

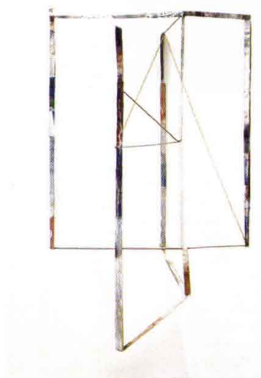
LONDON

Sara Barker

STUART SHAVE/MODERN ART

Sara Barker's thoughtful, delicate constructions of wire, metal, and canvas were the quietest, slowest objects on view in London this Olympic summer. Standing on the floor at approximately human height, or wall-mounted and appearing more like architectural features, they resounded with a strong, independent voice. Barker is indifferent to refinement of fabrication, expensive or seductive materials, or any overt hankering after spectacular effect; in this sense, her work offers a real contrast to the high-spec, high-tech sculpture so common today. In *Draft overlapped* (all works 2012), for example, an aluminum structure is twisted and buckled, cut by hand with snips and pushed into place to make the join. Canvas strips don't quite meet the edges of the metal support, coming unstuck.

Sara Barker, *Draft overlapped*, 2012, oil paint, canvas, steel, brass, aluminum, metal filler, glass, 40 1/2 x 24 3/4 x 18 3/4".



Barker's emphasis on a rough materiality and adhoc construction is not an end in itself; she marshals these materials and processes to produce work with a surprisingly gentle and introspective tone. One, *Woman at a Window*, refers to a well-known painting by Caspar David Friedrich showing a woman in an interior gazing out a window, and it

set the romantic, introverted feeling for the other works in the exhibition. This piece is constructed from thin strips of roughly cut aluminum and filament-like metal rods, soldered, bolted, or riveted together. Other works, such as *Adolescent*, incorporate strips of canvas attached to metal structures, gently painted with washes and splashes of earth and lake colors. In other works, Barker uses watercolor to add to the sense that they have been constructed from scraps and leftovers. Her restrained palette—British-landscape tones, it might be said—underlines the sense of a fenestrated vista, the narrow passages of color like thin reflections of daylight in the mitered edge of a glass pane. Each construction evokes something different: *Adolescent* looks a bit like an expanded wire-frame model of an architectural feature; the roughness of *Woman at a Window* may in turn bring to mind an ersatz habitat,

a customized outhouse, or a writer's den, but as architectural survivals, in a state of permanent dilapidation.

Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they were sketches rather than finished models. Indeed, their highly attractive thinness made them seem hardly there—and indeed, hardly sculptures, but rather drawings and paintings in space, relying on taut lines and gentle planes. One might suspect an affinity with the wire sculptures of Eva Rothschild, but Barker's is an entirely different sensibility, less obviously à la mode. And like sketches, the works often seemed to refer to something beyond themselves: for example, the domestic themes in modernist literature—the psychological interiors of Virginia Woolf, say—that Barker claims as points of departure. These themes were subtly indicated by her titles, without creating any overbearingly literal references. Barker has wisely avoided the trend toward gnomic, over-determined titles that nowadays are rife. If anything, there is a flavor in Barker's work of end-of-season nostalgia for literature as a backdrop for painting and sculpture—we feel the vagueness of the connection, a hollowness, perhaps, that is the empty essence of these works. This nostalgia may have been reiterated once too often in this small display, and there were some dubious judgments; for instance, displaying two upright works, *Nature-builder* and *Love letter*, on mirrored plinths seemed to undermine the brittle and delicate airiness of the objects. Still, one left eager to see the next steps in the evolution of Barker's work, which shows such a fine and individual sensibility.

—John-Paul Stonard