

# The Dorset Magazine Dorset Life

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AUGUST 2022  
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MAPPERTON HOUSE GARDENS

# Sculpture by the Lakes

Nick Churchill has visited 'a most remarkable place where time can slip away'



*'Search for Enlightenment' by Simon Gudgeon*

**SCULPTURE** by the Lakes is a work of art in its own right. It is a haven for people and for sculpture where natural beauty is enhanced by the hand of man – one man, Simon Gudgeon. The soft lines of his monumental work somehow slip effortlessly into the landscape around Pallington Lakes as if the most natural thing in the world to find in this sanctuary for the soul is a pair of giant tilted heads you can look through. They are quite wonderful.

With some forty other large-scale works, some by other artists, they sit serenely in 26 acres of low-lying land where peace and quiet are interrupted only by birdsong and gently flowing water along loping riverbanks that

give way to four man-made lakes, the result of gravel abstraction in the 1970s. In the woodland and adjacent meadows, dissected by paths and trails, are concealed hideaways for the contemplation of all this restorative beauty. It is a most remarkable place where time can slip away and whatever concerns lie beyond its confines can seem a very long way away indeed.

'There is something very special here; the place speaks to you,' says Simon who, with wife Monique, has built the park over the last fifteen years. 'The number of times people tell me that they walk up the drive here to the park and feel their everyday stresses falling away, that's a lovely thing to hear. We feel it as

well – except for the fact that for us our everyday stresses are right here!'

One of Britain's leading contemporary sculptors, Simon is best known for his public works: large-scale bronzes such as 'Isis' in Hyde Park – the first sculpture to be installed there for fifty years – and 'Search For Enlightenment', the instantly recognisable monumental heads that now serve as a visual calling card for Sculpture by the Lakes. Three generations of the Royal Family own his work, as does Pink Floyd founder Nick Mason.

A Yorkshireman by birth and one-time city solicitor, Simon was 40 when an impulse buy of artist's clay led him towards sculpture on a quest to respond



*'Butterfly' by Simon Gudgeon*

to that which lies closest to his heart – the natural world. And while it would be stretching a point to claim that Simon's work is specifically about Dorset, when viewed in the context of this peaceful stretch of the Frome, it has very clearly become part of Dorset, assimilated with ease by the gentle landscape.

'Everything I make now is for here,' he explains, 'so this is a huge part of what I do now and I think, increasingly, this place tells me what to make. I love it that you can position sculpture here so that it enhances and is enhanced by the landscape, but I see the whole place as a work of art. I've made the tables for the café, the gates, fences. I've built the new riverside arena. There's never been a vision and we've never made a plan, we've just learned the lessons along the way and listened to what's needed. For instance, I love cooking over wood with the whole theatre that entails, so we have a brilliant full-time chef and a sous-chef and between us we cover the café and the new outdoor kitchen, with the pantry selling quality prepared food so people can build their own picnics. If I

love it, then I'll do it.'

Sculpture by the Lakes is a time-consuming business that necessarily keeps Simon from his studio. Nevertheless, he has just installed 'Parallel Passé', the latest of his figurative ballerina latticework sculptures, and his passion project, a stunning five-metre tall kinetic sculpture called 'Sail', is due to be installed by the autumn.

'I get less time for sculpture than perhaps I would like, but I am still making, still creating. Each sculpture should be an event. So each sculpture is different depending on the time of day, the weather, the season; a sculpture set on water will offer a reflection – two pieces for the price of one, if you like – in certain conditions and be something else if it is raining. What you see through and around the pieces is constantly changing, so the pieces are never the same twice. "Sail" came from an idea I pitched for the 2012 Olympics that wasn't successful. It's set in water with a 360-degree gyroscopic joint and counterweights beneath and it is moved by the wind. I've no idea how we'll install

it – we'll sort that out when it arrives. I'm really excited to see the finished piece.'

He tells me he was just as excited at the launch of the park's outdoor kitchen and riverside arena at the Dorset Tourism Awards in May and feels the quickening every time a new idea takes hold. 'I love travelling and picking up new influences.



*'Icarus IX' by Nicola Godden*