

Introduction by James Lingwood

The forms and materials of sculpture have expanded greatly over the past century – probably more than any other art form. Whilst plaster, bronze, clay and stone remain viable as materials for artists of the past few decades, the repertoire of possible materials has grown to include materials as diverse as fat and felt, light bulbs and bricks, cars and cosmetics, butterflies and trees, earth and sky. Almost any found matter has been transformed into an object or place.

Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva makes a singular addition to this expanded field of sculpture. The materials for her sculpture are found in the world. Sometimes they remain in situ. Sometimes they are gathered and remade, brought first to her place of work, the studio, and then on to a place of exhibition.

Ambush is an exceptional example of her work ‘in situ’. In the New Forest, the visitor first encounters glass panels on the forest floor, windows onto a hidden world. Within a dark chamber in the earth below, Hadzi-Vasileva has engineered a place of exposure deep inside. The living roots of two trees reach towards the visitor, threatening entanglement. With remarkable economy, the artist has framed the visitor’s vision and enclosed their body, offering a place which is at one and the same time full of wonder and dread. Who, or what, is being ambushed, the title seems to ask - the matter or the viewer?

Butterflies in the Stomach offers another kind of beguiling enclosure, this time a labyrinth within an interior. Like the underground chamber, the spatial construction involves movement. There is no fixed viewpoint, or standpoint; the work invites a passage through veined veils of extraordinary delicacy, partly opaque, partly translucent. What the material actually is initially at least matters less than the fact that it is clearly of the body, rather than a representation of it. The knowledge that the material is caul fat (also sometimes known as lace fat) – cleansed and stretched - is significant because in a living body, the fat is a membrane that encases living organs just as Hadzi-Vasileva’s sculpture encloses living bodies. There is no exit at the end of the labyrinthine passage, just as there is no way out of the body. The visitor must turn back.

A different material forms the basis for a third room-sized installation **Reoccurring Undulation**, presented last year at the Towner Museum in Eastbourne. Once again, the material remains itself and becomes something else. It is inert, flattened salmon skin and restless movement, a screen across which the viewer’s gaze traverses as if scanning the restless surface of the sea.

It is a slowly evolving, carefully considered and constructed body of sculpture. These and other of Hadzi-Vasileva’s large-scale works involve repetitive, physical labour by the artist over extended periods of time. She gives herself to the material, and the material gives back. She gives the work the time it needs – and then quietly but insistently asks for the time of the viewer too.

— James Lingwood, Co-Director of [Artangel](#)