



Sarah Maloney, RCA, is a Halifax artist who completed an MFA at the University of Windsor and a BFA at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. She has received numerous grants and awards from the Canada Council for the Arts, Arts Nova Scotia, the New Brunswick Arts Board and the Ontario Arts Council. Her work is held in the collection of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Dalhousie Art Gallery, the Nova Scotia Art Bank, the Canada Council Art Bank, the New Brunswick Art Bank and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

She has exhibited in group and solo exhibitions nationally and internationally, including *Fray* at the Textile Museum Toronto; *Corpus*, the Beaverbrook Art Gallery; *Atlantic Crossing*, Dresden Germany; and *Skin*, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Recent exhibitions of her sculpture and textile works include the Kelowna Art Gallery, Grenfell Campus Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of Peterborough. She has been artist-in-residence at the Memory Disability Clinic, Camp Hill Hospital, Halifax, Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland, and the University of Windsor Foundry, Ontario.

In 2012 she was elected to the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts and awarded the Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council Established Artist Recognition Award. She currently teaches part-time in the foundation and sculpture programs at NSCAD University.

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FIRST FLOWERS

AN EXHIBITION BY
SARAH MALONEY

ARTsPLACE GALLERY
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Confronting Beauty

Sarah Maloney's *First Flowers*, 2014

A graduate of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, a school famous for its involvement in the international conceptual art movement, Sarah Maloney's education was one that did not prioritize beauty. As one of few female students concentrating in sculpture (and instructed by an-all male sculpture faculty) her early work was arguably and suitably anti-aesthetic and disengaged from dialogues on gender. But as she and her work have matured, Maloney has called into question her early education, making art that is both beautiful and speaking to gendered histories of making and display. Sitting at her kitchen table, Maloney describes her shift in practice: "When you are given these set rules (dictating what kind of art you can or cannot make) you eventually want to rail against them." The difficulty, for Maloney, is not in making an object that is beautiful ("that's the easy part", she muses), but to make objects that are both aesthetically pleasing and infused with content. When her practice shifted from a focus on anatomy to botany in the early 2000s, she set out to conduct research at the library of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew in London. "I wanted to make sure that there was enough content there", she explained, and, struck by the gendered, capitalist, colonial, and sexual histories of flowers she has made work referencing botany for the better part of ten years.

Her latest work, "First Flowers", a series of bronze magnolias installed so as to appear to be growing from the gallery wall, continues to engage with these ideas of gender, history, and beauty. Attached to fragmented metal branches, the magnolias are simultaneously blossoming and static, organic and industrial. At once beautiful and confrontational, the heavy bronze blossoms appear to extend organically into the viewer's space, acting both as passive display and almost aggressive, certainly protective, self-preservation.

The title of the piece likens these flowers to a botanical Adam and Eve, calling to attention that this genus of flowering plant is at least 20 million years old. In capturing these ancient flowers in their various stages of bloom Maloney is conflating the timeless and the ephemeral: the persisting Magnolia species with the dying blossom. Through the scale of the piece and the material there is a sort of monumentalism at work,



what could be understood as an homage to the enduring nature of these flowers. But it is also a piece that captures a moment of fleeting beauty, understanding the ephemerality of such blossoms as well as the fragility of even so ancient an organism in the contemporary world. "When we are young we think that beauty will last forever," she adds on the topic middle age, "We don't appreciate beauty when we're young, we take it for granted. I think the work is about appreciating beauty in hindsight."

While writing this piece I struggled with the ideas of the personal in unpacking Sarah Maloney's work, as well as in my own authorship. The personal lives of women artists are more often than not taken heavily into account when analyzing their work: their appearance, love lives, reproductive choices, and gendered identities. In Maloney's case, however, I would stress the intimate link between maker and object; in making art about identity, one's own sense of self and place inevitably become part of the discussion.

Pouring me a glass of wine, she revealed that "Reflection", a series of bronze orchids gazing at their reflections in the mirrors of constructed vanity tables, was about her daughters' budding sexualities. As her daughter I was struck by this – my mother's roles as parent and artist always seemed very distinct and I was humbled to know I had impacted her practice. As with gender, beauty, and art, the personal and the practice are not so easily separated. Instead of rejecting these ideas, Maloney confronts them in her confident and unabashed way. "Women spend their lives trying to make other people happy!" she exclaims, "their spouses, children, parents, etc. Beauty is for me. Ultimately as an artist you make art for yourself." The process of bronze casting is an industrial and arduous one, but one which, in Maloney's case, rewards the artist and viewer with the beautiful object.

"Life is to be celebrated!" she tells me, "Beauty is a big part of it." With our seemingly innumerable media outlets, we, as a society, are inundated with images of atrocities, poverty, and corruption. Maloney argues that it is only natural to want to make something beautiful in the midst of this. The beauty found in Sarah Maloney's work is not in this way a form of escapism, but is rather a reprieve, though one imbued with the awareness of all that has led you to that place. Rather than any Eden, her floral landscape is an oasis for us all.

Mollie Cronin, Halifax, NS, July 2014