

Letters to my Father

ROSE RIGLEY





Look what you made me do I-V (detail), 2014, mixed media installation, dimensions variable



Bacon for breakfast III (detail), 2014, mixed media installation, 54x22x8cm



The mixed blessings of writing to someone like you (detail), 2014, paper & mixed media, 160x230x3cm



Where are you? III (detail), 2014, mixed media installation, 36x35x22cm

Unspoken

Memory is elusive and imperceptible; however, to some extent, it has a grip on all of us. Indeed, it might be said that memories shape us. Memories can sometimes offer a hint to that penetrating question: Who am I? Possibly for most of us, memory is interior: our memories remain undisclosed, even suppressed. Nevertheless, commonly, many personal and family memories are contained and held in the form of physical items such as photographs, letters, diaries and objects such as, for instance, a tattered teddy bear or an old postcard. Keeping such talismans is important to us. It is a way of preserving the past and, sometimes, illuminating the present. These objects help us recall places, times, events, milestones and people; we might retrieve from our memory the smell of plants, flavours of foods, sensations of weather, feelings of warmth and cold or the intensity of an emotion we felt.

For many artists, their memories inspire and motivate their work in moving and thought-provoking ways. The artist, Louise Bourgeois, for example, who often reconstructed past experiences in her artwork, suggested that memory, while not a sense itself, includes all of the senses. The intention of her sculpture was to work with memories and relive a past emotion¹. So too, for the writer, Marcel Proust, author of *Remembrance of Things Past (À la Recherche du Temps Perdu)*, memory played a central role in his literary work. Proust wrote in the novel that on Sunday mornings, when eating a madeleine, memories came back to him. The sweet smell and the taste of this small scallop, shell-shaped cake aroused sensory experiences and elicited important memories.

Rose Rigley's exhibition of new work, *Letters to my Father*, is impelled by her memories of childhood and of the times she spent with her father, growing up as the youngest in the family. Indeed, the exhibition is a testimony to Rigley's father and the memories of him that remain with her. While some twenty years has intervened since his passing, Rigley's recollections of her father are very much present and enduring. The series of works that comprise the exhibition are a conversation with Rigley's father: these works represent words that were left unspoken and exchanges that were never concluded.

The conversations between Rigley and her father are deeply personal and utterly private. There is little indication in the works that Rigley is conveying the more overt milestones of her life; those big events such as weddings and births that might figure prominently over the span of years. Rather, the groups of works suggest that what is being expressed are the interactions that are the ebb and flow of the everyday life of Rigley and her father; those ordinary moments and incidentals that pass between two or more members in any family. Familiar and mundane exchanges are taken for granted throughout the day but, in Rigley's works, it is these absent interchanges that are the important ones and which she quietly and tenderly murmurs to her father.

Intimate conversations resound in the very structure of the Rigley's works. The configurations in many of the series are suggestive of the domestic and of the home – shelves, tables, bundles and stacks – around which conversations happen, and where the artist is present. Yet, this communication now

resides in memory. For instance, the five tall tables, *Look what you made me do I-V*, constructed at the height which indicates the viewpoint of a child – perhaps Rigley herself around aged four or five – where everything is slightly beyond grasp. The high tables, precarious and unsettling, standing unsteadily on their slender wonky legs, are cues to past events. The white wax covered elegant forms are like diminishing memories, just out of reach.

Like these fading memories, the hues and tones of Rigley's works are muted and subdued, mostly nuanced whites and creams. These colours evoke silent reflection and contemplation rather than the noise and commotion of brighter and bolder pigments. Subtle hints of colour might lie beneath the white and cream layers of wax or plaster, but these are glimpsed as blushes or revealed in sgraffito scratched surfaces.

Letters to my Father resonates with recurrences and repetitions, which echo and reverberate across the gallery space: the reiteration conveys urgency and alludes to the sheer, possibly unending, volume of unspoken words that implore to be expressed. The plaster and paper work, *The mixed blessings of writing to someone like you*, presents multiples of bundled forms, closed and bound up with varied strings and ribbons, reminiscent of precious letters brimming with words and interchanges that have gone, that might have been, and are yet to be whispered to a beloved person. The body of works suggest an invocation, a hushed chant that is repeated over and over. The words

must be uttered: for Rigley they are insistent and lingering. The conversation is extended and will keep going, not only between Rigley and her father but also between her father and Rigley's children and their children and so on, into the future. This unfading contact is genealogical, reaching across the family over the generations through the DNA: this is conveyed in *Where are you? I-V* by the coiled springs suspended beneath the shelves.

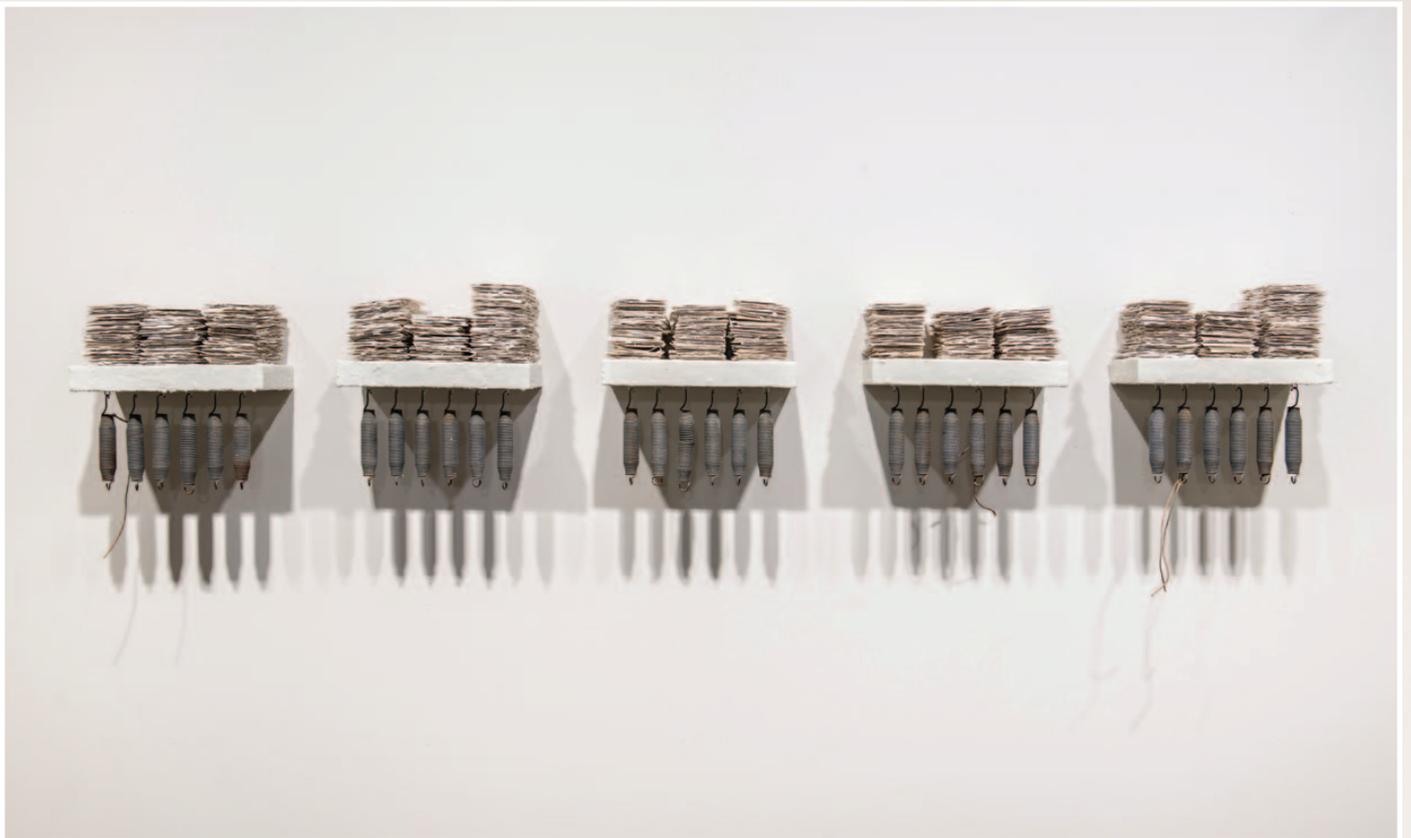
This exhibition of refined works of art choreographs materials, media, processes and structures that give visual expression to the ineffable; communicates the incomprehensible; and accesses the universal in the personal. In *Letters to my Father*, Rigley imparts intangible but compelling memories through evocative, transcending and haunting visual and visceral forms; and, in so doing, commemorates the memory of a cherished father.

Barbara Dover

¹Bourgeois, Louise. 1998. "Sunday Afternoon: A Conversation and a Remark on Beauty". In *Uncontrollable Beauty* edited by Bill Beckley. 331-342. New York: Allsworth Press.



Bacon for breakfast I-XIII, 2014, mixed media installation, dimensions variable



Where are you? I-V, 2014, mixed media installation, dimensions variable

COVER: Look what you made me do III (detail), 2014, mixed media installation, 156x38x38cm



PHOTOGRAPHS
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