

Rising stars of 2015: artist Sara Barker

The Glasgow-based sculptor of delicate metal and glass structures hopes to build on a successful year with shows in Edinburgh and Birmingham

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Sunday 28 December 2014 09.00 GMT

Sara Barker loves the physicality of art. Fitting, therefore, that aspects of her somehow merge with her sculptures: vibrancy in the luminous blue eyes; elegance in the long body lines; a gentleness that chimes with the fragility of her delicate metal work. "I like to stretch materials to their most poignant state where they can't stand any longer and take on a kind of humanness," she explains in her Glasgow studio.

Barker, who had a highly successful solo show this year at Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art, wants spectators to feel that humanity when they view her structures of metal, paint, brass and glass. "All I've ever really wanted my work to do, physically and emotionally, is reverberate with people, be powerful, which is probably why I make sculpture at all. It's that human physicality that is sort of looming, that is bigger than you. You have to be in it, or surrounded by it, or overwhelmed by it."

Art stretched Barker herself to the limits. Brought up on the Isle of Man, she saw it as a way of widening her vision. Yet it also seemed a burden, so she chose university before transferring to art school. "I was so passionate about it but that kind of life didn't particularly appeal, being obsessive and introspective. Hands covered in paint... always thinking so deeply about things... I just wanted to be something else. But it chooses you really."

Barker's sculptures start with drawings. A better drawer than painter, she likes the spontaneity, the provisional nature, of sketching, always retaining something of her first impulses in the final work. Other art forms inspire her. "Often I draw on female writers like Gertrude Stein, Doris Lessing, Virginia Woolf, who write about their own creative space. I always felt that space was a metaphor for creative freedom and was something I wanted to make work about. Often, dealing with glass and big metal works and welded structures, it's something you feel confronted by. Who made this work? Was it a man or a woman?"

Barker became a mother this year and looks forward to new emotional possibilities emerging in her work. She has two shows lined up for 2015, at Edinburgh's Fruitmarket and Birmingham's Ikon gallery, plus a string of major private commissions including one for the Cass Sculpture Foundation. She used to be a martyr to art, she laughs. "I think I thought it had to be hard and miserable for anything to be any good." Success has brought confidence and happiness. "It's definitely the right thing for me to do. It's a privilege."