

Preserving Stone Sculpture

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By Emma Crichton-Miller

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In 2023 dealer Willoughby Gerrish, Director and Curator of Thirsk Hall Sculpture Garden in Yorkshire, curated a selection of art works by Emily Young, Nick Fiddian Green, Anthony Caro, Mark Coreth, and Johnny Hawkes, some within and some outside the main tent at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. He will curate a new Sculpture Walk for 2024. These displays of monumental sculpture outside major art fairs remind us that great art can hold its own with nature and the built environment - and indeed may reach its full potential in that context. After all, human beings have been creating large scale monuments in the landscape since the ancient Egyptians. Henry Moore once said, "Sculpture is an art of the open air. I would rather have a piece of my sculpture put in a landscape, almost any landscape, than in, or on, the most beautiful building I know."

He is certainly not the only one. Peter Osborne suggests that all the sculptors whose work he shows at Osborne Samuel would prefer to make work for outside: "I do not know any sculptors who are not more challenged and provoked by the outside environment than the domestic or gallery space." With a strong specialism in the work of Henry Moore and Lynn Chadwick, the gallery also deals extensively in other major post war sculptors including Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler, Anthony Caro, Tony Cragg, Elisabeth Frink, Barbara Hepworth and Eduardo Paolozzi. Osborne adds, "One of the joys of being a dealer is working through with artists their response to context." They also work closely with collectors to find the best location for any piece they buy.

Edward Horswell of London's Sladmore Gallery is more precise: "As many artists as could get a patron would aspire to make monumental work out in the landscape. Particularly in a public setting." But many of their artists - including Nic Fiddian Green and Johnny Hawkes - can produce bronze sculptures from a single maquette, at various scales, to suit a variety contexts. "You have the courtyard garden scale, and then the larger garden scale and then landscape," Horswell explains. "Where you place something is a balance between the scale you prefer and your budget."



Edward Horswell posing with a monumental sculpture, 'Mighty Horse' by Nic Fiddian Green at the 2023 inaugural edition of The Treasure House Fair.

Gerrish suggests that when you have sculpture in the elements, “you experience the object in a totally different way every day, as the light and weather conditions change.” He notes that works inspired by nature, such as the bronze sculptures of artist Austin Wright, who came to prominence in the 1950s and 60s, which are heavily influenced by the fauna and flora of Yorkshire, where he then lived, are particularly in tune with landscape. On the other hand, he adds, “Something totally abstract that makes a total contrast with its surroundings”, such as the work of sculptor Mike Lyons, “also works very well.” He recently mounted an exhibition in collaboration with Richard Green, London, of the latest work of Emily Young, a sculptor renowned for her free-carving of beautiful heads, which emerge from the unique specimens of stone she selects specially. Those made of quartzite are particularly suitable for showing outside as they provide a continuity between the ground beneath our feet, the human imagination and the cosmic space beyond where the elements that constitute our world were first formed. Gerrish remarks that we are particularly fortunate in the UK to have the example of so many great sculpture parks - the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Jupiter Artland and the Henry Moore Studios and Gardens among them - to inspire us. Where the wealthy once aspired to buy paintings, now many aspire to create a sculpture park.

For all owners of outdoor sculpture, maintenance is a prominent consideration. Emily Young, for example, sends a team to install her larger pieces, with full instructions on how to care for it. Gerrish points out that while some sculptors, such as David Nash, “have a view that deterioration is part of the work”, others, such as Lyons, want the piece to remain pristine: “He expects to repaint every ten years.” Horswell says that at Sladmore they make their own outdoor wax for sculptures that is also bird-repellent and are in touch with a range of businesses that specialise in conservation. Osborne meanwhile comments “When we place a sculpture outdoors, we provide strong advice about how the work should be kept in good condition.” In extreme cold, as in a Swedish winter, marble can crack, while in Palm Beach, Florida, sand whipped up by wind can erode sculptures. Bronze is on the whole resilient but still requires maintenance. As Osborne puts it, “Most galleries handling big sculpture know you cannot just sell the piece and forget it. You must attend to it.” Still, with new sculpture parks popping up regularly, it seems there is no end to our appetite for sculpture outside.

'Stillness Born of History II', Onyx, 2014, ht 94cm

[By Emily Young](#)