

Interview

Chris Cudlip, Professional Sculptor

by Chris Gould

Back in 2008, SFM interviewed up and coming British sculptor Chris Cudlip, who had decided to take on sumo themes. Now, with three further years of creative juices having flowed through his system, SFM revisited Chris to see how his projects had developed.

CG: Can you tell us about how you became interested in sculpting?

CC: My father is an artist and there were always books at home about making and appreciating art. The first experience of sculpting that I had was carving a wooden puppet for street entertainment. The puppet was originally made from papier-mache, but this kept falling to pieces through constant use so I decided to replace it with wooden parts that I carved myself.

Working in a pottery studio involving slab and coil-built ceramic sculptures continued my interest. The biggest influence, though, was attending Wimbledon School of Art as an undergraduate and being taught the fundamentals of figure sculpture by my tutor Alan Sly.

CG: Can you take us through the process of your sumo cedarwood sculpture?

CC: For this piece of wood, I decided that a squatting straight-back pose would be most suitable for the shape of the tree trunk. I hope to capture some of the stillness and meditative aspects of the Rikishi's stance during the "toeing the mark ritual" or perhaps the dew-sweeper or sword-bearer who squat sentinel-like during the



Yokozuna dohyo-iri. I read somewhere that the dew sweeper and sword-bearer's ritual purposes are to go ahead of the Yokozuna empty handed to make sure the road is clear. I find this idea of selflessness very attractive.

The process of carving begins with a few small sketches, then some larger to-scale drawings of the



front side and plan elevations. These provided me with a pattern to take to the tree surgeon's yard. With the help of the patterns, a JCB and a crane, we selected a suitable tree trunk. I then started making a maquette (small model) of the sumo wrestler which acted as a guide for the carving. Next I used charcoal or crayons to mark out roughly what excess timber needed to be taken off the tree trunk, and started carving. This is the stage that I am at now.

CG: What will be the most difficult part of your cedarwood sculpture?

CC: Figuring out how to support the weight of the sumo wrestler's body on two feet but still make it stable! I am thinking about possibly including a mawashi which will reach the ground to create extra support, but ultimately this will be dictated by the behavior of the wood as I proceed through carving.

CG: What other projects are you

working on?

CC: I am working on a collaborative project documenting the development of Zen (Chan) Buddhism in China. There are pictures of this along with images of a 25m long relief monumental sculpture that I worked on at <http://www.cudlipsculpture.com>. The remit is to create sculptures of all the Chinese Zen patriarchs.

I have just finished a small sculpture of the fourth and fifth Zen Patriarchs, Daoxin and Hongren, which will eventually be scaled up to life-size and exhibited in a nature reserve in Hubei province. The whole project is estimated to span over the next five years so I hope they ask me back. Here in Southampton I am currently involved in setting up a ceramics group in our studios and getting ready for a head sculpture class that I will be teaching in Sept.

CG: How has your career changed since we last interviewed you in

2008?

CC: I had two years of intense activity where I was very much in demand for residencies in galleries, community gardens, schools and youth centers. I was working with young offenders, kids verging on exclusion from school, OAPs, all ages of school children and sometimes their parents. A new technique for me that I have been exploring is stucco work: basically cement built up onto a steel armature. I had some success using this for a pair of fighting sumo wrestlers which sold as soon as I had finished them. Around the same time I did my first small relief sumo portrait – this one is of Asashoryu and is cast in resin. I have also been making inroads into willow sculpture and large-scale mosaic sculpture. An important event for me last year was being asked to exhibit a bronze sculpture of Jimi Hendrix at the Dimbola photography museum and gallery on the Isle of Wight as part of its permanent exhibition.

