PORTABLE SCULPTURE

‘This is the future of sculpture’
The Telegraph

until 29 August 2021
1. Louise Bourgeois
   *Untitled (Personages Series)* 1953

2a. Marcel Duchamp
   *Boîte-en-valise* 1935–41
   [Box in a Suitcase]
   Facsimile of the series G edition 1968

2b. Marcel Duchamp
   *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires même (Boîte verte)*
   [The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Green Box)] 1934

3. Hannelore Baron
   *Untitled (B81051)* 1981
   *S-B-7 (B81057)* 1981
   *Untitled (B79002)* 1979

4. Claire Ashley
   *Clown (Laughing Stock)* 2020

5. Charles Hewlings
   *Valley Suitcase* 2002

6. James Ackerley
   *Studio Objects* 2014-ongoing

7. Alexander Calder
   *Chicago Black* 1949

8. Mohamad Hafez
   *Green Zone* 2019
   *A Refugee Nation* 2015
   *Untitled (Munitions Case)* 2018

9. Andrea Zittel
   *A–Z Escape Vehicle, owned and customised by Bob Shiffler* 1996

10. Do Ho Suh
    *Hub, Wielandstr. 18, 12159 Berlin* 2015

11. Liz Ensz
    *Convexity / Concavity* 2015

12. Walead Beshty

13. Barry Flanagan
    *a hole in the sea* 1969
    *bollards project* 1970

14. Veronica Ryan
    *Liminal Spaces* 2019
    *Feathers in Her Head* 2019
    *Sewing Seeds* 2 2019

15. Romuald Hazoumè
    *Sencha* 2018
    *Bacon* 2018
    *Bye Bye* 2009
    *Geco* 2002
    *Teruko* 2019
    *Ziggy* 2015
    *Tu sors, je sors* 2017

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One
*Leaving Home / The Art of the Flat Pack*

Two
*Building a World*

Three
*Made in Transit*
PORTABLE SCULPTURE

Portable Sculpture does exactly what its title suggests. This group exhibition explores sculptures that are deliberately designed to fold up, or pack down, or that have been made while on the move. We often associate the word ‘sculpture’ with large, immobile objects that are weighty and permanent, but sculpture is not always fixed in place: sculpture can be mobile, agile and endlessly adaptable. The sculptures on show are an indication sometimes of geopolitical situations, and sometimes of personal circumstances, but all present innovative approaches to the making, moving and display of sculpture.
Although the scale of the sculptures varies throughout the exhibition, they are by no means portable simply by virtue of being small. Sculpture that is packable, foldable or designed to be stored or transported at a small scale presents a very different set of challenges beyond its size. To produce something like that takes a huge amount of artistic ingenuity, and often involves truly impressive engineering and construction skills. Artists take their inspiration from architecture, industry and commercial design, as well as historical precedents and ancient crafts.

There are a number of reasons why an artist might want to make a work that can travel easily, and the fact that these sculptures are made to be portable raises questions about home and identity, migration and travel, public and private, instability and permanence. Although the long history of portable sculpture dates back to the small, carved stones made by nomadic tribes during the Ice Age, these issues have become ever more pressing during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The combination of unstable geopolitics and sweeping economic changes means that creating something permanent and immobile is often next to impossible. Artists have responded to their circumstances, therefore, by creating objects that are as mobile as they are.
The first group of works are all made by artists who had to leave continental Europe during the 1930s and 1940s due to World War II. In some cases, the works were designed to be taken on the journey, but in others they reflect the sense of loss and grief that resulted from leaving home behind, a response that is echoed in the work of Mohamad Hafez (seen in the second gallery). While Marcel Duchamp settled perfectly happily into voluntary exile in New York, other artists found it much harder to adjust, and some, like Louise Bourgeois and Hannelore Baron, carried the trauma with them for a long time despite creating a new life in post-war America.
Some artists carried the trauma with them for a long time... The sculptures reflect a sense of loss and grief.

1. Louise Bourgeois
   *Untitled (Personages Series)* 1953

Bourgeois created the *Personages* sculptures to represent people that she had left behind in France when she moved to America in 1938. Living in New York with her husband and three small children, the sculptures became a tangible link to the past. Some of the *Personages* were later cast in bronze, but initially they were all carved in wood so as to be lightweight and portable. The sculptures’ size relates directly to Bourgeois’ own body, and they are deliberately designed to evoke a human presence. The *Personages* are portable surrogates for much-missed loved ones (or in one case, a much-despised acquaintance), and are intrinsically linked to the issues of loss and guilt that Bourgeois and many other émigrés experienced after leaving Europe.

2a. Marcel Duchamp
   *Boîte-en-valise* 1935–41 [Box in a Suitcase]
   Facsimile of the series G edition 1968

Duchamp initially had twenty ‘luxury editions’ of these sets fabricated during the late 1930s as it became apparent that he would have to leave Paris. The cases fold out to reveal small-scale reproductions of Duchamp’s work, including *Fountain*, *Nude Descending a Staircase* and *The Large Glass*, along with tiny versions of his readymades to form a miniature museum of his work. Further editions were authorised in later years, including this one from 1968. Although these objects complicate the idea of original versus reproduction, Duchamp viewed them as original artworks in their own right. That Duchamp felt the need to have these cases made is highly suggestive of the geopolitical circumstances that required Duchamp and so many others to leave Europe.

2b. Marcel Duchamp
   *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires même (Boîte verte)*
   [The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Green Box)]
   1934

Duchamp’s *The Green Box* was the first of his miniature museums, and was originally intended to provide a reconstitution of his thought processes during the creation of one of his most famous works: *The Large Glass* (or *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, to give it its full title), made between 1915–23. The box contains ninety-two sheets of Duchamp’s notes, along with a small reproduction of the artwork, creating a portable archive of what is arguably one of his most mysterious and impenetrable works.

3. Hannelore Baron
   *Untitled (B81051)* 1981
   *S-B-7 (B81057)* 1981
   *Untitled (B79002)* 1979

Hannelore Baron’s box constructions, made from scraps of wood, fabric and found materials, stem from the artist’s traumatic childhood in Germany. Born in 1926, she fled Germany in 1939, ending up in New York in 1941. With no formal fine art training and no knowledge of developments in the art world, she began making collages and boxes, which became increasingly politically engaged throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The materials are damaged and the forms are enigmatic and secretive – analogous to the artist and her experience of the world.
Normally associated with a certain Swedish furniture store, the principles of the flat pack can be equally applied to the production of sculpture. Making an artwork out of component parts allows for the storage and transportation of what can potentially be a very large object in a small space. Alexander Calder, seen through the entrance to the second gallery, is something of a trailblazer in this respect, having developed the notion of flat pack sculpture long before Ikea. The principles adopted by Calder have proved useful for many other artists. The problem of storage and transport is a thorny one for sculptors, particularly if working on a large scale, and particularly for emerging artists, who struggle to find permanent and affordable studio space. A growing family, gentrification, transport costs: all reasons for making sculpture which can be easily disassembled. These artists have responded to their circumstances in exceptionally clever ways.

#PortableSculpture
The principles of the flat pack have proved useful for many artists. They respond to their circumstances in exceptionally clever ways.

4. Claire Ashley
*Clown (Laughing Stock)* 2020

Ashley’s inflatable artworks sit somewhere between painting and sculpture. Parenthood was a key factor in the development of her working methods. Initially inspired by her children’s toys, and also by the necessity to store work easily, Ashley developed her hybrid painted inflatable sculptures. Working in this way allowed her to make very large sculptures in a comparatively small space, and to pack the objects away easily when not working on them. A second key factor is that the sculptures also allow her, as a female artist, to literally take up space with her work, in a subversion of the scale and flatness of traditional abstract expressionist painting.

5. Charles Hewlings
*Valley Suitcase* 2002

Hewlings usually makes very large sculptures, which engage with their surrounding architecture to manipulate and activate space. In this instance, Hewlings has worked on a much smaller scale to produce a mobile work, which can be packed down for transportation and storage. The perennial logistical problems of making and keeping huge, heavy objects are surmounted by allowing the sculpture to ‘grow’ almost organically from its suitcase home, like a snail from a shell.

6. James Ackerley
*Studio Objects* 2014-ongoing

James Ackerley has been making meticulously constructed flat pack sculptures for several years, in a contemporary reading of the modernist ideal of the autonomous sculptural object. Originally made of cardboard, the sculptures are designed for swift disassembly, since Ackerley has had to move studios so many times during the last five years. They pack flat and allow the artist to store and move them at a moment’s notice – symptomatic of the difficulties faced by young sculptors who are unable to find permanent studio spaces. Revisiting the series in 2020, Ackerley has remade the sculptures using a range of woods and building materials: the shift to more stable materials reflects his recent move to a more stable studio space.

7. Alexander Calder
*Chicago Black* 1949

Calder’s mobiles are not only mobile when installed. He designed them essentially as flat packs. The sculptures are intended to come apart, with components that could easily be sent abroad without attracting the attention of customs. The mobility of Calder’s sculptures is partly for reasons of sculptural innovation, and partly for reasons of economics. He had always designed his sculptures to be portable: most famously, his *Cirque Calder* 1926 was a miniature moving circus model, which fitted into two suitcases so that Calder could transport it easily and give circus performances for his friends.

*This sculpture can be found in the second gallery*
The Art of the Flat Pack
A compelling response to changing geopolitical and social contexts emerges when sculptors begin making and remaking the world. Globalisation, exile, migration and conflict have prompted responses ranging from the highly personal to the highly impersonal. Nostalgia for a former life, or an attempt to escape the present one are both in evidence, but in every case the new world travels too. All of the sculptures seen here reflect contemporary themes of displacement, whether that be through the peripatetic lifestyle of the contemporary artist or the enforced population movement of the refugee. The work is provisional and contingent, and is highly adaptive to new and changing circumstances – much like the artists themselves.
Hafez’s intricately detailed miniature worlds depict the decimated cities, apartments and monuments of his native Syria. In the aftermath of the 11 September attacks, and later the outbreak of civil war, Hafez was unable to return home, and began to create these scenes as a way to deal with his unbearable nostalgia. Here, the suitcase is emblematic of the experience of the refugee, and becomes a powerful illustration of Edward Said’s description of the life of the exile: forever trying to create a new world that somewhat resembles the old. It is easy to despair in the face of suffering and destruction, but Hafez includes particular phrases from the Quran which remind us that there is always hope.

Zittel’s Escape Vehicles are based on the idea of a mobile home, and can be hooked up to cars and trucks. However, Zittel envisaged them being equally useful in a garden or even inside a house, providing a space of escape specifically customised for a single individual. While Zittel has been influenced by the Bauhaus ideal of uniting art and life, many of her sculptures speak to a profound sense of atomisation, geared towards the individual as a single social unit, rather than the collective ethos of the historical avant-garde.

Do Ho Suh’s fabric sculptures reproduce architectural features and sometimes entire buildings from memory. These are places in which the artist has lived in the past, and which now travel as translucent replicas. The delicate, floating structures reflect on the idea that home is a memory, rather than a physical location. Making the sculptures from fabric and wire enabled him to easily transport them in a suitcase, and thus the sculptures have become symbolic of his peripatetic existence.

Ensz’s work consists of large-scale silkscreen prints of images from Google Earth showing the impact of human activity, which are arranged on top of piles of ‘the best local trash’ to create provisional landscapes. Ensz originally created specially designed structures for the silkscreened fabric to drape over, but found that these vastly increased the costs and complexities of exhibiting the work. In a more sustainable approach to making sculpture, the prints are now rolled up into a rucksack and bases constructed on site from whatever can be found – the best local trash – at the exhibition’s locale. The work thus becomes both infinitely portable and completely site-specific.
The way in which sculpture is produced is often shrouded in mystery, and is historically associated with the static space of the studio. In this group of sculptures both the means and locus of their making form an inherent characteristic of the work, which in some cases remains open-ended and may never be ‘finished’. These sculptures retain the mobility that is inherent in the conditions of their production. They are all made while on the move, resulting in work that is a manifestation not only of the journey, but also of the systems of transport, bureaucracy, exchange and consumption through which the journey must take place. Travelling from place to place in cars, vans and trains, the sculptures become a form of documentation or mapping: the evidence of itinerant artistic and human labour.
The work is a manifestation not only of the journey, but also of the systems through which the journey must take place.
12. Walead Beshty  
*Fedex Kraft Box © 2005 FEDEX 330504 REV 10/05*  

For nine years, Beshty had glass boxes made to the precise dimensions of Fedex’s copyrighted shipping boxes (essentially the corporate ownership of an empty space). The boxes were then sent through the mail and the inevitable damage, along with the tracking details, formed the artwork. As a form of readymade, Beshty’s sculptures question traditional structures of authorship and aesthetic meaning. Both the form and the meaning of the object are specifically generated by its movement through time and space across global borders, and through systems of consumption, labour and exchange.

13. Barry Flanagan  
*a hole in the sea* 1969

Filmed on a beach in the Netherlands for Gerry Schum’s famous TV exhibition *Land Art*, Flanagan buried a hollow cylinder in the sand during a rising tide and filmed the gradual disappearance of the ‘hole’ as the water eventually covered it.

*bollards project* 1970

In protest against Camden council’s plans to erect a large number of permanent bollards on street corners, Flanagan, assisted by his friend Andrew Dipper, hired a van and with a concrete mixer and a sewing machine drove around creating his own versions using cloth bags filled with cement.

14. Veronica Ryan  
*Liminal Spaces* 2019  
*Feathers in Her Head* 2019  
*Sewing Seeds* 2 2019

Both the materials and techniques that Ryan uses have travelled through time and space: the mango seeds are widely cultivated in China, East Asia, Africa, the Middle East and in the Caribbean, where Ryan was born, and can be found in supermarkets across the world; the sewing techniques have passed down to Ryan through generations of her family. Sewing is a very portable technique, and she works on these pieces while sitting on trains or in waiting rooms. These well-travelled sculptures become a meditation on movement, memory and history, reflecting on Ryan’s personal experiences as well as the collective experiences of migration and diaspora.

15. Romuald Hazoumè  
*Sencha* 2018  
*Bacon* 2018  
*Bye Bye* 2009  
*Geco* 2002  
*Teruko* 2019  
*Ziggy* 2015  
*Tu sors, je sors* 2017

The movement of people and resources across the world is a key concern in Hazoumè’s work, especially the consumer waste that ends up being sent to Africa. These masks, which resemble traditional Yoruba masks, are constructed from found objects, the most significant of which are the petrol cans, which call attention to illegal petrol smuggling. The masks are portraits of individuals, which tell their stories through only a couple of objects, but which also reflect on long histories of the exploitation of Africa: its people, its natural resources and its art.
A consideration of portable sculpture seems particularly timely, at a point when concerns about climate catastrophe, conflict and, uppermost in our minds at present, a global pandemic have made the movement of art and artists exceptionally problematic. The urgency of these concerns has been brought into sharp focus during the last year, and the approaches adopted by artists in this exhibition show that there are ways to think about and around such issues that deal in possibilities for the future. The philosopher Walter Benjamin described the experience of modernity as one of continuous crisis: a permanent state of emergency. While this is as true in 2021 as it was when Benjamin wrote it seventy years ago, it is also true that artists have responded to the challenges of their contemporary worlds for generations with creativity, ingenuity and wit.

#PortableSculpture
A series of free online research events accompanies Portable Sculpture. We’ll hear from:

Professor T. J. Demos (University of California, Santa Cruz)
Dr Heather Diack (University of Miami)
Dr Jo Melvin (University of the Arts London / Barry Flanagan Estate)
Artist Claire Ashley
Artist Mohamad Hafez

Check our website for dates, times and booking information.

You can also find a range of online resources about the exhibition on our website. Watch Meet the Artist, a series of short films with episodes focussed on Mohamad Hafez, Claire Ashley, James Ackerley, Liz Ensz, Veronica Ryan and Charles Hewlings.

henry-moore.org/portable-sculpture #PortableSculpture
The Henry Moore Institute welcomes everyone to visit our Galleries, Research Library and Archive of Sculptors’ Papers to experience, study and enjoy sculpture from around the world. The Institute can be found in the centre of Leeds, the city where Henry Moore (1898–1986) began his training as a sculptor.

Our changing programme of historical, modern and contemporary exhibitions and events encourage thinking about what sculpture is, how it is made and the artists who make it.

As part of the Henry Moore Foundation, we are a hub for sculpture, connecting a global network of artists and scholars, continuing research into the art form and ensuring that sculpture is accessible and celebrated by a wide audience.