The Big Idea

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JOHN ATKIN

John Atkin’s sculptures have something in common with the work of David Smith, in their use of industrial materials and in the references they make to machinery. They also, however, have a quirkily sense of humour that is not usually present in David Smith’s work.

Some of his pieces are clearly figurative, in the sense that they reference the human figure – others are less so. The unifying factor, as visible in the maquettes that make up this exhibition, as in the completed sculptures, which are often very large, is a determination to use sculpture to give a particular locality a sense of place. One of Gertrude Stein’s more memorable aphorisms, inspired by a visit to Oakland, California, was her comment that “There is no there, there.” If we are honest, we could apply this description to any number of current spaces and places. When we visit them, we get no sense of exact, specific location – we might as well be somewhere else.

One of the tasks Atkin has set himself, or been set by those who commission him, is to cure this malaise through the use of art. Contemporary public sculpture treads a very fine line. On the one hand there is the Scylla of vacuous abstraction. On the other, there is the Charybdis of equally vacuous realism. The function of too much new sculpture is purely decorative – a nice shape, plonked down in some vacant area. It’s no surprise to learn that many sculptures of this type are in fact created by architects, reluctant to have any object made by a different hand in close propinquity to a building they have designed, or placed with its interior. Commemorative portrait sculpture – images of Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Ghandi or some famous footballer – tends to be coarsely executed and almost null in its rendition of character. Atkin’s sculptures, by contrast, are personages in their own right, beings that he has invented. Each is carefully fitted to its setting, each offers a potentially memorable encounter.

It may perhaps be argued that there is something nostalgic about his use of industrial fragments – these allude to an age when heavy industry was king, a time that is now rapidly vanishing into the mists of the past. In fact, nostalgia contributes to the power of these three-dimensional images, because it reminds one that the industrial past is often an important element in the history of the place where a given sculpture is located.

These heavy, metallic forms carry a powerful resonance, they concentrate an echo, and dredge up for the spectator things that he or she already knows subconsciously. That it why I think they will have a wide-ranging appeal, even for people who are not necessarily in sympathy with contemporary art.

Edward Lucie-Smith
**Signaler**

Corten & stainless steel

Commissioned by Highland Metrobrook for The Rushes, Loughborough

Height: 793 cm (26 ft)

1. **Signaler** (maquette)

Poured resin

Height: 66 cm (2 ft 2 in)
The Navigator

Corten & stainless steel

Commissioned by Ipswich Borough Council
On behalf of The Orwell Riverside Development, Ipswich
Height : 550 cm (18 ft)

2. The Navigator (masquette)
Corten steel
Height : 69 cm (2 ft 3 in)
Pound Mill

Corten and stainless steel
Commissioned by Spelthorne Borough Council for the historic Pound Mill site, Staines
Height: 430 cm (14 ft 1 in)

3. Pound Mill (maquette)
Painted cast aluminium
Height: 33 cm (1 ft 1 in)
Dal Fabbro’s Chariot

Corten & stainless steel
Commissioned by Beetham Organization
For Beetham Towers, Liverpool
Height: 920 cm (30 ft 2 in)

4. Dal Fabbro’s Chariot (maquette)
Corten steel
Height: 66 cm (2 ft 2 in)
The Clicker

Bronze

Commissioned by The Friends of the New Walk, Leicester

Height: 244 cm (8 ft)

5. The Clicker (maquette)

Bronze

Height: 57 cm (1 ft 10 in)
Strange Meeting

Marble & granite
Commissioned by Beijing Municipal Government for Olympic Park, Beijing
Height : 250 cm (8 ft 2 in)

6. Strange Meeting (maquette)
Marble and granite
Height : 35 cm (1 ft 2 in)
Twin Sextant

Stainless steel and granite

Visualisation of project for Jersey Sculpture Trust
The Weighbridge regeneration project, St. Helier, Jersey

7. Twin Sextant (maquette)

Granite

Height: 44 cm (1 ft 5 in)
Hard Bop

Visualisation of Hard Bop Stainless steel
Commissioned by Lamar Group LLC
For Fillmore Plaza, San Francisco, CA

Height: 490 cm (16 ft 10 in)

8. Hard Bop (maquette)
Stainless steel
Height: 57 cm (1 ft 10 in)
9. Hunter and Trap
Cast aluminium
Height: 50 cm (1 ft 8 in)

10. Clicker II
Stainless steel
Height: 61 cm (2 ft)
Landing Gear

Corten & stainless steel & rope

Commissioned by The Royal British Society of Sculptors
Through open competition for the RBS forecourt exhibition

Height: 250 cm (8 ft 2 in)

11. Landing Gear

Available for sale by appointment
Location: Artist’s Studio

Height: 250 cm (8 ft 2 in)
NZ323135

Corten & stainless steel

Commissioned by Arts Council Commissions North
On behalf of City & Northern (Newcastle upon Tyne)
For Morton Palms Business Park

Height: 260 cm (8 ft 6 in)
By Hook or by Crook

Corten steel & stainless steel & oak
Commissioned by Tesco Ireland
For Wexford, Ireland
To celebrate the site of Pierce Engineering
County Wexford
Height : 580 cm (19 ft)

The Klansman

Steel, galvanized steel, stainless steel, glass
England Representative
EMAAR International Sculpture Symposium
Dubai, U.A.E.
Sculpture commissioned for the Burgh Dubai
Height : 427 cm (14 ft)
CURRICULUM VITAE

Publications

Searched Earth, ISBN 1-900856-41-7
Distant Voices, ISBN 1-900856-30-1
Cut, ISBN 1 901560 65 1


Strange Meeting. 3m x 3m x 3m. Marble. Beijing City Space Sculpture Exhibition. China
By Hook or by Crook. Bronze/ oak/ steel. Commissioned by Tesco Ireland for the site of Pierce Engineering, Wexford, Ireland.


Breaking Boundaries. Lead Artist appointed by Kent County Council to collaborate with Whitelaw Turkington Archtects on urban regeneration project in Ashford Kent. Works will include developing site sensitive sculpture, paving, seating, features and other works within the proposed new Elwick Road-West Street district, Ashford

Bowes Moor. 3-meter tall, wall-based sculpture. Commissioned by Systems Engineering Innovation Centre, Hollywell Park, UK. Celebration of collaboration with B.A.E. and unveiled by Mr. Ron Dennis, C.O.E McLaren/Mercedes
Sculpture & Design: Symposium. Faculty of Arts & Architecture, University of Brighton: Plenary panel member and exhibitor. Supported by the Henry Moore Foundation.

2004  The Klausm. 4-meter tall steel and glass sculpture. Commissioned by EMAAR and Air Emirates for the Burgh Dubai, Dubai, U.A.E. Assistance from Carillion PLC
England representative. Stone & Steel Sculpture symposium, Dubai. Sponsored by EMAAR, Air Emirates and Systems Engineering, Dubai
Dal Fabro's Charriot. 30 feet tall corten & stainless steel sculpture for Beetham Towers, Liverpool. Sculpture selected as Tate Liverpool’s audit of Public Sculpture, City of Culture 2008. Commissioned by Beetham

The Navigator. 18 feet tall corten & stainless steel sculpture. Commissioned by Ipswich Borough Council, The River Action Group, Commissions East, and Arts Council for Orwell Riverside Development, Ipswich, UK
1st Guilin International Sculpture Exhibition, Guilin. China. Competition selection, juried panel, and sculpture retained for permanent outdoor sculpture collection
Railway Rumble. Internal entrance lobby commission, commissioned by Conran & Partners. Great Eastern Hotel, Liverpool Street, London

Other selected project partners on recent successful commissions include:

- Goyne Adams. Architects & Masterplanners
- PRC Architects Ltd
- Kingston Design Review Panel Member. Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames
- LDA Design. Landscape Architects and Masterplanners
- River Action Group, Ipswich
- Commissions East, Cambridge
- Beetham Organization
- Aedas Architects bd
- PlanArt London
- Carillon PLC
- Highfield Metropolis PLC
- John Rowan & Partners
- EMAAR Dubai
- Systems Engineering Dubai
- Mirage Glass Dubai
- Murray & Associates, Dublin, Ireland
- Conran & Partners
- Wardell Armstrong Landscape Architects
- City & Northern Planners & Developers
- Commissions North, Newcastle upon Tyne
- Joe Doyle Architects, Dublin, Ireland

Current project partners include:

- Jersey Sculpture Trust. Waterside Development Agency. Jersey
- Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. K+20 Urban Regeneration program
- Kent County Council, Ashford Ring Road. Champions Group. Jacobs Landscape Architects, Master Planners
- Friends of the New Walk, Leicester. Stage-2 sculpture project
- WBP Group Development. Landscape & Environment. Landscape Architects & Masterplanners
- SGP. Architects & Planners, Leicester
- Beijing Olympic Committee, Beijing, China