



TONY HEATON

altered

Tony Heaton has exhibited nationally and internationally, has work in public and private collections and is the founder of NDACA – the National Disability Arts Collection and Archive. He was awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours, 2013, for services to the arts and disability arts movement, has an alumni award from Lancaster University and honorary doctorates from both the University of Leicester and Buckinghamshire New University.

For Nic

TONY HEATON
altered

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Cover **Sweet Meeting**
Photo ©Brendan Buesnel

'You cannot escape your history and the trauma of your experience... What are the echoes that follow you...?'

Georg Baselitz

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FOREWORD

I see Tony Heaton again, in mid-November 2017. I say 'again', as our meeting, as well as our future meetings, would reveal that we share history. Not only did we attend the same high school (admittedly in different decades), but we had also spent many years in the same small Lancashire village south of Preston. Tony had owned a vinyl record shop in the village and I, although too young at the time to have need of it, have distant memories of the shop. Located en-route to a local playground, I can remember occasionally stopping to look through the window. There, behind a counter, I now realise was Tony, keeping an eye on the schoolchildren who, much older and cooler than myself, would be hanging out and leafing through the racks.

It is 35+ years before I see Tony again in 2017. I am ten days into my new role as Curator of Grundy Art Gallery in Blackpool and I am attending a one-day conference in Durham, part of the city's annual light festival Lumiere, and Tony, a guest speaker at the event, is talking about his practice as an artist, a Disability Rights activist and founder of NDACA, the National Disability Arts Collection and Archive. His presentation is informative and engaging, irreverent and inspiring in equal measure. His own practice as an artist and activist over the past 25 years unfolds before me, it's full of powerful symbolism, deep poetry and dark humour. Whilst undeniably critical of the societal barriers that negatively impact the life experiences of disabled people, Tony's words are underscored by hope; hope in the form of the many individuals, organisations and projects, past, present and future that he sees as embodying change. As my notes from the time show, in addition to recording a glimmer of recognition when I see him on stage, it is also in this moment that I make a commitment to pursue a future working relationship with him, and a commitment for Grundy Art Gallery to be part of this change.

Now, almost five years since that conference, I am proud to be able to count a number of different activities with Tony as part of Grundy Art Gallery's recent output. In summer 2019, he was part of a team of people that helped Grundy Art Gallery bring to fruition the large-scale exhibition, *NDACA at the Grundy: Art, Anger and Rights from the Disability Arts Movement* co-curated by Liam Hevey (NDACA Producer) and Alex Cowan (NDACA Project Archivist and Collections Lead), in collaboration with myself as Curator of Grundy Art Gallery. The exhibition included multiple works by Tony alongside other artists and activists from across the UK's Disability Arts Movement, from its beginnings in the 1980s to the present day. Including works on loan from NDACA, this exhibition told the story of how these artists and activists, through their actions and artworks, had brought about change, from protesting against what they saw as a culture of pity-based charitable fundraising, to informing the development of the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995.

Following this exhibition, Tony has committed to a longer-term relationship with Grundy Art Gallery as a steering group member. Now part of the gallery's governance, Tony is sharing his knowledge, experience and insight to inform Grundy Art Gallery's commitment to better represent artists from marginalised communities. As an artist, he is also leaving a permanent mark on the Grundy Art Gallery collection. With financial support from the Art Fund, Grundy Art Gallery has acquired a piece of Tony's work: a 2019 iteration from the *Raspberry Ripple* series, a text-based sculpture made from bright pink neon. Using words that, depending on the context of their use, can act as discriminatory rhyming slang for a person with a disability, *Raspberry Ripple's* content confronts the viewer. Rendered as it is however, in the colour of candyfloss and bubble-gum, and made from a material that is synonymous with the signage of seaside towns, *Raspberry Ripple* provides a perfect example of the exciting contradictions often at play in his work. From the ongoing conversation between covert and overt references to disability, to the juxtaposition of materials, content and form, his work is simultaneously cryptic and direct, witty and unflinching; a puzzle waiting to be solved, a lesson waiting to be learned.

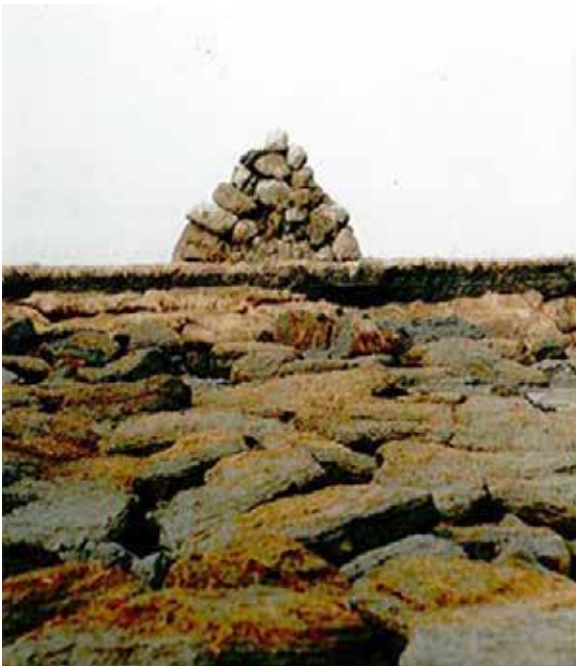
With this publication, we all have the opportunity to delve deeper into Tony Heaton's work. For me, it's also a chance to uncover more about what he has been up to since my first sighting of him, through a record shop window 35+ years ago.

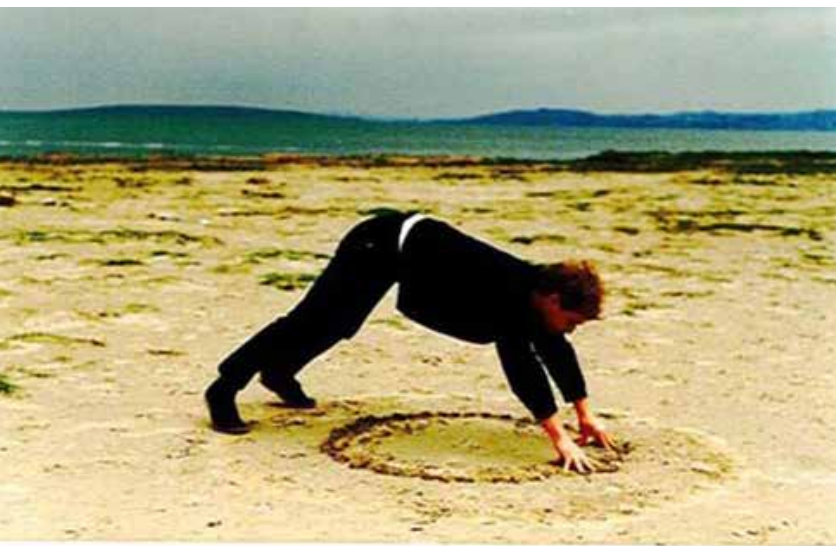
Paulette Brien

LANDMARKS

1987

A series of land based ephemeral works
made with sculptor Peter Graham on
Morecambe Bay in Silverdale, Lancashire





SPRING BACK

1988

*Spinal X-ray, motorcycle suspension springs, Perspex,
bulldog clips*

Photo: Paul Kenny



6 CIRCLES

1989

Elm wood

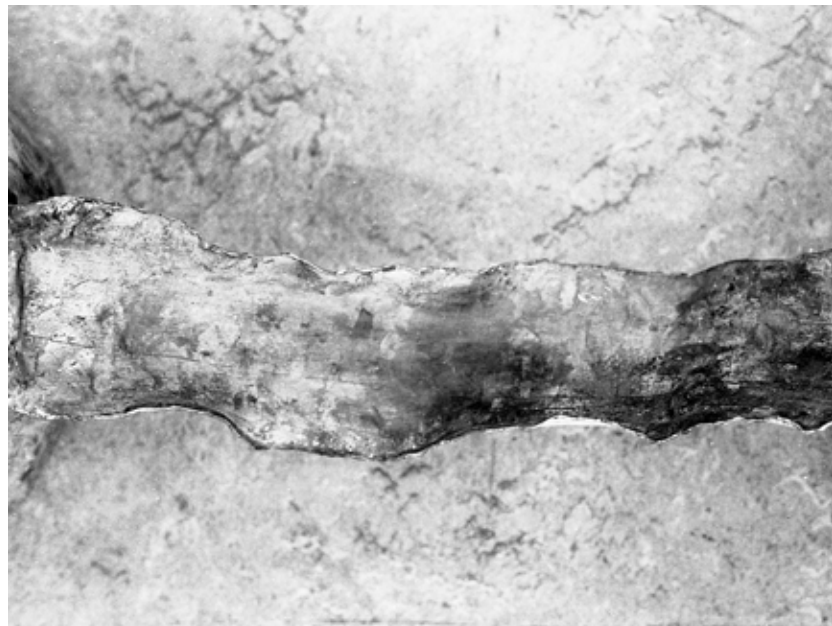


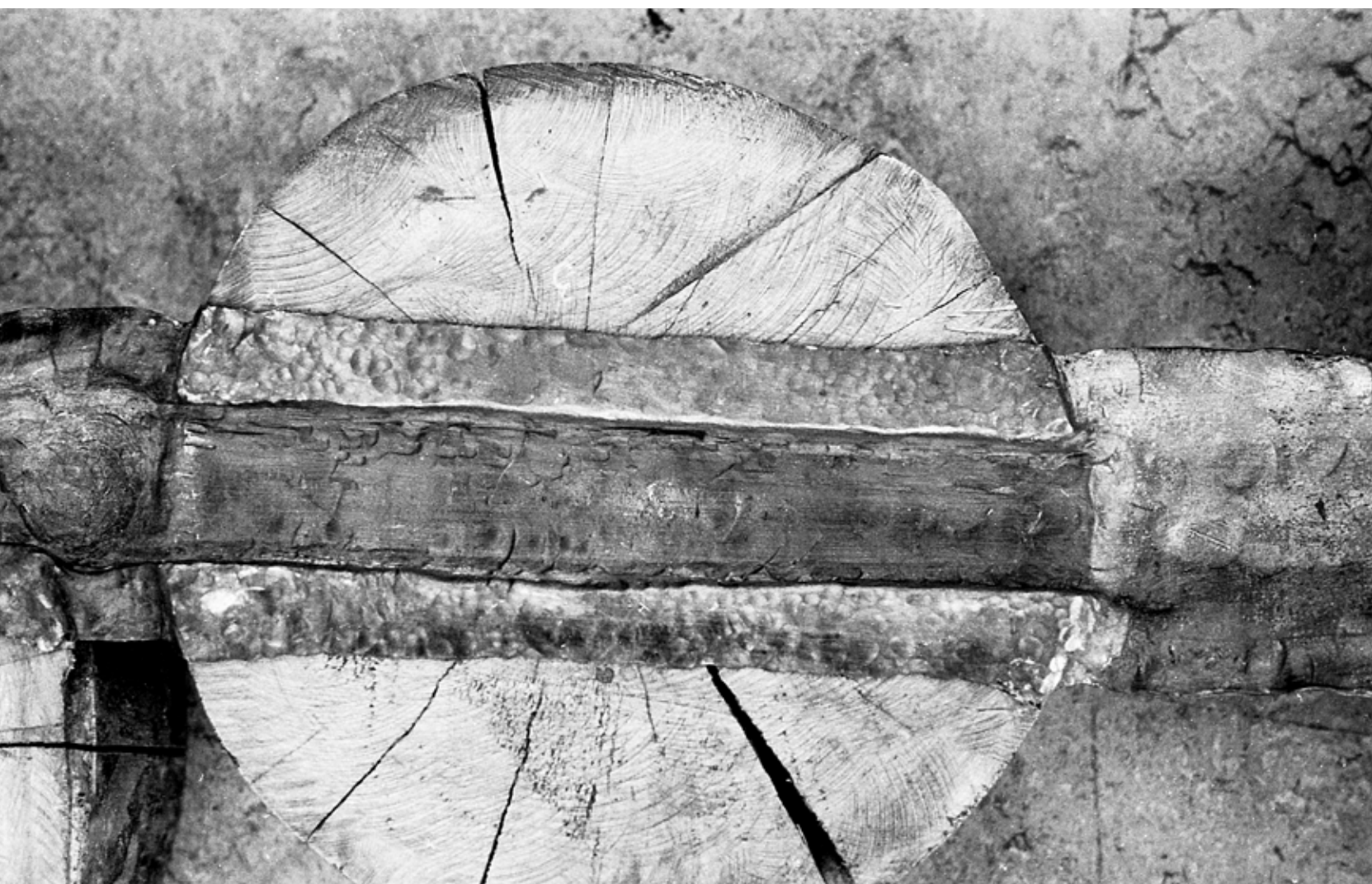


LEAD LINE

1989

Elm wood and lead





WHEELCHAIR ENTRANCE

1989

Sculpture/intervention – timber, vinyl, paint and rope

LADA, Live Art Development Agency, London



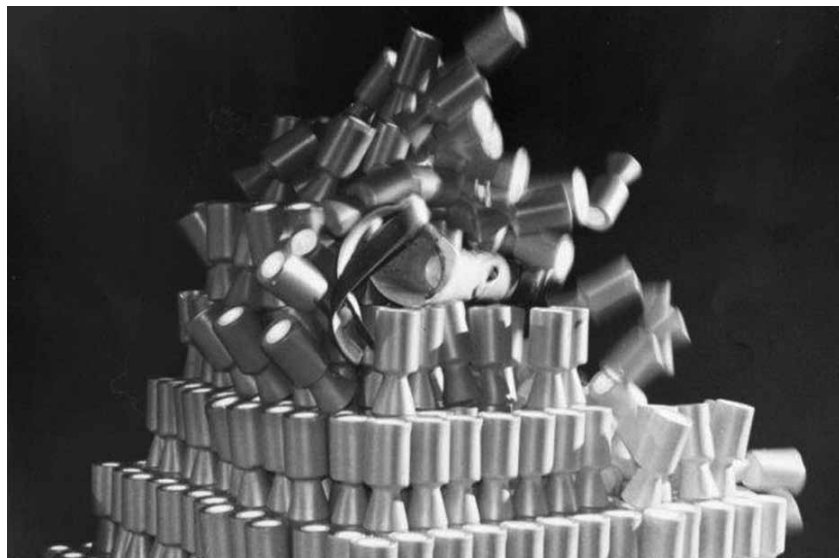


SHAKEN NOT STIRRED

1992

Performance/intervention – red plastic charity collecting tins, prosthetic leg, Doc Marten boot

Diorama Arts Centre, London





SPLIT
1994

Ash wood





Rules of engagement: The artistic development of Tony Heaton

When Tony Heaton started work in the 1980s his major interest was environmental art, perhaps influenced by Andy Goldsworthy, a contemporary of Heaton's, who had been working in Lancashire, Heaton's home territory, in the 1970s. Heaton describes making experimental work on Morecambe Bay (a favourite location of Goldsworthy's), where his work could be seen for 15 miles across the sands.

Heaton was pushed in another direction by the late Paul Hatton, head of sculpture at Lancaster University. Hatton noted that the tracks left in the sand by Heaton, whose mobility was impaired by a motorbike accident in his teens, were immediately distinguishable from the footprints of his fellow students and urged him to make work about this. Heaton states that 'a chance comment about the marks left in the sand by my feet and crutches became the catalyst for a whole series of works relating to disability and my interaction with the environment'.

One of the earlier examples of such work, *Spring Back* (1990), Heaton's most autobiographical piece, juxtaposes an X-ray of his own back, showing the springs that were inserted to strengthen it after his accident, with a pair of motorcycle springs, a typically simple and powerful artwork. The wordplay in the title is entirely typical of Heaton, who is always a highly intelligent and thoughtful artist. It links the surgical implants protecting his damaged spine with the power of the motorcycle that led to that damage, but it also refers to the process of rehabilitation he had to undergo following his accident.

The work itself creates a compelling interplay between the shiny motorcycle springs in the foreground and the more shadowy presence on the X-ray behind, counterpointing machine and body, past and present, history and current identity. The relationship is a complex one. Do the shiny motorbike springs represent a past freedom, set against the current physical limitations embodied in the X-ray, or does the X-ray refer to the past accident and hospitalisation and the shiny springs to an ongoing positive relationship with machinery? (Heaton is an undoubted petrolhead, who subsequently built a wheelchair-accessible motor-tricycle.)

GREAT BRITAIN FROM A WHEELCHAIR

1994

Condemned ex-Ministry wheelchair parts



Carving has always been a significant strand of Heaton's work, from his early work in wood and Portland stone to his more recent pieces in Carrara marble. His 1995 work *SPLIT* was carved from a block of ash containing a 'shake', a naturally occurring rift in the wood, which had been discarded by a woodturner as useless. Heaton did not see it that way: 'It's a beautiful thing, you could see inside the crack, the wood tearing you know, still connected so, as the wood splits, you've still got that, almost like chewing gum stretched inside it somehow.' Heaton carved a piece consisting of the word *SPLIT*, with the letter 'I' formed by the shake, a simple but remarkable piece of work.

In theory, this piece could have been created by any sculptor with the appropriate carving skills and would then have been a reflection on the properties of the wood. But, if known to have been made by a disabled sculptor, the work acquires further layers of meaning, which, if imposed from outside, would be to do with damage, impairment and rehabilitation, and which would potentially weaken the way the work is viewed. A disabled artist needs either to hide their disabled identity, or to reject such medicalised interpretations by taking full ownership of potential disability aspects of their work.

Thus, Heaton says of the way the wood had been discarded, 'I saw this as indicative of a society that sees only perfection and disregards all that is damaged or perceived as impaired. Yet in the sculpture, the fault becomes essential; perceived weaknesses become strengths, as the understanding of the piece depends on the fault being there.'

Had Heaton wanted to be seen purely as a sculptor, rejecting the label 'disabled', he would have had to limit himself to a quite different kind of work, and the world would be the poorer for it. Ironically, he would not have been able to make *SPLIT*, because of how it would be interpreted.

Let me be clear: I am not stating that an artist who has a disability must, or can only, make work about disability. Yinka Shonibare, a contemporary of Heaton's and another artist who has been disabled since his late teens, also makes work that is deeply rooted in personal identity, but chooses to explore his cultural background as someone of Nigerian ancestry. I regard that as a perfectly reasonable choice. Heaton argues that his concern with disability issues is entirely in line with regular artistic practice, an approach explained in the transcription poem 'Rules of Engagement':

When you think about
the Camden Town painters,
they just looked out of their windows
and painted what they saw, or their friends.

This is why I never quite understand
why people don't get disability art.

You know you look back at great paintings,
Picasso, Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas,
they painted what was there, you know,
they painted the people and the places
that they hung out in. And it was contemporary.
What was happening right there, right then.

And I think that's what disability art does,
it engages with what's happening
right here and right now and what's,
what it is that creates barriers

for us as disabled people.
I think that's interesting.
But I would, wouldn't I?
Just as you do.¹

This engagement with the immediate has also been reflected in Heaton's choice of materials. From *Spring Back* onwards, Heaton has made significant use of found materials and assemblage, incorporating into his work the various impedimenta of disability. He has sometimes received criticism for this. It would seem that there are some spectators who can look at a piece such as *SPLIT* or *Squarinthecircle?* without thinking about disability, but are filled with horror as soon as they are confronted with an X-ray or an artificial leg. This makes me wonder whether such people have ever encountered seriously shocking art, such as Bosch or Grosz or Bacon, or more extreme forms of performance art.

In any case, such critics are undoubtedly in the wrong, and indeed on the wrong side of art history. From the early twentieth century, from Duchamp's *Fountain* onwards, artists have been incorporating everyday objects into their work. In doing so, they have drawn upon the formal properties of those items, as when Picasso incorporated his son's toy cars in a sculpture of a baboon. They invited new consideration of what might have been dismissed as mundane, as when Braque and others included such elements as bus tickets within their oil paintings. They raised questions about what could be a work of art, as with Duchamp's readymades, and what a work of art could consist of, as when the Neo-Dadaist Robert Rauschenberg produced his 'Combines', bringing painting together with disparate physical objects, as in the delightful *Monogram* (1955-59), which incorporates a stuffed angora goat.

And, above all, they invited consideration of the outside world. In particular, as the poem above suggests, they looked at what was immediately around them. And then they presented that material in ways that made it interesting. Rachel Whiteread makes casts that describe the negative space around domestic objects. Tracey Emin, in her 1999 Turner Prize Show, exhibited *My Bed*, a work which initially attracted opprobrium for its

inclusion of condoms and stained underwear, but has come to be seen as a painfully honest representation of a period of depression. Why, then, should a disabled artist not use the items that surround *them*, the everyday artefacts of disability, to consider the world in which disabled people live?

Indeed, Heaton's best-known work, the 1995 *Great Britain From a Wheelchair*, is an example of this kind of practice, a map of Britain made from two grey NHS wheelchairs. A delightful piece of wit, it forms a wonderful repudiation of the value judgement ('This is for some tragic bastard', in Heaton's words) that some might see in the wheelchairs.

I have in the past described this work as the disability equivalent of Picasso's *Bull's Head*, (1942) made from the saddle and handlebars of a bicycle. Describing that work to the photographer Georges Brassai in 1943, Picasso stated that, 'if you were only to see the bull's head and not the bicycle seat and handlebars that form it, the sculpture would lose some of its impact'. The same is true of Heaton's sculpture; it can be seen as wheelchair parts and it can be seen as a map of Great Britain but one needs to take both into account.

By retaining the original grey of the chairs, Heaton gives a reminder of the depressing institutional uniformity that they inflict upon disabled people. But that has been left behind in what is a thoroughly cheering work. The sculpture reveals entirely unexpected possibilities, not just that these wheelchairs can provide a map, but that they can be joyful. And it gives a further, powerful message in relation to disability: we are everywhere.

An image of this work was chosen by the National Disability Arts Collection and Archive as an example of work from the 'golden age' of disability arts. During the 2012 Paralympics, Heaton was invited to redesign the sculpture as lecterns for Lord Coe and Sir Phillip Craven during the opening and closing ceremonies - a sign of how iconic the image has become.

In 1991, Heaton created a rare performance piece, *Shaken not Stirred*. The work consisted of a seven feet high pyramid of red charity collecting tins, representing the hierarchical structure of the charity industry which, in a sign of disabled people's potential disruptive power, he brought down by throwing an artificial leg. Originally commissioned by the London Disability Forum for their 'Euroday' event, the work was repeated the following year, when I asked Heaton to recreate it at a press conference for the 1992 demonstration against the ITV Telethon. Fitting the context, and recorded in press photographs, this is the performance that has gone on record.

In the latter part of his career, Heaton has made a number of large public sculptures. The first of these, *Grey Mares* (1997), commissioned after he won a public art competition run by Community Arts North West and Manchester City Council, is a strong piece of work reflecting a collaboration with a local school and the history of the site, but with little clue of what makes Heaton distinctive.

In 2007, Heaton created *Squarinthecircle?*, a permanent public sculpture for Portsmouth University School of Architecture, a 25 foot diameter work in Portland stone, developing the ideas of separation and integration explored in early pieces such as *Leadline* and *6 Circles*. As with *SPLIT*, it would be easy to disregard its disability content, but any disabled person will notice that the perfection of the circle creates an interior space which is inaccessible to wheelchair users.

2012's *Monument to the Unintended Performer* was a commission from Channel 4, one of a series of installations on the 'Big 4' outside the channel's headquarters, in this case commissioned to mark the coverage of the London Paralympics. The work links two iconic images, the *Discobolus* of Myron and the international wheelchair symbol, in a 50 feet high work in stainless steel and neon.

Heaton states that the title is a reference to the everyday experience of disabled people. 'It's a monument to all the performers who get stared at every day. I get stared at all the time. Getting on a bus, everybody stares at me. Somebody walking down the street with a white cane, everybody stares. Somebody with a guide dog, everybody stares. If you've got any sort of facial disfigurement, impairment, people stare at you.' Heaton wrote a text explaining this. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Channel 4 gave it a low profile.

Raspberry Ripple, a bright pink neon cruciform version of the two words of the rhyming slang for 'cripple', was originally one metre high, with a later, larger version called *A Bigger Ripple*. But when commissioned for the Lumiere Festival at London's Southbank in 2018, it became a 25 feet high projection. Heaton used a similar neon cross form for 2019's *TRAGIC/BRAVE*.

2014's *Gold Lamé* consists of an Invacar, the blue fibreglass 'invalid carriage' that used to be supplied to disabled people, sprayed gold and hung in midair, thus giving it an entirely new identity. (Heaton has form in this respect; when, in his teens, he was originally issued with an Invacar, he decorated it with an obscene cartoon and used it to drive to the Bickershaw Festival, accompanied by a guard of Hell's Angels.) The title is a pun on lame/lamé.

I have been following Heaton's work for over 30 years. My liking for it is in part because I share his concern with disability issues. But primarily it is because Heaton is an intelligent and imaginative artist whose work is always worth the time spent looking at it.

Allan Sutherland

1. From 'Tony Heaton - Making Links' in Sutherland, Allan, *Electric Bodies: Travels in Life History* (Disability Arts Online, 2020)

GREY MARES

1997

Stainless steel, brick, glazed brick

Beswick, Manchester



WHITE ON WHITE

2002

Conservators' gloves, map pins



FATHER AND CHILD

2004

Portland stone





5 CIRCLES

2004

Portland stone



ZEN MEN
2005

Carrara marble





SERPENT FORM
2005

Carrara marble





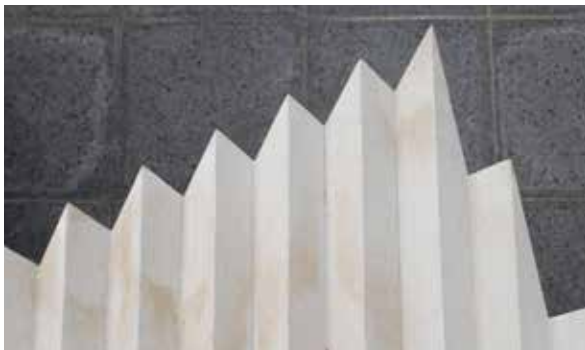
SQUARINTHECIRCLE?

2007

Portland stone

School of Architecture, University of Portsmouth

Photo: Chris Smart



SWEET MEETING

2007

Carrara marble

Photo © Brendan Busnell



TWISTED FORM
2009

Portland stone





MONUMENT TO THE UNINTENDED PERFORMER

2012

Stainless steel, neon

Installation – Channel 4 TV, Horseferry Road, London, to celebrate Channel 4's involvement and commitment to the London 2012 Paralympic Games

Photo: Dave King





Squaring the Circle

In talking about his work, Tony Heaton quotes from the German artist Georg Baselitz that 'You cannot escape your history and the trauma of your experience ...', to provide a useful perspective with which to approach a body of work that so evidently reflects his own biography. An early work like *Spring Back* (1988), for instance, incorporates an X-ray of Heaton's spine and stainless steel springs that were inserted during surgery following his motorcycle accident. Yet to consider Heaton's art only in the context of an experience of disability risks missing out on the artist's engagement with broader developments in contemporary art, and overlooking the formal and conceptual richness of his practice.

My first encounter with Heaton's work was *Gold Lamé*, an installation in the Bluecoat/DaDaFest group exhibition *Art of the Lived Experiment* (2014-15) that comprised a refashioned Invacar – the vehicle introduced after the Second World War that was issued free to 'invalids' by the British Ministry of Pensions, eventually being withdrawn from the roads in 1983. The artist had one himself in 1971 and, for the exhibition, he managed to track down one of the last of these museum pieces, whose sky-blue fibreglass frame he sprayed gold, transforming it 'from prosthetic to sculpture, transmuted from spazz blue to gold, lame to lamé'.¹ As well as the audacity of the installation – a gilded car suspended above head height in the towering 'Vide' space at the Bluecoat – *Gold Lamé* reflected the artist's fascination with the idea of precariousness and the process of transformation, both of which have been consistently employed throughout his work. Alchemy and artists' free reign to experiment were themes chosen by the curator of 'Art of the Lived Experiment', Aaron Williamson, and Heaton relished this opportunity to create a new work that would, like the quest of the alchemist, literally turn a base object into gold.

There were also technical and logistical challenges that had to be overcome in order for the piece to be realised, from sourcing the car to stripping it of its engine and working out how to suspend it at the correct angle. This knotty problem-solving is characteristic of Heaton's approach, an almost perverse delight he has in taking things apart and reassembling them, pushing materials to their limit, or figuring out complex calculations for the production and siting of the most demanding public art commission. *Gold Lamé* succeeded not just in terms of its critique of the 'deficit model of disability' through an unexpected *détournement* of a historical iconic object, the Invacar – given a wickedly ingenious title – but also in relation to the physical siting of the work within the volume of this particular space.

Gold Lamé was subsequently presented in different contexts and underwent further transformation: having been suspended rather

than anchored for its initial showing at the Bluecoat, it adopted a more traditional, if unusually-sited, sculptural display when it was selected to occupy The Liverpool Plinth, an empty outdoor platform at Liverpool Parish Church. Entering the public realm in this way – on display for a year in a highly visible site in central Liverpool – *Gold Lamé* demonstrates an underlying principle of Heaton's practice, that art should be an evolving conversation, both with the context in which it is presented and the audience that experiences it. The artist has talked about the 'subversiveness' of work that talks to a disabled audience but which may not resonate with a non-disabled audience,² yet in several public commissions he has managed to transcend the specific context for which the work was originally intended and engage with other themes, while reaching a wider audience. *Monument to the Unintended Performer*, for instance, was as much a playful intervention into the postmodern architectural setting of the London headquarters of Channel 4, who commissioned the work for its 'Big 4' series of art installations around its iconic logo, as it was a celebration of the television broadcaster's commitment to the London 2012 Paralympic Games.

An earlier commission, this time permanent, *Squar in the Circle?* (2007) is an 11 ton, 25 foot diameter sculpture at the University of Portsmouth comprising a circle of five blocks of Portland stone that also function as public seating. Carved and arranged with great precision, it brings together three symbols that recur in Heaton's work, the circle, the square and the triangle - geometric archetypes, the first two of which, the artist reminds us, 'proved to be an impossibility' for the alchemists attempting to square a circle.³ Here, the harmony and wholeness that the uniting of the different elements suggests is belied by the fact that the 'inner sanctum' circled by the sculpture – its social space – is made deliberately inaccessible to wheelchair users, a metaphor for being denied entry into the centre of power. Described as 'the largest piece of disability art ever erected in the UK' that will 'stimulate discussion, learning and controversy'⁴ an appreciation of *Squar in the Circle?* is enriched by knowing the work's philosophical and mathematical underpinning, as well as the collaborative process employed in realising it, which involved other artists, architects, students and monumental masons from the Portland quarry.

Himself an accomplished carver of stone and wood, Heaton's artistic practice over the past four decades has intersected with developments in contemporary art encompassing a wide range of concerns and disciplines, particularly within British sculpture. These include environmental sculpture and land art, object-based sculpture, mixed-media installation, performance intervention, photography, textual work using neon, casting





GOLD LAMÉ

2014

Ex-ministry invalid Carriage, gold paint, fibreglass

Above: The Bluecoat, Liverpool

Left: The Liverpool Plinth, Liverpool Parish Church 2018

and printmaking, as well as the traditional techniques of drawing and carving. Situated within this breadth of practice, there is a consistency of approach around the transformation of materials, an appreciation and employment of craft skills, and working in collaboration with other specialists, including mechanical engineers, architects and stone cutters.

Heaton's earliest work was inspired by the landscape of his native Lancashire. *Landmarks* (1987) was a series of ephemeral coastal interventions at Morecambe Bay, a collaboration with another artist, Peter Graham. Piling up found rocks and making circular body imprints in the sand, these experiments were a nod to the environmental art of Andy Goldsworthy and Richard Long's land art. *6 Circles* (1989) brought this interest in working with natural materials together with the process of carving, as the concentric growth-ringed surface of five sliced sections of an elm tree trunk were each carved with an arc which, when arranged together on the floor, formed a sixth, broken circle. In *Leadline* (1989) Heaton embedded lead into a hollowed out crevice in another felled piece of elm, timber that would 'expand and crack, contract and split. Time will mark the subtle changes of colour and texture, the lead has certain qualities as do the marks left by the hammer and chisel'.⁵

From this interest in the changing nature of organic materials, Heaton considered how man-made materials might also change, both materially and in terms of meaning. The re-use of found and mass-produced objects in art, stretching back to Duchamp and Picasso, has been especially influential on his work, particularly the New British Sculpture of the 1980s and the work of Tony Cragg, Bill Woodrow, Alison Wilding and others. For *Great Britain from a Wheelchair* (1994) Heaton took apart two grey NHS wheelchairs and refashioned the constituent parts into a map of the country. Whereas in Cragg's, *Britain Seen from the North* (1981), in which the shape of Britain is made from the arrangement of brightly coloured plastic shards and other detritus, the map is turned on its side, Heaton's faces in its familiar direction.

A more appropriate comparison here might be Woodrow's iconic sculptures in which incongruous new objects are assembled from cut-out sections of an existing 'host' object – a guitar springing from a washing machine, for instance. In *Great Britain from a Wheelchair*, Heaton's newly transformed object – the map – does not disguise its components: this Heath Robinson-esque assemblage is still recognisably a jumble of wheelchair parts, a visual pun that nonetheless poses serious questions about Britain's national identity and the extent of its accommodation, or exclusion, of disabled people.

The idea of this sculpture was reworked in *Great Britain from a Wheelchair (Revisited)*, where the disassembled parts of a sports wheelchair were fashioned into lecterns for the opening ceremony speeches at the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. More recently, Heaton has made a further version, *Power & Light*, commissioned by the disabled people's organisation Spectrum in Southampton. This time, a powered wheelchair was deconstructed and reassembled into the shape of Great Britain, and a neon element added. Neon is a medium that Heaton uses to good effect (in a crowded field where one artist's neon text is often indistinguishable from that of another), subverting the medium's unyielding brashness with subtly ironic wordplay. *Raspberry Ripple - Pink Neon* (2018) was developed from an earlier night-time projection of two intersecting words, 'ras(p)berry' and 'ripple', a reclamation of this derogatory Cockney rhyming slang. The cruciform arrangement of two other intersecting words in *TRAGIC/BRAVE* (2019) also unpicks terminology applied condescendingly to disabled people who are seen as either 'tragic' or 'brave'.

Using text as a strategy in post-war contemporary art has a long lineage, from Concrete Poetry, Pop Art and Conceptual Art in the 1960s and 70s, to the work of Bruce Nauman, Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger with its concerns with semantics, societal issues and the manipulative power of advertising and mass media. In Heaton's practice this critical interrogation of language is an important strand. His training in sign-craft has provided him with the technical skills to be able to integrate words into his work using a variety of media such as screen-printing, linocuts, neon and carving. But it is how he uses language that gives resonance to works like the aforementioned neon texts or others such as *Shaken not Stirred, Gold Lamé*, or *Daft as a Brush*, where what may appear as flippant titles are instead subtle articulations of the work's meaning. In another language-related piece, *White on White – Barbara, Johnny and the Quiet Revolution* (2002), Heaton addresses the low status of British Sign Language (BSL) in state education and, by extension, the wider culture. White gloves as worn by art conservators, pinned to a white background (*White on White* also refers to similarly titled historical modernist artworks and the hallowed space of the 'white cube' art gallery), are configured to spell out 'smile'; the riposte to this in a subsequent line of signing gloves may be recognisable only to BSL users.

While all the works discussed so far are related in some way to exploring and confronting issues of exclusion, a significant part of Heaton's practice does this in a more direct way, through often highly public interventions and performative actions. These have addressed physical access, starting with *Wheelchair Entrance* (1989), sited in a corridor, which prioritised

wheelchair users over ambulant people, a strategy that Ann Whitehurst was to further explore five years later in her Bluecoat exhibition, '*On the Map: Placing Disability*', which confronted disabling environments through a life-sized board game that penalised non-disabled visitors. Heaton has used a set of tensile barriers bearing the legend 'wheelchair access only' to disrupt access to public spaces at two high profile cultural events, the Venice Architecture Biennial (2016) and Turner Contemporary (2017). He had moved further into the territory of live art with *Wheelchair ascending and descending a staircase*, at Tate Modern (2008), its title a homage to Marcel Duchamp's painting, in which he struggled up the stairs that run alongside the vast Turbine Hall's ramped entrance, to highlight the more common experience of access discrimination for many disabled people trying to enter a cultural institution. A more joyous celebration of the Tate ramp was Heaton's performance for the *Architecture InsideOut* event (2008) with artist Chris Ankin and architect Ash Sakula, for which 100 people were invited to go from the top to the bottom 'by any means other than walking'.

Perhaps Heaton's most celebrated performance was in 1992 when he demolished his own installation, *Shaken not Stirred*, which comprised 1,683 red plastic charity collecting tins stacked in a perfect pyramid at London's Diorama arts centre. The occasion was a press conference staged by Block Telethon, an umbrella organisation of disability groups opposed to ITV's *Telethon*, demanding social rights, not charity handouts. Their protest was enhanced by Heaton's dramatic action against his work, whose title he describes as a reflection of the type of charity sector epitomised by the television fundraising marathon, 'shaking cans but not stirring consciences'.

Heaton's sculpture *Sweet Meeting* continues his fascination with the circular form and cyclical processes, and also plays with language and perception. Superficially resembling the branded Polo mint sweets with a repeat of the word 'LOOP', what you see here is what you *don't* get, as we are tricked into associating the sculpture with a familiar product, enlarged like one of Pop artist Claes Oldenburg's oversize replicas of everyday objects. Carved in Italy from statuary marble from Carrara, *Sweet Meeting* is a key work for Heaton, inspired by a re-discovered friendship, and it has spawned a series of editioned *Suite: Fruits*, cast in resin and brightly coloured, as well as a suite of screen-prints that share a Pop Art sensibility.

Considering the nature of much of Heaton's art discussed so far, using neon, screen-print, light projection, installation, reconstructed objects, and performance, it is perhaps surprising when visiting his studio to enter a sculptor's yard full of pieces of stone in various stages of being cut and

carved. The artist accepts that his carvings represent a separate body of work but one that 'still threads back to disability'. And as one studies these works, carved in marble, Portland stone or wood, similarities with other aspects of his practice become evident. In both *Zen Men* (2005) and *Zen Girls* (2020), two figures sit impossibly yet somehow plausibly on a bench that is unsupported by legs, while another, *Triclining Figure*, seems to have grown an extra leg. Although the figures are archetypal, with no facial features to indicate emotion, they nevertheless convey humour and warmth, as in the tender relationship evident in *Father and Child* (2004).

Alongside these and other non-figurative sculptures exploring natural forms and symbols, text too is prominent in the carvings, which have echoes of artists like Ian Hamilton Finlay whose often enigmatic texts in stone, sited in the landscape, helped reinvigorate as a contemporary medium a tradition seemingly languishing in the academy. Unlike Hamilton Finlay however, Heaton carves his pieces himself and also employs a more playful use of fonts. There is a more sombre tone though in *Damaged (Five Giants)* (2020), where five words are carved into a piece of broken Portland stone: 'want', 'disease', 'squalor', 'idleness' and 'ignorance' – the 'five giants on the road to post-war reconstruction' identified in the 1942 Beveridge Report as being the priorities for the post-war Labour government to tackle through its programmes of social reform. Heaton has left the stone plaque in the imperfect state in which he found it, each word truncated yet still recognisable, as if to emphasise the present diminution of the welfare state and the damage done to it, eight decades after its founding. There is also perhaps a paradox implied by this work – of a precarity that is, literally, written in stone, memorialised. And such contradiction, between contingent meaning and a fixed state, and discovering new possibilities from unexpected juxtapositions, has provided Heaton with a useful template for his art practice, allowing him to revisit older work, to continue to be surprised by where his experiments take him, and for us – his audience – to be both provoked and delighted.

Bryan Biggs

¹Tony Heaton artist's statement in *Art of the Lived Experiment* exhibition catalogue, Liverpool: The Bluecoat and DaDaFest, 2014, p. 35.

²Conversation with the artist, 1 October 2021. Other unreferenced quotes that follow are taken from this interview.

³The artist's website: www.tonyheaton.co.uk/direct-carving.html#d-18

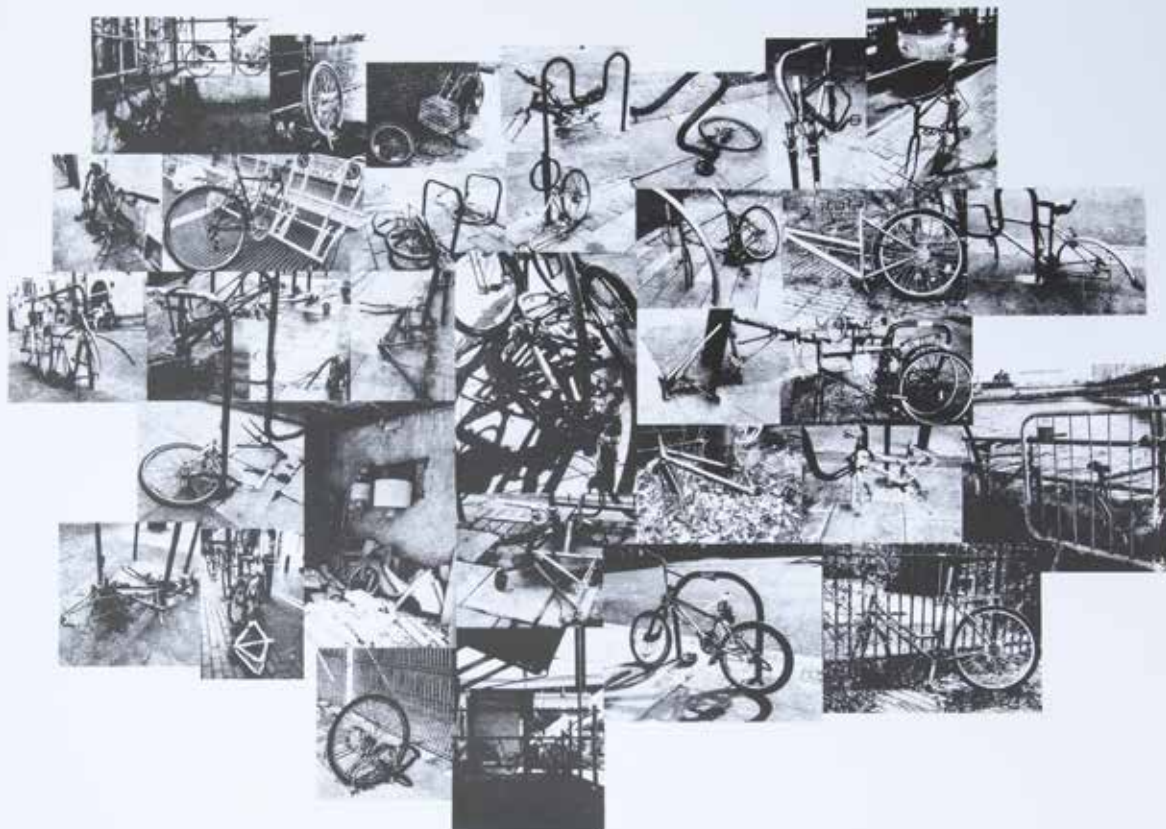
⁴Joe Bidder, feature on the artist in Disability Arts Online, reproduced on the artist's website: www.tonyheaton.co.uk/direct-carving.html#d-18

⁵The artist's website: www.tonyheaton.co.uk/direct-carving.html#d-4

**CYCLE TOUR OF EUROPE
(FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT)**
2018

Screen-prints





CYCLE TOUR OF EUROPE

Amsterdam • Barcelona • Bergen • Berlin • Brighton • Bruges • Cambridge • Carrara • Cologne • Copenhagen • Desenzano • Edinburgh • Florence • Geneva • Ghent
Glasgow • Liverpool • London • Lucca • Madrid • Manchester • Milan • Monaco • Munich • Nice • Oslo • Oxford • Paris • Pisa • Southport • Stresa • Turin • Valencia • Zurich

CYCLE TOUR OF EUROPE



CARRARA



LONDON

CYCLE TOUR OF EUROPE



SOUTHPORT



COLONNATA

RASPBERRY RIPPLE

2018

Neon

Courtesy of the Grundy Art Gallery,
Blackpool Council

Photo: Jonathan Lynch

Ready
to
Reproduce



RASPBERRY RIPPLE

2018

Light projection

Photo: Astrid Eckstein
Southbank Centre, Royal Festival Hall
Lumiere London, produced by Artichoke



CÔTE
BRANDERIE

TO JOIN
OUR TEAM
APPLY ONLINE

SUITE: FRUITS
2019

Fibreglass, enamel paint





TRAGIC/BRAVE

2019

Neon

Photo: Richard Wheater

T
R
BRAVE
G
C

ZEN GIRLS

2019

Carrara marble





ZEN MEN 1

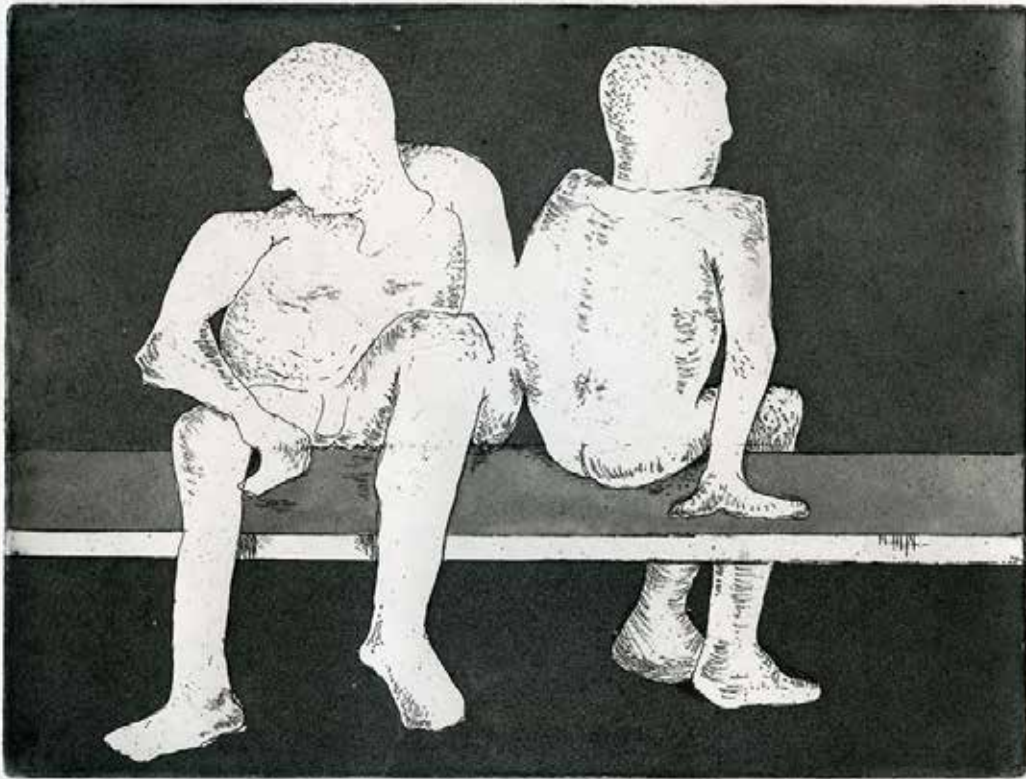
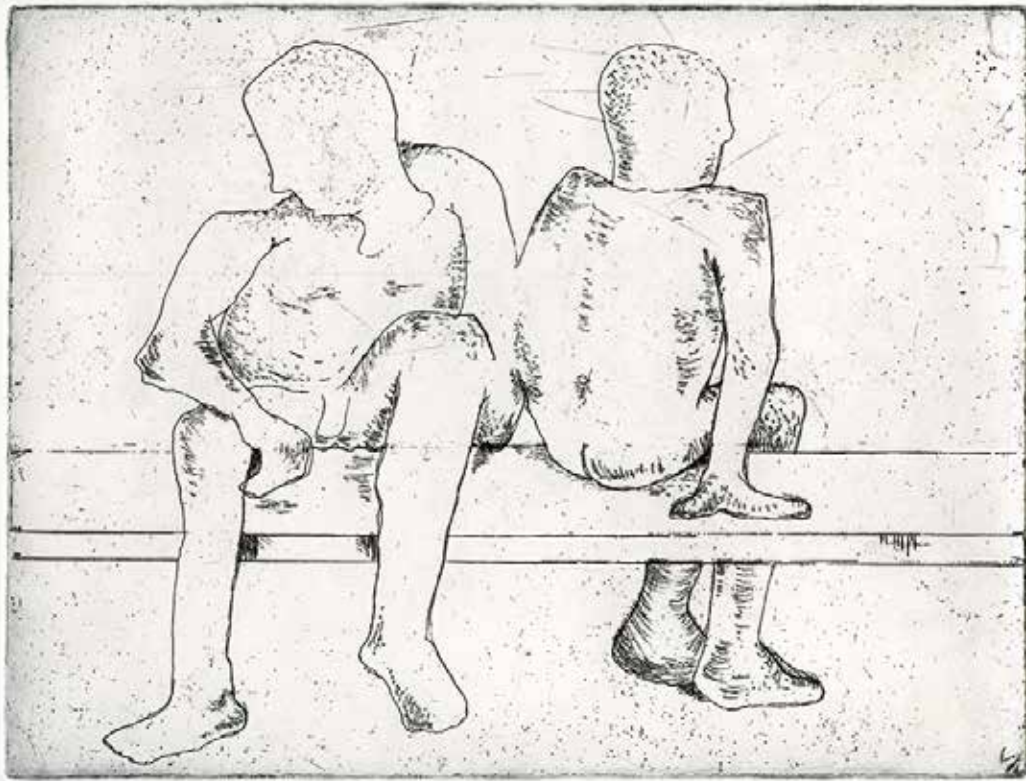
2019

Etching on Fabriano paper

ZEN MEN 2

2019

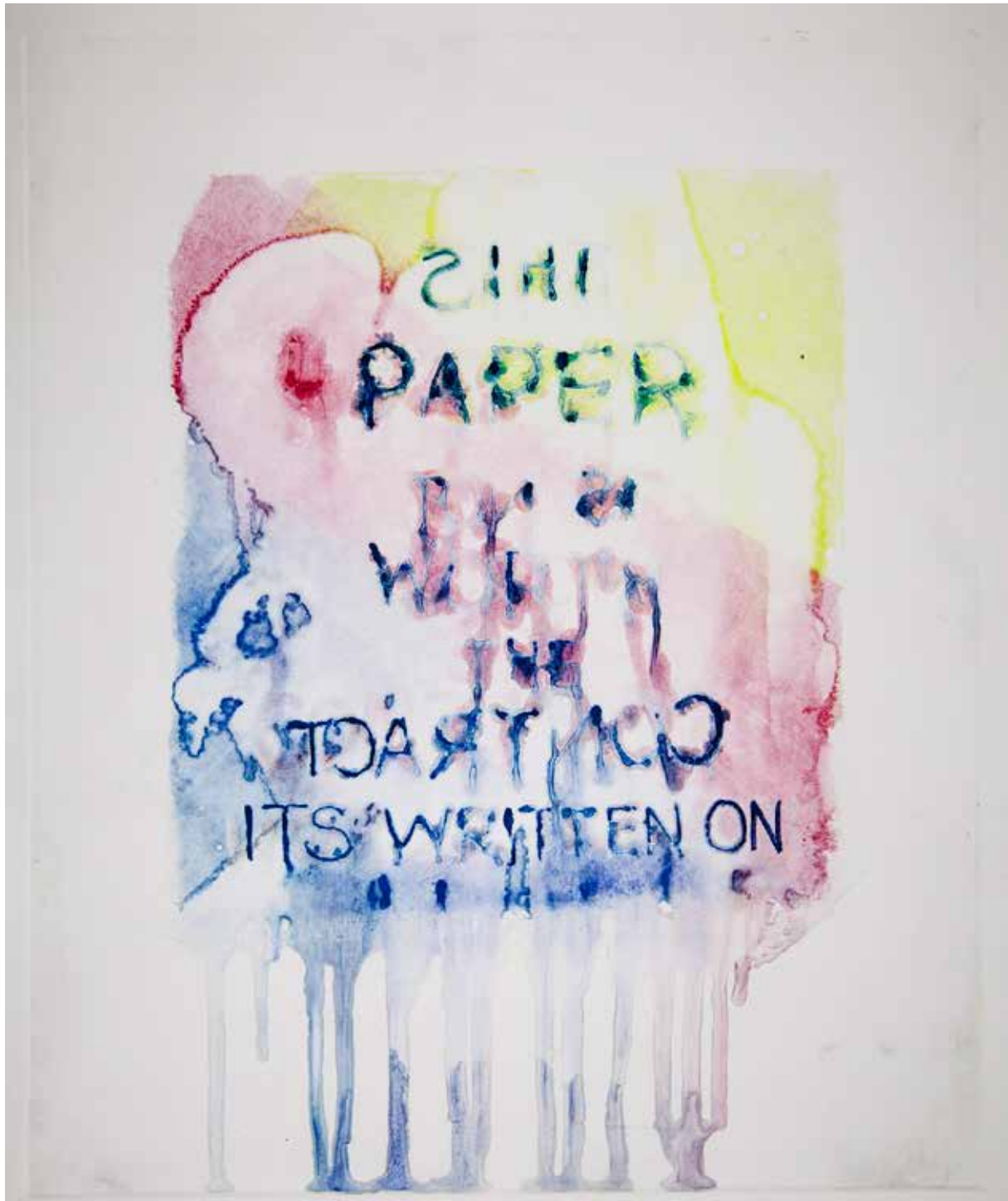
Etching and aquatint on Fabriano paper



THE CONTRACT

2019

Monoprint on Fabriano paper



SUITE: FRUITS

2019

Screen-prints

Set of five



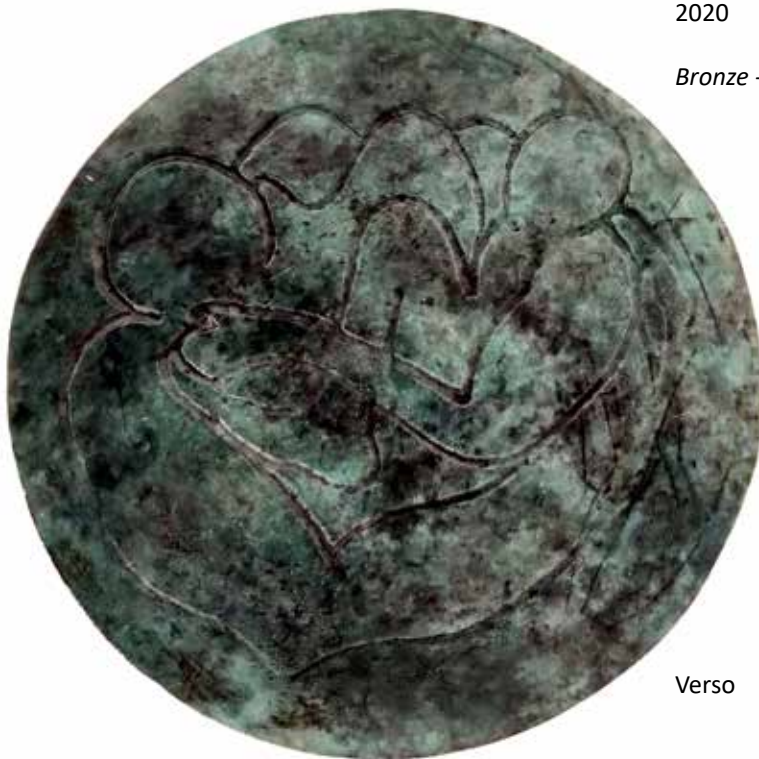
SUSAN (ZEN GIRLS)

2019

Bronze







FATHER AND CHILD
2020

Bronze - British Art Medal Society

Verso



DAMAGED (FIVE GIANTS)

2020

Portland stone



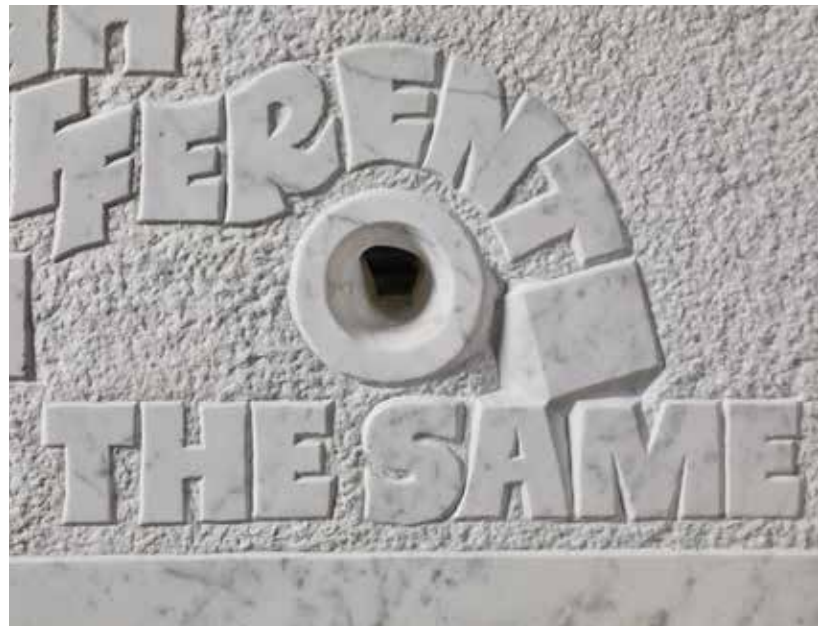
A stone monument with a triangular face, inscribed with the words "WANT DISEA SQUALO IDLENESS IGNORAN" in a serif font. The monument is made of light-colored stone and is set against a background of rough, layered rock. The text is carved into the stone, with the letters being slightly raised. The monument is positioned on a flat, light-colored surface.

WANT
DISEA
SQUALO
IDLENESS
IGNORAN

YOU LAUGH
2021

Carrara marble







A BIGGER RIPPLE
2021

Neon

Lumiere Durham 2021
Produced by Artichoke

Photo: Matthew Andrews

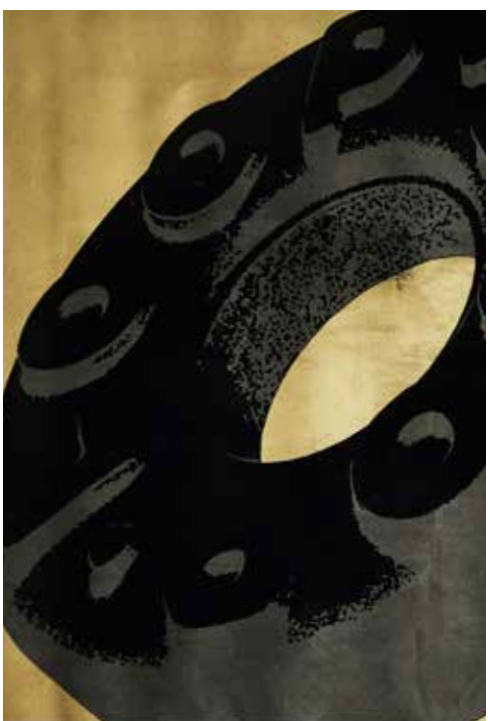


SUITE: FRUITS

2021

Screen-prints

Set of eight



SUITE: STACK
SUITE: SPREAD

2021

CGI Giclee prints



**SUITE:
LINK RED
2021**

*CGI Giclee
prints*



**SUITE:
LINK BLUE
2021**

*CGI Giclee
prints*



**SUITE:
LINK CLEAR
2021**

*CGI Giclee
prints*



**SUITE:
LINK WHITE
2021**

*CGI Giclee
prints*



SUITE: FRUIT
2021

Acrylic on linen



CONTRIBUTORS

Bryan Biggs is Director of Cultural Legacies at the Bluecoat, Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts, where he has curated many exhibitions and programmes of performance and literature over the last four decades. He has written for and edited many publications about visual art and popular culture, and most recently co-edited *Bluecoat, Liverpool: The UK's First Arts Centre* (2020). He trained in fine art and continues to do a drawing every day.

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Allan Sutherland is a writer, performer, disability arts activist and leading historian of disability arts. He created the *Chronology of Disability Arts* and, with Tony Heaton, developed the thinking behind what would become the National Disability Arts Collection and Archive.

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Zoe Partington
Terry Smith
Allan Sutherland
Mark Walmsley
Aaron Williamson
Anne Yates

INDEX OF WORKS

All dimensions where known (H x W x D) cm.

1. Landmarks - 1987 (with Peter Graham)
2. Spring Back - 1988 - spinal X-ray, motorcycle suspension springs, Perspex, bulldog clips
3. 6 Circles - 1989 - elm wood
4. Lead Line - 1989 - elm wood and lead
5. Wheelchair Entrance - 1989 - timber, vinyl, paint
6. Shaken not Stirred - 1992 - red plastic charity collecting tins (210 x 180 x 180)
7. SPLIT - 1994 - ash wood (24 x 30 x 9)
8. Great Britain from a Wheelchair - 1994 - condemned ex-Ministry wheelchair parts (165 x 100)
9. Grey Mares - 1997 - stainless steel, brick, glazed brick
10. White on White - 2002 - conservators' gloves, map pins (75 x 110)
11. Father and Child - 2004 - Portland stone
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13. Zen Men - 2005 - Carrara marble (34 x 68 x 13)
14. Serpent Form - 2005 - Carrara marble (42 x 28 x 20)
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16. Sweet Meeting - 2007 - Carrara marble (46 x 46 x 9)
17. Twisted Form - 2009 - Portland stone
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19. Gold Lamé - 2014 - ex-Ministry invalid carriage, gold paint, fibreglass
20. Cycle Tour of Europe - 2018 - screen-prints (64 x 90 and 44 x 62)
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22. Raspberry Ripple - 2018 - projection
23. Suite: Fruits - 2019 - fibreglass (46 x 46 x 9)
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38. Suite: Fruit - 2021 - acrylic on linen (60 x 60)

Sweet Meetings (Loop)

As it is for the poet
So it is for the men of stone

Sorrow is as sorrow does

The poet dips his pen in tears
The sculptor pierces the form

Circles drawn or hewn
Smoothed
Refined, reworked, renewed

O

Without the looping link
To the past we cannot move forward
Without the O
There is no mother
Without the O
No brother

Without the brother
There are no sweet meetings

From:

Straight Outta Tarleton - Poems 2016-2018 - Raymond C Bramford

Edited for:

My Name is Michael KANYE (NW) - Not a lot of people know that
Poems written for *The Good Life Experience, 2019* by Raymond C Bramford

