

## On Her Majesty's Splendid Sculpture

An Interview with Philip Jackson,  
Sculptor, West Sussex, United Kingdom



**EDITORS' NOTE** After attending the Farnham School of Art in Surrey (England), Jackson worked at a commercial sculpture studio before founding his own studio in 1978. A fellow and former vice president of the Royal Society of British Sculptors, he has exhibited widely throughout Europe and the United States, and his work graces numerous public and private collections worldwide.

**As one of the world's leading sculptors, you were commissioned to create the new statue of Her Majesty the Queen.**

Yes. This was the first public sculpture of the queen created during her reign, so it was quite a responsibility. In October 2001 the Crown Estate asked four artists to compete for the commission, and by May 2002 I had prepared my design, which included not only the sculpture itself, but also the base and landscaping of the area it's going into – the eminence of Queen Anne's Ride in Windsor Great Park. If you're in Windsor Castle, you can look across this wonderful expanse of English countryside that rises up to a ridge, the eminence. There are two rides leading up to this eminence: the

Long Walk, which features a vast sculpture of King George III; and Queen Anne's Ride, the highest part of which includes the queen's sculpture. The sculpture itself is one and a half times life-size, on a base that's nearly 10 feet high. The entire piece is about 23 feet high and portrays the queen as she was in the early 1700s.

**Who did the unveiling? The queen herself?**

Yes.

**You must have been nervous.**

The queen has unveiled other pieces I've created, but this is the first time she unveiled a sculpture of herself, and I was concerned about whether she would like it. In addition, Prince Philip was there. So there were many aspects to this project that made me more nervous than usual.

**And most of your subjects are people?**

Yes. I'm a figurative sculptor who basically creates two types of work: public sculptures, which we've touched on; and gallery sculptures, which are the product of my imagination and are usually rendered in a more impressionistic style. When I create the gallery pieces, I go to the studio with a head full of ideas and translate them into maquettes. Then, if

the ideas are good, I create them in larger sizes. Once they're complete, they're shown in galleries and exhibitions around the world, and people buy from these.

Public sculptures, on the other hand, always come via commissions. The people who commission them generally know very little about sculpture, but they're very enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the people or events they want to commemorate. When they come to me, I do a lot of research on the subjects and then advise them on how they can best be commemorated as sculptures.

**Many of your gallery works have appreciated tremendously over the years. You must be very proud of this.**

First and foremost, I hope people buy my sculptures because they like them; that gives me the greatest satisfaction and pleasure. But if they're a good investment, that's great, too. Ultimately, I want people to see my sculptures and be entranced by them. I particularly enjoy it when people who've never looked at sculpture before get exposed to it by looking at my work. That makes me feel like I'm doing something significant.

**Many sculptors will sculpt a piece and then make limited editions of 5 or 10 of them. Do you make limited editions as well?**

My public sculptures are all unique pieces, but my gallery pieces are generally created in editions, which helps to keep costs down. Large pieces generally have very small editions – three or five – while smaller works have a maximum of eight, and each piece of my limited-edition sculpture is stamped accordingly.

**Of all the sculptures you've created, do you have a favorite?**

No. I never like anything I produce, which always surprises people. As a rule, sculpture takes a long time to create, and it goes through a number of stages. For me, there is the initial stage of the idea and the first thumbnail, which is essentially a little three-dimensional sketch I create very quickly. Then, I'll sketch a few more thumbnails, all of the same subject



*Sculpture of the Queen maquette (top); Dogerina's Progress*

but rendered differently; line them up in front of me; and look at them for a long time. Eventually, one of them will seem better than the others, so I'll develop that one in a larger size, and that will become the maquette for the job.

From that point, I usually look at the maquette on a daily or weekly basis, making adjustments until I'm satisfied, before I start the process of making it much larger. Once that's done, it gets cast in plaster or some other material as a working model so I can exhibit it outside, see how it looks from a distance, and experiment with color. Then, I take it to the foundry, where the molds and castings are made, in either wax or sand. So a sculpture goes through many changes over a period of six months to a year, and by the



Philip Jackson (right) with Her Majesty the Queen at the unveiling of her sculpture in October 2003.

time it's actually finished, I've seen enough of it.

**Even though you're relatively young, you've been sculpting for many years. Do you worry about getting arthritis in your hands or having to wear glasses, which you're not wearing today?**

Well, I have glasses in my pocket.

**Do you use them when you sculpt?**

Yes, I do. I also use a magnifying glass because I'm often working on small details. Sometimes, even when you're working on a big sculpture, the difference between a recognition and a non-recognition is in the smallest detail – perhaps just a fraction of an inch, just the tipping of a feature.

**The twinkle in the eye?**

Yes. I've found – knock on wood – that most sculptors live to be quite old because there's no logical time to retire. No one says: "You're 65 now, goodbye. Here's your celebration clock." Instead, sculptors just continue to work. And if you're doing something you enjoy, why should you give it up? Many of history's greatest sculptors continued to work until the day they died.

**So you're going to follow them, not only in reputation, but also in longevity?**

I'll do my best. Sir Jacob Epstein was

79 when he died, and he had been working on those vast *Pan* sculptures in Hyde Park – a very big project for an old man. He finished the sculptures late at night, went to bed, and died in his sleep. That's not a bad way to go.

**How would you describe your new sculptures – the ones you're working on now?**

I would define them as impressionistic and figurative – a style I began to develop many years ago, when I created a sculpture that had to go onto a passenger ship being built in Venice. When I produced the sculpture, it was packed up and sent to Italy. Afterward, I was asked to go and see it installed on the ship, which I was very happy to do, in a place called Mestre, a rather grim, industrial area on the Venice Lagoon. While I was on board, the ship was taken from the yard and towed across the Venice Lagoon, through the Giudecca Canal and into the old Arsenal, which, of course, is where the Venetians built their incredible galleys that gave them naval supremacy. This experience enabled me to see Venice for the first time from the sea, which is the only way to see it, and the city was a revelation; I fell in love with it.



When I finished work on the ship, I visited Venice's museums, explored the streets, and got a real feeling for the city's history and atmosphere. One of the things that intrigued me most was the eighteenth-century convention of

wearing masks. In fact, masked figures inhabit many great paintings of that time. In addition, the subjects wore big hats and cloaks, so you couldn't tell who they were, whether they were male or female, whether they were happy or sad, and so forth; the only way to tell anything about them was through their body language. I thought it would be rather exciting to create a series of figurative sculptures that obscured the figures themselves and instead relied heavily on body language. My first was called *Le Figure Mascherate dal Don Giovanni* in a series that became known as the Masked Series, a 20th-century interpretation of an 18th-century convention. These sculptures became very popular, and I am amazed at how people continue to respond to them.

**What's your next big project, after having finished Her Majesty's statue?**

I'm already working on my next big piece. It's a sculpture of Terence Cuneo, a painter who died about seven years ago. He came to fame in the 1950s, when he was commissioned to paint the coronation of the queen. He sat in the gallery of

Westminster Abbey, watching the scene as it took place, and then sketched it. In subsequent years, he did a lot of court and regimental paintings, as well as railway paintings all over the world. The sculpture I'm doing of him is one and a half times life-size and will be unveiled in the spring.

**How can people go about acquiring your sculptures?**

They can go to an exhibition, or they can come to the studio, where we have a small gallery that shows my latest works.

**Can they actually meet the artist there?**

They can, if they like.

**You're very modest for an artist.**

Perhaps.

**Well, Dali would have been quite different.**

Yes, but his was both a performance and an output.

**And your performance is in the output?**

I hope so. I believe the sculpture should speak for itself. First and foremost, people have to like and appreciate it, whether it's in a gallery or a public space.

**And do you periodically go around London to see how your sculptures are doing?**

I go about London, but I avoid my sculptures. ●