

Early Works 1982 - 1990



In 1982 I was invited by Henry Moore to meet him at his studios in Much Hadham, Hertfordshire. Moore had seen examples of my work and I had written to him in connection with a place I had been offered on a MFA course at Columbia University in New York.



During the course of this meeting, Moore suggested that I should speak to Prof. Phillip King at the RCA in London about the possibility of pursuing a postgraduate career within the Sculpture School at the RCA. If Prof. King thought that my work had enough potential, then Moore assured me that he would personally fund my period of study, through the Henry Moore Foundation. This meeting was the catalyst for the start of my career. The three years I spent at the RCA, 1982-1985 allowed me enormous scope to develop my work and research the history of the subject of Sculpture within a culturally challenging environment. My own personal history, brought up within a working class environment in the North East of England, was an important influence on my developing ideas and prompted me to make my first large scale piece of sculpture, "The Room".



The Room was a life size installation based on my parent's living room and this was constructed from a variety of materials, employing a number of varying sculptural techniques. The walls of The Room were made from discarded local newspapers that completely enclosed the two plaster figures sat within it. The floor was strewn with discarded receipts and the rest of the installation reverberated with other memorabilia and objects that I associated with that part of my own personal history.



Writers such as Edward Bond, (*The Popes Wedding and Saved*), were influential in terms of the dramatic focus brought to bear on ordinary everyday situations. These plays and their observations about life tapped into the core ideas that had become an integral part of this body of work. Other writers such as Samuel Beckett (*Krapps Last tape*) and Harold Pinter (*The Caretaker*), also influenced aspects of my practice. Wilfred Owens First World War poetry was also of interest but assumed a much more important role later on when I began to work from observational studies, researched at the Imperial War Museum in London.



The tableaux sculptures of Edward Kienholz significantly influenced the direction my work was about to take and allowed me to access fresh ways of interpreting the ever unfolding diversity of what was to become my own working methods. Kienholz was a keen observer of what is termed, the social condition. He was also someone who had developed a language based on Found Objects and this was of particular interest to me and relevant to the ways in which later sculptures of mine were to develop. Much of what he observed within his own personal history and environments where he lived and worked became the subject matter for a number of major works. *The Beanery*, *The Illegal Operation*, *The Twentieth Century War Memorial* and *The State Hospital* are all key tableaux's by Kienholz, that helped to shape my own identity as a sculptor.



I was able to empathise with Kienholz method of working and assembling of his sculptures, as well as feeling stimulated by the intrinsic subject matter of these works. My visit to Kienholz's studio in Berlin in 1984 where I was privileged to be able to work in the studio and research private archive material dating back to the early 1960's, endorsed the conceptual framework that was evolving in my own sculptures and drawings.

Drawing had always been the central principal that underpinned my approach to developing ideas and within the Sculpture School at the RCA, it was allowed to flourish. In 1985 I was awarded the Drawing Prize at the RCA. I began a series of drawings based on *The Room*, made through the pin-hole apertures that facilitated views into the menacing interior of the installation. These drawings became subjects in their own right and others developed into studies based on observations of the sculpted version of my fathers head, seated in *The Room*. Memory and recollections of my father were also important in terms of the way in which these collaged drawings were eventually resolved. An 8mm film that I had taken at the time my parents were both alive fuelled other approaches to translating visual outcomes of this research. This film and subsequent footage I made of *The Room* became yet another piece of research that addressed the boundaries of what is now thought of as sculpture. These

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Thickly laminated mixed media drawings influenced the development of a series of large -scale sculptures entitled Watchman for the Morning. The Watchman series of sculptures, made from a collection of discarded materials, roofing felt, rope, card, paper stood over 12 feet tall and were first exhibited in a solo show of my work at the Hatton Gallery, Newcastle Upon Tyne, in 1985.

This exhibition received critical acclaim in a Guardian article by William Varley and also in the BBC documentary on my work, Strange Meeting, first screened in 1985.



The relationship between these large-scale sculptures, drawings and The Room, generated an atmosphere for the viewer of a silent social stalemate, a reflection on the atmospheres generated in Edward Bond's plays and an inflection on my own Northern background. The formal relationships between the works was also important because it signaled the beginnings of a plural approach to researching appropriate methodologies for making work. The outcomes of this research was no longer bound to the language of sculpture, it was now about Fine Art practice.



The Room

