

Press Pack

A man with short brown hair and a serious expression, wearing a dark blue jacket and brown leather apron, stands in a workshop. He is holding a large, rough, dark piece of wood or bark. The background shows various tools and equipment, including a large metal frame and a wooden structure.

Exhibition of Sculptures
by: Jonathan O'Dea

Exhibition title: Material - Art

Exhibition dates: 12 – 25 June 2025

Winns Gallery
Lloyd Park
London, E17 5JW

Press Release

Jonathan O'Dea: *Material – Art*

12 – 25 June 2025

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Lloyd Park
London, E17 5JW

Winns Gallery is delighted to announce ***Material – Art***, an exhibition of 10 new abstract sculptures by Irish artist Jonathan O'Dea MRSS, FRSA, exploring the metaphysics and physical science of making art.

The work for this exhibition started from the discovery by O'Dea of burnt and discarded materials in a local building destroyed by fire, augmented by other found, household and building waste materials, including discarded plastic CD covers, building aggregate and castoff metal from construction sites.

O'Dea's use of these contrasting found, and repurposed materials is used to explore ideas of cohesion - from the physical to the metaphysical - as well as discovering how the chemical composition of different materials can determine the outcome of an individual work. Even under intense heat and pressure the materials will not create a uniformed bond, as one heats up the other burns, or cracks. They may stick together but never become a resolved or solid mass.

For O'Dea, the juxtaposition of these materials also stands as a metaphor for the human condition. He says, *"Through these sculptures I am exploring the relationship between abstract art and science and how humans try to create order from 'chaos' to make sense of the world around us. This might involve stretching the cognitive processes to think outside the box to find answers – but also accepting that truth and reality cannot always be easily understood."*

The four vertical, totemic works, standing at just over human height, create a curious tension in the viewer, calling to mind both the destruction inherent in their making and the history and present circumstance of human conflict around the world.

Dr Julian Freeman, Art Historian at the Courtauld Gallery, observes. *"The combination of fierce heat and natural and man-made materials, sourced from unknown locations, can make these works disturbing, and in their pillar-like presences they can easily resonate with eras, or to epochs that are more in keeping with the classical world than with the twenty-first century"*.

These sculptures also stand as a commentary on our wasteful society, repurposing discarded 'trash' into sculptures which are dynamic and imbued with an urban aesthetic which is both beautiful and thought provoking in its rawness.

Jonathan O 'Dea - Material – Art

Free to visit. Open daily - 12-25 June

By: Dr Julian Freeman / Courtauld Gallery / 2025

Material - Art

Never afraid of experimentation, and impelled by an innate curiosity, Jonathan O'Dea has spent much of the last two decades reviewing his initial artistic development in North-east London, and altering his practice to better reflect his aims. Over time, sculpture has come to replace painting in O'Dea's output, and that switch to three dimensions now declares a creative confidence that is capable of functioning very effectively across more than one medium, and an ability to realise complicated and commanding visual responses to real events.

Urban life has always marked O'Dea's mature work, but twenty years ago his subjects tended to be more tentative, and structurally smaller. More recently, amongst several themes that have most commanded his attention, local events have significantly taken centre stage. They have not been 'drivers' in the strict sense, but they have undoubtedly offered sustained stimuli for the fabrication of a range of structures, each held together by a variety of processes and materials, and resulting in some powerful outcomes.

To live in East London since the millennium one could not have avoided the collective impact of the 2012 Olympic Games, or the 2008-22 Crossrail project (now the Elizabeth line). In their engineering and architecture, above and below ground, each in their way significantly impacted on life, existence and public consciousness in and around the city, and continue to do so, and as they progressed O'Dea discovered and witnessed myriad subjects that stimulated his imagination at several levels. His preparedness to admit experiment into work in progress means that his newest work often evolves from a single idea but develops through several stages, even after a pause, to finally conclude in outcomes whose inherent and built-in poetry is sometimes uncomfortably stark, yet lose nothing in their richness. His audience must form their own ideas about meaning, and a visit to his studio in 2025 prompts a slew of surprises. Not the least of these is the muscularity of much of his work – even the smaller pieces – from which natural materials have often been sought from waste sites or offered by contractors who have become enthused by O'Dea's ideas.

These works are singularly impressive. Their height, which is belied by photography, is taller than most humans, and so invites audience speculation about their purpose, and their construction, which is rarely the same. All are made from 'repurposed' materials, often discarded wooden boards, slats or lathe from demolished buildings or construction sites, including the Olympic Park and the 'Lizzie Line' tunnels, and amongst them the earliest of O'Dea's newest works own several human qualities, and entertain the possibility of their commemorative or documentary purpose. Others use wooden beam-ends that have been cut to random lengths before assembly into a semi-orderly if teetering verticality. Others still combine ungainly wooden off-cuts with the hardened relics of molten plastic, to become more speculative floor pieces. The combination of fierce heat and natural and man-made materials, sourced from unknown locations, can make these works disturbing, and in their pillar-like presences they can easily resonate with eras, or to epochs that are more in keeping with the classical world than with the twenty-first century. If O'Dea is presenting them as contemporary *stelae*, markers or signposts that simultaneously commemorate, and point the finger at, a volatile culture of modern manufacture and speedy obsolescence, he has now manifestly succeeded.





Title: Carbon Dating 1
Medium: Wood
Size: 200x70cm





Title: Carbon Dating 2
Medium: Wood
Size: 200x30cm





Title: Carbon Dating 3
Medium: Wood & Metal
Size: 200x30cm





Title: Wooden Polymer
Medium: Wood and Plastic
Size: 200x60cm





Jonathan O'Dea: Statement & Biography

Deconstructed Art & Regeneration

Over the past 15 years, I've delved into the theory of deconstructed art, transforming it into a tool to both inform and create new works. I've collected objects, disassembled them, and transformed them into sculptures. This process is intrinsically linked to the narrative surrounding my work, which has centered around the concept of regeneration. Jacques Derrida's theory on deconstructed art posited that:

"There is not one single intrinsic meaning to be found in a work, but rather many, and often these can be conflicting".

Through this process, I've taken familiar objects, deconstructed them into parts, and transformed them into abstract sculptures. This process offers viewers a unique perspective that challenges their cognitive abilities. While 3D artwork like sculptures naturally provide more to process than paintings or drawings, adding additional layers further enhances cognitive function. This complexity is further amplified when combining various materials and techniques in a single piece, stimulating the brain with visual stimuli. Additionally, I've employed paint in a specific manner to impart depth and tonal qualities. By applying and removing sections of paint, I reveal layers, creating ambiguity and depth of field. Through this process, I'm pushing the boundaries of materials, causing them to lose their original identity or purpose and emerge as new objects.

A part from the physical creation of my work, the narrative surrounding it is informed by the term "Regeneration." The term "Regeneration" conveys a general transformation; it's proactive and drives the processes involved in making of my work. Over the past four decades, the term has evolved to describe urban and social renewal. What underpinned this renewal were the reconstruction and regeneration of large urban areas in the U.K., such as Liverpool, Manchester, and London. Like all reconstruction projects, it involves taking something old and creating something new. In my case, I source recycled building materials from interesting and significant reconstruction projects and transform them into abstract sculptures. In part, my work reflects how changes in our physical environment impact our visual culture, identity, and a sense of place and ownership.

Biography

Jonathan is a member of the Royal Society of Sculptors, which is committed to the pursuit of excellence in the art form. Jonathan is also a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts. Jonathan has been producing and exhibiting artwork professionally for over 20 years. Between 1995 and 1996 Jonathan attended Central St Martins where he completed a diploma in Art and Design, followed by a degree in History with Irish Studies at London Metropolitan University. After his degree he returned to art with the support from the Prince's Trust for his first solo exhibition. Since then, Jonathan has had 15 solo exhibitions, and has been selected for over 23 group exhibitions, in Britain, Ireland and China. Jonathan also have been commissioned, and received funding from Arts Council England for number of high-profile projects including the Cultural Olympiad in 2012. Jonathan has also created sculptures from materials used in significant infrastructure projects such as Crossrail (Queen Elizabeth line). Jonathan's studio is located in Borough of Waltham Forest, in the grounds of the William Morris Gallery. Jonathan is also a strong advocate of supporting the arts and culture at a social and policy level, and has sat on different advisory bodies and groups to inform strategic delivery of cultural policy.

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