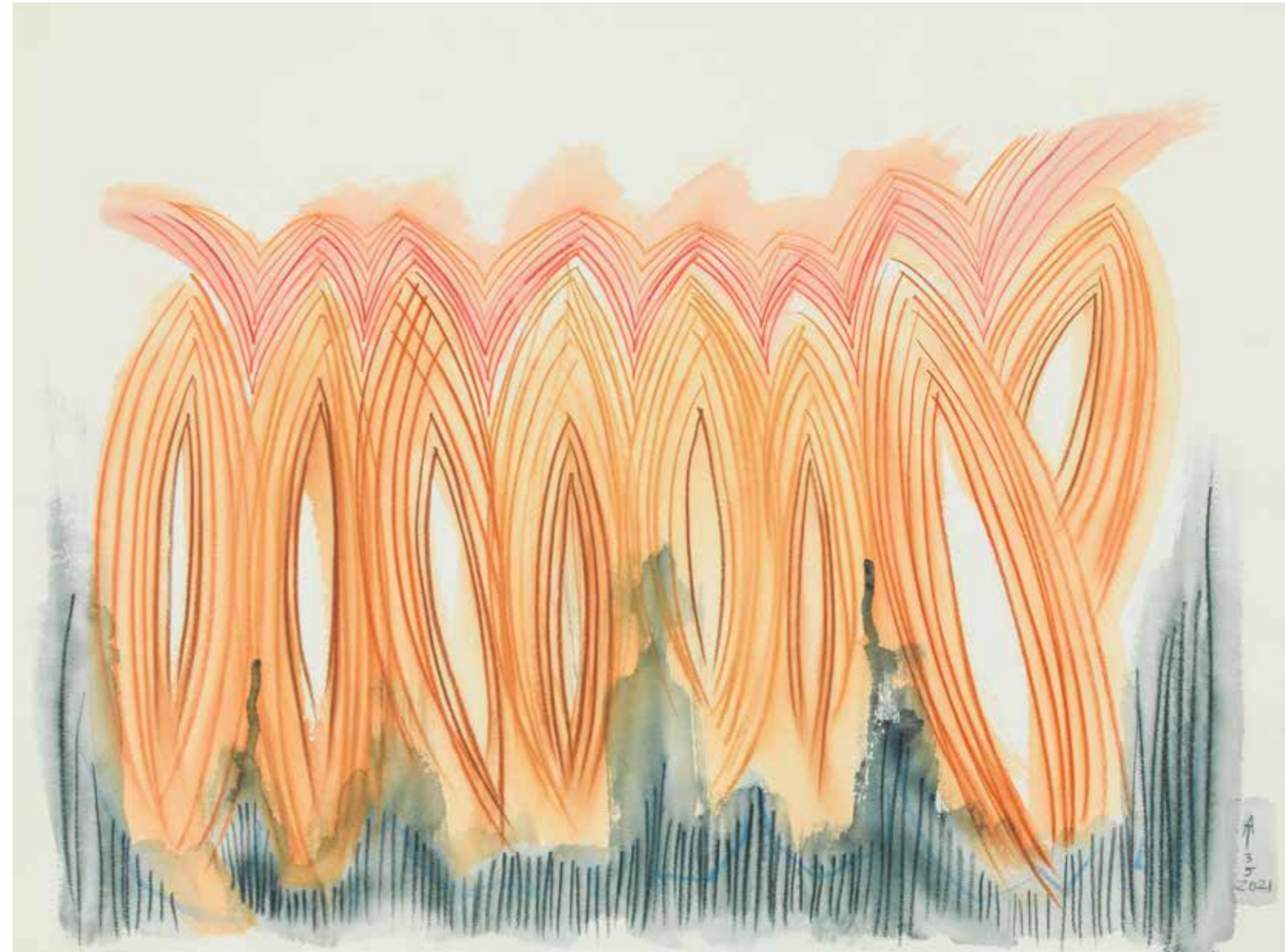
Oracle
2016
Sterling silver on granite base
Edition of 7
17 x 15 x 5cm





Flight
2011
Carrara statuario marble
Unique
35 x 54 x 18cm

Shrine
2021
Watercolour pencil and gouache on Fabriano paper
Unique
56 x 75.5cm



Ballstar
2009
Bronze
Edition of 5
11 x 11 x 11cm





Indensities
2020
Ceramic
Unique
2 - 7cm high



Indensities
2020
Ceramic
Unique
2 - 7cm high

'Symbolically, the edge where sea and land meet, is the place where consciousness begins. I am populating my underwater world with strange plants that appear to flow and ripple, opening and closing, dark and light. Seaweed, bladderwrack, kelp...'

Hightide
2022
Watercolour pencil and gouache on Fabriano paper
Unique
56 x 75.5cm



In Wind and Water
2022
Carrara statuario marble
Unique
49 x 50 x 50cm

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The Hedge
2023
Fabricated steel, painted
Unique
250 x 600 x 100cm





Gallery Pangolin would like to thank Almuth Tebbenhoff for allowing us to present this exciting and diverse body of work.

In her own words Almuth Tebbenhoff would also like to thank the following:

'I would like to thank Claude Koenig and Rungwe Kingdon for giving me this wonderful opportunity to show a substantial body of work in Gallery Pangolin; bringing together the different strands of my work in clay, steel, bronze and marble spanning over 25 years.

Thank you also to Sally James and Cath Ingram for curating and organising this show with great enthusiasm, patience, skill and Panettone.

Thank you to Keara McMartin and her brilliant team at Studio Sem, Pietrasanta, Italy for helping me with my two latest marble sculptures.

Thank you to Ben Wood for fabricating The Hedge, working day and night.

Thank you to Steve Russell for superb photos that capture exactly what needs to be captured.

Thank you to Sue Hubbard for writing the catalogue introduction, such a perfect fit.

Lastly, thank you to my husband Nick Branwell, for love and support always.'

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Sculpture measurements are: height x width x depth

Paper measurements are unframed : height x width

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