

**March 31, 2018**

**Isla Burns Eldon and Anne Foote Visual Arts Prize Nomination**

It is with great pleasure that we nominate Isla Burns and her piece *September Arrangement* for the 2018 Eldon and Anne Foote Visual Arts Prize. Burns' passionate and enduring commitment both to her art practice and to the visual arts community makes her an outstanding candidate for this award.

In her most recent exhibition *Tempered Steel* (2017, Peter Robertson Gallery), following an extensive exhibition record, Burns continues to evolve formally and conceptually, persistently challenging our relationship with material and its potential. The steel and forged steel piece *September Arrangement* stands out, in our esteem, as demonstrating compelling artistic expression and masterful manipulation of the medium.

Burns' inspirations for her sculptural works come both from her local natural environment in rural Alberta and from her distinct cultural experiences throughout her life. Born in Calcutta, India, Burns travelled frequently in childhood throughout Bombay, Monghyr, Saharanpur, Calcutta and Gauhati. These formative years impacted her deeply and have had a lasting impact on her sculptural practice. Several recurring motifs in her work such as altar and pillar forms are drawn from this time, as well as her interest in communicating a sense of spirituality and the beauty of the human condition.

Burns frequently incorporates found objects (whether industrial steel elements or organic materials like wood) with steel elements that she skilfully forms through heating, shaping, grinding and welding. The contrast between the stark, geometric forms and the delicate, flowing elements in *September Arrangement* - and throughout her exhibition *Tempered Steel* - heightens the sense of wonder conjured by the hand-formed components.

These organic and natural forms play vital roles in Burns' sculptural work. The piece *September Arrangement* features both natural elements and organic abstract forms, grounded together on a four-legged altar-like base. The pinecones and branches in the piece are drawn directly from nature and illustrate Burns' remarkable attention to detail, at once calling upon still life traditions, while also resembling a kind of precious spiritual offering. These familiar natural forms engage in a dynamic play with the abstracted elements of the piece. When viewing the delicate branch or the animated, fabric-like forms that flow freely from the sculpture's base, it is easy to forget the incredibly strong and heavy steel with which they are made. This illusion of lightness permeates Burns'

works, inviting a sensation of the unexpected as materials are manipulated in extraordinary ways.

Burns' sculptural works engage with both traditional and innovative notions of craft, ambitiously pushing the limits of sculptural expression in the contemporary realm. Visitors to the gallery recurrently comment on the works' unique ability to surprise them and defy their ideas of what metal can do. This feeling of surprise and wonder is an emotional response that Burns strives to evoke through her sculptures, and she does so in impactful and ever evolving ways. For these reasons and for those described above, we believe Isla Burns to be a commendable candidate for this year's Eldon and Anne Foote Visual Arts Prize.

Thank you for your consideration,



Peter Robertson