

**TOO MUCH** Magazine of Romantic Geography SPRING 2014  
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Issue 5 THE BODY IN SPACE AND TIME



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# THE LITTLE FIGURE



Francis Upritchard and her work in her studio, London, 2013, photographed by Audrey Fondacore.  
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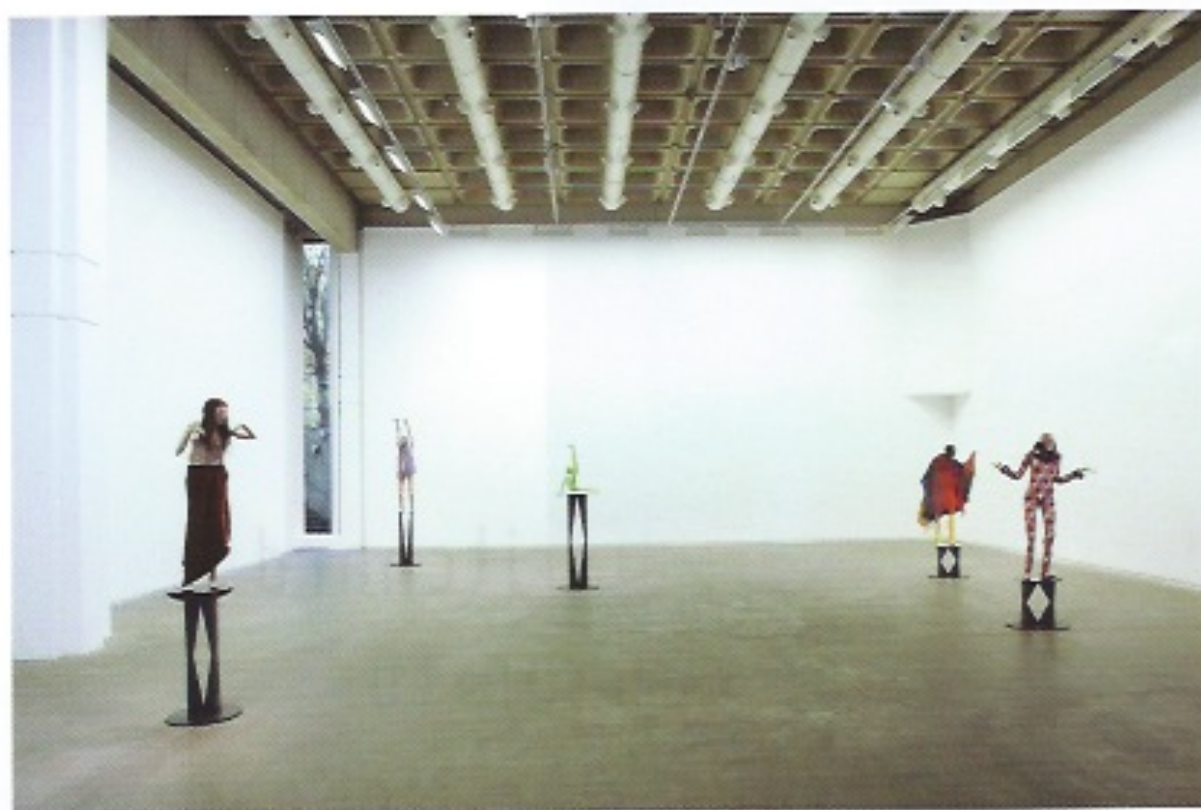
# STANDING ON A PLINTH



Francis Upritchard  
as spoken to  
Cameron Allan McKean



"I always begin by going into the space," says Francis Upritchard about the first thing she does when she begins planning an exhibition. Upritchard is a contemporary artist now based in London, born in New Zealand in 1976, she has made small esoteric objects and figures for over a decade she, often from clay, super sculpey or balata. In 2009 she represented New Zealand at the Venice Biennale. Her characters are monkeys, spirit people, failed hippies or ageing ascetics, all trying to access some kind of primitive enlightenment. They carry textiles and little objects, their bodies bent into exaggerated postures taken from yoga, fencing, or even photos of Upritchard's family ("I notice our elbows always stick out in photos," she says). Their little bodies are always placed on a pedestal: a modified piece of furniture or a piece built by her husband, designer Martino Gamper. Here she talks about her work and the designers and architects referenced in the plinths her figures rest on.



I always begin by going into the space. I recently had a show at Douglas Hyde Gallery in Dublin, Ireland, a brutalist gallery on an island. I loved the space and thought my plinths looked good in there.

Installation view of Francis Upritchard's *Mandala* (2013)  
at the Douglas Hyde Gallery  
Courtesy Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin



I don't think the figures can go directly on the floor, you'd have to be on your knees to look at them. It would mean something different if they were at human size, I think you'd relate to them more as humans. I want people to relate to them strictly as sculptures.

Francis Upritchard, *Allegro*, (2013)  
Modelling material, foil, wire, paint, cloth, 89 x 38 x 24cm  
Photography Anna Aron  
Courtesy Kate MacGarry, London





Installation view of Francis Upritchard's *Potato Poem* (2013)  
at Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art.  
Photography Keizo Kikaku  
Courtesy MIMOCA, Marugame

And also I used a lot of textures and things at my previous show at MIMOCA (Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art), in Japan, so I wanted to try out just showing the figures with the plinths. My ideas for plinths came from a lot of different places.



So this is inside Sforza Castle in Milan and this is some work by BBPR. I really like the delicacy of these metal plinths. They're really beautiful. BBPR are great.

And this one looks just like my husband Martino, look at that!

So, I thought this room was amazingly inspirational. Look at that crazy lamp on the right. It serves no purpose at all really, but it's brilliant. I guess it lights the ceiling a little bit.

B.B.P.R. *Electra* (1954)  
Metal and polystyrene, 50 x 47 x 75cm



BBPR Japan



Image of Sforza Castle in the 16th century from *Dictionary of French Architecture from 11th to 18th Century* (1896) by Eugène Viollet-le-Duc

BBPR was founded in Milan in 1932 by four architects: Gian Luigi Banfi, Lodovico Barbino di Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti and Ernesto Nathan Rogers. The name is an acronym formed from the surnames of its members. In 1950 BBPR's design for the Torre Velasca building was completed in Milan, it included abstract medieval references and was seen as a reaction against the prevailing modernism of the International Style.







And look at that, this is the most famous sculpture they've got, and look at the brutal breeze-block looking thing they've got in behind. I wish I could do that.

I started looking at Ettore Sottsass's work too, I thought these were really cool plinths, but they're too cool right now, even though I love them. We don't have a lot of good portraiture like this in New Zealand. When I left New Zealand I went to Europe for a month. When I walked into the room



Ettore Sottsass, *Cartoon* (1985)  
Wood and laminated plastic, 186 x 180 x 40cm  
Courtesy Tony Kitchen Style



©Gottschalk

[Ettore Sottsass (1917-2007) was an Italian architect and designer who worked for Olivetti. He helped design the first Italian mainframe computer and Olivetti's iconic red typewriter. In 1981 he formed the Memphis Group with other young designers and architects, who produced furniture, ceramics and textiles (among other things) with a focus on bright neon colours, globular lines and slick surfaces. In a 1986 Chicago Tribune article, Sottsass described the Memphis style as "like a very strong drug. You cannot take too much." Sottsass passed away in Milan at age 90.]

of the Prado where all the works of Bosch are displayed I was gobsmacked. I was doing a lot of work with landscapes before I visited Europe, which makes sense in New Zealand. The paintings in the Prado are so old, but the colours so powerful and the figures so funny and tragic.



Hieronymus Bosch, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1480-1505)  
Oil on panel, 220 x 390cm





Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Netherlands Proverbs* (1559)

Oil on oak panel, 117 x 163cm

Pieter Bruegel the Younger, *The Peasant Wedding Dance* (1607)

Oil on panel, 38.5 x 51.5cm



Erasmus Grasser, *Morris Dancers* (1480) at Munich Stadtmuseum  
Photography by Shokko

Erasmus Grasser's Morris Dancers in the Munich Stadtmuseum, and the paintings of Bruegel (my mother had an amazing book that I looked at a lot as a child), all those drawings of poor people. For me Bruegel and Bosch are inspiring for detail and colour, and Grasser for form and content. I met Martino when I was in Europe, too, he's Italian.





Peter Bruegel the Elder, *The Triumph of Death* (1562)  
Oil on panel, 117 x 160cm

Peter Bruegel the Elder, *The Wedding Dance* (1567)  
Oil on panel, 118.1 x 157.5cm







We met here in London, he'd done a show of his '100 Chairs in 100 Days' Project at the Design Museum here and I wrote him some fan mail saying I loved his work and that I'd love his help making some plinths. Eventually he helped out a lot.

Clockwise from top left: Martino Gamper, *Hands On* (2006), *Backside* (2007), *Arnoldone* (2007), from the collection *100 Chairs in 100 Days* (2005 - 2007). Photography Martino Gamper and Abilux





I've recently started commissioning Martino to design my plinths, which is a huge relief as I can rely on him to come up with something striking and I can concentrate on my core work, which is the figures, the sculptures.

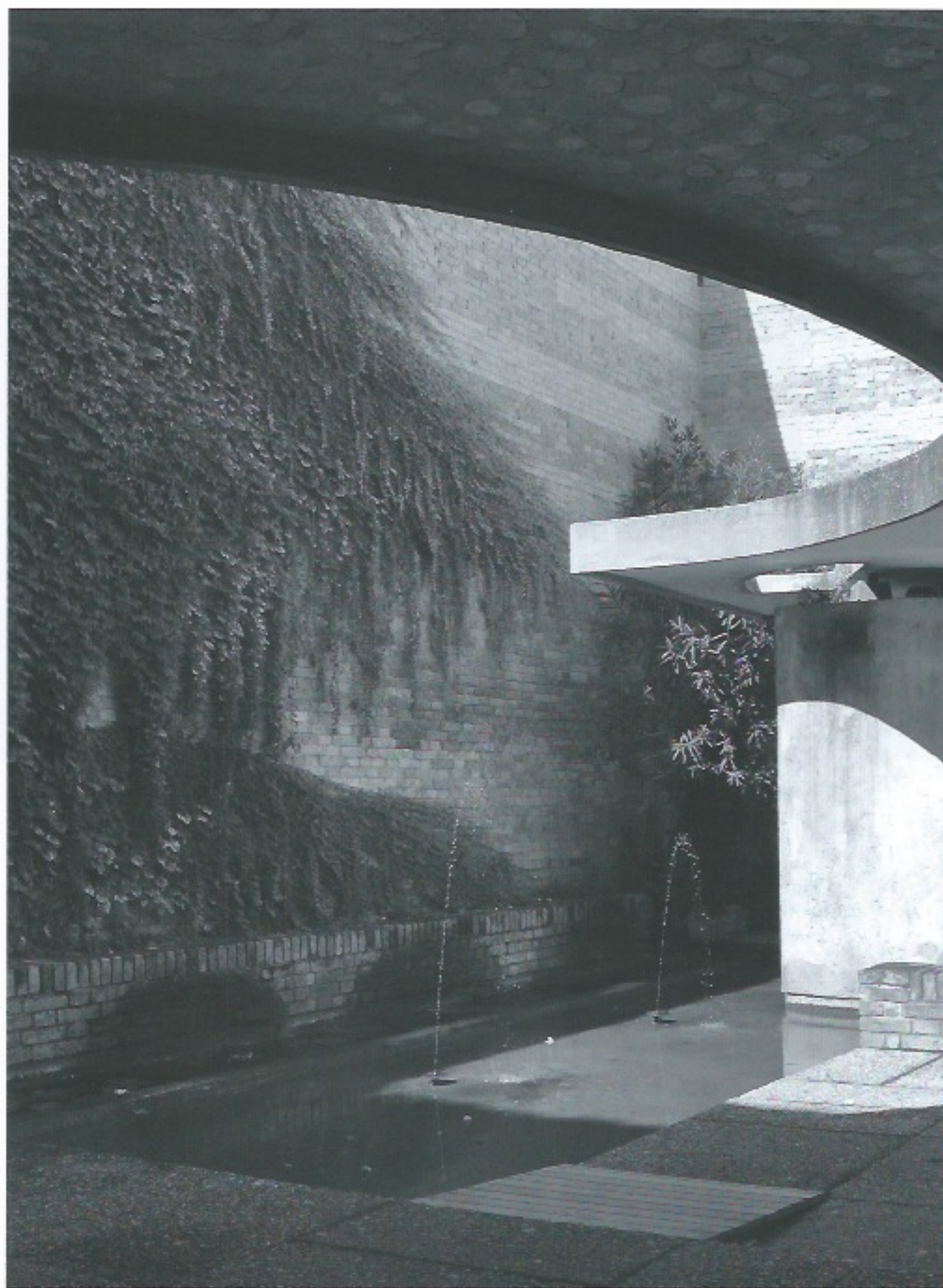
I was really inspired by BBPR with my plinths, but I don't think he was a huge fan of them,

he was really into Giò Ponti, and Carlo Scarpa. Let me find some images here.

From left: Francis Upritchard *Menschke* (2013), modelling material, foil, wire, paint, cloth, 125 x 88 x 25cm; *Hugwood* (2013), modelling material, foil, wire, paint, cloth, 117 x 26 x 25cm; *Susan* (2013), modelling material, foil, wire, paint, cloth, 95 x 26 x 20cm  
Photography Anna Arca  
Courtesy Kate MacGarry, London









Carlo Scarpa,  
Sculpture Garden (1952), Venice  
Photography Seleni Seleni

This is Scarpa, very masculine, rational, but poetic at the same time. This is a great place. Scarpa is from Venice, so he uses water a lot. He was a big influence on Martino and Martino really introduced me to this world of Italians.

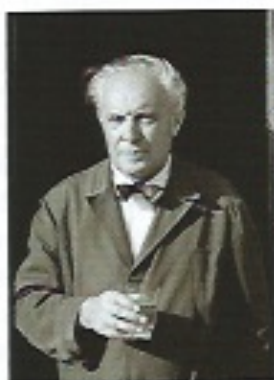
[Carlo Scarpa (1905-1978) was an Italian architect, and designer of glassware and furniture. His work confounded simple definitions of modernist architecture. It was often ornate, decorative and detailed. He died after falling down stairs in Sendai, Japan, and is buried "standing up and wrapped in linen sheets in the style of a medieval knight," in Bion Cemetery at San Vito d'Altivole in the Veneto.]



Gio Ponti, Chest of Drawers  
Dress.2 (1952-1955), released by  
Molteni&C, elm, Italian walnut,  
mahogany and rosewood, 102 x 52  
x 71.9cm  
courtesy Artifex Japan

Gio Ponti, Superleggera, NO  
699 (1957), designed for Cassina,  
varnished ash wood and Spanish  
cane, 83 x 40 x 45cm  
courtesy Cassina Inc.

And there is Ponti. Very beautiful, he made this beautiful chair. It's very light. This is the furniture I've got in my studio. I think it's very funny, and ugly. I love it.



© Artifex Japan and Cassina Inc.

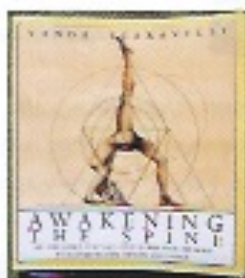
[Gio Ponti (1891 - 1979) was an Italian architect, industrial and furniture designer and the founder of Domus Magazine. He is renowned for designing the Pirelli Tower built in 1958, one of the first skyscrapers to not use the standard rectangular block form. He is also renowned for his ceramic objects, furnishings, glass bottles, lamps and chairs.]





Top left: Francis Upritchard *The Gentleman* (2006), Modelling material, foil, wire, paint 54.5 x 21.5 x 20 cm  
 Top right: *The Friend* (2007), Modelling material, foil, wire, paint, found stand 25 x 48 x 10.5 cm  
 Photography Anna Arca  
 Courtesy Kate MacGarry, London

The furniture acts as a plinth, to display my figures at the correct height and it sets a feeling or context. I prefer not to use white box style plinths, because they are often so ugly in a room, so for years I have found and modified furniture to meet my needs. It was often quite hard to find exactly the right furniture for the pieces.



Vanda Scaravelli *Awakening the Spine: The Stress-Free New Yoga that Works with the Body to Restore Health, Vitality and Energy* (1991) published by Harper Collins.

A friend lent me Scaravelli's *Awakening the Spine* a few years ago, and I have borrowed poses from that book when I'm sketching figures. The poses are good for drawings but they seem to be too complicated to make sculptures from. Many of the figures from my Arch series were inspired from a combination of yoga, tai chi and fencing. In all my figures there is also a resemblance to the posture of my family, in photos our arms all stick out in odd ways.



Peter Pletto + Francis Upritchard, *Arch* (2012)  
 Figure: modelling material, wire, filling, fabric, plastic and glass beads  
 Plinth: brass, steel, oak  
 Figure: 35 x 29 x 88cm, Plinth: 141 x 95x50cm  
 © Steven White





Here we are just after doing the show in Japan. We passed some scarecrows and we happened to be dressed just like them. In Kagawa. It's near...what's the name of that funny art prison called? Yes, near Naoshima.

I prefer to be intuitive. That said, I certainly don't work in a traditional craft style. To me, that would presume that before I start a work I know what I'm doing, and where it's going. Craft to me also has the connotation that the material is used in a prescribed way.





I have worked in the past with potters, weavers, glass blowers. I have always valued craft – at home we eat mostly off handmade pottery, our house is strewn with hand woven blankets and quilts.

At art school everybody was supposed to read Deleuze and translate that into something cold. It made me so mad hearing half digested theory and I reacted by trying to make work without meaning. I guess to some extent that stuck. I read a lot, maybe not Deleuze, but I go to a lot of shows, lectures and films. I don't keep that at the forefront of my mind when I make work. I let my intuition take hold rather than applying the things I've been thinking about or reading about.



Francis Upritchard's exhibition Francis Upritchard (2014)  
at Kate MacGarry London  
Photography Anna Arca

When I'm working, sometimes I begin by making a head or doing a sketches or I might try to reproduce someone I've seen on the street that I think looks sweet, or silly or funny. Or I'll use a photo that I like, that I've found somewhere, maybe online or from a photography archive. Sometimes I've made a figure and I want to make a sister or a brother to it, or maybe I've found some purple hair and I want to make a face that would go with purple hair.





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**Cameron Allan McKean** is a writer, culture editor at The Japan Times, and co-editor of *TOO MUCH* Magazine.