

Press Release

## Phyllida Barlow. unscripted

Hauser & Wirth Somerset

25 May 2024 – 5 January 2025

Opening reception: Saturday 25 May 2024



The work of Phyllida Barlow (1944 – 2023) will take over Hauser & Wirth Somerset in a celebration of the British artist's transformative approach to sculpture, marking the 10th anniversary of the arts centre that was inaugurated by Barlow's solo exhibition 'GIG' in 2014. Over a career that spanned six decades, Barlow took inspiration from her surroundings to create imposing installations that can be at once menacing and playful. Barlow's restless invented forms stretch the limits of mass, volume and height as they block, straddle and balance precariously. The audience is constantly challenged into a new relationship with the sculptural object, the gallery environment and the world beyond.

Curated by Frances Morris, 'Phyllida Barlow. unscripted' brings together a collection of the artist's signature elements from several major installations, as well as a number of free-standing sculptures ranging from the early 1970s to work made in the last year of Barlow's life. The landscape, courtyards and gardens beyond the galleries are animated and disrupted by a selection of sculptures, including 'PRANK', a series of seven wonderfully – and deliberately – ungainly sculptures Barlow made for New York's City Hall Park in 2023, shown for the first time in the UK. The exhibition also features previously unseen smaller-scale works, including drawings and maquettes. These works reinforce the important role the studio played in Barlow's practice, whilst conveying the restless energy, endless curiosity and unabated ambition which are as much a part of Barlow's legacy as are the works themselves.

'Over the last 10 years, Phyllida Barlow kept her fans and followers on the edge of their seats as she brought new and ever more audacious projects to life in venues across the world. Unfolding as a running commentary on the tragedies and absurdities of our time, each work formed part of an ongoing and intensely experimental investigation into the techniques and materials of art making, seeking visual equivalents to her own personal experience of living and looking.' —Frances Morris, 2024

The title 'unscripted' refers to the experimental and iterative nature of Barlow's working process, allowing each project to evolve through a process of making, unmaking and remaking, involving chance and mishap as well as changes of mind. She saw this working practice as akin to processes of growth, decay and renewal in nature. Barlow was aware of the forthcoming exhibition and had begun to think seriously about bringing her interest in painting to the fore.

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The Bourgeois gallery opens the exhibition with singular works that span almost four decades of Barlow's career, ranging from the remake of 'shedmesh, 1975-2020' (1975-2020), to two of the artist's last works, 'untitled: hollow; 2022' (2022) and 'untitled: modernsculpture; 2022' (2022). These works are part of a continuous investigation of the language and possibilities of sculpture, which emerged as Barlow found her voice as a student through exploring the legacy of British and European post-war sculpture. Key works in this display make references to other artists who became part of her internal conversation for many years, notably Alighiero Boetti, Eva Hesse and Tony Smith. These works engage critically with the grid and cube of minimalism, post-minimalism's resistance to geometry and the materiality of Arte Povera.

In contrast, the Rhoades Gallery will combine large-scale elements originally conceived for several different installations including 'folly' (2017), Barlow's acclaimed British Pavilion for the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017. This gallery engages with the artist's ongoing interest in states of urban destruction and unrest, reflecting on Barlow's fascination for natural and human-driven disaster, stretching back to her memories of bomb-damaged London, as well as her interest in monuments and fallen monuments. During her final years, Barlow was increasingly recycling elements of one project into another, or enabling individual items a future life liberated from its original context. This gallery takes this habit as its methodology; key gatherings of works are inspired by juxtapositions Barlow made from disparate parts and which can be found in photographic documentation of her exhibitions. Other choices and sequences take care to respect some of Barlow's key principles and preferences, for example she preferred to block entrances and exits, inducing curiosity in the viewer. She often placed obstacles in the way of visitors, in their pathway or disturbing their line of site.

There were periods in Barlow's life where her principal activity as an artist took place in the studio. This was the case for months and years during her teaching career when significant exhibition opportunities were harder to come by, whilst raising a young family, and was also the case more recently during lockdown. The Pigsty gallery focuses on these more private aspects of Barlow's practice and speak to forms of 'open' experimentation. 'TORSO' and 'LOAF' (1986-1989) are among the earliest works included, alongside maquettes and drawings, often made in the genesis of larger-scale works and have never been shown in public.



Over the course of a long career there were images and forms, materials and subjects that occurred over and over in Barlow's work and held a special significance for her. The Workshop gallery foregrounds 'untitled: double act' (2010), and combines two adjacent spheres each speared by a vertical intrusion, one in the form of a ring, the other a disc. The reference to theatre in the title evokes Barlow's longstanding interest in theatre and the staging of her work for audiences. Here the double act, was effectively an 'in conversation' with Nairy Baghramian who she exhibited alongside at the Serpentine Gallery the same year, and point to Barlow's continuing interest in and responsiveness to her peers.

Barlow's first and last group of paintings on canvas will be on display in the final gallery. Small-scale and captivating, these paintings stand in lieu of what was to have been a major new adventure. The works represent motifs repeatedly explored in her sculpture, including several works on display elsewhere in the exhibition, while others touch on primary themes and interests in her art and life. The painterly experiments were part of a move to larger-scale canvases that were to be debuted in this very exhibition.

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Alongside the exhibition, Hauser & Wirth Learning will launch a new Education Lab, 'Open Art School', in partnership with Bath Spa University. Taking Barlow's life-long engagement with arts education and notably her ethos of there being 'no right or wrong way' to be creative, the Education Lab will draw on the latest thinking within creative pedagogy and experimental learning. 'Open Art School' will provide an interactive space for new ideas, experiments and working methods, inviting a multitude of voices and communities to engage through making. In addition, the gallery's summer artist residency programme will welcome guest artists, Jessie Flood-Paddock, Young In Hong, Jack Killick and Hamish Pearch, to spend time living and working in Somerset. Selected by curator Frances Morris, and in the spirit of Phyllida Barlow, the artists will be invited to seek inspiration from the exhibition, landscape and architecture of Somerset, as well as conversations that develop between the group.

**Roth Bar in Somerset**  
**Opening Saturday 25 May 2024**  
**Wednesday - Sunday, 10 am - 11 pm**

To coincide with the launch of 'Phyllida Barlow. unscripted', and as part of Hauser & Wirth Somerset's 10th anniversary celebrations, a new site-specific artwork and fully functioning Roth Bar will open in the Threshing Barn.



Artist Oddur Roth, grandson of the late German-born Swiss artist Dieter Roth, lived and worked in Bruton as artist-in-residence from January - March 2024, alongside his team, Einar Roth, Bjarni Grímsson, Sigrún Holmgeirsdóttir, Thrandur Gíslason Roth and Gudmundur Oddur Magnusson. Björn and Oddur Roth were one of the first artists-in-residence in Somerset in 2014, creating the original bar that formed an integral part of the gallery's on-site restaurant. First conceived by Dieter Roth in the late 1970s, the bar is a dynamic and changing installation and is a continuing element in the Roths' cross-generational practice.

Inspired by the history of Durslade Farm, Roth Bar in Somerset is composed of salvaged materials and objects from reclamation yards in the surrounding area. The new bar also features an interactive installation conceived as a functional Revolving Door by Björn and Oddur Roth, inspired by the work 'Allerweltsbild' Dieter Roth created between 1982 and 1985 together with Björn Roth, Dominik Steiger, Ómar Stefánsson and André Thomkins. Furniture throughout the wider Roth Bar space has been curated in collaboration with Paris-based international architecture firm, Laplace.

**For additional information, please contact:**

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**Hauser & Wirth Somerset**

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**Opening hours:**

Thursday – Sunday  
10am – 5pm

**[www.hauserwirth.com](http://www.hauserwirth.com)**  
**[@hauserwirthsomerset](https://www.instagram.com/hauserwirthsomerset)**

**Caption and courtesy information:**

Phyllida Barlow, Hauser & Wirth, Los Angeles CA,  
2022  
Courtesy the Phyllida Barlow Estate and Hauser &  
Wirth  
Photo: Emma Louise Swanson

Phyllida Barlow  
untitled: folly; awnings; 2016/2017 (detail)  
2016-2017  
Timber, plywood, paint, cement, PVA, pigment,  
polystyrene, polyurethane foam, spray paint, steel  
666 x 387 x 603 cm / 262 1/4 x 152 3/8 x 237 3/8 in  
Installation view, 'Phyllida Barlow. folly', British Pavilion,  
57th Venice Biennale, Italy, 2017  
© Phyllida Barlow Estate © British Council  
Courtesy the Phyllida Barlow Estate and Hauser &  
Wirth  
Photo: Ruth Clark

Phyllida Barlow  
untitled: double act  
2010  
Plaster, fabric, scrim over polystyrene core, plywood,  
expanded foam, timber, bonding plaster, PVA, wire  
mesh, paint, spray paint, 2 parts  
Each: 180 x 180 x 190 cm / 70 7/8 x 70 7/8 x 74  
3/4 in  
Installation view, 'Nairy Baghramian and Phyllida  
Barlow', Serpentine Gallery, London, UK, 2010  
© Phyllida Barlow Estate  
Courtesy the Phyllida Barlow Estate and Hauser &  
Wirth  
Photo: Andy Keate / Serpentine Gallery

Installation view: 'Phyllida Barlow. frontier', Haus der  
Kunst, Munich, Germany, 2021  
© Phyllida Barlow Estate  
Courtesy the Phyllida Barlow Estate and Hauser &  
Wirth  
Photo: Maximilian Geuter / Haus der Kunst

Oddur Roth, Hauser & Wirth Somerset, 2024 ©  
Oddur Roth. Photo: Bjarni Grímsson

Roth Bar, Hauser & Wirth Somerset, 2024 ©  
Oddur Roth. Photo: Bjarni Grímsson