





NOT EVEN NOTHING CAN BE FREE OF GHOSTS

Frances Richardson

Cover: Frances Richardson, *We have never been modern: Goodhope*, 2018. Back cover: Frances Richardson, *This dry feeling will pass* (detail), 2018.

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Introduction

Cross Lane Projects is proud to welcome the Mark Tanner Sculpture Award 2017/18 exhibition as it travels outside of London for the first time. This major UK sculpture award rewards innovative and outstanding practice by emerging artists working in the field of sculpture – we're thrilled to take the initiative in sharing the art practice it supports with audiences across the North of the country.

Frances Richardson's exhibition has been developed over the period of a year, as the 15th winner of the award.

Marking a significant development in her practice, the exhibition *Not even nothing can be free of ghosts*¹ presents a group of new works referencing the image of water and water's metaphorical use to suggest state of mind. The artist is fascinated by the potential of things and places to hold information that is not explicit or measurable by traditional observation.

Symmetry and mirrorings are present in many works in the exhibition. The artist is interested in dualities, and, in particular, investigates a splitting between the sense one can get from being with an object or place, and its measurable qualities. Her art practice aims to provoke a visceral as well as an intellectual response in the viewer.

Richardson's approach to sculpture draws out and exposes inherent properties in materials – wood, veneer, video and copper – and the language of making. As she puts it: "The material, and the way that you process the material, is integral to the spirit and meaning of the piece."

¹ The title of this exhibition is borrowed from an essay, *What is the measure of Nothingness; Infinity Virtuality Justice*, written by Karen Barad, *100 notes DOCUMENTA (13) Erschienen im Hatje Cantz Verlag* p.12

Frances Richardson (born 1965, Leeds, UK) received her MA in Fine Art Sculpture from the Royal College of Art, London in 2006. Previous to this she studied BA (Hons) Fine Art at Norwich School of Art and Design, Norwich. Richardson exhibits both nationally and internationally. Key solo exhibitions include: *In times of brutal instability*, Chiara Williams Contemporary Art, London Art Fair 2018, *Performed object: Fig.090616*, Concrete Canvas, Trefforest Industrial Estate, Cardiff 2016, *Loss of object and bondage to it Fig.2*, Bermondsey Square Sculpture Commission, Vitrine Gallery, London 2015, *Loss of object and bondage to it*, Lubomirov-Easton, London 2014 and *Ideas in the Making: drawing structure*, Trinity Contemporary, London 2011. Richardson was awarded the Chiara Williams Contemporary Art SOLO AWARD 2017 and nominated for the Max Mara Art Prize for Women 2015-17 in collaboration with Whitechapel Gallery.

The Mark Tanner Sculpture Award is one of the most significant awards for emerging artists working in the field of sculpture in the UK. Offering £8,000 towards the making of new work, it rewards outstanding and innovative practice, with a particular interest in work that demonstrates a commitment to process, or sensitivity to material. Richardson was selected by a panel comprising British artist Alison Wilding RA, British Sculptor Denise de Cordova, MTSA trustee Rebecca Scott and MTSA winner 2016/17 Beth Collar. The Mark Tanner Sculpture Award exhibition is coordinated by Standpoint, and tours to Cross Lane Projects after exhibition at Standpoint Gallery in London in May/June 2018.

Mark Tanner was a British Sculptor who trained at St. Martin's College of Art and had been associated with Standpoint since its inception. He worked mainly in steel, and was one of the first artists to show in Standpoint Gallery. He died in 1998 after a long illness. The Award was established in 2001, on the initiative of and with full sponsorship from a private charitable trust, to keep alive the passion and enthusiasm he had for the making of art.

Frances Richardson in conversation

Standpoint Gallery, June 2018

An edited text of Frances Richardson in conversation with Luce Garrigues, curator, and Javier Pes, UK News Editor Artnet, discussing her recent Mark Tanner Sculpture Award Show: *Not even nothing can be free of ghosts* during its first presentation at Standpoint Gallery, London.

J: Javier Pes, F: Frances Richardson, L: Luce Garrigues, Q: questioner.

J: Frances, tell us, how did you approach winning the Mark Tanner Sculpture Award?

F: The first thing I did on receiving the Award was to measure up the gallery space at Standpoint, to get to know it and make a model for the studio. I'm often drawn to working with a space, more often than not its architecture, but aside from the complex offering of five areas, the overriding thing I came away with was the feeling that I could smell water there.

I found out later that the River Walbrook actually runs under the gallery - one of the subterranean rivers of London - and I started to ask myself, what is this potential that things and places have to hold information that is not explicit or measurable with a ruler?

L: Can you say something about the title of the exhibition?

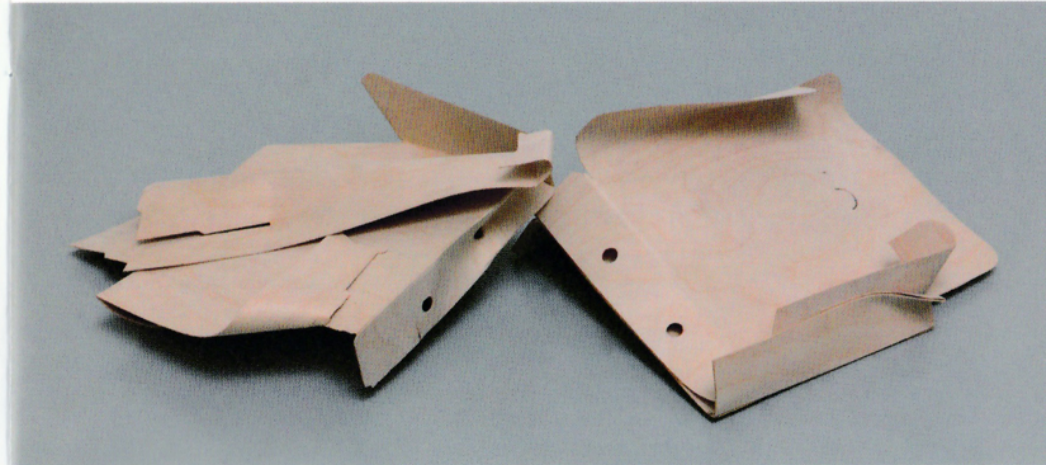
F: The title 'Not even nothing can be free of ghosts' is a quote from Karen Barad. She writes about measurements as agential practices, "the agencies of observation being inseparable from the observed". Measuring is something we do in order to understand the world around us, how and what we measure with exposes more than just the thing under investigation.

J: We are starting this talk outside the gallery at your request, as you are keen to talk about the placing of work.



F: I'm deliberate about placing the work. In the studio, as a group of works emerge a complex web of relationships form. When placing the pieces into another space you can reinforce or disable these links whilst also dealing with the encounter. Here at Standpoint the encounter is pretty linear and starts outside with a piece in the window...

J: The very first work we see is 'Split object', which is based on an observation of what most would consider trash.

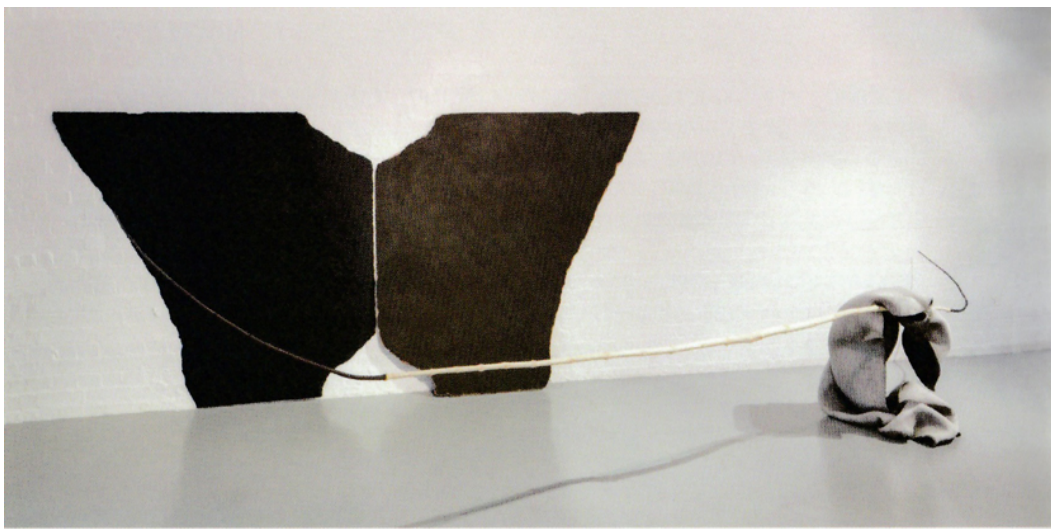


F: On the street near my studio I picked up a paper object that I thought was interesting, I liked the folds. Then there was another similar piece 200 yards away. Looking at them together some weeks later, I realised that they were part of the same object - a pizza box that had peeled apart to appear as two separate things; but it is not, it is one.

L: You are into boxes! You have to tell us about this. You study the outside of the boxes, the way they are made, and also the space inside the box.

F: Yes, I've made images of boxes before; in making a box out of another material, I'm measuring it with that material. In the process a translation takes place; there is a dialogue between the material I am using and the familiar structure of the box being observed.

For this new body of work I wanted to make objects that retain an independence from the space they are in. Boxes and their contents retain a sense of autonomy; they are understood as transitory objects so it seemed a natural starting point to refer back to the image of a box,



but here the purpose of using the image is different to before. In 'Boxes for thinking about opening', the work I made for Trinity Contemporary exhibition in 2011, I was interested in the unobserved enclosure inside the box. In 'Split object', I'm considering the idea that an object can exist in a discontinuous space, that is, it can exist singularly in two places.

- L: It is interesting that you are using different materials, moving away from MDF, in this show. In these works there is a reminder of all the techniques you have used before but you have returned to using wood, which you told me you were not going to do!
- F: Well, yes, a leap of faith! I dismissed wood as too seductive for a long while, but I began to need materials that would articulate certain ideas and MDF wasn't sufficient, it's too neutral. Plywood, for example, is spun off a tree in one layer so you get the same bit of the tree grain appearing repeatedly. I use this figuring to visually link the two halves of 'Split object', to indicate they are part of a whole.

When I was in Nigeria I trained with a Yoruba carver and we made Ibeji, twin figures. The two separate figures start as one piece of wood. The material, and the way that you process the material, is integral to the spirit and meaning of the piece. Whether people see it or not, it is there... but it's really important for me that nothing is hidden, that the idea is visible: it's the content of the work, the image is just the carrier.

- J: As we move into the gallery, I want everyone to make the leap from Nigeria to Wales, and a particular place, the birthplace of 'Divider'.

F: I go quite a bit to Goodhope near Fishguard in Wales; there is no mobile signal and no wi-fi. There is a standing stone, a menhir, and you feel connected to humanity in another way. The Ash saplings for 'Divider' came from the top of the lane. Ash wood grows straight... in the right conditions. 'Aesc' the Old English and 'Fraxinus' the Latin for Ash both mean spear. Ash is a strong and flexible wood, traditionally used to make tools. It has opposing branching, reflective of a N-S and E-W compass axis. I had the intention of putting them end to end from the start and wanted the stick to hover marking a horizontal level, some kind of diviner. It wasn't until much later when I finished the piece that I recognised the image of the compass and the folds of fabric to be reminiscent of Albrecht Dürer's print 'Melancholia I'.

L: Knowing Frances, she's always working with a classic piece of work in her mind that will motivate her, give her a rhythm and locate an emotional resonance.

F: Yes, 'Melancholia I' was the muse I couldn't shake off. There is a sense of speculative searching in the image, searching for an answer to something that perhaps can't be measured.

J: It's interesting there is a sort of prosaic approach you have to materials that results in the unexpected.

F: Yes, you could say that... 'Eidolon' for instance... I found a piece of chipboard on the street in Deptford and there was just something about it... It made me wonder what is it that makes something recognizable, particular, particular enough to be a thing... or intriguing enough for me to take it to the studio and not throw it away for three years! Eidolon is a Greek word for object and applies equally to an idea and a thing. I made a mirror image of the board in paper as a way of getting to know it. The two sit together in a kind of Rorschach... a death moth ...or are they wings?



J: In terms of titles, this amazing work here 'This dry feeling will pass' has the most literal reference to water. Frances what is this material you've used? You see it catching and reflecting the light.

F: Essentially it's wood and copper, like this the copper is sold as "slug tape" ... it's made to use on garden pots! I've use copper several times in the show, it is an elemental metal, it has a real beauty to it, it's quite special. It doesn't react with water that's why we use it for plumbing, it's so prevalent we've created huge networks of this material but we kind of take it for granted.



Q: What is the wood? Have you had it specially cut?

F: Walnut, the trees are very hardy against drought. And, no, they sell it like this in 19mm x 19mm square cut lengths. I struggled with it initially; it wasn't giving me much to work with. Then after a time in the studio I noticed it bending, resisting the ideal of the square cut straight length.

'This dry feeling will pass' is actually the last piece I made, the one that breaks out of symmetry and not stuck looking at itself. The title is a quote from Leon Battista Alberti, consoling the melancholic.

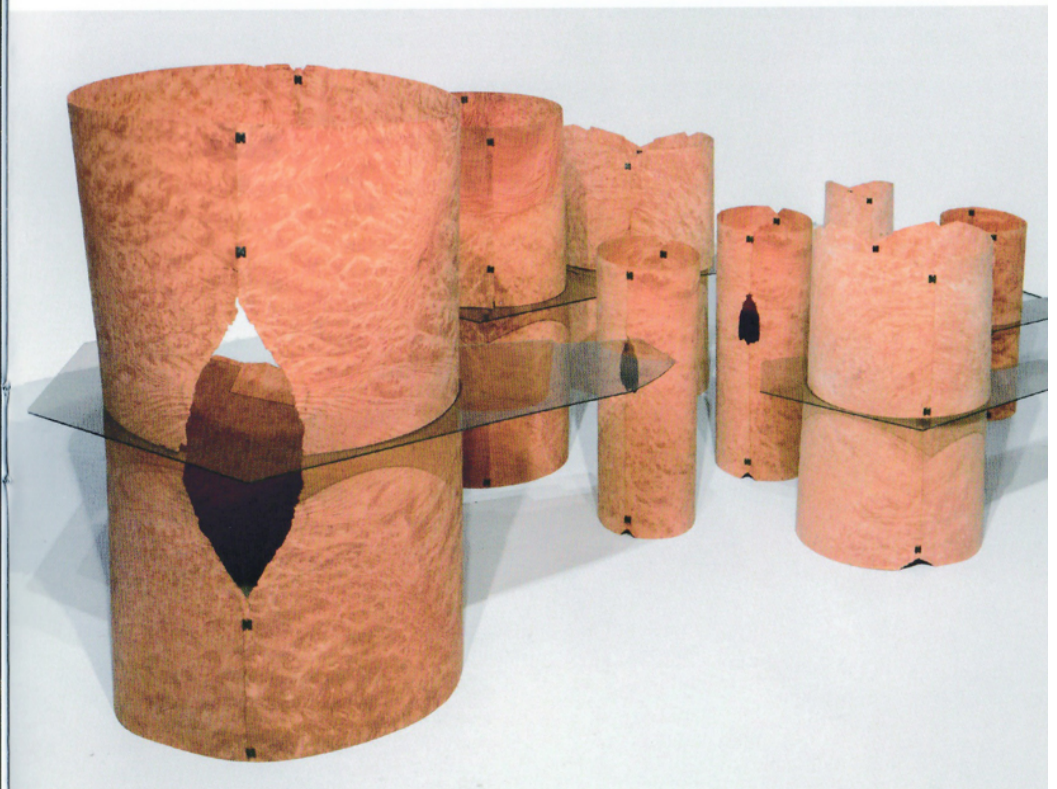
Here the piece sits in relation to 'What beauty is I know not', the only





literal image of water. The video clip is edited to move forward and in reverse, endlessly, stuck. The title is a quote from Dürer.

- J: I can now see it, but it's such a contrast from, well, I can think of plenty of artists and it would be waterfalls, cascades... Luce, you've just come from an art fair, one of the alpha art fairs in the world, Art Basel in Switzerland, where every booth is shouting at you. This is kind of the opposite...
- L: That's something you do a lot in your practice Frances, you want people to be with the work and stay with the work, to feel present with the work, to create an intimacy.
- F: I think it takes probably about three - four minutes to tune in. Slowing down allows one to be vulnerable to actually exploring those senses that take us beyond what is seen.
- J: The next piece we come to is the madrone wood veneer, metal and Perspex work 'Not all temporary objects can be avoided', a wonderfully poetic title.



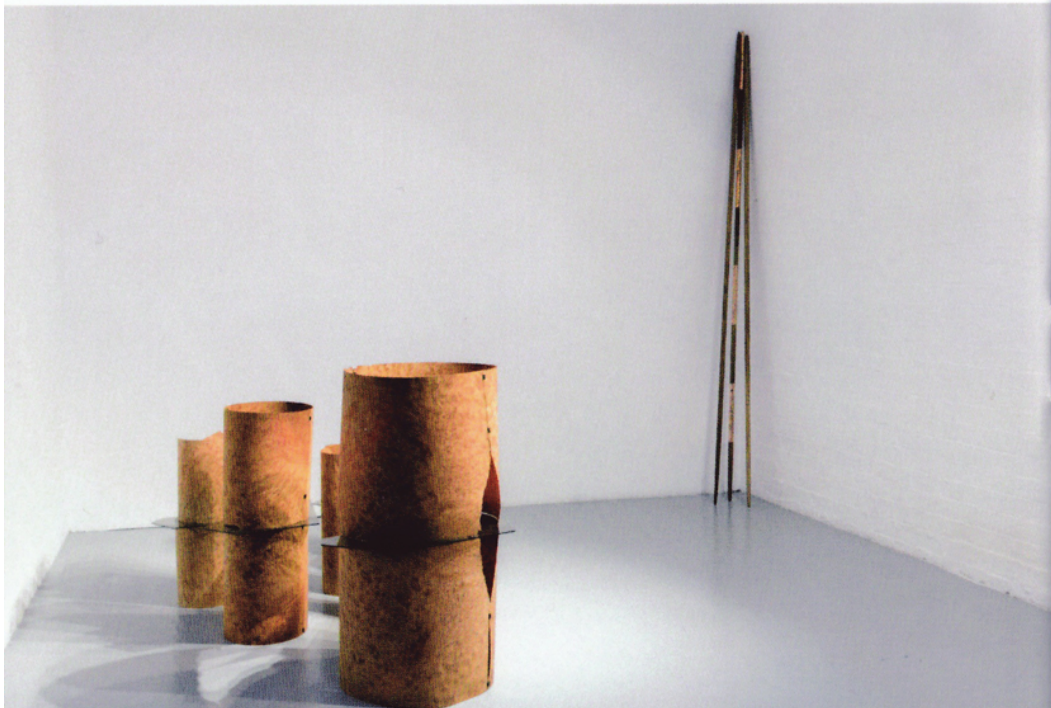
F: The title comes from a computer-coding manual; a temporary object is something that allows something else to exist, but is usually erased after use, but sometimes 'not all temporary objects can be avoided'. Computer programming has its litter as well!

L: That's very interesting; I'm fascinated by that. You link scientific theory or the contemporary to something that actually looks quite primal and ancient. That's something I find very stimulating in your work; you manage to find this link and this timelessness.

F: Some conditions seem endlessly present they are archetypal. The archetype of the object as carrier that is then discarded has always interested me...maybe it's to do with the feminine, being the container and not the contained...

L: This work is like an old landscape, something that is prehistoric.

F: As I was making this piece, and trying to imagine a temporary object in relation to water, I was recalling digging holes in the sand - pools of water appearing and disappearing back into the ground. What is the temporary object? The hole or the water... or both?



There is a reflective / mirroring thing going on in all the work apart from one, they are all kind of stuck in time...

J: That leads me to 'If I measure it must exist', because these aren't any old lengths of wood to be transformed into art. They are a very particular length - a measure that I had never heard of and here we are in the heart of 21st Century London with all the banging and crashing, but this is the London that was. Could you tell us...?

F: It is half a rod or pole, which is about 8 1/4 ft. The measuring of an acre stems from this length and we still use acres to assess land. An acre is one furlong in length and four rods wide, a furlong being the length a team of four oxen can plough before needing a rest, a rod being the length of the stick the ploughman used to control and reach the leading pair of oxen. But I found this out afterwards and I tell a lie, it's about six inches off a half-rod, it's the idea of a measurement being tangible and relational that interests me.

On my second visit to the gallery I brought a stick with me so I could have a physical reference to the space when back in the studio. 'If I measure it must exist' was a mantra I found myself writing down one day repeatedly, it's a western obsession to measure, it's how we realise the world.

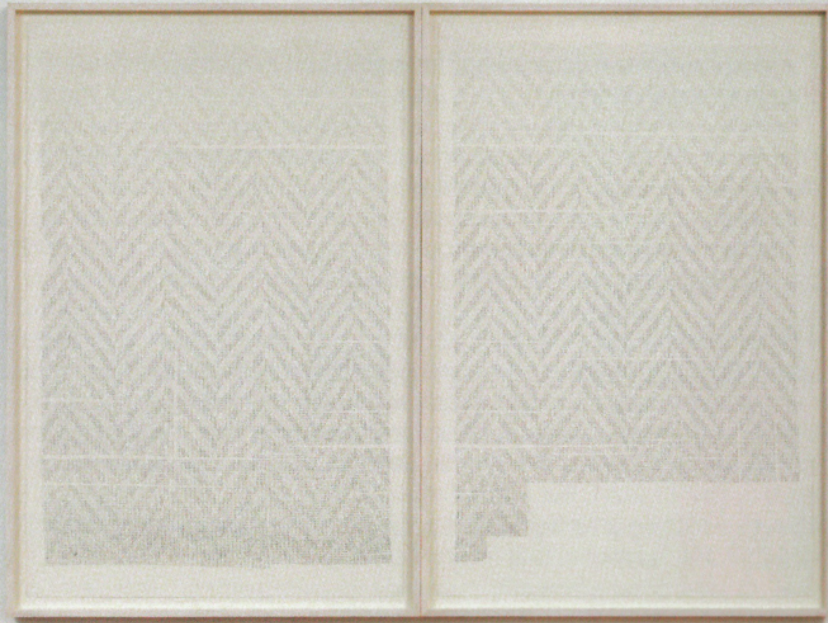
L: And this one is in two halves, so is it for measuring something else?

F: No, I did it so I could take it on the tube without arousing much too much attention! It's very much a tool.

L: The drawing here is actually very important. It's a key to how you think, composed entirely of plus and minus marks.

F: I get a bit tired of explaining the marks and I apologise in advance because I've been drawing with + and -'s since 1997, so it feels like it should be, I don't know... obvious by now, but I realise that my work is not that well known! I use it as a form of talking about everything and nothing.

I was collecting people's "I"s at one point, I had an idea of imaging who the "we" we use too frequently is? There's a kind of humanistic thing to it, but also an idea of infinity and a mathematical expression of everything... it's like how we communicate with electronic pulses.



In this drawing I am interested in the conceptual nature of the drawing itself, the title is 'A thought drawing, drawing of a thought'. The first drawing on the left is the act itself and the second on the right is the reflective act, a drawing of the drawing. The thought of the thought is never quite the same as the thought itself.

- J: I think, as you pointed out, this particular drawing also has that movement of water through it?
- F: The chevron is a universal symbol for water. A passive observation of the parquet floor present in the gallery may have instigated the thought of water in the space initially.
- J: There is also a photographic work here in the form of a postcard that visitors can take away. I understand the full size work will be on exhibition at Cross Lane Projects, where all the works will be exhibited later this year. The image is really mysterious; I thought it was fabric or something. It has that ghostly appearance of calling out spectral images, but far from it, can you tell us what it is, it's the most material thing you can imagine?
- F: I mentioned before the standing stone in Wales. I wanted to capture the sense of being with it.

'We have never been modern: Goodhope' is a composite image of the menhir taken from North, South, East and West. I have a bit of a joke with a friend that we must not touch the stone on the same day because we will pass our ailments to each other. I think there is something within us, something that we fear to sense sometimes, that takes us beyond the material world through being with objects.

- J: This exhibition will travel North; for the first time the Mark Tanner Sculpture Award show is travelling beyond London, all the way to Cross Lane Projects, Kendal in the heart of the Lake District.
- F: It's a completely different space and I think the relationships between works will change a little. I'm looking forward to seeing what happens.

Image captions

1. Front window of Standpoint Gallery, with *Split object*, 2017, shown in window on right hand side.
2. *Split object*, plywood, 2017.
3. Installation view: *Not even nothing can be free of ghosts* at Standpoint Gallery with *Eidolon: I thought I could smell water*, 2015-2018, shown left and *Divider*, 2018 on right hand side in foreground.
4. Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia*, etching, 1514.
5. *This dry feeling will pass* (detail), walnut wood, copper, 2018.
6. Installation view: *Not even nothing can be free of ghosts* at Standpoint Gallery with *This dry feeling will pass*, 2018 on right hand side, *Not all temporary objects can be avoided*, 2018, on left hand side and *If I measure it must exist*, 2018 in background on right hand side.
7. *What beauty is I know not*, projected video, bonding plaster, plywood, ash wood shavings, walnut wood chips, in-situ objects, 2018, at Standpoint Gallery.
8. *Not all temporary objects can be avoided*, golden madrone wood veneer, metal, Perspex, 2018.
9. Installation view: *Not even nothing can be free of ghosts* at Standpoint Gallery with *Not all temporary objects can be avoided*, 2018 shown left and *If I measure it must exist*, 2018, on right hand side.
10. *A thought drawn / drawing of thought*, pencil on paper, 2018.

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Published by Cross Lane Projects .
16pp
Edition of 150

Produced on the occasion of the exhibition

Frances Richardson
Not even nothing can be free of ghosts
Mark Tanner Sculpture Award
13 October – 16 December 2018

With thanks to Simon Jennings, Edward Perks and Prudence Scott of Mark Tanner Sculpture Award Trust, Emma Kelly, Michael Taylor, Natasha Vicars and Mark Woods.

The artist would like to thank Beth Collar, Denise de Cordova, Rebecca Scott and Alison Wilding RA for selecting my work for this award. Leon and Moni Mannings, Alexandra Toscano and Luce Garrigues for their support over the years, the family for putting up with me missing Christmas. The friends who keep me smiling and a special thank you to Kate Brakspear.

Established in 2018 by Mark Woods and Rebecca Scott, Cross Lane Projects is an artist-run space bringing contemporary art to Cumbria.

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