

On Form 2016 at Asthall Manor – the UK's best Sculpture Garden

on Jun 12, 2016

If you were to close your eyes and try to imagine the Cotswold idyll, the vision in your mind would not be far from Asthall Manor, with its rolling dairy fields, honey-stoned surrounding hamlets and tranquil cottage gardens. Home to the eccentric arts patron Rosie Pearson, the seventeenth century Jacobean manor house plays host to a sculpture biennial that has grown to become one of the leading sculpture events in the country. Every two years, applications open to any artist across the globe, with the only rule being that the works must be made of stone. On Form, now in its eighth occurrence, has come to be known for being a show that is as joyous as its setting, and a delightful assault on all the senses.



Achilles heel, Portland p's, Refuge, by various. Photo by Peter van den Berg.

This year, On Form brings together 268 works by 39 stone sculptors, set within the six acres of grounds of the house. Each year the Biennial grows in both ambition and production – the sheer scale of the enterprise is the first thing that greets the visitor. Rosie Pearson, and her curator Anna Greenacre have striven to make the whole thing a very multisensory experience – stone and stonemasons have traditionally been seen as more of a naive craft than a contemporary material and expression – but On Form helps dispel this myth. The sculpture is every part as conceptual, thought provoking, skilled and impressive as that which can be seen in the best galleries and institutions made from other materials. In fact when one considers that every piece of stone set around this site has been hand selected from a quarry, painstakingly carved by hand from a modello, polished to a fine surface and transported to the site, all by the artist, it becomes apparent just what a feat of work each piece, and the whole show, must have been.