

# COCKPIT ARTS 3 YEARS

## Eleanor Lakelin

- *Maker in wood*



Eleanor Lakelin is one of Britain's most accomplished artists making in wood. Working exclusively with trees that have been felled in the British Isles, she combines highly-skilled, traditional craftsmanship with a free-form approach where pieces can be scorched, bleached, microwaved or sandblasted to create vessels with a distinctly contemporary feel. Her work is shown in major galleries and exhibitions including CAA (Contemporary Applied Arts), Sarah Myerscough Gallery at COLLECT and William Benington Gallery, Sculptural 2015. She was nominated for the Perrier-Jouët Arts Salon Prize and has work in the permanent collection of the National Trust.

Eleanor studied cabinet making at City and Islington College (1995-6) and London College of Furniture/Guildhall University (1996-8) before embarking on a successful career designing and making furniture and functional objects for both retail outlets and to public and private commission. In 2008/9 she began carving and turning wood on a lathe to create both functional objects and decorative vessels and forms. But it wasn't until she won the Cockpit Arts/Worshipful Company of Turners' Award in 2011 and moved into a dedicated studio space at Cockpit's Deptford incubator that she was able to concentrate fully on this new direction. 'I think it's fair to say that without the Turners' Award, I would not have had the confidence to pursue [turning and carving] full time,' says Eleanor.

During her early years at Cockpit Arts, Eleanor focussed on repositioning her business for art galleries, high-end retail outlets, collectors and commissions. With one-to-one coaching from the Business Development Team, she learnt how to present and price her work for this new market, as well as develop her artist story.

"The one-to-one business advice was crucial. It gave me the confidence to apply for opportunities that I didn't even know existed and wouldn't otherwise have considered," says Eleanor. In 2012, just a year after joining Cockpit Arts, Eleanor won the Jill Humphrey Prize, which she used to buy a new lathe.



Eleanor continues to tap into the business support on offer, finding the one-to-one sessions particularly beneficial. "It's great being able to run ideas past someone who has a different perspective on your plans and ideas. It's very useful to talk through where you're going." Cockpit's Business Development Manager, Madeleine Furness, recently helped her to apply for an Arts Council grant, which paid for an industrial bandsaw. This has enabled her to work at a larger scale and with greater efficiency and scope for experimentation. She has now moved to one of the newly refurbished ground floor studios at Cockpit Arts Deptford, which has direct access to the rear car park, an invaluable asset when one is shifting large pieces of wood, not to mention industrial machinery, into a workshop.

Eleanor has also taken advantage of Cockpit's Creative Employment Programme, which enables studio holders to hire an intern. She now has someone working with her one day a week, putting together an image bank of past work, as well as occasionally helping sand and finish pieces. "It's been interesting for me to work with Cockpit on employing someone for the first time," she says.

Eleanor cites being part of the wider Cockpit community as 'vastly important' to her creative development due to the 'enthusiasm, influence and experience of the other studio holders' around her. "Creatively [having a studio at Cockpit] has allowed me to take risks and develop ideas whilst working alongside other creative people in a supportive and exciting environment."

2015 was a phenomenally successful year for Eleanor. Highlights included work being sent to the Milan Furniture Fair (Salone del Mobile) in April to be displayed in the Carl Hansen showcase. May saw work exhibited at Collect, Sculptural 15 and RHS Chelsea. In September she was invited to take part in Future Heritage at Decorex International, curated by design and applied arts critic Corinne Julius as "a definitive guide of today's most important designer-makers". Then in October Eleanor created her first site-specific work, and the largest-scale pieces she has made to date, for 'Sensing the Landscape' curated by Karina Joseph for Field during Somerset Arts Week. "I love being part of these curated shows," Eleanor enthuses, "and having my pieces shown within a body of work from other leading artists, sculptors and makers in their field."

At the end of last year Eleanor was selected for Walpole's Crafted programme, where exceptional craftspeople are paired with a mentor from the luxury and craft industries. "I know from my experience at Cockpit how useful one-to-one support can be," she says. "No matter how long you've been doing this, it's still important to be mentored."

"Without the support of Cockpit Arts I would have struggled to find a way to express myself creatively," Eleanor concludes, "to be able to turn that into a way to make a living really does feel miraculous."



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Photographs: Alun Callender.