Frances Richardson
Ideas in the Making: Drawing Structure

Trinity Project 2
11–28 October 2011

Three-dimensional drawing
Jeremy Cooper

I-beam to walk through

Boxes for thinking about opening

Drawing of (Untitled) Box for Standing

Inside the image
Frances Richardson in conversation with Luce Garrigues
As a child at home in Leeds, Frances Richardson was constantly making things. Her father was a geologist and keen fisherman, and the whole family accompanied him on his days out, Richardson and her sister spending hours combing the riverbanks with their mother, at an early age fascinated by objects. She liked watching her father tie flies, and learnt from her mother to make clothes, and to build lollipop-stick houses, as well as enjoying visits to museums. Like both parents, the two children were state educated, their interests largely acquired by personal observation – Richardson witnessed her father pursue the process of mapping coal fields, listened to him tell of hidden landscapes as he showed her slithers of rock under the microscope. On retirement he set up a small antique shop in Harrogate, and Richardson has inherited from him an ability intently to look at things, seeking hidden information. She remembers with clarity an afternoon during the family summer of 1971 in the Devon countryside, aged six, when she picked up two bits of fallen branch on a walk through the woods and, back at their holiday cottage, made these into a mallard’s head and an elephant’s foot. Forty years on, she describes in detail gluing melon pips to the driftwood to make the elephant’s toenails, and varnishing the wood. Her mother has kept the elephant’s foot through all these years. And Richardson displays on a shelf above the desk in her flat in Clapham the postcard of Leonardo’s drawing of an elephant that, at this same time, she chose to pin to the wall beside her childhood bed. Long-term possession of favoured objects is characteristic of a certain kind of artist – a British sculptor of the same generation as Richardson, Rachel Whiteread, was also taken to museums as a young girl, and today keeps at hand the Landseer postcard which she first pinned to her bedroom wall in 1971, when she was eight.

Continuing throughout childhood and beyond with these creative pursuits, progress direct from school to the Foundation Course at Leeds College of Art felt to Richardson the natural path. She had been in the same form as Damien Hirst all the way through middle school in Leeds, and the two of them went on to the same high school, then also attended art foundation in the same year. After the year course in Leeds, Hirst did not recommence his art education until going to Goldsmiths College in London in 1986, whereas Richardson began her degree course in sculpture at Norwich School of Art and Design in 1984. During the second year she worked in the school’s yard on a chestnut tree trunk which she made into a totem pole with five stacked figures, her first carving. Undertaking large scale carved work of this kind followed on from her influential encounter with the work of Anthony Caro, in the sculpture exhibition Drawing in Air at Leeds City Art Gallery in 1983. Richardson still refers to her catalogue of the Caro exhibition organised for the Arts Council by Catherine Lampert that she saw
in the summer immediately before beginning her degree. Three of the tutors in the sculpture department at Norwich had been taught at St Martins by Caro, whose use of the steel I-beam girder captured Richardson’s attention, later becoming a feature of her work – though made by her out of MDF, not rolled by a factory in steel. Prior to this, the sculpture which most closely touched Richardson had been the Romanesque carved stone capitols in Norwich Cathedral, and Caro was therefore the first contemporary sculptor she came across who spoke a language and engaged with feelings that concerned her personally.

Another influence at home in Leeds was the presence of the Henry Moore Foundation, and it was Moore’s keen interest, alongside Romanesque stone carving, in African sculpture that aroused Richardson’s curiosity to find out about the subject herself. Visits followed to the Museum of Mankind in London and to a show of Yoruba carving in the Ipswich Museum, the architectural basis of which made a strong impression. After graduating from Norwich and moving down to London, Richardson met the Nigerian musician Fela Anikulapo Kuti at his gig at the Brixton Academy, where he
had a finely carved contemporary drum on stage. That year Fela returned to London to record the anti-apartheid album *Beast of No Nation*. Later in Lagos she visited him regularly at the communal compound Kalakuta Republic and accompanied him to the shrine and on tour. For a large part of her teenage years, music had held Richardson’s interest as forcefully as the visual arts. She played the ‘lute at school and took up the saxophone at art school, and it was her unwillingness to perform publicly that turned her decisively towards the private, solitary activity of making art.

In order to find out about contemporary Yoruba art and artists, Richardson applied for and won a Commonwealth Foundation Fellowship to spend a year in Nigeria, arriving there in 1990 and, by a circuitous chain of events, ending up working for the master carver Segun Faleyeye – it was partly due to the discovery, after several months, that the drum she had admired in Brixton was the work of Segun that persuaded him to take her on as his first and only white pupil. Richardson laboured hard, gathering tree trunks from the forest on which to work, making drawings of batik patterns, often carving for ten, twelve, even sixteen hours a day, determined to keep pace with her master. On her completion in 1991 of a figure of Oya [1], Segun, in respect for her artistry and discipline, gave Richardson the ‘Master’s freedom’ to continue in the tradition on her own, symbolised by presentation to her of the tools of his with which she had been working. ‘I had been admitted into someone else’s culture. But there was no point in just copying it. You have to sing your own song.’
Richardson adapted these African techniques on returning to London late in 1991. Whereas her Nigerian works were of accurate ceremonial form, the pieces carved in London related simultaneously to European tastes from the 1950s, the shapes abstract and the conceptual narrative less straight-forward – as in *Hades' Balls – Persephone’s Pomegranate*, a complex work made of carved beech wood, palm fronds, plaster and earth pigments, exhibited in *Eyes Abroad* at The Wellcome Foundation in 1994; in *Balls II*, skilfully carved in 1995 from a single piece of cherry wood [2]; and in *Rupture*, made from an inverted tree trunk and spray of branches [3]. Despite the abandonment of Yoruba forms Richardson was and is conscious of the direct influence of the whole African experience. Segun is convinced that the making of every mark by an artist matters, even if subsequently changed or erased, and this has become an indelible part of Richardson’s own aesthetic as she paints, draws, stitches, cuts, saws, carves – does anything. Through the patient acquisition of artistic experience at Segun’s side, Richardson describes ‘learning that something is not merely what it looks like.’

3  *Rupture*, 1998, extracted from a felled tree, H. 218 cm
At the end of 1991 the Commonwealth Institute in Kensington hosted an exhibition of carvings by Segun Faleye and Frances Richardson. Amongst the guests was Robert Loder, a collector of both contemporary African carving and avant-garde European art, who bought drums carved by each of the artists. Some years later Anthony Caro bought a mask by Segun, which Richardson delivered to his studio in Camden. Loder visited Richardson in her small, damp studio under a railway arch at London Bridge to view her work, expressing his interest in funding the purchase of a building with potential for sizeable studios and storage. Richardson helped locate a suitable building in Vauxhall Street, South London, which was converted into studios and developed into an artist led gallery and international artists residency programme Gasworks. It opened in 1994, with Richardson occupying one of the twelve studios for the next ten years. The organisation and location remain in principle unchanged, with financial assistance for Residencies and International Fellowships offered by the Triangle Arts Trust, which Loder and Caro had set up in 1982.

Richardson had been disbalanced by her African experience, her immersion in the aesthetic of traditional Yoruba art involving the abandonment of the western artistic ego, instead acquiring physical skills and emotional truthfulness through non-didactic methods, solely by watching and doing, without any direct instruction. Sitting beside Segun in his workshop, there was no passing of judgement, merely the simple, unforewarned conclusion of being told, with satisfaction, that you, a western woman, have become a real carver, one of the few. Back in London, Richardson struggled to accommodate this approach to her
5 Cat's Cradle: fence around well (detail), 2007, pencil on paper, 12.8 x 20 cm

6 Deposition, 2006, H. 248 cm
big-city artistic life. Confusion led to crisis, during a period in which she felt unable to work — with difficulty, she forced herself to make at least one drawing a day, although for ages the only thing she could think of drawing was the day’s date. From these number sequences, as she called them, Richardson in 1997 narrowed her range down further, to the symbols for plus and minus, with which she began to find a newly satisfying creative voice [4]. In the slow recovery of artistic confidence, she experienced the application of graphite to hand-made paper as a kind of sculptural accumulation, and proposed that ‘the positive and negative symbols suggest the idea of magnetic forces, balance, electrical pulses and infinity.’

Because she still found it — in her words — ‘a real battle to locate myself in my work,’ Richardson moved out of Gasworks in 2004 to study for her MA in Sculpture at the Royal College of Art, graduating in 2006. ‘My practice was all over the place — although the drawings were sorted, the sculpture, though, wasn’t tangible, somehow, not to me. I suffered from an unwillingness to jettison ideas. Something like that. Probably didn’t know how to. Or what had to go. Maybe I wasn’t critical enough. I don’t know — anyway, I needed art college again.’ [5]

The strategy worked, and her degree show in 2006 was highly praised. It included a large installation, *Deposition* [6], for which she constructed walls and made the first of her I-beams, and also two work benches, constructed out of MDF [7]. Another three-dimensional work of this
time, *Suckersuccour* (2007), was based on the crazy paving in Neri di Bicci's painting of the Archangel Raphael Saving an Attempted Suicide, known to Richardson through the illustration in a book she had found at home. The piece, made of MDF, constituted a sort-of angled and flattened barrow, the broken shards of the pavement divided by smoothed ‘rock-buds’ made of self-drying clay [8]. Richardson’s sculptural discoveries while doing her MA were expanded in scale with *I-beam to walk under: Fig. 1, ‘drawn’* for exhibition at the Angus-Hughes Gallery in Hackney in 2010 [9].

Another element of Richardson’s work, begun before her time at the Royal College, made use of stickers and credit cards. At the exhibition *Sign and Deliver* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2001, four credit card pieces were displayed as billboards, with six smaller sticker pieces mounted in the ceramics galleries; the forms the artist used, and the position she chose set going a spatial conversation with the old plate-glass and mahogany display cases. Despite the exterior contrasts in medium and manner, lines of straight connectedness link Richardson’s creative thinking from an early age through till today. Her childhood habit of sewing keeps reappearing, in, for example, the two stitched raffle ticket bedspreads and an admission ticket pillow of 2002. The graphite drawing [10] *Every hour of every day of every week* (2003) has its origins in a piece she made by stitching together the perforated corners torn from her diary during a whole year, a physically
9 *I-beam to walk under*: Fig. 1, on exhibition at the Angus-Hughes Gallery in Hackney in 2010, MDF, bolts, screws, paint. H. 260 cm  W. 3'000 cm  D. 18 cm
10  *Every hour of every day of every week*, 2003, graphite on paper, 50 × 50 cm

11  Stitched paper piece made by Richardson from the torn-off paper corners of her diary, from which she developed the drawing *Every hour of every day of every week*
arduous endeavour typical of the artist [11]. Richardson’s capacity for carrying forward the past without letting herself be weighed down by it relies on the determination always to focus on the activities of the present, whatever they might be.

In 2008, inspired by the sight of rainbows over Clapham Common, at the southern edge of which she lives, Richardson began to use coloured pencils in the creation of target drawings, each stroke on the paper still alternate + and – marks. Both physically and philosophically she is drawn towards the extremes: the ultimate subtraction to nothing or the eventual addition to infinity. Throughout these years of concentration on pencil drawings [12] Richardson continued to experiment with ways of applying the same aesthetics to the making of sculptural objects, reaching towards a unity of expression in her work. As she puts it: ‘Drawing is my life-line … [they] offer a slice of what I feel it is to be.’

The quality of Richardson’s drawing was recognised by inclusion in the Phaidon publication Vitamin D. New Perspectives in Drawing (2005), with an introduction by Emma Dexter and illustrating the work of over a hundred leading international artists. Cliff Lauson, at the time a curator at Tate Modern, wrote in Vitamin D: ‘Using an array of pencils with varying hardness, Richardson builds her compositions up from thousands of minute negative (–) and positive (+) signs, the most minimal of mark-making gestures, incorporating the influence of philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Giorgio Agamben, Richardson’s work stands at the limit of contentless abstraction without jeopardising the subjective elements of emotion, communication and imagination.’ Agamben wrote about the significance of gesture and its intimate connection to language, arguing in one of his essays that drawing is the ‘speechless dwelling in language.’

Richardson has recently refined her language of artistic expression into the creation of the extraordinary series of ‘three-dimensional drawings’ in this exhibition. The group of sculptural works collected under the title Boxes for thinking about opening, although solidly part of the western modernist tradition, with no obvious connection of form or technique to her Yoruba carving, does nevertheless share common characteristics with Richardson’s earlier ceremonial figures. The main thing, as the artist sees it, is the fact that in both cases she works with the material as it comes, without preconception of what the final piece should or even could look like. At the same time, the outcome of each is conditioned by the cultural conditions in which the artist is steeped during the period of execution, so that the language and structure is predefined. The absence of a sketch means that Richardson feels she is actually drawing in the making of these three-dimensional shapes, the planes and wedges and joins cut in MDF, as much ‘the record of a gesture as a graphite line drawn on the page.’

Even the two large individual I-beams which Richardson has created to date, both of them constructed in pieces in her studio to the measure of specific spaces, emerged in the way a drawing does, with the precise line of the
beam's edges, the placing of the structural bolts and flow of the curves of the form chosen in the process of execution, through right-feeling and instinct, just as the most meaningful lines appear on a sheet of paper. Similarly, although the shapes of the eight boxes relate to cardboard packaging, they are not built on a model or for a model but exist in themselves, as do conventional drawings made for their own creative pleasure, in preparation for nothing. 'My boxes are not sculptures,' Richardson emphasises. 'They're drawings. Three-dimensional drawings, if you like.' This way of making and of thinking, of thinking-in-the-making, is unusual amongst younger artists, and contributes to the different quality of this group of pieces to other work being made today.

There are quiet, hard-working patterns to Richardson's life, within which she has built up, alongside aesthetic preferences, stoically held social and moral views. She listens regularly to the radio and tapes programmes of particular interest, replaying them from time to time. Since hearing three years ago a reading from the American playwright David Mamet's *True and False*, Richardson has given thought to his ideas, and this has affected the approach to her own work. Mamet's belief that 'to set out to manipulate the emotions of others is misguided, abusive and useless' is precisely Richardson's view, leading her to a statement of her own: 'I too fear that we have become culturally accepting of emotional manipulation, because it is easier to pretend than really feel, and this frightens me.'
The photographs (pp. 20–35) of the eight three-dimensional drawings, were taken by the artist herself. She sees these photographic images as objects in their own right, in which the care taken by her in digitally cropping and lighting and adjusting, removes them from the function of illustration to become individual connected works. For the exhibition, she is in the process of making *I-beam to walk through: Fig. 1*, which will form a looped divide between the two halves of Trinity Contemporary's space in Bruton Street. Another new work, *Drawing of (Untitled) Box for Standing* (2011), is taken from the open vertical 'coffin' piece made by the American artist Robert Morris in 1961. Richardson's admiration of Morris was confirmed by attending a lecture of his called *Subjective Histories* in New York in 2007, and his *(Untitled) Box for Standing* precisely fits her purpose. Richardson's piece illustrates her feeling that the point is not the object itself but where both the maker and the viewer are in space related to the object. In *Drawing of (Untitled) Box for Standing* the viewer can walk inside the work and, it is hoped, feel comfortable, just as Frances Richardson as a child often used to stand on a stool in the kitchen at home, simply because it felt good.
Inside the image

Frances Richardson in conversation with Luce Garrigues

As a prelude to this interview, I would like you to explain why you say the works you are presenting at Trinity Contemporary are drawings and not sculptures? Luce (L)

There is no simple answer but a jigsaw to put together ... the idea of ‘drawing’ is to me like the straight edge on the puzzle pieces that helps me locate the space in which this work is found. The concept of drawing frames firstly the process and materials by which I make the work, then the idea that it is a three-dimensional image of an object and not a ‘real’ object, and also the movement of the viewer whilst looking. Frances (F)

Brancusi said something like it is impossible for anyone to express anything real by imitating its exterior surface. I feel that language and visual advertising culture makes us look so fast at the surface of things that we are forgetting how to be with things and to be sensitive to the physicality of the world surrounding us. I want to examine the form of things, to ask what is our relationship with the physical world and perhaps in the basic act of drawing I can find my feet so to say ... but I don’t want to deal with illusion. It is natural for me to make things instead of drawing them traditionally as representations. Initially I chose things that I responded to like flint tools and started making approximations in clay as an investigative process akin to drawing.

3D sketches of flint tools made in porcelain, 2005
H. 1.5 cm W. 5 cm D. 9 cm (each)
The first MDF I-beam came about as a support for something else in the studio. Again, the making of an object came so naturally to me but I was aware that I didn't want the I-beam to be a fake, as that would locate the sculpture I was making firmly in a fictional space. With sculpture there is always this question about where it exists in space, the beauty of it being that it has one foot in real space and one in the imaginary. Having made the I-beam I saw a struggle between the image and the real, totally embedded in the work, which I liked. The boundaries of 'real' and 'imagined' seemed to fold in on themselves, a little like when looking at sculpture or clouds and getting lost in it so much you lose track of time. This used to happen to me as a child when I would try and work out the position of missing arms and legs broken from a small alabaster tourist copy of Giambologna's The Rape of the Sabine Women that we had at home, turning the statue round and round until I understood the whole form as an image in my head.

Calling the work drawing, introduces the idea that your encounter can be different to that of looking at an object. I would like the encounter to be one of being with the work ... on the edge of the real and the imagined. The perception of 'being with the work' is a very natural position to take with sculpture, it is closer to us and our position in the world than a picture, it steps into our space. Whilst I am making the work I am acting and reacting to the piece emerging in the space just as you would when drawing on a piece of paper only I have gravity to contend with. Maybe by thinking of sculpture as drawings, perhaps by imagining the room is the sheet of paper and that we are sharing the same space as the work, we can recover a sense of being in time with objects.

This interaction with the work is central to the three pieces you are showing and is clearly suggested in the title of each work i.e. I-beam to walk through, Drawing of (Untitled) Box for Standing but what about the Boxes for thinking about opening, could you explain how as the viewer we step into the space of the work and how we become part of it?

Yes, the process of looking is central to the work, it's demanding on the viewer especially with objects because we are not given all the information from one viewpoint to build up a mental image. In order to know the object we have to walk around it and sometimes even look underneath, I just had a great time inspecting the underside of Caro's Early One Morning in the recent Modern British Sculpture exhibition; it was fantastic all sorts of bolted angle iron supports. Caro often talks about how sculpture is to do with the body, he says 'children become aware of their size and their stretch by going and playing under the table and in between peoples legs and the tablecloth. It's all a discovery of what the body is about, how big the body is and how you move it and I like that idea with sculpture.' I like it too. As well as relating to the body, the I-beam works relate to the space in which they are installed, it is a three-way negotiation between body, object and space.
When I set about making the *Boxes for thinking about opening* I had decided to try to make something where our experience of it, unlike the I-beam works, could be independent of the space in which it was placed. I am really attracted to boxes, the different ways they are designed to open, tags, perforations etc. and on reflection it is the perfect object to choose to 'draw' to be independent from the space it is in, because as an object it has an enclosed space – its function is to be independent from places unlike an I-beam on which space is dependent.

With a box there is this tension between the external form and the desire to open – I'm going to sound like I should get out more, but I do love it when the perforations work, like when you open a tissue box. It's not possible to open the folds and perforations of *Boxes for thinking about opening*, you enter the space of the work in your imagination. Instead of a three-way negotiation it is a four-way between mind, body, object and space.

In the making of the boxes, you also facilitate the observation and the physical relationship with the objects by increasing their original size. At the same time, you avoid the works becoming facsimiles. Is it for the same reason that you paint the screws in grey? What is their role in the I-beam?

All the screws and bolts in the I-beam are integral to the structure of the piece, without them it wouldn't stand up. However, I am aware of their aesthetic so I tend to line up all the heads of the screws and place the bolts to create rhythms that are in sync with the structure. Leaving them visible, and therefore the construction of the piece exposed, directs attention towards thinking about the act of making.

By painting the screws, nuts and bolts in matt grey it knocks their presence back, they become less 'real', more like images of bolts that one would see in a two-dimensional drawing. On *I-beam to walk under: Fig. 1* the painting of the bolts is graded from one end of the piece to the other, from dark to light grey at the end that hits the ground. Although not immediately obvious it gives the piece a visual lightness, a weightlessness, altering our perception of gravity acting on the piece.

Yes, this visual lightness is really striking. Actually the I-beam and the Boxes, including *Drawing of (Untitled) Box for Standing*, raise a paradoxical feeling, a sense of strength and fragility. Did you choose the MDF and the porcelain to enhance this sensation?

Well, yes and no – my choice of material is primarily driven by its lack of content. I don't use anything that has a previous history, the material has to work like a pencil, fresh. Raw material such as MDF, which is reconstituted wood pulp, and clay have little visual structure unlike wood or stone where we see the grain that indicates the original form and growth of a tree, or see fossils and crystalline structures that indicate the history of the rock formation.
It took a long time for me to ditch wood as a material, it has a sensuality and a sense of time embedded in it, it seduces you, you work with it and that seduction overrides the form of anything, the process of carving marks time just like the grain does. The fact that the materials that I use now have no visual signifier of time is important, it gives them a feeling of timelessness, which contributes to the feeling of lightness.

So going back to your question about the sense of strength and fragility, I think it comes from the combination of the image and material, and exposing the way it is made. The pieces of ‘tape’ for example made from porcelain are actually fragile and inflexible quite unlike real tape, the porcelain ‘bolts’ are also very fragile and will break if put under any force unlike the real thing, but the form and the image tells us they should be strong as they are used to support and hold things together.

_Tape, 2011, porcelain, H. 2.3 cm_  
_Nuts and Bolts, 2011, porcelain, L. 3.5 cm (each)_

L Understanding and revealing ‘the making’ is recurrent and central to your practice. When did this idea of exposing ‘the way it is made’ come across your mind?

F Yes, an awareness of making as a process is important. Something I got from working with my carving master, Segun Faleyie, was an attention to and investment in something becoming. With carving, the process creates visual rhythm, the initial blocking out could be seen as equivalent to setting down a base line in music and the finished knife marks are like the melody, they describe and move the eye across the form. However, what interested me in carving was the synchronicity of the material and process that made me think of time. The 1+1 pencil drawings developed from ideas of time and infinity abstracted from the process of carving. It seemed right that ideas about time, a concept, should be drawn out on paper but what about objects, how do they exist in time? When I made my piece for the MA show I wanted to examine the idea of being inside an image of something frozen in the moment of falling down very slowly, like being stuck in the present.
I went back to the basic principals of making that invests each decision with equal merit and used the materials and the making to create rhythm in the piece. Like the screws for instance, they create a constant pace down the spine of the I-beam, this slows the eye down to an even pace along its length.

I find this metaphor of 'something frozen in the moment of falling down' very interesting. Actually, the movement or the migration from one point or state to another is explored in most of your work. Could you explain through a few examples how and why the movement is experienced physically and psychologically at the same time?

I am interested in how we locate ourselves in relation to the world around us, how we locate ourselves in a complex perception of time in space. It appears to be something we learn very quickly as children and rarely question until something like quantum theory comes along and proposes the unimaginable, like being in more than one state at the same time.

In the painting *Archangel Raphael Saving an Attempted Suicide* by Neri di Bicci on which I based my exhibition *Internus* the figures appear twice in the same picture. In early Pre-Renaissance and African art, figures are often repeated within one composition in order to create a narrative, alternatively we could read these works as proposing the idea of the figures being in different places at the same time.

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Detail from *Internus* exhibition installed at Corn Exchange Gallery, 2007, MDF, cast iron, dimensions variable
Sculpture is seen and understood in the past, present and future of the moment of viewing, unlike a painting which one sees all at once. Braque and the cubists putting everything into the flat picture plane, front back and sides, to see the whole all at once, explored this difference. For me the sculptural object is pieced together in the mind in a kind of small ‘present’ where past, present and future collide in series of moments.

With movement we build up a mental picture of the object in space in relationship to our body. This movement, however subtle, also carries with it an emotional charge. With the I-beam to walk through the form, a loop drawn against the internal walls floor and ceiling of the gallery, doesn’t physically separate space as would a floor or ceiling (the structure to which it alludes to supporting), but the idea of passing through the form and the movement through the form marks a psychological separation of the space.

The idea of movement and transit is also embedded in the choice of the objects you represent. In the Boxes for thinking about opening the idea is reinforced by the porcelain strips of masking and packing tape lying around the boxes and I can’t help thinking about the Coffin drawing series that you realised at the same time.

Rachel Whiteread, in her major installation at Tate Modern in 2005, displayed a thousand polyethylene boxes but her inspiration came from one single box that she found in her mother’s house shortly after she died.

How do you relate your work and especially the Trinity project: Ideas in the Making to Rachel Whiteread’s practice?

I hadn’t quite recognised that – movement is also in the image of the ladder that I used in my show Playing Against Reason and, perhaps less obviously, in the benches. They are visually static and it is their stillness, in relation to the imagined activity that would surround them if put to use that interests me.

To me the Ladders are full of movement, as an image they are constantly shifting in relation to the architecture or out of kilter and not at all functional, even if they appear to be. This is apparent in Playing Against Reason Fig. 4 where, as in a relief, the rungs have the illusion of being horizontal but actually are set at an angle so the leg doesn’t touch the ground. In Playing Against Reason Fig.1 you can move around and under it but it arches the ‘wrong’ way. It’s a form that reminds me of playing the game ‘the big ship sails down the illy-ally-oh’, where one person forms an arch by leaning their hand up against the wall and the others pass under in a long line whilst singing this song about a ship sinking.

I thought quite a bit about Whiteread’s work when writing my dissertation The Unseen Space, just before my father died. Artists who came to prominence in America in the 1960s have influenced us both. People are quick to point out the unoriginality of her casting spaces but that’s really
Coffin drawing 4, 2010, mountboard on paper, 88.9 x 118.8 cm

Coffin drawing 4 (detail), 2010, mountboard on paper, 88.9 x 118.8 cm
missing the point. For me the interesting difference between her cast works and Bruce Nauman’s *Space Under My Steel Chair in Düsseldorf* (1965–68) is that in the title he clearly locates the mortified space to a specific, personalised, material, object, place and time. In Whiteread’s cast work she doesn’t put any emphasis on the form of the now absent object at all, most of the work is ’Untitled’ with a generic object name almost given as a clue under duress. What is left of the object is a trace of the surface transferred onto a monolithic mortified space, an abstracted memory out of present time and place.

*Playing Against Reason Fig. 3, 2008, MDF, screws, H. 2.13 m*

*Playing Against Reason Fig. 4, 2008, MDF, screws, H. 3.01 m*

The idea of absence and loss can make you look at something like a box quite differently, I seem to remember her saying the box that inspired the work had the list of contents it contained written on the lid and crossed out as they had changed. This idea of the transient occupation of space could be seen as a metaphor for the human existence. I share with her the realisation that objects can be used to talk about bodily presence ‘Everything we use has been designed by us and for us and for me that is much more interesting than replicating our physical tangibilities.’ Her interest however seems to be in the imprint, in recording the past, in opposition to the temporal quantitative and spatial fragmentation of the present that I am interested in.
To conclude, could you explain how your Drawing of (Untitled) Box for Standing in this show differs from Robert Morris' (Untitled) Box for Standing? Through this citation or evocation, are you also questioning the perception of one's reality?

Unfortunately I missed the Robert Morris exhibition in Tate Modern (2009) where they reconstructed the exhibition of 1971; it had many of his interactive pieces in it. He has had such a varied output, but I suppose I am interested in the works that he made about relating the body to space and form. I recently went up a climbing wall which – I'm not comparing it to his work but the activity had this element of total immersion of body and mind. I kind of think perhaps that's what he was getting at.

There isn't always a definite reasoning to making things in the studio. I'd seen this picture of him in his (Untitled) Box for Standing in his book Have I Reasons and I suppose I just wanted to know how it felt, how he felt in the box. In an interview Morris said when asked why he described (Untitled) Box for Standing as 'coffin-like', that it and the Passageway piece was about 'Art as a closed space, a refusal of communication, a secure refuge and defence against the outside world, a dead zone and buffer against others who would intrude.' I thought it would make a good space to think in.

My biggest dilemma about this piece was whether to make it the same size as his or to my own body measurements. I made it to my measurements. It's an image of the real thing but not because it looks like the original – not really, it's not a replica or like the pieces in the Tate (his work but made anew) the image is what I experience, fed by sight and touch and movement about the box and the space in and around it. That's why I had to make the box relate to my measurements to be able to imagine what Morris experienced; it's not about the box, it's about the experience with the box. It feels good in the box, protected but then I am confused by a thought, am I imagining being him in the box or feeling being myself?
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