

Holder Up Ro Robertson

1 May – 14 June 2025

Maximillian William is delighted to present *Holder Up*, a new body of work by Ro Robertson, their third solo exhibition at the gallery. Drawing upon a working-class history of bodily engagement with the materials of heavy industry, Robertson channels the physicality of industrial labour through drawing, riveted steel collage, and welded steel sculpture, reinterpreting its gestures into rhythmical abstract form.

At the core of the exhibition, a pair of dynamic steel sculptures, *Holder Up I* and *Holder Up II*, engage in a kind of dance. For the artist, the sculptures describe the space of two different sets of hands working in complete harmony – a joyous act of unity between body, metal and sound. A smaller sculpture, *Construction I*, occupies a high plinth, topped by a black rubber welding mat. Both a nod to modernist art movements such as constructivism and to the embodied skills of workers, the sculpture enacts a play of ideas also reflected in the wall-mounted construction in the opposite corner of the gallery, *She Moves Out*. A tension between vulnerability and strength underpins Robertson's work, where the forces of rigid steel and fluid water become metaphors for the body's capacity to endure, resist and transform.

Hanging freely on a rust-coloured wall, *Residue I* and *Residue II* recall the Hendon paper mill, now demolished, in Sunderland, the artist's hometown, while the marks become a 'residue' or map of the artist's labour: Robertson used the sharp edges of their sculptures to mark and abrade the paper. Swathes of green and blue plunge away from each other in *The Plunge I* and *The Plunge II*, the forms evoking both waves and oxidised red residue washing down the river during the launch of a ship. *Hung Up I* and *Hung Up II* act as a bridge between the two-dimensional and sculptural works in the exhibition, with painted sheet metal riveted to wood in forms that echo similar wave-like shapes in the *Holder Up* sculptures and *The Plunge I* and *II*. Everywhere in the exhibition, artworks enact dialogues – working together, conversing, enacting a set of propositions both aesthetic and political, a set of ideas subtly epitomised in the small graphite *Workers in motion*.

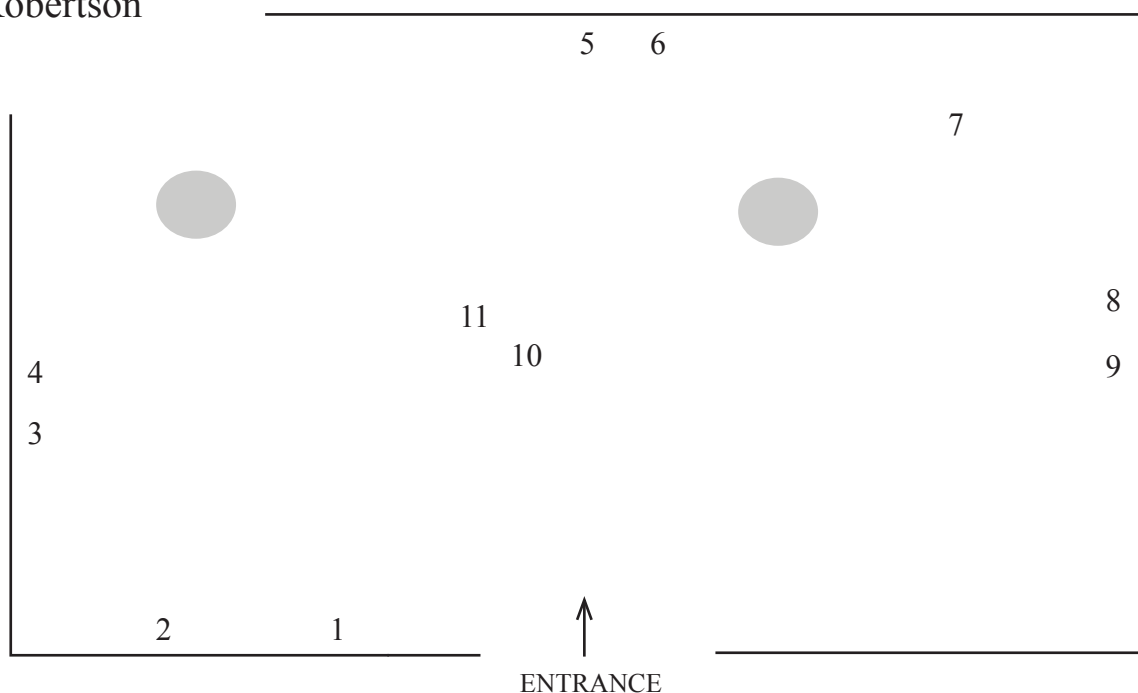
The exhibition's title is drawn from the artist's great-grandfather's role in the shipyards: a 'Holder Up' – someone who was responsible for bracing red-hot rivets in place while they were hammered overhead into steel structures. The exhibition *Holder Up* revisits Robertson's family history and working-class experience as a sculptural language, one that is re-examined through a queer feminist lens to subvert the rigid gendered associations of industry and materiality. 'Working-class people working in heavy industry', writes the artist, 'learned more directly than anyone about a heightened awareness of force, scale and the relationship between body and material – I draw on this understanding which is embedded deeply in my sculptural practice.'

Ro Robertson (they/them) (b. 1984, Sunderland, UK) is a contemporary artist based in West Cornwall. Robertson's practice spans sculpture, drawing, painting and video, mediums through which they explore the boundaries of the human body and its environment.

Recent and forthcoming exhibitions include *Sea State*, a two-person exhibition with Maggi Hambling, Wolterton Hall, Norfolk, opening June 2025; *The Ribs Begin to Rise*, Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland, opening July 2025; *Forbidden Territories: 100 Years of Surreal Landscapes*, The Hepworth Wakefield, touring to The Box, Plymouth and Museum Arnhem, Netherlands later in 2025; and *Modern Thresholds: Ro Robertson*, Tate St Ives, until December 2025. Recent group exhibitions include *Dreaming of Home*, Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, New York; *TRICKSTER FIGURES* at MK Gallery, Milton Keynes; and *WINK WINK* at Whitaker Museum & Art Gallery, Rossendale.

Holder Up

Ro Robertson



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| <p>1 <i>Workers in motion</i>, 2025
Graphite on paper
68 x 51 cm
26 3/4 x 20 1/8 in.</p> <p>2 <i>She Moves Out</i>, 2025
Riveted steel collage and gouache on board
102 x 91.7 cm
40 1/8 x 36 1/8 in.</p> <p>3 <i>The Plunge I</i>, 2025
Gouache, graphite and ink stick on paper
114 x 164 cm
44 7/8 x 64 5/8 in.</p> <p>4 <i>The Plunge II</i>, 2025
Gouache, graphite and ink stick on paper
114 x 164 cm
44 7/8 x 64 5/8 in.</p> <p>5 <i>Hung Up I</i>, 2025
Riveted steel collage, oil paint, sea water, graphite, gouache and ink stick on board
120 x 80 cm
47 1/4 x 31 1/2 in.</p> <p>6 <i>Hung Up II</i>, 2025
Riveted steel collage, oil paint, sea water, graphite, gouache and ink stick on board
120 x 80 cm
47 1/4 x 31 1/2 in.</p> | <p>7 <i>Construction I</i>, 2025
Welded and riveted steel, oil paint and sea water
56 x 48 x 42 cm
22 x 18 7/8 x 16 1/2 in.</p> <p>8 <i>Residue I</i>, 2025
Drawing with steel edge, surface rust and ink stick on paper
181 x 140 cm
71 1/4 x 55 1/8 in.</p> <p>9 <i>Residue II</i>, 2025
Drawing with steel edge, surface rust and ink stick on paper
181 x 140 cm
71 1/4 x 55 1/8 in.</p> <p>10 <i>Holder Up I</i>, 2025
Welded and riveted steel sculpture, oil paint and sea water
112 x 60 x 240 cm
44 1/8 x 23 5/8 x 94 1/2 in.</p> <p>11 <i>Holder Up II</i>, 2025
Welded and riveted steel sculpture, oil paint and sea water
138 x 105 x 240 cm
54 3/8 x 41 3/8 x 94 1/2 in.</p> |
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