

Nottingham
Contemporary

Lara Favaretto

Absolutely Nothing

20 May – 28 August 2017

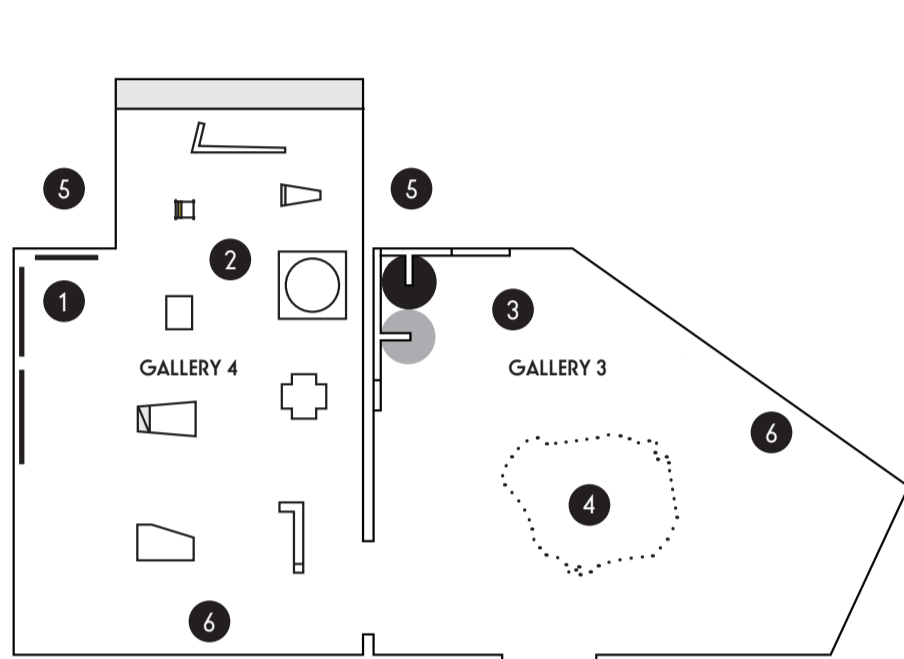
Absolutely Nothing

Lara Favaretto's exhibition is her largest to date in the UK. It brings together pivotal pieces spanning two decades of her practice, along with recent works and a major public commission. The Italian artist's work addresses sculpture's mutability and monumentality; failure, futility and disappearance are treated as generative processes. As Favaretto has said, "I like to shift from perfection to the fall, to push the work to its tipping point, its limit, to endanger it, to the point of making it yield, jam, collapse."

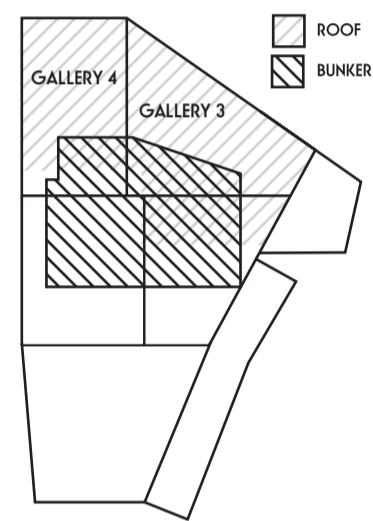
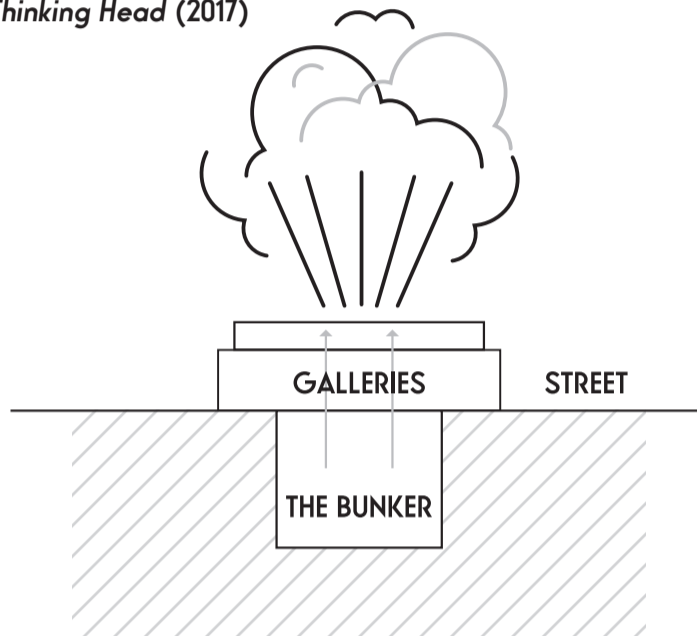
Titled *Absolutely Nothing*, the exhibition is intended by the artist to evoke varying states of uncertainty. Ranging from kinetic sculptures and hidden paintings to a punctuating audio piece, the works presented at Nottingham Contemporary are often concerned with concealment. Actions are frequently obscured, leaving behind only the traces of forms or events. Some of Favaretto's works can be viewed as painting by other means, while several of the sculptural works here take on the melancholy sense of remains.

For example, *Bulk* (2002) comprises plaster casts of masks from a carnival procession, while the concrete sculptures of *Relic* (2015) resemble archaeological finds, remnants from an unknown past.

For the rest of the year, a major new public commission, titled *Thinking Head* (2017), comprises clouds of steam slowly rising from the gallery roof. Completely uncontrolled by Favaretto, this vapour will move in shifting patterns. The inspiration for Favaretto's project is Alighiero Boetti's final sculpture, called *My Brain is Smoking* (1993). Favaretto has said she wanted to turn a museum into a "thinking machine." At Nottingham Contemporary, the intensity of the steam clouds above will correspond to the intensity of the thinking happening inside.



Thinking Head (2017)



1. 7724-7716 (2016)

Found paintings and wool
178 x 193 x 4 cm / 178 x 282 x 4 cm / 178 x 303 x 4 cm
Courtesy the artist

Since 2010, Favaretto has been producing a series of works that always follow the same process: paintings bought on the internet, at a flea market or from an antique dealer are entrusted to a wool worker, who has devised a special technique for wrapping the entire surface of the canvas using a single thread. Applied vertically and tied to the back of the frame, the thread forms a dense warp, which veils the canvas beneath. The colour of the wool is chosen to match the tones of the painting below. The title of each work is that of the colour number of the wool used, based on the Pantone chart. The triptych of "wool paintings" shown at Nottingham Contemporary is the largest of these works that Favaretto has produced. The process of making these works retrieves forgotten paintings, only to return them to anonymity, hiding them behind salvaged wool.

2. *Relic* (2015)

9 concrete elements
Site-specific dimensions
Courtesy the artist and Galleria Franco Noero, Turin

In 2012, Favaretto created a vast landscape of scrap metal, behind an old train station in Kassel, Germany. Titled *Momentary Monument - The Dump*, the installation was a desolate vision of a post-apocalyptic scene. These 400 tonnes of junk were seemingly dumped at random, but this was not the case. In fact, the composition was based upon a collage of more than 70 different photographs of the fallout from natural and manmade disasters – from the San Francisco earthquake in 1906, to the 2011 tsunami in Japan. Favaretto removed nine objects from the pile of scrap, and exhibited them close by, in a renovated warehouse space. Within the scrap heap, these nine elements were replaced with concrete forms that reproduced their outline and volume. They betrayed the fact that this seemingly random assemblage was in fact carefully composed. After the three-month span of the exhibition in Kassel, the scrap metal was disposed of. Only the mute forms of the concrete sculptures remain – like archaeological finds from an unknown past that have survived a catastrophic event. This sense of the remains is expressed by the title: *Relic*. Here at Nottingham Contemporary, the nine concrete forms are installed so as to echo the installation of the nine original metal objects shown in Germany.

3. *TABOO* (2017)

Car-wash brushes, iron slabs, motors, electrical boxes, wires
Overall dimension variable in time
Courtesy the artist and Galleria Franco Noero, Turin.

For ten years, Favaretto has been making a series of sculptures that take the form of car-wash brushes. Each one is attached to an iron slab and driven by a motor set on a timer. The action creates an alternating state of motion and inactivity. The rotation means that the brush repeatedly rubs against the metal sheet, beating it like a whip, rubbing and polishing the surface. Friction leads to overheating, melting the tips of the plastic bristles, while also creating an electrostatic charge, meaning that the metal surface attracts dust and detritus. Favaretto did not conceive of the works as sculptures, but as paintings, inspired by the vertical thrust of Barnett Newman's "zip paintings". They have, in the past, been titled after films and superheroes, and have been shown as standalone pieces, as well as in pairs and groups.

4. *Bulk* (2002)

Gauze, plaster, wood, iron, newspaper sheets, strapping band
Installation dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

Fourteen enigmatically shaped plaster sculptures, each consisting of two mirror-image parts joined by a black plastic strap, are set upon the floor. The work is closely tied to *Treat or Trick* (2002), a performance organised by Favaretto in the form of a carnival parade, for which 14 papier-mâché masks were created. The sculptures in *Bulk* are casts of the original clay models used to shape the masks; far removed from their original use, these sculptures are empty shells. This is particularly important in relation to the masks in *Treat or Trick*, which were designed in the ephemeral spirit of carnival as temporary means to be used solely for a performance, after which they were burnt. The back-and-forth between the two works – the moulds and the masks, the content and the container – finds a parallel in the carnival, with its momentary reversal of order. Carnival is a metaphor for the transition from the old to the new through an act of destruction, one in which beginning and end coincide.

5. *Doing* (1998)

Recorded live sound
54 min.
Courtesy the artist

In 1998, Favaretto commissioned a trio of amateur stone-cutters to reduce three blocks of salvaged Carrara marble to dust. The performance lasted two months, during which time a sound engineer recorded the noise of their hammers and chisels. At the end of the action, what remained of the blocks was exhibited, together with the tools and the dust that had been produced. Forty-seven audio tracks were gathered from these recordings, conveying the sensation created by the performance. Played through the galleries at Nottingham Contemporary, *Doing* is, at once, a work of construction and destruction.

6. *Di Blasi R7* (2012)

Tyre marks and wall
Site-specific installation, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and Galleria Franco Noero, Turin

Traces and dents left on the walls of two galleries in Nottingham Contemporary reveal the action of a "private performance": a second-hand moped ridden repeatedly around the spaces, the week before the exhibition opened. To avoid any control over the final outcome, Favaretto asked a number of people to ride the moped in a circle, skimming the walls and striking them, producing different marks depending on their level of confidence or recklessness. Titled after the model of the moped, *Di Blasi R7* is not a performance so much as the traces of an action that has already taken place. The moped is not shown in the exhibition, thus denying the viewer the possibility of connecting the damage to the machine that produced it, which is only suggested in the title. The same moped has been used to repeat the action in several exhibitions. Even though the operation is potentially destructive, the traces it leaves fill the exhibition space with lines and rhythms that recall the action of a painting.