

THE SOUL OF THE WILD: THE ART OF

Hamish Mackie

Whether he's crafting tiny maquettes on a conservation trip in Kenya, or embarking on a series of life-sized wild boar, Hamish Mackie's aim is the same: to evoke the personality and spirit of the beast in front of him

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The most successful sculptors are those not only with the rare talent of crafting anatomically correct physical forms but who also capture the spirit of their subject. Hamish Mackie is a British sculptor whose mastery over cast metals, particularly bronze and stainless steel, has resulted in an impressive portfolio that celebrates wildlife in all its splendour. From the humble hare to the charismatic cheetah, Mackie's sculptures breathe life into metal, inviting us to connect with the untamed heart of nature.

Growing up on a Cornish farm, Mackie's early exposure to the animals around his home, their care, and their movements, imprinted a lasting impression on him. Developing an innate understanding of the subtle expressions and behaviours of the animals gave him a foundation that would later infuse life into his sculptures.

"My grandfather, Desmond Fortescue, lived next door at Bocconoc Estate, and he was an avid countryman who loved his fishing and shooting. He was a brilliant grandfather because he always wanted someone to go and play with him. I was lucky enough to be shooting by the age of eight, and was later taught to shoot by David Clark, who kepted at Sandringham."

These formative years spent within the local countryside not only shaped Hamish's current love of shooting but also laid the groundwork for his interest in the wellbeing of wildlife throughout the world. "I shoot about 10 days a year on a local syndicate shoot with some mates, but I'm not bothered about numbers and really don't think that's what it's about.

Shooting is a massive part of my life, partly because I believe it goes hand in hand with conservation. Without shooting, our wildlife would suffer enormously.

"As a sculptor, my biggest inspiration is the natural world around me. I have been lucky enough to travel to see wildlife all over the world in its natural habitat – and that has become an important part of my sculpting process, as it really helps me gain a proper understating of what they're about."

After university, Hamish travelled around Africa and got involved in relocating black rhino and wild dog at Lewa Wildlife Conservancy in Kenya. He remembers: "I bought some local beeswax and ended up making little maquettes in front of the rhinos. It was from that moment that I seriously got into sculpting."

One of Hamish's most notable ventures is his series of sculptures of wild boars, a subject that he has often returned to over the years. "I've shot wild boar in Belgium, France and Luxembourg. It's brilliant fun; I absolutely love it. I think they're the most incredible animal. While shooting in Belgium, I stayed an extra week to stalk around the woods with my camera, trying to get pictures of them. It turns out this is almost impossible, but it gave me a real feeling of what they're about, where they live and how they behave.

"I fell in love with the wild boars' primeval characters, and found it fascinating working out how the sounder group works, with this year's frischlinge (piglets) following the bachen (mother) at the front, followed by the uberlaufer, ••





and the keiler (older male) at the back. Similarly, I did a little train of elephants years ago and wanted to make sure I got the pecking order right. I love that kind of stuff and just think it's important.

"Taking on my huge *Souther of Boar* piece in 2022 took a bit of bravery, to be honest. It features the front boar, two frischlinge, three uberlaufer, and the keiler at the back, so that's seven animals and really they need to be in a train about two metres long, running down a dining table. It was a lot of work!"

Hamish's sculpting journey pays testament to his particular perspective as both skilled artist and passionate Shot. With a dedication to capturing not just the physical attributes but also the personalities of his subjects, Hamish's sculptures come alive. His loose and organic style combined with anatomical precision breathes life into each piece, making it seem as though the animals are poised to spring into action at any moment.

Looking back at this journey as we discuss his life's work, Hamish reflects on his beginnings, recalling his first sale: a pair of lambs under the name *The Embrace*, which marked the beginning of his foray into bronze casting. "When I first

started out back home in Cornwall, my studio was an old carthorse stable with cobbled floors, slightly angled for water drainage. The spow would blow in and I would keep my clay in the hay trough.

"Now, however, I have a studio which was built just metres from my kitchen door at home. It's roughly 20m x 6m, with a flat concrete floor and huge double doors on one end. It has a 2-tonne gantry running down the middle so I can move things. I sculptured my over-lifesized Andalusian stallion in there, which is 4m high, and I could sculpt a life-sized elephant in there, just. It has floor-to-ceiling glass windows on the south side so it's lovely and light. As a sculptor, I don't need the north light favoured by painters. I love being in there. It's a creative place."

With a glint in his eye, Hamish speaks of his ambition to sculpt the wild sheep and goats of the Himalayas. "Last month, *Fieldsports Journal* ran a piece on the Kashmir markhor in Pakistan and I think going out there to see mountain goats such as those, as well as the Himalayan tahr. It would be an incredible research trip. What a subject that would be; such a proud, remarkable animal." *FJ*

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