

Unfolded Magazine were invited to a recent solo exhibition of Joseph Paxton's 'Animal' works at Pyrus London's basement gallery in Newburgh st.

The exhibition showcased a variety of works created in recent years and we spoke to the artist about how his sculptures try to capture the 'simplicity, strength and vulnerability' of the animal form. Although it may be cliched to say dogs are a man's best friend, Paxton compels us to relate to the innate emotive response of this relationship with the striking physical dynamic the sculptures take on.

With life size sculptures, we feel drawn to each piece, sharing the space and feeling the energy radiating from the sculptures in as much as or equal to the effort and energy that has gone into the creation of these bronze sculptures.

Although the primary focus is on dogs, there is a fish sculpture, where the absence of eyes leads us to investigate the form more. Of the lack of eyes, Paxton states "I think the eye brow and the shape created by the socket cavity, is one of the most important parts of the sculptures. It tells a lot about the 'soul' of the sculpture and leaves the work far more emotionally open than if I were to try and recreate the eye ball and close in this negative space."



# Joseph

# Paxton

Words: Nardip Singh



Describing the processes involved in creating each piece, Paxton tells me that he "works over welded steel frames with straw, chicken wire and plaster" creating the life size form and body "meant not to be anatomically exact" but in his own representation, exploring how "the use of fragile straw and plaster mediums" when "cast into bronze, become a dichotomy of "fragility and strength". The whole casting process is quite involved, he has to "go back and make alterations in the wax stage of the process, replacing small areas of texture and protruding sections which get lost when pulling the wax from the mould". These little areas of texture which stand proud from the surface of the piece, make a huge difference in giving the sculpture it's dynamism.

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Rendering a 3D shape with just bare hands is difficult and can take several weeks to perfect, but the use of hands and "connection to the work" helps Paxton to create something individual and unique. Each "artist is different in the way they sculpt" he says, "I often use my hands" as it "gives a more direct contact between the material and the mark I make".

Why the fascination with dogs and animals we ask? It may be due to his childhood, "growing up in Monmouthshire, Wales, with memories of his beloved



English setter". Sculpting dogs and other animals may take him back to a lost childhood and countryside but the love for sculpture he beams, was instilled by his art teacher at school. Driven on by supportive parents and family who also saw both the talent and passion he employed in his work, his vocation was "set in bronze" so to speak.

Of other passions, the violin is mentioned, with Paxton having played it since childhood, the skill requires dexterity of hand

and fingers, but of the instrument itself, parallels can be drawn between the shape of the violin: curved body; neck; tail-piece; fingerboard; bridge, and that of the hound: long legs, deep chest and flexible spine. There may be a hidden energy emanating from the sculpture, but you can almost hear a sound too, whimpers, growls, barks and whines, depending on how you view each piece.

He mentions that "cuteness of animals" is not a look he wants



from the work but he "wants people to feel energy", albeit from an inanimate object, the work does remarkably draw out emotions of sadness and empathy with postures bowed and sullen. On the flip side, evoking feelings of threat; invading a private space with aggressive movement and haunting form.

Of upcoming work and studies, Paxton is to feature a collection at the CLA Game Fair in July and in future works is set to explore the relationship between human and animal further, combing the two and merging realities. Watch this space.

