

Cultural Mapping Project: City Centre fact sheet

Tranquillity Seats

2 stone carved seats in Cornish De Lank Grey Granite,
De Montfort Square, New Walk, Leicester

Installation: December 2003

Emergence Seats

2 stone carved seats in Kilkenny Limestone, New Walk Museum &
Art Gallery forecourt, New Walk, Leicester

Installation: February 2004

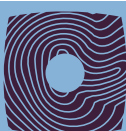


Artist

Graeme Mitcheson

Biography

Graeme Mitcheson is a sculptor who works primarily in stone, occasionally in bronze and other materials to create major public artworks or works for smaller commissions. His work is sometimes abstract, monumental and clinical or it can be functional, figurative or light hearted. He incorporates letter cutting into many pieces and uses contrasting textures, particularly with stone to create effect. Many of his works incorporate some aspect of public engagement. This can be in the form of generating ideas for a sculpture, through drawings or even 'hands on' carving workshops.



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Statement

Tranquillity: “The seats fit seamlessly into the environment around them and accentuate the curves and aspects of the landscape and architecture in the square. While the seats are very strongly sculptural shapes, the inscription provides a little subtlety and hopefully a small diversion for passers by.”

Emergence: “These sculptural seats complement that very formal area of New Walk extremely well. They take a small, uniform shape out of context and make it a giant, bulbous, tactile sculpture. However, the viewer can appreciate its origins while the colour of the stone assures that it is inoffensive and respectful to the historical values of the Walk.”

Graeme Mitcheson

Project Brief

To commission site-specific contemporary artworks as an integral dimension of the refurbishment of New Walk, an outstanding and unique heritage site and conservation area in Leicester. To contribute to the visual enhancement of the area and raise awareness of New Walk from Welford Place (City centre entrance) to Granville Road (Victoria Park entrance), through a number of distinctive interpretative artworks located and integrated at strategic points along the pedestrian route. The two sites De Montfort Square and Museum Forecourt were designated sites for sculptural work which would incorporate seating and contribute to the interpretation and the identity of New Walk.

Community Involvement

The artist was involved in and contributed to the awareness raising, community consultation and participation programme that included: a changing on-site display in the Museum’s foyer, explaining the **Cultural Mapping** project and the artist’s designs as they developed over time; exhibitions, in the gallery Upstairs at the City Gallery and community venues around the city, of the artist’s designs and work created in community workshops, in tandem with visual presentations and artist’s talks. The artist conducted practical workshops in poetry writing and stone-carving during a short artist-placement held in the New Walk Museum and Art Gallery, concurrent with local schools and De Montfort Hall’s Gifted and Talented event. These sessions were intended to be both an introduction to new skills and an educational device, linking the new artworks firmly to the history of stone-carving as one of the best preserved forms of public art and ‘commemorative’ public sculpture. The word ‘tranquillity’ was selected from a community-generated poem and translated into 18 different languages.

Purpose/Function

Tranquillity & Emergence aim to provide a focal point and functional seating as part of the refurbishment of New Walk. The sculptural forms draw attention to some of the inherent qualities and decorative features located along New Walk and the use of language celebrates Leicester’s culturally diverse communities. It is intended that the sculptural seats will complement the specific formal area of New Walk.



Site/Location

Emergence: New Walk Museum & Art Gallery forecourt, New Walk

Tranquillity: De Montfort Square, which is also home to the Robert Hall statue, New Walk

Special Features/Points of Interest

- The 2 **Tranquillity** seats are carved out of Cornish De Lank Grey granite, constructed from triple-stacked cylindrical blocks each measuring 1.0m x 0.75m x 0.80m. Each block features a carved inscription of the word 'tranquillity', selected from a poem created through artist-led community poetry workshops.
- 'Tranquillity' was translated into several different languages to celebrate Leicester's diverse communities. Languages included are: Arabic, Chinese, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Gujarati, Somali, Bengali, Welsh, Gaelic, Spanish, Greek, Polish, Ukrainian, Italian, French and Swahili.
- The seats are located within the De Montfort Square opposite one another and close to the re-landscaped area in front of the statue of Robert Hall.
- The seating material echoes that used in the plinth of the Robert Hall statue.
- The 2 **Emergence** seats, carved out of Kilkenny limestone, measure 2.0m in length and are 0.45m high (approx). Kilkenny is one of Leicester's 'friendship towns'.
- The artist drew inspiration from organic forms seen in the existing Victorian railings located along New Walk.
- The artist has taken a small uniform shape and enlarged it into a bulbous tactile sculptural form. The viewer will be able to appreciate its origins while the colour of the stone assures that it is inoffensive and respectful to the historical values of New Walk.
- The artist uses natural stone in a variety of ways, ranging from direct carving, piercing through to mechanical manipulation of the surfaces.

Possible Focus or Point of Engagement for Learning

- The granite used for the **Tranquillity** seats is the same as that of the plinth of the statue of Robert Hall. Who was Robert Hall? What was he best known for? What does the statue tell you about him?
- Who is De Montfort Square named after and why? What other areas, places and institutions bear this name? What do we mean by 'commemorative' artworks?
- When was De Montfort Square designed and by whom? How was the land, the grassed and planted areas of the De Montfort Square used differently during the 1940s and 50s and why?
- Granite is a very hard stone – how long do you think it took the artist to carve the text into the stone? Do you know the name of local granite, its colour and where it was quarried?



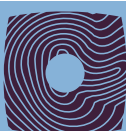
Possible Focus or Point of Engagement for Learning

- Tranquillity is translated in to different languages. How many and which languages are represented? How many different languages are spoken in your area/school? Try to take a rubbing of the text on the seats and translate the word tranquillity into all the languages spoken in your area/school.
- The **Emergence** seats are carved from Kilkenny limestone. What colour is Kilkenny limestone in its natural state, when it is rough tooled and when it is polished?
- How do you think the stone was transported from the quarries in Cornwall and Ireland to Leicester?
- Which other artists use stone as a medium? What is the difference between 'hard' and 'soft' stone? Where else along might you see artworks carved out of stone?
- How many different types of stone are there? How is stone excavated? Where is it found?
- What is reconstituted stone? How is it made and where and how is it used in the public realm?
- Where else can you see stone carvings in your neighbourhood, in the City of Leicester or elsewhere in the East Midlands?
- When did people first use stone as a medium and for what purposes?
- New Walk is classified as a conservation / heritage site, what does this mean and which special considerations do you think the artist had to take into account to comply with these?
- Which health & safety aspects did the artist have to take into consideration for the project and why?
- Try to create your own sculptural seats inspired by the 'found' in your immediate environment or from the imagination. Use different materials such as plaster of paris, paper or clay and make reduced scale models, or working as a group try making larger than life size sculptural 'seats' from materials that are not permanent or hard. What are the issues, considerations and challenges to make the sculptural seats 'fit for purpose'?
- Which 20th century artists and arts movements have used soft materials or altered scale to change the way we see and experience the everyday and common place objects?
- What public art project could you do with 'twin' or 'friendship' towns?

For More Information:

www.leicester.gov.uk/publicart

Toolkit author Jasia McArdle with input from Steve Cooke. Image © Tom Martin 2005 for Public Art Leicester Cultural Mapping project.



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