

Maud Cotter – capturing the intangible

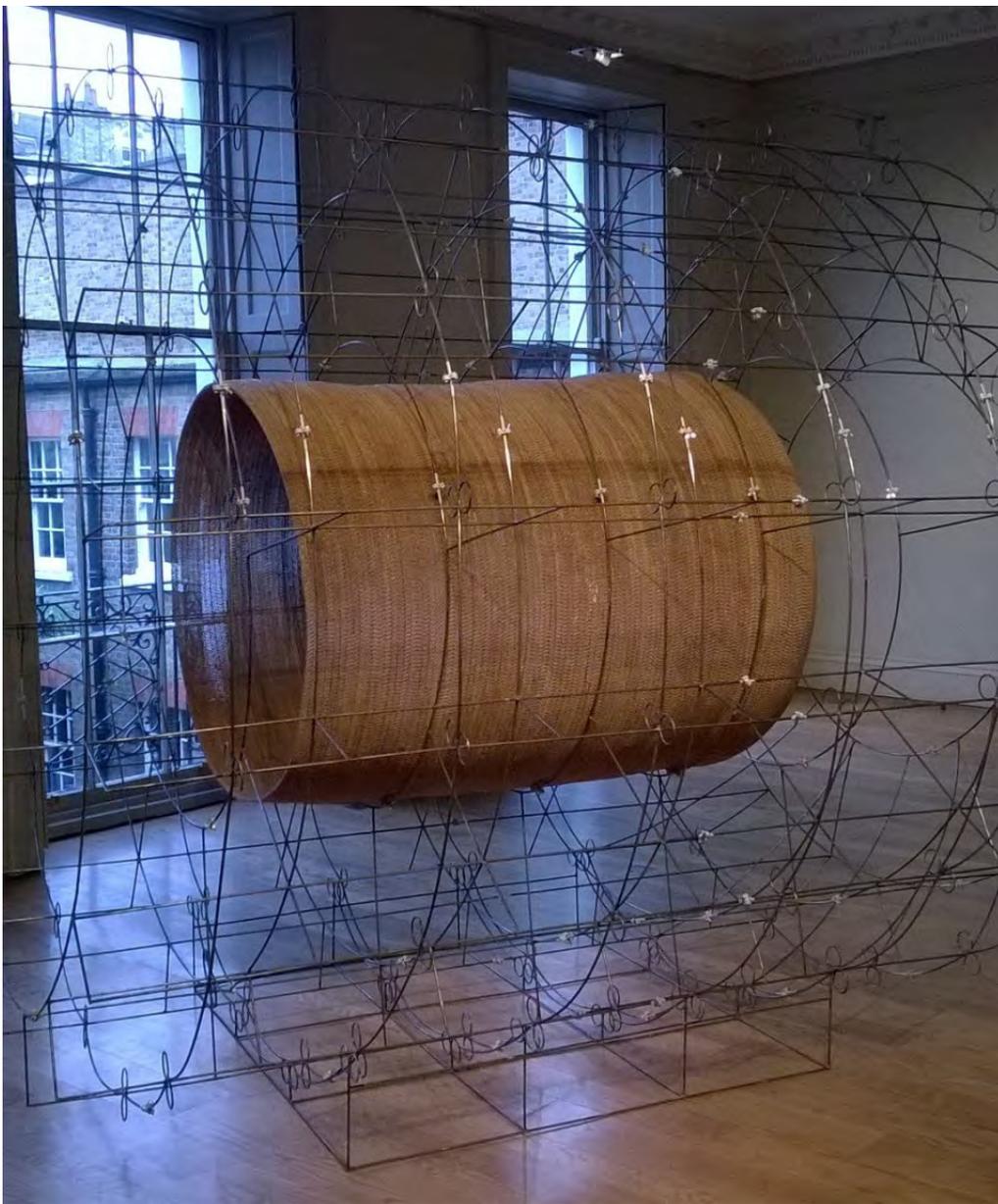
It was back at the beginning of 2014 that I came round to the possibilities of cardboard; I had previously been sceptical that anything interesting could be made from it but I was impressed by the work of **Michelangelo Pistoletto** (<https://artelological.com/2014/02/24/coming-round-to-cardboard/>) at the *Cent Quatre Arts Complex* in Paris. In that case the cardboard was left pretty much in its natural state but was looped around to form a complex internal maze. My conversion to cardboard has just taken another jump forward with a visit to the extraordinarily discreet Domobaal gallery in Bloomsbury to see *Matter of Fact*, a solo exhibition by the Irish artist **Maud Cotter**.

Unlike Pistoletto, Cotter does not adapt cardboard, but uses it as a raw material and transforms it through painstaking work into a thing of beauty. Her creations, which can take months to complete, start with cardboard of the three ply corrugated variety, the kind from which sturdy boxes are made. She slices it into thin strips about half a centimetre wide, dips the pieces into resin and reassembles them to create structures that appear both light and fragile, they can be supported, as in the work below, solely by thin yellow hand-tied mason's line. But they are in fact tougher than they look. I know that to be true as, unexpectedly, in view of the normal don't touch rule, I was invited to tap one by the gallery owner. It didn't feel like cardboard at all, but was hard like an eggshell.



Maud Cotter: Litter Bin

Look closely and you can see that the structure has been made up of panels, like some kind of three dimensional quilting. The photograph shows quite clearly how the strips of cardboard are teased into complex whorls and patterns. For works which are so complex, they have surprisingly prosaic names: *Litter Bin*, for instance. Writing about her work, Cotter explains that her aim is to hold on to *intangible moments*, which I take to mean the very stuff of our everyday lives, which for most of us is prosaic enough. Although these creations involve a huge number of hours work, in their lightness of touch they resemble sketches in the air; there are the lines drawn in metal, delicate and intricate; the cardboard forms are the shading.



Maud Cotter: Matter of Fact

Whilst it is the central form which first attracts attention, the surrounding stand, is equally important; its little swirls of metal reflect the cylinder it contains. You can line these circles up and squint through them; it's like looking down a telescope.



Maud Cotter: Matter of Fact

The exhibition also includes other smaller works, there were some things downstairs which looked a bit like beakers of cappuccino. I liked the way the lines of the larger work were referenced by this wall mounted piece, *Falling into Many Pieces* and then made double through the shadows cast by clever lighting.



Maud Cotter: Falling into Many Pieces

Unlike many successful artists Cotter believes in making her works herself rather than handing it over to assistants or a fabricator. She cuts and bonds the cardboard, bends the mild steel of the stands over her knee and then welds the pieces together, only to cut them up once the construction is made to insert hand made joints which allow the works to be assembled and disassembled.



Look carefully and you can see the irregularities that this method produces. I like that. There are some who argue that the concept is all, and you should never make what others can do for you; but for me the thumbprint of the artist adds something, intangible even, but important

Matter of Fact is showing at the domobaal Gallery, 3 John Street, London WC1N 2ES, till May 14