

# Dust, determination and furies win award for Headington artist.

Press release 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013

In a tranquil and mystical garden tucked away in darkest Headington, there's a workshop deep in stone dust from which mythological furies are emerging. They're a new series of work by sculptor Martin Smith who has just been awarded the 2013 Mary Moser prize, an award established in 2003 to mark the work of a local artist who has taken up art as a second career later in life.

A child in Bradford, Martin discovered Henry Moore as a young teenager and decided then and there that he'd like to become a sculptor. It has been a long journey via academia and a career in academic publishing but Martin, with this award, has finally been recognised for both the quality of his art and for making a brave career choice, fifty years later, to pursue this same dream.

Inspired by the human form and shapes in nature Martin crafts his work from lumps of marble, alabaster, soapstone or other rocks, transforming large hunks of stone into tactile sculptures rich with organic colour, pinks and reds, ochre and sand, brown and green, or translucent in the sunlight.

His sculptures are heavily influenced by the beauty of the female form; others are abstract or botanical, with pods and seeds figuring largely. The University of Oxford Museum of Natural History is also an inspiration to him: both the building, with its wonderful stonework, and the bones and exhibits within.

"You can't impose a fixed idea on stone," he explains. You have to work with it as there are softer and harder seams with a piece so it's rather a two way process. The shape of the sculpture evolves slowly as the carving is long and laborious work – however, it's worth it because once completed a marble statue can last for several thousand years. This is certainly art to keep!!

And stone carving isn't an artistic pursuit for the faint-hearted - Martin's sculptures vary widely in size and form, and can weigh as much as 120kg or more so he's a regular at the gym just to be able to move some of them! 'I learnt about the need to keep fit the hard way' laughs Martin. 'I left a work-in-progress on a bench seat in the back room when I went on a relaxing holiday for a couple of weeks and when I came back I couldn't lift it anymore! I also once had 10 tonnes of Rajasthan marble delivered to the house by lorry all the way from Tuscany and when the lorry arrived without a lifting arm, there was no way I was going to be able to get the marble slab into the garden. I had to call in emergency help from a local stone merchant and even then the closest ones didn't have the equipment I needed.'

Formerly an academic editor, Martin went to Tuscany to learn his craft 10 years ago and revisits regularly. With a workshop for the dirty work in the garden and an attic studio for life drawings, and wax and clay modelling, Martin plans to put the Mary Moser prize money towards developing a third artspace, a second studio in the garden for casting bronze – a double challenge, as he'll not only plans to start more bronze works but also because this workshop will need to be dust-free!

To see Martin's work visit  
<http://www.martinsmithsculpture.co.uk/>



## **Notes to Editors**

### **Oxfordshire Artweeks [www.artweeks.org](http://www.artweeks.org)**

Artweeks is Oxfordshire's largest visual arts festival and the UK's oldest and biggest Open Studios event, a three-week celebration each May that celebrates the county's artistic and creative talent. Around 1000 artists open the doors to their homes and studios and welcome the public to see their creations and watch them work. An estimated 100,000 people visit nearly 500 venues across the county each year.

#### **All exhibitions are free**

*Oxfordshire Artweeks 2014 will run from Saturday 3rd – 26<sup>th</sup> May 2014*

and is organised into three geographical areas

*South Oxfordshire Exhibitions: Saturday 3rd - Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> May*

*North Oxfordshire Exhibitions: Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> May*

*City Exhibitions: Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> - Monday 26<sup>th</sup> May*

The *Oxfordshire Visual Arts Festival (Artweeks)* is a non profit-making company, limited by guarantee and owned by its members. Everyone is welcome to take part and there is no selection process for artists wishing to participate.

**The Mary Moser annual prize** honours the work and commitment of Lady Mary Moser who took up art seriously on retirement and became a printmaker; first working in silk screen and latterly in etching and woodcuts, Mary was also chair of Kids@Art, the Oxfordshire Artweeks Education Charity which provided residencies in schools until 2009.

**Previous winners** include Wendy Newhofer in 2011, whose fresh glass pieces have earned her acceptance into the Oxfordshire Craft Guild; Crabby Taylor in 2012, a raku-ceramacist based in Chipping Norton, and last year, Caroline Meynell, a painter based in Great Milton producing contemplative abstracts.

**Further press information & photographs from Esther Browning 01865 821090 or 07776 196967  
[esther@artweeks.org](mailto:esther@artweeks.org)**

**Esther Browning is also available for interview.**