



In the studio: Sara Barker, sculptor

'You can make mistakes here, but you can't get away with not taking risks'

Karen Wright

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Sara Barker works at the top of a curving flight of stairs in downtown Glasgow next door to her gallery, Mary Mary. Born in 1980 in Manchester, Barker is a graduate of history of art at the University of Glasgow and of painting at the Glasgow School of Art. She joined the gallery run by artist Hannah Robinson, whom she met while they were fellow students. Barker admits that living in Glasgow is good for her. Artists are encouraged to experiment: "You can make mistakes here, but you can't get away with not taking risks."

I ask if it is difficult to work so close to her gallery and Barker replies, "No, they listen when I say it is not a good moment to come and see the work." It took a residency and job at nearby Cove Park, as well as that of her husband Tim Facey to give her the "confidence to pursue art as a full time career".

Barker's studio is filled with small sculptures destined for her forthcoming show. In their painterly flourishes there is ample visual evidence that Barker trained as a painter before turning to sculpture.

"I want that impossibility of drawing. I want that top-heaviness and precariousness."

Her works purposefully seem to defy gravity, part of her determination to look for "impossibility", and to push the materials as far as she can. Their delicacy and deliberate awkwardness is balanced by a strength that reflects her historical artistic heroes – Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois and Matisse, her "default artist that all artists who study history of art return to for his looseness, gestural qualities and sense of colour". She also looks to contemporaries such as Hayley Tompkins and Cathy Wilkes, artists dealing with the issues of "provisionality" that she is pursuing herself.

Patterns, a co-commission with the Edinburgh Arts Festival and Jupiter Art Land, is her first outdoor work, and is "uncompromised": "They said I could make exactly what I wanted to make." The piece was inspired by a poem by Amy Lowell, Barker tells me on the way to see the work in situ. Seen in the woody glade where it is sensitively sited, I am impressed by how the delicacy and fragility of the works of the studio have not been lost in this larger-scale work.

The glass reflecting the leafy ferns reminds me of the dress from Lowell's poem that she has described to me, the structure "allowing negative spaces to enter the work". There is an element of the figurative here, along with the feeling of "drawing in space" of the great Modernist American artist David Smith. Yet the language at the end is uniquely hers, a blend of femininity with a strong sense of graceful purposefulness.

Barker has a solo show scheduled at the Fruitmarket, Edinburgh, in 2016, and next year will be part of Generation – 25 Years of Contemporary Art in Scotland at GoMa in Glasgow. A bright future is predicted for this woman who lives in a tough city where "breakdown is breakthrough".

Sara Barker: Patterns, Jupiter Artland, Edinburgh (01506 889900) to 15 September; Sara Barker: The Things That Are Solid, Absorbed and Still, Mary Mary, Glasgow (0141 226 2257) 7 September to 26 October