



SPECIAL FOCUS

- 4 Hand Notes at the End of Quarantine / Luo Xiaoping
- 6 Works Selection of Online Sculpture Exhibition of Anti-epidemic Fighting 2020 (2)
- 14 Interview at the Meeting of 2019 Urban Sculptural Art Engineering Standard Revision / Meng Lei
- 18 Eco-civilization + Low-carbon Art Seminar / Shang Xi

INDEPENDENT CRITICS

- 20 Meme Story: *From Indoors to Private Handbook* / Su Bin
- 26 Gender and Power: The comparison between *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago and *The Secret of Meeting* by Luo Xiaoping / Han Xiangcui

COVER ARTIST

- 30 Artistic Thinking Triggered at the Paradox
—Discussion on the Artistic Thinking Characters of Ma Tianyu / Fu Yuxiang
- 36 Contradictory, Anxiety and Hope / Ma Tianyu

TRANS-SCULPTURE

- 38 Re-Solving and Reconstruction by Emotion
—The Meaning of the Trans-sculptural Design by Xu Liaoyuan/ Yang Qi

PUBLIC ART

- 46 Goals of Art Setting and Public Space Development / Wu Shixin
- 50 Comment on the Method of Public Sculpture Setting / Zhao Yunchuan

CRAFTSMEN OF THE NATION

- 54 Taking the Western as Utilization and the China's as the Essence—Interview with Ma Gaihu / Miao Peng

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

- 60 Borderless Art Making—Interview with John Atkin / Zhu Yilang

THEORY INTERSECTION

- 66 Giacometti, Gormley, Quinn, Kapoor—The Effectiveness and Importance of Visual Experience / Fu Yan
- 68 Contemporary Context of the Traditional Lacquer Sculptural Art of Fujian / Liu Jiamao
- 70 From Sculpting Spirit by Form to Accentuating Meaning Instead of Form
—Argument on Portraiture Sculpture in Urban Space/ Ni Zhiqiang
- 72 The Worship and Figure of the Maitreya Bodhisattva of Tokuda of Gandhara / Pang Yuelei
- 74 Image Analysis of the Grout Panel Relief “The Hunting” of the Sassanid Empire Collected by the Boston Museum / Xu Fan
- 76 “Painting” with Knife instead of Brush
—Discussion of the Inheritance and Development of Shallow Carving Artistry / Zheng shibin
- 78 The Enlightenment of *The Death of the Author* by Roland Barthes / Zhao Zhuo
- 80 Mother's Love in the Solid and Void—Analysis on *Mother and Son* by Henry Moore / Duan Cheng
- 82 Analysis on the Development Trend of the National Architectural Sculptural Art Design / Quan Huimin、 Zhao Bin
- 84 Lingshi as Shape and Gandang as Figure
—Exploration on the Culture of Tai Mountain Shigandang / Liu Chunhong、 Qi Lesheng
- 86 Argument on the Soothing Function on Speculator's Psychology of Sculptural Art / Wu Deqiang
- 88 New Form of Modern Sculpture under Neo-media Technology / Yang Zhiyu

TRADITIONAL SCULPTURE

- 90 Contemporary Exploration of the “Image” in Traditional Sculpture / Dong Shubing
- 91 Brief Discussion on the Abstract Sculpture / Li Xuanfeng
- 93 The Image of Lines in the Creation of Sculpture / Dong Doudou
- 94 What is Sculpture? (2) / Peng Fuchun

Front Cover: *Naming Waiting for Deliberation—The Obelisk 2017* Ma Tianyu

Back Cover: *Pupil on the Plateau* Ma Gaihu

Inside Front Cover: *Trans-sculptural Furniture* Xu Liaoyuan

Office: 506 Tower A JinSongJiaYuan, GuangHeNanLi Chaoyang District Beijing, China

(100021) Tel: 0086-10-67749920 Editorial Department Tel: 0086-10-87779476

顾问委员会: (以姓氏笔划为序)

马小玫 马国馨 田世信 齐鸣秋 吴良镛
宋春华 张伯海 张崇和 张晓明 沈爱民
杨伯达 赵为民 倪志平 唐克美 钱绍武
陶小年 陶如让 曹春生 韩美林 潘绍棠
Ruth Beer (加拿大) 澄川喜一 (日本)
Bart'd Eyckermans (比利时)

艺术委员会: (以姓氏笔划为序)

王 中 王 林 韦天瑜 许 江 孙振华
李象群 宋慰祖 杨奇瑞 杨剑平 吴为山
张 辑 陆光正 陈云岗 范迪安 项金国
殷小烽 殷双喜 隋建国 景育民 傅中望
鲁晓波 曾成钢 黎明 霍波洋 魏小明
Billy Lee (美国) Jörg Plickat (德国)
柯 乔 (加拿大) 松尾光伸 (日本)

编辑委员会: (以姓氏笔划为序)

马钦忠 马天羽 王志刚 尹悟铭 邓 乐
吕品昌 刘礼宾 李砚祖 宋伟光 张松涛
陈 克 陈晓春 杭 间 郅 敏 榕
班陵生 顾 森 翁剑青 黄月新 董书兵
蒋铁骊 焦兴涛 鲍海宁 蔺宝钢 谭 云
谭 勋 魏小杰
Klaus Mertens (德国) Girschek (奥地利)

观察员:

张英超 (辽宁)	郭继锋 (陕西)
庞 渤 (天津)	邱泰洋 (中国台湾)
于牧洋 (美国)	孙龙本 (俄罗斯)
阎淑芬 (比利时)	刘 悦 (德国)
牛彦军 (意大利)	文 集 (韩国)
项秉勋 (澳大利亚)	林胜煌 (日本)
李云逸 (法国)	Wendy (英国)
皇甫晓岚 (奥地利)	

BIMONTHLY MAGAZINE SINCE 1995
100 KEY JOURNALS OF THE 2ND CHINA
NATIONAL
PERIODICAL AWARD

Charged by: China National Light Industry Association

Undertaken by: Sculpture Professional Committee of China Crafts and Arts Society

Overseas Distribution: China International Book Trading Corporation

International Standard Issue Number:
ISSN1007-2144

Domestic Standard Issue Number:
CN11-3579/J

Oversea Post Issue Number: 1373Q
Domestic Post Issue Number: 82-602

Operating License of Advertisement:
No.00171, Business & Advertisement of

Chaoyang District, Beijing

Domestic Price: RMB ¥ 32

Oversea Price: US \$ 12

Director: Fan Weimin

Editor-in-Chief: Zhu Shangxi

Executive Editor-in-Chief: Hai Min

Associate Editor-in-Chief:

Su Bin, Xu Yongtao, Wu Shixin

Editor-in-Charge: Zhang Xiaoyang

Legal Consultant: Huang Yong

Borderless Art Making - Interview with John Atkin
by Yilang ZHU (Images provided by John Atkin)

John Atkin



Interview site (Photograph by Shangxi ZHU)



Introduction of the artist: John Atkin, British sculptor; Fellow of Royal Society of Sculptors; Director of Internationalisation, School of Design and Creative Arts, Loughborough University; winner of Henry Moore Scholarship at the Royal College of Art, recipient of the University Award 2018, Loughborough University. Since 2003, he has concentrated on developing artworks for the built environment and public space, which is stimulated by the history and culture of any specific locale, in order to enhance the vitality of public space within the context of urban regeneration. His studio is located in London.

1. About sculpture education background

Yilang ZHU (ZHU): You were invited to visit Henry Moore in 1982 and won his support, to personally fund your study at the Royal College of Art in London for three years: please give a brief overview of your situation at that time.

John Atkin (JA): *I had earlier obtained an offer from Columbia University in the City of New York for a two-year MFA in 1982, but despite the generous offer of a scholarship and other financial assistance, the tuition fees were still too much for me to afford. So, I returned to the UK and used my drawing, collage and painting artworks to apply for support from the Henry Moore Foundation, and my application was sent to Henry Moore directly. Soon after, I was delighted with his unexpected phone call, and Moore invited me to visit his studio's in Much Hadham one week later. He thought three years at the RCA would be better than two years in New York, and recommended me to Prof Philip King, (Professor of Sculpture at the RCA) who interviewed me and agreed to over enroll me at the Royal College of Art with a special scholarship from Henry Moore. Therefore, I was lucky, and this was an instance of right time-right place.*

ZHU: Anthony Caro and Philip King are significant people of 'New Generation' in British sculpture, do you place yourself in their ranks?

JA: *No. I studied Painting during my Undergraduate, after which, I suddenly turned my interest to Sculpture and made rapid progress. But my work ideas all come from my personal experiences and stories based on my family life, which made my work have little to do with the philosophy of the 'New Generation'. There is a specific groundbreaking brilliance in the New Generation, but my works were more introspective, and my influences were painters such as Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff, as well as George Segal's sculpture, or Mark Rothko's sense of desolation and isolation. Even later when my creative inspiration shifted from my personal experience to other influences, I still can't place myself in the 'New Generation'.*

ZHU: Philip King was your Professor at the Royal College of Art, was your professional road afterward influenced by him?

JA: *Yes, and the main influence of Phillip King was his use of colour as part of sculptural form. Of course, Anthony Caro also used colour, and it's important to mention his wife, Sheila Girling's painting's, and her influence on her husband's use of colour in his pioneering sculpture. Philip King's use of colour simultaneously expressed the form and volume of his sculpture output, which was particularly significant in the 1960s. Extensive experiments in new technologies and materials was another of his influences on me, which undoubtedly extended the scope of what was possible in sculpture-based practice, so that any complacency in technique or ability was always interrogated by my restless desire to explore uncharted territories in my work. Some artists make efforts to capitalize on their "style" or a certain genre, which is of no interest to me. I think the process of artistic creation is a process of development and change, hence the journey is often more important than the destination.*

1. About sculpture and art

ZHU: *Your works show a distinct sense of the machine and mechanization (Fig. 1). Were all the machine components found in flea markets or scrap-yards? According to our experience, machine parts are artificial, so they are already the output of the designer, and it's easy for us to fall in love with them. How do you transform Engineering or Product designers' detritus into a real sculpture? Do you prefer to redesign forms using the components, or reorganize the forms of those components into playfulworks?*

JA: *In 1970s, I grew up in an environment of countless engineering factories, railways, and mining industries. Close to where I was brought up, there was an enormous Cummings Engineering Plant. The façade of the building was a glass curtain wall, which meant that the inner workings of the Plant (engine production) could be easily seen from outside by anyone passing by. Simultaneously, throughout my childhood my Father was constantly fixing cars and I was very interested in his Manuals about car repairs, especially the detailed disassembly drawings of engine parts. Engineering drawings of car parts allowed the viewer to look beneath the surface of appearance and into the workings of the machine. This experience*

was integral to my environment and looking back, the idea of the 'machine' as part of the human experience is deeply embedded in my imagination, not only the appearance of mechanization, but also a sustained influence that continues to this day. This was in contrast to my Painting output at the time which focused on the hinterland between the surrounding rural landscape, which bordered on the ever-expanding fields of industrialization from nearby Towns and Cities. I was captivated by my attraction to the duality of beauty and ugliness. Were these factories 'ugly', or another form of 'beauty'? My drawings and painting of that period sought to unlock this dialogue between what constitutes beauty. This debate led me to the sculptures and collages of Sir Eduardo Paolozzi, whose artworks focus on interpretations of beauty within the context of the machine-world.

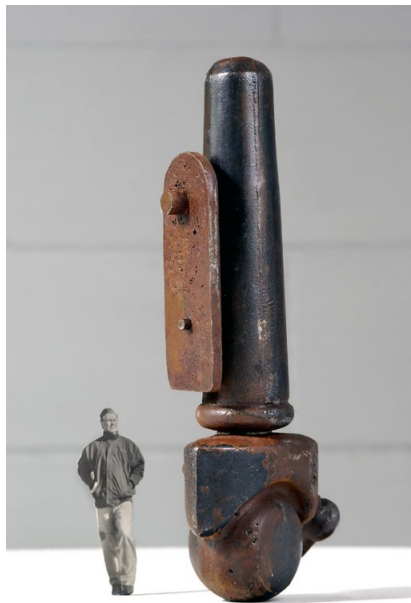


Fig.1 'Sentinel'



Fig.2 'Lookout'

ZHU: Then your use of machine parts and assemblage in your art works seek to explore the human condition through the language of mechanization, or do they use the physical articulation of the human body to create machine sculptures?

JA: *One way to answer this question is through reference to Ridley Scott's Bladerunner where the difference between what is real and what is synthetic is integral to the plot. Deckard (Bladerunner) is asked to identify "replicants" and then "retire" them. His mission is undermined by the near-perfect (Android) Rachael, who believes herself to be human. This nuance between the real and unreal is the tightrope- territory my work explores. It's an extension of Mary Shelley's Modern Prometheus, but instead of bestowing the (Ancient Greek) gift of fire to humans, the gift in Bladerunner is for "machines" to be "human".*

ZHU: Is there a kind of humour in it?

JA: *Maybe, but what I hope is that it contains some kind of bleak humour such as found in the Plays of Harold Pinter, Edward Bond, or perhaps Samuel Beckett, whose Plays embrace a sense of discomfort for the viewer.*

ZHU: Is there a nostalgic ingredient in your works?

JA: Nostalgia is a wistful longing and affection for the past and I don't think there is a nostalgic element in my work. I do have an embedded cognition of the past based on first-hand experiences, which were in the main fraught and not a place I'd wish to return to. My sensibility towards machinery is entirely down to where I was born and brought-up, the pre-digital industrialized N.E. of England and I was fascinated by the machinery which dominated my formative landscape. However, I do accept that in the era of digital technologies replacing machines, machines have a vernacular charm for some people, but not me!

ZHU: Your works have made a big leap over form and concept, what is the reason behind this?

JA: As an artist, I can't always stick to one way of doing something. Artists make creative adjustments according to the times we live in, such as our surroundings, political changes, innovative methods of production, or digital technologies. I imagine if Michelangelo or Leonardo were to find themselves in the 21st century, they would be unlikely to turn their back on the digital age. When something new comes along, innovative artists will always make the effort to experiment and explore new technologies.

ZHU: I notice that there are always wheels and balls at the bottom of your mechanical assembly works (Fig. 2), is it to imply movement? Expressing gravity and balance?

JA: Yes, I use a lot of these kind of elements in my earlier artworks. Partly because these forms are part of the artwork referring to ideas of momentum, transit, or transportation. The idea of movement from one place to another, which also includes transfer and progress. Commentators have reminded me that such carriage-like elements also echo my early stage abstract sculptures during my three working periods in Australia (Fig. 3). "Hostage" was part of a series of ceramic and mixed media sculptures, which examine ideas of human ritual, as well as referring to geological phenomena, such as the Pinnacles Desert in Western Australia. Conveyance in this instance is a granite funeral headstone supporting the (Promethean) bound and wrapped sinister form of a hooded figure. In earlier sculptures the arced muscle and bone defining structures of my sculpture "Watchman for the Morning", (and subsequent drawings) based on my Fathers Head (Fig. 4), contain an inherent rhythm and visual flow, which relates closely to the fluent stainless steel arc-like forms of my recent sculptures, Slipstream' (Fig.12) and seems to define an innate code or 'rule' in my sculpture output, which has been present for more than forty years.



Fig.3 'Hostage' 1990.



Fig.4 'Watchman for the Morning' 1983

ZHU: Henry Moore's drawings and sculptures can be seen as a whole, his drawings have a complete sense of sculptural form. However, and in total contrast, Anthony Caro didn't sketch, and his artworks don't have preliminary sketches because they are directly welded. Chillida's drawings are comprehensively two-dimensional, while his sculptures are emphatically three-dimensional. Richard Deacon regards drawing as precursors to his sculptures. What is the relation between your drawings (Fig. 5) and sculptures?

JA: *Creating artworks is a process of problem solving with imagination, different problems come with different (potential) solutions. If I find that drawing can't solve the problem, I will revert to sculpture; if sculpture can't solve the problem, I might turn to film; if film can't solve the problem, I will return to drawing, possibly via Printmaking. Thus, I'm searching for the most appropriate solution for each problem in the cycle of accessible media and methodology. I'm not tied to one method of making, although I do consider drawing as the foundation of my output, I still try other digital and traditional ways of producing work. Hence my sketches and drawings don't serve other works, they are independent artworks in their own right. Drawing is a kind of communication, a catalyst for realising future artistic expression. I will extract good ideas from my drawings to stimulate future possibilities. That's why I started using 3D technologies four or five years ago: sophisticated CAD software which enabled fresh ways of working. I remember as a student at the RCA, Phillip King would often visit my studio space and prod and probe the arsenal of drawing materials I used. He'd ask questions like, "what does this one do? – How do you use this one?". I was an unusual student at the time with enormous drawings stretched onto my studio walls, whereas fellow students would have much more discreet drawings, if any at all.*

ZHU: So that your Drawing practice is independent, but also as reference for your sculpture?

JA: Yes, and depending on the viewers personal history they will bring different interpretations to the drawings they're looking at. Some of their interpretations might be similar to mine, and some are very different. Tony Cragg's recent exhibition at the Lisson Gallery is a good example because he now doesn't title his artworks because he doesn't want to steer his audience towards his own thoughts & meanings that underpin the making of his sculptures.



Fig.5 'Border Raider'



Fig.6 'Signaler' 2003

ZHU: What do you think about 3D technologies?

JA: I chose 3D technologies not for their sophistication, but because this method is so much like drawing in three-dimensional space. I can move and rotate the works flexibly during the process, add and remove the volume, whilst observing the effects in real time. Then I can produce physical models by 3D printing processes. Some detractors claim that the very process of digital sculpture is limiting because it's not created by the artists themselves, and it's done by a tool substituting human interaction. I don't agree with this interpretation. For me, the only difference between 3D technologies and manual creation is the sense of touch. Having said that, digital making is a different sort of touch. Also, the digital age has come at an interesting time for such artists as myself, trying to define what it is to be human.

ZHU: One of the principles of sculpture is that it is defined by gravity within the space it occupies. Your 'Signaler' sculpture (Figure 6) does not seem to follow this principle because the body of the sculpture appears anchored to the plinth instead

JA: The series of concrete plinths in this artwork are integral to the overall reading of my sculpture. The shapes that define the plinth are based on the same sort of tailored-patterns I've used to make the Corten steel sculpture. If you look at it from this angle, (Fig.6) the

sculpture is still able to stand on its own by its implied balance, which is notionally relevant to your question about gravity. However, I don't necessarily think sculpture has to stand up like this because hanging or suspending artwork are also important in contemporary art practice. Examples of suspended artworks are my "Pendulum Reliefs", which maybe are only suitable for display in a gallery. Suspended sculptures (such as Alexander Calder) are easily damaged, but since vandalism is relatively rare in China, I should perhaps test more ideas for suspended artworks in China.

ZHU: Your use of materials and artistic genres is broad. Your art activities are not only sculptures, but also installation, painting, drawing, ceramics, and film. What is the role of the image within the context of installation for you?

JA: "Living Room" is a Film and an Installation artwork, which explores my father's existence. (Fig.7). I used Tri-X Super-8 film because I'd tried painting and drawing to examine the subject matter but failed. I was influenced by the Tableaux artworks of Ed Kienholz and the installations of George Segal, so I made a full-scale paper and plaster installation of the living-space that my Mother and Father occupied. The viewer couldn't access the space except via peep-holes that ran around the exterior perimeter of the artwork, enabling voyeuristic views into their silent social stalemate existence. The film "Living Room" is a triptych that presents multiple moments of the mundane that characterized my Fathers later life, synchronized to the slow beat of a metronomes rhythm: simultaneously grasping the beauty of the everyday' - just simple scenes of him shaving, and tying a tie, illustrating his decaying profile before the bleach-white sunlit background beyond The Room. My film and installation are the same as sculpture, in that they interact with space. Film is illusory space, whilst the installation and sculpture occupy real spaces. The objective in these two very different ways of working was to focus on how to solve problems that weren't easily realized through my drawing and painting practice. Interestingly, I read an article in the UK Times newspaper recently which described the current situation in Higher Education in the UK, where students major in STEM subjects such as Mechanical Engineering or Industrial Design for instance. They are outstanding in their academic and professional skills, but lack creative problem-solving abilities associated with Creative Arts. Prospective Employers suggest Universities should consider increasing their exposure to creative arts skills to enhance STEM-students employability in today's ever-evolving market place. Collaborative working is becoming increasingly important in order to address the demands of the C21st.



Fig.7 'Living Room' 1980

ZHU: What is the main motivation for making your sculpture? What governs the aesthetic character of your work, and what is the philosophical thinking that underpins your practice and keeps you motivated?

JA: Motivation and determination have always been important traits that characterize my career. I was fortunate because I never had to make a decision about my career-path because art has been first and foremost from a very early age. For instance, I fell in love with LEGO (and Mecano) when I was five years old, using three-dimensional elements to build three-dimensional shapes. Unlike today's LEGO that comes with detailed drawings of finished products, the LEGO back in my day only had component parts: the final construction depended on my own ideas and imagination fueled by science fiction cartoons on TV, which I found mesmerising! Lego also fostered my ability to think creatively about real space, and together with my drawing ability, provided me with a continuous flow of ideas. Problem solving is like an endless series of doors, which need to be skillfully navigated in order to move forward. So, determination, willpower, and self-belief are important characteristics to develop in order to fortify us for the challenges that lay ahead.

1. About public art

ZHU: When did you start to be interested in public art? What is the motivation?

JA: The 'Navigator' in 2003 (Fig. 8) was my first work of Public Art. At that time, I'd become frustrated at being restricted to the four walls of the gallery and wanted to take my studio work into the outdoors. This was expensive and logistically fraught with challenges. Getting started was a problem because potential clients had concerns about a comparative novice to deliver high-quality sculpture on a large scale. However, my break came when David Wright (from Commissions Projects Ltd) encouraged a delegation from Ipswich Council to visit my studio in London. They subsequently gave me the opportunity to make an 18-foot tall "Navigator" (sculpture) for a public space in Ipswich. The Ipswich Council Art Committee members viewed an 8ft tall plywood version of the sculpture I'd made in my studio and unanimously agreed to enlarge the Navigator for the Orwell Riverside site in Ipswich. There were still hurdles to navigate especially when my plans for making the sculpture in bronze were scotched by a renowned Foundry mis-quoting for the job! I had to find another means of making the sculpture and was helped by a fellow-sculptor Paul Wager who suggested fabricating it in Corten steel. This approach worked really well. Not only had I found a way of realising my art via funding from local authorities, but I'd found a way of making large-scale sculptures via fabrication, which was far cheaper than foundry techniques. The opportunity to locate my studio practice within the public realm, in front of an egalitarian public was a new chapter in my career.

ZHU: Then your public art works are more like sculptures placed in public space. What is your opinion on Placemaking?

JA: A good example of Placemaking is my public artwork for the Kent County Council project 'Breaking Boundaries' in Ashford (Fig. 9) is one of the works that interacts directly with the environment. There are lots of examples of sculptures being placed on roundabouts but none are artworks and roundabouts at the same time! My design became known as "Notaroundabout", a phrase coined by Councilors in Local Government, Interdisciplinary Design Team collaborators, and the Ashford community. This artwork quickly established a direct dialogue with the surrounding environment and people, which makes it a good example of Placemaking

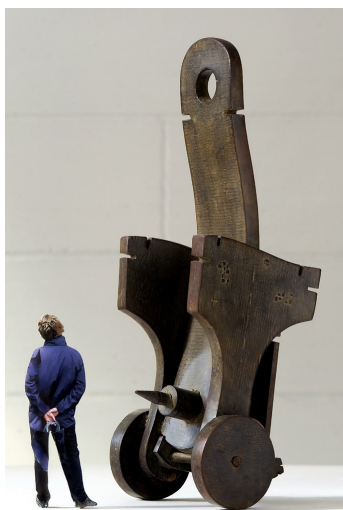


Fig.8 'Navigator'



Fig.9 'Breaking Boundaries and Notaroundabout'

ZHU: Your public art work 'Access to Justice' in Toronto 2017 (Fig. 10) also links to the surrounding environment and demonstrates the importance of location.

JA: Yes, locality, history & heritage are becoming increasingly important. In Europe and America, delivering public art needs to go through the procedure of community consultation. Although there is no such process in China yet, the local input of opinions is still very important. The input from the community is not about producing sculpture, but participating in telling the story and history of the area, which enables me to learn more about local culture. In the majority of cases, during the Research & Design phase of my project, I will prepare three concept -ideas and exhibit these three maquettes in a community space for the community to scrutinize. For my landmark project in Corby I asked the community to vote for their favourite artwork from the three exhibited scale-models and this was the one that was produced for the new Railway Plaza concourse in Corby. This is my community-based strategy for creating public art.

In 2017, I was invited onto the Overseas Elite Scholars Program at South China University of Technology (SCUT) in Guangzhou, which was part of their 'Mega-City University' Campus. My workshop with PG students in Art & Design involved collaboration between groups of students in which their outdoor sculpture-design proposals were focused on providing recreational and interactive functions for their individual community's. I encouraged each Group (of students) to interact with their proposed site in terms of its local characteristics and how the community engage with the space.

ZHU: Your method of creating public art works is to conduct on-the-spot investigation first, then generate concepts according to the research result, or to fit existing works in public space adaptively?

JA: *For Access to Justice (Fig. 10), I was invited to Toronto to take photos of the spaces the client had in mind for an as yet unspecified artwork. I think a sense of place can only be gained by experiencing the location myself. At the same time, there would also be my own interpretations of how the space was used, and if there might be an opportunity for an interactive element in any proposed sculpture. For instance, if circumstances permitted, why not design something architectural in collaboration with architects rather than sculpture? In Beijing, for example, there are quite a few repetitive and ungainly buildings, so why not bring artists to collaborate on architectural design processes and let history and culture be integrated into the design concepts?*

ZHU: Your 'Access to Justice' proposals were rejected several times and subject to comments from the Art Committee and community, which is different from your previous design philosophy on making sculptures. For instance, why did you chose crisscrossing straight lines and that specific range of materials for this sculpture? What stories and histories were you trying to embed in the finished sculpture?

JA: *Sculptors need to be very careful when making work for the public domain, which is very different from studio-based practice. In the studio, the creative process is more like the accumulation of ideas built around years of creativity. With Public Art there can be many competing opinions from Art Committee members as well as the community. At least 15 different versions of Access to Justice were created during the Research & Design process. The concept of passing through a 'doorway' is an experience that people worldwide encounter every day, whether physical or metaphorical. Canada is different from the 'cultural melting pot' of the USA, and Canadians refer to their ethnic diversity as a 'cultural tapestry', which is formed by interweaving with different immigrant cultures.*

'SCULPTURE'



Fig.10 'Access to Justice' 2017

Hence, I chose different sheet-metal materials to crisscross with each other, and I think the austerity of using geometric squares can probably represent the hardships of immigration better than the friendliness of using organic shapes or curves.

1. Relation with China

ZHU: You participated in the Sculpture Art Festival in Zhengzhou as well as the International Art Festival in Hengshui at the same time, I saw that the two artworks were totally different. The 'Twister in Zhengzhou (Fig. 11) is a twisting body mass, while the 'Slipstream' in Hengshui (Fig. 12) is a combination of arcs, which are completely different sculpture characters: why?

JA: *The different sculpture characteristics are because of my interest in working with a variety of materials as well as a range of ideas I have for different sculptures. 'Slipstream' reflects the exhibition theme related to Ecology, and expresses in a discrete way the flow of something unseen, such as air. That's why I chose to use arc-forms in mirror-polished stainless steel. The polished surfaces of the sculpture capture the light and vivacity of the space it located in, encapsulating the surrounding surfaces in its billowing polished form, like a gust of wind.*

'Twister' was inspired by the Terracotta Warriors I visited in 2012. I was deeply impressed by this innovative collection of upright sentinel figures, and the sense that each was surveilling its territory. The twisting, arching form visually animates the upright pirouette of the sculpture as if it's monitoring its surroundings. The form of Zhengzhou Twister is based on a garment template pattern of a "collar" pattern, which for me possessed interesting analogies to an upright figure. Using CAD technologies, I exploded the form into 3-dimensional space, and whilst the spatial tension of the design is implied by its erect posture, the two-dimensional space is expanded into three-dimensions through its implied twisting movement.



Fig.11 'Twister'

ZHU: How did your career get started in China?

JA: *In my eyes, there was almost sculpture-inspired 'gold rush' in China in the early part of the 21st century. Many artists from all corners of the world who visited China in those early years, and consequently I am lucky to have enjoyed a widespread critical appreciation of my work here since 2007. My first visit to China was in 2007, when my sculpture "Strange Meeting" was selected as one of the best proposals from 2600 applications worldwide for Beijing Olympic Park. I was one of only 26 sculptors selected and my 27-ton marble carved sculpture 'Strange Meeting' (Fig. 13) was permanently installed in Beijing Olympic Park.*

ZHU: How many sculpture activities have you attended so far? How many of your artworks have been installed in China?

JA: About 15 activities altogether, including exhibitions, symposiums, conferences workshops, sculpture installation, etc. In which around seven or eight artworks have been permanently installed in China.

ZHU: Please talk about the concept of your work 'Strange Meeting', and what do you think about the finished artwork?

JA: This two-part sculpture was inspired by Wilfred Owen's poem Strange Meeting, which can be interpreted in many ways. I prefer to transcribe it as the reconciliation of two warring entities who don't realise that they are hewn from the same block of stone. I think the connotation of 'reconciliation' and 'compromise' between these combatants is comparable with the current situation of China and the West. When visitors walk around my artwork, the two disparate parts of the sculpture (one supine and one erect) contrast because of their formal configuration. Its only on closer scrutiny that the visitor can see that they are carved from the same block of marble and that the visual clue to their whole identity is a undulating seam, which connects them perfectly. This demonstrates the dialectics between the whole, and the parts.



Fig.13 'Strange Meeting' 2008

Once again, the process of making this artwork also went through an unexpected process because of mis-communications between the organizers. Since I'd never worked in stone until this point, my concept idea was for the sculpture to be fabricated in steel, which was familiar to all of my work so far. Instead of being taken to the fabrication workshop, I was taken to the stoneyard on the outskirts of Beijing. Here the organisers realised their mistake and were about to take me back to the fabrication workshop. However, I'd noticed all manner of beautiful natural stone in this enormous factory. One stone interested me in particular because the surface of this flesh coloured marble had rich purple veins running through it. The concept of flayed skin and the wanton destruction described in Wilfred Owens poem, reverberated in the veins of this marble surface, so I asked to remain in the stone factory and make my sculpture in marble instead of fabricated metal. The organizers agreed. Therefore, the work presented to the world at the Beijing Olympiad was an "unexpected" success, as well as my very first stone carving!

ZHU: The number of your visits to China has increased in recent years, what kind of work have you been doing, teaching, or creation?

JA: *As I mentioned earlier, I recently delivered two workshops and teaching at South China University of Technology, which is the third time I'd visited Guangzhou. My last workshop with students there was based on collage and assemblage, and subsequently exhibited at the Shanghai Art Museum 2019/220. I'm also an Expert Jury member for the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, as well as lecturing on Public Art for Prof. Dong Subing. Last year I was the International Guest for CAFA on the Eco-Art Balance the World exhibition in Nanjing. I've participated in several high-profile symposiums throughout China, in Fuzhou and Changchun, as well as participated in conferences at several other institutions. I'm Director of Internationalisation for the Design School and Creative Arts at Loughborough University and I'm interested in exploring more academic links with high-profile Universities in China in order to maintain cultural links between China and the UK. It would be interesting to develop more academic research opportunities as well as collaboration with the Academy of Art and Design Tsinghua University, Beijing Normal University, and the Central Academy of Fine Arts.*

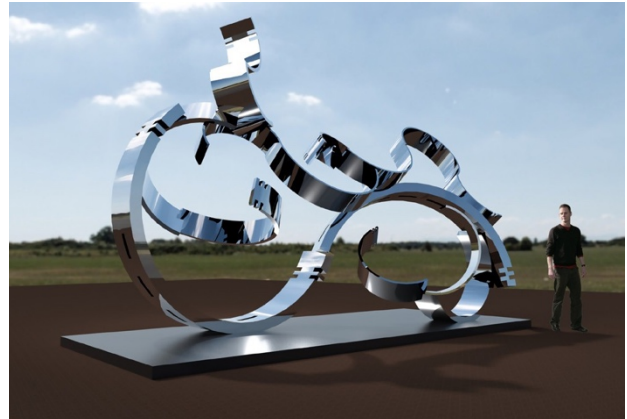


Fig.12 'Slipstream' 2019

ZHU: What is your understanding of Chinese culture? Based on your perception of China, what is your view and opinion of the present situation of Chinese sculpture?

JA: *My understanding of Chinese culture is that it is firmly rooted in its ancient past as well as histories and stories which have been handed down over many years. Even in the 21st century, many contemporary Chinese artists still create monuments in praise of their country. This philosophical position on the role of art to tell the history of a country was evident in the former Soviet Union and China throughout the C20th. In the C20th & C21st artists in the UK are not compelled to make monuments about perceived great men or events of the past. In fact, in recent times, because of Black Lives Matter, there is a public reappraisal of monuments especially where there is evidence of cultural misdeeds and explicitly where people have been involved with the slave trade. This has stimulated a worldwide debate about tearing-down monuments and thereby erasing history. Monuments to the so-called "great" were systematically churned-out in Victorian times, and it was viewed as acceptable: a point of view which has changed greatly in recent years.*

However, it's also evident that Art Schools and other institutions in China are producing art which is cognizant of what is happening worldwide and are much more familiar with the artistic movements which have influenced Western contemporary art. The digital age has stimulated a greater flow of information alongside the ability of Chinese people to travel, and participate in exhibitions globally has brought about a degree of change.

What I want to say to Chinese sculptors is, a new era has come and I'm pleased to see their passion to explore Western Art: this exploration is not necessarily a commitment to change the outlook or values in Chinese culture, but to learn from their ever-expanding cultural horizons in order to forge an art that is quintessentially Chinese, but at the same time cognizant of worldwide art movements.

With this in mind, my role as Director of Internationalisation at Loughborough University is to promote cultural exchange and forge the dynamic partnerships that will have a global impact on the way contemporary art fuses Eastern and Western traditions.

The international impact of Chinese artists has gradually emerged and is being exhibited at high profile museums and gallery's worldwide, but the elitism in the West is also echoed in China. The West will constantly promote the works of high-profile artists because of the elitism that governs connections between museums and commercial galleries. Consequently, China will invite the same top-rated artists and so the unspoken rules of who gets to eat at the top table become a cultural export to China.

One of the main differences in my experiences in China over the past 13 years has been how artists are selected for various opportunities. Often, submissions are anonymized and the selection committees are practicing artists. This is a more democratic way of awarding opportunities to a wider range of artists based entirely on the merit of their work, and not their gallery connections.

Whilst political détente between the East and the West rapidly cools, it's even more important that we retain a strong cultural dialogue underpinned by education, so that the East and the west can continue to learn from one another.



Zhengzhou Twister and Slipstream: the two most recent artworks by John Atkin completed in China in 2019.