

# BODIES, MOUNTAINS AND BOMBS

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PETER BEVAN



HOUSE FOR AN ART LOVER



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## BODIES, MOUNTAINS AND BOMBS

PETER BEVAN - A SCULPTOR IN CLAY

Peter Bevan is an artist working in clay. A painter by training, he found the process too direct perhaps, and too solitary. At the Glasgow School of Art he discovered his milieu for sculpture and ceramics, where kiln-side discussions and problem solving made for lively dialogue. As a maker, the move seemed a natural progression, from painting objects to making them. He models ideas to make his thoughts visible, and through form and material his concerns become manifest.

The objects fluctuate between the geological, ornamental, natural, including the human body, and manmade. Unifying them is the malleable plasticity of clay.

Clay's ability to morph and mimic is harnessed to effect in the sculptures produced by Bevan. But it is not clay for ceramic's sake. Instead it is clay's ability to emulate and represent that attracts Bevan to the material.

Collectively the works present the possibility of a narrative, playing out in an imagined landscape: Torso forms are wrapped and contained. Mountains become artifacts, in a museum perhaps. Magical-realism is the focus of figurative forms, which are shrouded and disguised, or conversely, perhaps in the process of revealing themselves. Flowerbombs suggest an explosion of life, reminiscent of Seeger and Guthrie's seminal song, Un-neutron Bomb, with its promise of a better world.



**Volcano and Bud**  
Fibre glass resin and paint.

**Cover: Freyamuse (detail)**  
Fired clay and jesmonite inlay.



**Green Mountain**  
Fired clay, wood and paint.

Objects are embellished with colour and pattern; their surfaces a mirror of the Eastern traditions and architecture that inspire them. Mountains are realistic in their rendering, but their scale suggests a memory or image of the real thing - ideas captured, with reverence and poise.

Bombs and landmines are subverted, made celebratory with flowers and decorative detailing. The violent function of these munitions transformed instead into positive energies, ready to burst.

Bevan's work evokes much of Buddhist iconography. The use of terracotta clay to model sculptures are like the votive figurative forms of South Indian sculpture. This is no coincidence. Bevan has spent a lot of time in India working in Gujarat, with clay, bronze, wood, and a community of like-minded craftsmen and artists to collaborate with. In a place where he feels anything is possible his adaption of sacred offerings, transmuted into the everyday, transforms a specific spiritual vocabulary into universal symbolism.

Votive figurines and Stupa silhouettes are all part of Bevan's language. Like the power of the Stupa to balance and collect energies, Bevan seeks to portray the vigor latent in the living things around us, in our own bodies, erupting mountains, buds and bombs. These objects all suggest activity of one kind or another. A moment paused, new growth breaking forth, powerful transitions from sleeping to waking, dormant to quaking.

These auspicious sculptures are presented to us, not as holy offerings, but on stools and upturned tables: Pedestals of the everyday.

As with the Stupa's role to promote harmony, prosperity and peace, Bevan's work sets out, through a process of thinking, making, collaborating and communicating, to make us feel the energy instilled in the work he makes, and in turn the things growing and breathing all around us.

**KATY WEST**

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## RETROSPECTION

### HOW THE IDEA FOR THE EXHIBITION DEVELOPED AND WHAT'S IN IT.

The idea behind this exhibition came to me during a period of serious disabling illness, sciatica, in Autumn 2014, when I was unable to move my body without severe pain. This event unfortunately coincided with preparations for a six-week visit to India to work with the Indian artists, Ganesh and Santana Gohain. Since it was impossible for me to travel, the flight bookings were cancelled and the trip postponed.

This confinement of a normally, very active life inevitably perhaps, triggered introspection about how I lived my life and, about my work. Why did I do it? What was it about and what could it be about when and if, I recovered from this disability? Looking back over the many years of working as a sculptor, I tried to create in my mind, an overview of the many works I have made and in the various places and contexts in which they were constructed. This overview seemed to expose a discontinuity and perhaps confusion in the variability of subjects and working processes I had engaged with over the years, and a lack of clear direction or indeed overall purpose.

This was somewhat dispiriting, and I began to wonder if I'd overlooked something? Then I realised that this was a conceptual exercise and what was missing was the works themselves. My memory of these works is variable, a few re-generate intensely powerful, rich, memorable experiences but most, are more vaguely brought to mind, in groups or batches made in particular times and places, and in the context of the prevailing personal circumstances, as if they were separate, unrelated.

So it seemed to me that I needed to actually see them all together, in order to see them as an oeuvre, more holistically. But how and where could this be achieved?



**Helen's Twin**  
Fired clay.

Coincidentally, the building and expansion of the Art centre and new Pavilion Gallery at House for an Art Lover were coming to fruition and I saw its first exhibition, that of Kenny Hunter's work. Admiring the new gallery, (as well as the work) I let the thought afloat, that maybe; it is here in this place that all my works could come together? With that thought expressed informally and later, formally as a proposal with James Cosgrove, David Leslie and their Committee at HAL, and was delighted when it was accepted. I am pleased to augment the already long -standing relationship with HAL, including the installation in the Garden of "Paisley Date Palms" in 2009.

A public exhibition is, by its nature, a visual, tactile, space-occupying way to present ideas to other people to invite response, interaction and debate. It is very important to me that my work is critically appraised in a public domain for me to fully understand what I am doing, and how it is seen objectively.

The exhibition is selected from work from the last 25 years, since my first visit to India in 1989 and distils three strands of work from that period to the present. Bodies, mountains and bombs are the "subjects" of these strands and form the structural framework of the show and are roughly in chronological order.

### BODIES

I began making sculpture with a background of being a figurative painter, with a love of and respect for the art of drawing from the live model and knew I wanted to make figurative sculpture. But didn't quite know how I wanted them to look. As a full-time teacher, didn't have time to research and develop the process of modelling from life and the lengthy processes of casting, so I looked to the simplest of ceramic process. Modelling, then firing. Firstly, making small squat figure-like forms but also, soon I became concerned with the control and manipulation of the surfaces, which of course would be fixed in the firing and experimented with patterned marks and impressed texts.

These early works were like putting a toe in the water before jumping, and I wanted to make life-size works, so developed the idea of modelling a form around my own body. I became aware of Anthony

Gormley's early work around this time and took encouragement from his intentions but his material process was quite different, his were casts of his body, mine were modelled from within. In a crouched position I built up a clay wall around my feet with a roughly 5cm gap between body and wall and continued all around the body and over my head. This took several days and of course in the breaks from modelling saw from the outside how it was forming. It looked remarkably similar to the small figures made earlier. The difference was that I became more conscious of the hollow body inside. Which was the trigger for and is a continuing influence on much of the figurative work in the exhibition. The hollow body was a place, the site of our consciousness. The necessity of hollowness in ceramics informs the reading of the works in an acknowledgement of the negative form within, an invisible presence of which the clay is its skin.

The use of floral decoration on the surface of architecture and sculpture came to me vividly of course, on trips to India and the first sculpture where I used such embellishment was the piece previously mentioned, "Paisley Date Palms" in the garden of House for an Art Lover. I was familiar with the ubiquitous "paisley pattern" but did not know the history of how it came to be so-called and through research; I came to think it an appropriate subject for this project for outdoor sculpture in this area relatively close to the Town.

The idea to make a three dimensional interpretation of a two dimensional "paisley" pattern intrigued and puzzled me, but the research told me that it was derived originally in the Middle East from a budding form of the Date Palm. This natural became the three-dimensional form of my sculpture and although I could not reproduce the astonishingly beautiful intricacy of the real paisley print and weave, I could emulate it by hand-pressing fragments of contemporary crocheted lace into the wet surface of the clay before firing.

I was so intrigued by this technique that I have continued to use it since then. In the Classical sculpture seen in India it appeared to refer almost always to clothing or decorating the body varying from God to God, according to their different attributes. The floral

**Three Flower Bombs**  
Fired clay and paint.



decoration in my work similarly refers to clothing, jewellery, body decoration, and tattooing, sometimes exposing sometimes hiding the body below.

## MOUNTAINS

When I was a teenager living in, almost, the middle of England, mountains were exotic places. One had to go to them, in North Wales, Cumbria and Derbyshire, which from a distance, I saw them as recognisably shaped peaks, walking towards them and as you climb higher and higher, the peaks have long disappeared and vision is focussed on the immediate ground around and before you. Although achieving the peak is the goal of the climb, for me what I recall almost vividly are the paths, tracks, gulleys, chimneys and the myriad of rock surfaces you clambering over on the way up.

I took the memory of these experiences on visits to Japan and to India where mountains became the focus of the work. In Japan it was the "local" volcano, Mount Iwate, which at the time was cordoned off because of fear of imminent eruption. The peak was just visible from the stone carving site, so I carved a replica of the shape of the peak which, after an eruption might be irrevocably altered. The sculpture "Volcano and Bud" has its origin in this work. In India, I worked alongside the artist Ganesh Gohain who had recently returned from an inspiring visit to Lahdak in the southern Himalayas and in sharing our experiences we collaborated on an exhibition in which Mt Padhia, nearby, became the recurring theme in drawings and sculpture.

## BOMBS

I started to make "Flowerbombs" and "Seed Landmines" as a result of the vicarious experience of the wars in Afghanistan, then Iraq and now Syria through Television and Newspaper reportage. Though they are useless, ineffectual and perhaps even whimsical they are an expression of my horror, impotence and anger over the violence of these conflicts. Let us disperse flowers and seeds rather than shrapnel.

**PETER BEVAN**

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**Above: Studio Detail 2015**  
Unfired clay pieces.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Below: 6 Paisley Date Palm 6**  
Fired clay and paint.



## BIOGRAPHY



Peter Bevan trained as a Painter at the Royal College of Art in London from 1968-971 and taught Fine Art at the Glasgow School of Art from 1973-2003.

After visiting India for the first time in 1989 he started to make sculpture in stone, wood, clay and resin and fibreglass, occasionally cast into bronze. For the past 25 years his primary medium is modelled in clay and kiln-fired into ceramic and the surfaces are finished in various media.

He has been an Artist in Residence in Scotland, India, Japan, China and USA, but more frequently works in India. Most of the residences culminated in work made on-site, which remain in Public or private collections, others were site-specific and remain where they were made.

In 2004-2005 he studied on the Classical Asian Art Course at The British Museum just prior to a three-month collaborative residency and Exhibition, "Jugalbandi", with the Indian artist Ganesh Gohain in Vadodara, India. He was awarded the Prince of Wales Bursary for the Arts, resident at the British School at Athens in 2007.

Inspired by the life and works of the poet, Robert Burns, he made two solo Shows, "Love and Liberty" 2009 and "Portraits of the Poet" 2010 commissioned by Compass Gallery, Glasgow. A permanent outdoor sculpture, "Paisley Date Palms" was installed in the garden of House for an Art Lover, Bellahouston Park, Glasgow in 2009.

In 2008 he worked on a Bronze Sculpture residency at the Uttaryan Centre for Arts in Gujarat and returned to working in modelled clay-cast-into-bronze at the Bilal Academy of Art, Kolkatta in February 2015.

Since 2003, Bevan has written regularly about the work of Indian Artists, Ganesh Gohain and Sanatana Gohain, in exhibition catalogue essays and Indian Contemporary Art Journal. He lives and works in Renfrewshire.



# HOUSE FOR AN ART LOVER

**STUDIO PAVILION, ARTPARK  
BELLAHOUSTON PARK, 10 DUMBRECK ROAD, G41 5BW**

The Studio Pavilion, situated in Bellahouston Park, opened to the public in 2014 acting as an artist's retreat in the heart of the city. The Studio Pavilion is a highly significant addition to House for an Art Lover's ARTPARK Glasgow, Centre for Arts & Heritage. The innovative design enables transformation between exhibition space and artist's studio, giving local and international artists opportunity to produce and exhibit work in a creative environment.

In addition to the Studio Pavilion, ARTPARK Glasgow comprises of a Heritage Centre, dedicated art studios and ARTsheds providing exciting opportunities for artists of all levels of ability. This includes masterclasses and workshops, public talks, events and artist residencies. Our ambition is to create a vibrant artistic community in ARTPARK Glasgow which engages with everyone from the local community to artists of international renown.

**For more information on ARTPARK Glasgow's programme,  
please contact our Arts and Heritage Development Officer  
at: [arts@houseforanartlover.co.uk](mailto:arts@houseforanartlover.co.uk) or call: 0141 427 9557**

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