

BENJAMIN ARMSTRONG

TRAVERSE

Holding in careful balance an array of figurative and abstract components crafted from diverse materials, this new group of sculptures gives symbolic and metaphorical expression to traversing – that is, moving across or through – a place, the mind or an idea.

The six sculptures are the happy result of Armstrong's return to the medium following an extended period spent focused on painting and printmaking – and building construction.

"My partner and I bought an old factory in Coburg in 2013, and, in collaboration with our architects, turned it into a workspace and home," Armstrong says. "I became obsessed with this project, building flat-out for two-plus years. As a consequence, I didn't even want to think about sculpture, because it was too physical in the round."

Appropriate, then, that in pivoting back to three dimensions, Armstrong has selected materials that would be right at home on a building site: steel, wood, plaster and glass.

"This is the first time I've worked with steel in sculpture and it's the thread that runs through all the works," he says of his first exhibition of sculpture at Tolarno since 2013. "Here, I'm forcing it to do what I want it to do, rather than simply using off-the-shelf steel for a utilitarian reason."

Armstrong has welded steel rods together to form a step-like succession of hollow cuboids (*Measured* 2024–25), another stepped structure (*Scent* 2024–25), and a distorted rectangular grid containing a number of indecipherable shapes (*Linear and Circular* 2023–25).

For other works, he has used a plasma cutter to give steel sections a serrated edge, then welded them into jagged triangles (*Midday* 2024–25; *Evening* 2024–25).

Animating these black-painted steel structures are a pair of below-the-knee legs on tiptoe, carved from wood and coated with a chameleon pigment.

In *Measured* 2024–25, the legs are one step below the top, counterbalanced by a pile of plaster bricks at the base.



Benjamin Armstrong
Measured 2024-5
paint, plaster, steel, timber
156 cm x 27 cm x 70 cm



Benjamin Armstrong
Linear & circular 2023-5
blown-glass, paint, steel, timber
166 cm x 124 cm x 67.5 cm

In *Linear and Circular* 2023–25, the legs perch on top of the steel grid, which is bent and seemingly in the process of being sucked into a powerful vortex, thanks to the glass vessel angled on the floor beside it.

In *Traverse* 2013 & 2024–25 they stand on top of a steel rectangle framing tiny fronds of lichen between glass like a scrubby landscape in perspectival recession. The frame itself rests on a steel tightrope.



Benjamin Armstrong
Traverse 2013 & 2024 5
glass, lichen, paint, steel, timber
145 cm x 137 cm x 7 cm

And in *Midday* 2024–25 and *Evening* 2024–25, the legs are balanced on steel tightropes slung above the pointy triangular 'mountains', which contain sandwiched glass decorated with long streaks of pigmented wax: orange and blue for *Midday*; orange and peach-pink for *Evening*.



Benjamin Armstrong
Midday 2024-5
encaustic, glass, paint, silicone,
steel, timber
161.5 cm x 128 cm x 76 cm



Benjamin Armstrong
Evening 2024-5
encaustic, glass, paint, silicone, steel,
timber
155 cm x 126 cm x 94 cm

Scent 2024-25 is the only sculpture with inverted legs, along with an oversized eye in plaster that serves as the 'head' to its vertically oriented steel 'skeleton'. Climbing the structure are four plaster insects with dainty steel legs painted blue.



Benjamin Armstrong
Scent 2024-5
paint, plaster, steel, timber
200.5 cm x 94 cm x 54 cm

“Our feet are the contact point, the place where we connect to the earth,” Armstrong says. “In these sculptures, there is both joy and trepidation at this contact point. The summit of joy tends not to arrive without traversing risk.”

Tony Magnusson