

# SFM Interview Sumo Sculptor Chris Cudlip

by Chris Gould

For at least 1500 years, from the time when the earliest known sumo carvings date, sculptors have been fascinated by Japan's national sport. In 2009, Chris Cudlip, a young artist from the UK, will seek to enhance his reputation as the latest sculptor to tackle this fascinating artistic phenomenon. SFM Editor Chris Gould sought to find out more about him.

**CG:** So Chris, can you give SFM a basic introduction to yourself?

**CC:** Sure, my name is Chris Cudlip, and I am a figurative sculptor based at The Arches Studios in Southampton, south England. In 2007, I exhibited a life-size relief sculpture of a sumo wrestler in polyester resin at the Bargate Monument Gallery, Southampton.

**CG:** How did you get into sumo?

**CC:** I was teaching English in Kumamoto a few years ago, and came into contact with sumo via the television. Since I returned to the UK, my interest in sumo has continued, and I hope that the media interest in my sculptures will enlighten the British public to the fascinating sport of sumo a little more.

**CG:** So, Chris, what are your plans for your latest project?

**CC:** The project I am undertaking involves carving a life size sculpture of a rikishi in a crouching position from a rather large lump of wood which is currently sat outside my studio



*Sculptor Chris Cudlip aims to transfer his skills to the field of sumo*

seasoning. So far, the project has involved hiring a digger, a crane, a flatbed truck, and a tree surgeon at the site where I picked up the wood. It has also involved borrowing a forklift truck to get the tree trunk – which weighs at least a ton – off the flat bed and into my studio.

**CG:** And what exactly will you do with the wood?

**CC:** I will be using a chainsaw for roughing the piece out, and then I will finish everything off by hand carving. I learned the hard way from my last big wooden sculpture (see picture) that doing it all by hand is a bit punishing.

**CG:** And which wrestler are you going to sculpt?

**CC:** I have recently enlisted the help of a former heavy weight

boxer as a model to take some vital measurements for the sculpture of the body. As for the face, I am still undecided as to whether to use a specific person or simply make a general figure of a rikishi.

**CG:** Sounds like a lot of work. What's your timescale?

**CC:** I estimate that carving will commence in about a month and a half. The project needs to be finished by next summer in time for an exhibition in which I wish to display it. The exhibition is called 'The Arts Vaults,' and it is held in several locations inside Southampton's medieval vaults.

**CG:** What research will you be conducting in Japan?

**CC:** Perhaps this would be a good time to mention that I am looking for a collaborative partner in

Japan as part of a research visit I am planning for the January tournament in Tokyo. I desperately want to go to some heya and take some photographs

and do drawings of the actual wrestlers – with their permission of course. I am applying to the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation and The Daiwa

Foundation for funding. I currently have partners here in Southampton, but nothing connected to Japan as of yet. Hopefully that will change soon.

