

**Interview by Maria Beatrice Vanni, Università degli Studi di Milano, Italia (Milan, October 2004)**

**Jon Edgar** trained at the **Frink School of Figurative Sculpture** in the United Kingdom and was awarded the **2001 Discerning Eye Bursary**. A postgraduate background in **landscape ecology and design** provides natural influences to his work. He has exhibited across England and had pieces selected for **Chelsea Flower Show** and **Hereford Cathedral** during **2003**.

**1. Did you always know you wanted to be a sculptor, or did you drift into it gradually?**

Well, both things I guess. My first academic training was as a biologist and I also have a masters degree in landscape design. For me, sculpture is the same as having a feeling and appreciation of the landscape, but on a smaller scale... you are still trying to make something sublime and beautiful. I try to create something with emotion that will make somebody want to look back at it and perhaps consider it further.

Everybody can see, but sculptors and other artists develop their visual senses so that they can better observe the relationship of lines, forms, spaces and planes in faces, bodies, the landscape around us. To see, this is *everything!*

I am constantly exploring, not to make pieces, but to build forms and shapes which make me feel good. Sculpture just happens as one explores... at some point you decide to stop and say "this is it" - and move onto exploring another block, or another idea - but nothing is ever definite.

**2. Do you think of a particular setting for your works? Do you imagine the work integrated with an ideal surrounding and landscape?**

It's true, especially with a commission for a specific destination. You have to be an engineer and a project manager as well, to properly site the piece safely whilst ensuring the work complements the background and the surroundings. You might place a work in white marble against dark evergreens rather than over a cloud skyline. For smaller pieces, it's much the same: I would like it, if a piece is set - let's say on a shelf, if people noticed, stopped and thought about the piece. But it's much better if the piece can be seen in the round, so that if the eyes fall on it, they are lead through points and lines and just can't avoid following the shapes. They are guided to see the complete figure.

Music links to sculpture, and the same with poetry: you've got notes...word...forms. The way and the rhythm they're linked with creates the work. In many poems the subject is not what is important, you don't look for sense, you're entranced by the sound and rhythm of words, which in sculpture are planes, point and lines.

**3. In your CV page, on your website, we can read that your studies were mainly oriented to "natural physical and organic forms supporting and reinforcing the human figure". How do you develop this relationship between natural forms and human being?**

When I am just observing, or sketching, working with clay and small pieces, I am mostly researching, trying to catch forms. These forms become lodged in the brain, like a 'bank' of forms. With a new piece, these forms sometimes emerge to link or complement existing forms. Sometimes the block may suggest a figure, or a animal and so on. I find the natural movements in many trees or cut sections of trunk often yield human standing figures or torsos. I try not to follow obvious perceptions, but also to be loyal to the lines and points I see on the piece. So then, when I am starting to work, I try to blank my mind and reach the essence of the piece. I follow the path of my feelings for the piece.

My sculpture is non-conceptual; there are no "connections". It's much more simple. An artist should never need to make statements about the meaning of his work. Criticism should be left to critics, and people should see what they feel. I am not there to say "this work symbolizes..."

**4. You've recently experimented working with pneumatic tools. Do you prefer these to working by hand alone?**

I feel they may be a danger for the direction of my present work. But they are addictive! I *have* to try it but I have to be aware. I need to be constantly exploring, and, not trying, I would never experience, and never know what I prefer. Personally, these air-driven chisels seem to work too fast. I'd rather let the material dictate the speed one can work, to have time to breathe, to reflect upon it. To work little and often allows you to come back to it afresh, objective, ready to identify areas which do not 'work', to really get ideas to develop it further. You have to avoid making work too cerebral, and try instead to go towards the subconscious, so that something else inside you makes the work.

**5. Your works seem to imply 'possibilities', as the image that you seem to recognize might change completely as one moves around it, or through differences in light and reflection on the surfaces. Perhaps you are trying to catch a form and finally, while fixing its shape, you also want to maintain some flexibility?**

A piece of sculpture is a relationship of forms. When you look at something it may be more than one shape, but something inside you tells you that a certain part should be of a certain size and proportion to the others, that the piece has to be something rather than something else. It's not a question of right or wrong, yes or no, you are constantly checking, either taking away, until it feels right. To you. And hopefully to others.

It feels right if when, looking at a piece, somebody can believe that there is either some emotion or movement, or just some primitive 'recognition'. An excellent example is the simplification of the human form. The way the brain works, it sees a female form and catches all the thousands of different points on the figure, to see how the parts go together; and then it matches these against its stored knowledge before telling you 'nude woman'!

To simplify the human form is to take away all the excess so that when someone looks at the work, they immediately recognize the form perhaps from four or five reference points, but in such a fast and direct way that it leaves them stunned, enlightened by the identification - eureka! It's like trying to reach the essence of that form. But nothing is definite. Probably this is what would be defined as subconscious flowing out, and perception of archetypes.

I like to see my works with the mass up off the ground. That gives a potential energy to the piece, like if it was a tree or a dancer... finely balancing all that weight, but also having the possibility of seemingly crashing down through gravitational force!. A balanced work that leans perceptibly implies movement - somewhere in the piece are huge straining forces keeping this balance. You need to imagine yourself in positions to see where these huge energies act – try standing up very straight then leaning forward gradually...

Something that seems important is that you must not 'finish' and display a sculpture that you don't feel has been properly resolved. It can only speak for itself and if it has nothing to say, then what good can it do...

**6. While you're working, what is your perception of the natural splitting of wood, and of the colours and shades that may appear as the work progresses? How do they influence your work?**

Grain of the wood and veins and flaws in stone or marble may suggest directions that sometimes I don't want to follow, but other times can inspire me. But I try not to be forced by the characteristics of a piece. Whilst working on the Adam piece - carved in laburnum wood and where the natural dark and light shades always interfered with my thoughts on the piece - I could have used the possibilities implied in this particular wood, but I preferred to blank my mind to it and look directly at the forms. Form is the most important thing in sculpture. Unnecessary detail just obscures the underlying rhythms of the forms - hence why historical portraits with medals and so on have no real 'life' to them, whilst true sculpture captures some essence, perhaps of a person, or a figure, or a feeling.

**7. It is interesting that you let someone offer their own piece of wood or stone for a commissioned work. Why do you do this?**

If people have a piece that is emotionally important for them, like wood from their garden, then this might add another dimension to the finished work. Sometimes people might have materials, or perhaps a specific idea for a piece, that I don't really feel is appropriate for me. In this case I need to retain my creative integrity; if you compromise your ideas (for money) then other people may see this work and think you're not so good!. It's like modelling portraits from photographs, without knowing the person or having perceived their energy and mood and character... if you don't have access to all the primary information at the beginning, how can you hope to produce a good result?

**8. Your portraits make the sitters look very familiar. What relationship develops between the artist and sitter, and what influences the expression of your model?**

It's very difficult. There are so many variables! One scenario is that you portray someone famous that you don't know. You have to try to forget all the media image around that person; to try to reach them as a real person. Some people don't like their portrait because it attempts to represent the truth; it shows their vulnerability as humans, and not as they think they are or would like to be. If you think of caricature, I will never intentionally try to do that, but it sometimes happens that the facial features and feelings affect you so much that you slightly accentuate them.

(To contradict, it IS actually very simple. Observation gives the asymmetries which bring life and familiarity to the work. Subconscious abstraction, and luck, may help other emotions or feeling to appear. The sitter needs to keep both animated and relaxed, so talking helps.)

**9. Do you feel different emotions when a stranger sits for you, as opposed to when you portray your partner or a friend?**

If you know the sitter really well then unconscious things may emerge through the portrait which one inevitably interprets in some way. It is remarkable how infrequently we actually closely study people we know well.

**10. Are you always at work or do you need breaks to gather fresh ideas and feelings; to find inspiration?**

You have to transport your works to and from exhibitions, deliver them to clients, gather ideas, listen for projects and to suggestions, meet people, identify sitters, find materials... it all takes time! Of course you have to do the "keeping in touch" work which is very interesting and stimulating. I couldn't work physically each day, because you become tired and eventually feel like it's just manual work with no inspiration. I need to breathe and let my work breathe. I am doing some writing at the moment and that helps refresh my mind. It's fulfilling. Talking to people, letting ideas come in: every person you see, everything you're looking at may link with new ideas that store in the brain and may pop out at some future time! Just like a writer.

You end up realizing that most artists don't make any money, but they live an interesting life and leave something behind that may inspire others. That's what I want to do...

*Directly-modelled portraiture and life studies show the powers of observation, whilst abstracted stone and wood carvings contain more ambiguity... the former provides the raw material for the latter.*

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