

The *Brian Mercer*
Charitable Trust



Mary Bourne Residency in Pietrasanta, Italy 2015

in collaboration with

Fondazione *SEM*

and

The Royal British Society of Sculptors



Mary Bourne Residency at Studio Sem in Pietrasanta, Italy 2015.

Mary was chosen from amongst the members of the Royal British Society of Sculptors (RBS) by the trustees of the Brian Mercer Charitable Trust and Fondazione Sem

The Brian Mercer Charitable Trust wishes to thank the following people and organizations for their support of Mary Bourne's residency:

The Trustees of the Brian Mercer Charitable Trust

The Council members of the Royal British Society of Sculptors

Helaine Blumenfeld for her generosity of time and continuous guidance

Inger Sannes, Turid Gyllenhammar and Eppe De Haan for their support

All the members of Studio Sem:

Keara McMartin, Pierangelo Ghelardini, Davide Cancogni, Leonardo Buratti, Evelina Ravaglia, Lorella Santini

The Brian Mercer Charitable Trust

The Trust was established in 1999 according to the wishes of Dr Brian Mercer OBE, F.Eng, FRS (1927-1998).

Brian Mercer was a prolific inventor and industrialist. In 1956 he invented a revolutionary process for the manufacture of plastic nets that became known as Netlon. The Netlon process has become accepted as only the ninth generic textile process since the dawn of civilization. Its ingenuity comes from making a net not by weaving, but by the integral extrusion of molten plastic into mesh structures. Global interest in the process resulted in Netlon being rapidly licensed to many of the largest international companies in more than 30 countries around the world. Netlon products are well known in applications such as the packaging of fruit and vegetables, gardening meshes for plant support and fencing, and in the field of Civil Engineering for land stabilisation.

As the inventions became more technical he conducted joint research with many universities and was very much a pioneer of the joint funding of research between industry and universities which is now commonplace.

Research into strengthening Netlon through molecular re-orientation by stretching resulted in the invention of Tensar, a plastic grid as strong as steel. Tensar is widely used within civil engineering for reinforcing earth structures such as road and railway embankments. All of Brian Mercer's inventions have originated, been developed and manufactured in Blackburn to the benefit of the town's economy. His inventions have been protected by hundreds of patents around the world making him one of Britain's most prolific and well respected inventors. He was inventing until he died.

Brian's work has been recognised by honours from many learned institutions. In 1984 he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society. This is the highest scientific distinction awarded in the Commonwealth. It is quite exceptional for such an award to be bestowed upon one whose work is within industry rather than academia. A bequest to the Royal Society established the Brian Mercer Awards for Innovation. A portrait of Brian Mercer by Salvador Dali was also bequeathed to the Royal Society.

The Brian Mercer Charitable Trust was established primarily to support medical research - in particular research into primary liver cancer and age-related macular degeneration. However Brian was a keen art enthusiast and he wished his support for talented artists to continue. Hence the Brian Mercer residencies in Pietrasanta and, more recently, awards for arts graduates progressing to an MA degree at North West Universities were established.

www.brianmercercharitabletrust.org



Brian Mercer demonstrating the properties of Netlon to Salvador Dali

Fondazione *Sem* was established in Pietrasanta, Italy in March 2003. The Foundation derives its name and founding principles from the cultural legacy of Sem Ghelardini (1927-1997); who in his time founded and directed Studio Sem one of the most renowned studios for stone sculpture in the world.

During his forty years of activity, the Ghelardini studio attained a name of great international notoriety above all for the realization of monumental works by such celebrated artists as Henry Moore, Alicia Penalba, Juan Mirò, Georges Adam, Barry Flanagan and many other sculptors. But what made Sem Ghelardini so special to so many was that he opened his studio to the many young artists who today, as in the past, arrive in Pietrasanta seeking to better their carving skills and develop their creative aspirations.

He gave the aspiring young sculptors the opportunity to work alongside his artisans with some of the finest marble in the world; he advised, cajoled and encouraged them to open their eyes to the sculptures being made in the studio and invited them to dream of making large works. His greatest desire was that they become better sculptors; that they learn from working in the proximity of master craftsmen and celebrated artists.

Long before his death in 1997, Sem Ghelardini had a dream of creating a foundation that would serve to help the most promising among the innumerable young artists around the world who sought the opportunity to work beside famous sculptors and master carvers. He remained convinced that this international influx of artists, united with the traditional mastery of the local artisans, would contribute to keeping alive the millennial “art” of marble carving in the Versilia area. Fondazione Sem was established to realize Sem Ghelardini’s aspirations, adhering to the principles that he maintained during the course of his long activity in the world of contemporary art.

Keara McMartin President
info@fondazione-sem.org



Previous Artists in Residence

Nicolas Moreton	ARBS	U.K.	2006
Louise Plant	ARBS	U.K.	2007
Eugen Petri	ARBS	Romania	2008
Immanuel Klein	ARBS	Holland	2009
Nick Turvey	ARBS	U.K.	2010
Halima Cassel	ARBS	U.K.	2011
Mark Richards	FRBS	U.K.	2012
Ed Jones	ARBS	U.K.	2013
Alice Cunningham	MRBS	U.K.	2014



Mary Bourne MRBS

RBS Brian Mercer Stone Carving Residency 2015

This is the 10th anniversary of the Brian Mercer stone-carving residency. I have been reflecting on the parameters that we have used to determine its success. The impact of the experience has varied from one sculptor to the next. For many it has been a breakthrough; they have learned to carve and discovered that that is the way forward. For others they were able to extend their carving skills and learn new techniques and experience working in many different stones. For a few, working in stone provided them with an opportunity to develop a new aesthetic that could later be applied to other materials.

Whatever their normal routine, for almost every resident coming to Pietrasanta for three months meant giving up their comfort zone and this in itself had a great effect on their future work.

Mary used the residency as an opportunity to experiment and to extend her practice by integrating tools and processes familiar to her with those that were unfamiliar. This can be seen in the way Mary called upon her drawing skills; alternating work on paper with work in stone opened up a new way of thinking for her. The rapidity, ease and fluidity of drawing combined with the more contemplative, meditative process of carving allowed her to reflect more deeply, remove limitations and enable her to allow her deepest thoughts and feelings to permeate the work. This particularly comes through in Mary's series of Family sculptures in which she tries to explore stone to express her emotions and relationships.

In the Studio, Mary spent time engaging with the artisans and artists, sharing ideas and challenging herself further to develop carving skills and use a variety of different stones. Mary also spent time visiting the marble quarries and surrounding countryside as well as taking in the richness of art and architecture of the region. Now that she is back in Scotland, we all look forward to seeing how the experience of this journey will manifest itself in the completion of the works she brought back from Pietrasanta as well as her practice in general.

The RBS is very grateful to the Brian Mercer Charitable Trust for its continuing generosity in funding this, the tenth edition of the Fondazione Sem Residency program and for its on-going commitment to and support for what is a unique and vital enterprise.

Helaine Blumenfeld OBE FRBS

Mary Bourne RSA MRBS

Mary trained at Edinburgh College of Art in the 1980s where she was taught stone carving by Jake Harvey. Since then she has developed a practice that includes exhibiting at home and abroad, residencies, engagement and public realm commissions. The latter often involves working closely with other design professionals such as architects and landscape architects, for example Malcolm Fraser Architects at the Scottish Poetry Library, Edinburgh and Page and Park at Eden Court Theatre, Inverness. In many projects, the involvement of local people from conception to installation is also important.

She has won a number of prizes and awards for her own work and has also participated in the wider art scene through serving on arts organisations' boards and committees. She was a member of both the Exhibitions and Visual Arts Committees for the Scottish Arts Council, chaired the Scottish Sculpture Workshop through a period of organizational



Rim at the Chelsea Flower Show 2014

development and change and was a Trustee of the Scottish Sculpture Trust. More recently she has chaired the engaged practice/international residency organisation, Deveron Arts; currently she is a member of the Royal Scottish Academy's Exhibition Committee.

Based in rural Moray in the North East of Scotland, Mary is married with two teenage children.

View of Mary's home and workshop, with Ben Rinnes in the distance

Introduction

My work, predominantly in carved natural stone, reflects on our relationship with our environment and often deals with themes of the passage of time and change, both gradual and violent.



One Loch, Two Days *Caithness flagstone*



Wing *slate*

The physicality of the objects I make is very important and they are highly tactile. For me art is a medium for exploration, reflection and communication. Given the durability of my medium this means communication not only between contemporaries but between generations: stone warmed and shaped by my hands will perhaps again be warmed by the hands of someone in some unknowable time to come.

Objects are only part of the story, however, and much of my work for the public realm involves a broader, multifaceted consideration of place. This often results in programmes of related artworks realised with numerous partners, rather than stand-alone sculptures.

For the last five years most of my work has followed this model. It is fascinating and rewarding, but complex and hectic; deadline follows hard upon deadline, often squeezing out any chance to reflect and capitalise on what has been learned.



Above: River of Words, Ellon Academy for Aberdeenshire Council. With Bernard Briggs (Poet), Ellon Academy staff and pupils, Ellon Editors writing group, Beyond the Block writing group, Ellon Reminiscence Group, and Better Read Books bookshop.

Left: Caithness flagstone sculptural seating for Grampian Hospitals Arts Trust. With George Gunn, drystane dyker.



The Brian Mercer Residency was set up by Fondazione Sem, guided by experienced artists associated with Studio Sem. This means that the opportunity has been specifically designed for the benefit of the artist's creative development. It provided me with a heaven-sent opportunity to pause, to dig deep, recalibrate and consider where I want to go with my practice from here.

Pietrasanta

Living here, in this beautiful old town, was an important aspect of the residency. Located at the foot of the Apuan Alps with their marble quarries and sweet chestnut forests, and within walking distance of the sea, it is also within easy reach of Pisa, Lucca and Florence on the train. Walks to the sea and in the mountains were an important part of the residency for me, as were return trips to Pisa and Florence.

There is no traffic in the town centre and people walk or cycle the short distances from place to place. In the Piazza Duomo, at the heart of the town, you can still see the building Michelangelo stayed in when he came to choose marble.



There are public sculptures, galleries and sculpture making facilities everywhere in the town and there was a feeling of validation being somewhere where the value of my profession is taken as read. Despite differences in nationality there was a fluency in talking the common language of sculptors, of form and materials, of ideas being chased, but yet to be defined.

Top left work by Mitoraj in the Piazza Duomo

Bottom far left the Mariani foundry

Bottom near left studio of Knut Steen



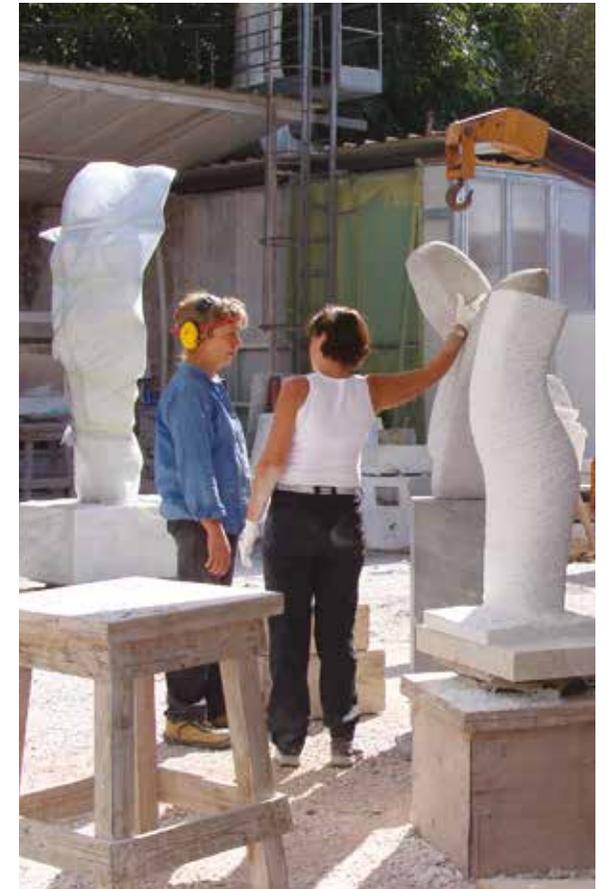
Studio Sem

Studio Sem has a well-deserved reputation for the high quality of the work it has done for artists such as Henry Moore and Damien Hirst, but at the studio both artists and artisans wear their skill lightly. The atmosphere is friendly and supportive, and again and again people went out of their way to help me on a technical level and to make my visit more interesting and enjoyable.

The hum of the compressor and the whine of grinders were familiar to me, but the gorgeousness of the stone pile took my breath away! Pinks and blues, reds and yellows, stone that held the light or reflected it – stones from all over the world, all new to me - and a challenge to go beyond and do more than I had anticipated.



Left: Eppe de Haan
Middle: Discussing the finer points of air hammer technique with artisan, Evelina Ravaglia
Right: Inger Sannes and Turid Gyllenhammar



The residency

I arrived at Pietrasanta almost exactly thirty years after I completed a Royal Scottish Academy Kinross Scholarship in Florence during which I studied Michelangelo's stone carvings. Following this scholarship I had moved away from the figure in my work, but recently a few hints of it had started to return, and I came now wanting to explore that miraculous moment when marble is transmuted into flesh, when the stone teeters between mineral and animal. I wanted to revisit Florence, to look back before moving forward.

At the other end of the spectrum I was also interested in using unworked stone, allowing the intrinsic qualities of the stone to express my ideas without the intervention of carving.

Beyond that I had no clear plan – it was the open nature of the residency that had attracted me and I was looking forward to a period of free experimentation, able for once to do exactly as I wished.

During the residency I kept a diary. This is what I wrote on arrival at the beginning of October:

Diary entry 3.10.15

Concerns in my work at this point:

What is Life?

- Where is the line between life and no life?
- Tension between animate and inanimate
- Tension between flesh and stone (particularly marble which has a special place as a stand in for flesh)
- In Michelangelo's work the transformation of a block into a figure equals the divine creation of life from the inanimate stuff of the earth
- For me the carving of a figure in stone tells of the figure being of the earth, being an integral part of the systems of the Earth.



Timescales and Life

- Individual life is temporary by nature
- Collective life is continuous over millions of years
- Regular cycles of time (seasonal, lunar etc.) keep rolling while life comes and goes/ ebbs and flows
- These regular cosmic cycles are immovable and indifferent to life

Physicality

- Sculpture as physical/sensual remembrance of life, of momentary experience, transient warmth
- Cold stone/warm flesh
- Contradiction of the momentary in the permanent
- Physicality of stone = physicality, earthiness of humanity

Planning

At the beginning of the residency I met with Keara McMartin, Director of Studio Sem, and made a plan for an initial group of work. Experimentation was the order of the day, but on a practical level stone had to be ordered and cut, and some forward planning was essential.

We agreed I would work on two groups of sculpture, one testing that Schrodinger moment when the carved stone appears both inanimate and animate, and one exploring the use of unworked stone. For the former we would use my own family as models, adding a personal depth to the work. To this end we took some body casts for me to use for reference when they visited early in the residency.



“In this first project I am seeking freer, more directly expressive organic forms in my work. I want to express feelings associated with intimate connections to other people and hence, very obliquely, to parts of the body – not a literal connection at all, more a physical remembrance of sensation, a cheek kissed, a shoulder leaned on - a fragment that captures a shared moment.

In contrast to this, I am haunted by the indifferent forces of time and nature that will keep marching on until infinity, regardless of our presence. The cycles of the moon embody this concept; in their simplicity and geometry they become a foundation or a physical back drop against which to juxtapose the organic forms that are animated by the human spirit with all its transient emotions, unpredictability and fallibility. The machined pieces of the moon cycles also offer me a quick way to gain experience with a range of different marbles and surfaces.”

Extract from a letter to Helaine Blumenfeld

Two families

When I came to Pietrasanta, I had thought the residency would be a period of introspection. I would be free of the mundanities of everyday family life and be able to focus on my own concerns for a while, insulated from the stream of bad news on the radio. As the residency progressed, however, I found the opposite was true. I could no more cut myself off from my own family's concerns than I could remake my own personality; I could no more ignore the unfolding drama of world events than I could live on fresh air.



Diary entry 5.10.15

Thinking about where the plan for this body of work has come from – the indifferent forces of nature/march of time, and the quick warmth of life, I realise that loss is playing a part. Ian's Dad gone, Lizzie soon to leave home; the need to cherish family is all the more urgent. This morning there was a message from a friend – she talks about the "actual physical pain" of her daughter leaving home. I remember Lizzie sitting on my lap when she was little, and I felt there was a tight cord between her heart and mine holding us together, like a power cable. And I remember my Mum's cheek against mine, sitting on the sofa leaning against my Dad's warm shoulder. I think of myself as quite solitary, but two days here and I feel unmade, undefined without the force of my family's presence holding me in shape, giving me focus.



*A cheek to kiss
An arm to encircle
A shoulder to lean on
A place at the centre*

As I worked I realised I was making sculptural representations of two families; the idea of families, families united and families separated, became central to the work.

The stress I was feeling due to a voluntary separation from my family could only be a faint shadow of what was being experienced by the millions of families being torn apart by war. My Facebook feed was full of photographs of families clinging together or lost from one another. Some of the sculptors working at Studio Sem while I was there had personal connections with the Greek islands where so many refugees were coming ashore; the crisis was close and real.

We talked of the destruction of Palmyra, wondering why this should be so upsetting when the plight of living people is so much more urgent. Perhaps it is because the stone city stands for so much human endeavour and achievement; people had laboured long and hard to make it a place that was beautiful and significant; to sweep that away as of no consequence is to suggest that the people who made it were of no value – and by extension, people who labour similarly now are also of no value.

Stone as a container of hopes and dreams, as a connection to peoples long passed.

Diary entry 20.10.15

My family and I went for a couple of happy walks on the beach at Marina di Pietrasanta – I couldn't stop thinking about the other families coming ashore on other Mediterranean beaches, struggling to come through the breakers into Europe; the love I feel for my family, the love these other families have for each other all part of the same force.

So this [Family II] is about them, about the families that could so easily be mine - families in wartime, and about the tide that washes their children onto our shores amongst the driftwood. The arms will be entwined. I will use a combination of creamy white statuario marble and grey/white Carrara marble for this to try to suggest a seeping away of warmth.



Looking back, moving forward



The relationship between sculpture and architecture was much closer in the Romanesque and Renaissance periods. In religious architecture every part of the building was of symbolic importance; the significance of the architectural elements was enriched and enlarged upon by the integrated sculpture scheme. Rhythms would be built up in the architecture, arches and columns marching through space to represent the passage of time; striped walling stone, like day following night, and brightly coloured inlays used for emphasis and symbolic association.

I revisited Florence and Pisa, bowled over afresh by the scale and beauty of the architectural achievements there. The abstract, geometric perfection of the baptistery at Pisa, the integration of man and beasts, each taking their place in the measured cosmos of the architecture, was especially moving in 2015 at a time when it seemed that everything in the world was out of kilter, people pitted against people, the planet being exploited and spoiled.



As the residency progressed I realized these considerations had entered my work. Architectural space, the space between my sculptural elements, as well as the thematic relationship between them, had become as important as the individual sculptures.

Well
red travertine





Letting in the light

The symbolic role of windows in religious architecture is well understood, but still for me the piercing of the dense stone to admit warm shafts of light has a revelatory quality. This quality is heightened and given significance by the perfect balance of the apertures' design.

Across the mountains in Barga (a small town in which 10 000 Scottish Italians are said to trace their roots) we saw onyx windows – the bright outdoor light gently diffused through the translucent stone.



Arise / Adore

Statuario marble slab carved
to a translucent thinness.







Time and tide

The passage of time has been an enduring theme in my work. Using stone fosters awareness of geological timescales, and of the brief transience of human life by comparison. The geological character of marble as the residue of millions of tiny, ancient life forms enriched my ideas about animating the inanimate stone; marble had been living, then not living, and now I would try and create an illusion of life again.

2015 was remarkable for its moons – huge yellow harvest moons, and flushed blood moons contrasting with cold white moons. The names we ascribe to the moon (“harvest”, “blood”, “strawberry”) tell us about ourselves – the sterile moon becomes a mirror for our states of being. I decided to use machine cut discs of marble and travertine to represent these moons, the mechanical character of their production expressing the undeviating nature of the lunar cycle, with the quality of the stones themselves expressing the changing faces of the moon. These moons would be a portrait of this particular year.



The moon from my home, 1st July 2015



In the drawings I made during the residency I was seeing an equivalence between the spreading ink washes on the paper and the spreading stains of waterborne minerals through rock which are revealed as you carve. Both were things I could not totally predict, and I had to make educated guesses about how work would turn out. In both cases, I was seeking a partnership between the materials and my expressive intent; I wanted the meaning to be expressed through the physical qualities of materials as much as through the forms chosen.

This was a very different way of working from that traditionally used in Pietrasanta where the artist works out a detailed design in a small clay maquette and this is then enlarged and translated into marble and bronze by artisans under the supervision of the artist. This *modus operandi* has much to recommend it: it gives the artist great flexibility in the design stages and frees them up from much of the labour of working on the large piece. For me, however, all the stimulus to work is in the stone. Its geology and cultural history are as much a part of the finished work as my personal preoccupations. To work first in clay is too different an experience to be easily translatable into stone.

If I were making a large piece of work for a client I would no doubt employ the traditional method with a maquette first (albeit a stone maquette), but in this residency, with that pressure removed, to work directly with the stone, with this stone so full of light and colour, was pure joy.



Left top: Blood Moon, red travertine

Left bottom: Stained Circle, ink wash on paper

Above: sunlight revealing the character of worked and unworked stone surfaces



Tide
sawn and polished red travertine





The spreading stain

There was a sense of escalating crisis in late 2015. More and more violence, tides of miserable humanity on the move; as the year wore on and the nights drew in it seemed like darkness was spreading, both literally and metaphorically.

Diary entry 17.10.15

We hired a car and drove over the mountains, chestnuts rolling on the road like misplaced sea urchins, exhausting switch back roads.

Passed disused marble workings, tunnels cut in the hillside like cathedral aisles, flat-cut sheets of bedrock like doors into the mountain.

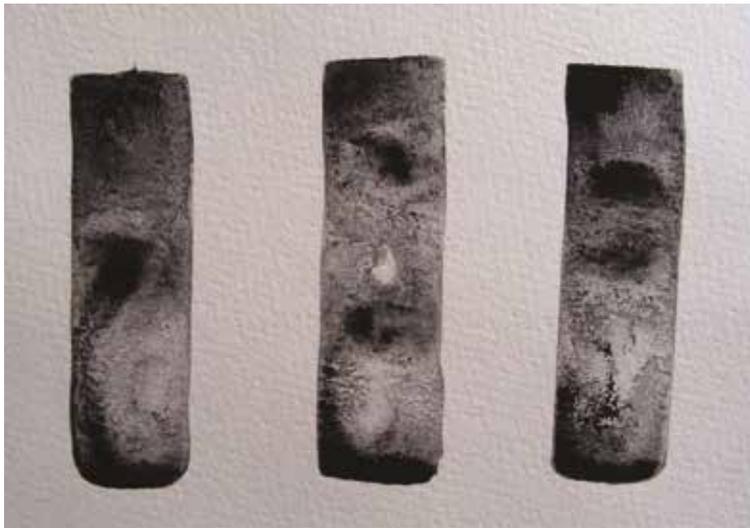
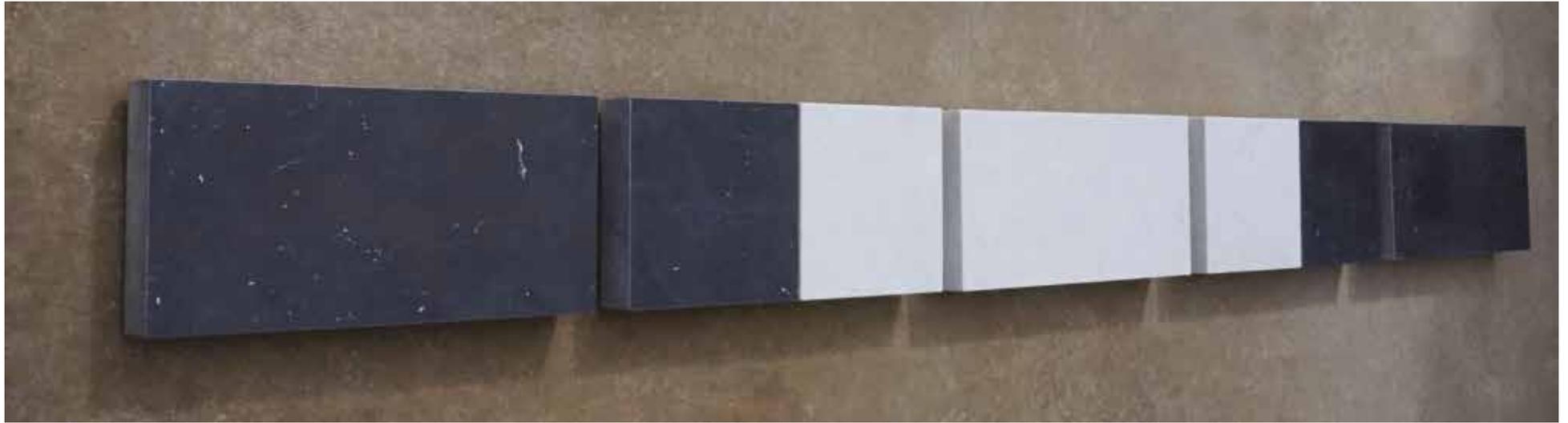
Interesting to see the marble weathering, dissolving, crumbling:

white, stained black

In an abandoned marble quarry the pristine white of the stone was disfigured and spoiled. I explored this in a series of drawings, the quick medium of ink on paper allowing me to move rapidly from idea to idea. In time these led to a design for a companion piece to the moons – a year expressed in units of light and dark marbles:

Diary entry 11.12.15

The white marble is pure, the dust not toxic, odourless, even edible; the black marble is full of impurities, you must wear a mask – when you carve it, it gives off a smell of sulphur.



Top: Solstice to Solstice Black marble and Carrara Grey marble

Bottom left: Three Stained Blocks ink on paper

Bottom right: church wall in Lucca



*Dear to me is sleep; still more to sleep
in stone while harm and shame persist;
not to see, not to feel, is bliss;
speak softly, do not wake me, do not weep.*

Poem by Michelangelo
translated by Peter Porter and George Bull



*Top right: Fantiscritti marble mine, Carrara
Bottom right: Michelangelo's "Awakening Slave" in the Accademia in Florence
Left: Drawing of a child asleep under a blanket inspired by Magnus Wennman's
photographs of sleeping Syrian refugee children*



The marble has travelled in space as well as time since it was laid down all those millions of years ago. It has risen from the bottom of the sea to the top of the mountains, a dislocation that creates a sense of the restless movement of the surface of the earth; below the tread of migrating peoples the earth itself is migrating.

Conversations

Conversations are central to any residency. You experience the sharing and exchange of ideas, the testing of your own outlook against other people's, the opening of windows into other lives. Sometimes this can be uncomfortable, you can be met with criticism or incomprehension and must defend or explain yourself. At other times it can be affirming, a sharing of experience that confirms you are on the right track.

I experienced both types of conversation at Studio Sem. There were those who took the role of "critical friend" challenging me, pushing me, making me defend myself. I did not always find this easy, but I know it was one of the most valuable aspects of the residency. It helped me to pick apart what I was doing and examine it, to find out what was worth keeping and what simply to leave behind. At the same time I was reminded that difficult experiences can be a gift – perhaps a greater gift than easy experiences, and that when you meet resistance you must push harder! I was both challenged, and supported to meet that challenge.



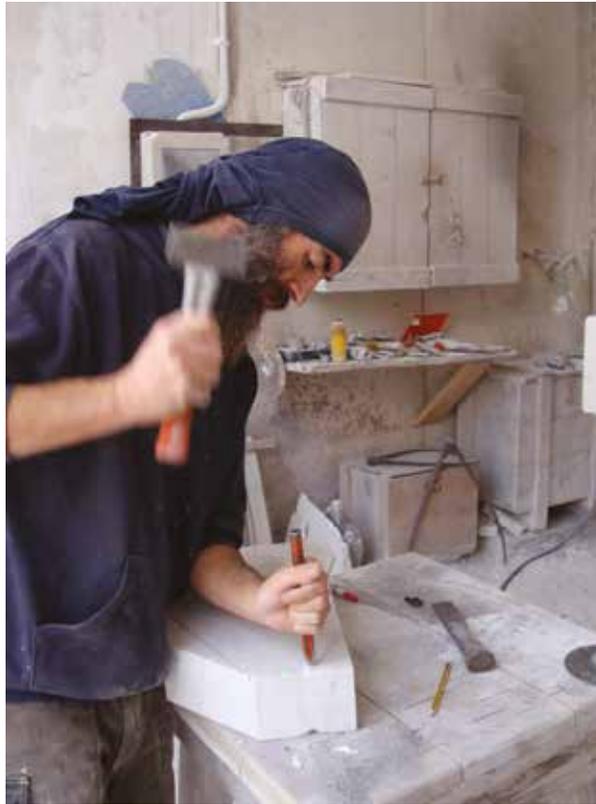
Diary entries

3.10.15 Conversation on the subject of interpretation

- Artist as showman and interpreter of work
- Is the artwork the finished product/centre of the endeavour, or the artist?
- Which work can stand on its own – needs no interpreter?
- Is it wrong to need an interpreter for work?
- Relationship between discreet, physical sculpture and perception of it by the viewer – where does the meaning lie? In the sculpture or in the viewer?

1.11.15 I think a great deal of work has needed explanation when it first appeared, from the Romantics to the Impressionists, from conceptual artists to socially engaged practitioners. There is a relationship between the artwork and the ebb and flow of ideas it exists within that cannot be disentangled. Once an explanation has entered the general flow of ideas people absorb it and often they are not even aware they have assimilated it – so the work of the Impressionists, so challenging in its day, is now considered very accessible. For me it is fine to explain your ideas and this can enrich other people's experience of your work. However the work must also be strong enough to stand alone!

1.12.15 I was talking to one of the artists about the flaws in my "window" stone. He said they didn't matter because I could Photoshop them out. I think perhaps he was joking, but it made me think, is the photographic record of the work now as much an artwork as the original piece? Or is it an ambassador for the original piece? What might this say about the importance of the stuff used to make the sculpture?



Diary entry 6.11.15 Friday

Leonardo helped me break the ends of the arms – I wanted a natural break, not a cut or “fake” break. We hit along the line we wanted to break with a point – top and bottom of the break, weakening the stone until it came away (a tried and tested technique in other stones, but apparently the bed in marble, which is not always easy to determine, makes it harder to predict how things will happen). I remembered long ago being told by a Japanese sculptor that you should be patient, take your time and allow the stress to travel through the stone in the chosen direction. If you put too much force in too quickly it will spark out sideways, taking the shortest route to the surface. Certainly the best, cleanest breaks were the ones I left alone for a while mid-process.*

Leonardo, always so interesting, described some early photos he had seen of quarry workers who had managed to remove large areas of stone in one piece using just a point, by working with the bed of the stone. Working in the quarry, by hand, the workers would have had a keen awareness of how the bed lay in the stone. Now diamond blades mean you don't have to worry so much in which direction the bed lies, as you don't need to hit the marble and it is less stressed so less likely to crack down the bedding plane. But this also means you don't know the stone so well.

I think Leonardo quite enjoyed the challenge of breaking the stone – it wouldn't have been the end of the world if it didn't go our way as it is an experimental piece; usually the artisans have to be absolutely in control of the commissions they are working on. He said it's great having the residency artists in the workshop as it is an opportunity for the artisans to try things out and benefit from the free experimentation too.

**The natural layers in stone, created when it was laid down.*



Top: Highly skilled artisan, Leonardo Buratti

Bottom: Brian Mercer bronze resident, Richard Jackson, whose time in Pietrasanta coincided with mine. He was alight with the possibilities of this new material; you couldn't help but be energised by his enthusiasm.

Diary entry 18.11.15

So now with a month to go – have I been getting there?

My own work tends to be a slow burn, often I only realise something has been haunting me, sometimes for years, once it is out in the open, translated/trans-located into stone, the act of carving also an act of exorcism. Some of the most personal works, the family pieces, have crystallised here out of a ferment of unfocussed ideas and feelings I have been carrying with me for a long time.

Of course I wish I could be working at full throttle all the time in a constant churn of ideas, but periods of drawing back, of reflection, are just as necessary as intense activity. The freedom to be able to do this is one of the great gifts of this residency, along with the freedom to try things that might not work in the end. These two invaluable opportunities ironically mean that the physical sculpture you have at the end of the three months may in no way reflect the value of the experience to you as a sculptor...



Freedom to take risks: playing with light and stone.



Experimental sketches: *Thick to Thin, Stone to Flesh, Front to Back*

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank the following organisations and people:

The Brian Mercer Trust for making this extraordinary opportunity possible, and the Royal British Sculptors for enabling it to happen.

Keara McMartin, the artisans and artists of Studio Sem for making me so welcome, for helping me, for pushing me and for supporting me.

Helaine Blumenfeld for her passionate engagement and belief in the residency, and for her hospitality and kindness.

Inger Sannes for practical help and support, for great conversation - and for reminding me how important it is to enjoy the good things in life.

Turid Gyllenhammar, Eppe de Haan and Richard Jackson for their company and friendship, which added so much to the residency.

The Hope Scott Trust for support towards preparing the work for exhibition.

And thanks to my family who willingly spared me so I could spend time amongst the rocks in a golden Tuscan autumn.

Photo credits: Mary Bourne, Keara McMartin, Turid Gyllenhammar, Richard Jackson, Ian Fraser, Lizzie Fraser, Peter Fraser





Afterword: 2015

In retrospect I can see three threads winding through the residency: an exploration of the relationship between “dead” rock and living bodies, a sense of the short passionate lives of man set against the cold, immovable cycles of nature, and a consideration of formal settings, of architectural spaces and the way art and people can inhabit them.

These came together in a kind of time capsule called 2015. You can walk into this, as into the nave of a church, with each of the sculptural elements playing a part in the architecture of the piece. It is a container for all the intense thoughts and feelings I experienced during the residency. It tells something of what it was like in 2015, of that sense of being stuck on the tram tracks of international strife, of human stories played out against the inexorable and indifferent cycles of nature and of my love for my family so far away.

Within the capsule I hope there is an uneasy peace of forces held in equilibrium.

