

MEET:

Celia Smith by Nicola Mesham



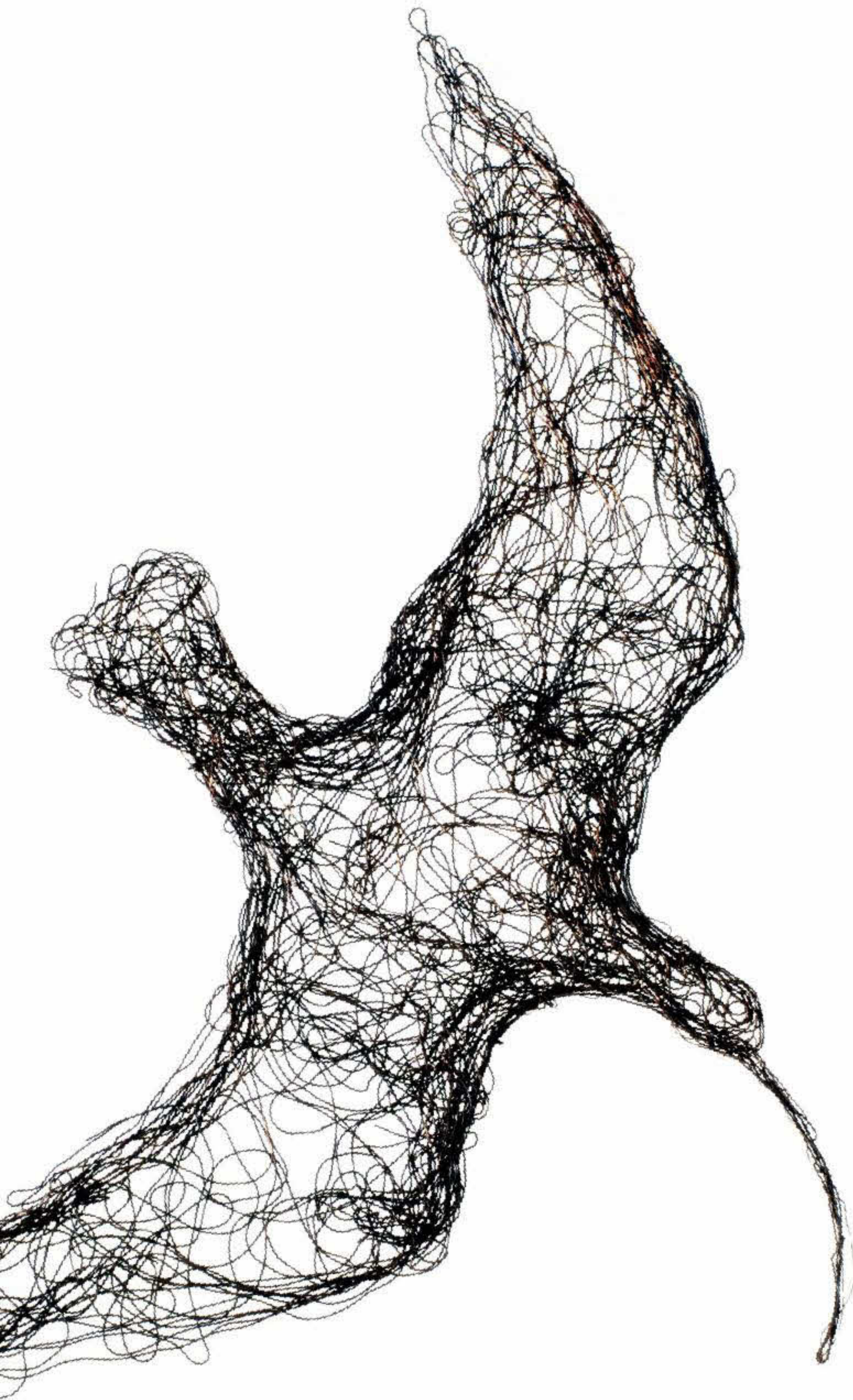
From her studio on a farm in North Wiltshire, Celia Smith sculpts with wire, inspired by birds and impelled to capture their movement and character. Each avian sculpture is produced as a three-dimensional drawing with the wires representing a quality of line, and every piece of work is linked to an experience or drawing made directly from life studies.

What is your background and where did you study?

I grew up on farm in Gloucestershire, where I was always making things as a child and often looking after injured and sick calves and chicks. I was taken to see *Sophie Ryder's* studio on a school trip during my A levels; she makes large scale, wire-dense sculptures and this was a huge inspiration for me. I immediately went home and started collecting wires around the farm to make into sculptures.

I went on to do an art foundation course in Bath, continuing to make sculpture using wires, and from there proceeded to Wimbledon School of Art to study a fine art degree in sculpture. It was a highly disciplined course and I spent the first year learning different ways of making sculptures including casting and carving. There was a heavy emphasis on drawing, with a life model at our disposal most days. Construction became my favourite method of making though; I think I am drawn to the immediate nature of it, particularly with wire, as within a few minutes something begins to emerge.





What provides your inspiration? Do you draw or sculpt first?

Drawing is a huge inspiration for my work, and also birds. When I started to sell my work, it was mainly sculpture of chickens and ducks. I was living back on my parents' farm after my degree and began to produce sculptures of what was around me, using wire which was readily available on the farm. The chickens became very popular and after a few years of orders, I decided to close my order book and do a bit of travelling, ending up in New Zealand where I had a one year work permit. Inspired by the exotic birds I came across, I had an exhibition whilst I was out there, showing the different birds I had made.

On my return to the UK, I continued to visit and draw at nature reserves, and was surprised to discover the wealth of amazing birds that we have here. It was a bit of a learning curve; often I'd turn up at places at the wrong time of year and not find the birds I was looking for! My drawing style is influenced by the way I use wire, and I also have to draw very quickly to try and capture a bird as it moves. I try not to use photographs to make my birds. This gives me my loose and free drawings, and it's these drawings that inspire my wire work.

What creative processes do you go through when producing a body of work? Do you update your skills and how important do you think it is to be knowledgeable about the latest techniques?

I don't update my skills formally, though I am always discovering new wires to use. I often feel the teaching I do helps me to come up with techniques and innovative ways of making wire sculpture.

For instance, in June 2014, I worked with *New Brewery Arts* in Cirencester to produce a gallery show commemorating the role of the carrier pigeon in WW1. Entitled 'The Feathered Aviator', it was planned that the main body of work would consist of flocks of wire pigeons flying around the gallery and these would be made by 5 local primary schools. I only had two hours per school to make the pigeons, so I had to come up with a quick way of working. I made 15 negative plaster moulds with volunteers from the gallery, and these were then used in the workshops to form the pigeons using thin telephone cabling. Each student made their own bird in the mould, and then spent time weaving into the bird before writing their own message for the pigeon to carry. In the end, I had 450 birds to install within the gallery space. This mould technique has inspired a new way of working for me and I recently have been trying out new moulds in my studio.





What else inspires your work?

When making a body of work or working on a particular commission, I begin by drawing. I go to an island off the Pembrokeshire Coast called *Skokholm* to draw seabirds each summer. This often inspires a whole body of work, all about the birds that live and visit the island to breed. I take a whole suitcase of wires across with me and often

make whilst watching the birds. I've also started to use pieces of old metal in my sculptures, found or scavenged whilst out drawing. Once back in the studio, my collection of drawings helps me finish sculptures initiated on my trip or begin new pieces inspired by my trip. Recently, I have been producing large wall drawings of bird flocks and these use a drawing or an experience as a starting point.

Who are your favourite designers or artists working in the United Kingdom today?

I love the work of *Thomas Heatherwick*; I think the way he uses materials in his buildings is awe-inspiring and like the innovation of his smaller works. *Andy Goldsworthy's* 2007 show at the Yorkshire sculpture park was very memorable and I love the way he plays with materials. I also admire the metalwork work of *Junko Mori* and the willow installations of *Laura Ellen Bacon*.

What are the best and worst things about running your own business?

The highlights of working for your self would include the feeling of satisfaction once a sculpture is completed and installed, the variety of work and meeting lots of interesting people along the way. The not so good bits are the paperwork, the never ending email inbox and generally always being just a little too busy.

I have recently taken on an agent, *Leonora Martin Fine Art*, to handle my commissions and communications. This has helped me tremendously, and I hope to have a number of online shows during the year where customers can buy new works directly from *Leonora's website*.





Do you have any new projects and what are your goals for the future?

I recently launched my first wire kit, an exciting new thing for me. Over the years I have developed ways of working with wires which I share in this *'Make Your Own Robin Kit'*. It's great to be able to have something to sell directly to customers and I hope to launch a series of bird kits. I also have a real interest in printmaking and over the past few years, have experimented with printing and embossing my wire drawings. I have an ambition to do an MA in printmaking in next few years.

I'm currently working on my first major public commission as part of *'The Feathered Aviator'* exhibition and the sculpture will be installed permanently outside of the New Brewery Arts building in Cirencester. It's been a real learning curve making this large scale piece; it's approximately 8 metres long and consists of 40 wire pigeons flying along the building. I'm hoping that I'll be making more large scale pieces and installation for both public and private settings in the next few years.

For more information, visit:

www.celia-smith.co.uk

For information on Celia's upcoming workshops, visit:

www.celia-smith.co.uk/workshops

Images courtesy of Celia Smith