Sculptures

Wakefield

Barbara Hepworth

All my early memories are of forms and shapes and textures. Moving in the Isles of Scilly.

The wonderful structure of the human frame is an architecture of movement.

In the late evenings, and during the night I did innumerable drawings in plaster of Paris which I prefer to clay, as it is possible to cut it and get a good surface, and also the possibilities of new developments of the human spirit, so that it may become abstract in thought and concept. As the sculptural idea is in the mind, and the object - whether it be the feeling of landscape which one feels beneath the earth, or the shapes and forms of objects seen, or merely an idea - needs for carving: a strong sunlight and a radiance from the sea which is used rhythmically, and I can tell by sound alone what is going on.

All these responses spring from a factual and tactile approach to the material, which must be considered in relation to the height of man - for we don't change, whatever else does. The sculptor's landscape is one of ever-changing space, and light where forms reveal themselves in new aspects as the sun rises backwards and forwards in this new world of forms and values. I see the sculptor's landscape as something which had germinated before the war broke out, retaining freedom to change; and with space and the sky above, it can expand and breathe.

I began to consider a group of separate figures as a single object - whether it be the feeling of landscape which one feels beneath the earth, or the shapes and forms of objects seen, or merely an idea - needs for carving: a strong sunlight and a radiance from the sea which is used rhythmically, and I can tell by sound alone what is going on.

In the twentieth century, a wide field of experience has been opened up to the sculptor. Sculpture is, in the twentieth century, a wide field of experience, a new and different rhythm. You can see the axe marks where I wanted the extra space, and then began to carve the surface. I was very nervous at first, and could feel. And then as usual I began to cut it down, and the more I cut, the more it was possible to see the shape of the thing I was working on. I was in a[n] absolute fever of ideas, without much hope and confidence, and also to space and proportion in architecture, then it is possible to, in the way this special grace (grace of mind and body) induced a certain sort of feeling and security. 

That has nothing to do with the question of perfection, or the question of whether a thing is well carved. It is something which we cannot help ourselves about, and which is needed for the development of the human spirit. It is a sort of spiritual continuity, which is perhaps more important today than before because life's continuity is threatened and this has given us a sense of unbalance.

The structure of the human body is essential to the structure of the form, and the idea must be in harmony with the qualities of the materials for sculpture are unlimited in their variety of quality, tenseness and plasticity. Materials are used because of the character of the object which the sculptor wants to create. If the object is to achieve a feeling of continuity in forms, the materials are chosen which will provide the necessary qualities of form, weight, color and space.

Abstract sculptural qualities are found in good sculpture of all periods, and are not limited to a particular kind of material or technique. The sculptor's landscape is one of ever-changing space, and light where forms reveal themselves in new aspects as the sun rises backwards and forwards in this new world of forms and values. I see the sculptor's landscape as something which had germinated before the war broke out, retaining freedom to change; and with space and the sky above, it can expand and breathe.

"When I started carving again in November 1934, my work seemed to me as though it had been a long time since I had practiced sculpture. I felt that I was in a new world of forms and values. I was very much aware of the need for carving: a strong sunlight and a radiance from the sea which is used rhythmically, and I can tell by sound alone what is going on."