

PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

BARRY FLANAGAN

515 West 27th Street

APRIL 19 JUNE 9, 2018

Paul Kasmin Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of sculpture by Barry Flanagan. The presentation, on view between April - June, 2018, will bring together a selection of the artist's iconic bronze hares from the 1980s - 1990s alongside his lesser-known works made with rope, sand, cloth, stone, ceramics and light as a sculptural component (largely from the 1960s - 70s). A series of small paper collages, drawings, prints and film will also be included.

The exhibition, curated by Dr Jo Melvin, offers new insights into the interconnectedness of seemingly distinct periods of Flanagan's 40-year career, demonstrating an ongoing experimentation with materials and their properties and a symbiosis between abstraction and figuration. It challenges the supposition that Flanagan's later works represent a marked shift in the artist's approach to art-making. Rather, they represent the distillation of Flanagan's decades-long fascination with ontology, movement and the physicality of the various materials with which he worked.

For Flanagan the activity of making sculpture, although primarily visual, involved orchestrating ways to demonstrate the sensual and the tactile; surface, color, weight, balance, sound, and light. From the outset of his career, Flanagan questioned expectations and value structures; testing the limits of the genre and so redefining sculpture's conventions.

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In 1966, immediately on graduating from St Martins, Flanagan was offered a solo exhibition at the Rowan Gallery, London, rapidly establishing his reputation as a leading figure of the Avant-garde. Deeply engaged with structural composition, explicitly exploring shape and form, and constituting, in terms of materiality, a profound break from traditional sculpture, the works in that exhibition played mischievously with perception. On their presentation, art critic Paul Overy remarked that the works looked “soft to touch, like cuddly toys, but are in fact rock hard - which is nicely disturbing.” Flanagan soon received international acclaim for his intuitive and inventive approach to materials, which aligned him with the emergent movements of Arte Povera and Land Art, known under the rubric of Conceptual Art.

In 1979 Flanagan’s investigations turned to figuration, modeling and casting in bronze at a time when the medium was as unexpected as the soft sculpture and use of building materials had been to its audiences fifteen years previously. He was drawn to the figure of the hare, the motif for which he is now best known, via his immersion in country pursuits of game keeping and poaching. The publication of George Ewart’s ‘The Leaping Hare’ in 1972 cemented his engagement with the hare’s mythological and ‘pataphysical iconography, and after witnessing the animal dash across the Sussex Downs, the artist was struck by its mysterious, acrobatic, unpredictable movements as set against the backdrop of an untamed wilderness.

Flanagan’s primary fascination, however, lay in the hare’s anthropomorphic potential; its ability to magnify a range of expressive attributes, to convey meaning and feeling beyond what he felt was possible in the manifestation of human form. These works, elaborating on the dynamic potential of bronze first radically proposed by Rodin, have been celebrated across the world from the moment of their debut and emit a bounding life-force unparalleled in contemporary sculpture.

Despite the pronounced contrasts, both formally and materially, across his bodies of work, Flanagan’s oeuvre is connected inextricably by the fact of their ongoing exploration of and dialogue with Alfred Jarry’s ‘pataphysics, or the “the science of imaginary solutions.” Engaged with the dual possibility of presence and absence, interior and exterior, the theory attempts to essentially distance philosophy from logic, instead championing its inherent incoherence as functional, even necessary. Since understood as a central tenet of Dada and Surrealism, ‘pataphysics represents a challenge to academic seriousness, its hermetic perversity inspiring a century of innovation.

In bringing together works that span the scope of Flanagan’s inexhaustibly explorative career, Paul Kasmin Gallery continues its decades-long examination into the enduring influence of one of the world’s most celebrated artists.

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Notes to Editors

Barry Flanagan was born in Prestatyn, North Wales in 1941 and died in Ibiza in 2009. He studied at Birmingham College of Arts and Crafts before attending St Martins School of Art in London 1964-66. Between 1967 and 1971, he taught at St Martins and the Central School of Arts and Crafts, London.

Flanagan represented Britain at the Venice Biennale in 1982. A major retrospective of his work was held at the Fundación 'La Caixa' Madrid in 1993, touring to the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes in 1994. Flanagan's bronze hares have also been exhibited in many outdoor spaces, most notably on Park Avenue in New York in 1995-6 and at Grant Park, Chicago in 1996; and in the grounds of Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, 2012. In 1999, he had a solo exhibition at Galerie Xavier Hufkens in Brussels followed by an exhibition at Tate, Liverpool (2000). In 2002, a major exhibition of his work was shown at the Kunsthalle Recklinghausen, Germany, and toured to the Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, Nice. In 2006, the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin held a major retrospective of his work, in association with Dublin City Art Gallery The Hugh Lane, which included ten large-scale bronzes installed along O'Connell Street and in Parnell Square. In 2011 Tate presented Barry Flanagan Early Works 1965-1982.

His work is held in public collections worldwide including MoMA New York, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Netherlands, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Hakone Open Air Museum, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan, Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, Musée des Beaux Arts Calais, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Israel and Tate in London, National Galleries of Scotland, National Museums and Galleries of Wales, Ulster Museum, Northern Ireland, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin.

Dr Jo Melvin, Director of The Estate of Barry Flanagan, is an art historian and Reader in Fine Art, Special Collections, Chelsea College of Art, University of the Arts, London.