

A matter of SIZE



Monumental sculptures that defy the laws of nature and question our place in the cosmos have been gaining momentum over the past five years – and there's still time to start collecting. **Camilla Apcar** speaks to the artists and gallerists leading the pack

Last year, a polar bear stood guard on its hind legs in King Street, two anthropomorphic rabbits trotted into Grosvenor Square on a horse, and a girl practising yoga with a globe took position on New Bond Street.

Far from some otherworldly plot playing out in Mayfair, these were all signs of how, with the rise of private foundations and exhibition spaces, artists have been given new opportunities to think big – quite literally – about sculpture.

In the ten years since Abby Hignell opened her contemporary and 20th-century sculpture gallery in Shepherd Market, she has noticed an increase in demand for large-scale works. "I think there were the wilderness years for sculpture, and in a lot of people's minds it was about a man on a horse in the middle of a town square," she says. "People's eyes have been opened to what sculpture really is, and are really engaging with it. It has stopped being behind a velvet rope."

Size and scale are key to grappling with what makes a sculpture 'monumental' – a concept that precedes even the monolithic Moai figures found on Easter Island (carved by the indigenous Rapa Nui people around 1300), and goes all the way back to totem poles and ancient Egyptian and Chinese culture. The term sometimes refers to commemorative monuments, but in contemporary circles it most commonly concerns physical size.

"Artists like Anish Kapoor and Richard Serra want you to be totally eclipsed by a form so that you have a sort of internalised experience within it," says Neil Wenman, senior director at Hauser & Wirth London. "Or it might be a play on the form's relationship to its environment, or perhaps about your own body size in relation to it."

Case in point is the work of Indian artist Subodh Gupta, who plays with scale in his mixed media creations that reference history, daily life and our human position within the universe – a theme explored repeatedly in monumental sculpture. Gupta's work has taken the shape of a tree made entirely from stainless steel pots and pans; 697 bronze potatoes heaped together on a stand; and a life-size boat filled with detritus from the urban environment and tilted at an angle to allow visitors to walk underneath it, as exhibited at Hauser & Wirth on Savile Row in 2012 (pictured overleaf).

Monumental sculpture is a specialised part of the collecting market, not least because it demands another premium: space. Many collectors are taking to the great »

► outdoors. "I have more clients than ever who are building their own sculpture parks, either publicly or privately," says Hignell.

The gallerist represents both Helaine Blumenfeld – the contemporary American sculptor often credited with moving the medium on from the Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth aesthetics – and Sophie Ryder, whose *Lovers on Horseback* rode into Grosvenor Square last year.

A host of temporary outdoor exhibitions in the public realm, be it Berkeley Square or Marble

PREVIOUS PAGE: BARNABY BARFORD, *ME WANT NOW*, 2016, PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID GILL GALLERY/MARTIN SLIVKA



Monumental sculpture is a specialised part of the collecting market, not least because works of this scale demand another premium: space

Arch, mirror collectors' appetites. "I think that's more to do with the popularity of contemporary art," says Wenman. "The landowners of these spaces have seen that it's a benefit."

Large outdoor sculptures have also been highly prized in recent years at both Christie's and Sotheby's. The latter's *Beyond Limits* exhibition and private sale took to Chatsworth House for the eleventh time in September. Meanwhile, Christie's worked on an exhibition with the Cass Sculpture Foundation, which gives its proceeds towards supporting artists and new commissions. Similar plans are in the works for later this year.

These exhibitions, the opening of the Hepworth Wakefield museum and a focus on sculpture at fairs such as Frieze London have raised the market's value. "There aren't many areas where you can still get a world-class museum-level collection together," says Hignell. "It remains just about possible to do so with sculpture, but the doors are closing fast."

Fortunately, collectors have a particularly broad pick of contemporary artists. Bowman Sculpture's roster includes Emily Young, whose Neo Bankside sculpture walk was installed last summer beside the Thames and is set to stay well into 2020.

Standing beneath one of Young's huge pieces of stone is particularly powerful, says the gallery's director Bill Gerish. "It makes you feel very human, very small. I remember standing underneath *Planet* [a metre-high face emerging



from a block of clastic igneous rock] when it was installed in Berkeley Square, and I felt dwarfed. There's something almost otherworldly to something so unnaturally large."

Elsewhere, this month The Fine Art Society will show new work by Tim Pomeroy who, like Young, draws from the sacred, ancient and nature, and crafting sculptures in stone and wood.

The polar bear that towered in David Gill Gallery throughout November and December



was created by Barnaby Barford, an Edmonton-based sculptor with a certain predilection for labour-intensive work.

Barford's exhibition *Me Want Now* (pictured previous page) included 11 life-size animals made from porcelain flowers and tiles: a tiger prowled alongside a rabbit; a brown bear sat not far from the neck of a giraffe that extended out of a mirror like a hunting trophy. His carefully-planned menagerie considers the

relationships between humankind and the rest of the natural world.

"I thought the polar bear would be quite aggressive in scale, but I miss its presence in my studio," says Barford. Over a number of months, the artist attached more than 7,500 ceramic flowers to wire and sculpted them into the bear's snowy form.

Yet going large was not always intentional for Barford, and he maintains that his works are not about shouting the loudest. "They can be huge and subtle at the same time, even though they're so physically large. I've always made works the size they needed to be."

Barford's *Tower of Babel* was exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2012, and its very subject required a monumental structure. "It's supposed to reach to the heavens," he describes.

It took two and a half years to create and stack 3,000 miniature bone china shops on top of each other, stretching six metres skywards in socio-economical commentary. Abandoned shops and bargain stores formed the tower's wide base, while boutiques and galleries were precariously balanced at its narrow summit.

For Italian sculptor Lorenzo Quinn, whose pieces can be found at Halcyon Gallery on New Bond Street and in public spaces the world over, working on a large scale is all-important. "The monumental represents the permanence of the artwork," he says. "It brings the sculpture closer to people, putting it out there: it's public, not yours anymore. The idea of leaving something to posterity is quite amazing for an artist."

Despite the amount of engineering involved, and the fact that "every small error becomes a big mistake", Quinn says he finds it easier to work in such a monumental way. His artworks, like *Holding Up the World* – the girl balancing a globe on her feet – or *Force of Nature* (which landed in Berkeley Square in 2011, pictured far left), concern uniting people.

"The most important thing has always been how people react to my work and whether they understand it," he emphasises. "Sculpture is a way of communicating. It's about the message." Sometimes, size does matter. ■

bowmansculpture.com, davidgillgallery.com, halcyongallery.com, hauserwirth.com, hignellgallery.com, thefineartsociety.com

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: SUBODH GUPTA, CHANDA MAMA DOOR KE, 2015, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND HAUSER & WIRTH; PHOTOGRAPHY: KEN AGLARD; SUBODH GUPTA, WHAT DOES THE VESSEL CONTAIN, THAT THE RIVER DOES NOT, 2012, MIXED MEDIA, 1,100x1,500x300, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND HAUSER & WIRTH; PHOTOGRAPHY: ALEX DELAFRANE; LORENZO QUINN, FORCE OF NATURE I, 2011, BRONZE, BERKELEY SQUARE, LONDON