

# True to form

The biennial sculpture in stone exhibition on form returns this month, and the magnificent Asthall Manor Ballroom will once again be put in the very capable hands of Toby Lorford, as Candia McKormack discovers

ON FORM 18: June 10-July 8



One of the real joys of the biennial on form sculpture exhibition is the sense of fun it engenders. You know those little signs you see dotted around most galleries and museums saying 'Do not touch'? Yep, all perfectly acceptable, of course, but just a little frustrating when faced with a beautiful, tactile object that the maker very possibly would love you to feel.

Well, at the on form sculpture exhibition they say DO touch; DO stroke the sculptures, DO feel the fluidity of line as the artist will have felt them, DO sense the varying textures and temperatures... and, above all, have fun.

Oh, go on, then!

Started by Rosie Pearson in 2002, the idea for the exhibition came about after she commissioned sculptor Anthony Turner to make two gatepost finials for her beautiful gabled Jacobean home of Asthall Manor – childhood home of the Mitford sisters, no less. The organic-looking stone forms at the driveway's entrance made such an impression on visitors, the two mooted the idea of filling the gardens there with works in stone. An ambitious plan, you may say, but the hard work of Rosie and Anthony – and latterly co-curator Anna Greenacre – saw the seeds that were sown in 2002 growing into rather beautiful specimen plants, and bearing the most delicious fruit. In fact, at the last exhibition in 2016, over 8,000 visitors were welcomed to the six acres in the Windrush Valley, and a record 176 sculptures were sold. Testament to the unique nature of what they

do, and the way it has captured art lovers' imaginations.

on form 18 will be the largest to date, and will include work by 40 world-renowned and upcoming sculptors from the UK, Italy, Greece, Canada, the Netherlands and the US and, as ever, themes around nature, ecology and displacement dominate. As is the case with true innovators, the on form team are not ones to rest on their laurels and are always looking for fresh ideas to bring to the party. And so it was that local antiques dealer and creative force of nature, Toby Lorford, was brought on board.

Toby is well known in the area, having set up Lorford Antiques in Tetbury in 2003. The first showroom was an intimate affair, set over three floors on the town's Long Street, but within two years the success of the first business led to taking on larger premises just 100 yards away in a converted bus garage, complete with gravelled forecourt – an unusual feature in the centre of Tetbury and perfect for showing off larger architectural features.



The on form sculpture exhibition in the beautiful surroundings of Asthall Manor

Two years ago, at on form 16, Toby was invited by Rosie to dress the ballroom, office and gallery with pieces from his business that would provide visitors with visual inspiration for living with sculpture in stone at home, and highlighting the positive influence it can have on everyday life.

When we meet, he's in the midst of setting up for The Battersea Decorative Antique and Textile Fair in London and has whizzed back to the Cotswolds to keep an eye on business here. He seems to have boundless energy, often has his Dalmation Florence at his side, uses the word 'fun' a lot (not necessarily a word bandied around among antiques dealers) and has an infectious positive attitude. So, when I learn that Toby's motto is "Just say yes and you can figure it out afterwards", it comes as absolutely no surprise; he says that anything is possible with enough belief... and I have no reason whatsoever to doubt him.

Lorford's had previously collaborated with celebrated painter Anthony Murphy, who displayed his work in the Tetbury showroom on three separate occasions and, as Rosie knew Anthony and had often visited Lorford's, she decided to approach Toby to work with them on the sculpture exhibition.

"I was super, super chuffed to be asked," says Toby, "because I'm sure there are very many people who would love to work with on form; it is pretty amazing. The first year I did it, I kept things simple and it worked beautifully... thank goodness!"

This year Lorford's has been invited to work with Ivo Textiles



who print the Kew Collection, licensed by the Royal Botanic Society. Key pieces will be upholstered in these beautiful, naturalistic prints, while the large bay window in the ballroom will be draped with the fabric, too. "We're going to be using a few very simple patterned fabrics to soften the look," says Toby, "it will be very summery, very delicate."

Before the set up, Toby will be given a list of the sculptures by Rosie and will start planning the look in readiness for the installation. "It's a fluid feast during instal," he says, "otherwise it wouldn't work. Often things will be fine in theory, but on the day they might be 'too safe', or just won't have the impact we're looking for."

As well as the beauty of the stone sculptures – both inside and out – visitors can expect summer dishes from acclaimed local chef Fiona Cullinane; a pop-up shop by The Mad Hatter Book Shop in Burford; literature talks and signings; and a varied programme of events, ranging from birdsong

walks at dusk, garden talks and tours, painting and stone carving workshops, poetry workshops and performances from the Scary Little Girls, including their popular Mitford walks.

Toby, meanwhile, is already working on ideas for 2020, when the plan is for all the furniture to be sprayed with gesso, making everything a warm white. "The original idea I had was to have something quite Miss Havisham-esque about it," he smiles. "To me, the brief is to display sculpture in a way that works and inspires people in their own setting, so the more we can reflect the

setting but withdraw it from the sculpture, the more successful it should be. It should really allow the pieces to sing." ♦

*on form runs from June 10 to July 8 at Asthall Manor, Asthall, Burford, OX18 4HW, tel: 01993 824319, [www.onformsculpture.co.uk](http://www.onformsculpture.co.uk) Admission (includes full colour catalogue): £10 for everybody except under-12s (free), Asthall residents (free), 12-18s and students (£5). There is also a £15 season pass, for anybody who knows they want to come more than once.*

**ABOVE LEFT:** Asthall Manor Ballroom in 2016, showing work by various artists. Styling and furniture by Toby Lorford

**ABOVE RIGHT:** Sculptures in the magnificent bay window of Asthall Manor's Ballroom during on form 16



Toby Lorford of Lorfords Antiques

## LORFORDS ANTIQUES

Lorfords is Europe's largest source of decorative antiques, and has been established since 2003. Together with their London showroom, the core business is based in the heart of the Cotswolds, on Tetbury's Long Street, and within two vast WWII aircraft hangars, home to 48 of the biggest names in the antiques trade.

Their 'Created' range offers a fully bespoke collection of furniture and lighting, to include traditional, mid-century and contemporary design.

[www.lorfordsantiques.com](http://www.lorfordsantiques.com)