

## ***The Present Moment is the Only Real Time***

*Words by Barbara Hepworth*



The article from which the following is extracted originally appeared in *Unit 1: The modern movement in English architecture, painting and sculpture*. Edited by Herbert Read. London: Cassell and company, ltd., 1934.

The present moment is the only real time. Tradition is no longer a day-dream and things that have been made seem like the unfolding and development of one idea, the growth of some great tree. There is freedom to work out ideas and today seems alive with a sense of imminent new discovery.

In an electric train moving south I see a blue aeroplane between a ploughed field and a green field, pylons in lovely juxtaposition with springy turf and trees of every stature. It is the relationship of these things that makes such loveliness-

The sounds of unseen birds and droning aeroplanes in the sky, part hidden by the leaves of a tree so much very older than I am, the feeling of easy walking down the street with green red traffic lights, the earth revealing its shape to the feet and eyes as I once walked up along a long white road between trees and saw a stone arch two thousand years old standing on green flat space of earth against stony mountains, olives quietly growing in obeisance at their feet and café Robinson hidden by trees, the wireless filling the air with music from some foreign station; we can dance at the feet of these lovely undulating hills.

It is the relationship and the mystery that makes such loveliness and I want to project my feeling about it into sculpture – not words not paint nor sound: because it cannot be a complete thought unless it could have been done in no other way, in no other material or any different size.

It must be stone shape and no other shape. Carving is interrelated masses conveying an emotion; a perfect relationship between the mind and the colour, light and weight which is the stone, made by the hand which feels. It must be so essentially sculpture that it can exist in no other way, something completely the right size but which has growth, something still yet having movement, so very quiet and yet with a real vitality. A thing so sculpturally good that the smallest section radiates the intensity of the whole and the spatial displacement is as lovely as the freed and living stone shape.

I do not want to make a stone horse that is trying to and cannot smell the air. How lovely is the horse's sensitive nose, the dog's moving ears and deep eyes; but to me these are the stone forms and the love of them and the emotion can only be expressed in more abstract terms. I do not want to make a machine that cannot fulfil its essential purpose; but to make exactly the right relation of masses, a living thing in stone, to express my awareness and thought of these things.

At the present moment we are building up a new mythology which is more easily understood when the things we care for are seen. Small things found and kept for their lovely shape, their weight, their texture and intense pure colour. Objects that we place near to each other, in their different aspects and relationships create new experience. A scarlet circle on the wall, a slender white bottle on the shelf near it, a bright blue box and lovely shaped fishing floats that rest in the hand like a bird, weighty pebbles, dull grey, some gleaming white, all these move about the room and as they are placed, make the room gay or serious or bright as a frosty morning and nearly always give a tremendous feeling of work – because they are so much part of the different seasons and varied light and quality of each day.

The predisposition to carve is not enough, there must be a positive living and moving towards an ideal. The understanding of form and colour in the abstract is an essential of carving and painting; but it is not simply the desire to avoid naturalism in the carving that leads to an abstract work I feel that the conception itself, the quality of thought that is embodied, must be abstract – an impersonal vision individualised in the particular medium.

In the contemplation of Nature we are perpetually renewed, our sense of mystery and our imagination is kept alive, and rightly understood, it gives us the power to project into plastic medium some universal or abstract vision of beauty.

*© Alan Bowness, Hepworth Estate.*