



Ben Dearnley

THE BATH SCULPTOR HAS BEEN IN THE NEWS QUITE A BIT RECENTLY: HE'S BEEN SELECTED FOR THE BT ART OF SPORT PROJECT AS PART OF THE CULTURAL OLYMPIAD, AND HE'S REMODELLED THE ICONIC, CHEEKY 1980S POSTER OF 'THE TENNIS GIRL' INTO A GOLD STATUE . . .

Q. What led to you becoming a sculptor?

A. I've always had an inner passion to carve stone. I was brought up in London and my dad was organist at St Paul's Cathedral, and I remember watching the stone masons carving huge chunks of stone into beautiful works for the cathedral.

Q. Who are your biggest inspirations in this field?

A. Michelangelo, Antonia Canova and Rodin. These sculptors were all working in the tradition of figurative, emotionally expressive work, which speaks as strongly today as it did the day it was carved.

Q. You honed your craft in Pietrasanta – how was that?

A. The time I spent in Pietrasanta was like being in heaven. Walking in the mountains of marble at dawn, leaving footprints in the dust, exploring the quarries, getting to the heart of the stone, and working with the beautiful nature of the Italians. All those stone carvers are born into that environment, generation upon generation, so they seem to be built for that work. The lovely

hospitality of the guys I was working with; an amazing generosity of sharing the ancient teachings that had been passed down through the years. That time was a very intense time of learning the teachings and techniques, with every waking moment spent with the marble. And at the end of each day a swim in the sea to clean off the dust, some local red wine with dinner, and sleep.

Q. Do you have a favourite piece of sculpture?

A. I love Canova's *Three Graces*. To create something with such life out of a silent block of stone is true genius.

Q. How did you get involved with the BT Art of Sport – and what will your contribution be?

A. It came about through a contact, Ann Aldridge, who developed the original programme. She saw in my work a certain classical beauty with the fragmented torsos for which I have become known.

My current work with Oscar Pistorius, the BT Paralympics Ambassador, brings a return to the Bristol Foundry and with my working again with Mike

Brett. This bronze torso will be my signature piece for my Avenue of Champions show in Salisbury Cathedral next summer during the Olympic and Paralympic Games. It will be unveiled in Trafalgar Square on International Paralympics Day in September by Oscar and a young Paralympic athlete, with Sebastian Coe and Boris Johnson.

Q. If you hadn't become a sculptor, is there anything else you would have considered doing?

A. I was a saxophone technician for many years before becoming a sculptor. But having found sculpture, I wouldn't consider any other profession.

Q. How's the Bath art scene?

A. Bath is a great place for artists as it is a melting pot of artistic talent and I have made many new friends in the creative community, particularly since starting work on the twice lifesize Mark Foster carving in the open studio on Crescent Lane (featured in *Bath Life* issue 186). A massive thank you to the Bath Stone Group for donating the block for this Art at the Edge project!

Q. Do you have a favourite local gallery?

A. Bath Fine Art (soon to be Bath Contemporary) has just requested to show my horse sculptures now, and will show my Olympic and Paralympic figures before they go to Salisbury Cathedral. I always enjoy the variety of work they have on show there, and that they support the local community and artists.

Q. Where do you enjoy eating and drinking?

A. My wife Lynn and I like country pubs such as The George in Bathampton, The Eastern Eye on Quiet Street, and the Thai Basil in Walcott.

Q. What has been your finest hour (so far)?

A. My finest hour is every time a visitor pops into the studio in Bath and sees the work taking place before their eyes. It's a wonderful feeling when you hear people's appreciation of your work.

Q. What book's on your bedside table?

A. I'm reading *Men of Destiny: Leonardo Da Vinci* by Clifford Bax. **BL**



(top to bottom) Taking a cast of Paralympic athlete Ade Adepitan; The Athena girl gets the *Goldfinger* treatment; Ade's torso as sculpture

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