



## Yorkshire Sculpture Park - Free Art and Landscape Tour

### Steve Scott Tour Outline

In this tour we look at some of the history of the park area and its relationship to art and specifically sculpture. We look at various elements of art that have echoes in our approach to landscape and vice versa. The tour takes a slightly different form each time, as I tailor it to the people on the tour.

As a starting point, we look at the HaHa, which is the sunken ditch used to keep livestock under control without spoiling the view. Part of this structure runs under the main visitor centre. The HaHa is a symbol of the way landscape is manipulated like an artwork. Like many garden designers Richard Wood, who is described as a minor Capability Brown, wanted the control of a wall, but also didn't want the wall to interrupt the view. This allows the landscape beyond the wall to seem as if it is a continuous part of the main garden. At the same time it separates the agricultural from the domestic, turning the grounds into a sort of theatrical *performance* based on illusion. *Illusion* is a common feature of much art.

The mixture of practical and artistic decision making that has gone into the park starts with the location itself, which is in the rolling hills of Yorkshire. We go to the top of the park near the walled garden and the Bothy gallery. The view from here looks out across to the other side of the park, where we can see Basket #7 by Winter and Horbeit, the Longside gallery and on through the hills. This particular landscape is not part of the higher Pennine ranges but is a more benign area built on the geology associated with coal measures. Unlike the hills round nearby Huddersfield, there is a reasonable amount of rain, but not an excessive amount. This means that from earliest times the landscape has been one that is fairly good to work and also good to look at.

One of the initial impulses in nearly all art is based on the *materials* available. Artists look at the materials and wonder what they can do with them. This is particularly true of sculpture. There is a story that many sculptors had looked at the piece of marble used to make Michelangelo's David and rejected working on it because they could not envisage the piece that would safely come out of it. As artists look at the materials and wonder about potential, so people look at the landscape in the same way. At first this may be purely practical but at some point it starts to encompass the use for *pleasure* or to make *a statement* of some sort.

From the walled garden view point you can also see how the Underground Gallery has disappeared. The design of this is based on the HaHa we viewed earlier so the architects have used the location itself to influence the design and built on previous artists' ideas to create a new work. If you are lucky you may also catch the automated lawnmowers at work on the roof of the gallery. This is an interesting performance in itself.

Like many northern areas this one seems to have been occupied by Brigantes before, and presumably after, the Romans arrived. Also, while many of the place names a few miles to the west and north of the park reflect the Viking influence, this part of the country

evidences the more farming orientated Saxon influences. There is some evidence of larger Saxon land owners in the area, but the name Bretton comes from Guy de Bretton, who was apparently gifted the area by William the Conqueror. Personally I find it interesting that the French speaking Norse people of Normandy invade Britain and hand out parcels of land to people who presumably hailed from Brittany, which itself was home to invading Cornish Celts. It is presumably from this date that the rise of the park starts, though most of it is much later. There is another interesting parallel here with much art, which also often requires people of power and money to support it. Today it is not just wealthy patrons who yield the power of *patronage*, but also corporate and civic bodies. Related to patronage is the idea of art as *status* symbol.

While we are stood next to the Bothy gallery in the wall, it is worth reflecting that the house itself is considerably lower down in the park. This area would probably have been primarily the domain of staff rather than the residents of the house. This top part is cut off from the rest by the large hedge bordering the formal Terrace. We might look at the gardener's residence and think of it as a rather magnificent place to live, especially with such a glorious view, but the residents of the house wanted their statements of power and taste lower down the hill where the climate will be even gentler. When we are looking at a piece of art or landscape it often helps to remember that the original creators may have viewed it differently to us. While both the artist's *intention* and the audience *perception* are both part of the performance of a piece of art, the audience may need to be careful that they do not completely misinterpret the work. I am reminded of some young students doing a drama course who interpreted the Brecht play 'The Good Person of Szechwan' as being against the oppression of Chinese Communism, when the play pre-dated the communist takeover.

Although we do not visit it on the tour, the Bothy Gallery was this year home to an exhibition by Emily Speed who built movable shelters that were then placed in various parts of the park landscape, including the lake, and then photographed. Like Andy Goldsworthy who often originally presented his work as photographs of temporary structures in woodlands, Speed's work directly connects the sculpted piece with landscape and makes it a performance that is then recorded.

From the Bothy gallery we move down onto the formal terrace. At the time of writing there are three sets of sculptures visible from here that raise interesting ideas relevant to our themes. The first we can see is The Kiss by Nigel Hall. His sculptures often use simple shapes that are usually designed for open spaces. They do not mimic the landscape but might be influenced by it. While they may have colours that do not necessarily reflect their immediate surroundings, they are designed to interact with the surroundings and to sit in the landscape as part of the landscape.

Also visible at this time is a work, by Eva Rothschild, that seems to sit against the landscape. While being abstract it seems to resemble two figures, perhaps connected by a continuous stream of juggled pots. In 2011 there was an exhibition of her work in the nearby Hepworth Gallery and similar sculptures looked very different in the white walled surrounds of that space. The effect of a piece of art on us is often influenced by the *location*. It is worth remembering that the location of works in the park may change and may be chosen in conjunction with the artist or by the park's curators.

The third piece that is interesting in relation to the themes of the tour, is Portal by Mimmo Paladino. This is a more overtly representational piece that has a figure coming through a doorway. It uses *symbols* as well as *shape* to incorporate *meaning*. Because it is almost architectural it could have been designed as part of the garden, like a form of folly. This raises interesting thoughts about how we view different forms of art and often give them *value* based on a perception of whether they are an *art or craft*.

Moving on down the park we head towards the Camellia house. On the way we pass Barbara Hepworth's Family of Man. These sculptures were made using wire and wood frames covered in plaster. Hepworth directly modelled and shaped the plaster which was then cast into Bronze by a foundry. This point in the tour usually prompts a discussion of the different means of production for sculpture. In this case there was a life size original that was then turned into metal. Sometimes sculptors work directly on the final sculpture and I personally often find these better, as in Hepworth's own plaster and metal versions of sculptures in the Hepworth Gallery. On the way to the Camellia house we also pass some Sophie Rider sculptures. She often makes drawings and maquettes that are actually scaled up and produced by others in a workshop. The role of the sculptor is one of *designer*, but may not always be directly that of *producer*. In the Camellia House is a sculpture by Isamu Noguchi, a US/Japanese sculptor who has worked directly into the stone. He too has probably used other workers to do the laborious job of polishing the carved portions.

Also currently outside the Camellia house is Fructus by Peter Randall Page. This is carved out of a massive block of stone but, as the names suggests, is reminiscent of the shape of a small piece of soft fruit. Paradoxically its symmetry and regularity is also, somehow industrial and we often have to check that it is indeed stone and not metal. Like much of the landscape, the sculpture manipulates our ideas of *scale*. For a considerable time there has been a large exhibition in the park by Jaume Pensa, who sometimes manages to make solid stone look almost translucent or even a bit like plastic. From many angles in the park Pensa's wire structures also look solid, our own perceptions seemingly filling the gaps. This is another interesting option that artists have, to emphasise the nature of the materials or to *play games with our perceptions* of them.

The Camellia house contains a fountain by William Pye. Fountains often occupy a place between sculpture and architecture. Like most sculptures, fountains have no direct functional purpose, but their technical nature can alter our perspective on them. A fountain that doesn't work has lost a major part of its design purpose. Being of stainless steel, Pye's Off Spring has particular resonance in the camellia house where it is in *opposition* to the otherwise traditional feel of the building. This idea of opposition is carried on outside the Camellia house where Martin Creed's I Beam 70 blocks the steps down. His use of industrial artefacts has played with the idea of *purpose* and challenged common ideas of the sculptor's decisions on shape, size and placement in relation to *beauty* and meaning in sculpture. The location here also makes a statement about the sculpture because it is hard to get a full view of it.

As we make our way down the park towards the lake, we often see a peek view of Michael Zwingmann's Invasion, which is described as perhaps symbolising the way our industrial road based landscape intrudes on nature. Contrary to this intension, tour parties are usually taken with the beauty of the shapes in the parkland context. Often *intention* in art is not

matched by *viewer perception*. Recently at the same point there have been some bushes that have been radically cut back, as part of the grounds maintenance. People have remarked on the sculptural effect of these bare branches, further highlighting the complex nature of what impresses us and taking us back to the artist's studying of materials. Helen Escobedo's Summer Fields 2008, elsewhere in the park, is an interesting contrast with Zwingmann's work here.

At this point we can also see a side view of the house through Dennis Oppenheim's Trees. This sculpture uses domestic artefacts such as bins and dog kennels in the branches of the trees. Its placement against the, drainpipe covered, less public view of the house is interesting. Also interesting in this sculpture is the fact that the artefacts are very obviously American and thus have less *cultural resonance* to most of us observing them in this context.

Down by the lake we come across Promenade by Anthony Caro. This sculpture often divides tour parties more than most. It is certainly one that children enjoy running in and out of and this perhaps ties in with the idea of the promenade, where adults would walk to see and be seen while children played and ran, if given a chance. Personally it has strong resonances with my time at art school in the 1960's, where we would camp out amongst piles of scrap metal, cutting, welding and shaping such abstract but symbolic forms. It is interesting to contrast the painted, protected surface with the patina developed on Creed's sculpture discussed above.

At the time of writing, the lakeside woods have been cleared, which changes the nature of this part of the park completely. The trees now frame a view of the lake and beyond. Up in the Longside Gallery there was recently a sculpture by Aeneas Wilder called Untitled # 155, which was a complicated stacked set of wooden blocks. Many people viewing this walked round the perimeter, without entering the space it created within. If you entered the space, not only did the form of the sculpture seem to change, but also it was immediately connected to the landscape beyond. Like the woods, sculptures are not just about solid forms, but also about spaces in the forms and what they frame and how they interact with their environment. In early November the artist knocked this sculpture down, changing its form in a domino like effect. Once again the borders between sculpture and other forms of performance are blurred by the idea of *sculpture that evolves* or changes. I recommend that you look at the ongoing work by Nash, who built the Black Steps and has been moulding his own woodland over a significant part of his lifetime.

From here we move alongside the lake and into the field containing a number of Henry Moore's sculptures. There is one visible through the arch of trees and despite its huge and solid appearance this is hollow metal. Contrast this with the mention of Fructus above. This sculpture is also often climbed on by children or felt by adults and this has resulted in a polished surface in some areas. Interaction with the sculpture has changed its nature. One of the nice things about the park is this ability to physically interact with the sculptures (whatever the effect on them). In my own dabbling with sculpture, carpentry and pottery the physical act of feeling and shaping the object is important and galleries often separate us from this ability.

Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth both attended Art School in Leeds. They were contemporaries and parallels can be seen between some of the motifs in their works. Both

also expressed the desire to see their works in landscape and there are early drawings by Moore of his work in a landscape situation very similar to this park. I think it is important to stress that Moore ranged across some of his themes (e.g. sitting woman, reclining nude, totem inspired works) throughout his life. They do not particularly follow different 'periods' of work. Personally I also find it interesting that there are parallels between more diverse artists than Moore and Hepworth. As an example, if you look at the drawings Moore made in the underground shelters during the second world war, I think you will see a great similarity to the wire wool like structures of Sophie Ryder.

There are similar parallels that highlight differences, when we go and sit in Turrell's Deer Shelter Skyspace. This is topped by a dry stone wall that fits into the landscape and the Skyspace room is hidden underneath it and through the back of the deer shelter space. The dry stone wall is there to guard the hole in the ground that becomes your sky view when you enter the room and look up. This contrasts with other dry stone wall structures in the park. Further over in the same field space than we tend to go is Goldsworthy's Sheep Fold, a working space that we are encouraged to enter, connecting us to the working of the landscape and the people and animals in it. Across the other side of the lake, at the top of the hill, there are two Goldsworthy dry stone wall enclosures that surround holes in the ground that we are encouraged to look down into, where we find suspended tree trunks built into the walls. Further round the top walk, on the way to the Longside Gallery, is another Goldsworthy wall that is too high to look into and has no entrance. In this way the wall is used to exclude us from viewing the space within. All these are examples of the way that the same dry stone wall materials can be used in different ways to create different effects in us, the viewers.

Our final stop on the tour is normally in the woods just below the visitor centre, where we return to the HaHa and Brian Fell's HaHa bridge. The first point about this work is that there is an irony in having an ungated bridge across a HaHa that is meant to be a barrier. The next is that, like some of the works by Pensa, this sculpture incorporates text, which is an interesting mixed media choice. The final, important point raised by this work is that artists can be attempting to put before us all sorts of ideas, both serious and less so. Sometimes the ideas have not even been consciously formed by the artist. This sculpture raises the point that in art like anything else there is a role for humour.

The tour takes in only a few of the things on offer in the park and hope that you will continue to explore. I hope you have enjoyed the tour and that I have stimulated some thoughts and ideas of your own. Thank You.