



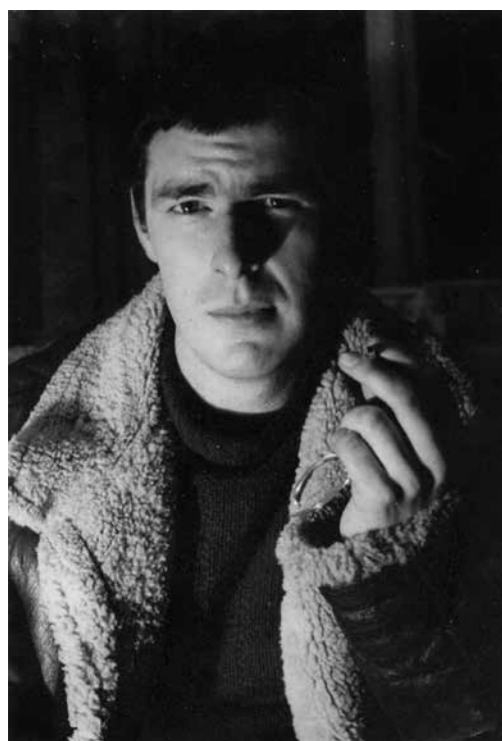
BRYAN
KNEALE



BRYAN KNEALE RA

Foreword by Brian Catling and essays
by Andrew Lambirth, Jon Wood and
Judith LeGrove

PANGOLIN LONDON



First published in 2018 by Pangolin London
Pangolin London, 90 York Way, London N1 9AG

E: gallery@pangolinlondon.com
www.pangolinlondon.com

ISBN 978-0-9956213-8-1

All rights reserved. Except for the purpose of review, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publishers.

Pangolin London © All rights reserved
Set in Gill Sans Light
Designed by Pangolin London
Printed in the UK by Healeys Printers

(ABOVE)
Bryan Kneale, c.1950s

(INSIDE COVER)
Bryan Kneale with *Catalyst*
Catalyst
1964, Steel
Unique
Height: 215 cm

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Another Brimful of Grace by Brian Catling 7

CHAPTER 1

The Opening Years by Andrew Lambirth 23

CHAPTER 2

Productive Tensions by Jon Wood 55

CHAPTER 3

Seeing Anew by Judith LeGrove 87

BIOGRAPHY 130

INDEX 134

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 136

ANOTHER BRIMFUL OF GRACE

“BOAYL NAGH VEL AGGLE CHA VEL GRAYSE” BY BRIAN CATLING

Since the first draft of this enthusiasm for Bryan's work, which I had the privilege to write a couple of years ago, a whole new wealth of paintings have been made, and it is in their illumination that I keep some of the core material about the life of Bryan Kneale's extraordinary talent.

The new paintings have gushed out of series of more delicate drawings which were gleaned from both the complexities of the sculptures and the dissecting eye of his anatomical studies. The sturdy bones of both whittled down, the mass removed. These studies are not the gathering of past configurations of solid bodies, but the interior of the interior in the act of separation; delicate, translucent and fluctuating. They may have started as longings to make strong hands-on work again, to contact the grace of steel, which has been denied by physical frailty of age. But they too are evolving in Kneale's imagination, not coming to terms with the catalogued disappearance of weight, but finding another existence that is separate to gravity. More of mist than earth, closer to music than stone. Then they astonishingly transformed in signatures of force. The palette knife, which carved out the early violent portraits, turning inwards to fold and forge dimensions written as presence. There is an immediacy here

that is as telling as a storm and as monumental as a runic glyph. And makes yet another lens to look back on a lifetime of distinctively original work.

Notwithstanding, it would be irreverent to discuss these works without acknowledging the enormous influence of his upbringing on the Isle of Man. Its dark and windswept isolation is still a subject he evokes and takes pleasure in, even once claiming that he was fundamentally a Manxman, and that was the strength of his directness in making art. The five decades since have obviously proved that wrong. The level of elegant sophistication and the tenacity of brightness in his evolving sculptures have left the mud of that work ethic far behind. But there might be a primal key here to examine the core of Kneale's highly original metaphoric practice.

One of the things about the island is that whatever I saw seemed to assume a daguerreotype-like kind of reality owing to the extreme clarity of light and bareness of the landscape.¹

Single found objects in an environment of grass and rock create focus and mystery in a vivid imagination. Remnants of machine, fragments of sheep carcass, driven posts and fallen gates and all

(LEFT)
Imperial Blue
2018, Acrylic on canvas
102 x 76 cm



(LEFT)
Bryan Kneale with skulls, c. 1990

(RIGHT)
Colin
c. 1950, Oil on canvas
90 x 40 cm
Manx National Heritage

the other a man made contrivance, punctuate the rural indifference and give a sign of closer systems of form and function; an otherness that demands a subconscious dialogue of revelation. This would explain the constant seeking to understand what the memory might be, of how the imagination invents another image to fill the hollow of unknowing. Sometimes the hand is the most direct way to expose this process and open a glimpse to meaning. Allowing and trusting in it to go beyond the matter-of-fact paths of conscious design. Kneale's drawing and sculpture are seething with this dissection of recollection. Remaking the echo of fragment inside his language of poetic cause and effect.

If I experiment it is only because this is a means of realising that I have at last understood something: it has become intelligible to me.²

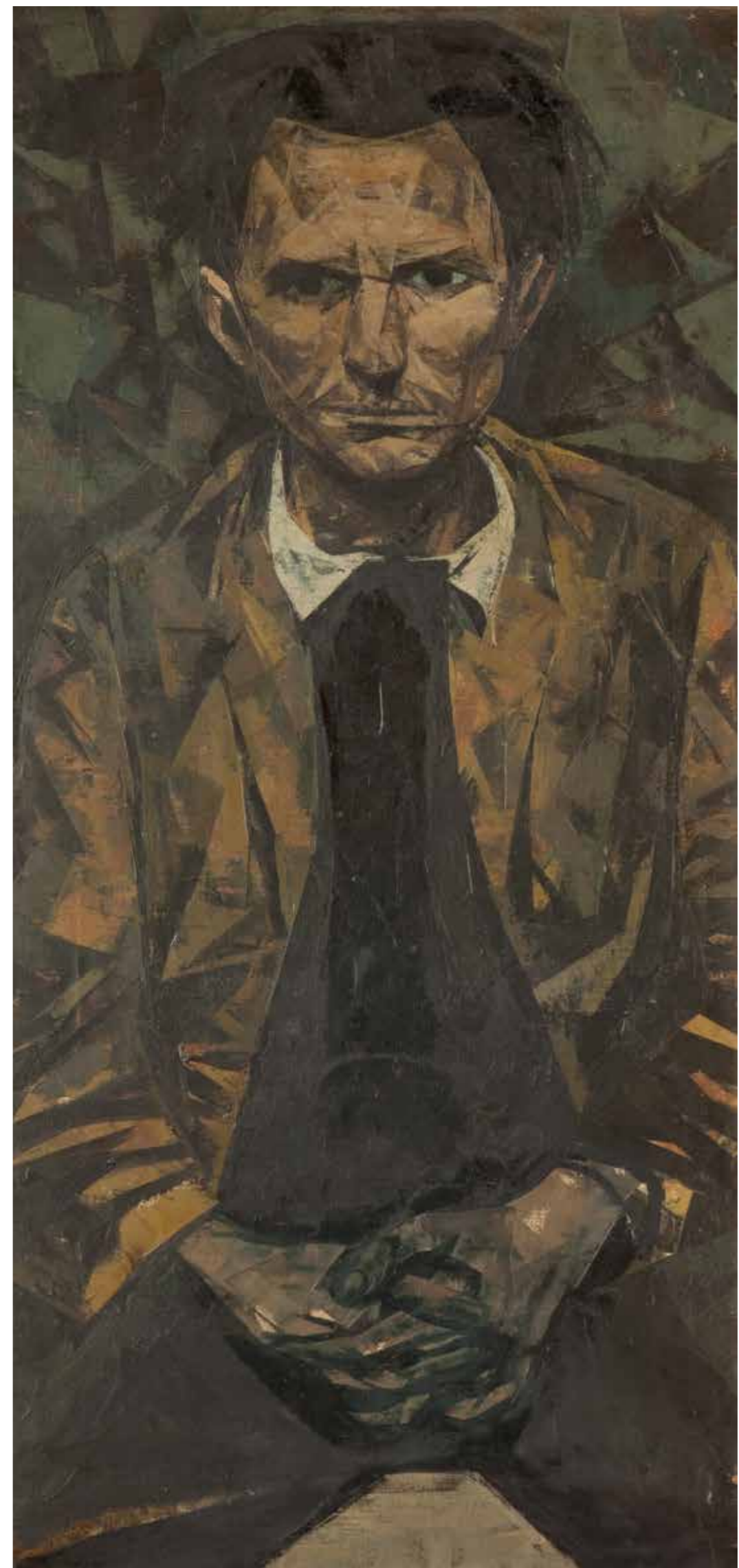
This is one of the constant signatures in his work which separates him from so many other contemporary and near contemporary British abstract sculptors. His striving is not seated, like

so many other cutters & welders, in the academic and does not rely on training or a reaction with the life room and the objective external contours of the human body.

*The more I examined the exterior quality of a head the less real it seemed..
...in a life-class, I suddenly realised that when the model opened her mouth.
I became aware of an internal world which whilst invisible was more real than the outer one.³*

Kneale's early paintings do not show the worthy study of dull pigment and blunt observation, but a fierce and uncompromising expressionistic portraiture of people, haunted by the emptiness of numb peace in bleak post war isolation. Hollow-eyed and big handed they stare out of the canvases angry and melancholic. They demand emotional contact with the viewer and purposely ignore the rising fashionable tides of Colour Field painting that were demanding the Stalinization of all figurative elements.

Kneale's move into the third dimension had



little or nothing to do with external pressures, but rather a need to find a greater fluency to summon the growing surrealist shadow in the work. Picturing the protagonist or the victim was now no longer enough. It was necessary for the actual essence of the mystery and conflict to become manifest. Early experiments with wood and plaster did not give him the resistance he desired. The stem flexibility of steel became that, the primal processes of heat and force.

Appealing to his sensual delight in struggle and concussion, and also resonating with the sound of explosion. The only German bomb dropped on the Isle of Man tried to nail the rock even

deeper into the Irish Sea. Bryan's father, hastily cycling over to the crater and returning with a fragment of warm buckled steel; a prized possession that was miserably stolen from the boy at school and doubtless is still hidden there. More manipulation was required to match such an incident, the knowledge of forging and machine lathing giving agile stealth to the composed object; increasing the logic of their machined anatomy. The pitted steel rectangle of *Bible Box*, 1964, being made concave by controlled military explosion. Opposite cooler skills honed to perfection; brass, aluminium and perspex engineered to contrast; the language expanding.

In *Pendulum*, *Drift* and *Witness*, the forms are open, linear and converse in a distance of balance and suspension, demonstrating one of the artist's keenest preoccupations; poise. In these works it is actual, and set in a rigid Beckettian framework of tension. In later works it becomes absorbed, sheathed and internalised, so that poise becomes the subtle motivation that drives the work. There is an inspired restlessness in Kneale's sculptures. The hand won't settle, but drives into new configurations of form and material through different understandings of process, interrogating images with their opposites.

These were also the features that made him such an important educationalist and curator of contemporary sculpture before his retirement. The energetic encouragement of difference and diversity, with significant shows at the Tate, the Royal Academy and Battersea Park. He also strengthened and guided the RCA sculpture department in direct opposition to the St. Martin's School of Sculpture (where attitudes towards



(ABOVE)
Bible Box
1964, Steel
90.2 x 24.8 x 31.1 cm
Unique
Arts Council Collection



(RIGHT)
Pendulum
1963, Steel
Unique
152 x 251 cm



innovations in abstract sculpture were often less than flexible). Kneale was never part of that clan or any other conglomerate of thinking. He demands his own separate oxygen for private experimentation.

William Tucker once complained to Bryan that there was 'too much of the Quatermass'⁴ about his work. This comment was obviously limp but might just have had an accidental kernel of profundity in it. Bryan's brother Nigel made films and TV stories which were hugely successful and are still gaining critical praise. A dark menace was

at the heart of each, a Manxian shadow escaping into over-lit modern settings, wickedly tinged with humour and understatement. There is nothing literal in the younger brother's sculptures; no story-telling with a beginning, a middle and an end. But there might just be a tincture, the quintessence of a brooding memory, of chill and otherness, in the way its layered parts fold. Or an uncertain circumference, shuttered like a giant lens, hung vertically and given the name *Polyphemus*. The eye of a monster trapped on an island.

Kneale always matches elegance with ingenuity

Witness
1963-4, Steel
Unique
125.2 x 231.6 cm
Leicestershire County Council
Artworks Collection

in his finely crafted works. It is one of the haptic read-outs of the joy of making, and also offers a scent to the viewer in their need to track the identity and meaning of an abstract work. This is true in his gliding forms that have immaculately exchanged the mechanical fingerprints of their invention for polished reflection; as it is of *Crocus*, 1975, and the smaller Haiku table pieces which look like they may have been modelled in clay instead of delicately hammered out of steel.

In the circular and domed works *Shrine of Daedalus*, *Oracle*, *Mars* and *Crucible*, a planetary image is exploited. They are not gesturing to us in the same way as the other work, but turn inwards while glaring outward. There is a summoning of unstable momentum here. Some brim with night and ripeness, while others have given up the perfection of their meniscus in a spilling that bends and fragments them towards inversion. It is difficult not to read murmurs of fear, decay



Polyphemus
2000, Bronze Coated Steel
Unique
140 x 170 cm



Crocus
1975, Copper, Brass
and Stainless Steel
Unique
190.5 x 33 cm



(ABOVE)
Shrine of Daedalus
2006, Stainless Steel
Unique
70 x 110 cm

or environmental collapse in these cauldrons of future.

Kneale's relationship to drawing has been complex and to some extent contradictory. The power and impact of the works on paper is conspicuous. The skeletal bestiaries are the only works where he shares his subjective potency with objective study, allowing one view to pass through the other, with tangible relish and wit. The distribution of weight and contrasts of proportion creating line and volume inside the metal, as in *Astra*, 2011. The surface detail alive with touch as in *Samurai*, 2008, or written into the carapace of *Shrine of Daedalus*, 2006.



(RIGHT)
Mars
2005, Copper
Unique
40 x 90 cm



Those actions are now imbedded in the thin surface of canvas. Interior, exterior and surface spun in the fulcrum of the wrist. Applied without doubt to conjure the viewers eye into their depths.

BRIAN CATLING

Boayl nagh vel aggle cha vel grayse.

"Where there is no fear there is no grace."

On The Classification of Proverbs and Sayings Of the Isle of Man by G.W.Wood.

^{1, 2 & 3} Interview with Bryan Robinson. Whitechapel Gallery catalogue, 1966

⁴ Thomas Nigel Kneale (1922-2006) was a British screen-writer. He wrote professionally for more than 50 years, was a winner of the Somerset Maugham Award, and was twice nominated for the British Film Award for Best Screenplay. In 2000, he received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Horror Writers Association. Predominantly a writer of thrillers that used science-fiction and horror elements, he was best known for the creation of the character Professor Bernard Quatermass. Quatermass was a heroic scientist who appeared in various television, film and radio productions written by Kneale for the BBC, Hammer Film Productions and Thames Television between 1953 and 1996. Kneale wrote original scripts and successfully adapted works by writers such as George Orwell, John Osborne, H. G. Wells and Susan Hill. He was most active in television, joining BBC Television in 1951; his final script was transmitted on ITV in 1997. Kneale wrote well-received television dramas such as The Year of the Sex Olympics (1968) and The Stone Tape (1972) in addition to the Quatermass serials. He has been described as "one of the most influential writers of the 20th century," and as "having invented popular TV." (Source: Wikipedia)

(ABOVE)
Oracle
2006, Brass and Copper
Unique
50 x 90 cm

(ABOVE RIGHT)
Bryan in his studio, c. 2005

(LEFT)
Crucible
2005, Copper
Unique
79 x 60 cm