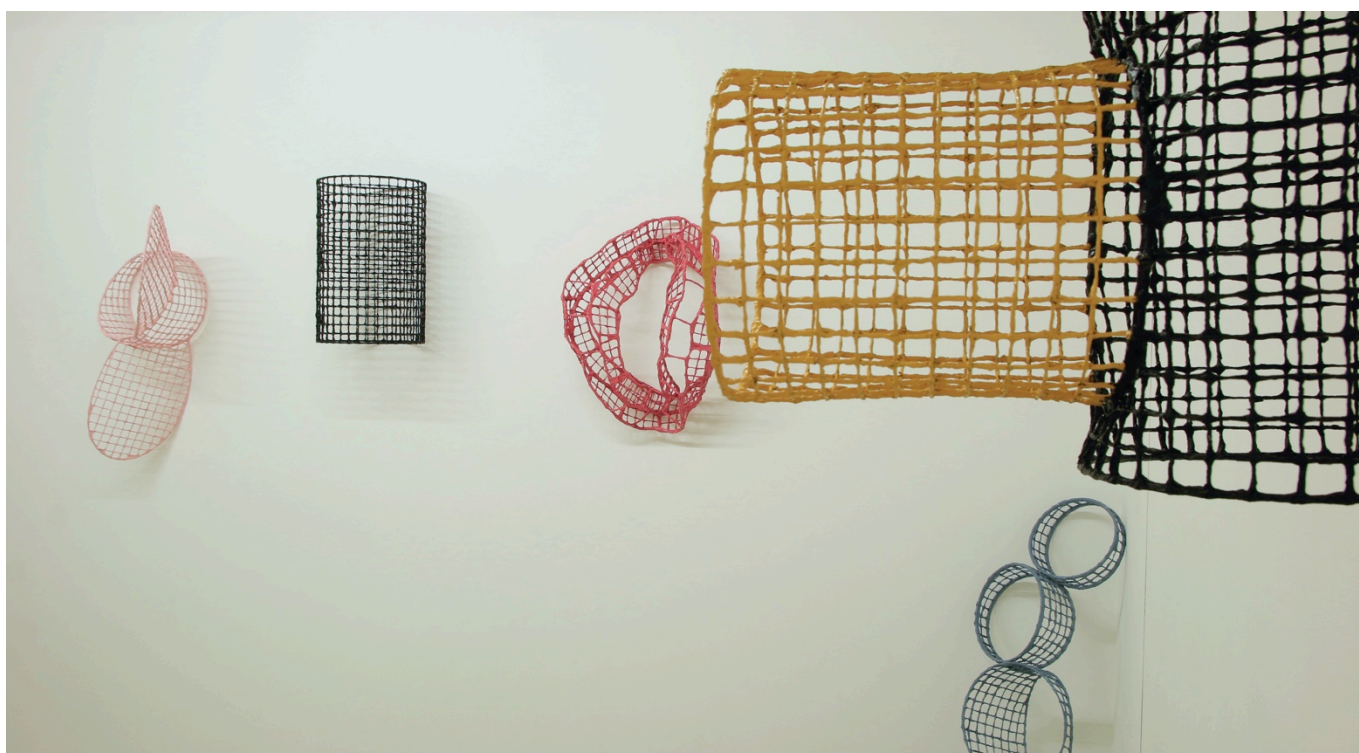


## Beyond Appearance I

A watering can with no spout; a waste paper basket with no bottom; a crocheted necklace that won't fit over the head; a skeletal wheel with no spokes: there's an immediate sense of function lacking functionality in Nicola Dale's sculptures. With their air of industrial purpose, these steel and aluminium forms evoke cages, wire fencing, window security mesh, built or installed to keep stuff in and people out, or people out and stuff in. But any hint of menace soon collapses into a range of emotional responses from amusement and friendliness to feeling quizzical and intrigued. Some of the sculptures gain groundedness from the floor, others are attached to the wall at head height, as though ready to engage in conversation. One leans in the corner minding its own business.

Whether it's the palette or the shapes, the pieces soon acquire characters or moods. Pink is an amiable bunny with big ears. It's a netted pink basket with no bottom and a curved lid that's open and another lid that grew in the wrong place. Its shadows tease the object into an aerodynamic shape – a propellor? It seems to want to take off. Look closely and you'll see how the woven, crooked and twisted mesh has been wrapped in layers of papier-mâché, creating bumps and lumps in the grid-like structure. Of course, Dale is keen to revision the grid and its centrality to the Minimalist tradition. Rather than emphasise the hard, unyielding edges of a machine-made modular unit, Dale wants to underline the irregularities of the object's subjectivity and the hours her hands took to make them.



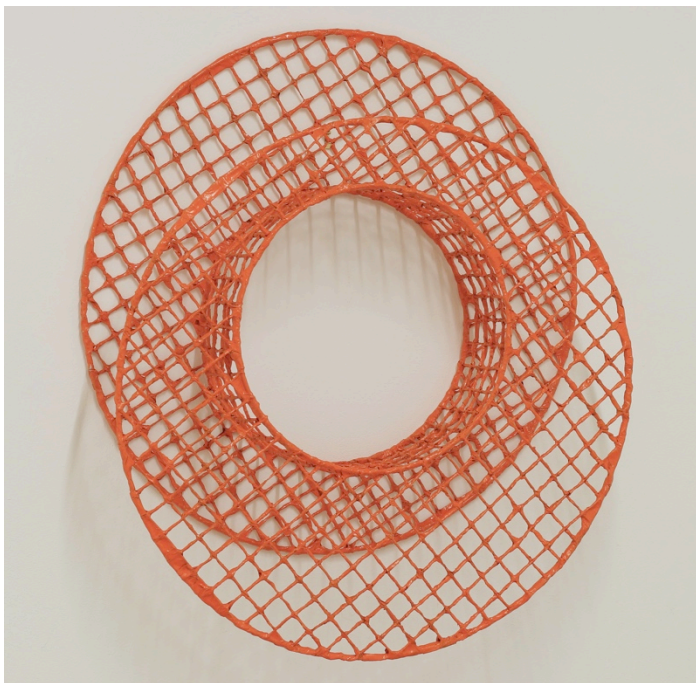
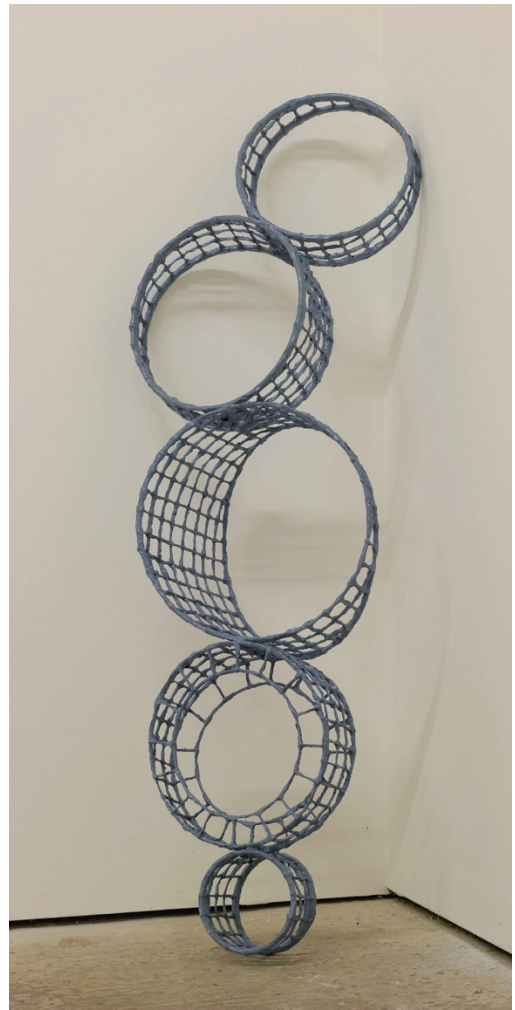


Another piece in deep magenta makes a two-tiered oval outline, bent out of shape. This lifebelt won't save you. There is no safety net. A bright blue torso seems to have holes for arms, like a woven metal tank top, waiting to be picked up and worn. Its function is unclear but it needs us. A black and a gold waste paper bin seem to be fucking. They're calling out for attention, to become articulate. Mr. Navy looks forbidding – a round shape of crocheted wire suggests a DNA or viral system that holds deep knowledge, while the collar or porthole that protrudes from it, speaks in another language. A grey meshed hoop with a squashed middle suggests a basketball net, held in frozen pliability. It's stuck mid-goal. Nothing can be scored. It can't win. Is it sulky? Bad-tempered? Aloof?

The works recall sculptures by Gego (1912-1994), the Venezuelan artist who made hanging wire forms that she dubbed 'drawings without paper....consequently without frames.' For Gego, as well as Dale, the spaces in between the wire lines are as important as the lines themselves, just as the shadows around each sculpture are incorporated into the work itself. While Gego said, *Things are as they appear to the spectator because visual perception cannot go beyond appearance* (1), Dale defies the distance Minimalism demands and makes her objects touchable, inhabited, peopled. 'I've touched them so much,' she says, 'why can't others touch them? Touch is so important.' Suddenly you realise that these are a form of kinetic basketry and you are the motor. They must be lifted, weighed, turned, swung, worn, held aloft. We complete them. They tell us how it feels to have a body.

Cherry Smyth

(1) Gego, *Sabiduras & Other Texts* by Gego, Houston, International Centre for the Arts of the Americas, 2005, p.99



Nicola Dale 'Head On' Bobinska Brownlee New River  
9 - 21 May 2023 [bbnrgallery.com](http://bbnrgallery.com)  
[nicoladale.com](http://nicoladale.com) Photography: Darren Nixon



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