

Edward Allington (1951-2017)

A J.A. Prestwich (JAP) engine leans in a corner inside the front door, it's probably a 125cc single much favoured by speedway riders. It has a typically long stroke. This is the door to the house of the sculptor Edward Allington who recently died age 66 on 21 September.

Edward is best known for his part in the 1980's 'New British Sculpture', emerging alongside artists, Richard Deacon, Bill Woodrow, Tony Cragg, Anthony Gormley, Anish Kapoor and Jean-Luc Vilmouth. His work at the time was typified by the series of exuberantly abundant 'cornucopia' sculptures as seen in *Objects and Sculpture* (1981) Arnolfini, Bristol and ICA, London and *The Sculpture Show* (1983) Hayward Gallery, London. In 1983 he had his first exhibition at the Lisson Gallery. Numerous exhibitions and commissions were to follow in UK and worldwide, particularly in USA, Germany and Japan.

He is represented in major public, private and corporate collections, including the Arts Council, Tate Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum, The British Museum, Leeds Art Gallery and the Henry Moore Institute.

Edward had first studied at Lancaster College of Art 1968-71 followed by Ceramics at the Central School of Art and Design 1971-74 and then Cultural Studies at the Royal College of Art 1983-84. By this time he was already well grounded in the aesthetics and forms of Classical Greece yet not so apparent was a fascination with Japanese aesthetics, both ancient and modern. Although many materials were appearing in the sculpture, at the core of the making process remained modelling and casting. The relationship of mould to cast part was to figure in later sculptures. A natural transition from the modelling of clay to the modelling of wax also formed the basis of the later bronzes. Drawing was a key to all activity throughout. Everything started with a drawing and there was always a pencil and small notebook in Edward's pocket.

He was awarded the John Moores Liverpool Exhibition Prize in 1989, became Gregory Fellow in Sculpture at University of Leeds 1991-93 and then Research Fellow in Sculpture at Manchester Metropolitan University in 1993. He also received an award to work at the British School at Rome in 1997.

Edward Allington was dedicated to teaching, he considered it integral to develop his practice as a complete artist and to share experiences with a younger generation, and he began teaching regularly at the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, in 1990. He became Head of Graduate Sculpture in 2000 and Professor of Sculpture in 2006. He had a great rapport with staff and students in so many ways. A conversation with Ed might well engage the significance of the *Gutai* and *Mono-ha* Japanese movements, the influence of Raymond Roussel on the Surrealists and particularly Marcel Duchamp (and significantly Roussel's invention of the 'Winibago' travelling home), and a description of the perfect Martini (the Luis Bunuel recipe) which Ed would mix and shake individually for anyone at certain gatherings. Introducing Ed at an early Slade talk Bruce McLean said – 'Ed Allington is a very generous artist and that's a very rare thing'. That was also the point where I started to work more closely with Ed on a series of technical talks that were offered right across the school.

Although Ed is known for his sculpture, his writings and academic teaching, he was also highly adept with a broad range of materials and making processes. His particular presentations on the hammer, in all its sizes, guises and specific uses; his taking clay from its raw state to a complete hand-built teapot in a one hour session; the full round table top of all possible mechanical fixings available that were carefully fondled, demonstrated and explained. (Of course these also included the specifically sought out 'specials' that regularly adorned Ed's later sculptural flanges, as with the 'Tilted Vase' (1998), commissioned for Ramsbottom town centre, and 'Cochlea' (2000) at Jesus College Cambridge.) These were insightful and special moments of educational exchange, and carried out in such good fun.

But then when you read Ed's wonderful texts, like 'Buddha built my Hot Rod' (which provoked a photographic gift sent from Robert Irwin of his latest set of wheels), 'Dream Machines - Robot Art' and 'Labours of Love – the true confessions of a spare parts freak', these diverse material, technical and cultural concerns all converge so eloquently. As with all of Edward's writings you are aware of those slight traces of clay, plaster, wax or grease on the writer's hand, the hand of a maker. This ability to articulate sculpture with such sensitivity and knowledge, he shared regularly with students and colleagues, not least as a long-standing member of the editorial board of the *Sculpture Journal*.

The significance of Edward's teaching is now borne out by the very many tributes paid on social media by years of ex-students, each one keen to share their own

personal moment of revelation or piece of insight gained either over a period time or through just a brief meeting with him.

Edward's most recent show, *The Hidden Sculptures*, was at Megan Piper's gallery in 2016. Seven small sculptural pieces nested into the cut out pages of the old ledgers that Edward had for many years used as a source of drawing paper, a study of the relationship between object, container and drawing and placed rather than shown in the library of an antiquarian dealer. He also contributed to the recent Arts Council survey exhibition of Eighties sculpture, *Making It: Sculpture in Britain 1977-1986*, showing 'Snail from the Necropolis of Hope' (1983).

In 2015 as part of Edward's continued research into Japanese Sculpture he was awarded an AHRC Network Grant for his project 'A study of Japanese Modern Sculpture 1912-1941', a collaborative research network with the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, and Musashino Arts University, Tokyo, which resulted not only in an exhibition, called 'Modern Japanese Sculpture', staged both at the Henry Moore Institute and at the Musashino Arts University, but also a conference and a publication. Sadly the book he was writing on the subject remains unfinished.

Within the last few years Ed was delighted to have finally got his beloved racing 1970 HARLEY DAVIDSON XR750 TT fully restored. It is currently on loan to the Sammy Miller Motorcycle Museum.

On my last visit to Ed in hospital just a few weeks ago, he asked for my advice. He showed me some images on his phone of an MV Augusta 125cc motorcycle from the early 70's. He said he was thinking of buying it and what did I think. Of course I approved, but I said 'is that an image taken outside your house? You've bought it already haven't you?' He positively beamed and nodded; a mischievously defiant and invigorating move by a dedicated petrol head from his prone position. From there he also managed to orchestrate a final artwork – a Harley Davidson petrol tank to contain his ashes, with "Allington" replacing the Tank logo and with "The Professor" along with his name and dates in a loose brush style across the top. This was meticulously carried out by his son Harry and daughter Thalia and finished by Sammy Miller's workshop in time to adorn Edward's coffin along with a small flask of sake.

Gary Woodley

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