

SOME NOTES ON PUBLIC PROJECTS.

Like A Bird, 1984, laminated wood; *Like A Ship*, 1984, galvanised steel with screws.

Both works originally commissioned by the Merseyside Development Corporation for the 1984 Liverpool Garden Festival. *Like A Bird* was vandalised and removed within two weeks of the Festival opening. Repaired and restored, the work was shown at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, in 1984 and the Nouvelle Biennale de Paris in 1985. Bought by Raymond and Patsy Nasher the work was permanently installed in Dallas, Texas, in 1985.

The original site was a mound near to the entrance of the Garden Festival with commanding views over the River Mersey. *Like A Bird* occupied a large volume with a minimum of means. The exposed site was visible from a considerable distance and the three intersecting profiles gave a clear outline. However, the nearer one got to the site the more a volume emerged whilst a sense of outline became more difficult. *Like A Ship* on the other hand, only seen as one approached quite close to the site, aped the appearance of the boats on the distant Mersey, all shape with no depth. Thus, in some senses, *Like A Bird* disappeared as one got closer, leaving something hollow, like a husk, whilst *Like A Ship* appeared but always seemed to be in the distance until one got so close that the surface became mostly detail.

Blind, Deaf And Dumb, 1985, a pair of works: laminated wood (internal), mild steel, bolted, welded and zinc sprayed (external). Both works originally made for and installed inside and outside of the Serpentine Gallery, London. The laminated-wood work subsequently bought by the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands. The steel work bought by Thomas Amman and installed in the garden of his office in Zurich.

This pair of works, as originally installed, made use of the window that looks out over the park from the Serpentine east gallery. The glass in this long line of French windows was replaced with frosted glass and powerful lights installed above the windows on the outside. These lights shone into the gallery making it possible to see the vague shape of the work inside from the park. It was, however, impossible to see out. The work inside the gallery, which filled the (bright) room, was rhythmical and insistently physical – rough wood, oozing globular glue, a smell of wax. Made in the studio, it had an intentionally direct, almost confrontational appearance. In opposition, the work outside of the gallery had been entirely planned in advance and drawn in considerable detail. This was the first work not made in the studio; I had wanted only to describe it, not to fabricate it. Although size guaranteed a physical presence, by distancing myself from the act of making I had wanted to rationalise or idealise that presence. The repetition of some curves and similarity of scale provided a framework of connection between the two – each could be seen as a type of the other. Inside the gallery a powerful physicality was separated from a view of the world whilst outside a rationalised and somewhat idealised object was imposed on an open park. The title *Blind, Deaf And Dumb*, specified the particular detachment of each from its surroundings and pointed to the role of the window membrane. The complicity of the building itself, actively used in the service of the work, was an important element.

Distance No Object, 1988, copper and mild steel, welded, bolted and painted.

Originally made for the plaza of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, where it remained for about a year. Subsequently purchased by the Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco.

The plaza sits over the main entrance to MOCA with a short flight of steps leading up to it from the street. Part of the administration wing of the museum bridges over

these steps, framing them. The plaza is a public thoroughfare, there is no need to enter the museum to cross it. *Distance No Object* was sited at the head of the steps, the thick copper pipe bordering the far end almost hidden by the curvature and bulk of the work. From the steps the first sight of the work was as a thin oval, slightly interrupting the appearance of the blocks of flats down hill from the museum on the other side of the plaza. The passer-by was presented with three choices – passage to the right, to the left, or through the work. Each choice resulted in a different experience, since the lobster-back curve appeared very different on either side. Passing to the left, on the outside of the curve, the segments gradually revealed themselves, the work appearing to continually extend itself, as if of massive and elastic bulk. Passing to the right, on the inside of the curve, the work was considerably foreshortened, both ends being visible as well as the compressed sequence of flanged segments. Passing through the middle, none of the complexity of external detail was visible and the raising of the far end of the smooth curving tunnel caused by the thick copper tube came as a surprise, necessitating a step down.

Distance No Object intentionally provided a frame for a passer-by to look through, whether towards the distant Hollywood Hills on one side or towards downtown LA on the other. The differences between the two ends – one ringed by an open box as if the material itself had been cut and split, the other a florescence of copper – coupled with the apparent elasticity of the body, posed the question as to what was material between the viewer and the view. The abundance of fabrication detail on the outside and the diversity of experience in passing by or through the work was, in part, a response.

Between The Eyes, 1990, Yonge Square International Plaza, Toronto, Canada. Stainless and mild steel, bolted, welded and painted, granite-faced base. Commission offered in 1987 by York-Hannover Developments Ltd after a juried competition as

part of the City of Toronto's Percent for Public Art programme. The development of the residential towers of the Toronto World Trade Centre was subsequently managed by Camrost Development Corporation who took overall responsibility for the installation of the sculpture. Architects: Zeidler Partnership.

Although at the time of the competition a detailed plan of the development existed, building had not yet started. The proposed site was still a parking lot. It was the wish of Toronto City Council that the chosen artist should contribute to the final design and layout of the plaza, working in collaboration with the architects. This wish was given force by the withholding of approval from the development plans until a final scheme had been agreed between architect and artist and presented to the developers and city representatives. Additionally a building permit – necessary before ground could be broken – was to be withheld until detailed fabrication and installation plans had been submitted. Thus, although the artist was tied to the construction timetable, he or she was being given the rare opportunity (and some power) to control broad aspects of the environment in which a work would be situated. From my point of view these discussions centred around the way in which the plaza was defined and on providing a base for part of the work (formed integrally with the plaza) that would also serve as a bench.

As originally planned, the plaza was to be isolated from the street by the continuation of a line of trees along Queen's Quay, the waterfront street forming the southern edge of the plaza. My proposal was that this planting should go around the western and northern edges of the plaza and be continued down the far side of Yonge Street, bordering the plaza to the east. Effectively the plaza was thus increased in size, the southern edge being defined by the waterfront – Lake Ontario abuts directly onto Queen's Quay at this point. The position chosen for the sculpture – the south-eastern corner – was nearly central in this enlarged square. The base/seat under one

leg of the work provided a point of congress in the middle of the expanded space. A consequence of the enlargement was that the plaza became genuinely public rather than an exclusive part of the residential complex. The architects raised no substantial objections to these proposals – indeed they were extremely supportive.

The work itself was made from two large, skeletal volumes joined in the air by a knuckle made from seven vanes around a thin core. These vanes lined up with and continued the lines of the seven ribs that were the basic component of the two bulbs on either side. One leg of the sculpture rests directly on the plaza and is an asymmetrical volume. The other is raised on a stepped base and is symmetrical. At the extremities of each part the seven ribs come together, joining onto thick, polished, stainless-steel rings. These two end details are identical. The title of the work, *Between The Eyes*, reflects the iris and pupil-like appearance of these two rings and the fact that the sculpture lies between them. The site itself lies at the beginning (or end) of the longest street in Canada, an old logging road running all the way to Hudson Bay. In the other direction Lake Ontario itself extends through the St. Lawrence Seaway to the Atlantic and beyond and through the Great Lakes to the American Midwest. It is a point to journey from. The step of the sculpture has some aspect of this voyaging. The eye is an instrument of measure. Looking out over the enormous lake, it is between our eyes that the horizon, the far distance, is established. Paradoxically there is a similar ascription to the centre or core of something; ‘slap between the eyes’, we say of something dead on target. And death is the result of such a hit, identity abolished. In relation to the sculpture, it is possible for an individual to be literally ‘between the eyes’ in that it is possible to sit and stand under the arch of the work. In a more complex way the here of the individual is contrasted with the there of journeying.

The two volumes, strung together and resting quite casually on the ground have something of the air of flotsam about them. In part this reflects the site itself, between the city and the lake, a shoreline. The city grew from close to this spot, pushing out into the landscape. The work is symmetrical on the city side and asymmetrical on the water side. The change in formalisation seems an appropriate transition.

Once Upon A Time . . ., 1990, mild steel, painted, welded and bolted; old Redheugh Bridge abutment, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, UK. Commissioned by Gateshead Metropolitan District Council and made in Middlesbrough by Amarc Enterprises as part of their training programme and Youth Training Scheme. Technical drawings and structural calculations were done in house by Gateshead Metropolitan District Council (M.D.C.).

I was originally invited to Gateshead in 1986 by the Metropolitan District Council and Northern Arts to look at some potential sites earmarked in connection with an ongoing programme of commissioning contemporary art for the region. This first visit and my subsequent proposal came to nothing, as changes to the urban plan meant that the site disappeared. However, I had seen and asked about the abutment and on several later, unrelated, visits to Gateshead returned to examine the site carefully. The Tyne Gorge at that point is one of the most complex urban locations in England; downstream the sequence of six bridges crossing to the Newcastle side is a sequence of formidable engineering structures; the splendours of Newcastle's Greek Revival station can be seen as can the city itself, spreading out on the surrounding hills. Upriver, past the bulk of the Vickers factories and the extraordinary structure of the coal stays, can be glimpsed the Northumberland moors. On the abutment itself the tollhouse, a small domestic structure perched on the edge of the gorge, contrasts

strongly with the massive, reinforced-concrete piers of the new motorway bridge passing high overhead.

In 1988 Gateshead M.D.C. began to turn the derelict bankside into a riverside park, running from the swing bridge downriver to the site of the 1990 Garden Festival and passing under the other five bridges. Knowing of my continued interest I was asked to make a proposal for the abutment, which was accepted.

Drawing somewhat on the experience of works in the series *The Back Of My Hand* – #1 in particular, which is installed on the façade of Interim Art in East London – the work was intended to function as a signifier for the site. In the same way that the phrase ‘Once upon a time . . .’ is a beginning that attests to the fact that a story is about to be told, without specifying which story, so the sculpture tries to act like such a starting point for the place. The work is made in an ‘old-fashioned’ way, the separate plates riveted to the frame, the brackets holding the fins bolted into place, lines of bolts around the edge. Once upon a time many things in the North East were made in this way. Currently the technical processes and quantity of handwork involved are reserved for the industrial-history theme parks that are springing up all over the old industrial areas. They are joined to a nostalgia that cannot celebrate, and thus overlooks, the human cost of that industrialisation. “Once upon a time it was done like this,” the tour guide will say. In the history of that industrialisation rivers were sources of power, arteries for goods, carriers for effluent: providing for the vital functions of the industrial body. A bridge, spanning this vital resource, reducing dependency, is a high cultural achievement. The coalescence of a multitude of elements around the site connotes history. The detachment of the work from its support, the lean outwards away from the abutment, connotes doubt. There is no narrative to the work but, like the site itself, it is possible to use it as a beginning.

Moor, 1990, mild steel, welded, bolted and painted. Disused railway viaduct, Victoria Park, Plymouth, UK. Commissioned by TSWA (Television South West Arts) in connection with their Four Cities Project: New Work for Different Places. Built by Blight & White Ironworks, Plymouth, and installed by them as part of their 175-year anniversary celebrations. Victoria Park was one of a number of sites in Plymouth (the other cities involved in the project were Newcastle, Glasgow and Derry), for which various artists made proposals.

Having been a child and a teenager in Plymouth and having left at eighteen with scarcely a return visit, I was intrigued by the possibility of working there. The place holds powerful memories. On the train journey from Exeter to Plymouth there are two sections of the track that I particularly like. On the first, between Teignmouth and Dawlish, the train runs right beside the sea, diving in and out of the red sandstone cliffs. On the second, between Newton Abbot and Totnes, the great dark bulk of Dartmoor looms over the little green field to one side of the train. The piers of the disused viaduct lie close to this same track, between Plymouth main station and the railway bridge over the Tamar with its two great tubular arches, Brunel's last bridge.

These three elements – the bridge and two passages of landscape – form a structure for the work. To a passenger, as a train passes the piers of the viaduct, the lower edge of the steel loop moves rapidly closer, then falls away, a movement echoing the shuttling back and forth of the cliff passed some forty minutes previously. The rising curve of the upper half of the loop echoes both the curve of Dartmoor's bulk and anticipates Brunel's bridge to come. Travelling in the other direction, of course, all this is reversed. From the ground, the deflection in the upper half of the loop means that, from side to side, the appearance changes radically, seeming to gape from one side whilst appearing to almost collapse from the other. This impression of a

downturn in the middle slowly disappears the further away one gets. At the far end of the park the distant loop appears as part of the skyline.