

1 *Moon Standing Form*, white stoneware, burnished, smoke fired, 2006, H31cm  
2 *Studio portrait*, 2005 3 *Nidus*, white stoneware, smoke fired, 2007, H20cm

# Don't Look Now

Antonia Salmon ponders on the forms she makes and the ideas that inform them.



usually our unconscious nature. How we respond to the world and our experiences informs our intellect and feeds our psyche. As human beings we are all deeply connected, and yet neither words nor forms can express the true nature of this oneness. As creative beings we try to carry this spirit forward; our work is an echo of that oneness, limited of course, not the thing itself, but important in the current world climate.

**NATURE** The natural world is a source of considerable inspiration to me. As I walk through the folds or ridges of hills, I have the sense of moving over a vast sculpture, exploring its gradient, surface and textures. I pick up a rock, a seed, some bark without asking myself why I am drawn to that particular form. The small object may sit in the studio for months or years before I return to it. Then, there is a more conscious observation about the quality of the form and the way that light falls on it. It is the qualitative feeling that is my guide. When I begin to make a new shape I do not usually know what the intention is. I hope that the eventual form will emerge from a background of observations, both visual and sensual. I feel my way forward along with these invisible threads as my guide. Sometimes there is considerable struggle finding the form, but when it finally appears it seems as if it had been waiting to emerge: there is a kind of 'rightness' about it which, in retrospect, looks obvious.

Perhaps we all explore a few chosen themes in our lives. Sometimes it may look as if we had abandoned them. But, almost certainly, we will rework them in another way, or allude to them indirectly, from time to time. Eventually we will almost certainly return to them. We may conceptualise these themes, because labels are the dominant language of our society, but concepts are not the essence of my work. Concepts may stimulate the mind, bring humour and evoke curiosity, help to understand my motivations, but it is seldom the conceptual element of an artwork that intrigues or draws me to it. In any case, I wonder whether, as makers, we are in the best position to understand what motivates us and why we create certain forms and images.

Much of my work has what may be described as a self-contained quality. This may be because I seek clear lines in the form, always supported by an



I walk beside a full river flowing down from the moor. The water, golden coloured from the moorland peat, flows swiftly, swirling and catching loose fallen leaves and pulling them down with energy. Looking down from a bridge the water appears dark in the misty autumnal air; the trees, amber and golden, have spread their leaves in great drifts over quiet pools beside the riverbank. Some are half submerged yet visibly caught in the current, their forms twisting, folding, spinning and lifting; surrendered to the watery world. Dynamic, malleable, responsive, yet retaining their essential structure – inside/outside working as one – a metaphor for how I would wish to live and work? Suddenly a yelp breaks the reverie – a six-year-old needs help; his wellie is stuck in a tree root. I go to the rescue. The day continues in its normally full yet fragmented way. But somewhere the vision of the river and its watery leaves remains.

Now – twenty-five years since starting to work with clay, six years since the beginning of a late motherhood and entering middle age – I am in the mood to reflect upon life as I continue to work as a maker. What we make reflects our conscious, or more





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underlying geometry – combined with surface markings – that is integral to the form. Also, I am interested in achieving within a single work a dynamic balance – between a sense of movement and an intrinsic stillness. Two acknowledged themes are those of containment and of holding, both of which are continuing. I also find pleasure in focusing on the touching point between two shapes (with one sometimes a tangent), whereby they may appear poised to lift away from each other.

**A WORKING DAY** Since the birth of my son, my working hours have often been limited or fragmented, and this can create a sense of urgency. In contrast, it has sometimes encouraged a greater readiness to play with form. Another effect of the exigencies of parenthood has been in my work on sculptures that are constructed out of small elements. With *Bridging Form*, *Strata* and *Strike* in particular, each element correlates with those bridging moments when I could touch clay, in between childcare. As one moves around these sculptures they seem to move, the finished form reflecting the ebb and flow of daily life.

Coincidentally, this has aroused interest in the way that light falling on different planes considerably alters a form. For many years I have been fascinated by the significance of the space surrounding the form – or rather how the solid form and shape energise that space. More recently the focus is on the sense of no boundary between internal and external space. Perhaps it was the observation of leaves tumbling about in the water that was the catalyst for this. There is a visual conversation between what is observed in the natural world, with an internal theme of interest.

The nature of the making process influences the shapes that are produced. Because the works are hand-burnished they subtly express the hand of the maker. There is a kind of ritual nature to this burnishing; repeated when the sculptures are offered up to the smoke firing. The element of unpredictability in the firing is a healthy contrast to the controlled forms towards which I work that reflects the nature of the process of living and working as an artist/craftsperson. We live with much uncertainty, balanced between

4 moments of exhilaration and moments of seemingly



4 *Dark Sol*, white stoneware, smoke fired, 2006, H42cm  
 5 *Small Marble*, white stoneware, smoke fired, 2007, H18cm  
 6 *Light Sol*, white stoneware, smoke fired,

2006, H24cm  
 7 *Bridging Form*, white stoneware, smoke fired, 2007, H34cm  
 8 *Strike 2*, white stoneware, smoke fired, 2007, H60cm

Technical information See page 67

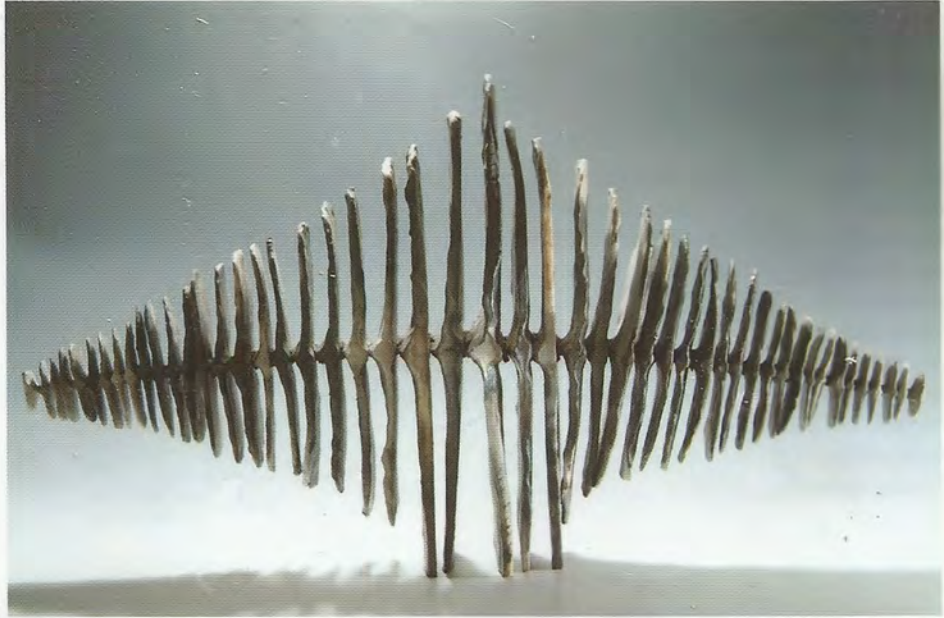
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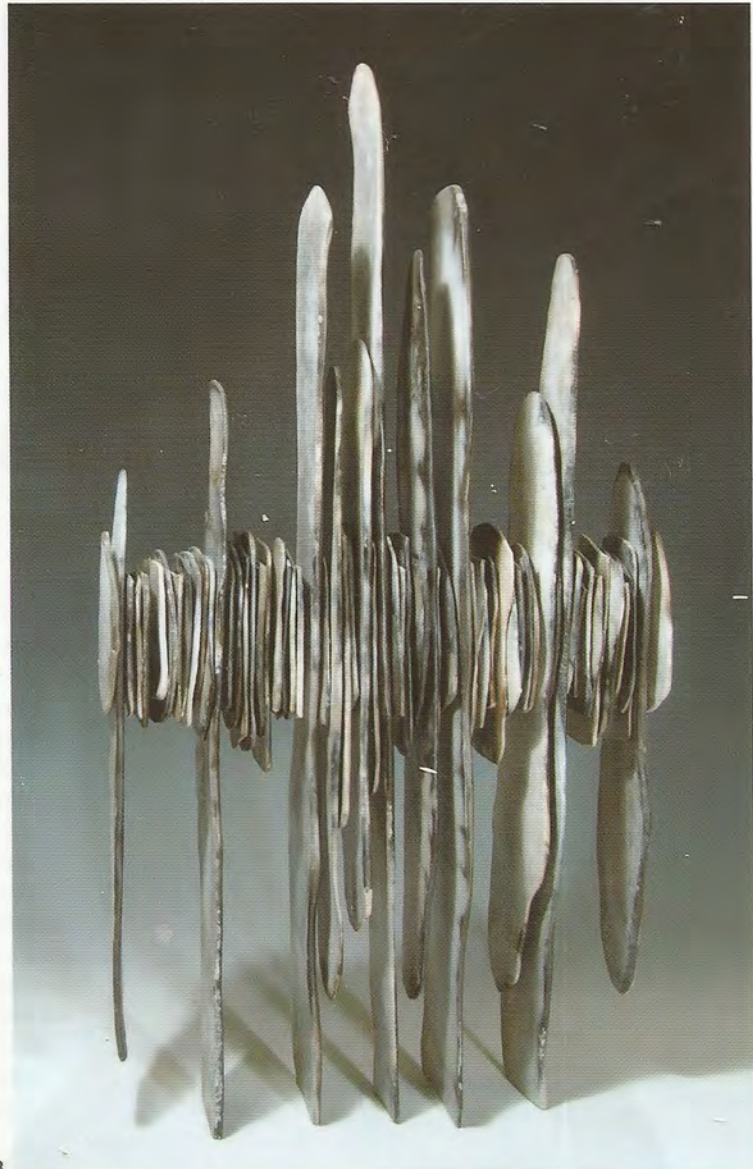
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gigantic struggle and self-doubt. Yet always we are driven on by the need to create – to make.

When our natures are open, we may be inspired. When we are inspired, we are opened. We see with the feeling eye, we hear with the feeling ear, we touch with the feeling hand – all this beyond thought. We may remain connected to the clear eye of childhood, before it is burdened by the sense of self. Without seeking we are, each day, presented with beauty. As makers and as viewers we have this opportunity to set aside opinions, notions of value and our chattering mind, and to see things afresh – and to listen. Above all, in this thoroughly materialistic world, we still have a need for mystery. For me the best art in any media has an invisible element to it – something that is never obvious but alluded to indirectly and subtly. HE Fosdick said 'I would rather live in a world...surrounded by mystery, than live in a world so small that my mind could comprehend it.' 