



Bowman Sculpture Gallery Presents “Subconscious Playground”: The Debut Solo Exhibition by Emerging British Sculptor Joanna Allen

Apr 14, 2025 — by OpenArt in United Kingdom



Bowman Sculpture Gallery is pleased to announce Subconscious Playground, the inaugural solo exhibition by emerging British contemporary sculptor Joanna Allen. The exhibition will run from 1st to 30th May, 2025 at the gallery's Mayfair location: 6 Duke Street, St James's, London.

Subconscious Playground is an exploration of human psychology, offering an alternative reality that strips away the illusion of normalcy to reveal a more complex, sometimes dark, yet playful perspective on our subconscious. Joanna Allen's exhibition at Bowman Sculpture is particularly timely, as it comes just after the Centenary of Surrealism in 2024, a century since André Breton wrote the Manifeste du Surréalisme.

Allen is an innovative and exciting contemporary Surrealist whose work moves seamlessly between figuration and abstraction, culminating in fully abstract pieces, reflecting the shifting boundaries between our conscious and unconscious minds. Through her sculptural practice, she examines the tension between intellectual aptitude and primal instinct, as well as the way personal and inherited experiences shape individual identity.

The exhibition includes works that visually dissect these themes. In some earlier pieces like Shadow and Horizon, she employs striking imagery, such as part of an adult skull posed as a child's helmet and an eye-level plane of solid bronze through a floating head. These works explore the intrinsic nature of our learned and inherited psychology. Shadow, in particular, is deeply personal, emerging from Allen's own childhood memories.

The piece reflects her sense of feeling insubstantial both in the presence of adults and within herself. During these times, her imagination offered a refuge—an expansive, safe space for creativity and development. This is represented by the skull on the child's head, symbolizing a psychological armour as well as the contrast between vulnerability and the mind's ability to construct an internal refuge.

Pieces such as Monument and Diminishing Capacity convey a similar theme by distorting figures in ways that suggest we are permanently and generationally shaped by our experiences. Allen's powerful work exists somewhere between Symbolism and Surrealism, balancing deeply personal narratives with broader, universal themes of psychological introspection.

In Allen's abstract sculptures such as Inherent, she pursues a purer representation, visually and metaphorically turning bodies inside out to openly reveal the nature of our psychological imprints. Through all these explorations, she poses the question, “What is normal?” and intriguingly suggests that deviation from this so-called norm is, in fact, what constitutes normalcy.

Joanna Allen's signature sculptural language incorporates recurring motifs such as distorted forms, floating ovoid or egg-like heads, and dissecting planes. While her abstract works move beyond literal representation, they retain a figurative presence, reminding us that we are ultimately confronting the complexities of the human psyche. The play between fluid, buoyant forms and harsher, jagged elements underscores the duality within the self. The materials she employs—patinated bronze, bold ink lines, and layered strokes of paint—enhance the dreamlike and surrealist quality of her practice, evoking both ancient and futuristic aesthetics.

A key element of Allen's process is her use of mindful meditation to access the subconscious. Through blindfolded, one-stroke drawing sessions, she develops what she calls psychomorphs—shapes that often take on personal or archetypal significance. Whether these forms function as a Rorschach-like reflection of the mind or emerge from deeper psychological imprints remains an open question. Her engagement with the subconscious places her work in conversation with the legacy of Surrealism, a movement historically dedicated to uncovering the hidden depths of human thought.

The exhibition catalogue will include a forward by Dr. Jon Wood, the art historian and curator who specializes in modern and contemporary sculpture. Formerly Head of Research at the Henry Moore Institute, Wood has written extensively on major sculptors, including Henry Moore, Tony Cragg, and Emily Young, and has curated significant exhibitions internationally. His insights will provide context to Allen's exploration of the psychological and sculptural interplay between form, abstraction, and meaning.

Mica Bowman, Director of Bowman Sculpture Gallery, remarks, “We are living in a time where the surreal is no longer confined to art—it is woven into our daily experience, shaping the way we perceive and engage with the world. Joanna Allen takes this concept further, not just reflecting the surrealist aesthetic that surrounds us, but pulling us deeper into the subconscious, where reality is deconstructed and reimaged. Her work does not just depict an alternative perspective; it forces us to question the layers of perception we take for granted.”

About Joanna Allen

Joanna Allen is an emerging British sculptor whose work bridges psychologically charged figuration with abstract representations of the inner self. With a background in both academic training and atelier practices, she has exhibited in various prestigious venues, including the European Museum of Modern Art in Barcelona and the Royal Society of British Artists in London. Her sculptures are held in private collections and institutions across the UK, Europe, and the USA.

About Bowman Sculpture Gallery

Bowman Sculpture Gallery, based in London, specializes in the finest examples of 19th and 20th-century sculpture, with a particular emphasis on Rodin and his contemporaries. The gallery is committed to showcasing both historical and contemporary works, providing collectors and art enthusiasts with a diverse and high-quality selection of sculptures.

About Mica Bowman

Mica Bowman (b. 1994, UK) joined Bowman Sculpture in 2019, having worked in several prominent Art Galleries including Sladmore and Daniel Katz in London and Les Enluminures in Paris before deciding to return to her true passion, sculpture. Her enthusiasm for the subject has led to significant sales to both private collectors and public institutions, including the Musée Rodin, the Musée Camille Claudel, the Snite Museum and The Wadsworth Atheneum. In 2020 she collaborated with the Sir Denis Mahon Foundation featuring the work of UK Sculptor Emily Young and participated in Masterpiece conversations discussing contemporary Sculpture with Melanie Vandenbrouck, curator of sculpture at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

She has curated several exhibitions over the past six years including 'Rodin: Influenced and Inspired', 'Hanneke Beaumont: Timeless Expressions of the Human Condition' 'When Matter Becomes Form' an all-women exhibition entitled 'The Power of She: A Tribute to Women in the Arts' in collaboration with Guerin Projects and 'Faces and Fables Rodin's Portraiture, Great Commissions, Mythology, and Sculptural Innovation.'

Subconscious Playground will be open to the public from May 1 to May 30, 2025, at Bowman Sculpture Gallery, 6 Duke Street, St James's, London

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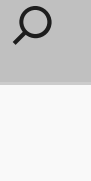
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