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Jackie Wullschläger

Sculpture in the City – lending new life to London

The show's 10th edition brings human-scale perspectives to the Square Mile's post-lockdown streets and towers

Jackie Wullschläger 29 MINUTES AGO

There may be fewer workers, now or ever, returning to the Square Mile, but the sculptures have come. Launched in its 10th edition this week, London's annual summer show *Sculpture in the City* has never been more welcome in bringing a sense of human scale and enlivening the monotony of high-rise glass and steel with colour, texture and idiosyncratic interventions at street level.

Starting at the Gherkin, I slipped into a cul-de-sac just behind St Mary Axe and met a quartet of abstracted gravel and limestone figures, a fraction taller than life-size and arranged in slight gradations of height, from the classically graceful to the lumpen, bumpy, indented and hollowed out. This is "Reactivity" by young Danish sculptor Regitze Engelsborg Karlsen.

The gossamer delicacy with which she handles earthy matter, the twin suggestions of geological remnants and the spirals and coils of fabric clinging to the body as in ancient Greek drapery, the rhythmic flow between the figures — all would be exquisite anywhere, but in the shadow of the Gherkin the organic shapes and tactile appeal are tremendously affecting.

If the city's skyscrapers are emblems of dynamism, ambition and global identity, "Reactivity" stills time, and asks us to reactivate more contemplative urban encounters. She finds, and wants to offer, "a great calm in communication and being with physical objects and materials".

After so long living virtually, a dominant theme in this year's selection is our relationship with the material world, with urban grit particularly.

Several works spin art from junk. Tatiana Wolska cuts, perforates and thermo-welds recycled plastic bottles into elongated blood-red biomorphic forms sprawling through Leadenhall Market; they imply environmental catastrophe.



Tatiana Wolska's untitled piece in Leadenhall Market © Nick Turpin