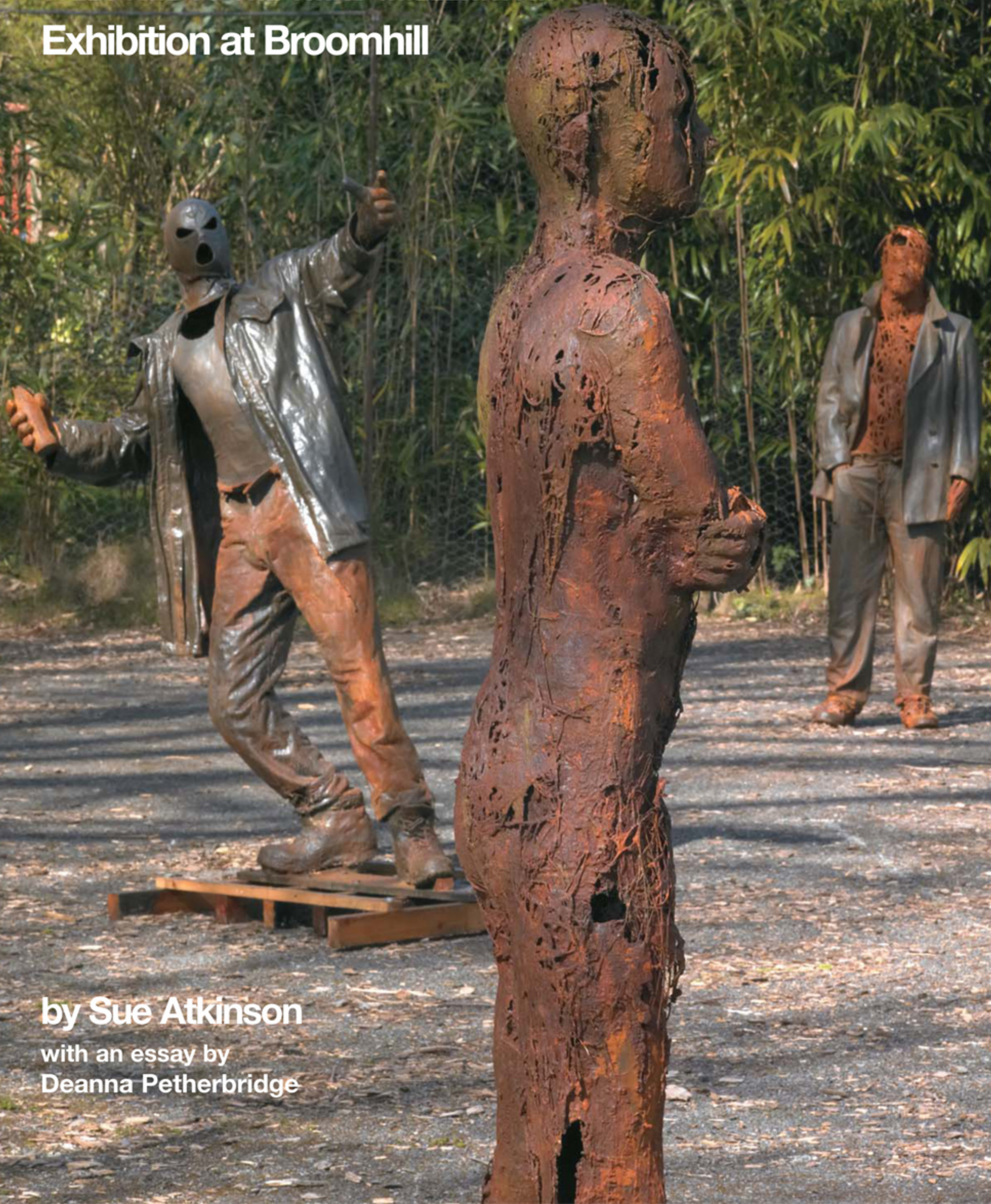


Mike Roles

WELCOME TO THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Exhibition at Broomhill



by Sue Atkinson

with an essay by
Deanna Petherbridge



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Mike Roles

WELCOME TO THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

All photographs by Sue Atkinson
except those in Biography which were taken by Mike Roles

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INTRODUCTION

The installation by Mike Roles of "Welcome to the Third Millennium" at Broomhill and the production of this catalogue are a celebration of the 10 energetic years that it has taken to create such a wonderful place.

Our first years at Broomhill were spent renovating the house, cutting tracks for paths and display spaces for sculpture. After surviving the first 5 years, we spent the second 5 working towards a permanent collection including Tenfold, a passionate promotion of the work of 10 contemporary figurative sculptors working in bronze.

This celebration year represents the starting point for the development of 3 sites in the garden which will enable us to present our audience with a unique series of exhibitions, showcasing the work of independent artists and the collective. "Welcome to the third millennium", Mike Roles' installation on The Court, is our first major show.

The cooperation with Mike Roles began 3 years ago, with a small display in the Garden drawn from a concept Mike was developing. I was touched by his dark poetic approach, and by the way he expresses that emotion in form. We offered Mike the enclosed space of the old tennis court for his installation and over a period of the last 3 years we have witnessed a dramatic change in the space with every new piece arriving.



• Mike and Rinus at Broomhill, 2007

While the serious philosophy behind Mike Roles' work is given full force by its siting in The Court, the extent of the Garden's allows us to show a great diversity of work. Broomhill is not created to make a statement, we like to introduce sculpture to our audience and hope they have an interesting experience.

Our very good friend the sculptor Giles Penny always says: "What you see is what you get." That credo is good enough for us. At Broomhill, all of our passions for art, food and quality of life have come together. Ten years ago we could not have dreamt that such a magical place could have been created and shared with thousands of enthusiastic art lovers and collectors. Aniet and I would like to welcome you here at Broomhill to share the magic and take from it the depth of experience you choose.

Rinus van de Sande
April 2007



Coming upon Mike Roles' exhibition "Welcome to the Third Millennium" in The Court at Broomhill provides a powerful, almost stark contrast to the overall feel of the sculpture garden. Set apart in its own secluded space this show interrupts the leisurely pace induced by the sensitive placing of numerous sculptors' individual works around the garden and confronts the viewer, drawing them into another, far less comfortable, world of sinister decaying figures and confrontational male forms.

Mike Roles' sculpture deals with the human condition in an uncompromising and sometimes disturbing manner. Seen for the first time, its emotional intensity and the apparent rawness of its commentary may come as a shock. But there is also a lighter side to Roles' work; a sense of irony and an element of black humour. The work has a strong narrative that draws us in and challenges us to reflect, to look back at ourselves, to put our own human strengths and weaknesses into context.

Roles' sculpture was introduced to Broomhill's owner, Rinus van de Sande, when he had recently begun work on the sculpture series "Collisions with Time", which takes a stoical perspective on man's implicit relationship with time while continuing to explore the existential concerns of the self and masculinity which had been the main focus of his recently completed PhD "Two Kinds of Being: An interface between photography and sculpture" (RCA 1998).



• "Welcome to the third Millennium" exhibition in The Court, Broomhill

Van de Sande immediately identified with the work: *"I can be very optimistic ... but there is also a dark hidden part of me and an awareness of the decline of humanity, of human values and something really struck me when I saw Mike's work for the first time that we have a very similar outlook on the darker side of life."*

In contemporary fine art the direct emotional expression of personal ideas is comparatively rare. As Van de Sande observes: *"In the 21st century art world, concept is king. Arguably, conceptually-based art now forms the establishment."* (Expression, Rinus van de Sande, Broomhill, 2006). Roles' work is the antithesis of this, the sculptures on show representing a culmination of many years development both in concept and execution. This way of working falls loosely within a tradition that has come to be known as Modernist in that it seeks to push forward the boundaries that confine the artist's visual vocabulary in the expression of an idea. While the core themes which concern Roles and inspire his work are always based around the vulnerability of the human condition, the methods he uses to convey

SCULPTURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Roles' use of the life cast as a basis for this series of sculptures evolved from his fascination with photography and the expressive potential of combining the photographic image with three-dimensional form. During the 1980's he became known for his Photo-constructions, of which a major exhibition entitled "Loves and Vanities" was held at the Royal Photographic Society in Bath in 1991. It was the first time the RPS had ever exhibited totally three-dimensional work.



• "Disi at Sunningdale" Photo-construction, 1986 3 views

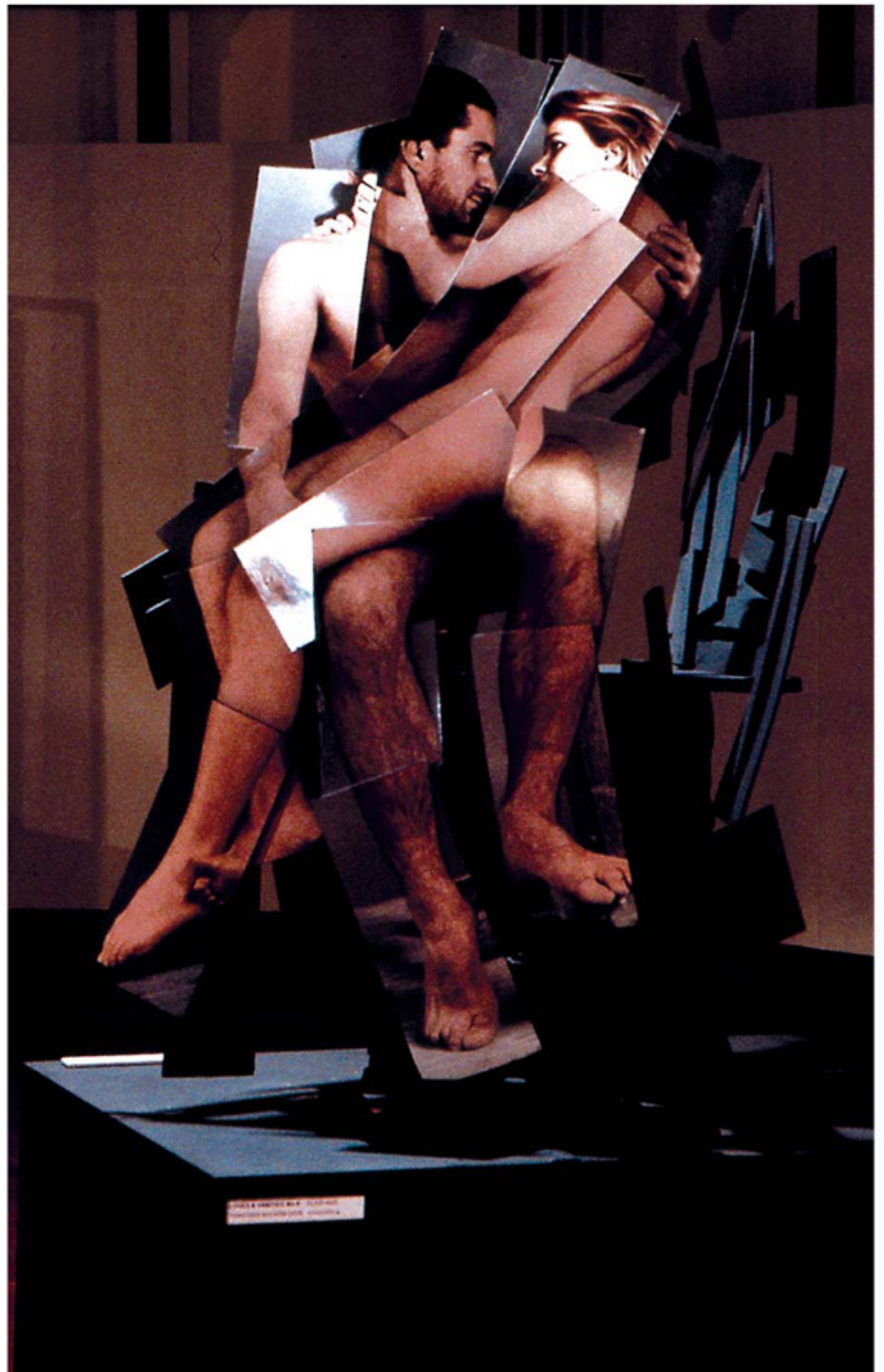


Photographic images taken from a range of viewpoints around his subjects were fragmented, mounted onto flat planes of shaped wood and reconstructed to produce life-sized structures often incorporating wood and glass panels. By breaking up the picture surface, the work challenged the accepted two-dimensional representation of space in a photograph, giving it a new context as a device for portraying spacial and sequential narrative outside of the confines of the picture frame.

The theme of "Loves and Vanities" concerned the perennial complexities of emotional relationships, exploring particularly the role of male sexuality within this context. Its subject-matter generally was nudes, uncluttered by the specific accoutrements of fashion. To Roles the expression of ideas was almost as important as the means he used to portray them. In "Loves and Vanities" a narrative was emerging. So strong was the new vocabulary of photographic sculpture, along with Roles' challenging subject-matter, that it demanded a great deal from its viewers : *"This exhibition is not easy viewing...."*

It hurls us into a world which demands participation.... The spacial consideration of the sculptor, the interpretative considerations of the painter and the representational considerations of the photographer are addressed simultaneously here... " Stimulating Sculptures, British Journal of Photography, 20th June 1991, pp.26

While the exhibition was very well received, Roles began to recognise that in this work his experimentation with technique was detracting from its meaning. His fascination with the ambiguous illusory qualities of the photographic image and the personal ideas he wanted to convey were dominated by the method of construction. For him one of the most enduring memories of the show was a pre-view night conversation with a local clergyman who confided to him succinctly: *"We are dealing with the same issues."*

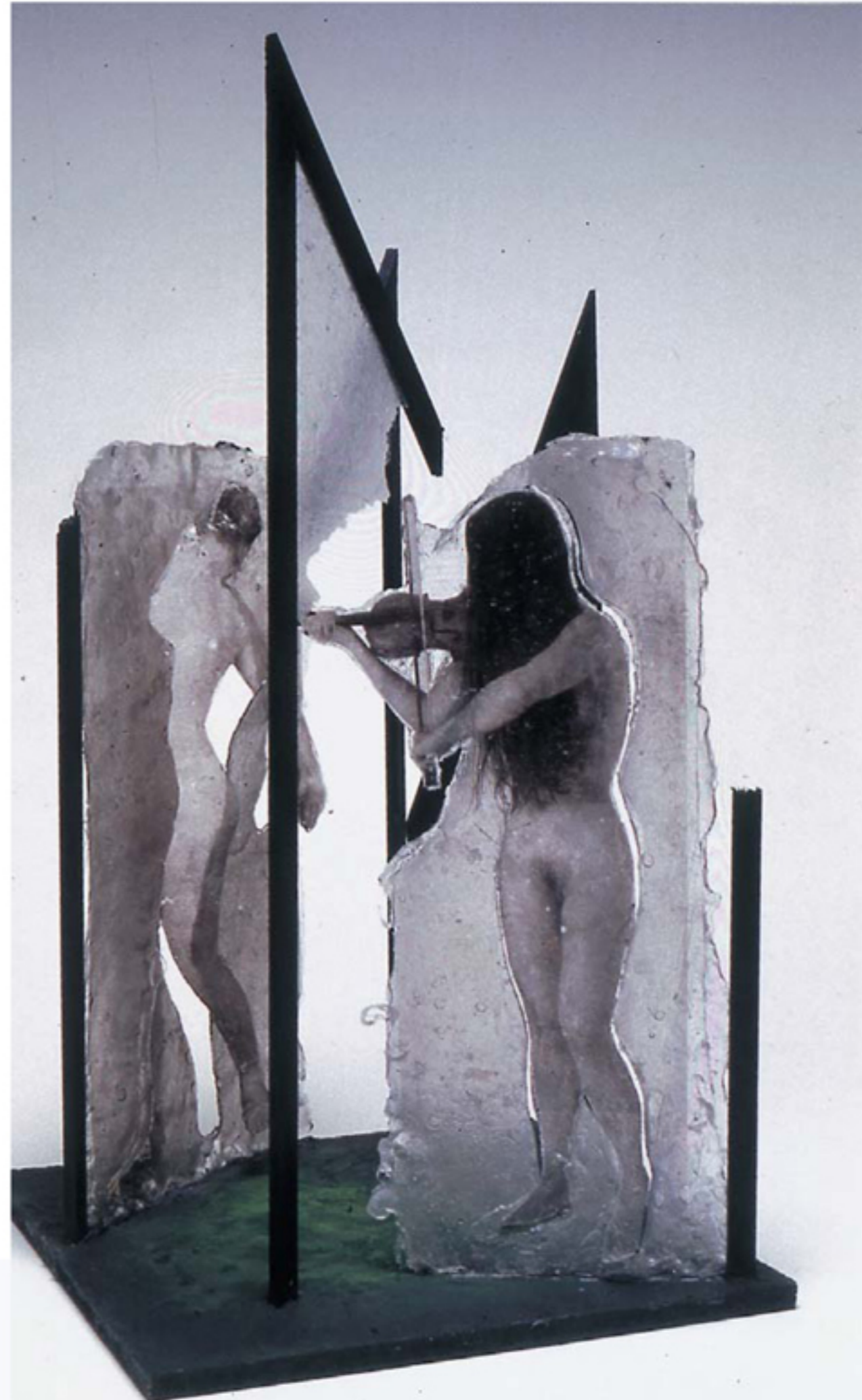


• "The Kiss" Photo-construction from the series "Loves and Vanities No.6", 1989 at Royal Photographic Society, Bath

Immediately Roles began to seek a more effective and less technique-conscious means of using the realism of the photograph in a sculptural context. "The Dance", 1991, from the series "Loves and Vanities" was among Roles' earliest experiments using photographic images outside the context of their normal paper support.

However, he wanted more than to liberate the photograph from being purely two-dimensional. In order to be able to manipulate its potential for expressing the essence of the human individual he had to liberate it from its purely representational function. With this objective in mind he turned to more sculptural means, in particular to the life cast which opened up an entire new area for experimentation.

• "The Dance", maquette, 1991 2 views



With photography and sculptural form equally crucial to the way in which he wanted to express himself, Roles applied to the RCA Sculpture Department to develop the potential for integrating two- and three-dimensional form. His doctorate: "Two Kinds of Being: An interface between photography and sculpture" was to be the department's first thesis that combined both practice and theory. The practical research centred on methods and materials that could be used to integrate photographic images within sculptural forms based on human figure casts from life. This was supported by written analysis and a thesis analysing the potential of the aesthetic vocabulary produced by the integration of the two media.

Roles determined to experiment using materials such as resins, fibreglass and plastic in conjunction with casts from the human form to produce free-standing figures into which he would incorporate photographic elements, fragments printed onto tissue and trapped in resin incorporated into the body forms.

• Experimental resin figures, male and female, 1995



Initially the technical problems he encountered - particularly making solid casts out of resins - proved prohibitive. However, turning his attention to working on a smaller scale with masks gave him more control.



• Collection of experimental masks and heads, 1993-4





• "Seated Nude no.1", 1996



• "Seated Nude no.1", 1996 detail of head

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"Seated Nude, No.1", 1995 represented the first serious attempt to apply the new methods and materials on a larger scale. Rather than representing the body as a solid form the figure was created as a hollow shell to which fragments of photographic images were applied.

Developing this theme further Roles became fascinated with the way in which the photograph could be used to represent inner mortal existence rather than dealing more generally with external existence and appearance. *"As I began to overcome the technical problems of integrating photograph and life cast simultaneously the new vocabulary I discovered acted as a catalyst to the expression of my personal conceptual concerns. I wanted to instil one within the other - the image trapped within the form - the cast as the objective, outer appearance, the photograph the inner being, ... the spirit and its inseparable memories."* Gradually the practical means Roles was employing were aiding, rather than distracting from, the end product.



• "Standing Man No 1", "Dangerous Spaces", with detail 1996



• "Standing Man No.3", "In other times" with detail 1996





• "Standing Man No.2" "Seroxat" ,1996



• "Standing Man No.2" detail of insides, 1996

This period was intensely productive for Roles, resulting in substantial changes in the nature of his work both in form and content. It would, however, prove to be a very challenging time as he sought to balance the physical and emotional demands of his educational career with the rigours of the doctorate. A period of depression experienced at this time was materially manifest in works such as "Standing Man, No.2", 1996 entitled "Seroxat" after an anti-depressant drug. Looking at work from this period in a broader context, its extremely personal nature reflects very clearly the emotional pressure Roles was experiencing.

Completing his comprehensive doctoral research, Roles consolidated a maturity in his work. The ideas he had for so long been striving to express were becoming clearly focussed into specifically existential concerns of the self and masculinity; themes that continue their importance into his current work.

COLLISIONS WITH TIME

In the intensely personal imagery of "Two Kinds of Being" the life cast had been used to represent the outer body, the shell inhabited by the inner being, represented by the photograph. Working increasingly with the cast Roles began to appreciate its expressive potential in its own right. For him its remarkable presence and authority is akin to a three-dimensional photographic representation yet with greater anonymity. Using the cast as a layer rather than in its traditional application, to create a solid form, implied a fragility to the figure, which equated to a suggestion of human frailty; the body as the protective but still vulnerable container for the spirit.

Experimenting with materials, particularly with metals, led Roles to explore the idea of applying rusting metal to the human form to suggest an inherent symbolism of the decay of the human body. This offered a new parallel for the passage of time and its impact on human life. Essentially this marked the point of departure from works in the series "Two Kinds of Being" and the beginning of "Collisions with Time". In using rusted metal Roles found a simplified vocabulary that echoed the development of his ideas, a transition from preoccupation with the conflict between inner and outer being to a concern with the transient nature of humans' existence on Earth. The more durable nature of these materials also permitted the work's placing in a greater diversity of location, much of it best-suited to being placed in an exterior, natural environment. The sculpture garden at Broomhill offered the ideal venue.

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• Rust detail "The Way things are", 1999



• Rust detail "That which is always present", 2001

WELCOME TO THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

After exhibiting various pieces by Roles around the garden at Broomhill, Rinus felt the works would have far greater impact when viewed together. The space afforded by The Court, a previously under-used tennis court, seemed the ideal venue, so that it was mutually agreed to use it for the installation of this special show "Welcome to the Third Millennium".

Approached from the direction of Broomhill house, The Court show is pre-empted by the siting in a shady, leaf-littered spot of "Impressions of Time", one of the earliest pieces in the "Collisions with Time" series, which serves well as an introduction to Roles' work at Broomhill. A prone figure constructed from



• "Impressions of Time" detail (head), 2001



• "Impressions of Time", 2001

rusting twisted sinews which seems to be decaying into the ground, was one of the first pieces of Roles' work Rinus saw and which appealed to him. He referred to it as "the grave".

"Time past and time future
What might have been
and what has been
Point to one end,
which is always present. " T S Elliot

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16 *"Time and its impact on all matter is starkly evident. We are a part of it, it is central to our routines, our cultures and our very existence.... yet the very nature of time itself is cause for conjecture explored by artists, scientists and philosophers alike. The focus of my work is the subjective understanding of the emotional struggle of an individual's confrontation with time as life's controller, transformer and ultimate assassin, from which there is no escape. All matter will change, grow, deteriorate and transform with time. Life, the planet, the universe and beyond have a finite existence which from an existential position pose some interesting questions regarding our own existence, our need to achieve, procreate and have some small speck of immortality in a world which is ultimately doomed."*

"'Collisions with Time' attempts to confront some of the dilemmas which the collision of existence with time creates, in particular the despair as the optimism of youth corrodes along with our physical being and the fragility of our mortality is made real."

Mike Roles, 2003



• "Reflections of the moon", 2000



• "Reflections of the moon" detail of male head, 2000

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Around 2000 a number of works explored the theme using rusted metal applied to the cast human form, firstly the group "Reflections of the Moon", 2000 and "Impressions of Time", 2001.

"Reflections of the Moon" takes two of the recurring main figures in Roles' vocabulary - the seated female and the standing male - and reduces them to figures of pathos. Their human form, represented by rusted broken planes of twisted metallic fibres, is sufficiently whole to represent individuals. However abstracted, they are, nonetheless, characters to whom we attribute human characteristics and emotions. The rust and piercing of the forms amplifies the abstraction of the figure from the real world yet it also serves to remind us of the transience of being.

A third piece, the flat panel with the single impression of a head, lies between the two figures adding an indefinite narrative to the relationship between the two complete forms. The face upturned towards the sky, the moon... is female, perhaps childlike, but there is little clue as to what she represents to these figures. We cannot even determine whether the man and woman are united in grief or separated by this third element; the only overwhelming impressions are those of sadness and hopelessness. As with all of Roles' work the grouping of figures serves to make the individuals more remote and alone, victims of circumstance and time. The use of materials is also hostile and menacing, particularly so in "Impressions of Time", 2001 where the sinuous nature of the construction of the figure is so redolent of decay that it almost evokes feelings of revulsion.

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• "Reflections of the moon" detail of head ground panel, 2000



• "That which is always present", 2001



• "The way things are", 1999



• "That which is always present", 2001



• "The way things are", 1999

In contrast, "That which is always present", 2001, uses the cast in a way that almost parallels Roles' earlier use of photographs in "Loves and Vanities". The two flat panels containing a single complete impression of the front and back of a male figure lean towards one another and are bound together by rusting wire.



In this piece and "The way things are" 1999, which is the most fragile and insubstantial of all the work in the series to date, the preoccupation appears to be with disintegration, the hollow, the incomplete. Unlike the more recent work in the "Collisions with Time" series the more esoteric titles Roles has given to these pieces make them seem at once more abstract and more intensely personal. However, "That which is always present " and "The way things are" in fact represent a universal statement on the nature of the human being restrained by the confines of a pre-determined genetic pattern, intending: "... to evoke a sense of reflection on the relationship between body and soul, time and decay, life and death." (2003) These two works also take experimentation with using the life cast to extremes. "That which is always present" uses the cast as the starting point to create shroud-like impressions of the front and back of the standing male figure in two flat panels reminiscent of three-dimensional photographs. Although the impressions are complete, the way in which the two panels are leaning together serves to exaggerate the trapped, vacuous and inconsequential existence of the figure. The piece challenges the idea of the person as a whole entity by representing the body as an empty container. The construction of the male figure "The way things are" suggests an inner strength with more emphasis being placed on the greater solidity of the head and upper body, while the supporting body structure seems almost to crumble away before the eyes.



• "When the music stops", 2001

In 2001 "When the music stops" marked a departure from the intensity of the work of the preceding years, returning to a favourite past theme of overtly sexual relationships. This piece is at once witty and disturbing, and its siting - slightly hidden from view in a recess among overgrown foliage at the edge of The Court - adds to the suggestion of a clandestine meeting for a brief, hurried sexual gratification. The emotional emptiness of the encounter is exemplified by the emptiness of the clothing; the unzipped trousers and high heeled shoes are at once narrative and symbolic. Here, the rusting nature of the piece, otherwise suggestive of haste and transience, alludes to the timeworn nature of sexual desire, something which crumbles and decays with the power of time yet is always a latent force in our lives. To Roles the driving force of sexual desire is recognised very much as a part of the controlling power of genetic forces. That the sexual acts are pleasurable makes us more vulnerable to being subsumed by the same instincts that drive all life forms to procreate. His fascination is with the way in which we exercise the opportunity we have to make conscious decisions about the sexual role we play in our society and the veneers and facades which overlay these instinctual urges.

Roles has often used representations of the female form as a vehicle for these ideas and in "I will always be here" he continues this theme - making use of the more finite cycle of female fertility in contrast to the overtly sexual symbol of female adornment as represented solely by the high-heeled shoes in "When the music stops". "I will always be here" is a rather tragic piece, made the more so by the ambiguity of its ironic title.

While the pose and clothing are sexually provocative, all are rusting and the body within decays as paralleled in Sylvia Plath's poem The Mirror:

"Now I am a lake.
A woman bends over me.
In me she has drowned a young girl,
and in me an old woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a
terrible fish."

Roles has been heavily criticised as sexist for his use of sexual themes. His intention is far from that. It is in fact the demands and expectations of the male and the way he responds to this predetermined role that are Roles' particular concern. It may account for why he often finds men seem more uncomfortable viewing his work than women. This response is particularly interesting in light of Rinus van de Sande's observations: *"One of the first images I saw was "History man" and he struck me as representing what is so laddish about English men - so very different from Dutch men who have no problem about being in touch with their more feminine side. In England there is a strong attitude, a pub culture of "lads, blokes" with which I have nothing in common which is epitomised in this piece of Mike's in a way that made me feel connected with it. Friendship and identity of males is very difficult in the UK. But a lot of artists have a very different character from the average English male."*



"I will always be here", 2001



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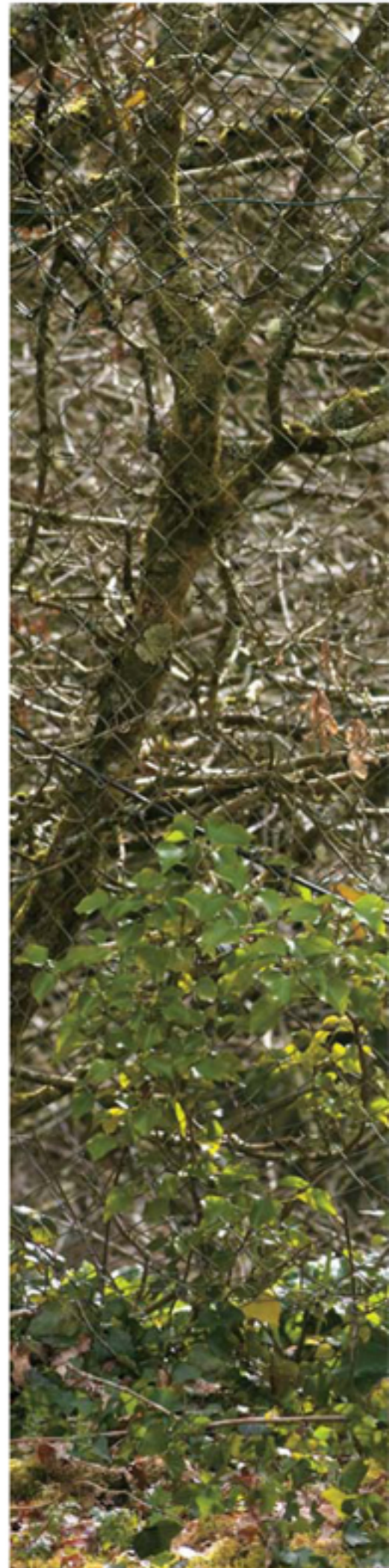
"The high heels and trousers piece ("When the music stops") deals with all the issues of being a man - through seduction to the fear of being declined. A lot of things fell into place when I saw this work." Interview August 2006

In the two 2001 pieces, "When the music stops" and "I will always be here" Roles makes another departure from his earlier method in that the sexual reference is implied purely by using clothes moulded into the shape of figures. This use of clothing was not entirely new in his work but Roles had deliberately avoided its specific identifying references while developing the vocabulary of "Two Kinds of Being" and its deeply personal representation of the individual in conflict with his or her inner self. During 2001 the work began to shift focus towards the conflict of the individual with the outer world. Here clothing became relevant to the way in which we relate and represent ourselves to one another. The use of clothes in subsequent sculptures also functions as a means of establishing identity within a specific cultural context and time.

• "I will always be here" detail of clothes, 2001



"When the music stops" detail of shoes, 2001



The symbolism of fashion is also a short-cut vocabulary for Roles. "Memories of times past", 2003 - apparently the most light-hearted in this exhibition - seems to poke fun at the importance we place on fashion as a part of our identity, not least under the influence of the United States.



• "Memories of times past", 2003



After 9/11

The events of 9/11 and their implications on the future of western civilisation as we know it, affected Roles profoundly. So much so that for a brief period he turned away from sculpture entirely and began a series of small paintings, based on newspaper images that portrayed extreme incidents of man's inhumanity to his own kind, including that of Guantanamo Bay which would later provide the inspiration for "The Warrior", 2004.

"The Journeyman", 2003, the first sculpture Roles produced post 9/11, appears, perhaps ironically, to be one of his most passive, a timeworn workman dressed in working clothes iconic of his time and culture. *"The Journeyman" was based on the character of a friend of my stepfather's during the early 1960's. He had worked his way around the world and seen the diversity of life in all its extremes. But he expressed no personal opinions on his experience, made no comment. It was as if he viewed the life unfolding before him as on a cinema screen.* While in this sculpture the exterior dress code tells the story of a the hard-working man of the world, the individual within rusts and decays with his story. "The Journeyman" is blameless, innocent. Yet equally he takes no responsibility and by that abdication of responsibility he is, by default, guilty.

The works from this time all adhere to this similar theme - central to Roles' existential or stoic philosophy - that it is the responsibility of the individual to make the most of their own life by awareness and a greater understanding of their potential as an evolutionary life form on earth and exercise the will to move forward rather than abdicate responsibility.



• "The Standing Man", 2005



• "The Standing Man" detail of head, 2005



"The Standing Man" detail of shoe and rose thorn foot, 2005

Like "The Journeyman", "The Standing Man", 2005 (which was actually reworked from the earlier piece "Seroxat") is an onlooker but unlike "The Journeyman" his stance, hand on hip, is impatient and slightly arrogant as he surveys the scene before him. The more solid formation of the head and his clothes and their treatment suggest a more educated man. Yet his human frailty is all too apparent, symbolised by a fragile tangle of rusted fragments that adhere to decaying chicken wire mesh.

WELCOME TO THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

The collection of work entitled "Welcome to the Third Millennium" is more a direct comment on contemporary life than any of Roles' previous work. Roles first brought together "The Journeyman", "The History Man" and "The Warrior" under this title at his ArcArt show in 2004.



• "Welcome to the "Welcome to the Third Millennium" at ArcArt Mike-ArcArt 2004

The third millennium was heralded as a new beginning and a new opportunity for change and for mankind to make the world a better place.... It did change, dramatically, and humanity appeared to suffer some kind of radical inversion and the hoped-for future evaporated into a vision of destruction, violence and a regrouping of ideologies, set against a background of a planet no longer able to support the life which inhabits it." (intro to ArcArt show, London, 2004)





• View with "The Warrior" 2004



• "Welcome to the Third Millennium" The Court, Broomhill, 2007

The circumstances and events surrounding the 9/11 massacre served to focus Roles' ideas at this time but the work is not a meant as a specific comment on this period: *"Compare Welcome to the Third Millennium to the work of the war photographers of the past 150 years, to the paintings of Goya, the sculptures of ancient Greece and beyond. Welcome to the Third Millennium could easily relate to any of these periods. In essence referring the the Third Millennium is an irrelevance except that it positions a record of humanity's inability to evolve from its past."*

This exhibition at Broomhill represents an entirely new concept for Roles - largely inspired by the decision to place the work in The Court. Roles has used the opportunity of this large but secluded space to arrange pieces conceived within the series "Collision with Time" in a manner akin to composing a theatrical narrative with emotional dynamic between the characters.

As an exhibition venue the area of The Court is very unusual. While the space itself is a confined rectangular shape - as are most galleries - its setting makes it quite unique in that the area is not actually totally confined. The surrounding environment provides a more extended and changing backdrop to the exhibition than any indoor space; likewise the lighting, hour to hour, day to day, month to month, is far more varied. It is as a small world, apart.

To the viewer the entrance to The Court can be likened to a stage on which is set a tragic play, frozen for a moment in time to which he or she is invited to wander among the actors and ponder on the roles they play. Sixteen works, completed since 2000, comprise the ensemble. Each is to be seen and appreciated as an individual work in its own right but the arrangement of the pieces is carefully choreographed so that each plays a part in the whole, creating a greater energy.

As the viewer is confronted by this silent band of players Roles' empathy with Shakespeare is readily evident: *"Whether performed in togas or modern pin-striped suits, the stories are just as relevant both in content and its portrayal of the human condition. They slot easily into any time, any culture, anywhere. It's all there: love, compassion, greed, passion, lust, jealousy, ambition and betrayal."*

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The exhibition was first installed in The Court in 2005 but, true to Roles' way of working, it has been constantly evolving since that time. As pieces have been changed and added, so the scene has been reset and each time a new narrative evolves echoing Roles current preoccupation. In arranging the sculptures his consideration is not only for the way light plays upon them but every slight change of angle suggests a new relationship between the figures, building up positive and negative energies as one "character" becomes dominant or subordinate to the adjacent.

Central to the narrative in "Welcome to the Third Millennium", are the most recent works. Three main characters embody the human condition; "The Standing Man", "The History Man" and "The Warrior", to which has recently been added "The Dissident", 2007.



• "The History Man", 2003

Most diminutive of all the works, "The Warrior" forms the focal point of the exhibition. Thinking it would be evident to all, Roles based this piece on the heavily used newspaper images of detainees at the Guantanamo Bay prison camp. The figure kneels, submissively, head bowed, yet here he is the centre of attention to which all the other figures turn as silent watchers.



• "The History Man", 2003 and "The Warrior", 2004

To the left stands "The History Man", representing: "... the powerful and ambitious characters who have shaped history." To the right "The Standing Man" looks on, knowing but withdrawn, an idealist, a philosopher, a politician whose words fall on the deaf ears of the protagonists.

The energy created by the placing of these three works in relation to one another and the realism of their presence invites a wealth of potential interpretation. This could even represent a political statement but it was not conceived as such. Each individual piece evolved purely in its own right and it is the arrangement of the sculptures as a form of installation within The Court that has helped generate enormous new narrative possibilities.



• L to R: "The Warrior", 2004 "The History Man", 2003 and "The Standing Man", 2005

Roles has been fascinated and stimulated by the new dynamic of this form of presentation and in many respects it inspired the latest addition to the ensemble, a balaclava-clad, bottle-hurling figure, "The Dissident", which he feels completes the story.



"The Dissident" contrasts with the largely static poses of the earlier works, conveying a sense of movement and energy that both cuts right through and unites the scene. Positioned towards the back of the ensemble, his pose and its threatening implication for all the other characters, is totally redolent of the present fears and anxieties of contemporary post 9/11 and 7/7 society as we are shaken from the confidence of a settled society into a future of fears and uncertainty. Taking the analogy of the stage further, the impact of this piece is all the greater in that his threat is hidden from the view of the other figures, save that of "The History Man" who would be the one figure who looks prepared to meet his challenge.

With "The Dissident" in situ the stage is fully set in 2007 with the foreground as the present and episodes of past and remembered life receding into the distance to be discovered as we wander through the show. Each turn reveals a new detail, a new perspective on the broader picture. But in this narrative the past is not complete; "The Dissident"'s disruptive presence disturbs the otherwise static scene, warning against complacency, a provocation of awareness of our own strengths and weaknesses.

• "The Dissident", 2007 Broomhill

Mike Roles' work is innately human in the physical and emotional conditions it seeks to portray, poignantly reminding us through its evocative use of method and materials of the fragility of life within the great machine of marching time. This exhibition does not confine its subjectmatter; the passive, sorrowful ensemble "Reflections of the Moon" and ironic sexual overtones of "When the music stops", are works of equally enduring relevance while they sit comfortably within the contemporary context of the emotive irony of the most strident and menacing sculptures. All challenge the viewer, reflecting the question of how each of us as an individual can take responsibility for the role we play in this great theatre. "Welcome to the Third Millennium" is an extraordinary contemporary exhibition and one which will have lasting resonance.



"The Dissident", 2007

"The Dissident", 2007, rear view, The Court, Broomhill



MIKE ROLES AND BROOMHILL

Extracts from an interview with Rinus van de Sande, 2006

In working with Rinus van de Sande at Broomhill, Mike Roles has been able to produce this exhibition through being offered a freedom of artistic expression seldom permitted in the UK. This is due to Van de Sande's individual outlook on showing art at Broomhill.

"Broomhill's collection is an "exhibition collection" as opposed to a commercial collection and is put together with personal taste, not a particular statement. In the SW of England there are no (other) exhibition galleries as in Holland. Art is an urban thing and Holland is an urban society of 14 million people with a very different lifestyle from the UK. Unfortunately, in the UK, London is the centre of the art world so it's very difficult to get a critic to come here but the work - for example - Mike's work - is just as good as in London."

32 "Most people in the UK are fascinated by fame and celebrity artists.... The art world is dominated by financial concern whether overtly as in the case of commercial galleries or through the public-sector via the Arts Council.... I look to a piece of art as an entity in its own right - I don't expect every piece by a good artist to be faultless and don't put a value on it because of that. There are galleries selling sketches by famous artists for huge prices just because they are by those artists. That is just commerce; it's ridiculous but in the UK people accept this. This attitude is just to do with money. That is why it's really important to me to do something which is free from commercial restraint allowing me to bring in and show something fresh and new."

"(At Broomhill) there is no overall theme. Things develop as they come along and I'm happy to find people and do something with them as individuals. In showing artists work at Broomhill I am not interested to explain things. People can see what they want. Mike brought some text with him to put with his work - that was his choice. His installation needs some time for consideration. Yet it is quite funny to sometimes see people moving through the whole garden in 15 minutes. If people don't get the message in such powerful work then there's not much hope."

"The beauty of Broomhill is that the people who visit are in a domestic environment but where they are surrounded by things they don't have at home. They can't sit and eat without noticing and talking about the art/ paintings around them. Broomhill is not a museum - a white space - the whole tableau is a different one."

"Broomhill gives people access to things they've not experienced before and people used to going to museums find it an interesting experience. For myself, the main thing is that I show what I feel is strong work - what appeals to me. I don't have to justify anything."



Working sketches for "The Journeyman"



CLONING AND CONCEPTUALISING: THE DUALITY OF MIKE ROLES' FIGURATIVE SCULPTURE

Deanna Petherbridge



It gives me great pleasure to participate in this catalogue of work by Mike Roles, to re-familiarise myself with sculptural pieces which I know, and to see an accumulation of new work in the extraordinary installation at Broomhill park.

I became very involved with Mike's practice when he was researching his doctorate at the Royal College of Art, and what I admired then was not only the determination with which he moved from photography to sculpture – no easy matter in a mature practice – but also the troublesome issues of identity, masculinity and sexuality which he addressed in his work, as well as wider social and political concerns. Self-reflexive issues of identity and gender were very important in the 1990's – and indeed remain the starting point of much contemporary conceptual art; but at the time such questions were usually being interrogated within the context of feminism or so-called 'queer studies' or addressed under the rubric of post-colonial racial 'otherness'. Mike came to them from a very different position, as a mature male artist, professional photographer and teacher who suddenly had the motivation to confront very personal issues which had previously been un-acknowledged in his oeuvre.

The need to think about self-as-subject was probably the result of the artist's switch from photography to sculpture, from selected and manipulated images of the 'other' to the making of castings based on a real body. Although Mike Roles has not used his own body as direct subject, he has repeatedly made castings of another, younger man, whom he has come to regard as an alter-ego. In a deeply interesting set of interim pieces, Mike embedded two-dimensional images within transparent resin busts or suspended photographic prints within hollow body castings, bringing together object and subject in a novel manner. The contrast between the robust, yet sometimes torn and shredded outer casing of a body with flat and ghostly images of alternative or potential being-ness (for example a print of a female face within a masculine shell) was thought provoking. Increasingly these works illuminated and sought to reconcile the often unacknowledged dialectic between two and three-dimensional image-making, proposing a material fusion of flat and volumetric modes as analogues of the unbridgeable gap between self and other, artist and onlooker, made and found imagery.

This superimposition of different modes of art (the combination of manipulated 'hands-on' artifacts within ideas-based contexts) through analogies of process, continues in Mike's present work. Although he has made castings of female bodies (as for the seated figure in *Reflections of the Moon* 2000) generally Mike uses the same male model for the expressive army of figures which now participate in the open-air installation at Broomhill. This factor (as with the body castings of Antony Gormley)¹ immediately interjects the potency of individuality and /...

¹ Although it is obviously much more straight forward to make a cast of another person, sculptor Antony Gormley has developed complicated procedures for making castings of his own body, with the help of studio assistants.

CLONING AND CONCEPTUALISING: THE DUALITY OF MIKE ROLES' FIGURATIVE SCULPTURE

by Deanna Petherbridge

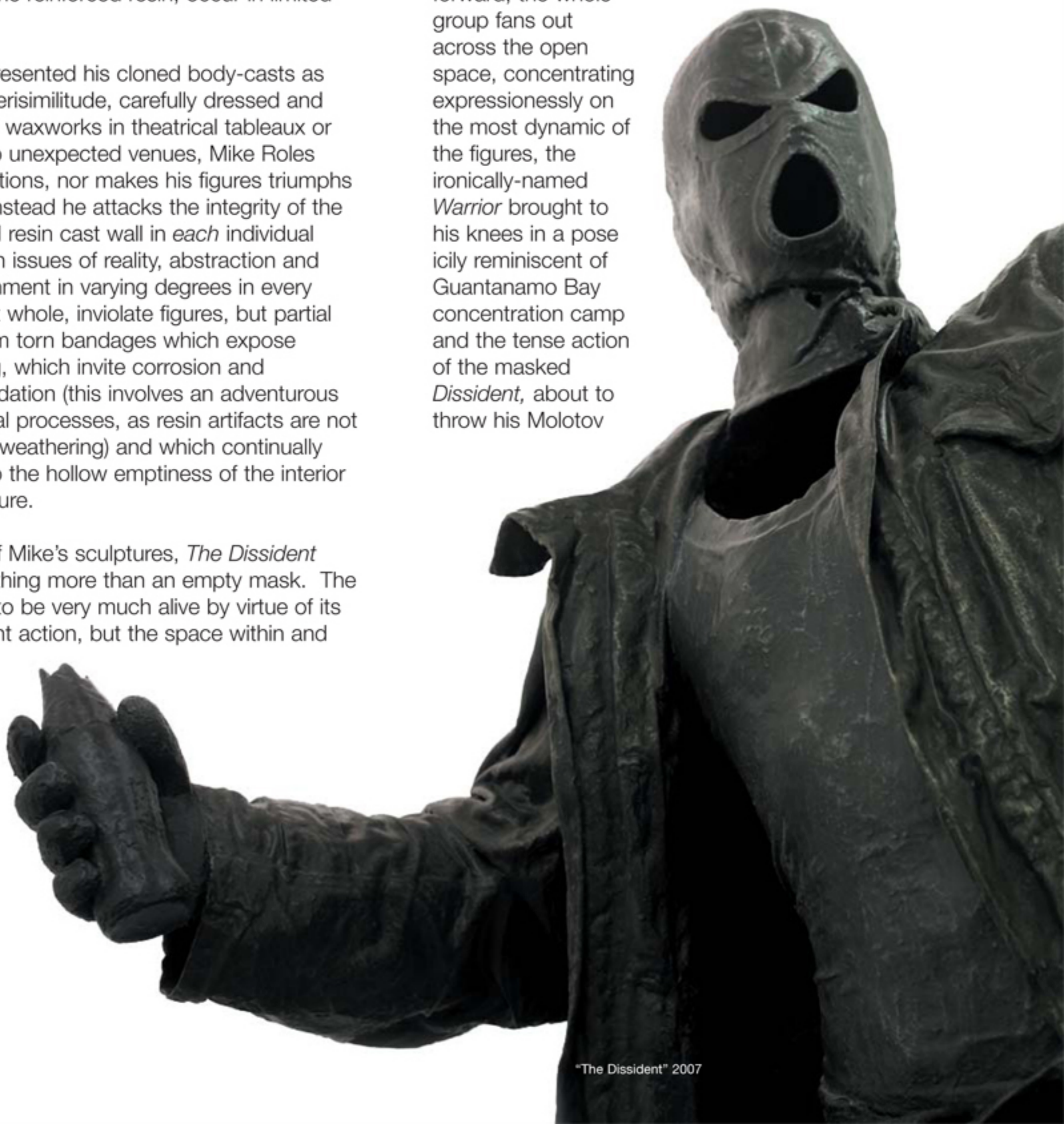
identity into a mechanical process designed to deny these very matters. A cast is generally a process of undifferentiated similitude; a cloning operation where mechanistic likeness is the prime motivation and changes are negative issues of degradation of the mould. Cast pottery or modern digital printing, for example, depend on production lines where the four thousandth artefact or print is as crisp and clear as the first. A very large edition of a crafted and mass-produced artefact is designed to keep prices down, and therefore has a different economic and symbolic value from a unique, or semi-unique, art work. In art production, on the other hand, generally reproductive processes are monitored in relation to important considerations of originality, ownership (autograph), uniqueness and value. It is for these reasons that the nineteenth century bronze casts of Rodin's *Burgers of Calais*, for example, or the hyper realistic body-casts of American pop-artist George Segal (1924-2000) in plaster-of-Paris or polychrome reinforced resin, occur in limited editions.

Unlike Segal, who presented his cloned body-casts as disturbing icons of verisimilitude, carefully dressed and posed like traditional waxworks in theatrical tableaux or casually inserted into unexpected venues, Mike Roles neither produces editions, nor makes his figures triumphs of realistic casting. Instead he attacks the integrity of the fibre-glass reinforced resin cast wall in *each* individual piece, and deals with issues of reality, abstraction and technical accomplishment in varying degrees in every work. These are not whole, inviolate figures, but partial envelopes made from torn bandages which expose processes of making, which invite corrosion and environmental degradation (this involves an adventurous extension of technical processes, as resin artifacts are not usually subjected to weathering) and which continually alert the spectator to the hollow emptiness of the interior space of the cast figure.

In the most recent of Mike's sculptures, *The Dissident* 2006, the face is nothing more than an empty mask. The figure might appear to be very much alive by virtue of its engagement in violent action, but the space within and

around the balaclava (indelibly saturated with memories of Northern Ireland to a British spectator) implicate the hollowness of the gesture as an important signifier of the ensemble. The homology between means and meaning is very direct in this work; in other of Roles' cast pieces, where the front of the bodies are more complete than their back-views, more complex spectatorial engagement is involved. This discrepancy between finished reality and unfinish as a sign of making and process, constitutes one of the disturbing factors of the installation of figures in the decommissioned tennis court at Broomhill, ironically entitled *Welcome to the Third Millennium*. Through this grouping of mainly solitary figures, Mike Roles seems to propose that the past always repeats itself, and we can never escape the cycles of cruelty, barbarism and misfortune.

Facing resolutely forward, the whole group fans out across the open space, concentrating expressionlessly on the most dynamic of the figures, the ironically-named *Warrior* brought to his knees in a pose icily reminiscent of Guantanamo Bay concentration camp and the tense action of the masked *Dissident*, about to throw his Molotov



"The Dissident" 2007

CLONING AND CONCEPTUALISING: THE DUALITY OF MIKE ROLES' FIGURATIVE SCULPTURE

by Deanna Petherbridge

cocktail. Viewed from behind, however, each one of the static figures on the periphery is decaying, skeletal or shattered. Their initial impact as passive participants in an endless cycle is directly contradicted, therefore, by the movement of the spectator through the installation. And the realism of their clothes and human actions are contradicted by incomplete body parts, or wounded skins that allow our gaze to penetrate into the very core of the figure.

Uncanny presences

To find oneself next to a life-sized sculpture is always an eerie event, evoking all the disquiet of Freud's formulation of the uncanny; the shock of "something which is secretly familiar [but] which has undergone repression and then returned from it." ²



To find oneself within an installation of life-size figures, for example, confronting the multiplicity of the 3rd century BC terracotta warriors of the Qin Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi, is to exaggerate this effect into theatrical dimensions. Each of the stylised Chinese figures of the well-known *Terracotta Army* is obviously made of inert clay and is far from real, but to wander amongst them, even if only by proxy in a photograph, is to know uncannily that the moment one turns one's gaze away, each clone might shuffle or blink. The likeness of scale to the spectator's own body, the intensity of a gaze that mirrors our own, the very wearability of shoes and clothes causes these inanimate simulacra to vibrate on the brink of animation when our attention ceases to fix them. Resemblance and difference are caught within a tense and indissoluble reciprocity, capable of making the manufactured appear to be alive, and the alive to be transfixed by a shuddering moment of disquiet.

In his famous 1919 essay on *The Uncanny*, Freud discusses the re-animation of the dead, dolls, automata (particularly Hoffman's tale of Dr. Coppelius) and the uncanny effects of the 'double' or divided and interchanged self. He cites Otto Rank's work on the double, as an insurance against the destruction of the ego, with its counterpart in the language of dreams. Involuntary repetition, suggests Freud "surrounds what would otherwise be innocent enough with an uncanny atmosphere, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable when otherwise we should have spoken only of 'chance.'" ³ By using repeated, but differentiated casts of one particular male body, Mike Roles has long inhabited this charged territory of the double. To visit his London studio is always an intense matter, because of the life-size sculptures which tremble on the edge of one's consciousness when the door is opened ; or who call forth an involuntary gasp of surprise when one suddenly turns round with the creepy feeling that someone or something is looking at one.

When those individual *presences* from the studio space are transposed into an open space they continue to exercise an uneasy spell over the spectator. Far from being diluted by fresh air, backdrops of trees and shrubs, and the reassuring sounds of nature, their psychological uncanniness is augmented by the changing light, the in-built processes of rusting and decomposition and the quiet accumulations of leaves. A growing numbers of figures are mysteriously taking up residence in this theatrical space and the warning to visitors to Broomhill hotel and park is: look out for surprises when you go down to the woods today.

² Sigmund Freud *The 'Uncanny' (Das Unheimliche 1919)* The Penguin Freud Library, Vol.14, general ed. James Strachey, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p 368

³ Freud [1985] kp. 360



• Portrait of Mike in his studio/gallery, London 2007

BIOGRAPHY

1940'S - 1950'S

Born in London
before moving to a small village in Buckinghamshire

Only child of Ella Dollery and David Roles

Age 7, given first camera
and learned to photograph friends, family, landscape

From age 7 missed formal schooling
as result of illness and parental negligence

Taught himself to paint and draw

Various employment including apprenticeship
to two High Wycombe photographers

Worked as magazine photographer for Bugle Press

Missed opportunity to work for fashion
photographer Terence Donovan due to lack of driving license

Worked as stills photographer in film industry for 1 year

Parents divorced

Studied GCE's at night school

1960'S

1962-63
High Wycombe School of Art, Intermediate NDD

1963-66
St Martin's School of Art, Sculpture and Painting NDD

1962-66
Paid for his art education by driving trucks in vacations
and free time

Read Colin Wilson's "The Outsider"

Discovered work of Camus,
Tennessee Williams, Nietzsche, Sartre.

Was also deeply affected by the music of Stravinsky,
Bartok and the Avant garde.

Paintings influenced by Pop Art, Op Art
and decadence of the 'swinging '60's'

1966-68
Worked as mural designer for George Wimpey and Co.

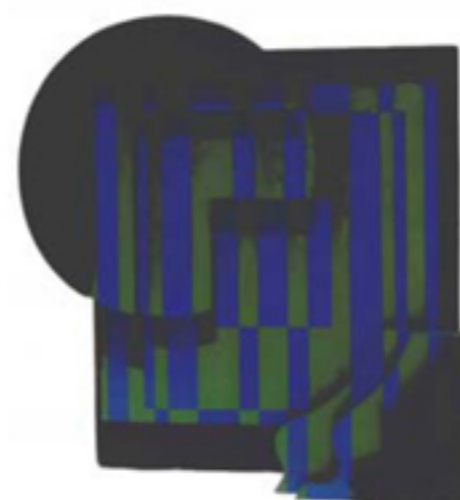
1967
Married Diana Coleman and moved to Windsor, Berkshire

1968-69
Worked as filling station attendant and freelance photographer



• "Granny", Oil painting 1963

• "The Life Room", Oil sketch 1965



• "Bluebell Woods",
Acrylic painting/construction 1966 -



• "Disi", Conte and wash drawing 1969



• "Go on Surprise me",
Enamel paint on wood, 1974



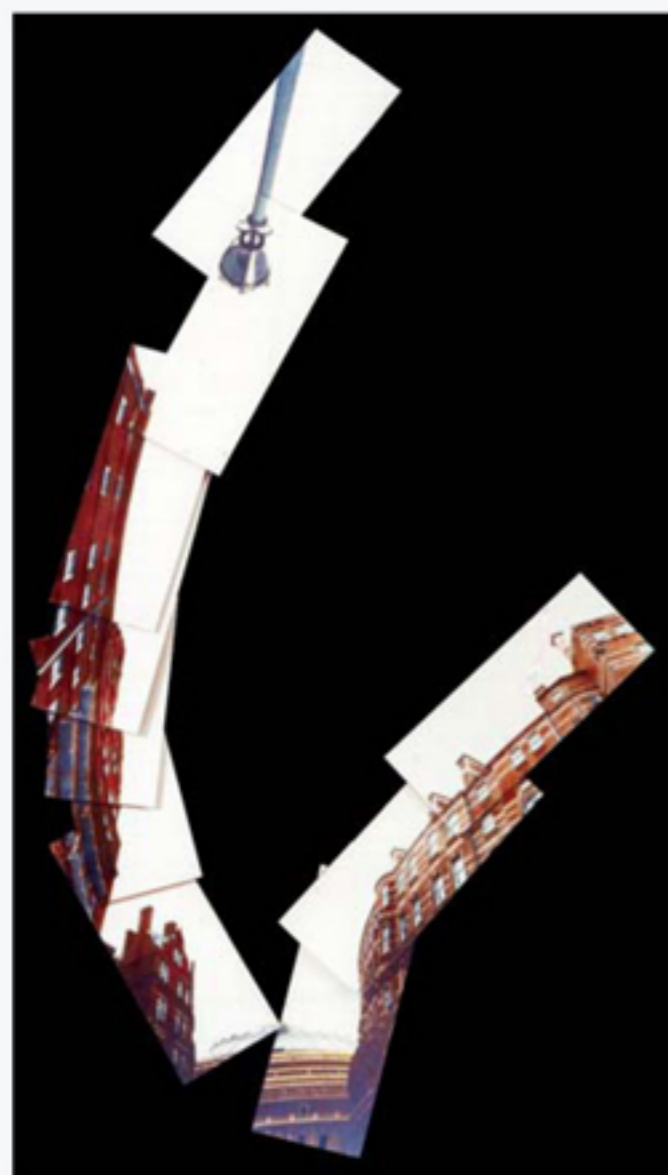
• "Mary-Jo Kowalski",
Painted cast and photo 1977



• "Love is", Painting 1974



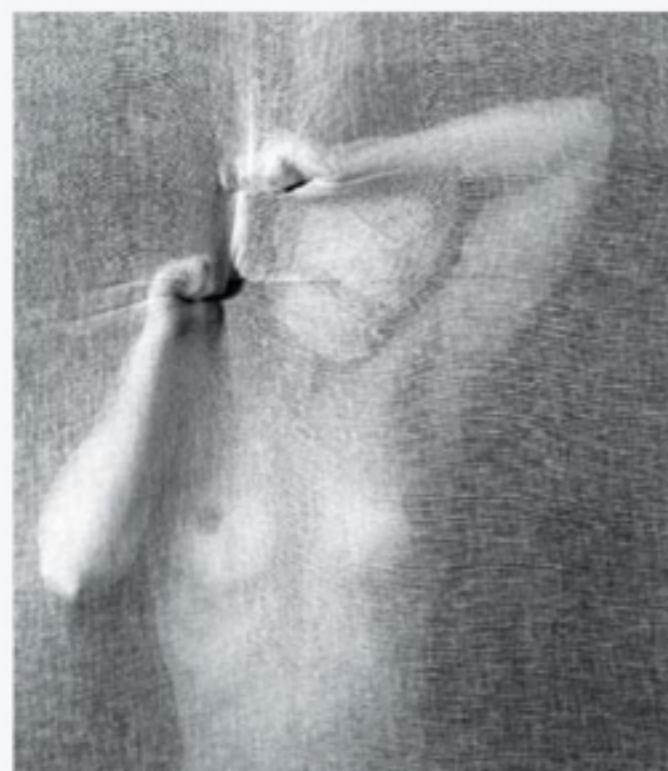
• "Hang Up",
Paint, plaster, photo and real
objects 1978



• "Albert Hall Mansions",
Photo-construction 1982

Bottom left
• "Chrysalis",
Photograph on linen 1982

Bottom right
• "Nude in a Chair",
Photo-construction 1987



1970's

Painting exhibited at IBA exhibition, Mall Galleries, London

Began teaching art, art history and photography
to Further Education students in Windsor, Berkshire

1973-77

Polytechnic of Central London

Diploma in Professional Photography

Began making "Photo-Constructions" which incorporated
photographs with constructed elements, casts and real
objects, exhibited at Concourse Gallery, London, 1977
Exhibition closed by feminist protesters

Creative Camera Gallery, London 1978 and
Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool 1979

Set up Mike Roles Studios with
former student/photographer Sue Atkinson

Moved to Sunningdale, Berkshire

Appointed Head of Photography 1979
at West Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education

1977-79 Visiting lecturer at University of Westminster,
London

1980's

1981-83

Royal College of Art, Master of Arts, Photography

Continued developing "Photo-Constructions"
in colour and black and white

Produced the sequence "Chrysalis"

Began series "Loves and Vanities"

1986-88

Head of Department of Foundation and Part-Time BA
courses in Fine Art and Critical Studies,
St Martin's School of Art, (University of the Arts), London

1988

Appointed Half-Time Principal Lecturer in Photography,
Deputy Director of Studies, BA Hons.,
London College of Printing ((University of the Arts), London

1986-90

Visiting lecturer (Photography) Royal College of Art, London,

Commissions for Photo-Constructions included: 3M (UK)
Plc, GB Aero Components Ltd, Liberty, London,
various private.

Exhibitions included: RCA Summer Exhibition, London
1983, Brixton Gallery, London (Mixed) 1984, Omell Galleries,
London (Solo) 1984, Hazelroyd Gallery, Bradford (Mixed)
1984, Hamilton's, London - Finalist Benson & Hedges Gold
Award, 1985, The Ffotogallery, Cardiff, (Mixed) 1985,
Contemporary Arts Gallery, Windsor, (Solo) 1987, Henry
Moore Gallery (RCA), London (Mixed), 1989, Special
Photographers Gallery, London (Mixed) 1989

1990's

1992-98

Royal College of Art, London,
Doctor of Philosophy, Sculpture School

Visited Pompeii and inspired by the petrified remains of figures

Suffered a bout of depression
out of which grew the ideas for "Two Kinds of Being"

1994-2000

Produced series "Two Kinds of Being"
using photography with sculpture based on life casts

1995

Relocated studios
(ARC Studios/now Atkinson Roles Company) to central London

1994-6

Responsible for writing/developing
MA Photography course at the London Institute

1997

Left lecturing to concentrate on sculpture and completing PhD

Consultancies and visiting lectures:

1990-95 Royal College of Art, London, visiting lecturer.

1993-96 (Photography), Lancaster University, Lancaster.

1996 Fachhochschule, Dortmund, Germany, visiting lecturer. 1998

Cheltenham and Gloucester College of HE, visiting lecturer.

1998/2000

London Photographic Awards, Judge

Commissions included:

Cogent for Whyte and Mackay Whisky,
private commission for three standing figures,
Lloyd's Millennium Commission

Exhibitions included:

Gallerie de L'Image, London (Solo), 1990, Espace Guyot, Paris (Solo),
1990, Atlantis Fine Arts, London "Loves and Vanities" (Solo), 1991, Royal
Photographic Society, Bath "Loves & Vanities" (Solo), 1991, Portfolio
Gallery, London "The Female", (Mixed), 1991, Special Photographers
Company, London (Mixed), 1991, Portfolio Gallery, London (Mixed),
1991, Portfolio Gallery, London, "Out of the Frame", (Solo), 1992, RAM
Gallery, Rotterdam (Rotterdam Foto-Bienale) (Mixed), 1992, Aberdeen
City Art Gallery, "Fotofeis" (Scottish International) (Mixed), 1993, Royal
College of Art, London, "'98 Sculpture Show" (Mixed), 1998, Gallery 1990
+, London, "Pure" (Mixed), 1999

2000's

2000 Mother died.

Completed and installed Lloyd's Millennium Commission

2000

Began purely sculptural series "Collisions with Time"

2004

Evolution of "Welcome to the Third Millennium" which included works
inspired by the 9/11 attacks and subsequent escalation in world violence.

Produced series of small paintings based on newspaper images

2004

Founded ArcArt Gallery at studios in Grafton Mews, London

2004 inaugural exhibition at ArcArt with painter Alan Barker

Other exhibitions included:

The Printroom, London, 2000,

ArtParks International, 2001/02/03/2004,

The Hannah Peschar Sculpture Garden, Summer Show,

Ockley, England, 2000/01/02,

The Royal Society of British Sculptors, Summer Show, London, 2002/2005,

Broomhill Sculpture Park. Devon England, 2003-present,

"20/20" a Retrospective of the past 20 years work

with Alan Barker, ArcArt, London, 2006

2000-2003 Visiting Lectures: Royal College of Art, London

(Drawing workshops and lectures to PhD students)



• Espace Guyot, Solo exhibition, 1990



• RAM Gallery exhibition, 1992



• Royal College of Art Sculpture show, 1998



• "Loves and Vanities" at the Royal Photographic Society, 1991



Above • Guantanamo Bay, Oil painting, 2003

Below • "The Game", 2006



Above • Lloyd's Millennium Commission, "ImageSculpture"

Below • "In Search of Tomorrow"





Opening Times

May-Oct • Wed-Sun • 11:00 -16:00

Nov-Apr • Thu-Sun • 12:00 -16:00

16h00 is the last admission time

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