

# The Sculpture of Philosophy – The Philosophy of Sculpture

## Rowan Bailey

### Biography

Dr Rowan Bailey was awarded a doctorate from the University of Leeds in 2009. She has an MA in Sculpture Studies (funded by the Henry Moore Institute) and received an AHRC scholarship to undertake her PhD. Her research focuses on the relationship between sculpture and philosophy, to the ways in which aesthetic philosophy uses sculpture, to not only articulate and express ideas, but to also shape philosophical concepts through the use of statue examples.

Rowan has lectured in aesthetics and cultural analysis, to students studying fine art, history of art and cultural studies at the University of Leeds. She teaches contextual studies in addition to her role as an Academic Skills tutor in the School of Art, Design and Architecture at Huddersfield.

Her enthusiasm for interdisciplinary exchanges has led to various collaborations with artists; for example, an engagement with a photographer for an exhibition

at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery entitled *The Object of Photography* (2009), resulted in a catalogue essay 'Monochromatic Productions: The Ends of Photography and The Beginning of Writing' ([www.andrewwarstat.co.uk/andrewwarstat/Bailey\\_Essay.html](http://www.andrewwarstat.co.uk/andrewwarstat/Bailey_Essay.html)).

More recently, Rowan has worked with the photographer Philip Welding to produce a piece for an exhibition by DIY art collective Black Dogs, at the Light in Leeds (2011). The show *Next to Nothing* explored notions of value in contemporary culture. The collaboration was part of a two-year long blog exchange, entitled 'The Duologue' (<http://theduologue.blogspot.com>), where both photographic images and theoretical fiction came together to forge new relations and formations of text and image.

Rowan has also been an editor for the international peer-reviewed journal *parallax*, and has edited over ten issues. Her article 'Herder's Sculptural Thinking' was recently published for a

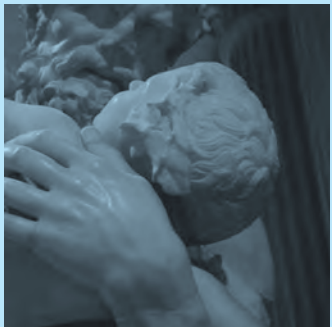
themed issue on 'Enthusiasm' in April, 2011 (<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/10257>). The article addresses the formation of sculptural thinking in relation to the historical and cultural currencies of enthusiasm in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

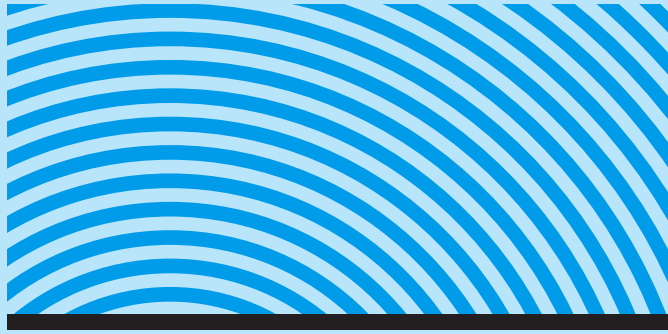
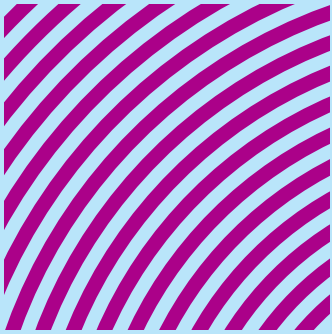
### Current Research Projects

Philosophical engagements with the aesthetic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have contributed to the legacy and tradition of sculpture as an historical category, and with the positioning of art forms within the hierarchically ordered modern system of the fine arts (architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry); Kant, Herder, and Hegel shape the art of sculpture through identifying features. Sculpture is a figurative formation; a representation of the human body; an expression of the beautiful; an art form receptive to the senses of sight and touch; a three-dimensional object in space; a figure weighted down by its material; and perhaps most importantly, a vehicle for the manifestation

and pedagogical instruction of philosophical ideas. These features are determined from the ground of the material examples these philosophers set out to read. However, the impasse generated between the particularities of sculpture and the generality of the art form as a concept, has equally shaped philosophy's thinking of the aesthetic encounter.

Rowan's research into sculpture and philosophy works with the effects generated by a doubling: *the sculpture of philosophy / the philosophy of sculpture*. The interconnected play of this framework registers those instances in philosophical texts when works of sculpture and processes of the sculptural converge. As theoretically informed frames, they introduce two distinct approaches to sculpture as a fine art and the sculptural as a process of production in philosophy. The *sculpture of philosophy* presents sculpture as an explicit object or art form in the German Idealist writings of Kant, Herder, and Hegel. The *philosophy of*





*sculpture* appeals to a more creative engagement with the use of sculptural processes (*carving, modelling, moulding, casting, shaping, and forming*) in these writings. Rowan examines sculptural processes to reveal that whilst sculpture is registered as an explicit object-example in philosophy, the implicit use of sculptural processes signals modes of productive activity not yet accounted for in existing research on the philosophy of sculpture.

For example, Rowan attends to the development of key terms within the aesthetic tradition such as the beautiful, the sublime, and the ideal, to assess how philosophy attempts to make sense of itself through its contact with sculpture. Such examples within her analysis include Kant's use of Polyclitus' statue *Doryphoros* as a pedagogical tool for demonstrating the ways in which reflective judgment thinks the beautiful in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790). She argues that this sculptural analogy is possible only from the ground

of recognising the imagination as a plastic faculty shaped by, and shaping in turn, the material world. Herder on the other hand, provides a different approach to the sculptural in his text *Plastik* (1788). Rowan argues that Herder is a philosopher who adopts the Pygmalion motif to show how touch experiences with the materials of sculpture (solidity, hardness, softness, smoothness, form, shape, and volume) can help develop 'concrete' concepts for philosophy. She suggests that Herder is a proto-cultural materialist, calling for philosophy to encounter the base materials of sculpture so as to develop a language that can be understood by everyone. She has also addressed Hegel's use of the sculptural in his *Lectures on Fine Art* (1830), whereby he reads Lysippus' *Silenus with the Infant Bacchus* as a classical ideal image of bodily expression alongside the sculptural tropes of 'plastic individuality', 'self-moulding', 'self-cultivation' (*Bildung*). In this respect, Rowan suggests that in order for Hegel to convey the processes of his speculative

idealism (the self-development of the philosophical thinker) he must cast a methodology from the ground of his engagements with sculpture.

Her research methodology is of necessity, inter-disciplinary, channelling a close reading of philosophical texts through the disciplinary frames of aesthetic theory, art history, visual and material culture, critical theory, cultural history and deconstruction, with the intention of considering the ways in which sculptural thinking corresponds to dialogical reading practices. For Rowan, dialogical reading is a pedagogical practice that calls for reciprocal exchanges between the disciplinary registers within which sculpture subsists. This methodological framework allows her to critically explore how sculptural thinking is inherently dialogical in character. Through close readings and analyses of philosophical writing, she is intent on considering how philosophy is both informed and reshaped by different approaches to reading.

The long-term research development of Rowan's project is to produce a dictionary of the sculptural, where ideas are both shaped by the materials (stone, marble, metal, wood) of sculpture and the activities of the sculptural (making, moulding, casting, carving, shaping, and forming). The historical and cultural development of key concepts of the sculptural, through the relation between materials and processes of formation, will be evidenced through philosophy's dependence on sculpture. For example, she will address the concepts *archetype* (first-moulded) and *ectype* (material image) in Kant, *plasticity* (as a process of forming) and *Bildung* (as self-cultivation or self-moulding) in Winckelmann, Herder, Schiller, Humboldt and Hegel, and the *cataleptic* (stony immobility) figure of Socrates in Plato's dialogues. Her aim is to signpost a specific syntax or language of the sculptural in philosophical writing for her dictionary of terms.

Rowan's intention for such a work will be to establish

interdisciplinary collaborations between creative practices and sculptural thinking. She will account for sculptural insights into the technical processes and methods used in the manipulation of raw materials for the production of particular cultural formations, so as to establish new and creative reading experiences or encounters with philosophy. Her primary motivation is to ask: how might a reader sculpturally think their way through philosophical texts? In this sense, Rowan's project attends to the ways in which sculptural thinking may serve as a pedagogical tool that can trigger, provoke and enthuse, practitioners and theorists alike.

