



# THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

British sculptor Hamish Mackie's renowned animal artwork can be seen inside and out of the new-look Chewton Glen.

Where does all that inspiration spring from?

"I'd love to do a life-size elephant," says Hamish Mackie. "They've always been a favourite subject; they're so readable and from a sculpting point of view they've got such amazing texture." Such an ambition is not so fanciful coming from an artist who famously created six life-and-a-quarter size bronze horses 'charging' through the plaza of London's Goodman's Fields. This award-winning piece required over a

kilometre of steel, six tonnes of clay, a tonne of silicone rubber and four tonnes of bronze, and was brought to life by Hamish and a team of architects, developers, landscape designers, concrete specialists and fountain engineers.

You may be reassured to know that none of the pieces at Chewton Glen is rendered on quite such a scale, but you can certainly expect an elephant or





A life-size female wolf, bronze 2023



Greyhound, bronze 2022

two, if not full-size. The exhibited works will continue to change over time, ensuring that there is always something different for guests to view and admire.

"Hopefully this is the beginning of a really good relationship with Chewton Glen and perhaps some other Iconic hotels," says Hamish. "I've installed some sculptures outside and a few inside, and it's really great for me to have my sculptures in a real setting, rather than on a plinth in my studio, because people can have more of an idea of what it looks like in a home environment. Discerning guests stay at Chewton Glen, and I think with art you have to stay awhile to decide whether you like it.

"It's exciting - I'm really up for making it work. A few of my summer exhibitions are coming to an end, and some of the slightly bigger sculptures will go to Chewton Glen. I have a life-size leopard climbing a tree that would look really cool outside the front."

Famed for his exhaustively realised animal pieces, Hamish is regarded as one of the world's foremost wildlife sculptors, having been commissioned by major clients including Woburn Abbey, Blenheim Palace, the National Trust and Merrill Lynch. He has travelled the world, literally looking animals in the eye to create a sense not just of how they look, but how they behave, how they move, how they feel.

"The important part for me of seeing animals in the wild is that I get a much better understanding of

what they're about," says Hamish. "I love to try and get into the head of my subject. At the moment I'm sculpting an elephant, and I really want people to get a feel of what elephants are about, not just what they look like. You can't really do that without seeing them in their natural habitat.

"Sometimes I'm in a field with a bull or a stable with a horse, I've sculpted albatross on the back of a boat, Arabian gazelle in the desert, big cats in Africa... I'm turning clay into an animal, and trying to make cold hard metal feel alive. You should be able to look a bronze in the eye and see life."

Hamish is so devoted to his technique that he actually begins the sculpture on location, working with plasticine in front of his live subject in wild settings such as the African savannah. "I've developed an explorer case which becomes a mobile studio, and I can hang sculptures upside down with it when I'm going through airport security," he says. "It's basically a big box. I make a sculpture which I bolt to a plate, which then sits upside down in the box with the material on the top of the plate. And then when I want to make something, I take it out, attach a pole to the lid of the box, and it becomes a sort of mobile sculpting studio.

"I start making in front of the subject because it makes me look properly. I don't necessarily need to finish it. Some of the information goes into my head



and some comes out of the camera. I blow it up on an enormous screen, and bring the bush into my studio."

Growing up on a farm in Cornwall, Hamish was close to animals from a young age, and he caught the sculpting bug when a sculpture of two lambs he created for a school project sold for £50. "I was gobsmacked that someone had given me some money for something that I had made," he says. "They later got it cast into bronze and took it to a foundry in London run by Simon Allison. I was 18, I had never heard about bronze casting and never come across people making a living out of sculpting. Simon introduced me to this world of bronze, and said that if I made pieces, he would cast them for me and I could pay him when I sold them. Bronze casting is expensive; it was an awesome first foot on the ladder."

Discouraged by people telling him you don't make a living from sculpture, Hamish gained a 'more sensible' degree in furniture and product design. But the artistic direction he was destined to take took shape when he first visited Africa, and met renowned conservationist family the Craigs in Kenya. "I got involved with helping to relocate black rhino and wild dog in Kenya with the Craig family at Lewa Wildlife Conservancy. They were awesome, they saw my enthusiasm, lent me their vehicle. They helped me get hold of beeswax and I ended up making little beeswax sculptures in the Kenyan Bush, underneath the tree with a tame Rhino, or from the back of a Land Rover, sculpting elephants and wild dog which we were moving. It was really exciting.



"It was almost totally by chance that I came across Lewa, which was the beginning of it all."

The basis of all of Hamish's art is a highly accurate anatomical core onto which he sculpts an interpretive clay skin. His technique is unusual partly because he is ambidextrous. "I was born left handed and my school made me write with my right hand," he says. "I did mirror writing until about the age of six or seven, so the only way you could read what I was writing was in a mirror. I actually sculpt with both hands. Sculpting wasn't a normal way of making a living when we were growing up. I have been very lucky to have found something I love doing."

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