

Between sculpture, sneakers and eternity: a talk with Alasdair Thomson (OG Version)

Q: So, Alasdair, we are finally here! First of all, I wanted to ask if you can briefly introduce yourself to our readers, to make them aware of your background.

A: Of course. My name is Alasdair Thomson and I am a stone sculptor working in Edinburgh, Scotland. I carve sculptures of many things, but I am currently quite focussed on carving sneakers. I have been carving stone for 17 years now, beginning in 2006 with an apprenticeship in Connecticut, USA under American sculptor Mark Mennin. I then studied for a diploma in sculpture in Siena, and since completing that 11 years ago I have maintained my own practice here in Edinburgh.



Q: Perfect! Now we can start our tough, extremely complicated and troublesome interview. Nah, just joking man, don't worry. So, I think that a good starting point may be the connection between your education and your actual job as sculptor: if you want to, explain what your turning point has been and why-how-where you started to carve.

A: I studied for a degree in Art History at the University of Edinburgh, graduating in 2004. Many of my additional classes were in related fields, including History of Architecture, Classical Art and Classical Archaeology, and the through-line that linked all these subjects was the use of stone. So my interest in stone began there. I chose to focus on the sculpture of the early Renaissance for my thesis, and again my interest deepened, but it wasn't until 2 years after graduating that I was given the opportunity to try carving stone for myself. I completely fell in love with the material and process and have been pursuing opportunities to further my knowledge and experience ever since. This took me initially to America where I worked as an assistant to the American sculptor Mark

Mennin, but this experience did not necessarily allow me to learn sophisticated stone carving techniques and skills, although I did learn a confidence in using heavy power tools and pneumatic hammers that gave me an advantage later.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CmFRFyIKtB3/>

Q: Got it. So everything began with your journey in America, where you had the possibility to express your creativity. Extremely interesting. However, as you said and as I was supposing, you lacked finesse. You just learnt by experience, and that's something admirable, but where did you learnt also the proper technique to "work" the marble?

A: After working in America I enrolled on my diploma programme in Siena in order to learn how to carve stone properly. It was a one year intense programme, 5 days a week but I didn't feel that that was enough, so I obtained my own studio insurance so that I could work after class (which ended at 4pm) until 9pm when the studio was locked up for the night. So I was getting an extra 5 hours carving time per day, 25 hours per week. I also worked all day on Saturdays, trying to use every opportunity to learn more, practise techniques and just get as many hours on the tools as I possibly could. At the end of the year I was awarded 100% by the studio masters, the first and only time I have achieved 100% in anything!

My diploma programme was funded entirely by the E.U so it was heartbreaking when the U.K decided to leave. One of my recent sculptures, 'We folded' was in response to this. It makes me sad that my daughter, at present, will not have the same opportunities that I did to study abroad. But I hope that will have changed by the time she is old enough.



"We folded" di Alasdair Thomson

Q: Extremely interesting. I couldn't agree more on the last point: I had the possibility to study abroad thanks to UE too. Indeed, this institution can be surely criticised, but it always dedicates place, time and huge funds to permit us, young people, to get to know the world. Let's go back to our interview: so you've studied in Toscana, the homeland of marble and art. As can be noticed in your Instagram profile, now you use marble, but which materials have you used in the past?

A: Yes, I studied in the heart of Tuscany, and was extremely fortunate to be in Siena, a city with so many great and inspiring works of art and architecture. The stone I trained with was travertine because it is the local stone to Siena and therefore cheap and easily obtainable, but I have since changed to carving marble which is from Carrara in the north of Tuscany. I didn't go there during my diploma year but I now go there every year to purchase new stone for upcoming projects.

Q: So Tuscany is a piece of your heart. Therefore, I had a fast and maybe out of context question: what's your favourite artist (and maybe your role model) from this region?

A: If you want my favourite sculptor from the region then I think it has to be Michelangelo (1475 - 1564). He was from Firenze. His work was on a level of accomplishment that hadn't been seen before, or maybe not since Classicism, and his genius allowed him to carve straight into the block to 'find' the figure without taking measurements from his models. But if you want my favourite sculptor outright then it has to be Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598 - 1680). The realism of his work and way he portrays the 'drama of the moment' is just amazing and I would say unrivalled, even to this day.



La morbidezza di un'opera in marmo

Q: Magnificent. So now I can go back to our discussion: as for now, we've understood that you have always been a creative person that loved art and decided to "catch the wave". That's fine, and in a certain way also admirable, but now this is your work or it is a huge hobby?

A: This is my full-time job! I get to carve marble sculpture all day, every day!

Q: So you can be considered an artist!

A: Yes, I suppose so!

Q: Incredible. Now the the toughest question of the whole interview: how the hell you ended up doing sneakers?

A: I had been working on a series of drapery-themed sculptures, inspired by the figurative subjects that I had studied during my degree and had seen whilst walking round Florence and Siena. (You will see me return to this theme quite often in my work.) Carving drapery sculptures led to carving other accessories and then shoes. Shoes led to sneakers, specifically Nike sneakers because there is the link between Nike being the Greek goddess of victory, classical sculpture and marble, so carving a pair of Nikes from marble was a really fun and playful idea, but it also seemed an obvious one.



Q: So you weren't a sneakerhead before someone just told you "Oh man, your marble sneakers are nice, you should do more of them"??? Unbelievable! And then what's happened? Have you ever get in contact with Nike?

A: I decided that I wanted to try and court Nike as a client, so I carved a pair of Air Max 1's and sent them as a gift to a Nike contact that I had acquired. I didn't send a covering note and I didn't ask them for work, I just thought that I would let the sculpture speak for me. The next year Nike commissioned me to work on a couple of prestigious projects, including making a sculpture for Super Bowl LIII in 2019. Since then, and with every sneaker sculpture I make, my client list grows and people's awareness of my work expands.

Q: That sounds amazing and weird at the same time: it just represents the beauty of life and how it can easily change. Amazing. So, what was your first sneaker? And your favourite one?

A: My first pair of special sneakers were the Nike Pegasus '91, but I wasn't into sneakers at the time and I just needed something for gym class at school. My favourite sneaker for everyday wear are the Nike MD Runner 2, but my favourite pair of hype sneakers are my Jeff Staple 'Panda' Pigeon Dunks. Super cool.



Q: Absolutely. And think that I have a pair of Pidgeons too, and they're signed by Staple! However, now I wanted to talk about your last masterpiece: the LeBron sculpture.

A: I had been thinking about making this sculpture for a couple of years. I was aware of the scoring record and that LeBron might break it, so I made plans to mark the moment with a sculpture. I thought that the nature of this project was quite unique, owing to the monumental nature of LeBron's achievement, and by using marble which, as I'm sure you can appreciate, is synonymous with monuments from Classicism and the Renaissance, it makes this a fitting tribute to LeBron's achievement.



Q: So they're a celebrative masterpiece: as for emperors were built massive monuments to celebrate their victories, you decided to pay homage to the best scorer of all times in NBA. At a first glance, it's surely anachronistic, but also the demonstration of the transversal of marble and art in general: in simple terms, you're an artist that is using an evergreen material to represent your era.

Now we expand a little bit our discussion: have you ever collaborated with famous brand or people? I know the answer, but I want you to present your astonishing collabs to our readers.

A: As I mentioned earlier, I have worked for Nike. They have been a fantastic client to have worked for. It has opened so many doors. My work was seen at the Super Bowl in 2019 and at the opening of the Nike's Blue Ribbon Sports Store in Santa Monica, and is on permanent display at the Jordan Building at Nike Headquarters in Beaverton, Portland. Those are some of my favourite projects. I have also made a series of sculptures for Nike SB athletes, for NBA all-star Damian Lillard of the Portland Trail Blazers, for Puma, Jeff Staple, Salehe Bembury and Gianluigi Buffon amongst many others.



Didascalìa

Q: So you've worked with Nike, Puma, Jeff Staple. Some funny anecdotes related to these collabs? I don't know, maybe something that just happened and you didn't expect.

A: I was watching my stories on Instagram and I saw that Jeff Staple had used an image of my sculpture for the cover of his new book. He had asked if I could send him images to use IN the book but he never said anything about the cover! It was a very pleasant surprise!

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CkqP7oEK6ST/>

Q: Well, Jeff put your sculpture on the cover of his book and were completely unaware of this? Unbelievably funny! However, considering that we have a complete overview of you as a sneakers-sculptor, we can talk about the more business side of your job: so, you are extremely creative and you have taken out from a simple block of marble astonishing sculptures like the LeBrons or the megaphone. But, do you produce also custom pieces?

A: A large percentage of my business is from private clients. Right now a lot of people are wanting the sneaker sculptures, so that is what I am making mostly, so in order to keep my own creativity flowing I occasionally make a personal sculpture that is of specific importance to me. Recently the megaphone was one of those, and my folded E.U flag sculpture was another. I have a few other non-sneaker sculptures that I really want to make, so look out for those.



Q: And now are you open to commissions, specifically from Italy?

A: Absolutely. I love the fact that I work in this ancient material that is the same material that the great masters of sculpture also used. It is a privilege to work in such a beautiful material that is imbued with the history of art, and it would be my greatest pleasure to keep making sculptures for the pleasure of your readers.



Le Versace Chain Reaction...presto ne parleremo in maniera più approfondita :)

Q: I just asked because Eyes was interested in building a celebrative monument in the centre of Milan...UNFORTUNATELY we are just joking, but it would certainly be great, an another masterpiece.

So Alasdair, I think we are over. I really wanted to thank you for your kindness, your professionalism and your openness. I had a great time with you, and hope you had the same feeling: it was an amazing pleasure to talk with an artist that have combined a classical discipline with a pop-culture-thing like sneakers. That's it! See y'all in the next article!

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