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Holly Hendry
Interviewed by
Edward Wainwright

Amputated Architectures



1–3 *R:255 G:145 B:175*. Latex, air, aluminium, European oak, aluminium ducting, fan, bolts, (2013)

Holly Hendry is a sculptor based in London. Graduating from the Slade School of Art, University College London in 2013, Hendry was the inaugural Woon Fellow at Northumbria University, a significant prize for young and emerging artists. Hendry held a twelve-month residency at Baltic 39 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, culminating in her first solo-show at Gallery North, Hollow Bodies. *Her work is concerned with the spatial, material and structural qualities of architecture and how space is experienced in historical and contemporary contexts. Currently in the first year of a two-year sculpture MA programme at the Royal College of Art, London, Hendry sat down with reviews and insight editor Ed Wainwright to discuss the intersections of art and architecture, the architecture of hollowness and the cut, and how her sculpture interrogates architecture for its silent symbolism.*

EW: As an artist who works very closely with architectural ideas, and comes from a place with an architectural influence in your background, *Hollow Bodies* is an interesting exhibition for an academic journal of architecture to explore, in relation to the deeply spatial ideas that are evident within your work. But before we approach discussing the exhibition itself I'd like to first begin with what you may regard as a tangential question, but one that is based on your own writings on your work: *is digging a tunnel architecture?*

HH: That's a hard one to start on, but I think it is. It's about creating space, and space can be created in all kinds of ways. Architecture, for me, isn't just about building walls and floors and roofs that function. When you're digging a hole or a tunnel, you're removing, rather than adding matter. I think about that question in a sculptural and an architectural way: removing material can be as much about making architecture as making sculpture.

EW: So removing material could be seen as being as productive as adding material to something?

HH: Yes, if it's in the process of making a form, or a space or something, then I believe so.

EW: I ask that question partly because of your exhibition title, *Hollow Bodies. W*ithin that is the idea of emptiness and a lack of something, an idea that you don't often encounter within architecture. Architecture seems primarily concerned with the existence of something, not its absence or lack. The emptiness of something is really quite intriguing for the architect. I

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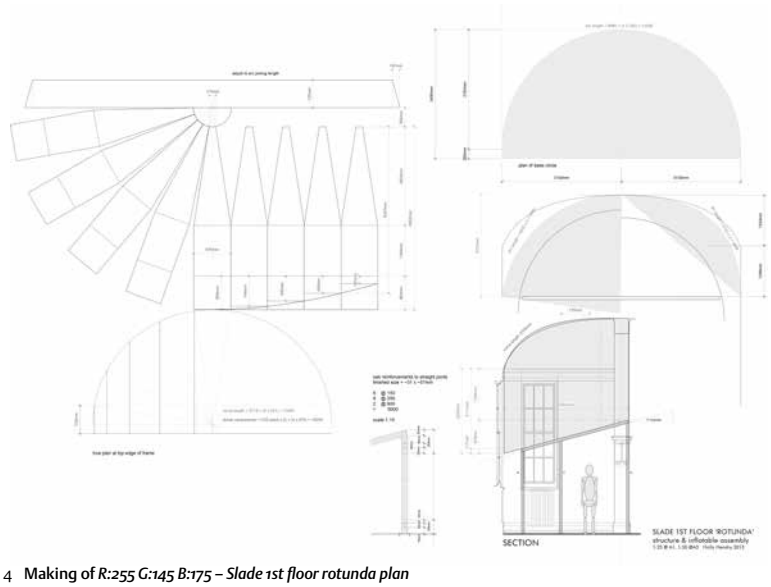
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wonder where that hollowness has come from in your work?
HH: It has come from a year or so ago, when I was working with a series of inflatables (*R:255 G:145 B:175) [1]*. These inflated forms had a real volume and presence, but were created simply from air, so I was dealing with the fact that these quite dominating forms can be the containers of this apparent nothingness that surrounds us every day. At the time I was dealing with air as a material, in a sculptural sense, but thinking about it in terms of architecture, and these two opposing ideas of our immersion in it and its symbol as a void or as nothing. It goes back to the digging question, of moving through a space where the material is your surroundings as well as your structure. When I was working with the inflatable forms, and some of the work in the *Hollow Bodies* show, I was interested in creating an awareness of the inside, through a material that evidently holds that void within itself. There's also a bodily awareness, as when you enter into a chapel, or church or cathedral, with large open spaces, you become aware of your own movement and being that's created through this emptiness of something that heightens your own presence. I hoped with my inflatables, to draw attention to those notions through the physicality of the works, their tension as containers and what is contained, where the inside becomes palpable as something experiential too.

EW: Is it the emptiness of the architectural environment you're interested in?
HH: Yes – the emptiness of that environment brings you immediately back to your being within that space. You suddenly hear your footsteps; you become aware of your own breathing; the light changes. The emptiness makes you more aware of the qualities around you, and the lack of things you negotiate with brings you to a certain awareness of yourself. The emptiness of these inflatables was so much about the form of them exploring that lack, their fullness through that emptiness.

EW: Can you tell me a little more about the inflatables? How did the forms emerge? What are they made from?
HH: They're usually squashed between a structure, squashed within a space and always dependent on surviving by some framework within that has a language and a dialogue with the inflatable form. They're made from sheet latex that is actually quite horrible stuff, but the more I've worked with it, the more I've found it beautiful as well. I then make a clothing type pattern, derived from the framework of a building to make the flats of latex. The seams are almost the same as the building's seams, but when it's filled with air, it becomes something completely different from the hard structures of the places they are designed to be in *[2–4]*.

EW: Frames seem important to parts of your work, and to key structures within your solo show. The frames appear as quite contrasting pieces to the elements that start to show the spaces you are defining within. Where have these frames come from? What role do they play in your work?
HH: They have equal importance to the other, contrasting elements of the work. There's interdependence between the two, where the inflatables rely on the frameworks to be suspended within or defined by a certain space. These frameworks are more abstracted from the forms of the buildings that generated the latex pieces. They're not so determined by other structures and spaces, but more stand-alone things. They take on this idea of display, the history



4 Making of *R:255 G:145 B:175 – Slade 1st floor rotunda plan*

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5 *Laocoön and His Sons*, also known as the *Laocoön Group*. Marble, copy after an Hellenistic original from c. 200BC. Found in the Baths of Trajan, (1506)



6 *The Hoarders and Wasters: Organ.* Plaster, aluminium, polyurethane foam. Installed at Curate Projects London, (2014)

of sculptural display, how we look at sculpture today as well as acting like armatures or crutches. I was looking a lot at the Laocoön group sculpture, unearthed in Rome in 1506, and believed to be from the Julio-Claudian period in ancient Greece. It's been a fascination of artists throughout the history of sculpture, and it's a sculpture of Laocoön and his sons wrestling with sea serpents *[5]*. When it was dug up, several of the limbs of the figures were missing, and there have been attempts to remodel these over the centuries, by various sculptors. In particular, the arm of Laocoön himself has been remade multiple times, in various positions. It's a significant historical sculpture, but also one that has been subject over the years to all kinds of popular cultural appropriations in its remodelling. I'm interested in how there are always parts of us and our environments that are missing and we have to try and add ourselves in. The frames in my works are almost symbolic of those things that are in the middle of being reconstructed and deconstructed. Which relates to other works I've talked about, such as the building site, a place that is in a strange moment between falling down and building up. I'm trying to slightly play with those boundaries, the space between permanence and impermanence.

EW: There's also a presence in certain aspects of your work, and in images in and around your studio, of scaffolding. This type of frame is something that is lost from the building after completion (a lack of sorts); scaffolding is the thing that is dismissed, that is removed during the building process, but is deeply integral to the process of making architecture. Are your frames in some way in dialogue with that process?

HH: Yes, I think so. It's strange the way that scaffolding is the initial framework of a building that you then make another framework within. For me, the structures in the show are these exterior skeletons to the more squishy-looking objects and I see the scaffolding as a strange exoskeleton that disappears when the building reaches its ideal form *[6]*.

EW: Your sculptures, however, are quite evidently not scaffolding. You don't use scaffolding itself in your work. Is that conscious? Do

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you deliberately choose not to use scaffolding and to refine the frame?
HH: You're right – it's not scaffolding itself in my work. Even recently, I've been looking at metal stud walling, and using that for the frameworks I've been building *[7]*. But I've wanted to be a little more considered with the use of those languages, particularly of using scaffolding and metal stud walling. These come with very direct references to the construction trade, whereas I'm interested in my work being able to be read in a variety of different ways. Is it the cage of a strip club, for instance? Or something that has another reference point.

EW: By not being scaffolding itself, the frames have a certain ambiguity in their reading. Your work never seems to use stock items from the building trade as found – the pieces are always tailor made, specifically sculpted for the environment they will be placed in.
HH: I never want my work to be a comment on the very specific material per se of architecture. I want it to borrow symbols from that world, but not overtly be part of that world.

EW: So it could be read in many different ways?
HH: I like exploring the line that comes from using architecture in my work but not having studied architecture, that slight lack of technical knowledge that lets me, as an artist, see the building site, for instance, as a gritty, messy place that is the site of the creation of architecture. The final, finished thing is a polished, almost glamorous emergence from this chaos and mess. Scaffolding usually acts as the barrier between the grubby building site and the rest of the world that is more polished and finished, so these scaffold-like elements of the work attempt to straddle that line. In my work, these scaffolding-like structures are designed to form particular shapes, and made from aluminium, to give this polished feel, which is at odds with other materials that I use. I'm interested in that contrast.

EW: So you have a little bit of the polished and a little bit of the rough simultaneously. In discussions around your work, you've alluded to the Baroque being of interest to you – the large and awkward forms of bulging muscles and an abundance of material – do you associate your work with something Baroque?
HH: I'm not sure if I associate it so much with the Baroque as with the ideas surrounding lightness and heaviness, which has a tangential relationship to the Baroque in terms of the heavy forms of something, and things growing fat and becoming.



7 *Breathing Space.* Aluminium, latex, air, timber, cushions.



8 *The Hoarders and Wasters: Torso.* Plaster, green oak, polyurethane foam, (2014)

EW: Heaviness in architecture, weighty forms seems to be something that has been lost over the past three decades, certainly in British architecture. Formal and material architectures that emerged in the '60s and '70s, and in particular the Brutalist movement, very much had that heaviness, weight and density to them; an awkwardness almost.
HH: Yes – of being something very specific, very *there*.

EW: There seems almost a desire for architecture now to be something that almost isn't there, that's a self-effacing materiality of transparency, slenderness, thinness of materials. Your work seems to be something that quite actively challenges that – through its materiality and form – where you get the slenderness of material or form, you seem to push through some bulging bit of latex or rubber or something that directly contrasts with that *other* thing. We see this particularly in the group of works called *The Hoarders and Wasters [8].*
HH: Those bulging things are always quite sad, or angry, things in comparison to the structural elements of thin delicacy they counteract. They are these heavy, big, clumsy-looking forms that are slightly deflated, slightly dependent. They have a delicacy as well as impermanence that counteracts that heaviness. I wanted the impression that they were buckling under their own weight, struggling to support themselves.

EW: How are they supporting themselves? What's their internal structure?
HH: A thin layer of expandable foam within forms the internal

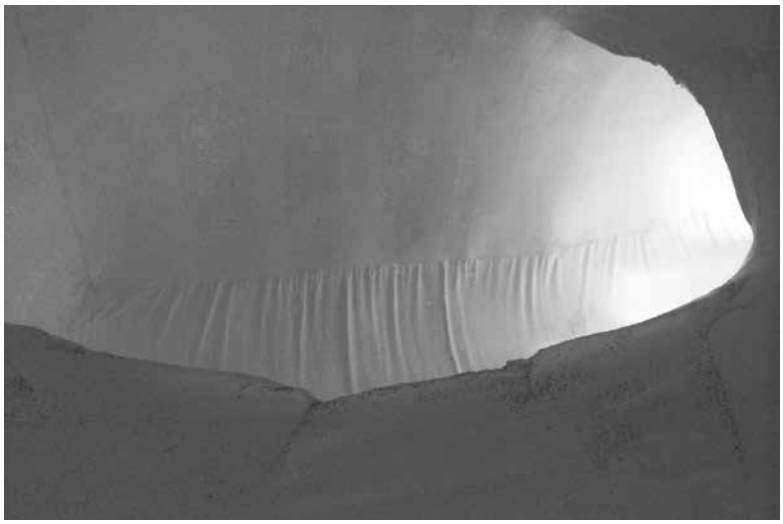
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support for the plaster skin that, through its making, buckles and cracks. The final pieces support themselves, and at the same time the cracks are part of the finished product. They are made from waste-moulds, so they are one-offs, but if you were to make them again from the same inflated form that they were cast from, there would be an entirely different outcome each time.

EW: How were they made?
HH: Measurements were taken from specific architectural interiors that were then translated into geometric shapes of the interiors, transposed onto flat sheets of latex that were cut out and sewn together. From that, the inflatables are placed on the structure that will finally support them, and are cast in a thin layer of plaster bandage so they will hold their shape. Even as you cast them, they slowly morph a little bit through the weight of the plaster cast, and then there's a layer of foam that goes on top as a casting layer, a support. The inflatable inside is taken out, and I'll physically get into these big moulds and Vaseline the interior as a release agent, which I coat with a thin layer of plaster, which when dry will be coated with another layer of the same expanding foam material used on the outside. The shell of the external mould is then removed from the outside, and you're left with the plaster cast of the negative of the architectural space that the initial measured drawings were taken from *[9–11]*.

EW: In a way, for a very short duration of time, you have inhabited the hollowness of the bodies of these sculptures. You had to inhabit those spaces in order to make these forms, but was that an intentional part of the creation of these art works?
HH: I knew there would have to be this physical involvement with forming them from the inside out, but I didn't know how it would work, or even if it would work. It wasn't the initial concept of the work, but emerged during the process of working out the construction of these pieces. I suppose the process came out of the attempt to create these awkward, blobby objects from something quite controlled and measured.

EW: Coming back to the discussion about scaffolding, it's something that goes up, and you don't see the process of what's going on behind. The building of the thing emerges eventually from the skeleton that's been hiding it. Here, the process seems reversed; you see



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9–11 The making of *The Hoarders and Wasters* series



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the emergence of the skin on the external of the form, which is then supported by an internal skin that will remain always part of the work.
HH: There's still a slight mystery about how they are, and people expect them to be these solid objects, but there are certain clues that give them away: finger marks from me rubbing the Vaseline on the inside of the mould are then translated into the final piece. They are not these perfect things with perfect seams, perfectly cast. They have the marks of their making, which relate back to the hand. That's quite an important part of the exhibition, the manufactured and the handmade.



12 *Take Good Care of My Baby.* Plaster, polystyrene, pigment, baby lotion, latex, varnish, (2014)

EW: That's something you've written on in the accompanying book to your exhibition, *Hollow Bodies*, referencing Jules Michelet, speaking of bird architecture. He says, quoting from your text, quoting Michelet, *A house built by and for the body, taking form from the inside, like a shell, in an intimacy that works physically. The form of the nest is commanded by the inside. 'On the inside … the instrument that prescribes a circular form for the nest is nothing else but the body of the bird'.*[1]
HH: Michelet was talking about how the nests of birds are built from the inside out, using the form of their body to expand the space, which they would then inhabit and reproduce in. I like the idea of using the body to form the shell of your next place of being.

EW: Using the body as the tool for forming both the form of the nest, and the emptiness within it – its hollowness that's left afterwards.
HH: It relates to these enclosing membranes of the inflatable, like the cell and the membrane of the cell being the thing that is most in touch with the present. The external can be seen as the future of what will happen to this cell, and the internal is the history of what has already lived – the content of the cell if you will. That membrane that contains the content of the cell is the material most close to the present.[2]

EW: One of the key parts of what we've talked about in your work has been the idea of cutting the architectural body. Dismembering classicism, such as we've seen in your interest in the Laocoön group and the lost and re-made arm. What are these amputated architectures for you?
HH: These ideas of cutting into architecture translates in a few different ways, and it's something that has emerged through a variety of different works. For instance the work *Take Good Care of my Baby [12]* was about slicing, which is about time and these symbols of time for us, which we see as the past, as a ruin. In that piece, the slices are to do with the fact that the restoration of the Parthenon is completely reversible. They make these sections that fit into the columns, and they're not attached to the stone, and can be taken out. It's like a giant jigsaw puzzle. In this work, the column cut into slices relates to the idea of the ruin that is also a series of building blocks. The slicing of the other works *[13]* operates to indicate a way these elements fit together and form some kind of larger architectural body or an almost anthropological body, which relates to ideas of how we treat our own space and make these spaces our own places to be. It's like an extension of the self, and the thought that there's also a fragmentation of that self in space too.

EW: There's a physical dismembering, a literal cutting into pieces taking place here. But also a psychological idea of dismembering elements and a concern with the fear that those cuts and dismembering of both the body and space induce.
HH: And also how we relate to architecture in a bodily sense today. I have an interest in how the body's influence on architecture has shaped the way we conceive of space. For instance, the Vitruvian man and that notion of building to the ideal proportion of the body, as that was seen as



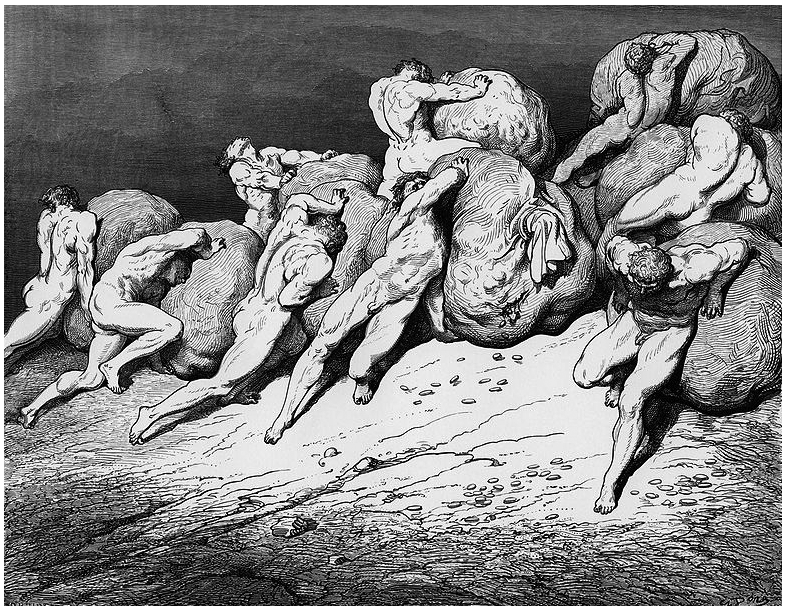
13 *The Hoarders and Wasters: Torso*. Plaster, green oak, polyurethane foam (2014)

a microcosm of perfection. I'm interested in how we see that idea now, how it can translate into a contemporary condition where the body is perhaps seen in a more dismembered way.

EW: But unlike almost all classical sculpture, the body as a literal thing is totally absent in your work. Is that an intentional absence?
HH: I think so. For me it reflects our contemporary society. Like Grindr, Tinder (digital apps for dating and 'hook-ups' or casual encounters) – there's something about the way people interact today. Getting to know someone to a certain degree through a lack of physical touch apart from touching the screen of your phone, or the keyboard of your computer.

EW: You're suggesting there's a sort of distance that's created, and in a way you're conflating some of the problems of architecture and some

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14 Gustave Doré, illustration of Dante's Inferno. Plate XXII: Canto VII: *The Hoarders and Wasters* (originally 1857)



15 *The Hoarders and Wasters: I Need You to Knead Me.* Plaster, aluminium, polyurethane foam (2014)

of the problems of sculpture, and broader popular culture, that absent the body?
HH: I don't know if it's even that literal. The work is getting into an area that is much more subconscious than that. An area that generally we don't think about. For me it's the representations of the body through those two different mediums – architecture and sculpture – and with an actual, physical body in the work it would be a completely different thing.

EW: I suppose you start to have hints at something you might regard as more bodily in the anthropomorphic work that you've titled *The Hoarders and Wasters*. Why have you titled them this way?
HH: It relates to classicism too, and in particular an etching by Gustave Doré, *The Punishment of the Avaricious and the Prodigal [14].* It depicts a scene from Dante's Inferno of sinners trying to push these large, amorphous bags up a hill and these giant, squishy bags are all being eternally pushed. Aesthetically, I enjoy the layout of the etching, and the contrast of their muscles against these big, bulging bags. And also the idea of gluttony, and dealing with what you have, what you accumulate and possess. These objects are almost an indulgence, gluttony of scale and growing fat, trying to store these objects. It relates to sculpture making itself, and attempts to bring attention to the physicality involved in the making of these works *[15].*

EW: I wonder if something also relates back to ideas of the sublime that other parts of your work address? There's something at once terrifying and intoxicating about the sight of these obviously heavy bags being pushed up this vast hill, by highly toned thieves. There's also quite an objectification of the male body in such works representing the classical – and we have become accustomed to thinking that objectification is a contemporary condition. But looking back at the sculptures of ancient Greece and Rome, and the later representations of those sculptures, we find a high degree of bodily perfection being presented. The formless-forms of *The Hoarders and Wasters* seem to play on those themes with their materiality and scale, and their way of being built from the inside, out. You draw on the writings of art and architecture critic Steven Connor, in particular with reference to the spatiopetal and spatiofugal, in your work. What do these terms mean to your practice?
HH: It's the idea of building in, or building outwards. The digging aspect of making space. These questions, of digging, tunnelling, have been in my work, but I didn't have a framework to question these spatial forms within. Spatiopetal is the making of structures from the outside, in; spatiofugal from the inside, out.

EW: One being the construction of the thing from the skeleton and the scaffold, building in and building up, the other is the burrowing, the extraction of material, the hollowness of things, of forms and spaces. Which brings us back to the question, *is digging a tunnel architecture*?
HH: I guess so – I'm interested in exploring both of these approaches to forming structures and spaces in my work.

Holly Hendry has an upcoming exhibition at Bosse & Baum in Peckham, south London, in January 2015.

www.hollyhendry.com

Notes

1. Jules Michelet, *The Bird*, first published 1869 (Kessinger Publishing, 2008).
2. Alberto Oliveira, 'Topology: Spaces of Transformation Edges of the World', *Tate Modern,* London, 28 Jan 2012.

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