

## THE SCULPTOR'S ART

by PETER BALL 12th July 1997

Peter was born in Coventry in 1943 and he grew up in a completely non-religious home: indeed, his father was, and still is, a card-carrying member of the Communist Party. He left school at a young age and in 1957 he went to Art School. Over the years he has worked on a building site, in a factory and as a teacher, but now he makes his living entirely from his sculptures. Peter has a special affection for Southwell Minster; at the age of 12 it was the first cathedral he ever visited.

THE CHRISTUS REX was made for the Minster in 1987 and was designed to fit in with the Norman building's chevron and cable carvings. The body of the figure is made from unseasoned elm, and the arms are of 18th century oak from Ossington. The whole is covered with copper and highlighted with gold leaf. The oxidising of the copper is deliberate, though in about 7 years time it will be so widespread that the figure will need to be taken down for some re-gilding. The figure weighs 7 cwt and is hung by 4 lines and a safety line. The weight will decrease a little as the wood dries out. The way that the lighting is arranged does not show up the eyelids, so the eyes look too big. There has been a suggestion that the Christus Rex should be lowered a little so that it hangs just below the level of the crossing arch.

CHRIST THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD This statue is also carved from 18th century oak taken from the stable block at Ossington. Peter says that he does not have a "blinding light" vision of what he should carve. The shape of the piece of wood gave the form to the sculpture, then, "as you think about it and are handling it, it happens as you go along. Things change and develop as you make them".

THE PIETA is special to Peter. It was made at his suggestion and was made with Pamela Irvine in mind.

ECCE HOMO is made from a railway sleeper bought in Newark. The wood is jarrah. The shape of the sleeper suggested a standing human form and it is almost untouched. The metal used is pewter with copper sulphate, and the crown of thorns is barbed wire.

Peter has other religious works in other cathedrals and churches. Several may be seen in Winchester Cathedral, a Crucifix at Portsmouth Cathedral and a Virgin at Southwark Cathedral. There is a crucifix at Chilcombe, near Winchester. Nearer to home Peter's work can be seen at St Martha's, Broxtowe and at Cotgrave.

However, most of Peter's sculptures are not Christian but pagan, and many of them are fertility symbols which people buy for their gardens.

### **The materials used**

Wood -comes from a variety of sources. Large works (like the body of the Reigning Christ or the altar at Winchester) are made from large blocks of unseasoned wood. Older, seasoned wood is often re-used wood, as with that from Ossington and the railway sleeper mentioned above. Sometimes it is driftwood - wood from the sea oxidises and gets very hard. Peter brought with him a Mother and Child sculpture which illustrated how a piece of driftwood sometimes suggests a subject and is essentially left in its natural form.

Metals are normally copper, pewter and gold leaf. Peter rarely works with bronze because it is so expensive. Copper comes in three thicknesses:- very thin sheets (almost like tin foil), thicker but still pliable sheets and rigid sheets. The two thinner varieties are annealed, moulded to the shape of the sculpture, glued and nailed with copper tacks. The thickest variety has to be heated and beaten to shape. Pewter is used in the same way as copper, but is covered with copper sulphate. Small quantities of gold Leaf are used for highlights.

Peter does not make drawings of his work before he begins. If he is working on a very large commission he will make a small model (a maquette), but always on the understanding that the finished work will not look exactly the same because things change as he works. Usually with the smaller works, the shape and form of the wood meet him half way.

Art was discussed but it is not possible to capture the feel of the discussion. Peter does not set out to shock: he wants his work to enhance people's lives. Art should make people think. But one form of art is not "better" than another. Each artist does what he or she is moved to do.