

As talented young artist **Jenny Allinson** prepares to exhibit her latest work at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle, Val Barnes spoke to her about how she came to make the most of her talents.

Sparkling, talented and focused are three words which immediately spring to mind when you meet north east - based young sculptor, Jenny Allinson. Meeting Jenny at the Arts Council building, it's obvious that she is excited by all there is to do and achieve over the next few months. This young sculptor is going places, having already travelled a long way since she arrived in the north east for her degree course in Fine Art at Newcastle University in 1999.

On her journey, she has had the good fortune to have met some inspirational people from the worlds of fine art and business in both the north east and Munich who have hastened her progress.

As well as sculpting, Jenny is working full time for the Universities of the north east as their Higher Education Cultural Development Manager, having only very recently been appointed to this position. There's also her involvement in the forthcoming high profile exhibition at the Laing Art Gallery entitled *Seasons* to prepare for, and her website is currently under construction. What's more, as an ex-Gleamer, she's involved with Creative GLEAM, an innovative and respected business start-up programme run by

Durham Business School and spear-headed by Wendy Parvin.

"It's all go," Jenny says with delight. "I didn't plan things to be quite this busy. It's just the way things have worked out."

Why Jenny is having to multitask soon becomes obvious. She goes on to explain that within a week of getting the full time job with the Higher Education Development Council she was approached by the curator of the Laing about *Seasons*, which runs from December 15th - April 6th 2008 and was asked to be part of the exhibition herself. "It was an opportunity too good to miss as I'll be in the main galleries for four months. I couldn't say no, so now I'm doing both!" Jenny says.

Jenny's work, *Winter Flowers*, will be in keeping with the theme of the exhibition and will be a unique opportunity for Jenny as a regionally based contemporary artist to respond to works from the permanent collection and as well as highlight the importance of contemporary art at the Laing.

For all this to have happened in just four years since graduating from Newcastle University's Fine Art Department in 2003 is impressive. Nonetheless, the actual installation of her work is preoccupying Jenny, as is

fundraising to get marketing materials together and covering costs related to the show. Meanwhile, she is busy finishing off her latest piece, *Winter Flowers* in time for the December show.

REMINISCING ABOUT HER student days in Newcastle, Jenny feels she owes a lot to some inspirational people in the Fine Art Department at Newcastle, as well as those she met as a guest student in Munich. "Studying at Newcastle gave me the freedom to find my own way. I met Bill Varley in my first year at Newcastle. He became a real touchstone for me and his support has been unwavering. We've remained in contact and he's my mentor now."

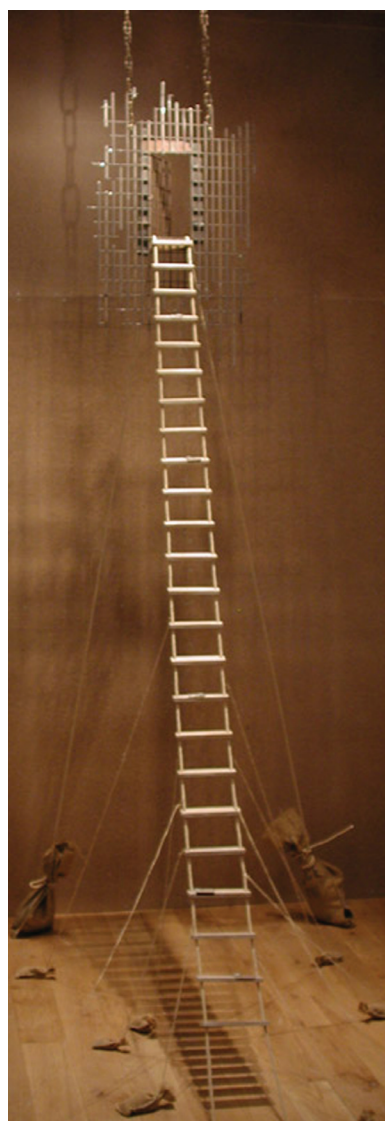
Wolfgang Weileder, Jenny's second year tutor opened another door for her. Apart from instilling in Jenny a strong and committed work ethic, he was key in pushing her towards studying at the Akademie in Munich.

Christoph Bermann - a Munich-based sculptor took Jenny under his wing. "He was fantastic," Jenny says. "He taught me a huge amount over the five months I spent with him. It was thanks to him that I developed my 'process' as an artist. In the same way, it was with the confidence instilled by Christoph that I began to engage with the class





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and find my niche within it.

"The buzz of the Akademie, with lots going on, busy workshops and people working incredibly hard day in day out was something I had craved for in England. I learnt so much from my peers in Munich, not only through conversation, but also in the imparting of practical skills.

"They had all apprenticed and worked in a trade in order to get a place at the Akademie, so my class consisted of stone masons, carpenters and engineers. This really suited my appreciation for materials and skilled making."

Not surprisingly, Jenny's work has been heavily influenced by this experience. Apart from *Winter Flowers*, she will also be exhibiting *Dandelion People*, a piece which is inspired by the tiny filaments that you blow from a dandelion clock. "The project was completely driven by my experiences in Munich. I had been spending a lot of time at the Deutsches Museum looking at Leonardo da Vinci's flying machines, as well as designs in nature – birds' wings, horse chestnut helicopters, for example. With these preoccupations and the fact that I felt that I was on my own journey, with no pre-determined destination, and very much at the

peril of forces other than my own, the concept of *Dandelion People* was born," Jenny says.

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"The materials make reference to different personality types. The wooden sculptures are light and drift slowly in the wind, whereas the resin sculptures are like glass; fragile and vulnerable, whilst the aluminium is strong and directed – making an impact on landing."

JENNY HAS MADE a continuous body of work since 1999, each one distinctive, highly symbolic and with an intriguing title – *Contraptions* (1999-2000), *Dandelion People* (2000-2001), *Rope Ladder* (2002), *White Stairs* (2002-2003), *Bow and Arrow* (2003-2004) and her most recent, *Winter Flowers*.

Jenny describes this latest piece for installation at the Laing as a "Make your own Spring kit." *Winter Flowers* is meant to be for times when Spring seems too far away, and the lifelessness and dullness of Winter needs interrupting. Like all her works, it juxtaposes contrasting materials and forms – the coldness of industrial materials such as

stainless steel and aluminium against sumptuous silks and organic oak and leathers. That is all the information Jenny will divulge. She wants *Winter Flowers* to be a surprise for visitors to the Gallery.

Jenny is also keen to stress the importance of GLEAM in supporting her as a professional artist. "I saw GLEAM as the next step in filling in my knowledge and skills' gaps – as preparation for self-employment. I didn't want to fall into a black hole – I needed to be business savvy. GLEAM helped me to value my existing skills and made me realise how I can use these to generate an income.

"Wendy Parvin, who runs GLEAM has been another source of inspiration to me. She was very encouraging and we're now friends. Thanks to Wendy, GLEAM gave me the confidence to realise my plans to become an artist."

Jenny feels equally indebted to the support from the Enterprise Centre and their team at Newcastle University who helped her to write her business plan. "Through the annual business planning competition, I won a number of awards and last year was New Trader of the Year. For this, I won £1,000, which I'm really proud of as I was the only sole trader, up against much larger

organisations," Jenny says.

Jenny is now poised for her first major public exhibition – quite a daunting prospect for one so young. "I'm delighted to be exhibiting at the Laing – it'll be a new audience for my work," she says excitedly. She is clearly looking forward to gauging people's reactions to the installation.

"The space is great, with big oak doorways – which relates to the aesthetic of my works, and big enough to be able to see the works at a distance. As an installation, that's very important."

"It's also going to be exciting to see how my work will resonate with more traditional paintings – they're a very different medium, but share ideas around skilled execution, the process of making and craftsmanship. I think my work will benefit from being outside the more typical white cube space," Jenny reflects. "It's a new exhibition for me." 

Seasons runs at the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle from December 15th - April 6th 2008. For more information about Creative GLEAM, contact Lynda Anderson 0191 334 5441