

'All the sculptures and forms and shapes in the garden respond to that distant sight line'

The 17-acre garden around the home of the South African sculptor Dylan Lewis was never intended to showcase his sculpture, but the stars aligned when Lewis hired a digger for a small job and didn't stop moving earth around until he had a landscape that bore some reference to the dramatic mountain scenery beyond, where leopards roam. 'It is the primary reference point,' he says. 'All the sculptures and forms and shapes in the garden in some way respond to that distant sight line.' This is never more obvious than when the clouds come down over the mountains, hiding them. 'Once the mountains are removed, the garden doesn't make sense to me.'

Lewis's work explores our wilder side, and our deep connection with the natural world that has only recently been disrupted. The garden, near Stellenbosch, is the summation of 25 years of work, a destination for visitors and potential clients, who happily pronounce on the artist's trajectory. He remains impervious to comments either bemoaning or celebrating his move from creating forms of wild animals to wild people, but he does become exercised when his landscape is called a sculpture garden. It does not reflect the sensibilities of a collector; instead, this is very much an artist's garden.

Although artists and buyers have been placing three-dimensional modern art in landscapes since at least the 1950s, the notion of a developed sculpture garden has really taken flight only in the past 15 years, according to Simon Stock, senior specialist in modern art at Sotheby's Europe and Asia. 'Having been a sort of poor relation, sculpture is right up there with the most expensive paintings and other art forms.' A person with an outsized sculpture by Marc Quinn, say, on their property is rarely satisfied with just the one, and outdoor sculpture has proved to be addictive for art appreciators who have noticed the effect that light, weather and landscape can have in animating their prize possessions.

The ideal setting for a sculpture collection is not a mere garden but an entire park: monumental artworks in a receding landscape are the new eye-catchers; try that in a modest garden and it becomes littered with sculpture – as though you're an 18th-century landowner just back from the Grand Tour. Ideally, an outside space needs to have enough compartments to create different atmospheres for pieces, or else be loose enough to allow them to breathe. In other words, a garden's design needs to be as good as the art.

In the Windrush Valley in the Cotswolds, roses tumble over the boundary walls of Asthall Manor, giving a hint of the 'formality and freedom' that designers Isabel and Julian Bannerman devised for its garden. Two non-identical, botanically inspired stone gate posts by Anthony Turner strike just the right note of intrigue. The delight of passers-by, as well as owner Rosie Pearson's own pleasure in the commissioned work, inspired the biennial stone-only sculpture show *On Form*, which returns to Asthall this June. Visitors who insist that they are 'only here for the garden' leave with a deeper understanding of sculpture, while art collectors find themselves beguiled by paths cut through long grass and, in picturesque spirit, bindweed. It is a transformative experience, balanced on the vivacity of the plants ('you can almost physically see them growing at that time of year') combined with the stillness of time, embedded in stone.

Modern art placed in a historic setting can create a frisson that has long been in the interior designer's lexicon but is not as well explored outdoors. Beverley Lear, a garden designer and consultant on heritage properties with Lear Associates, points out that a successful mix is more about scale than style: 'You don't want a whopping sculpture in a space that has small-scale paths, when you see things in close-up. It has to be the right size, it has to relate to the intimacy of the space.' This

especially comes into play when placing pieces near a house. Here, 'the skill is in scaling down your viewpoints, and interrupting the visual space.' Small, big or monumental, choosing and installing sculpture is about more than buying something that you love. 'It needs enough context for you to feel like it fits into the place,' continues Lear. 'It's all about context, which is scale, texture, colour and light.'

Siting a sculpture can involve models and photographs, and pacing around or sitting for hours, noting every angle and shift of light. The late Sir William Keswick shocked the art establishment in the 1950s by slowly placing sculptures by Henry Moore, Rodin and Jacob Epstein around his farming and shooting estate, Glenkiln in Dumfries, to be enjoyed mainly by sheep and the occasional motorist. In positioning each piece, 'he would sit down and be the sculpture, almost, looking out and imagining how it would be seen in that setting,' says Lear, who has catalogued all the trees, shrubs and sculptures there. Henry Moore credited Sir William with brilliantly placing his works, making it easier for him to create pieces for his friend, with Glenkiln in mind.

Commissioning new work, for the prospective sculpture-garden owner, is not as straightforward as it may sound. 'You've got to be sensitive; it's the artist who is doing the creating and they won't be told what to do – but they will do something for a particular spot,' says Lady Angela Keating of Nevill Keating Pictures, discreet art advisor on the grand scale. 'I don't think you tell a really good artist what to do, but you lead them to water.'

Lady Angela points out that the groundwork, transport, installation and conservation of a sculpture are just as important as its creation. Tropical rain is hard on bronzes, but even in Britain they need to be waxed every six months. Nevill Keating furnishes clients with a maintenance programme devised with royal conservator Rupert Harris. For transporting sculpture safely around the world, it relies on Mtec, a logistics firm that specialises in art moving. The company helped her to take one of Marc Quinn's monumental bronzes, *Planet* (nicknamed Big Baby), to Singapore's Gardens by the Bay.

There is no shame in seeing repeats of the sculpture that has pride of place on your lawn in someone else's garden, since casts, like etchings, are made in editions. The giant disembodied horse head nibbling grass on your own escarpment may happily be doing the same on a hillside in Tuscany. As Stock says, 'People like to have what other people have.' When he curated *Beyond Limits*, a selling show for monumental sculpture at Chatsworth, Zaha Hadid's *Belu Bench* sold over and over. Its utility as somewhere to sit was significant. 'Combining sculpture with an interactive purpose has proved tremendously desirable.'

When pressed, Stock acknowledges that the living British artists whose work will endure – in the manner of Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Lynn Chadwick – include Antony Gormley, Tony Cragg, Richard Long, Allen Jones and Conrad Shawcross. The Duke of Devonshire continues to commission work at Chatsworth, where the exhibition *Radical Horizons: The Art of Burning Man* opened this month, while at the Marquess of Cholmondeley's Houghton Hall in Norfolk, vistas reverberate with Richard Long's stone incursions across the grass, a concrete hut by Rachel Whiteread, and pieces by James Turrell, among others. Robert Indiana's giant works are currently in residence at Yorkshire Sculpture Park in West Yorkshire, while Tom Stuart-Smith's garden around the nearby Hepworth Wakefield art museum calmly demonstrates that trends in gardening, as well as in sculpture, are long-standing and slow to change. ●

By Kendra Wilson