

James Balmforth

Release Mechanisms

11 June - 31 July 2016

“Materials are information-bearing: they have inner constitutions with inbuilt tendencies; concealed aspects of their structure that dictate how they behave and interact. Tools and processes are information disclosing: their influence and application can reveal the structural properties, hidden qualities and embedded characteristics ... offering a glimpse into the inner life of materials.”

James Balmforth's works are the outcome of an ongoing exploration and negotiation with materials, processes and transformation.

This exhibition presents a group of new sculpture in combination with two memorable early video works - *Systems of Remembering and Forgetting* (2007) and *The Consumptive Sublime* (2009). The installation seeks to highlight the associative potential of the artist's work and in it the play of language across medium and message.

Key to approaching the sculptures is an awareness of their confrontation of the organic and technological worlds, the interplay of biological and mechanical systems, and a consideration of thresholds, margins of tolerance, moments of transformation and their resultant forms or outcomes.

The title of the show, *Release Mechanisms*, relates to Balmforth's focus on using sculpture and sculptural processes to draw out threads of material properties and capabilities, and to explore symbolic mechanisms.

Several of Balmforth's most recent sculptures are made using a thermal lance, a technique that has never been explored in sculptural production. It developed in post-industrial society as a heavy-duty demolition tool used to destroy large-scale industrial equipment such as cranes, ships, and bridges. The lance technique uses pure oxygen to burn steel tubes at extraordinarily high temperatures. By varying the heat and velocity of the reaction and adjusting the material composition of the fuel rods it is possible to achieve a broad range of effects on the material and thereby understand the limitations and potential of both the process and material.

Balmforth's discovery of the thermal lance has unlocked a new mode of expression for the artist, and the works made with it in the exhibition make legible an artist constantly attuning his particular language system and developing a deeply personal material correspondence.

The artist's practice celebrates process and implements a diverse range of materials manipulated using highly sophisticated and innovative (sometimes verging on alchemical) techniques. The result is a body of work that questions understandings of material reality and tests the physical limitations and chemical components of his chosen medium. One could consider his process constructive, but often his resulting sculpture serves to dismantle meaning, by placing technique and medium at the service of phenomenological – rather than purely formal – application.