

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution: University College London</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 34B – Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory: Fine Art</b>
<b>Title of case study: Phyllida Barlow: Shaping a new understanding of sculpture</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research conducted by Phyllida Barlow at the Slade has had direct and indirect impacts on the production of new art, on art professionals and the public in their relationship to and understanding of contemporary sculpture, and on the promotion of public engagement with cultural heritage. This was achieved through a series of high-profile exhibitions building on her research at UCL, which demonstrated impact through their increasing profile and public interest, responses to her research questions in the popular and specialist press, and through the critical recognition and artistic responses her work received, including acquisitions by major national and international collections.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Phyllida Barlow, now Professor Emerita, taught at the UCL Slade School from 1986 until her retirement in 2009. Initially part time, she became a full-time Lecturer in 1994 and was promoted to Reader in 1997, and to Professor of Fine Art in 2005, a position she held until retirement. Having worked as an artist since the late 1960s, her work has achieved great prominence over the last five years with the research between 1993 and 2009 representing a move towards an ‘anti-form’, which, being focused more on process and making than on final results, challenged earlier generations’ traditional aims of monumentality. While historically Barlow’s work can be seen as coming out of a trajectory of artists such as Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois (on whose work she is a recognised expert) her research particularly addressed questions about the relationship of sculpture to painting and drawing, to the spaces it occupies, and to its viewers. In those contexts she asked where sculpture goes and who it is ‘for’, examined distinctions between public and private activity, process and the act/s of making, and explored methods of encouraging audiences’ physical engagement in those acts. Barlow also investigated sculpture as an impermanent medium by employing quick processes in work with cheap, mundane materials, and by actively dismantling and recycling the finished works. All of these issues were explored through a series of exhibitions, lectures, projects and publications, notable examples of which are described below.</p> <p>The 1993 <i>Objects for...</i> series [a], in which she used improvised and found materials to respond to awkward domestic and non-Art spaces, underpinned much of Barlow’s subsequent work. Her interest in sculpture as an impermanent medium was reflected in and developed through <i>Untitled: Dallas</i> (2003) [b], for which Barlow used quick processes and worked with cheap, mundane materials to construct on-site works interrupting the vast 18x12m exhibition space. Her 2004 exhibition, <i>Peninsula</i> [c], also tested the use of cheap building materials including hardboard, polystyrene, tape, timber, and fabric combined with direct, on-site construction methods to produce sculptures exploiting the large exhibition space at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, where the ephemeral materials and quick methods of construction contrasted with the sculptures’ large scale. Barlow prompted the audience’s physical engagement in the act of viewing by locating her works in positions that encouraged viewers to look upwards, across, through and backwards. The balcony overlooking the space provided a view of the installation from the floor above, so that BALTIC’s own architecture also influenced the audience’s engagement with and experience of viewing <i>Peninsula</i>. This approach was re-employed in more recent exhibitions, most notably <i>RIG</i>, Hauser and Wirth (see Section 4).</p> <p>These methods of construction and approach to exploring the relationship between sculpture, painting, space and viewer were further developed in <i>SKIT</i> (2005), a 7-sculpture installation commissioned for the two spaces of the Norman Foster-designed Bloomberg Space [d]. Here, Barlow explored the theatricality of the building’s glass-fronted space by using its 10m height to create another work constructed on site, whose rough and crudely painted appearance deliberately contrasted with the building’s corporate architecture. This structure explored a spontaneous process of assemblage using specially made components of roughly shaped and painted polystyrene, foam and canvas and large quantities of paper, fabric and polythene bunting, which were thrown over a disparate cluster of painted timber lengths reaching up to the ceiling.</p> <p>Barlow’s commitment to using her research to address wider debates about the act of ‘making’ is evident in her initiation of and contribution to the 2007–9 Arts Council-funded project, <i>What do Artists Do?</i>. Set up to establish an environment where she and a group of artists could engage with</p>

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the processes of making without any expectation that work would be produced at their end, *What do Artists Do?* was not intended to culminate in an exhibition (although it did, in fact, eventually form the basis of *SWITCH*, 2012, the inaugural show at BALTIC 39) [e]. Rather, it documented the usually invisible – but nevertheless essential – activities through which artists produce work. Broader issues about the nature and role of sculptural work were also explored in *STINT*, 2008 [f], a major new commission for the Mead Gallery. As noted in the press release for its catalogue, *STINT* questioned “the nature and role of the sculptural object in contemporary culture, utilising an extensive, fluid vocabulary and immense enthusiasm for engaging with the physical ‘stuff’ of the world”.

Throughout this highly active research period, Barlow articulated her research themes and insights through talks, interviews and essays exploring her position on her own practice, the subject of sculpture more broadly, and the work of other artists, including Louise Bourgeois. A number of these were published in her monograph *Objects for...and Other Things*, 2004 [a].

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[a] BARLOW, P. (1993–1999) *Objects for...*, [Series of sculptural works] Various locations. Documented in BARLOW, P. (2009) *Objects for... and Other Things* [Monograph] London: Black Dog Publishing. Available on request.

[b] BARLOW, P. (2003) *Untitled: Dallas*. [Solo exhibition] University of Texas at Dallas, USA. Commissioned for McDermott Artist in Residency. Associated lectures published in: BARLOW, P. (2006); *Aspects of Sculpture*; *Lost for Words* In: Pollock, G. & Corby, V. *Encountering Eva Hesse*. London & Munich: Prestel. Submitted to RAE 2008.

[c] BARLOW, P. (2004–05) *Peninsula*. [Solo exhibition]. BALTIC, Gateshead; [Exhibition talk]. BARLOW, P. (25.11.2004) *In conversation: Sacha Craddock with Phyllida Barlow* [Exhibition talk]; BARLOW, P. (2004) *Phyllida Barlow: Peninsula* [Catalogue] BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art; BARLOW, P. (2004) *Peninsula* [DVD] BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. Submitted to RAE 2008.

[d] BARLOW, P. (2005) *SKIT* [Solo exhibition] Bloomberg Space, Finsbury Square, London. Submitted to RAE 2008.

[e] BARLOW, P. (2012) *SWITCH* [Curated exhibition] BALTIC 39; *What do Artists Do?* 2007–9. Arts Council funded research project (£35,000 Grants for the Arts, July 2007) <http://whatdoartistsdo.blogspot.co.uk/2008/04/introduction.html>

[f] BARLOW, P. (2008) *STINT*. [Solo exhibition] Mead Gallery, University of Warwick. SIMPSON, R. (2008) *Phyllida Barlow: STINT* [Catalogue] Mead Gallery, University of Warwick. Available on request.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Rooted in over 20 years of research at the Slade, Phyllida Barlow’s approach to sculpture represents a new and appropriate response to an age of austerity. Her choice of materials – recycled and taken from familiar, non-art, urban contexts, and her use of paint – is one of the ways that her work promotes new forms of engagement with sculpture, including debate about its value. She creates a dialogue/tension between the experience of the sculpture in the gallery and the everyday, familiar experience and visual vocabulary of non-art objects and materials in the urban space outside. The scale, impermanence, site specificity and precariousness of her work expand on this tension.

Since her retirement in October 2009, Barlow has continued to develop and meditate on the same research questions and themes she formulated during her time at UCL. As an *Evening Standard* review of her 2011 show at Hauser and Wirth notes: “There is... an energy about Barlow’s exhibitions that evokes an art that has been honed over several decades and suddenly unleashed” [1]. The outputs of her underpinning research delivered a range of benefits including Barlow’s **development of original art and support for innovative forms of artistic expression**. The impacts of her work extend to public discussion and debate about the value of sculpture, prompted in part by her creation of dialogue and tension between experiencing sculpture in the gallery, and the everyday, familiar experience and visual vocabulary of non-art objects and materials in the urban space. The development and exhibition of her work and its capacity to engage public audiences in new ways has **contributed both to the general cultural life in the UK and abroad, and to the success of the cultural and artistic organisations at which her work is shown**.

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Her receipt in 2007 of the prestigious Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Award for Artists enabled Barlow's further development of the practices for which she is now well known. These resulted, during the period leading up to and following her retirement, in a significant series of exhibitions and commissions emerging directly from her Slade research. Those exhibitions **enhanced the offering provided by the cultural and artistic organisations** in which they have been shown, where they have reached and **contributed to the visitor experiences** of very wide public audiences. Notable examples include *STINT*, [f, above]; *STACK*, Southbank Centre, London, 2008 (Southbank Centre average daily footfall 50k) [2]; *BRAKE*, One in the Other Gallery, London, 2009; *SWAMP*, V22, London 2010; *BLUFF*, Studio Voltaire, London 2010; *STREET*, Bawag Contemporary, Vienna, Austria 2010; *Nairy Baghramian and Phyllida Barlow*, Serpentine Gallery, London 2010; and *CAST*, Kunstverein Nürnberg, Germany 2011.

Since 2010, Barlow has been represented by major international commercial gallery Hauser and Wirth, at whose London space she presented the critically acclaimed solo show *RIG* in 2011. This drew upon the research methods she developed earlier in its use of everyday materials, in its approach to scale and in engaging with each nook and cranny of the wide range of spaces in the Piccadilly building, from basement safe to attic. *RIG* appeared soon after her 2010 Serpentine Gallery show, in which Barlow and her co-exhibitor, Nairy Baghramian, presented a dialogue between two different, yet related, positions on contemporary sculpture. The exhibition, which attracted 43,893 visitors (averaging over 1,100 per day), drew significant public attention to key questions explored in her research [3], and both *RIG* and the Serpentine show were important channels for the communication of Barlow's research insights to a wider audience, and for engaging that audience in contemporary conversations about the nature of sculpture. In addition, it engaged an already art-interested audience. Moreover, the Serpentine exhibition was accompanied by activities for traditionally harder-to-reach audiences, including a series of 16 workshops with a total of 492 participants; of these, two were for the New River College Pupil Referral Unit (for children excluded from education) and four for Open Age, a charity for older people in Westminster.

The impact of Barlow's work on public engagement with issues raised in her research has been extended through coverage in media discourse about contemporary art. *BRAKE*, for example, was reviewed in the *Guardian*, and *RIG* received widespread media coverage, including an interview in the *Financial Times* and reviews on many blogs and in the *Evening Standard* [1]. Naming it his exhibition of the week, Ben Luke wrote in the latter: "You'd never describe the sculptures of this remarkable artist as figurative, they are resolutely abstract, and yet by throwing together base and artless materials into dramatic gestures in the gallery space, she manages to evoke so eloquently what it is to inhabit a human body making its way through the world" [1]. The Serpentine exhibition itself, and the socio-cultural and artistic issues it raised, also received widespread popular and critical attention, with national and international media coverage including in the *Independent*, *Guardian*, *Sunday Times*, *Sculpture* and *Art Review* [4]. *Siege*, Barlow's first solo show in New York (May–June 2012) [5], was shown at the New Museum, Manhattan's only dedicated contemporary art museum, and was extremely well received both in the *New York Times* and elsewhere. *Hyperallergic*, a top New York arts 'blog-zine' with 250,000 unique visitors per month, welcomed this 'Lesson from an Unknown Master' and called her art "amongst the best we have" [5]. Massimiliano Gioni, Associate Director and Director of Exhibitions at the New Museum went on to include Barlow's work in *The Encyclopedic Palace*, the centrepiece exhibition of the 55th Venice Biennale (1 June–24 November 2013) for which he was Artistic Director.

Despite her emphasis on impermanence, ephemeral materials and recycling, Barlow's work is now much in demand among collectors internationally and has thus provided a **significant contribution to global cultural heritage**. A number of works were acquired by important national and international public collections. The Contemporary Art Society, who gifted 3 works (with support from the Art Fund) to Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery in 2012, described her practice as reflecting "a distinct new direction in contemporary sculpture" [6]. Eleven works on paper (made between 1990–2006) were purchased by Tate in 2012 and 2 sculptural works from *SWAMP* were purchased by the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich in 2010; [6]. Other collections which have acquired Barlow's work include The Government Art Collection (2011); Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen (2012) and the Henry Moore Institute (2012).

Barlow has made influential **contributions to professional and artistic practice** in terms of the



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contemporary practice and curation of sculpture. Her 2007 project *What do artists do?* [e, above], which drew together 16 artists (including three Slade colleagues), generated discussion and debate about the nature of artistic ‘making’ among artists as well as more widely. The increasing acceptance by and influence among art professionals of her reconceptualisation of the nature and role of sculpture is demonstrated by the curation and promotion of her work by three of the world’s most influential museum directors, who share an interest in questions around sculpture: Hans Ulrich Obrist (Serpentine Gallery); Kaspar König included her in his last exhibition at the Museum Ludwig, Cologne; and Massimiliano Gioni (New Museum), who included her in the 55th Venice Biennale as described earlier [7]. It is also demonstrated by her election to the Royal Academy in 2011 and awards including in 2012 the Award for the Most Significant Contribution to the Development of Contemporary Art at the First Kyiv International Biennale of Contemporary Art, Ukraine (135k visitors) [8] as well as the award to her in May 2012 of the Aachen Art Prize, given bi-annually to an artist ‘whose works have continually given new impetus to the international art scene’. In making the award, note was made specifically of the ‘forceful connection to place’ in Barlow’s work [9]. Explaining the jury’s decision to make the award, the Director of the Ludwig Forum described Barlow as “...somebody who was developing in such an interesting way a new term of what sculpture could be, in the very differentiated realm of the contemporary world. She’s somebody who is relating in her thinking to sculpture as well as art theory as well as to notions of what might public-ness be today: what is a city, how is society developing?” [9]. In early summer 2013 it was announced that Phyllida Barlow had been selected for both the prestigious 2013 Carnegie International and the Tate Britain Duveen Galleries Commission 2014 [7].

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [1] For local and national press coverage of RIG see: *Evening Standard*, ‘Exhibition of the week’, 1 Sept 2011 (circ. Aug-Oct 2011: 702k; <http://www.abc.org.uk/Certificates/17261584.pdf>) and *Financial Times*, ‘This time it’s permanent’, 3–4 September, 2011 (circ. Sep 2011: 345k). For Guardian coverage of BRAKE: <http://gu.com/p/27ee4/> (circ. 233k). Circulation data from <http://www.theguardian.com/media/table/2011/oct/14/abcs-national-newspapers>. PDFs available on request.
- [2] Figures from Southbank Centre Annual Review 08/09 p. 3 <http://tinyurl.com/kmkqnspl>
- [3] The Serpentine Gallery’s Senior Public Programmes Curator may be contacted to confirm the number of visitors to the 2010 Serpentine show and the range of outreach programmes.
- [4] For examples of national media coverage of the Serpentine show see: *The Guardian* (<http://gu.com/p/2hxcp>), ‘Sculpture’s lost in the third dimension’, Jonathan Jones 12 May 2010 (circulation: 300k); *Sunday Times* (<http://tinyurl.com/pczpuhp>), ‘Nairy Baghramian and Phyllida Barlow’ Waldemar Januszczak 16 May 2010 (circulation: 1.1m); and *The Independent* (<http://tinyurl.com/oc3uqdc>), ‘Curatorial coup: Nairy Baghramian and Phyllida Barlow share a show at the Serpentine’, 13 May 2010 (circulation: 194k). Circ. data from Sundays: <http://www.theguardian.com/media/table/2010/jun/11/abcs-national-newspapers1>; Dailies: <http://www.theguardian.com/media/table/2010/jun/11/abcs-national-newspapers>; *Sculpture*. ‘Phyllida Barlow’. July/Aug 2011, vol. 30, no. 6; and *Art Review* ‘Feature: Phyllida Barlow’. March 2010, pp. 72–77.
- [5] Coverage of SIEGE see *New York Times* (<http://nyti.ms/1exOd2t>), ‘Women on the verge of everything’, Dorothy Spears, 31 May 2012 (Circulation April–Sep 2012: 1.6m); and *Hyperallergic* (<http://bit.ly/PKQgDQ>), ‘Lessons from an unknown master: Phyllida Barlow at the New Museum’ 22 June 2012. The site attracts over 250k unique visitors per month, with an engaged community of tens of thousands on social media: <http://hyperallergic.com/advertise/>. PDFs available on request.
- [6] Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst website <http://bit.ly/1dYzHR7>; Contemporary Art Society website <http://bit.ly/1cOdckT>; Tate website <http://bit.ly/1iZDPR7>. PDFs are available on request.
- [7] The Curator, Tate Modern may be contacted to confirm the influence of Barlow’s work on curators.
- [8] Kyiv International Biennale of Contemporary Art website <http://bit.ly/17qAbjp>.
- [9] Aachen Art Prize: [http://www.ludwigforum.de/kunstpreis/kp\\_2012\\_phyllida\\_barlow/index.html](http://www.ludwigforum.de/kunstpreis/kp_2012_phyllida_barlow/index.html). The Director of the Ludwig Forum may be contacted to confirm the content of a telephone interview with her (9 April 2013) about the influence of Barlow’s work on the art world.