

## Short Circuit

Everyone knows what a short circuit is, and how much visible force and vital energy is compressed in the spark that provokes it. It is from a short circuit in the mind - understanding turned back on itself - that Janet Mullarney's installation is born, and hence the title of the exhibition.

As in a real short circuit, there are many elements that trace back to the sculptor's own past and here these elements return transformed as though through a sort of explosive alchemy. So it is with the fluid dancing figures of her beginnings, reaching in their gestures to link together water and sky, or soaring from high perches, figures symbolizing a condition of freedom through their wild and natural abandoning of themselves in the embrace of the universe. Today, twenty years on, having shed the weight of matter, and almost as if there was no longer any need for the artist to wrestle the figures from wood, they reappear, retaining their original sense of freedom though transformed by the artist into video images which capture this metamorphosis.

Men "as big as trees" that transform themselves into birds; so often animals appear in Janet's sculptures, hinting at the dark aspects of our being, with which we must necessarily live (the crow, the dog) or else the constrictions imposed by society (the blinkered horse) or again the boldness of a primordial desire expressed in her cows which take their form from cave paintings. But what struck her many years ago at a country festival, and what we see again today, is the awareness that one can lose oneself, one can escape from one's role, from one's own limits and free oneself, on condition that there is complete sincerity and a total lack of self-interest, including in art making, as we see in these strong men who chirrup and trill like "fragile creatures to be fed with crumbs of bread".

Another element seems to return in the short circuit: the aspiration towards the metaphysical purity of a geometric space, which Janet had already explored in *Halo*, the empty cubic room, lit only by the honey light of an alabaster window, as in the ancient Romanesque churches of Tuscany, or the vast gold leafed floor created by her in *Almas y Escaleras*, Mexico. The identification, in the invitation to enter, is between empty space and sacred space, the sacred space being made sacred by the emptiness and the light. In this new work, the aspiration to sacredness and purity recurs in the candour of the smooth wall, held between the living corners of an essential geometric cube, but the tops of the trees which reach above the wall suggest an image steeped in the fascination of a medieval *hortus conclusus*, evoking the further possibility of a new, magical garden of paradise. The suggestion is that sacredness lives not only in an illuminated emptiness, but also in that quivering of leaves and in that "chirruping of men" in which perhaps even we can recognise ourselves.