



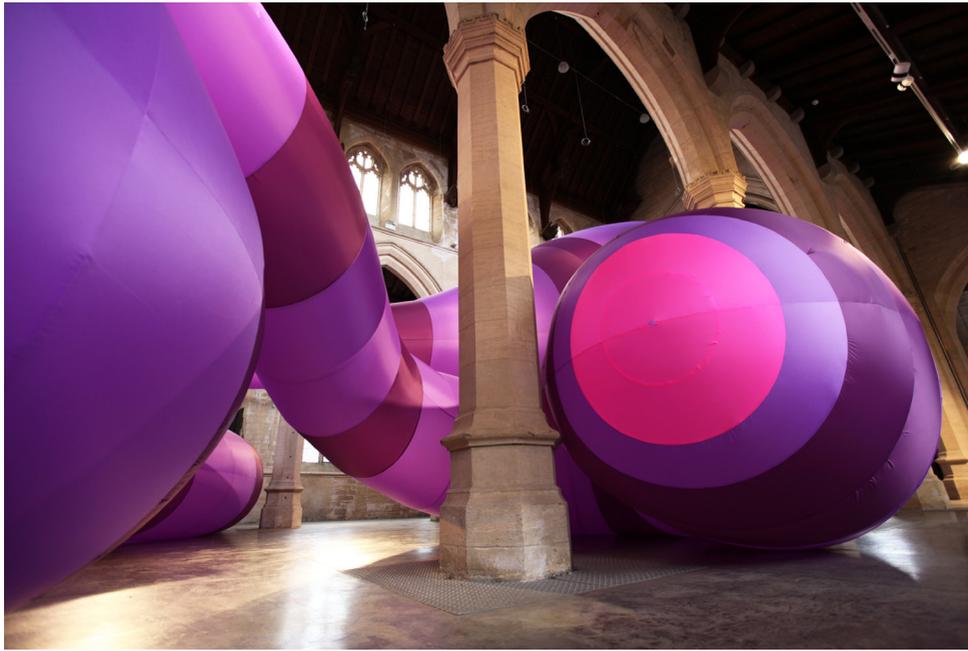
visual arts centre



# SCULPTING ARCHITECTURE

**MICHAEL SHAW**

28th April - 23rd June 2018



## Michael Shaw – Sculpting Architecture

The former Neo-Gothic church space here, with its sprawling concrete floor-spaces, rising pillars and elegant arches is spectacular - however it comes with its challenges. How does an artist respond to something so grand and ideologically loaded? Having known Michael for some years I was sure he would rise to the challenge, and the results would be more than fitting, and most likely ambitious, ingenious and breath-taking.

The gallery housing the sculptures is a vibrant space, populated by a broad range of people during opening hours; older visitors often drop-by to admire the church-space (some reminiscing about their memories of it as a working church). Children love to negotiate the architecture – they move and play between the pillars, and run their fingers along the crumbling stonework. Michael Shaw's suite of sculpturally based works in this exhibition



do all of these things too in their own ways; through forms of sculptural 'play' they aim to become part of the building, and encourage visitors to encounter the building itself in new ways.

At the heart of *Sculpting Architecture* is a monumental sculpture. Measuring 18 x 12 x 7m, INF22 was created digitally using sophisticated 3D modelling software, and manifests itself as a massive rip-stop inflatable intervention dominating the space.

The normal airy view up into the arches and roof of the church is disrupted by a triumphant and enormous colourful cartoonish bulb form, appearing a little like a crashed hot-air balloon. From there the sculpture stretches and curls around the building, negotiating pillars and looping back on itself several times in an extended snake-like form.

Despite its digitally-created origins and cartoonish appearance,





it is hard not to see the piece as bodily, perhaps even erotic? As the pump sustaining the inflation buzzes in and out of action, the piece becomes alive and breathing.

Visitors can let their imagine wander, and ponder whether it might be a sleeping monster, or the tail of some yet-larger entity. Perhaps they can imagine the building as a mould that the work is gradually expanding into, or the sculpture as a parasite, that will eventually consume its host?

As they look up into the space to cast their eyes across the bulk of the sculpture, I hope visitors might notice a previously unseen aspect of the building. They may perhaps glance at one of the building's beautifully crafted angels, or the profile of an arch, or a lovingly-carved detail in the stonework?

Despite the undisputable monumental nature of its central work,



Sculpting Architecture consists of three different sculptural interventions, the other two more subtle and far less forthright. In the second work, visitors are invited to negotiate the spaces in the building themselves.

The act of Brass Rubbing – creating facsimiles of ceremonial and commemorative plaques, using paper and a crayon or chalk – became popular in the mid-nineteenth century.

Michael has produced a contemporary version of this. Scattered throughout the building yellow digitally printed plaques are discoverable by those who look. Visitors are invited to compile 'rubblings' from the works to create an artwork of their own, and through this action map each part of building. The collaborative nature of these works means sculpture has become a device for drawing; enabling members of the public to become agents of production.



The third element of *Sculpting Architecture* sees Meccano laboriously constructed into large pendulum-like structures. They hark back to a nostalgic age when things were made by the endeavour of many hands.

I have been told that every object has a resonance, even buildings? Church spaces especially are constructed to echo, intensify and resonate with the music within. It is not hard to consider the works in *Sculpting Architecture* as musical. Michael himself talks about the work as ‘riffing’ with the architecture. The sculptures and actions themselves are only activated by cyclical rhythms of air, material and people in the space. The Meccano pieces are musical in a different way, the rigid pendulums hung on a straight bar punctuate the space like notes on a stave – followed by a Glissando as the final artwork cascades downwards.

Text and exhibition curation: Dominic Mason

[www.michaelshaw.org](http://www.michaelshaw.org)

## 20-21 Visual Arts Centre

Church Square

Scunthorpe, DN15 6TA

[www.2021visualartscentre.co.uk](http://www.2021visualartscentre.co.uk)

tel: 01724 297070

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