



Left Part of a granite boulder 1m 20cm high on the Two Moors Way, commissioned in memory of Joe Turner who was instrumental in creating the 2MW

Below Peter Randall-Page working on a new sculpture for his exhibition at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Quarried from Nature

Stone sculptor Peter Randall-Page considers gravity, mistakes and misunderstandings with **Jenny Pery**



PHOTO: CHRIS CHAPMAN

Loud music mixes with the sound of stone drills and sanders in the conglomeration of barns that make up Peter Randall-Page's studios alongside his home near Drewsteignton. Several dusty figures in ear and eye protectors are working with him on a number of huge granite boulders or massive chunks of Kilkenny limestone, cutting the stone away to release the basic shape before Randall-Page takes over to fine-tune the finished piece.

He and his team are working flat out to complete around 50 pieces for a major solo exhibition at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Granite boulders are incised with continuous lines, split like walnuts to reveal internal convolutions, or covered with a carved pelt of raised whorls and bumps to resemble giant seedpods. The softer Kilkenny limestone lends itself to larger, more geometrically structured shapes that



Pattern is fundamental to our understanding of everything

Peter's exhibition 'Stones, Sunlight and Shadows: New Sculpture in the Woods' at Roch Court near Salisbury

are then entirely covered with intricately patterned surfaces. The inert stone is transformed into something apparently organic, visceral, fluid, suggesting a rich internal life.

The surface pattern is all-important in implying the shape within. As Randall-Page says, "People often misunderstand pattern, thinking of it as superficial decoration, but the reverse is true. Pattern is fundamental to our understanding of everything – pattern in time and shape and space. Without pattern we wouldn't be able to navigate our way around the world: The whole world is made up of patterns, and it's growth patterns that particularly interest me. Psychologically we are pattern-recognising creatures, even finding them where there aren't any because we want to find them so much."

There are relatively few British sculptors working exclusively in the unforgiving medium of stone. Sculpting



PHOTO: CHRIS CHAPMAN

'Passage': 1992. Dartmoor granite and lead. 1m 25cm high. Whiddon Deer Park (National Trust)



'Warts and All', 2006,
granite boulder 1.5m high

stone is a one-way process in which bits can be removed but nothing can be put back. Randall-Page compares it in philosophical terms to Life: "If you make mistakes you move forward. You can't say 'I wish that hadn't happened', you've just got to redeem it." But stone amply repays the difficulty of working it by its characterful antiquity, the ancient life within the stone contributing to the strong presence it acquires when it becomes a piece of sculpture.

Most of Randall-Page's pieces are derived from natural forms or botanical specimens that are then reinvented to

become suggestive equivalents of organic shapes with a disturbing psychological twist. As they are quarried from nature, literally and metaphorically, his sculptures have a special piquancy when seen in the natural settings for which they are often designed. 'Granite Song', a Dartmoor granite boulder split to reveal an intricate linear pattern filled with lead, can be seen on a small island in the middle of the River Teign. 'Passage', another split boulder of granite and lead, is to be found at the end of an avenue of mature trees at the top of Whiddon Deer Park.

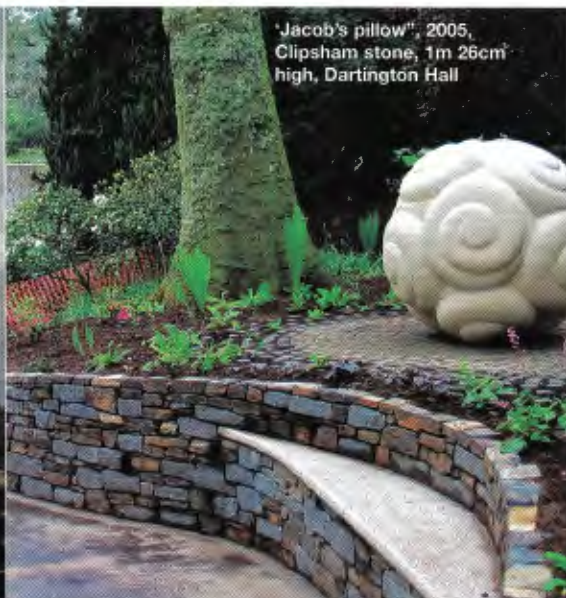
In 1987 Peter Randall-Page moved to

Devon from London, where he had assisted the sculptor Barry Flanagan in his researches into different methods of scaling up from small models. He went to Carrara in Italy to unearth the arcane technique of triangulation, a system he now uses all the time. As he says, "Getting the scale right for a sculpture is incredibly difficult. If I am working on a maquette I have a pretty strong idea in my mind about what scale it should be. If it is scaled up large there is masses more surface that needs reinventing. I draw the pattern on the stone and I deal with every inch of the surface."

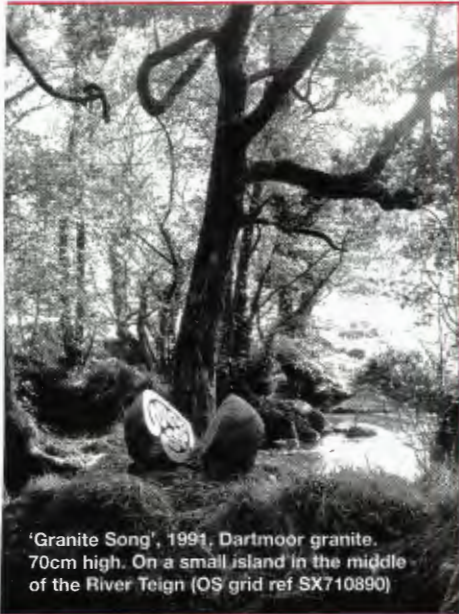
Randall-Page explores a wide range of ideas not only through maquettes but also through drawing, linocutting and etching. He enriches his visual vocabulary by constant looking and constant mark-making, always alert to subtleties of form and pattern. He stresses that tiny changes of form or texture can transform a piece of sculpture. "There's a lot of work in the last few centimetres or millimetres before the piece strikes that correct balance between the reality of it being just a lump of stuff and the illusion of it being something else. Getting that balance right is absolutely critical. If the illusion is overpowering it becomes less good, losing something if it is too explicit.



'In Mind of Monk', 2008,
marble 1m 18cm high



'Jacob's pillow', 2005,
Clipsham stone, 1m 26cm
high, Dartington Hall



'Granite Song', 1991, Dartmoor granite, 70cm high. On a small island in the middle of the River Teign (OS grid ref SX710890)



'Egyinja Eryimba', 2007, naturally split granite and ochre, 1m high, Uganda

PHOTO: STEVE RUSSELL

"It has to have that balance between what we all know is a piece of stone, and inviting the viewer to suspend their disbelief and see it as having other qualities – qualities of weight or muscularity. I like weight, the visual sense of weight, and the implication that gravity is affecting it, like a sagging breast, and I am interested in the relationship of the inside to the outside. We all know that this is just a lump of stuff, but by modulating the outside one implies internal structures."

Peter Randall-Page's exhibition in the brand new Underground Gallery at the

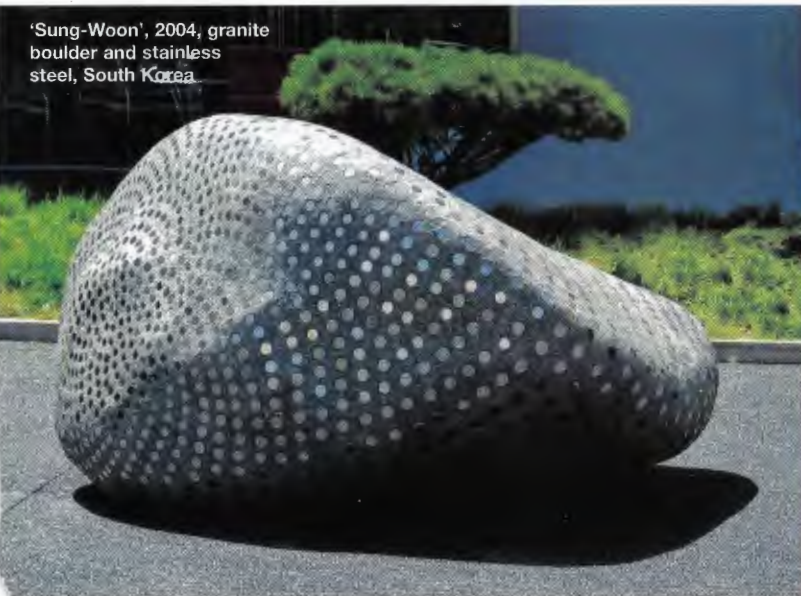
Yorkshire Sculpture Park runs from mid-June until January 2010. He admits to being quietly excited: "The Underground Gallery is one of the best ever, and it's a wonderful opportunity for me. I'm making three big new pieces in Kilkenny limestone. I haven't used Kilkenny for several years as I have been working mainly in granite, but now that they have come to an unusual part of the quarry where they are able to quarry very large pieces, I thought this would be a good opportunity to make some very large pieces for the new gallery."

The Devon countryside continues to

be a major source of inspiration, and an exhibition entitled 'Peter Randall-Page and Nature', staged by the Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World, and running from 10 April until 31 May, will show drawings, prints and some bronze pieces alongside a comprehensive display of Chris Chapman's photographs of him at work.

Many prestigious commissions for sculpture have gained Randall-Page a growing reputation, both nationally and internationally, and 2009 promises to be a particularly stellar year for one of Britain's most distinguished sculptors. □

PHOTOS: COURTESY PETER RANDALL-PAGE



'Sung-Woon', 2004, granite boulder and stainless steel, South Korea



'Shapes in the Clouds; Plato dreaming of Artemis', 2005, marble and oak, 50cm high