Cathie Pilkington

The value of the hand

Benedict Carpenter

BABS IS AT WORK IN HER STUDIO. Dressed in high heels and a tutu, with a bird's head and plaster running down her arms and over the floor, she is a strange cross between Barbara Hepworth, Barbara Windsor and a duck. The duck is surrounded by the fruits of her labour, a jumble of forms that resemble Hepworth's pierced sculptures from the 1950s, only this ensemble has a different tone, for it is all a bit too messy to match the high-brow stylings of Hepworth's High Modernism.

Babs (fig. 1) is a sculpture by Cathie Pilkington, a figurative artist with a reputation for intriguingly ambivalent forms. This article sets her new BAMS medal *Jumping Jack* in the context of her work, and discusses some of the themes that the medal shares with her broader practice. In particular, it shows how Pilkington collages approaches that are drawn from the interrelated and antagonistic worlds of fine art and craft. It suggests that this strategy enables her to develop an important authorial voice, one which satirises the inherent privilege of art, and which articulates an interesting relationship with reality. This significant benefit comes at a cost, as it makes her work harder to locate both physically and culturally. The article discusses some of the means by which she obviates this problem, and concludes with the suggestion that her medal *Jumping Jack* provides a form of resolution.

Pilkington was born in Manchester in 1968. One of her earliest sculptural memories is of climbing over a concrete abstract sculpture in Stockport town centre while her mother went shopping. A little older, she can remember encountering Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore in O-level art classes, but to her their objects seemed 'confusing and ugly'.[1]

When she enrolled on a sculpture course at Edinburgh College of Art the subject was set to baffle her once again. She found its focus too abstract, and changed tracks to jewellery and silversmithing, partly on account of 'an excellent teacher', but also, she says, 'because you are nineteen and you don't know how to make anything, and she actually taught me how to do things – whereas in sculpture, the metal is that thick that you can't work it, or it's not really about the material'.[2]

Her experience on this course was happier, but it would seem that she was not a typical jewellery student as her graduation show consisted of a three-metre long brooch in the form of Noah's Ark. This earned her a place at the Royal College of Art to study goldsmithing, silversmithing, metalwork and jewellery (GSMJ), specialising in electrotype processes under the tutelage of David Watson. But again, her experience was not immediately happy, this time, conversely, because the discipline was too narrowly materially focussed, too prescriptive in terms of its craft.

While on this course, she participated in the Royal College of Art / Royal Mint student medal competition, and took part in a medalling workshop run by Ron Dutton. This was a formative experience as talking to someone who looked at her objects as sculpture provided a crystallisation point for her frustrations and prompted her to change courses once again, from GSMJ to sculpture. However, Pilkington recalls that the Head of Sculpture, Glynn Williams, complained that her objects were 'too aesthetic, too thematic, and not large enough'. He told her to go away and prove herself capable in a year's time with a fresh portfolio. After undergoing what she describes as her own 'year-long sculpture foundation course', she reapplied and was accepted.

Since leaving the Royal College of Art in 1997, Pilkington has executed public commissions in Bristol and London and shown regularly, both at home and abroad. She was introduced to her gallery, Marlborough Fine Art, London, by Paula Rego;[3] and at the time of writing she has work on exhibition at Corner in Denmark and a solo exhibition, *The Value of the Paw*, at the Museum of Childhood in London, which is on until 7 May.

Much of her sculpture deals with familiar scenes, often with domestic connotations, but

1. Pilkington: *Babs*, 2010, jesmonite, wood, clay, plaster and paint, 110 x 60 x 50cm. Courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art. (Photo: Graham Challifour)

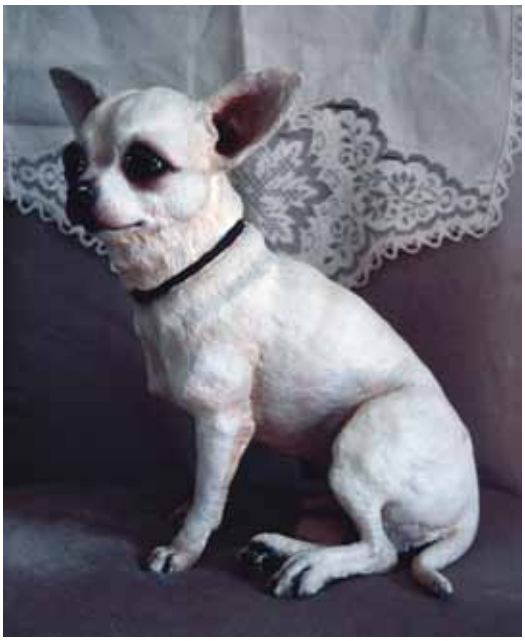
somehow also 'off'. The combination of the homely with the unhomely is a classic sculptural device, and her work from the early 2000s is often uncanny in the familiar manner of very realistic sculpture. *Alasdair* (fig. 2) is a typical early piece. It is a portrait of a champion chihuahua, unsettling on account of his verisimilitude, even more so when the viewer learns that his bulging black marble eyes are not a contrivance to arrest the viewer's gaze, but are faithful to the form of the poor dog's head.

Like much of the work that Pilkington produced at the beginning of her career, *Alasdair* involves the dexterous hand in self-effacement. Reality serves as the model of success in these pieces: the sculptures threaten to deceive, and become more uncanny, more successful, as the artist suppresses the history of modelling, casting, finishing and painting the work. Thus the sculptural language of these objects is not about expressive handling or the emotion of the artist, but something more akin to the unsettling prop. As the hand disappears, so too does the artist, and the sculpture begins to assert itself.

The later ensemble, *Singerie* (fig. 3), indicates a subtle change in direction. Pilkington's skill with modelling materials is equally evident, but in addition there is a strong element of fantasy in the work. The sculpture shows a group of unsettlingly realistic monkeys arrayed against one side of a long, low table covered with party detritus, as though Leonardo's *Last Supper* has been re-staged by chimps. The table stands directly on the floor and is as much a piece of furniture as anything else in the room. The party paraphernalia that surrounds the chimps could be left-overs from a gathering of toddlers: balloons, party-hats, streamers, half-eaten cake.[4] The transition from appropriated to sculpted material is smooth: the modelled heads and hands of the monkeys poke out from real jumpers, but the various elements are seamlessly put together. This seamlessness has the effect of opening the sculpture up to the space around it, drawing the viewer in. But just as much as this serves to make the work more real, the stageyness and evident absurdity of the composition telegraph an idea of conscious fantasy. By drawing attention to the artist's imagination, the viewer is made more aware of Pilkington as an author.

Singerie is also significant as it is a clear expression of an important theme in Pilkington's work: the orphan. One of the difficulties that any artist faces, but sculptors perhaps more than most, is how to find a place for their work both physically and culturally. A lot of the characters that people Pilkington's world appear a little confused or bereaved: the monkeys seem to be looking out for their parents, forlornly, as though they know they have been forgotten. But because the viewer is in the same, continuous space as the monkeys, they return the onlooker's gaze in a manner that casts the viewer as a candidate parent. It is this sense of having one's gaze returned that unsettles the spectator, all the more so for being judged and found lacking.

The range of Pilkington's bestiary is extensive, featuring rabbits, hedgehogs, badgers, pigs and ducks; but with increasing frequency, their bodies are human, and only their heads are animal, such that they resemble partly undressed figures in fancy dress. A typical



2. Pilkington: *Alasdair*, 2002, oil paint on bronze, 35 x 20 x 25cm. Courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art.

example is *Threesome* (fig. 4), a sculpture of a cockerel/man, duck/woman, and cat/man engaged in joint sexual enterprise. This is one of a series of sculptures that makes obvious allusion to the generative urge, but it has to be doubted whether these man/beast inter-species couplings will prove fruitful.

The vulgar nature of the subject makes the viewer wonder at Pilkington's imagination: why would she choose to depict such a scene? Surely, this question is deliberately prompted. There is something self-referential about these sculptures: each creature is obviously put together, collaged, and there are other works from the same period that depict monstrous scenes of motherhood and painful birth. Perhaps the viewer is intended to see the intense engagement of the characters as a parody of artistic creativity. It is tempting to read them as sculptures about the futility of sculpture, in the same way as *Frankenstein* or *The Island of Doctor Moreau* are novels about the strange compulsion of writing, in which the urge to create is portrayed as a sort of sex gone disastrously wrong.[5]

Indeed, there is a slightly Gothick flavour to some of the writing about the artist, for instance, the paragraph that introduces her on Marlborough Fine Art's website, which states: 'There is no material or object so utterly dead and dilapidated that it cannot be "sat up", stitched up and reanimated',[6] a sentence which would serve equally well as Henry Frankenstein's mission statement. Neil Walton is similarly concerned with 'the hephaestian mysteries of Cathie Pilkington's unconscious mind ... a primordial tangle of forms, an emerging miscellany of bodies in space'.[7] This reaction is unsurprising: most figurative sculpture is uncanny to some extent, and Pilkington's work seems actively to court this response, with its mournful nymphs, levitating dolls and libidinous chimera. But to dwell too long on the macabre or the uncanny is to overlook the most telling aspect of her practice.

Many of Pilkington's objects feature animals or humans involved in activities that require dexterity, such as making sculpture, sewing, throwing a pot, and forming snowballs. The recurrence of fabrication as a subject suggests a more fruitful angle of interpretation, namely the role of the hand, and Pilkington's ambivalence towards dexterous skill. This is strongly intimated in the title of her Museum of Childhood show, *The Value of the Paw*.

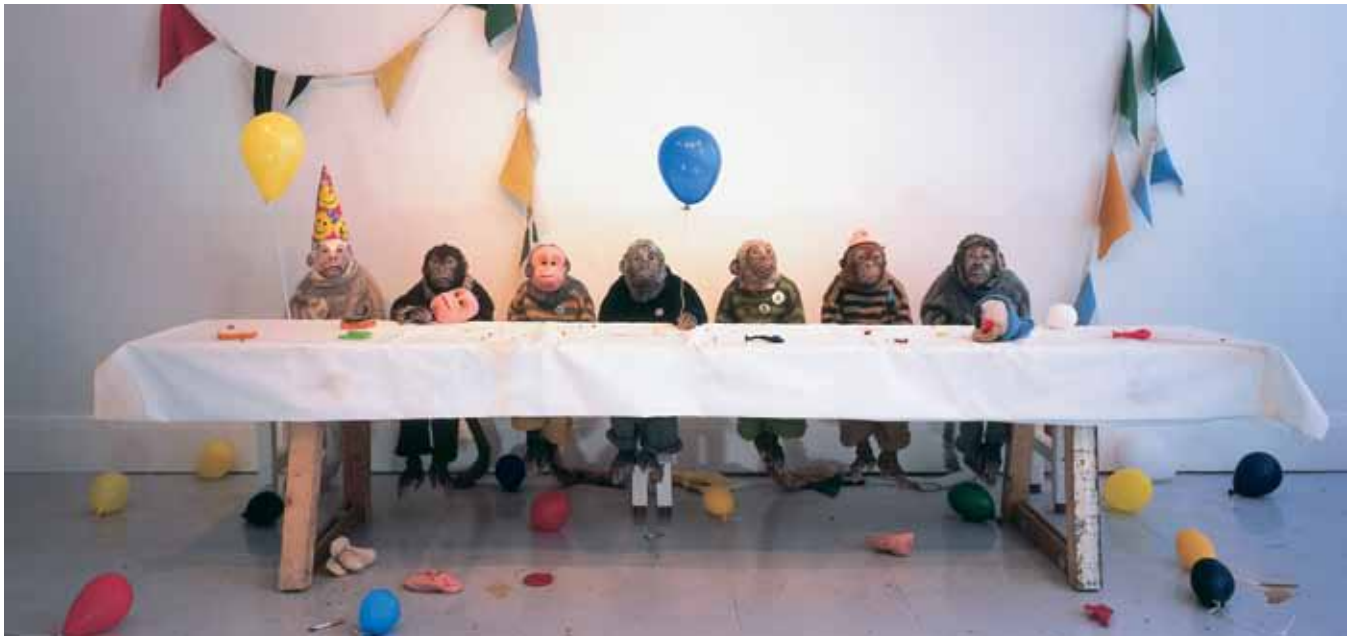
Although Pilkington's early work relies on a certain humility of facility, she has more recently shown a tendency towards coarseness in the handling and juxtaposition of materials. Not only does the vigorous subject of *Threesome* allude to a sense of creation, the evidence of the maker's hand, both in the manipulation of the material and the application of colour, serves to emphasise creative agency as a subject of the work. There is no sense that this sculpture invites the spectator to suspend their disbelief: although the half-beastly co-mingling of these creatures gestures towards an idea of the uncanny, the impression that the work transmits is more bawdy or inappropriate than actually unsettling. Perhaps there is an element of satire in the work, as though sculpture's language or history is being parodied. In 2007, before Pilkington adopted the more visible handling of materials as an approach, she commented that

'Rodin smells funny', and went on to discuss his 'overblown, romantic gesturing on his wobbly fecal [*sic*] surfaces'[8]. But only three years later, she seems to have adopted a similar approach to material. *Threesome* unflatteringly refigures Rodin's late work in two other ways: the collaged nature of the creatures recalls his repertoire of plaster-cast pieces in which Camille Claudel's head might collide with the left hand of Pierre de Wissant in the creation of new form; and secondly, *Threesome's* sexual theme evokes the goatish interests of Rodin's late erotic *oeuvre*. Loose surface handling is even more evident in a related sculpture, *Flopsy* (fig. 5), which shows two rabbit/people engaged in the activity for which rabbits are renowned. The sculpture is marked with parallel grooves that correspond to the artist's own hand: this is a sculpture that has been mauled, stroked and squeezed into existence. The physical intimacy of making is mirrored by the vigorous sexual theme of both works: both subject and method suggest a pressing physicality that seems to satirise as much as celebrate the urgency of making.

If uncanny works like *Alasdair* find their place in reality through the disappearance of the author, what kind of relationship with reality do these freer, more evidently made and authored sculptures have? Pilkington's show, *Peaceable Kingdom*, at Marlborough in 2010 presented a body of new work. All of these sculptures are displayed on plinths, and many of them incorporate stands, either in the manner of an ornament or with a more conventional separate base. Within the context of a typical West End gallery, these stands form a barrier between viewer and sculptor, suggesting that the work is discrete from its surroundings, an autonomous aesthetic offering.

This sense of distinction between 'Art' and 'World' is a familiar characteristic of the spaces of contemporary art. The white spot-lit cube that is the standard model for exhibition spaces has evolved as a mechanism of aesthetic signification. This has become increasingly important as art has moved away from defined materials and processes: when artists are just as likely to work in bubblegum as marble it is important that their products are clearly framed as worthy of our attention. The white cube, like the plinth, serves as a prophylactic against reality, a device that maintains the bubblegum's status as art and stops the viewer regarding it as rubbish.[9]

Sculpture is the most real of the arts called 'fine'. There was a time when it was routinely incorporated into buildings and public spaces, as an element in schemes of decoration and commemoration, a continuous and rooted part of the architecture that supported it. The private commissioning of public monuments to great men was a significant source of income for many sculptors; but this declined from about 1910 onwards as a result of shifting public tastes and a reaction to what was described as *Denkmalpest* or *statuomanie*, a plague-like overabundance of art.[10] Similarly, the very language of the monument was assailed by world events. Depictions of idealised youths had been a common feature of the war memorial, but to many the brutal reality of the First World War made this mainstay of sculptural language seem inappropriate. The successful propaganda use of the classical figure in sculptures commissioned by totalitarian regimes from the 1930s onwards



3. Pilkington: *Singerie*, 2004, jesmonite, fur, wool and party accessories, 200 x 140 x 100cm. Courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art. (Photo: Graham Challifour)

further tainted public figuration in the West and forced sculptors to develop new languages.[11] This development coincided with the emergence of radically innovative art supported by a network of private gallery spaces, which effectively supplanted the more centralised *salons* that had previously been the chief means of selling work and obtaining patronage. Thus, from the second half of the twentieth century the focus of sculpture shifted, from being a public art of the figure to a more private pursuit, with a fractured language, multiple outlets, and a much less clear sense of place and purpose.

In the face of this problem, one of the claims that sculpture has made, like all art, is that it is an intellectual pursuit, best approached on a formal or literary rather than physical or social level. But this is a claim that needs to be vigorously asserted, as many of its products are dangerously assimilable back into the world of brute stuff and its processes can smack of uncouth labour. Because of this, some sculpture seems marked by anxiety, a classic manifestation of which is Constantin Brancusi's invention of the half-plinth/half-sculpture. As readers will be aware, his work frequently takes the form of a refined object sitting on top of a hewn base. The rough element frames the object above as discrete from the world around it, thereby facilitating a formal reading for the work. But by being evidently crafted in a manner that is consistent with Brancusi's self-constructed image as a 'genuine peasant', the hewn plinth signals an unaffected authenticity that is a significant source of authority, and, as such, its roughness also serves as an authenticator for the sculpture on top. Thus the rough-hewn pedestal is both of the work *and* beside the point, and so it becomes possible for the uncritical viewer to believe that the sculpture is, in a sense, so autonomous that it is able to cut itself off from the world entirely through its own agency. This is a clever solution to how sculpture can be physically positioned and culturally framed. But it is a solution granted at extraordinary effort, and a certain degree of collusion on the viewer's part. The elaborate nature of this mechanism, as well as the severe architectural coding of the modern gallery, both indicate the scale of the problem of sculptural autonomy, and the cost at which it is granted.[12]

At first glance, it would seem that as Pilkington's career has progressed, she has had recourse to similar solutions, and has sought to gain cultural advantage by cutting herself off from the viewer and making herself more apparent in her work as a privileged author. Certainly, it seems that the emergence of the hand within her work, and other self-referential elements, coincide with a tendency towards physical elevation and framing. It would also seem that many of the stands are made, altered or repainted, and share with Brancusi's bases a sense of being simultaneously of and apart from the work. But as with the uncanny reading of her work, her use of plinths is worthy of close consideration.

Many of her stands take the form of studio furniture. An example of this is *Degas Doll* (fig. 6). This sculpture presents the viewer with a version of one of Degas' ballerinas, carefully sculpted and painted in a manner similar to *Alasdair*; but unlike the chihuahua, the doll has her sense of independence undermined by a

4. Pilkington: *Threesome*, 2009, jesmonite and paint, 50 x 50 x 35cm. Courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art. (Photo: Graham Challifour)

large armature protruding from her back and by her location on a modelling stand. Similarly, many of the smaller pieces from this period rest on flat bits of wood that seem to be the modelling boards on which these objects were made. Some of these also have parts of their armature still visible. These means of display recall the labour of sculpture in a way that threatens to de-reify them as *objets d'art*, and reposition them, awkwardly, as 'unfinished' and contingent. There is no equivalent in Pilkington's later work to the smooth culmination at the top of a Brancusi sculpture, in which all of the making disappears in a burst of its own creation and the work achieves a kind of near spiritual formalism. Where her recent work does approach a sense of autonomy, as in *Degas Doll*, the sculpture is subject to an indignant reminder of the baseness of its origins.

If the evident hand of *Threesome* and *Flopsy* introduced the author as a theme, *Degas Doll* starts to talk about sculptors as a category of person, a character type. This is a pattern that emerges in other works, and which is especially evident in *Babs*. Here another famous sculptor is depicted in vaudevillian terms, characterised as a marginally demented and distinctly uncool variety of practitioner. In itself, it is not unusual for making and sculpture to be important themes in art. There is a lot of Modernist art that is driven by largely self-referential concerns; similarly, art about art is a common jokey presence in much Post-Modernism. But in Pilkington's work the drive is not towards abstruse specialism or intellectual refinement. The emphasis remains on the messy realities of making: the stickiness of stuff.

Material is frequently asserted as a dramatisation of difficulty: narratives of macho struggle are abundant in art writing, and the image of artist-as-hero has been consciously created and exploited by artists such as Benvenuto Cellini and Medardo Rosso.[13] But Pilkington's emphasis on difficultly and struggle is not a celebration of the Protean Superartist, overcoming the odds, but on the contrary, a form of satire. For there is a consistent element in this work that balances the lyrical facility of Pilkington's modelling and sculptural imagination against an image of the artist as epic failure, up to the elbows in clay, saucer-eyed and mad with making. It seems that Pilkington makes us aware of the (capital A) Artist in her work, only to throw mud in her eye and knock her down a peg or two.

The demotion of the sculptor is approached through other strategies. Her exhibition at the Museum of Childhood features two sorts of work: *Singerie* which exploits the reality of the viewer's space; and other pieces based on dolls and children's stories. This latter category is displayed alongside the collection of toys and childhood paraphernalia, literally in the same cases as the artefacts which inspired its inception, for Pilkington has been a regular visitor to this museum for several years. In contextualising the work, the strategy also provides a means of interpretation. The Museum of Childhood is not an art collection, but a collection of objects that relate to the most common human experience: everybody has some experience of childhood, by being or having been a child, and in many cases by being a parent. This exhibition establishes the source of her work as utterly unremarkable and accessible to

5. Pilkington: *Flopsy*, 2009, jesmonite and paint, 46 x 58 x 33cm. Courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art. (Photo: Graham Challifour)

everybody. It also provides a way of reading the work, suggesting that it is best contextualised in relation to cultural or social history, quotidian life rather than art.

Pilkington's work seems distinct from the dominant culture of fine art in other ways. Although ideas of craft and art are very closely linked, they become most legible when viewed in contra-distinction. Glenn Adamson's recent book, *Thinking through craft*, provides an analysis of the extent to which craft is an essential element of art: all art needs literally to be made, and making and crafting can, to a certain extent, be taken to be synonymous; but perhaps more usefully still, craft provides a model of what art is not, and thereby helps to distinguish it from other classes of object.[14]

Art is understood as being about individual expression. We are accustomed to reading a sculpture as an authentic vessel that grants us, by looking at the object, access to the artist's mind. Craft, on the other hand, is about excellence of production, its forms standing in relation to seemingly pre-existent ideals of perfection that stand outside the artist and are inherently collective. This distinction has usefully been summarised by Grayson Perry: 'craft and tradition are very firmly linked and that must not be denied. That is one of the great things about it, and craft, by definition, is something that can be taught to someone else, you know, you can teach someone how to throw a pot and they will become as good at it as you if they've got the necessary. Whereas art is very much linked to the individual and their vision and it's not necessarily something that can be taught or passed down.'[15]

Rather than advocating a sense of hierarchy, Perry's quotation simply reflects the commonly held distinction between craft and art practices. There is a clear sense here of the difference between the image of the artist as unique and the craftsperson as somewhat run-of-the-mill. Craft is about making, and is pragmatically orientated; art is about the individual, their 'vision', their ability to think differently. This is not new. In 1997 the influential author Paul Greenhalgh characterised contemporary art as an essentially philosophical discourse in which the assumption of material form is almost an embarrassment, a tendency he traced back to R.G. Collingwood's 1932 book: *The principles of art*.[16] Stripped of Greenhalgh's negative gloss, this emphasis on intellectual work is reflected in the majority of contemporary writing on art, a characteristic example being the recent publication, *The art of not making*, by Michael Petry, in which the artist is portrayed as a philosophical employer of dexterous makers, someone whose job it is to think, while others do the heavy lifting.[17] The emphasis that is placed on intellectual as opposed to physical labour in fine art acts is the equivalent of the plinth or the white cube: it is the provider and guarantor of a privileged cultural space in which the artist can operate, a space that is insulated from daily life.

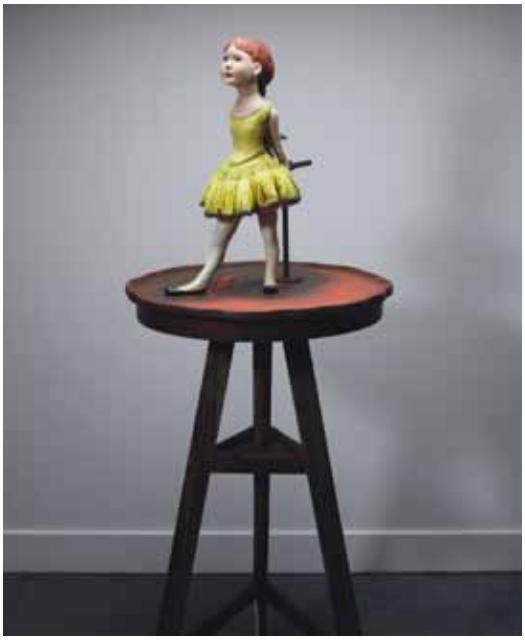
Clearly, Perry and Greenhalgh are not advocating the distinction between art and craft, and Adamson's writing is characterised by a useful sense that both art and craft are cultural constructs and subject to change. But a lot of writing about art and much of the delivery of art education reflect the embarrassingly Cartesian assumption that making and thinking do not

overlap, or even that making does not matter at all. These assumptions have been internalised by many artists. Thus, someone like Glynn Williams, whose own carvings demonstrate a huge amount of material understanding and intelligence of making, dismissed Pilkington's early craft centred practice as 'too aesthetic',[18] and, by implication, as possessing insufficient intellectual claims to qualify as art.

In the context of contemporary art's unease with manual skill, Pilkington's consistent interest in figuration continues to trouble her status as an artist, partly because it roots her work in familiar subjects, but chiefly because the audience's familiarity with its subjects provides a yardstick for success that is accessible to everyone and independent of the artist: *Alasdair* has to resemble a dog, exactly, or it will not work, and the external appearance of a chihuahua is hardly recondite knowledge. Similarly, one of the characteristics of craft is its sense of humility, its tendency to disappear in the service of a larger ulterior aim. This is certainly the case in realistic sculpture, in which the modelling 'disappears'. There are other instances of 'unartyness' in her work, such as the edition of *Toby Jugs* that she made for Space Station Sixty Five. There is a strong element of the vernacular in craft; the Toby Jug takes this to an extreme degree, being an exaggeratedly demotic form, a culturally base form of collectible.

So, if Pilkington's work seems to signal unease about its status as art, is she better understood as a craft practitioner? Of course, as has already been intimated, craft and art are clearly related and mutually dependent, so it is perhaps a little absurd to discuss them in binary terms. But by the same token, most practitioners are pigeonholed either as craftspeople or as artists, and their work is received by their audience according to their classification. Just think of the difference in discourse that surrounds materially motivated 'art' practices compared to a similarly material 'craft' practice. The way the work is packaged culturally makes a huge difference to how it is read. It can even dictate the institutions that the maker works with: Tate Modern or the V&A.[19]

Much craft celebrates its material and history, and is based on a model of excellence that seems to inhere in the process. This is certainly what is being alluded to in the sculpture *Majolica* (fig. 7), the form and colour of which suggest that this object is the product of highly skilled and traditional ceramic processes. By quoting methods of making that are drawn from craft, Pilkington aligns her practice with the humbler, repeatable and less individual actions of the artisan. However, in a way that seems to recapitulate her dissatisfaction with both craft and sculpture courses while a student, her appropriation of craft process also embodies a form of rejection, for again her approach is far from orthodox. Her majolica glazes, for instance, are not what they appear to be, the culmination of several hundred years of material understanding transmitted from master to apprentice, but a simple layer of gloss paint applied over an eccentric aggregate drawn from skips, sculptors' suppliers and charity shops. In fact, it is very difficult to pin down exactly where Pilkington sits in relation to her work as an author, for she seems equally dissatisfied with cultures of craft



6. Pilkington: *Degas Doll*, 2010, clay, wood, fabric, steel and paint, 165 x 58 x 58cm. Courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art. (Photo: Graham Challifour)

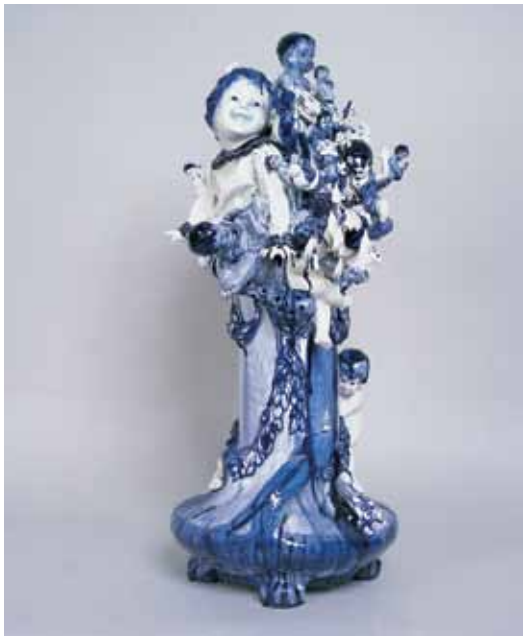
and art alike. Both of these conditions seem inadequate or limited: the language of fine art because it is too abstruse, too cut off from reality; craft because of its tendency to disappear, or to get lost in its own conversation about material. This twofold rejection creates a problem, as the ready means of interpretation that have evolved for understanding art and craft become less available. However, once engaged, this difficulty also serves to intrigue her audience.

Like much of her work, Pilkington's new medal for BAMS, *Jumping Jack* (see p. 70), talks about childhood, play and toys in a way that is intimate, engaging and a little unsettling, very much in keeping with the work on display in the Museum of Childhood. But besides being a lovely object, this medal also poses interesting questions about making and authenticity, which naturally extend her sculptural practice, and the ambivalence of her authorial voice.

Medal making is an art form in which the interdependence of craft and art processes is very evident. Indeed, Mark Jones has commented that the medal seems to belong neither to 'art, because its skills are those of the craftsman, nor craft because it serves no evident utilitarian need', but to an era 'before the division of the arts from the crafts'.[20] It is significant that this medal is struck, as striking is a more staged form of production than casting. Its initial costs are higher and there is a greater technical barrier to overcome. But once the object has been appropriately tooled, each of its issued forms is more identical than is the case with casting, and the implicit limits of the edition are also increased. This is achieved at the expense of the Romantic image of the artist; as Jones writes, 'multiples can create unease in a public used to the idea of the work of art as unique expression of the artist's feelings'.[21] It cannot be coincidence that Pilkington has chosen the method of production that provokes the greatest unease about the authentic individual.

This withdrawal of the artist in the bulk of the edition is brought into relief by the small, hand-painted part of the edition. As is the case with any hand-crafted process, this reintroduces the question of variability and difference, and leads to questions about quality being raised. Issues of cost to one side, are the hand-painted objects more valuable, culturally, artistically, than those that have not been painted? Why? Does this increased value stem from the resulting object having a stronger connection with the artist, or is there some other measure of quality that is reflected in the price? The correlation of creator and fabricator, art and craft, is inherent in almost every medal that BAMS issues. This medal dramatises some aspects of this relationship, and sets them in the context of Pilkington's existing sculptural practice, which *in toto* forms an idiosyncratic treatment of this antagonised bond.

A sense of 'where do I belong?' pervades Pilkington's whole project. It is mentioned above that *Singerie* has a sense of abandonment about it, as though the monkeys had been forgotten, or orphaned. This can be read as a manifestation of cultural awkwardness, a reflection of the lack of space available for artists who reject art's presumptions, but who are equally dissatisfied with the comparatively limited sense of craft's horizons. Perhaps Pilkington was drawn to making medals because this form has main-



7. Pilkington: *Majolica*, 2007, ceramic, gloss and oil paint, 73 x 40 x 32cm. Courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art.

tained a stronger sense of place than most sculpture, and seems protected against deracination. This is true in several ways: physically, the medal has a relationship with the hand – even when it is not being held, a medal knows where it wants to go. Culturally, it is a form that has a strong connection to history through its frequently commemorative function. Finally, like many medals, *Jumping Jack* evokes magical utility, looking like a talisman or amulet. It seems as though it should be *for* something. In the same way as Pilkington's Toby Jugs *could* hold beer, but will not, perhaps this talisman *could* cure St Vitus' Dance? (It won't, by the way.)

The most interesting aspect of Pilkington's practice is her ability to synthesise positions drawn from the cultures of craft and art. This is achieved by aping their processes, but also through satire and humour. While there are many examples of artists who can think and make, or think through making, Pilkington's conscious manipulation of ideas of craft and art is rare. In trying to understand our reaction to her works, we find ourselves reading Pilkington as several different types of practitioner: sculptor (genius of original forms), craft practitioner (humble toiler in service of a higher calling), and forger (fabricator of false forms). Thus it becomes difficult to rely on our preconditioned assumptions about the role of the artist relative to the artisan, or audience. This is a deliberate confusion, a ruse that gives Pilkington more authorial leeway than most artists are able to enjoy. It enables her to explore aspects of culture and material experience that are accessible to the majority of artists only in an attenuated form, or via a helpfully insulating layer of ironic distance. The principle means by which she has achieved this is through a dexterous thematisation of the hand. It is clear that for Pilkington the hand is a thinking organ, as well as a sign that has cultural significance in itself: the hand as marker and index of attitudes, a tool with which she continues to beguile and disturb. Ⓜ

NOTES

1. Biographical details are taken from Neil Walton, 'The beautiful ugly soul', in *Peaceable Kingdom* (London: Marlborough Fine Art, 2010), p. 3.
2. These quotations and biographical details and those that follow are taken from a transcript of a conversation between Pilkington and the author at the Museum of Childhood, London, 10 January 2012.
3. Paula Rego and Cathie Pilkington 'How do mentor and protégé inspire each other', *The Guardian*, 10 March 2007, (available on-line at http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2007/mar/10/weekend7.weekend8 (accessed 23 January 2012).
4. In the first showing of this piece, pictured (fig. 3), Pilkington's chimps, or their parents, had evidently been smoking. The cigarette butts are absent in the current showing at the Museum of Childhood.
5. This is a frequent psychoanalytic reading of horror and the gothic, for which see Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Creativity and perversion* (London, 1985). My understanding of conscious self-reflection of authorship in Gothic novels derives from Stephen Bann (ed.), *Frankenstein, creation and monstrosity* (London, 1994).
6. http://www.marlboroughfineart.com/artist-Cathie-Pilkington-122.html (accessed 23 January 2012.
7. Walton, 'The beautiful ugly soul', p. 2.
8. Pilkington quoted in Neil Walton, 'Archeology of the frivolous', in *White Elephant* (London: Marlborough Fine Art, 2007), p. 1.
9. The classic study of the evolution of the modern gallery space, still relevant today, is provided by Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube* (London and Berkley, 1976).
10. Penelope Curtis, *Sculpture 1900-1945* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 38-70.
11. Christian Fuhrmeister, 'The advantages of abstract art: monoliths and erratic boulders as monuments and (public) sculptures', in Charlotte Benton (ed.) *Figuration / abstraction: strategies for public sculpture in Europe 1945-1968* (Aldershot, 2004). This discusses the curious case of the boulder as a politically neutral form of public marker, a reaction to the problems of figuration.
12. See Glenn Adamson, *Thinking through craft* (London, 2007), pp. 14-20, for a review of the literature on Brancusi's plinths and his importance to later artists in negotiating modes of display.
13. See Harry Cooper and Sharon Hecker *Medardo Rosso, second impressions* (Cambridge, MA, 2003) for a book-length treatment of the various methods by which Rosso foregrounds his own labour.
14. Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (London, 2007).
15. Grayson Perry, *Grayson Perry discusses art and craft* (V&A Vimeo channel): http://vimeo.com/album/151819/video/7937367 (accessed 23 January 2012).
16. Paul Greenhalgh 'The history of craft', in Peter Dormer (ed.), *The culture of craft* (Manchester, 1997).
17. Michael Petry, *The art of not making* (London, 2011).
18. See n. 1.
19. This is a subject analysed by Elissa Auther in her recent article about 'fiber art' in the States in the 1960s and the various fates of makers producing near identical work, but differently orientated in relation to art and craft. Elissa Auther, 'Fiber art and the hierarchy of art and craft, 1960-1980', *The Journal of Modern Craft*, i, 1 (2008), pp. 13-34.
20. Mark Jones, *Contemporary British medals* (London, 1986), p. 15.
21. Jones, *Contemporary British medals*, p. 16.