

WADDINGTON CUSTOT

PRESS RELEASE

Barry Flanagan: Two by Two

Thursday 18 September – Wednesday 29 October 2025

Private View: Thursday 18th September



Waddington Custot is pleased to announce 'Barry Flanagan: Two by Two', an exhibition of bronze sculptures by one of Britain's most distinctive and imaginative sculptors. Bringing together works made between 1983 and 2008, the exhibition explores the dialogue between paired animal forms, most notably the hare, for which Flanagan is best known. These dynamic pairings invite reflection on themes of duality, performance and play. The exhibition also marks 45 years since Flanagan's first solo show at Waddington Custot (then Waddington Galleries) in 1980.

Flanagan's practice was shaped by a deep engagement with landscape, myth and material. The seasons, ancient symbols, and local folklore – alongside an enduring interest in process – inflect his practice. From the 1980s onwards, Flanagan's turn to bronze marked a new phase in his work, enabling a synthesis between classical, sculptural tradition and the idiosyncratic, conceptual impulses of his earlier work. His initial experiments with materials such as sand, cloth and rope reflected an interest in process, spontaneity and the absurdist logic of 'pataphysics' – Alfred Jarry's "science of imaginary solutions." In bronze, Flanagan found new ways to carry forward these ideas.

While the hare remains one of Flanagan's most recognised figures, it is with frequent warmth and wit that animals of all kinds populate Flanagan's oeuvre: hares, elephants, dogs and horses, moulded first in clay and then cast into bronze, fuse the everyday, the imaginary and the fantastical. Within this, Flanagan is perhaps best known for his dynamic and often monumental bronze hares, which spring into life as one of his most important characters. Presented in differing poses in a variety of sizes and combinations, among bronzes

made over 30 years, hares proliferate. Viewed together, the bronze figures become a comment on the archetype of classical sculpture, including Auguste Rodin, a figure of inspiration for the artist.

Flanagan's animals are distinctly anthropomorphic – leaping, boxing, or pausing mid-pirouette. In many ways, they became a versatile surrogate for the human figure: theatrical, animated and contemplative. Through this motif, Flanagan explored questions of identity, gesture, and emotion, drawing on sources from folklore to philosophy, while maintaining the playful, subversive tone that defined his earlier work.

Flanagan's use of the pair in much of his sculptural practice nods to his intention for his sculptures not to be autonomous objects, but instead, characters in conversation. A hallmark of Flanagan's ideal exhibition was this sense of interplay between works, in which meaning emerges through juxtaposition. In 'Two by Two', this relational approach is central: the animals perform together, balancing, mirroring or responding to one another in ways that animate the space between them. Each figure carries an anthropomorphic charge, embodying the humorous, poignant and celebratory qualities that run throughout Flanagan's work.

'Barry Flanagan: Two by Two' invites viewers to consider how repetition, pairing and performance shaped the artist's bronze sculpture. Moving beyond the iconic hare, the exhibition opens up a wider understanding of Flanagan's sculptural imagination: absurdist, playful and layered.

About Barry Flanagan

Barry Flanagan (b.1941, Prestatyn, Wales; d.2009, Ibiza) is one of Britain's most significant sculptors, and also one of its most loved. Having studied architecture at Birmingham College of Art and Crafts and, after spells at different colleges, Flanagan was offered a place on the Vocational Diploma in Sculpture at St. Martin's School of Art, London in 1964. After graduating in 1966, Flanagan went on to teach at St. Martin's as well as at the Central School of Arts and Crafts between 1967 and 1971. In 1991 he was elected to the Royal Academy, and he received the OBE.

From the outset, Flanagan's work was perceived as radical and independent. He revolutionised sculptural material when in 1965, while still a student, he showed the soft sculpture 'aaing j gni aa' (1965) [bought by the Tate Gallery in 1969] at Better Books, Charing Cross Road, which changed ideas about the language of sculpture forever. Flanagan was interested in 'pataphysics' – Alfred Jarry's 'science of imaginary solutions' – an ethos evident in his playful approach, which allows materials to find their own sculptural form, whether sand or rope, stone, sheet metal, cloth, clay or bronze. He was included in the exhibition, 'Between Poetry and Painting' at the ICA (also in 1965) and contributed a finger poem, one of many examples of concrete poetry in the exhibition. His first solo exhibition was held at the Rowan Gallery, London in 1966. His first solo exhibition at Waddington Galleries, London was held in 1980.

It is with frequent warmth and wit that animals of all sorts populate Flanagan's oeuvre; hares, elephants, dogs and horses, moulded first in clay and then cast into bronze, fuse the everyday, the imaginary and the fantastical. Within this menagerie, Flanagan is perhaps best known for his dynamic and often monumental bronze hares, which spring into life as one of his most important characters and were first exhibited in the early eighties. Presented in all manner of poses in a variety of sizes and combinations; among bronzes made over 30 years, one can find hares boxing, dancing, leaping and philosophising, all a comment on the archetype of classical sculpture.

When asked about his hare motif, Flanagan would describe the magical experience of seeing a hare running on the Sussex Downs. This event prompted his first 'Leaping Hare' sculpture, conceived in 1979. For the Egyptians, the hare represented life. In Chinese mythology, the hare is the inhabitant of the moon and the symbol of immortality. In addition to the nexus of mythological meanings attributed to hares, it was, in the end, the hare's anthropomorphic potential that held the most fascination for Flanagan; it came to stand as a surrogate human figure and a metaphor for the artist's own elusive character. Overall, Flanagan found something deliciously contradictory in taking an elusive creature associated with speed and transience and casting it in bronze, a weighty material that implies permanence and solidity.

Flanagan's return to bronze (he had previously cast work in the foundry at Central School of Art with Henry Abercrombie in 1969) was a continuation of his exploration into different media; from the early sand, rope and cloth pieces, which focused on composition, to the ceramic, stone, marble and sheet metal sculptures of the seventies. He was also involved in happenings and dematerialised practices. In 1966 he collaborated with Yoko Ono and in 1980 with the Marjorie Strider dance company. Like his contemporaries from St. Martin's School of Art – Richard Long, Gilbert & George and Bruce McLean – Flanagan experimented with film; his film 'A hole in the Sea' (1969) was included in Land Art, Gerry Schum's seminal Fernseh-Galerie film.

The 1979 exhibition 'The Horses of San Marco' at the Royal Academy of Arts, London made a deep impression on Flanagan. Abercrombie described the exhibition's impact on Flanagan's thinking and approach to sculpture, where the sheer tactile physicality of the ancient modelled horses created an aura and majesty. The varied patinas and gilding also provided substantial material to investigate the properties of bronze. As a result, Flanagan imbued each of his bronze horse sculptures with a distinctly different character, for instance the beautiful majestic and powerful 'Horse' (1983) at Jesus College, Cambridge to the gentle diffidence of 'Field Day' (1986), also known as the 'Korus Horse' in San Eulalia, Ibiza and the mysterious, mythological qualities of the 'Unicorn and Oak Tree' (1991).

Flanagan represented Britain at the Venice Biennale in 1982. A major retrospective of his work was held at the Fundación 'La Caixa' Madrid (1993), touring to the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes (1994). Flanagan's bronze hares have also been exhibited in many outdoor spaces, including on Park Avenue in New York (1995–6) and at Grant Park, Chicago (1996). In 1999, he had a solo exhibition at Galerie Xavier Hufkens in Brussels, followed by an exhibition at Tate, Liverpool (2000). In 2002, a major exhibition of his work was shown at the Kunsthalle Recklinghausen, Germany, touring to the Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, Nice. In 2006, the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin held a major retrospective of his work, in association with Dublin City Art Gallery The Hugh Lane, which included ten large-scale bronzes installed along O'Connell Street and Parnell Square. Recent major exhibitions include Beyond Limits at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire (2012); Barry Flanagan Sand Girl, Tate Britain, London (2016); Barry Flanagan, Hong Kong Convention Centre (2019); Barry Flanagan, IKON, Birmingham (2019); Alchemy of the Theatre, Waddington Custot, London (2020); In Contemplation, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (2022); Imaginary Solutions, Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin (2023); and Sculpture is Always Going On at Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin (2024). Flanagan's monumental bronze work 'Large Nijinski on Anvil Point' was exhibited in London's Berkeley Square as part of Art of Mayfair, a celebration of Mayfair's vibrant cultural scene, in June 2023. Flanagan's work is held in numerous public collections worldwide, including Museum of Modern Art, New York; Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; and Tate, London.

About Waddington Custot

Waddington Custot was formed through the partnership of French art dealer Stephane Custot and long-time London art dealer Leslie Waddington, in 2010. Located in Cork Street since 1958, formerly as Waddington Galleries, the gallery has a rich heritage and an international reputation for quality and expertise in works by modern and contemporary masters, with a particular focus on monumental sculpture. The gallery now has three locations internationally: London since 1958, Dubai since 2015, and with a new gallery opening in Paris in October 2025.

Notes to Editors

Image(s)

Barry Flanagan, 'Left- and Right-Handed Nijinski on Anvil Point', 1999. Image courtesy Waddington Custot.

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