

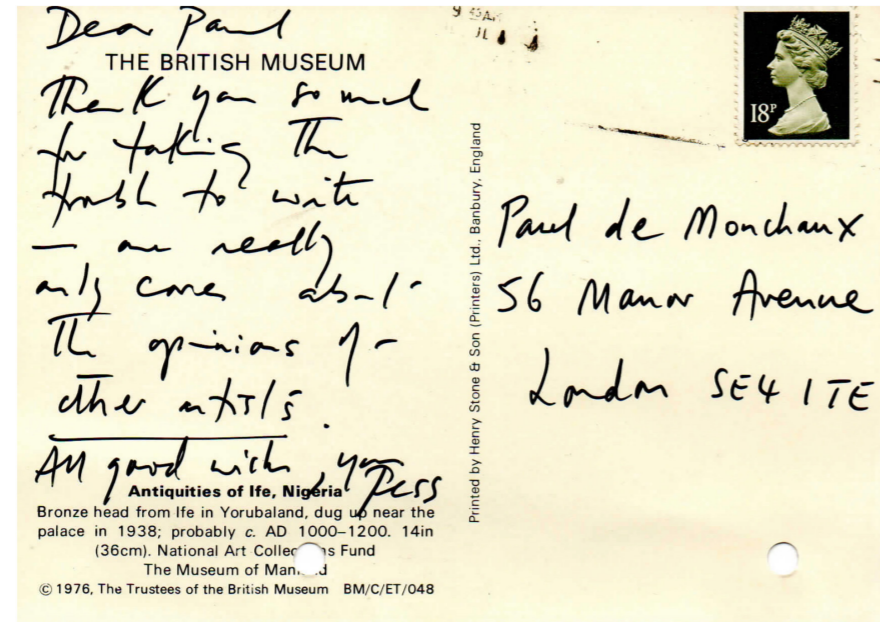
# Tess Jaray Paul de Monchaux

## Correspondences



## Foreword Megan Piper

Tess Jaray and Paul de Monchaux studied together at the Slade School of Fine Art in the late 1950s. They met again in 1986 during the Stoke-on-Trent Garden Festival, where de Monchaux's work was included in the Whitechapel Gallery Garden and Jaray presented her first brick floor-piece. As both artists pursued public art commissions through the 1990s, their dialogue continued. Over the last fifteen years, they have exchanged over 400 letters by email – discussing shared influences and artistic challenges. This publication features a selection of these correspondences and coincides with their exhibition at Frestonian Gallery, which brings together their work in a gallery for the first time, demonstrating their visual dialogue and highlighting their common ground.



Postcard from Tess Jaray to Paul de Monchaux following his enthusiastic response to her Serpentine Gallery exhibition in 1988



Paul de Monchaux and Tess Jaray at the Slade (1957)

TJ-6 July 2006 (in response to de Monchaux's studio show at Manor Avenue)

I greatly enjoyed seeing your work. It also made me feel less isolated in my interests.

PdeM-8 July 2006

Being completely out of the art school loop these days, opportunities for art conversations are rare, so being able to talk to you about work was a great pleasure and I have been replaying our discussions in my head since.

I have posted you some details of a sculpture proposal (1) where I made use of the root-2 rectangles to generate the structure of the piece. The other term for the 'incommensurable' dimensions of the diagonals of squares is 'unspeakable numbers'. In the case of the example I have sent you the dimension of the diagonal is known, making the dimensions of the sides of the square 'unspeakable'.

TJ-11 July 2006

Thank you so much for the drawings.

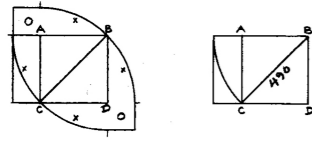
One of the things I find so interesting is that you make something so personal, so much your own handwriting, out of such simple means. It seems to me there are fundamentally two things going on: the first is the relationship of the parts within the piece itself, and then the relationship of the parts to the whole. In a way this itself reflects the Golden Section, but in a completely unacademic way. For some reason that I cannot fathom you have made a form both ordinary and extraordinary, both personal and universal. If the reason for this is its exactness, absolute precision, total balance, which in some strange way reflects your own needs, then I do understand it. Because I think that part of what I am trying to do is to make something special (I would prefer startling) out of something utterly ordinary, banal, conventional. Is this what most artists are trying to do? If you were painting a tree or a figure would you say the same?

Sadly, the more I learn the less I understand.

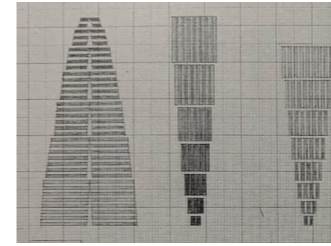
Whatever you say about not understanding geometry, I fear my ignorance is well in advance of yours. But I am going to send you a couple of catalogues with reproductions of drawings where one can see the process. I've never really worked with the Golden Section but in the past got very involved with Fibonacci. I love its relationship to growing things. Ever since I watched starlings in formation I have been looking for a way to echo bird formation, but so far it eludes me. I am going to send you a couple of catalogues which demonstrate some of my methods in the drawings. I am going to see if there is any way I can steal from your work...

PdeM-14 July 2006

Thanks very much for the catalogues. It is good to have a reminder of those great shows. Regarding stealing, I think I have beat you to it: looking at Studies 42 (2) and 43 in the Serpentine catalogue, I realise that your towers



1



2



3

seem to have surfaced 18 years later in mine (3). So please help yourself if you find anything worth taking!

I don't think subject matter is ever ordinary to the artist choosing it; for example your starlings in formation, architectural motifs etc. It is the means of building correspondences that seem ordinary or over-familiar; plain graphite, pigment in a tube, inert clay or stone, geometry, the musical scale, art conventions. They have to be given the kiss of life; to be woken up, to be made 'startling'. An observer might say that we have occasionally succeeded in this search but it is better for us to remain uncertain but optimistic.

PdeM-19 July 2006

For me, geometry acts as a mnemonic, a means of remembering that part of a solid that from any given view cannot be seen as an edge (often most of it) and its relief, which can only be sensed. As for colour, it used to make me cry as a child when it all turned to mud, and it still does, so I am in awe of artists like yourself who use it so freely and fluently.

TJ-23 July 2006

For me, geometry is not so much a discipline, nor, as you describe for you, a mnemonic, and I analyse it as little mathematically as one analyses a sentence casually spoken. I don't quite want to say as a fish analyses the water it swims in, because I hope I'm a little bit more aware. This may be (I haven't asked myself this question before) why I often have trouble 'moving on', as I have to rely on instinct and desires, which is OK when there is something in front of one to look at, but not much use if there isn't.

PdeM-29 July 2006

Among its many uses, geometry provides a means to coordinate the seen with the sensed. The process itself has its own poetry regardless of the application.

TJ-2 August 2006 (in response to an audio interview sent by de Monchaux about his work, Song)

There are several things you mention where I see we share the same territory, or drink from the same cup. You speak about the work being 'based on architecture'. It is the same for me, although I would put it differently: I have always thought that the influence of architecture for me - first experienced in Italy of course - has to do mostly with its emotive impact. How a building, or structure, or place, makes me feel. And I try to use that, somehow, in the paintings. And you say 'a few configurations keep cropping up' and speak of 'the structure that carries it forward again'... I sometimes think of this as 'the structural imperative', which is rather odd, as of course the structural aspect in my paintings is illusional. Here I think is a difference: I try to move away from 'stability' (without quite losing it) so that the image is always partly mobile, has movement built into it in such a way that it can

never quite remain at rest.

'A geometry that hints at more than itself'. I believe with this you have expressed the nub of the mystery of the thing. Sadly we don't live at a time when one could speculate on geometry being the underlying secret of the universe! Although I still feel that almost everything can be 'geometrised', and certainly for me everything creates a pattern. I'm also sorry that this word is seen as derogatory when mentioned in relation to art. This is something you have minimised: the pattern in your work has been transformed into, perhaps, elements of a structure that are as much self-contained as part of the external world. It may be something to do with the strength of your 'framing'.

'The meaning of spaces and architecture'. I think that a thing can 'mean' something without knowing exactly what that thing is. It must be a primitive need, and when you speak about 'the illusion of a spiral', which is absolutely one of my 'needs', I think we are in a long line of artists who have felt this, from early carvings of the spiral to Leonardo's studies of hair and water, to Bruegel's *Tower of Babel* to the pillars in Durham Cathedral. I am still at it right now. I also like your description of geometry as 'a means to coordinate the seen with the sensed'. I have just read an interesting biography of Leonardo da Vinci, in which is quoted a memo he wrote to himself: 'Learn from Messer Luca how to multiply square roots'. (Makes me feel a little better about my difficulties in grasping this concept...). Leonardo says that Alberti recommended 'natural proportions' in architecture, which are not borrowed from numbers but from the roots and powers of squares. I'm not sure this is true.

One of the reasons I have always found the Fibonacci series enchanting, apart from its generating spirals, is that it's a direct link to natural growth. I feel if a thistle can do it, so can I. But the root square seems more like having to start at the beginning of everything.

PdeM—2 August 2006

Alberti's 'natural proportions' may refer to the way roots and powers of squares can be generated using a compass without having to do complicated and difficult sums; hence their utility on a building site in those days and in my studio now.

TJ—21 November 2006

I realise that although many of our interests overlap, and although I do think that in fact there is a real spirit in common, and many of our inspirations are similar, that your means of getting there are far more grounded in real and understood geometry than mine. Because you understand it so much better than I do you have the means to exploit and play games with it. For instance, when you talk about 'generating the unseen but strongly sensed void holding the volume of water' you are expressing both the

calculatedly 'there' and the imaginary unseen simultaneously. I also now understand a little better how you achieve what I thought of as *transitions*. But that could imply a void which is not the case, rather you are creating a form that is somehow *hidden*.

PdeM—9 February 2010

I always start with the structure; the final choice of material comes later and making the same form in several materials can throw up interesting changes of emphasis and mood, with one being not necessarily better than another, just different.

PdeM—8 September 2011 (exchange about Jaray's commission for St Mary's Church in Nottingham)

Geometry, proportion and number have always been sacred, powerful evidence of gods ordering work. Triads (trinity) and sevens (creation) are everywhere in church buildings, art and liturgy so maybe the number of stations comes from the magic seven?

PdeM—29 May 2012

I have also read [your] account of the hang in the RA magazine and was very struck by your remarks about the powerful impact of your first encounter with Italian architecture; I had exactly the same experience on my first visit to Florence in 1954, having gone there to respectfully check out the great painters and sculptors, only to be quite overwhelmed by the buildings instead.

TJ—12 June 2012

Every time I see your pieces, I notice more and more subtleties. There is something about them that at one and the same time remain solid and stable, and yet effervescent, mobile, and dematerialised as well. Lots of words starting with 'trans' come into my mind: transformative, transmitting, transition, transmuting.

TJ—26 February 2013 (in response to de Monchaux's exhibition at The Piper Gallery)

I loved – as I always have – your transitions from one form into another, with the disappearing edges, with just the slightest hint of forms behind the forms – one form slowly revealing another. And the scale (not size) seems to contain a feeling of infinity – and not only *Uxmal* (4) but the others as well. What I hadn't quite seen before was the powerful element of sexuality there.

TJ—7 September 2006 (an earlier conversation relating to the work shown at Art15)

Although of course lightness and darkness do not exclude colour, the colours I am seeking have to do with thoughts about the time of day, those moments between day and night, the quality of first light, and what colour is midnight (5). The conflict between dark and light as seen in a reflected



4



5



6

surface. And is darkness something that surrounds us or something we look into?

TJ—18 August 2013

Your new piece (6) really expresses the controlled wildness of later life ... But we are both lucky to understand where the point of it all rests – in one's studio and one's hands and head. I personally love your pieces in wood, so no tragedy if they can't be bronze. There is a particular and personal touch you have in the finished surface that you can only get with wood.

TJ—20 August 2013

Your remark on the drawing of the voids in your new piece is very interesting. Perhaps that is partly what we have in common with our work, an attempt to deal with the invisible...

PdeM—24 January 2014

Maybe geometry is a Darwinian 'adaptation' of the kind so eloquently described by Dennis Dutton? It has after all been around a long time. I have always thought – since life-modelling days at the Slade – that it is a built-in attribute of our bodies projected outwards by the mind; a kind of bat's radar; a choreography for navigating invisible space and a crucial sculpture tool. On the other hand, my teacher there, Reg Butler, told me time and again that I would never be an artist because my work was 'too geometrical'; so naturally I have spent the past 50-odd years making it more and more so. I use it now like a musical scale to explore its inexhaustible permutations, mostly prosaic and predictable but sometimes miraculous and new.

PdeM—19 March 2014

Attached photo of new small piece (7).

TJ—19 March 2014

It strikes me that it is an expression of an artist's maturity, in that there is almost a kind of humour in it, a bit in the way that Matisse has in his late cut-outs.

It's the work of someone who has spent their life exploring the meaning and expression of form, and who can now play with it in total confidence.

PdeM—20 March 2014

I will work on the 'total confidence' bit. Seems more like total anxiety much of the time. I am trying to make a series of variations of equal impact but only some seem to work in spite of coming from an identical starting point. But things have to be made to be seen so I will keep at it for a bit longer until the core idea runs dry.



7



8



9

TJ—21 March 2014

Yes, they do have to be made to be seen; if only that were not the case. I'm in the same situation myself – can't just imagine something and then work on it in the air. More's the pity; one could do it all lying in a comfy chair...

I have noticed, throughout my life and to some annoyance, that the first in a series is often the best. Keep at it – you will know when the core idea has gone.

PdeM—15 October 2015

I received a copy today of an academic paper by one of my ex-students, which included the attached quote from an email I sent her some time ago ... Also, I have been looking at a book called *Sacred Geometry* by Stephen Skinner which has brief illustrated accounts of every proportional system I have ever heard of. I have enjoyed dipping in to it in small doses and trying to understand it all. It is a thread that seems to have held everything together from the beginning.

'We are formed by the past and are in constant communication with it, in our case via form, not words. When I was a child in the museums I felt I personally *knew* the artists who made the sculptures, however remote their place in time. I thought I could be like and with them, a member of a group with a common goal. I think it is this strong *identification* with work other than one's own that is the fuel that propels us forward as artists. Whether literally, as with transcriptions, or imaginatively as in an awareness of a scale of standards.' (De Monchaux: 2014)

TJ—16 October 2015

Your quote is wonderful, and also very interesting, because I think you were more advanced than I was. I couldn't (then) identify with the great artists; it just seemed like a distant, other, magical world. It came later in my life. For me, I think it was making a mark on a flat surface and finding that it had meaning, that opened the first door. I'm still trying to catch up. I too have a book called *Sacred Geometry*, but it's by someone called Robert Lawlor. Also fascinating, though I have tended to look at it for inspiration rather than actually read it.

TJ—22 January 2016 (in response to Volute V in the studio) (8)

There seem to me to be so many possibilities with those shapes, that it would warrant a whole series of works. There is something in the way you've made them that is both utterly simple and totally mysterious. It's as though the curl is the secret of life.

TJ—16 February 2016 (in response to the completed Volute V) (9)

Well, this may be your chef d'oeuvre. It is truly celebratory. Exuberant and expressive of someone who has tasted life and seen the point of it.



10

PdeM—17 February 2016

Many thanks for your very kind remarks. I am so glad you like it and hope you will be able to come and have a look soon. It was a long haul, with quite a few difficulties, but I feel it has come together in the end. There is not a maquette; I worked straight into it with only a very rough idea about where it might be going. I had to make it to understand it ... It is provisionally called *Volute V* as I thought of it as a companion piece to *Volute IV* (10). Now that the two are in the same space they seem very different, even opposites, in spite of sharing the same scale and geometry.

TJ—18 February 2016

I was very interested in your statement 'I had to make it to understand it'. I know exactly what you mean. It does not mean 'I had to make it to understand what it's about'. At least that's the way I interpret it; correct me if I'm wrong.

I suppose that's why we speak about the 'language' of art. It can't be said any other way, and the revelation is in the process of making. The question I always ask myself is, does it communicate to others?

PdeM—20 February 2016

You are quite right on all points about the language of art. I also believe we think with our hands, like good manual workers.

PdeM—3 August 2016

It may be that what keeps us interested in a work over time is precisely what is not revealed. Maybe those hidden geometries, hidden even to those of us with an interest in the subject, are what draws us in. Certainly with sculpture there is a constant effort to reconcile the seen edge with the sensed volume within. This has been a constant preoccupation since those dusty days in the Slade life room. When it is impossible to understand a form, I trust my hands; they seem to have brains of their own and mercifully are still working.

PdeM—31 March 2017

You have a way of amplifying a whisper; small changes that generate great power.

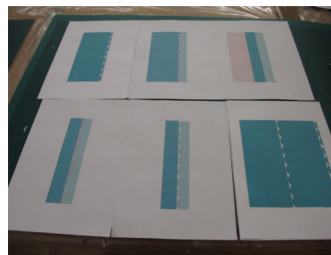
TJ—15 April 2017

In the meantime, I thought you would be amused to see that I have stolen, borrowed, whatever you want to call it, from the picture of the shelf you sent me (11) (you mustn't be offended; I don't that often get influenced by other artists' work, so please consider it the flattery that it is). Attached (12). Nothing remotely resolved. Should I manage something I could title it *From Paul de Monchaux* or something similar.

You say 'combinations that were never meant to be together'.



11



12



13



14

I suspect that is what, partly, we are both seeking. Random, chaotic, serendipity, emotional archaeology, need, desire, whatever we call it there is a strong force there. I think perhaps the reason is entrenched in the very first human molecule, let's hope they never discover it, or artists will be out of work.

I'm having a very quiet weekend, (not quite sure why I had children!) but am not lonely as I'm listening to Bach's *St Matthew Passion*. How he managed to write what is arguably the greatest piece of music ever written and at the same time have 11 children, I can't imagine...

PdeM—16 April 2017

Not just flattered but honoured. Keep it up. I am tempted to pinch some of them back.

I agree absolutely about the *St Matthew Passion* being the greatest piece of music ever written. It is occupying my head right now 2 days after listening to it again. As for his children, he of course did not actually have them: that was left to his two long suffering wives; his initial contribution was over in minutes, then as now. He had to provide for them all but they in turn were put to work in the family business, like farmers' children.

TJ—24 May 2017

Theft, inspiration or just borrowing? (13, 14)

PdeM—24 May 2017

As the old song goes: 'It ain't what you do but the way how you do it'.

PdeM—15 June 2017 (in response to a talk hosted at Jaray's Marlborough show)

I really enjoyed the discussions last night. As you said, like the old art school days, or rather the best aspect of them.

...

Attached work in progress (15). Where is it going? No idea; maybe the bin.

TJ—16 June 2017

What is particularly interesting about the pictures you sent is that, first, it looks like the work of a young artist (sexy as usual); and second, there is no sense of size. It could be enormous, though I suspect it's not. Sometimes I get that from photographs of Giacometti's work.

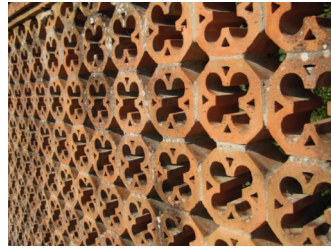
PdeM—18 June 2017

The wood trial pieces are hand-sized, a useful and ancient measure. I have found that if a hand-sized invention works (a big 'if'), it can be enlarged to any size and still be right. This is in contrast to the conventional view that every scale needs its own particular shape.

A concern that an invention might 'work' or not within itself was once common but not now; not publicly at least. Storytelling seems to be



15



16



17



18



19

what is valued now, even though sculpture is not a good medium for that and never has been.

TJ—18 June 2017

... if it's true what Gombrich said that 'there is no such thing as Art... only artists' then as culture and society are changing so incredibly fast now, change must be inevitable, as artists cannot avoid reflecting what is around them. Can they? The storytelling, or what is often called the 'narrative' now, is everywhere. Everything is so immediate, so inescapable; we are so surrounded by ever-changing anguish and information, it can't be avoided, so to some extent I do understand why young artists need to respond to that. Perhaps they are lucky in being able to focus on a particular part of all that? Perhaps if you focus on just one part you can diminish the rest of it, and help avoid being traumatised. We were not designed to absorb and understand the horrors of the world, so how do we redesign ourselves to be able deal with it?

TJ—22 July 2006 (on memorials)

It is such an immensely complicated problem ... Maybe the use of geometry is one of the few ways to bear and carry the subject. It can both refer to and transform it in a tangential way that avoids any hint of sentimentality and (to my mind) the impossibility of any direct description of such subjects.

TJ—26 June 2017

Here are 3 more of my 'inspirations' (16, 17, 18). The stripey one is from Siena, I think.

PdeM: 28 June 2017

Siena for me was the shock of the Campo (19). I have been thinking about it ever since.

TJ—2 July 2017

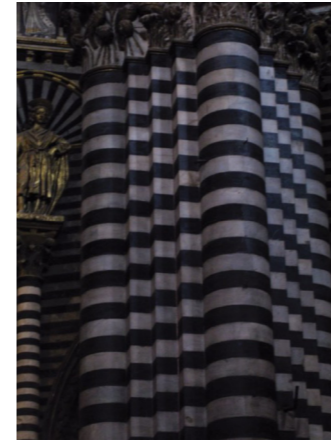
So interesting about your 'shock of the Campo'.

I had exactly the same. A cold and brilliantly sunny morning in November 1960. My sense of total amazement and beauty was augmented with my first real Italian coffee experience.

And while we are on Siena, here is another pic of the Cathedral (20).

PdeM—11 July 2017

Arriving in the sheltered world of the mid-50s Slade, I found the staff and many of the students shared a belief in the importance of measurement and I joined in enthusiastically. It was all new to me. The idea was: you may think you know what you are looking at but measure it and think again. Even while I was there it was the beginning of the end of that kind of approach and by the early 60s it was gone for good among the majority of students.



20

This is from my notes about my student days written for the Slade Archive in 1992:

Measurement was taken very seriously by painters and sculptors alike. In painting it looked to me as though it was being used to test the particularity of a given view while in sculpture the aim was to use it as a tool to arrive at a more generalised understanding of the total and largely hidden geometry of the figure. Either way it slowed down reactions and allowed time to bring each passage of work under conscious control.

TJ—15 July 2017

It's interesting to think that the period of Slade measurement was probably more or less wiped out by the advent of American Abstract Expressionism in the late 50s. Was it because it was a relief for students and young artists to be able to literally 'splash out' and bring the movement of the body into play? Was it the glamour of the famous Hans Namuth photo of Jackson Pollock painting on the floor? Was it because such evidence of energy appealed to young artists? Or could it be that some people are simply more 'measured' in their view of the world, and so more comfortable with that way of working.

Your development was very interesting because it seems to me you were attracted by proportion right from the start, especially when one thinks of your response to Brancusi at such an early age. It's possible that the Slade at that period was right for you, as being surrounded by all that measuring going on, it gave you the tools to look back and understand Classical art and the role of proportion. I know you've said that much of that disappeared when you left, but perhaps nothing really ever disappears entirely, so when you started working again in the way you have developed since, all that information had been absorbed and gave you a platform to start from. By that time your heart and mind and hand were ready to work together. The measuring aspect had just become a useful tool, to serve the expression of proportion, amongst many other things. After which you were free to follow your heart, as you could rely on your natural analytical abilities.

This may of course be far from the truth, and there are so many other things to be taken into account. Some of our generation had the fantasy (and I am among them) that they could work in what could be seen as a 'timeless' way, that our expression would be good for all time. And now of course I see that we are all trapped in our own time, that there is no way of escaping it, and perhaps that's why in some ways we see ourselves as the tail end of the Renaissance. As elitist, about which I have very mixed feelings.

PdeM—20 July 2017

You are right to say that the 50s Slade was the place for me. I experienced total engagement, with a new discovery every day. As for your kind (and

well written) account of my subsequent activities, it leaves out the constant doubt and confusion and the many studio blunders that take place behind the scenes. But it is still a better life than any other I can imagine.

I think a wish to work in a 'timeless' way is a perfectly proper ambition for any artist. Doing it is quite another matter but the work that moves me is like that: the temporal and societal context falls away completely to be replaced by a sense of wonder and a feeling that it could have been done yesterday, so immediate is one's identification with it.

TJ—27 July 2017

In response to your description of your time spent measuring at the Slade, I'm not certain that it's much different now, for either of us. I sometimes agonise for days over half a millimetre and clearly so do you. Perhaps one of the differences now is that we understand the power of proportion better, whereas all those years ago we were only learning that measurement existed and that it helped to see things.

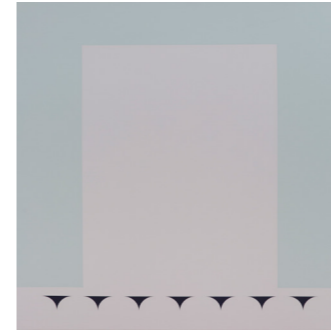
I have now started to use curves in the paintings and have been struggling to accept that this can be as serious as straight lines. I think it may be a female problem: it's possible that when we were young artists and trying to define ourselves as being as serious as you boys, straight lines seemed in some absurd way more 'serious' than curved ones. It's taken me all this time to see how silly this is. On the other hand, it must be admitted that curves are more 'female' than straight lines. Perhaps it's also partly physiognomic – a curved line as a smile is more heart-warming than a straight one. Why did it take me so long to think about this? You clearly always understood it.

PdeM—28 July 2017

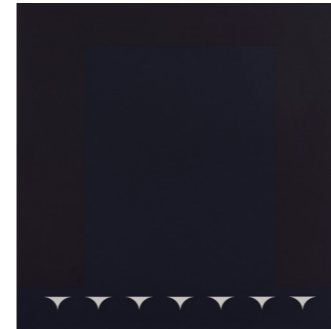
On curves I can only say that I have found them full of difficulties, perhaps more so than straights, but it had never occurred to me that their use or otherwise might have the wider significance you describe. For me, shapes only come alive in combination, so for every curve there needs somewhere to be its opposite acting as a foil to maintain the tension, like a bow and arrow. Also, every considered curve is tethered by a straight line to its centre point so there is always a degree of interdependence.

PdeM—14 September 2017

There is no better feeling, however fugitive sometimes, than to believe you have done a good piece of work. I am labouring away slowly on another big piece in the *Volute* family (21) which can only be evaluated when all the parts are eventually assembled and it can be seen for the first time. Until then I live in hope, which while not the same as thinking something is good, is better than knowing it is not.



22



23



24

TJ—16 September 2017

That looks as though it's going to be a spectacular piece. Such all-embracing curves, like a person you love waiting to greet you with open arms.

I am attaching 2 really bad snaps of the 2 new pictures (22, 23). I think they are ok, but the reliefs, sadly, I shall have to chuck (they cost me a fortune to get made). It's just that tiny difference between the physical and the metaphysical. If the bridge isn't crossed, it's just design.

PdeM—19 September 2017

The paintings show you at the height of your powers, balancing elements with great precision to launch those lunettes and their intervals into alternating focus. A great invention, radiating energy.

My studio is full of work that doesn't quite work. I keep it for a while because sometimes, even after years of it sitting there, I see a way forward – usually when I am not even trying (daydreaming, talking on the telephone or doing donkey work). Perhaps those reliefs, put aside as 'just design' for failing to meet your stern demands, might be resurrected one day by means of a random glance? By the way, the sentence about the bridge is very well put.

TJ—26 June 2018 (in response to de Monchaux's monograph text)

I think it's the clearest expression I've ever read about the complexities of being a sculptor now, and the relationship with sculpture of the past. You are tremendously interesting in speaking of the process and what that throws up and how it encompasses so much more that lies beneath the surface, of both the work itself and your intuitions. How you deal with surface and light.

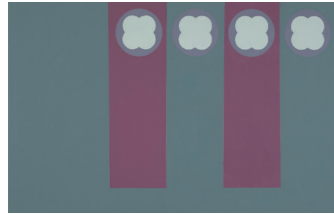
I was struck by your 'need to hold it in my head and ... make a kind of imaginary structure'. This is something I can never quite grasp, sometimes I feel like a monkey with a typewriter trying to write *Hamlet*. But have to pretend I really know what's going on. What you do is truly give an insight into how making a piece of sculpture – being an artist dealing with the nature of materials – demands, and finds, something of great value. An insight as to how you arrive at and bring out qualities of surface and light and geometry and intentions that can only be sensed when you look at the finished work itself. And underlying all, the achievement of maturity that comes (to some, by no means to all) from spending an entire lifetime making and thinking.

It is a model for future generations.

TJ—20 March 2019

Here is an incredibly bad shot of the little panels I'm doing, based on Piero (24). I'm not sure what they will turn into, but it's helped me grasp the magnitude of that great master. No one, in my opinion, has come anywhere near him in the last 600 years.





25

PdeM—22 March 2019

Yes, Piero is the best. I am particularly struck by the two studies left and right on the top row; but they are all impressive. You are finding *tunes*. Not easy, as we don't know where they come from but just have to be there to catch them when they turn up.

TJ—12 May 2019

I'm still enjoying my 'After Piero's, and am now starting on the battles. I'm attaching the contacts, and the first battle is there somewhere (they are all very small).

PdeM—14 May 2019

Your Pieros are formidable! The titles have sent me straight away to look at the sources, a fine extra pleasure. Ingmar Bergman said that one of his most powerful experiences was making his film of *The Magic Flute*, immersed in Mozart's music every day for weeks on end. You will know Piero better than ever now and the series will help others to do the same.

The boss motif in the three versions of the *Virgin and Child with Saints and Angels* (25) reminds me of a game I played with the elements of the wood column series a few years ago, before I put them together as they were intended to be. I dug out the attached photos (26, 27, 28) recently to see if there might be something there to use.

TJ—14 May 2019

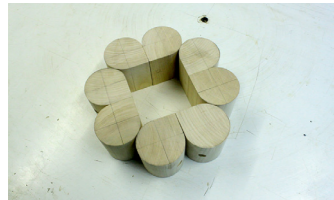
I'm absolutely amazed by your bosses! I had been searching for a way of using them ever since I saw Alberti's use of them all over his Church of Sant'Andrea in Mantua. You got there first! And you have also managed to simplify them to their barest, most minimal essentials. Although, as far as I remember – and judging by the Piero painting – there are actually five petals, not four. I think of the ones I have done, and yours, as clovers. I used to find and collect four-leafed clovers when I was a child.

Which one did you consider your final piece? There is surely something there to use.

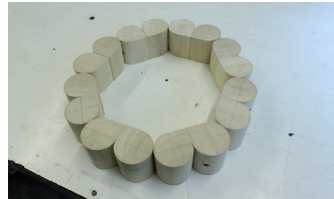
You are right about getting to know Piero better. But the more I look at his work, the more astonished I am by the complexity, and how he manages to somehow simplify that complexity and absorb it into the picture plane.

PdeM—15 May 2019

The boss units in the studio snapshots were about to go into the wood *Column* series (29, 30) which was their proper destination. But the random assemblies done beforehand showed me that the unit had what I call 'utility', that is, being capable of development (not common); so that is why I have trotted them out again to look at. Some more attached. My problem right now seems to be that I have too many ideas, not too few. What I need is



26



27



28



29



30

great wealth and an army of assistants, or just to make up my mind.

I was interested to read in my Piero book, published in 1954, a quote from Berenson in 1897 that Piero's 'universal art... was one that *is* and *exists* and does not merely *represent* and *express*'.

TJ—16 May 2019

These are both fabulous pieces and a very interesting glimpse into your working methods. Your expression 'utility' exactly describes my own responses when I draw: 'Ah! There may be something here'. And sometimes there is and sometimes there isn't and sometimes I just have to wait, as with the bosses or what I call 'clovers'. I suspect this process is common to the majority of artists, in different forms.

PdeM—17 May 2019

The move from having units of utility to finding a combination that sings is a great leap and no amount of helpers would make that happen any sooner. It just happens, occasionally, if you are lucky. If you count the people at the fabricators, foundries and quarries I have worked with as assistants, then I have had plenty of them, but they work on tasks that I have been able to specify precisely after much trial and (mostly) error in the studio. I am not sure that I would know how to make use of having someone else around during the chaotic invention stage. I do find it difficult to think in company. That may have to change as I become more and more decrepit but for the time being, I really have nothing to complain about at all.

TJ—18 May 2019

I am in complete agreement about not being able to think, or, as they say now, Move Forward, unless I am alone. To find something that propels you, it's necessary to somehow remove oneself from the world, and from anyone else, however much you can work with them on menial tasks. Really I don't need anyone to help with doing the paintings, at least the small ones, but the shopping and washing up is something else.

TJ—1 September 2019 (in response to de Monchaux's four 'Correspondences' wood pieces)

Such a marriage of stillness and movement. And I've always said size doesn't matter, at least in art... Think of the size of the Vermeers. Perhaps that is what you and I have in common with our work, an aspiration towards tranquillity without losing dynamic. And Brancusi would be very pleased, I think.

PdeM—3 September 2019

Of course you are right about size but I have found that with sculpture, at least, our own dimensions seem to rule:

A hand-sized piece remains in the eye.

An armful begins to be sensed by the body as well as being seen (my usual choice).

Life-size (arm's length) is nearly wholly sensed.

Larger than life-size becomes architectural, inhabited space.

Photographs of sculpture remain in the eye and so nearly always conceal the sensed element, the most important part.

So I try to find the right size for a particular shape by trial and error, which is not the same as finding the shape in the first place, where hand size is usually best; you can hold the whole shape at once, allowing a prediction, but a prediction only, of the sensed bodily phase.

TJ-4 September 2019

What you say about size and scale is fascinating. I think it's different with painting. Perhaps painters rely on the eye more than the body, though I've always found, and other painters have said the same, that it's easier to make very large or very small paintings – it's the medium size that is so difficult. Perhaps that's partly because it would be less a question of either focusing sharply, or being immersed in the painting; and the medium size is looking for eyes all over the body.

PdeM-8 October 2019

I suddenly understood, the other day, after only 65 years, why I like working with plaster: it is quite simply that it sets in 30 minutes and there is no room for random distractions or solemn contemplations, a good condition when one's time is soon up. I will return to the wood pieces when I have decided on their final scale. They are more like maquettes now, where the sizes have been determined by the availability of random bits of wood that happened to be handy in the studio. When I know what to do, I will spend some money on some designated sizes and re-do them properly.

TJ-9 December 2019

I not only count things, but in particular the spaces between them. It's always seemed a rather strange thing to do, but now I see that perhaps it's a way of stabilising oneself in relation to a rocketing world. Maybe it's common and many people do it? But when I think of it in relation to my paintings, it actually makes much more sense than trying to understand the geometry. Perhaps that's all I do; just count numbers and the spaces they make...

PdeM-11 December 2019

I think in the roundels piece (31) you manage somehow to make great depth out of its opposite. Although this happens often in your work, I have yet to understand how you do it. You have also invented new variation for your enquiry and I very much look forward to seeing what comes next as you 'count numbers and the spaces they make'. The process is one of the armatures holding the world together and much art besides, so keep counting!



## Image captions

- 1  
Detail of Paul de Monchaux's sculpture proposal (2001), posted to Tess Jaray on 8 July 2006
- 2  
Detail of Study 42 from Tess Jaray's *Serpentine catalogue* (1988)
- 3  
Paul de Monchaux, *Breath maquette* (2006)
- 4  
Paul de Monchaux, *Uxmal* (2008)
- 5  
Megan Piper Art15 booth: Paul de Monchaux, *Uxmal* (2008) and Tess Jaray, *Light with Dark* (2015)
- 6  
Paul de Monchaux, *Volute IV* in plaster (2013)
- 7  
Paul de Monchaux, *Study 2* (2014)
- 8  
Paul de Monchaux, *Volute V* in plaster (2016)
- 9  
Paul de Monchaux, *Volute V* in bronze (2016)
- 10  
Paul de Monchaux, *Volute IV* in bronze (2013)
- 11  
Shelf in Paul de Monchaux's studio
- 12  
Tess Jaray, drawings for *Predella* (2017)
- 13  
Close up of shelf in Paul de Monchaux's studio
- 14  
Tess Jaray, *Kiss* (2017)
- 15  
Paul de Monchaux, work in progress (2017)
- 16, 17, 18  
Three of Tess Jaray's 'inspirations' referred to in her letter of 26 June 2017
- 19  
*Campo, Siena*
- 20  
*Siena Cathedral*
- 21  
Paul de Monchaux, *Volute VI* in progress (2017)
- 22  
Tess Jaray, *Predella, Light* (2017)

- 23  
Tess Jaray, *Predella, Dark* (2017)
- 24  
Tess Jaray's studio, From *Piero paintings* (2019)
- 25  
Tess Jaray, *Virgin and Child with Saints and Angels I* (2019)
- 26, 27, 28  
Paul de Monchaux playing with elements of the wood column series
- 29  
Paul de Monchaux, *Crossed Column* (2010)
- 30  
Paul de Monchaux, *Cranked Column* (2011)
- 31  
Tess Jaray, *For Your Eyes Only* (2020)

## Installation







## Biographies

Tess Jaray was born in Vienna in 1937 and moved to England in 1938. She studied at St Martin's College of Art and Design (1954–57) and the Slade School of Fine Art (1957–60) where she was taught by William Coldstream and attended the lectures of Ernst Gombrich. Jaray was the first woman to teach at the Slade and taught there for over 30 years, from 1968–99. Jaray has exhibited extensively throughout her career. Solo exhibitions include Whitechapel Gallery, London (1973), the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford and Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester (1984), Serpentine Gallery, London (1988) and Secession, Vienna (2021). Public collections include the British Museum, Arts Council Collection, Victoria & Albert Museum, Tate, Centre Pompidou, Paris and Belvedere, Vienna. Over the last twenty years, Jaray has completed a succession of major public art projects. She was made an Honorary Fellow of RIBA (Royal Institute for British Architects) in 1995 and a Royal Academician in 2010. She lives and works in London.

Paul de Monchaux was born in Montreal in 1934. He spent an itinerant childhood living in Ireland, Australia, North and South America and studied at The Art Students League in New York (1952–54) before moving to London in 1955 to study at the Slade. He taught full-time at art schools for nearly three decades after leaving the Slade – at the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, Goldsmiths College and finally Camberwell School of Art, where he was Head of Sculpture and Head of Fine Art until he retired in 1986 to concentrate on his work. De Monchaux has exhibited extensively and has been included in group shows at the ICA (1960), Camden Arts Centre (1979), Hayward and Serpentine Galleries (1983), Henry Moore Institute (2012) and had his first solo exhibition at a private gallery with Megan Piper in 2013. Since 1986 he has carried out large-scale public sculpture commissions in London, Cambridge, Birmingham, Norwich, Coventry Shrewsbury, Southampton and St Lawrence, Jersey. He lives and works in London.

Megan Piper in association with Frestonian Gallery  
Tess Jaray & Paul de Monchaux  
Correspondences  
3rd December 2020 – 28th April 2021

Text and images courtesy the artists  
Letters edited by Megan Piper  
Installation photography by Ben Westoby  
Catalogue design by Dougal Burgess  
Works by Tess Jaray courtesy Karsten Schubert London

Frestonian Gallery  
2 Olaf Street  
London, W11 4BE  
[www.frestoniangallery.com](http://www.frestoniangallery.com)

[www.meganpiper.co.uk](http://www.meganpiper.co.uk)

**FRESTONIAN GALLERY**

**MEGAN PIPER**