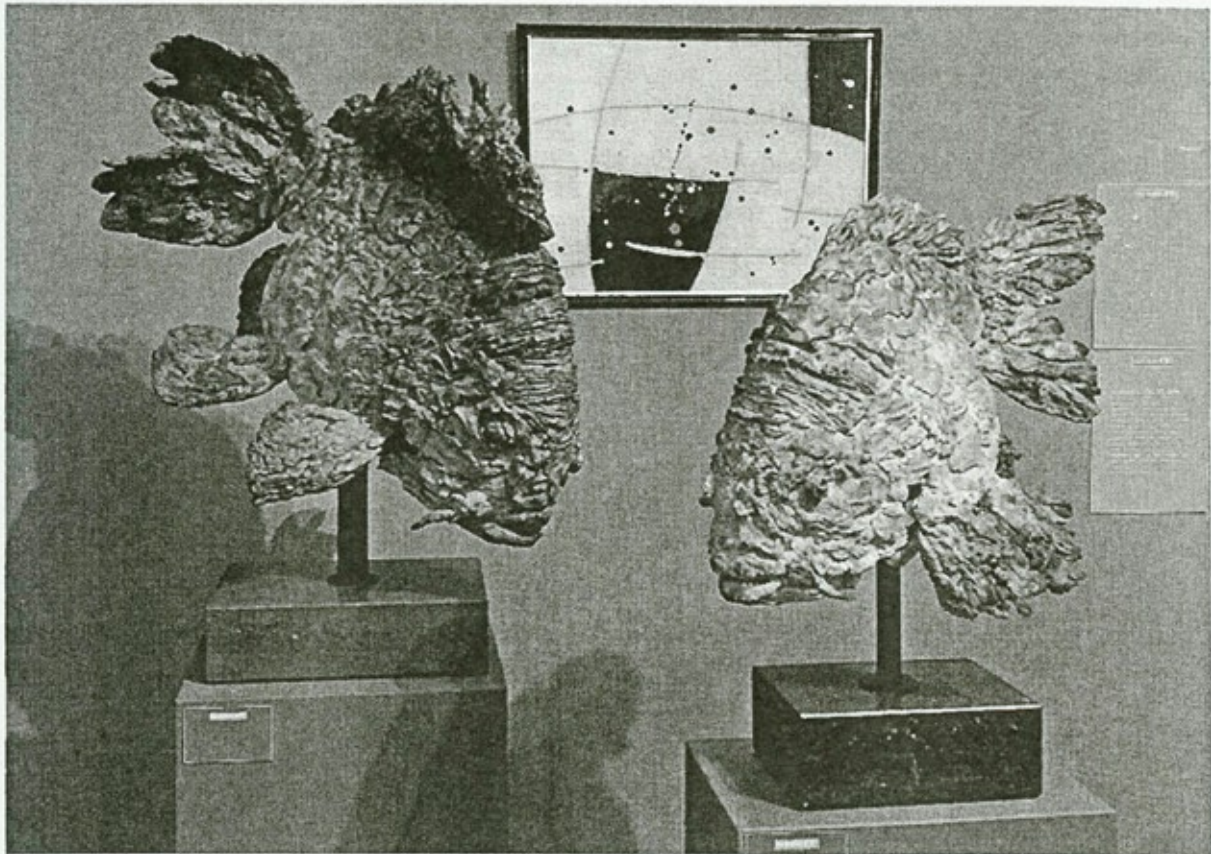


THE COELACANTH JOURNAL



NO.3 THE MODERNS

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VINCENT LACOVARA . AODHAN O'SHEA . THESE ARE POWERS

Inside Out by Alice Channer

Some objects stake a claim on the spaces around and outside of them. While moving around Barbara Hepworth's sculptures and writing about them, I am aware of them framing me as I am framing them. What interests me in Hepworth's work now is the way in which it can make relationships like these between people and objects happen in the present. The gaps left and made in the works have the effect of including within the objects the changing place they are set within. The works themselves appear to be colonising the space around them, and vice versa.



It follows that an artist who made works like these would also have made a place to put them in. Hepworth's sculpture garden in St Ives consists of both works that

frame space and a space that frames works. Hepworth planted the garden herself, and twice secured land from neighbours to extend its reach¹. When she lived and worked there the garden was an active, inhabited place. It was part of her busy studio, enabling her to work on a larger scale for the international commissions and public sculpture she made there in the fifties and sixties².

Hepworth's garden is now a museum rather than a working studio. Tate St Ives contains and embraces the garden, and entrance to the Hepworth Museum is included in its entrance fee. The garden sets up movements that go some way to resist the stasis implied by such a change in status. After a small Tate entrance room containing a ticket desk, books, postcards and a time line of the artist's life, the garden is accessed through a room she used for showing work. Once in it, the relationships that the works and garden set up take over. Because it is impossible to separate the individual works

¹ Phillips, Miranda, *Trewyn Studio – Barbara Hepworth's Garden in St Ives*, in Phillips, Miranda and Stephens, Chris, *Barbara Hepworth Sculpture Garden*, Tate Publishing, London, 2002, p. 12-18

² *Barbara Hepworth*, Curtis, Penelope, Tate Publishing, London, 1998, p. 16-21

from their surroundings and from my movement around them, a force field is created that holds all of this together. Whilst in and then outside the garden again what is most noticeable is that it relies on an edge – the force field I described begins and ends on entering or exiting it.

The garden seems to me an odd thing by which to perpetuate the reputation of an artist. It does not set out to face the public or frame sculpture within an epic or iconic landscape, nor was it intended as such. It is not an institution in itself, and Hepworth made no arrangements for it to work as an organisational front to communicate her myth to an external audience. What is invaluable in the garden for me now is the way it provides a spatial template to describe the particular and difficult position that an artist took up in relation to her work and to her audience.

This position can be seen in the way in which she represented her garden as a kind of stage setting for herself and her works, making artist-subject and her objects in many ways indistinguishable from

each other. In her *Pictorial Autobiography*³, Hepworth frequently represents herself using photographs taken in the garden. The first of these she titles simply 'In my garden'. The image shows the artist completely 'in' the setting she has made for herself, camouflaged, partially obscured and surrounded by it on all sides. This is repeated several times, one image showing her head and arms not so much leaning out of, but framed within one of the opening holes of *Four Square*, *Four Circles* set in the garden. Even the photographs included in the *Pictorial Autobiography* that show her 'at work', posed at one side of a sculpture, depict her surrounded by garden and works. In all of these images what strikes me is that it is as if she is actually 'wearing' her work. She is inside it, working from an interior perspective and locating herself as an artist there. What is it for an artist to be working from this place? What does she risk by positioning herself like this? What interests me is the way in

³ Hepworth's *Pictorial Autobiography* (Tate publishing, London, 1985) was initiated by her son in law Alan Bowness, written in the first person by the artist, and set out as a sort of scrapbook. It is one of many instances of the artist herself attempting to occupy the spaces around her work.

which in these images Hepworth is occupying two positions at once – she is both the maker of the sculptures and garden, and included within them. Hepworth described this position as working from an *inside response to form*⁴, and described her relationship to her work as follows:

*From the sculptors point of view one can either be the spectator of the object or the object itself For a few years I became the object*⁵

What would it be like to ‘become the object’? What I think I am trying to write about here is what goes on in the space around artworks. What if what artists really invent isn’t so much the work itself, but a way of working? Hepworth’s way was to work from the inside, as both creating subject and created object of her work, and it is this that most interests me about her now

It is this dynamic that constitutes the model for relating to artworks (both as artist and audience) that her work makes happen. This positioning of herself as an artist inside her work, literally ‘becoming the object’ is also the position that the individual works make for their viewer. It is impossible to move around *Single Form* in London’s Battersea Park, for example, without experiencing the way in which it changes my perspective, pushing me across a near, broad flat surface and then swiftly round a narrow



edge that distances itself again. There is at one moment an intimacy to this - it is as if I am moving and looking with it, not at it, and then an abrupt receding. Sometimes I am left wondering where I end and where the sculpture begins, and then we flip apart again.

⁴ Hepworth writing in Read, Herbert, *Barbara Hepworth: Carvings and Drawings, with an introduction by Herbert Read*, Lund Humphries, London, 1952,

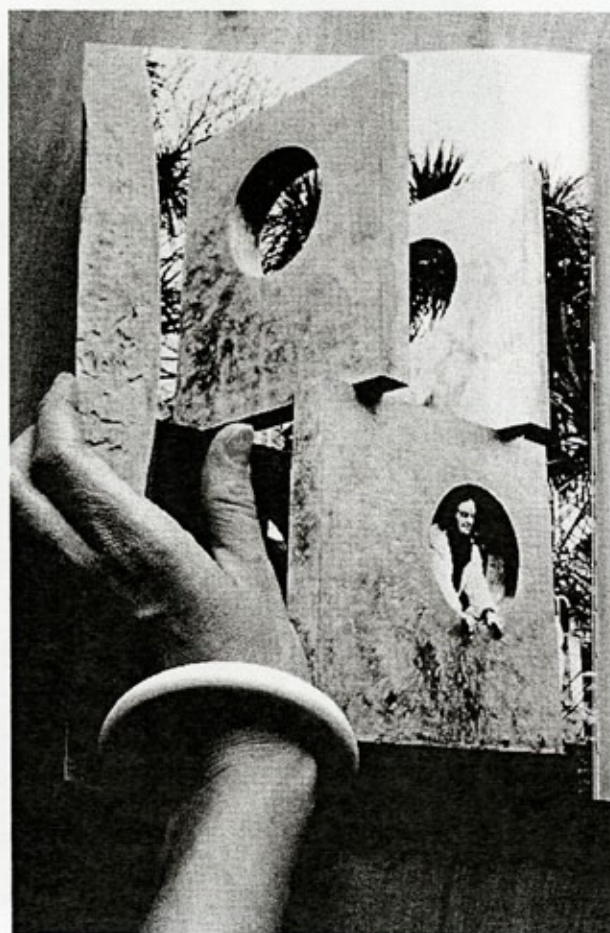
⁵ Read,

Single Form, like many of her sculptures, plays at being two dimensional, but this flatness has the effect of making the object more volatile and responsive to changes in perspective. Line is never entirely on the surface of the object, instead it works to pull my eye over, around and through it. Line here is similar to the way in which 'line' in fashion is used to describe the shape that clothes make over, around and with the body⁶ With these sculptures, though, the exchange is reversed - line is the shape that my body makes around the work.

For every moment spent inhabiting or wearing them, these works are just as often heavy and awkward. I can never do what their plinths ask me and detach the sculptures from their surroundings, but then again I don't think this is exactly what they are after. Their style and crafted surfaces are something I recognise and associate with many aspects of parochial British modernism - this limits them, defining a territory with an edge. What this makes clear is that it is impossible to engage with this work from the outside, and I think that this is one of the things that makes it vulnerable. Its edges are also limits, and this means the territory

⁶ The line of *Single Form* bears comparison to Dior's 'H-Line' of 1955, an appropriately longer, flatter, more severe silhouette that replaced his 'New Look'

risks appearing closed. However, as I have described, there is something within the area that the work defines that exists for me in the present moment. There is a kind of levelling of me, it and her - artist, work and viewer all in the same place. When I am able to climb inside it, like a set of clothes, Hepworth's work can make this possible for me now.



Alice Channer studied at Goldsmiths and The Royal College of Art. She is represented by Dicksmith Gallery. Recent exhibitions include *Strange Solution* at the Tate and *Dogtooth and Tessellate* at The Approach.

All photographs by Alice Channer