Helaine Blumenfeld was born in New York in 1942. She studied Moral Philosophy at Columbia University, graduating with a PhD in 1964. She studied sculpture with Ossip Zadkine in Paris and had her first solo exhibition in 1966 in Palais Palfy, Vienna. There follows an impressively long list of exhibitions in Britain, Europe, Scandinavia, China, Korea, Singapore and the United States. She has had numerous commissions for art in the public realm and is represented in both private and public collections.

Blumenfeld spends her time working in her studios in Pietrasanta and in Grantchester, on the outskirts of Cambridge.

Blumenfeld was the first woman to win II Premio Pietrasanta e la Versilia nel Mondo Sculpture Prize in 2007. She was made ‘Woman of Achievement’ by Women of the Year in 2010, and awarded an Honorary OBE for services to the arts in 2011. Helaine Blumenfeld is represented by the Hignell Gallery, London.

For more information visit helaineblumenfeld.com and hignelligallery.com

Exhibition Tours
Tuesday 12 May and Tuesday 9 June, 6.30pm–7.30pm
Curator Ann Elliott tours the exhibition with Helaine Blumenfeld
Free but please contact Canary Wharf Public Art Office to reserve a place on 020 7418 2257 or email publicart@canarywharf.com

Hignell Gallery will be holding a parallel exhibition of work by Helaine Blumenfeld, Intimacy, from 2 April - 31 July 2020, and will also screen the Sky Arts documentary film on the artist working in her studios, featuring the renowned marble quarries of Pietrasanta, Italy.

Hignell Gallery, 12 - 14 Shepherd Street, Mayfair, London W1J 7JF +44 (0)207 499 4528

We extend our thanks to the private collectors who have loaned work to the exhibition, to Abby Hignell for her generous support of the exhibition and to Helaine Blumenfeld for her unstinting and generous involvement. Canary Wharf Group would like to thank Mtec and J A Mackenzie for their support and sponsorship of the exhibition.

Photographs courtesy of the Artist unless otherwise credited.

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Looking Up

Helaine Blumenfeld OBE at Canary Wharf

Looking up at Helaine Blumenfeld’s latest sculpture being craned into position in front of a newly erected residential building, 10 Park Drive at Wood Wharf was the sort of experience that inspired awe and excitement in equal measure. Metamorphosis 2019 – a monumental bronze specially commissioned for Canary Wharf Group – weighing over 6 tonnes, with a height approaching 4 metres on its base, hovered in the air before being placed lightly into position. The first Saturday morning in January 2020 was cold and cloudy, and once the correct orientation had been achieved, the sun shone on the mesmerisingly beautiful blue-green patina of its smooth surface of undulating layered forms rising from the sculpture’s wide base, peaking gently.

Blumenfeld’s Metamorphosis, together with her earlier sculpture Fortuna 2016, which is already sited in Jubilee Park, are the two permanent commissions that form part of the largest solo exhibition of sculpture to be shown at Canary Wharf. The exhibition is spread throughout several outdoor locations: Jubilee Park, Westferry Circus, Cabot Square and Wood Wharf, as well as a large selection of sculptures in different media inside the Lobby of One Canada Square.

The selection of sculptures reflects Blumenfeld’s wide interest in materials and shows how she persuades the best out of each while maintaining her continually developing vision through intuition, touch and close scrutiny. She explores form initially through making models in clay. Her hands operate as her eyes, working intuitively first and later critically. The subject comes gradually, found through her hands and suggested by the basic form and supplementary, mindful working – drawing on memories from the past, new thoughts and emotions. Blumenfeld likes to feel that she has endless time to work, especially in her Italian studio in Pietrasanta where she can give one hundred percent of her time to working without domestic calls to distract her attention.

Metamorphosis 2019, bronze. Installed at Wood Wharf. Photo Sean Pollock

Should one of over twenty such small models satisfy her requirement – she is very, very self-critical – a larger piece is made and refined as a working model that may be further enlarged to a monumental scale, with still more refinements made before casting in bronze or carving in marble, stone or wood. The exhibition also features large terracotta pieces, worked by hand with great sensitivity to a fine surface.

When translating the plasticity of clay into the crispness of wood, the hardness and differing compositions of stones, and the interpretive qualities available when casting in bronze, Blumenfeld eases the nature of her chosen material into her subject matter with great finesse. After a long hiatus Blumenfeld has returned to working in wood, as she feels that the grain in wood accentuates the pure form of the sculpture.

Blumenfeld’s work was initially based on the figure, leading towards abstraction and she always allows her intuition free rein in developing narrative, movement and a particular aura around her sculptures that she does not put into words. But beauty comes to mind when looking at her work, both through her choices of materials and the way she manages them. Today the figure may be discovered in some of her pieces, but the abstracted movement she reveals brings to mind drapery floating and trees blowing in the wind in a fusion of humanity and the natural world.

Helaine Blumenfeld began her career as an academic, gaining a PhD in Moral Philosophy from Columbia University, New York in 1964. She had already begun studying sculpture with Ossip Zadkine (1888–1967) at his invitation in his studio in rue d’Assas, Paris, now the Ossip Zadkine Museum. Zadkine was a hard taskmaster, insisting that Blumenfeld worked out for herself why the heads of two of the figure sculptures she had made had cracked at the neck and broken away. She has kept them as a salutary reminder in her studio in Grantchester near Cambridge, where she has lived with her family since 1970.
The sculptures exhibited in the Lobby of One Canada Square date from 1974 to 2019, the earliest piece being Fantastico 1974 carved in a blue-veined white marble that gives its name (Fantastico) to the title. The sculpture shows the curving dynamic and upward reaching form of composition that Blumenfeld has developed through the years with undeniable assurance. However, working with Travertine marble during the 1980s and ’90s required a more robust response, since this highly textured material, with random holes caused by heat during its formation from sedimentary limestone, requires different handling from Statuario marble. She says, ‘White marble is much stronger and harder than travertine. Statuario white marble is my preferred material, not only because it is capable of rendering very fine detail, but because of its translucency when carved very thin. Travertine is not translucent. It is very porous, softer and much easier to work. It has naturally occurring holes which can interrupt the line and effect I am trying to create. I will use travertine for very particular works where I want to create a sense of time and drama.’

A sense of drama shows clearly in the Travertine sculptures exhibited here: Seascape 1983, Souls 1988, Venus 1993 and Forest of the Gods 1993-94, the latter featuring three unnamed figures. In a sense, this sculpture is left open to the addition of more figures. These gods reflect directly the notion of ancient sculptures damaged and worn through time. The drapery reveals the female form, a device used time and again in both Greek and Roman sculpture – one that Blumenfeld has refined through time, until in a number of her later pieces the drapes take over almost entirely. However, in Venus 1993, the figure is more complete, although the back and front of the sculpture reveals two faces: Venus, the Roman Goddess of love and sex, is also given the counter-characteristic of hatred and aggression.
Another feature of some of Blumenfeld's sculptures is that they are made from a number of separate elements. Seascape 1983, formed of five elements that may be interchanged, reflects the movement of water and the changing dramas of the ocean, which can also be seen in the later Rope of Europa 1993-94. The folds and curling of waves have echoes elsewhere in nature and mythology. She says that these pieces offer options, bringing people and elements together. On exhibition in One Canada Square are a number of pieces made in two, three or four parts: Souls 1985, bronze; Forest of the Gods 1993-94, Travertine marble; Shadow Figures 1990, white marble; Visionary Landscape 2007, bronze; The Space Within 2010, bronze; Taking Risks 2016, terracotta; Illusion 2017, terracotta; and Souls: Intimacy 2019, wood; while Illusion 2018, bronze is shown in Cabot Square and the most recent monumental Taking Risks 2019, white marble is at Westferry Circus.

The white marble sculptures in the Lobby of One Canada Square are installed in a way that they receive maximum light from the south. Shadow Figures 1990, Struggle 2010, Tree of Life 2010 and Toward the Precipice, Exodus III and Exodus IV, all of 2019, testify to Blumenfeld's increasing skill in carving the finest of white marble. Gradations of translucency range from opacity to near transparency, all of which throw greater focus on form and surface.

While subject matter for Helaine Blumenfeld has grown from the figure through natural forms and abstraction, as well as her musings on history, mythology, challenges that face humanity and the formal matters of materiality in making sculpture, a feeling of the figure remains largely present, if abstruse. She creates some of her subjects in more than one material. For example, although most of the 'Exodus' series are made in bronze, two of their number are carved in white Statuario marble. The smaller Exodus: Metamorphosis 2016 is also at the heart of the monumental Metamorphosis at Wood Wharf; both are bronze casts, but with different patinas. At the heart of her 'Exodus' series is the notion of all themes in her work coming together, reflecting, she says, the world's chaos. Blumenfeld says that Illusion could also have been part of the 'Exodus' series as a chaotic group of three, being chaotic in unity.

Souls 1985 also has versions in Travertine marble (Souls 1988) and in wood (Souls: Intimacy 2019), all representing a subject holding Blumenfeld's interest for more than twenty years. Compositional links also occur across subject matter: Toward the Precipice 2019 and Meridiana 2018, carved in white marble, share a backward thrusting form and the sense of a figure in contrapposto.

A larger version of Meridiana 2016 is displayed at Westferry Circus, with three other monumental marble carvings. Spirit of Life 2007, the earliest of these, a commission Blumenfeld won for a medical centre for cancer patients in America, exhibits a protective feeling although it is about 'opening up'. She says that everyone saw something spiritual in it – aspiration, hope and change. Of the three later pieces, Mysteries 2011 depicts an angel, and while she was working on it...
patina, fitting for this celebratory sculpture that alludes to luck and good fortune, evoking the Roman Goddess of Fortune (Fortuna). Ascent features male and female figures, the male giving support so that the female can fly. The theme of Flight 2010, also in Jubilee Park, recurs in the later Flight 2019, carved in wood with a delicacy that seems close to impossibility, shown in the Lobby of One Canada Square. Both versions fully capture upward movement, together with dynamic energy.

Completing the range of materials that Blumenfeld uses in her sculpture are three examples of works in terracotta, each following themes expressed in other media: Taking Risks 2016, Illusion 2017, both three-part sculptures, and Intimacy 2019, a single figure whose form is shown through drapery.

During the course of writing about Helaine Blumenfeld’s sculpture and thinking about her recurring themes, I found myself researching the ‘Tree of Life’, three versions of which are in the exhibition: Tree of Life: Transformation 2003 bronze, Tree of Life 2010, marble and Tree of Life: Encounter 2018, bronze. The ‘Tree of Life’ is in fact the Baobab tree. Although the Baobab is not a direct reference in her work, many of the characteristics attributed to it are, I find, in line with concepts that filter through Blumenfeld’s work: to unfold, to grow and to be strong.

Helaine Blumenfeld works in the hope that her sculpture offers us a way of looking anew and thinking of unity, proportion, movement and harmony. Her aim is that we should look up to enjoy the reality of art in an overly digitally obsessed world. To view sculpture in the open air, galleries and other interior spaces, offers us possibilities for direct enjoyment and understanding that is not possible when seen on a screen.

Ann Elliott 2020

Blumenfeld became more and more aware of the figure – which on one side is full of tension, while on the other has a more figurative aspect. Meridiano 2016 and Taking Risks 2019, show Blumenfeld’s growing confidence in carving large forms. Each of the three elements of Taking Risks is made from the same block of marble. The relationships of each element could be altered, while retaining the sense of the pull of gravity. All of these marble sculptures are made in her Pietrasanta studio from marble from the same quarry used by Michelangelo (1475-1564) for his five-metre high masterpiece David 1501-04. These large carvings testify to Blumenfeld’s rigour and trust in her singular vision.

The monumental bronzes displayed in Jubilee Park, in Cabot Square and at Wood Wharf, together with others in One Canada Square, demonstrate Blumenfeld’s exacting attention to the way in which patina and form complement each other. She employs a range of ‘finishes’ from highly polished bronze, through greens, to grey and blue. Her use of blue is unusual for bronze, but is seen used effectively in Metamorphosis 2019 (Wood Wharf), Ascent 2010 (Jubilee Park) and Hommage 2018 (One Canada Square). Both colour and the degree of ‘polish’ used on the surfaces of the bronze sculptures enhance form and emphasise movement and highlight line. Fortuna 2016, installed in Jubilee Park in September 2016, has a glowing, golden
Map

Looking Up: Helaine Blumenfeld OBE at Canary Wharf

Sculpture locations

LIST OF WORKS
Dimensions are given in centimetres, height x width x depth
For locations please see MAP overleaf

WESTFERRY CIRCUS
Spirit of Life 2007
Marble, 370 x 200 x 160
Mysteries 2011
Marble, 260 x 160 x 100
Meridiana 2016
Marble, 230 x 100 x 87.5
Taking Risks 2019
Marble, 3-part sculpture 365 x 306 x 231

CABOT SQUARE
Illusion 2018
Bronze, 3-part sculpture 356 x 275 x 275

JUBILEE PARK
Venus 1993
Bronze, 160 x 92 x 60
Flight 2010
Bronze, 320 x 110 x 110
Private Collection
Ascent 2010
Bronze, 335 x 200 x 165
Fortuna 2016
Bronze, 515 x 311 x 263
Collection of Canary Wharf Group

WOOD WHARF
Metamorphosis 2019
Bronze, 340 x 323 x 262
Collection of Canary Wharf Group

LOBBY, ONE CANADA SQUARE
Fantastico 1979
Fantastico marble 110 x 35 x 35
Seascapes 1983
Travertine marble, 5-part sculpture on base 60 x 140 x 100
Private Collection
Souls 1985
Bronze, 4-part sculpture 200 x 150 x 100
160 x 120 x 90
160 x 120 x 90
140 x 90 x 80
Souls 1988
Travertine marble on wooden base, 58 x 51 x 45
Private Collection
Shadow Figures 1990
White marble, 3-part sculpture on base, 130 x 95 x 37
Venus 1993
Travertine marble, 230 x 76 x 51
Private Collection
Forest of the Gods 1993-94
Travertine marble, 3-part sculpture on travertine base 55 x 75 x 38

The Rope of Europe 1993-94
Macedonian marble 44 x 26 x 24
Tree of Life: Transformation 2003
Bronze, 210 x 80 x 60
Visionary Landscape 2007
Bronze, 3-part sculpture 58 x 70 x 60
Tower of Dreams 2008
Bronze, 72 x 24 x 26
The Space Within 2010
Bronze, 3-part sculpture on marble base, 100 x 90 dia
Struggle 2010
White marble, 67 x 50.5 x 37
Tree of Life 2010
White marble, 60 x 40 diameter
Tension 1983-2015
(1983, reworked & recast 2015)
Bronze, 220 x 86 x 45
Exodus: Metamorphosis 2016
Bronze on black Belgian marble base, 45 x 50 x 50
Taking Risks 2016
Terracotta, 3-part sculpture on dark grey marble base 74 x 70 x 50
Illusion 2017
Terracotta, 3-part sculpture 66 x 62 x 56
Meridiana 2018
White marble, 103 x 45 x 30
Tree of Life: Encounter 2018
Bronze with satin finish on black bronze base 180 x 80 x 65
Collection of Canary Wharf Group
Hommage 2018
Bronze on brushed grey granite base, 185 x 75 x 40
Exodus IV 2018
Bronze, 50 x 41 x 41
Exodus III 2019
White marble, 88 x 70 x 63
Exodus IV 2019
White marble, 60 x 53.5 x 52
Exodus V 2019
Bronze, 55 x 44 x 54
Toward the Precipice 2019
White marble, 97 x 52 x 52
Intimacy 2019
Terracotta on travertine marble base, 131 x 92 x 35
Souls: Intimacy 2019
Wood, 2-part sculpture 77 x 72 x 60
Flight 2019
Wood, 192 x 80 x 55
Aurora 2019
Wood, 220 x 80 x 55

Sculptures are courtesy of the Artist unless otherwise shown

SELECTED WORKS ARE FOR SALE
For enquiries and a price list please contact publicart@canarywharf.com