

Form and Formless

Mari-Ruth Oda



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Form and Formless is Mari-Ruth Oda’s first solo show for Francis, featuring freestanding and wall-mounted sculptures in jesmonite and ceramic stoneware. Rounded natural forms are abundant in her work, appearing in the shapes of flowers, fruit, seeds, planets and moons. Many of her recent pieces have a quality of turning in on themselves, and exhibit a move towards symmetry. “At the start of 2020, I moved from Manchester to the tip of the Llŷn Peninsula in Wales,” says Oda. “The quiet has provided more headspace for me to work. I have been practising meditation too, which helps me to focus on the feeling in my body as I create. I’ve found that when I aim to convey this feeling, symmetrical forms arise, as if the sculptures are reflecting the natural symmetry of the human body.”

Some of the freestanding sculptures in the show developed from an early maquette of *I Hear You*, a curving work in jesmonite with a long indentation at its centre. “The piece was inspired by a disagreement I had with my husband,” says Oda. “He is a good listener, and while he didn’t agree with me, he said, ‘I hear you’. While I was working the clay model, I kept coming back to those words and how they felt in my body, and began translating that into a form.”

The works in *Form and Formless* incorporate Bath stone and yellow sandstone jesmonites, which are new to her practice. “I tend to envision my compositions in white,” she says. “But when I made the sculptures in these natural tones, they acquired a sudden ancientness, and immediately felt more grounded.” The materials lend themselves to the earthy forms evoked in Oda’s work: the ovarian swell of fruit; flowers opening to the viewer; and small, round seeds placed inside sculptures. “The idea of the seed form arose when I was making a sculpture inspired by the concept of a book,” says Oda. “I was thinking about the crevice in the pages as a metaphor for the way a book draws you in, seeps into you, and plants a seed within you. From the seed, something flowers — which then led me to the next sculpture: *Flowering Bird of Book*.” Here, the book’s spine becomes that of a petal, a guiding line of symmetry flowing through the sculpture.

In this body of work, Oda also revisited parts of her practice she has not explored since the beginning of her career, including two large stoneware sculptures: *Bean* (1997) and *Sit-able with a Belly Button* (1997). “When I first made these ceramic sculptures, I aspired to make things that held a dual function,” says Oda. “I was interested in Isamu Noguchi’s work, which involves many experiments in functional and sculptural pieces. I was thinking about how people naturally end up sitting on certain objects, such as pillows or boulders, and thought a sculpture that invited a similar response would create an interesting engagement with the viewer. It was curious to inspect these works again and encounter my thoughts from that time, as if I were having a conversation with a former self.”

Oda hopes people are drawn to the energy of her pieces, but also believes they are free to define that energy in their own way. “It is like feng shui,” she explains. “Rather than being to do with the objects themselves, the energy derives from what those objects represent to the person. Similarly, beyond my intentions as an artist, it is the viewer who brings crucial personal meaning to the work.”



Mari-Ruth Oda
SCULPTOR

Mari-Ruth Oda is a Japanese artist based in North Wales. Her serene, emotive sculptures reflect her fascination with fluid lines and natural forms, in materials such as jesmonite, resin and ceramics. “My work says more than I can with words,” she explains. “The processes of art making allow me to find a meditative mind space, where thoughts can flow and dissipate.”

Oda studied 3D design and later completed an MA in ceramics. “I found I cared more deeply about what the work conveyed than the materials themselves, so the shapes became my focus,” she says. Her inspirations range from the contours of the human body to the soft arcs of a peach; bones interest her because they are both hard and soft, and she often finds herself enamoured with the minute curves of beans.

Each project begins with key words or an intention — to create something calming, for instance — followed by rough drawings and small experiments in clay. These intimate, hand sized maquettes allow Oda to express her ideas in a three dimensional language and to reach a point of resolution, which can precipitate larger works. Oda always seeks to imbue her sculptures with peaceful, positive energy. She does not create narratives around her work, but hopes it resonates with people on an intuitive level. “I’d like people to respond to my work as they would to a pebble on a beach,” she says, “as something they are inexplicitly drawn to.”



A BOOK THAT FEEDS (2020)



ME, MYSELF AND EYE (2020)



PEACH WISDOM (2020)



PLANET INSIDE A FLOWER (2020)



SITTING UNDER A TREE (2020)



FLOWERING BIRD OF BOOK (2020)



LISTENING TO THE WHISPERS (2020)



“I HEAR YOU” (2020)



EGG (2020)



AFLOAT WITHIN (2020)



WATERY MOON (2020)



WHOLE I (2012)



BEAN (1997)



SIT-ABLE WITH A BELLY BUTTON (1997)



FLOWER SEAT (2010)



CORE (2020)



TAMING THE BEAST (2020)



BOOK SEED (2020)



WAVE WHISPERS (2020)



DISSOLVE (2020)



HERE (2020)



WHITE STILL MOTION: CRESCENT ECLIPSE (2020)



WHITE STILL MOTION: UNFURLING (2020)



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	A BOOK THAT FEEDS (2020) White Marble Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 6 W 121mm H 82mm D 105mm		ME, MYSELF AND EYE (2020) White Marble Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 7 W 158mm H 112mm D 80mm
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	PEACH WISDOM (2020) Bath Stone Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 8 W 130mm H 99mm D 85mm		PLANET INSIDE A FLOWER (2020) Natural Stone Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 9 W 145mm H 65mm D 122mm
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	SITTING UNDER A TREE (2020) Yellow Sandstone Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 10 W 115mm H 150mm D 168mm		FLOWERING BIRD OF BOOK (2020) Bath Stone Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 11 approximately W 230mm H 170mm D 170mm
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	LISTENING TO THE WHISPERS (2020) Bath Stone Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 12 W 230mm H 350mm D 110mm		“I HEAR YOU” (2020) Bath Stone Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 13 W 240mm H 413mm D 151mm
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	EGG (2020) Portland Stone Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 14 W 112mm H 258mm D 112mm		AFLOAT WITHIN (2020) Yellow Sandstone Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 15 W 260mm H 260mm D 220mm
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	WATERY MOON (2020) Bath Stone Jesmonite (1 of 2) — pg. 16 W 445mm H 490mm D 235mm		WHOLE I (2012) Jesmonite (1 of 1) — pg. 17 W 900mm H 830mm D 1350mm
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	BEAN (1997) Stoneware Ceramics — pg. 18 approximately W 715mm H 435mm D 640mm		SIT-ABLE WITH A BELLY BUTTON (1997) Stoneware Ceramics — pg. 19 W 690mm H 375mm D 670mm
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	FLOWER SEAT (2010) White Marble Jesmonite — pg. 20 approximately W 760mm H 760mm D 565mm		CORE (2020) Bath Stone Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 21 W 250mm H 250mm D 70mm
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	TAMING THE BEAST (2020) Bath Stone Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 21 W 250mm H 250mm D 75mm		BOOK SEED (2020) Bath Stone Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 22 W 247mm H 250mm D 74mm
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	DISSOLVE (2020) Bath Stone Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 22 W 250mm H 250mm D 70mm		WAVE WHISPERS (2020) Bath Stone Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 23 W 250mm H 250mm D 70mm
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	HERE (2020) Bath Stone Jesmonite (1 of 8) — pg. 23 W 250mm H 250mm D 72mm		WHITE STILL MOTION: CRESCENT ECLIPSE (2020) Jesmonite (1 of 1) — pg. 24 W 736mm × H 905mm × D 120 (sides only 95) mm Approximate weight 20kg
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	WHITE STILL MOTION: UNFURLING (2020) Jesmonite (1 of 1) — pg. 25 W 740mm × H 905mm × D 180 (sides only 140) mm Approximate weight 30kg
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