



**Ely Cathedral presents *Tree of Life* - a major solo exhibition by
Helaine Blumenfeld OBE**

13 July – 28 October 2018



Tree of Life (bronze). Photo by Erio Forli.

A major solo exhibition of large-scale sculptures by internationally-acclaimed artist **Helaine Blumenfeld OBE**, will be presented in the magnificent setting of the 900-year old **Ely Cathedral**, Cambridgeshire, from **13 July - 28 October 2018**. Bringing together 17 bronze and marble sculptures, including six new works, the exhibition will be displayed throughout the cathedral and in the surrounding grounds.

The title of the exhibition, ***Tree of Life***, takes its name from one of the most important and enduring themes in Blumenfeld's fifty-year career - despite atrocities and widespread destruction, life finds a way to renew itself. Featuring five sculptures from the *Tree of Life* series, presented together for the first time, the exhibition explores the spiritual and cultural symbolism of these works and the other sculptures on display, projecting a compelling narrative of energy, optimism and hope.

The original concept for *Tree of Life* came in response to a statement made by Blumenfeld's mother, that many Holocaust memorials have a 'total absence of spirituality'. She noted that they were often depictions of objects that victims had to leave behind - empty bookcases, suitcases,

vacant buildings and gravestones - which did not convey the immense loss felt then and for generations to come. Years later, Blumenfeld created her own artistic response. **Helaine Blumenfeld** says: *“I found myself creating a sculpture that began with what looked like the trunk of a tree formed by many bodies twisted and turning, combining and informing the trunk. I realised, as I was completing it, that it represented the victims of the Holocaust. However, instead of disappearing in smoke, the trunk moved upward and opened into a panoply of branches with a regrowth of blossoms, and clouds of many leaves, creating a sense of hope. I was trying to express that, although there had been almost unbelievable destruction, there could still be renewal and regeneration. These bodies were vanishing, but their loss might provoke society to respond with greater compassion and greater creativity.”*

This piece was the first in a series of sculptures that centred around the *Tree of Life* motif. Although each has a different emphasis, they are all about possibility and hope, healing and renewal, and represent a shift in Blumenfeld’s focus, moving from largely figurative and introspective subject matter, towards an outward-looking perspective in reaction to world events.

Helaine Blumenfeld says: *“The condition the world is in - the political chaos and lack of leadership, the divisions and the suffering - has increasingly been a focus for the sculptures I have been creating. I think the greatest challenge for our time is in overcoming apathy and restoring empathy, in reviving the belief in something higher and more meaningful than material success. Perhaps most important of all is understanding that individual perspectives can be different, but that we are united in our humanity. Art has the power to lead the way in this renewal by helping us to transcend our own perspectives and feel part of a larger community. In viewing art, we can come together and share in experiencing Beauty.”*

Jacquiline Creswell, the curator of *Tree of Life* says: *“Visual art is one of the great civilising achievements of humankind. It can speak to us of the transcendent and eternal truths, as well as challenging our perceptions of ourselves and the way we live. In its creation and presentation, art elicits wonder. It challenges, probes and inspires. In the context of the Cathedral, it has the power to open us to hidden meaning and to deep purpose. Art can speak where words fail.”*

2018 sees Helaine Blumenfeld embark on one of the most ambitious periods of her career, with a group show at the Venice Biennale (26 May - 25 November 2018), a solo exhibition at Ely Cathedral (13 July – 28 October 2018) and a new film about her life and work to air on SKY Arts in April.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Press Contact

Julia Safe | julia.safe@flint-pr.com | 0203 470 0096

Visitor Information

Ely Cathedral, The Chapter House, The College, Ely, Cambridgeshire, CB7 4DL
+44 (0) 1353 667 735 | elycathedral.org |
Opening times: 13 July – 28 October 2018 – 7.00am to 6.30pm daily

About Helaine Blumenfeld

Helaine Blumenfeld OBE (b.1942, New York) Blumenfeld studied sculpture at the Ecole de la Grande Chaumière, Paris (1962–63) and later studied with Russian sculptor Ossip Zadkine in his studio. In 1985, she had a seminal joint exhibition with Henry Moore at the Alex Rosenberg Gallery, New York. In 2007 Blumenfeld became the first woman to win the Il Premio Pietrasanta e la Versilia Nel Mondo, adding her name to the list of winners of this honour including Botero, Pomodoro and Marc Quinn. In 2008 the Royal Society of Sculptors held a major retrospective of her work and in 2011 Blumenfeld was awarded an honorary OBE to mark her achievements in sculpture. Blumenfeld has exhibited her work extensively both in the UK, including at Salisbury Cathedral (2013) and London's Berkeley Square (2015), and internationally in Europe and the United States. She has created more than 90 public sculptures, among the most notable are 'Tempesta' overlooking Hyde Park in London and 'Fortuna' in Jubilee Park at Canary Wharf.

About Ely Cathedral

Ely Cathedral is widely acknowledged as 'one of the wonders of the Medieval world'. The present building dates from 1081 and is a remarkable example of both Romanesque and Norman architecture. In addition to its unique Octagon Tower and magnificent Lady Chapel, Ely has the third longest nave of any UK Cathedral. The Cathedral's role today is not so far removed from its days as a Benedictine monastery and offers regular daily worship with a special emphasis on choral music. As well as being a major visitor attraction, the Cathedral serves as a cultural focal point for East Anglia by providing a unique venue for the arts & music, for exhibitions, concerts and theatre. Most recently Ely has gained global recognition a prominent film location including *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, *The Other Boleyn Girl*, *Macbeth*, *The King's Speech* and *The Crown*.

About Hignell Gallery

Helaine Blumenfeld is represented by Hignell Gallery. Hignell Gallery was established in 2015 by twentieth-century and contemporary sculpture specialist Abby Hignell in Shepherd Market, Mayfair. Representing some of the leading figures in contemporary sculpture, Hignell Gallery's roster includes Helaine Blumenfeld, Johannes von Stumm, Sophie Ryder and Ben Russell. For more information about Helaine Blumenfeld please contact Abby Hignell at Hignell Gallery +44 (0) 207 499 4528