



CANARY WHARF  
ARTS+EVENTS



Angoulême 2006-09. Photograph Orlando Gili

# Sparks Fly

Katherine Gili Sculpture  
1974 to 2018

**14 January – 1 March 2019**  
**Daily 7am – 8pm**  
Lobby, One Canada Square,  
Canary Wharf, London E14 5AB

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Katherine Gili Sculpture  
1974 to 2018

The earliest sculptures in this exhibition were made when Katherine Gili was just one year out of art school, having studied sculpture first at Bath Academy of Art and then at Saint Martin's School of Art in London. Michael Pennie (1936-2019) who taught sculpture at Bath Academy, whose work was shown in the Lobby of One Canada Square in the autumn of 2018, recognised her aptitude for working large in three dimensions. It was at Saint Martin's that she began to work, like many of her peers, in steel – cut and welded – a material and way of working championed by their teacher Anthony Caro (1924-2013). His sculpture was shown in Jubilee Park in 2012.

Gili, however, is marked out as being different, not through her beginnings, but for the way in which she has developed her highly individual method of working with steel, forged and welded iron. Although materiality is important, without the sense of movement observed in the human body through dance, although not taken forward literally, Gili required more from steel than flat cut-outs could provide, although *Shift* 1974, *Splay* 1974 and *Cut Out* 1977, marking the beginning of this collection, are fine examples. This exhibition shows her development from 1974 until now, consistently exploring weight, balance and scale. She says that weight and balance gave her a way of arriving at a whole in abstract terms, while unfailingly avoiding the matter of 'taste'.

From Saint Martin's Gili moved immediately to Stockwell Depot, an artists' studio complex formed in a disused Victorian brewery. Lambeth Council had offered the premises to a group of young sculptors from Saint Martin's in 1967, which they accepted with alacrity. The organisation gained an



Cut Out 1977

international reputation as a centre for abstraction in Britain. At the time she joined in 1974, Gili was the only female sculptor amongst the number of painters and sculptors working there. The artists organised annual exhibitions of their work and Gili's pieces *Shift*, *Splay*, *Blow* 1978-79 and *Rise* 1979 were shown successively. All were made from steel sheet, expressing volume and mass through cutting, bending and welding.

Moving to another studio complex in 1978, this time in Greenwich, Gili was able to build a gantry, which assisted her development in terms of the scale and weight of her sculptures, and she also installed a coke-fired forge there. *Leonide* 1981-82, which is now in the collection of Bradford Museums and Galleries; *Aspen* 1985-88, *Llobregat* 1989-90, *Sprite* 1989-91 and *Serrata* 1994 were made there and exhibit the new element of forging pieces of steel, prior to welding them into abstract compositions that were increasingly robust and marked her particular individuality as strengths on which to build.

Of this group, *Leonide* is clearly based on the figure of a dancer. Two dancers in fact, who gave their names – Leonora and Edie – to the singular *Leonide*. However, the fact of the figure was not as important to Gili as her wish to develop a greater understanding of movement through looking at the anatomy of the figure in terms of abstraction and sculptural expression. For her, *Leonide* freed her from constraints of her past working practice. The other sculptures mentioned above exhibit the immediate effect of *Leonide* on their compositions – works that are vibrant and increasingly expressive.



Katherine Gili in her studio, 2017  
Photograph Anne Purkiss



Katherine Gili in her studio, 2017. Photograph Anne Purkiss



Still Life 2001



Lima 1993

Furthering her idea of getting to the essence of movement in her sculptures, Gili says that she had to find in them something more basic than the body, wanting a structure that is unique to a sculpture. We see, as her work progresses, that full movement flows through her compositions as she develops in them more pathways, through complex structures, peaking with the larger pieces, *Angouleme* 2006-09 and *Petiole* 2014-15. In the smaller *Twyblade* 2017-18 and *Escapade* of the same dates, the intensity increases.

Gili's journey, digested here, seems slow and considered, but her progress has always been accompanied by drawing and by working in a range of materials that feed further into her major works in steel, as she says, 'I turn to other materials when I feel I need them - working sideways'. From the early 2000s she began working in clay, which, unlike steel, offers no resistance to being worked. Finding that paper clay has a structural strength that allowed her to cross over to creating similar formations in steel, she was able to advance different sorts of flowing forms. Comparing the small paper clay sculptures *Still Life* 2001, *Trend* 2002, *Crossover* 2003 and *Anew* 2008, with the steel *Quicksap* 2016 and *Petiole*, it is possible to observe her intention.

The small bronzes also have a similar feel, although not as refined as the paper clay pieces, as the models for bronze are first worked in wax that is difficult to handle. If brittle, such as candlewax, wax breaks easily and softer wax may sag. Gili also works directly in paper to test ideas for sculpture, but examples of these are not included here.



Daedal 2009

When asked about naming her works, Gili says that most titles come after the sculptures are made. *Llobregat*, the name of a river in Catalonia - her father was Catalan, naturalised British - came as she thought the sound of the word seemed to go with the sculpture, as with *Twyblade* - the word for her seemed to be approachable. *Rise* 1979 came about because the sculpture seemed to lift off the ground, while the early *Cut Out* 1977 is obvious. In all, for Gili titles are just a means of identification.

When writing this text during the week before Christmas 2018 I received a card from the writer and poet, Andrew Lambirth. The final lines of his poem printed in the card were based on a painting by the artist John Blackburn, *Fire Painting II* 2017-18. Although Lambirth's words did not provide me with the title for Gili's exhibition, they did resonate.

*For man is born to making  
As the sparks fly upward,  
and come down slant.*

Ann Elliott  
December 2018



Escapade 2017-18



Leonide 1981-82



Duetta Series No.1 1996

Quicksap 2015



Photographs courtesy of the artist unless otherwise credited

## Exhibition Tour

Tuesday 12 February, 6.30 – 7.15pm

Curator Ann Elliott tours the exhibition with Katherine Gili.

Free but please contact Canary Wharf Public Art Office to reserve a place on 020 7418 2257 or email [publicart@canarywharf.com](mailto:publicart@canarywharf.com)

### LIST OF WORKS

Dimensions in centimetres, height x width x depth

#### Shift 1974

Mild steel, hot zinc spray, painted, waxed  
144 x 164 x 56

#### Splay 1974

Mild steel, hot zinc spray, painted, waxed  
145 x 120 x 120

#### Small Piece 1976

Mild steel, waxed  
39 x 29 x 26

#### Cut Out 1977

Mild Steel, hot zinc spray, painted, waxed  
193 x 104 x 96

#### Blow 1978-79

Mild steel, waxed  
187 x 100 x 88

#### Anther 1979

Mild steel  
60 x 77 x 70

#### Rise 1979

Mild steel, waxed  
90 x 98 x 60

#### Aquí 1981

Forged mild steel, varnished, waxed  
36 x 49 x 45

#### Leonide 1981-82

Forged mild steel, burnished paint  
157 x 92 x 94  
Courtesy Bradford Museums and Galleries, City of Bradford MDC

#### Aspen 1985-88

Forged mild steel, hot zinc spray, patinated, waxed  
65 x 63 x 50

#### Llobregat 1989-90

Forged mild steel, hot zinc spray, waxed  
54 x 56 x 74

#### Sprite 1989-91

Forged mild steel, hot zinc spray, patinated, waxed  
65 x 64 x 60

#### Serrata 1994

Forged mild steel, hot zinc spray, waxed  
152 x 97 x 91

#### Flow Free 2005

Forged mild steel, hot zinc spray, patinated, waxed  
54 x 70 x 40

#### Angouleme 2006-09

Forged mild steel, hot zinc spray, patinated, waxed  
166 x 134 x 128

#### Squinny 2007

Forged mild steel, waxed  
15 x 27 x 20

#### Daedal 2009

Forged mild steel, waxed  
42 x 67 x 35

#### Meril 2014

Forged mild steel, hot zinc spray, burnished graphite paint  
64 x 83 x 50

#### Mulled 2014

Forged mild steel, patinated, waxed  
45 x 48 x 38

#### Petiole 2014-15

Forged mild steel, hot zinc spray, patinated, waxed  
137 x 141 x 124

#### Quicksap 2016

Forged and welded mild steel, patinated, waxed  
46 x 29 x 40

#### Twyblade 2017-18

Bronze from paper original, edition 1/5  
48 x 49 x 37 cm

#### Escapade 2017-18

Forged mild steel, waxed  
81 x 100 x 65

### SMALL SCULPTURES

#### Still Life 2001

Fired paper clay, coloured, waxed  
25.5 x 18 x 13

#### Trend 2002

Fired paper clay, waxed  
13.5 x 41 x 17

#### Crossover 2003

Fired paper clay, waxed  
23 x 38 x 24

#### Anew 2008

Fired paper clay  
27.5 x 39 x 26

#### Split/Aliata 1991-92

Bronze from wax original, edition 3/3  
31 x 49 x 50

#### Lima 1993

Bronze from wax original, patinated, waxed, edition 2/5  
29 x 50 x 29

#### Duetta Series No. 1

1996  
Bronze from paper original, patinated, waxed, unique  
14 x 19 x 15

#### Duetta Series No. 6

1996  
Bronze from paper original, patinated, waxed, unique  
13 x 23 x 16

Most of the works are for sale. For enquiries please contact Felix & Spear at [www.felixandspear.com](http://www.felixandspear.com) or telephone 020 8566 1574.

**Katherine Gili** was born in 1948 in Oxford. She studied sculpture at Bath Academy of Art 1966 to 1970 and at Saint Martin's School of Art 1971 to 1973. From Saint Martin's she worked in a number of London studios before finally creating a studio in a vast agricultural building in rural Kent in 1994, where she works alongside her husband, the sculptor Robert Persey. In the early years of her career she taught at a number of art schools, most notably Saint Martin's and Norwich.

Her sculpture was first exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford in 1973, since when she has exhibited regularly in numerous group exhibitions and significant solo shows at the Serpentine Gallery, London 1977; the Salander-O'Reilly Gallery, New York 1981 and a career survey at the Poussin Gallery, London 2011. Solo exhibitions of her sculpture and drawings were shown at Felix & Spear, London in 2016 and 2018. Her work was shown at Canary Wharf in a group exhibition *Steel* 2006.

Gili's work is represented in the collections of the Arts Council of Great Britain; Bradford Museums and Galleries; City of Lugano, Switzerland and the General Electric Corporation, USA. There are also examples of her sculptures in private collections in Britain, Spain and the United States.

In 1999 Gili was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Sculptors and was awarded the Jack Goldhill Award for Sculpture in the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition 2013. She lives and works in Kent.

Katherine Gili is represented in London by the gallery Felix & Spear – we are grateful to the Director, Cameron Amiri, for his involvement in the exhibition. We also thank the photographer, Anne Purkiss for allowing us to use her photographs of Katherine Gili and her studio in Kent. Katherine also extends her sincere thanks to her husband Robert Persey for his help and encouragement.

For more information visit online: [katherinegili.com](http://katherinegili.com), [felixandspear.com](http://felixandspear.com) and [purkiss-images.eu](http://purkiss-images.eu)



**Aspen** 1985-88. Photograph Orlando Gili