



Photo: Jackie Norman

A multitude of silent characters

There is a house in the Suburb which is inhabited by the most wonderful sculptures. Alec Worster has created a multitude of silent characters in varied sizes, shapes and textures. In the studio, small and large portraits, in the form of heads, fill two shelves. They have a quality of alertness, and appear as if caught in mid movement. Particularly memorable are a bust of a young black man with a gold earring, and exquisite drawings for a garden statue of a deer.

As a contrast, life-size shapes of rough figures lie, slouch or crouch on plinths or cardboard boxes. They are without any detail, and are made of chicken wire armature, covered with hessian scrim, and dipped in plaster. Four of them appeared as eerie presences in St Jude's Church during the recent Proms. They symbolize homeless people.

They are very striking because they have no faces at all. They strongly reminded me of the figures caught in the larval flow at Pompeii, or medieval illustrations. Alec Worster made them in response to a competition called, ironically, "Faces of the City".

By making these figures featureless, he avoided their representing a given person or

type. He uses the absence of faces also to convey the lack of eye contact we have with the homeless people on the streets. They first imposed themselves on his consciousness as he commuted to the City Polytechnic in Whitechapel four years ago, and he began to consider what he personally could do about the problem.

He does not photograph or

sketch these people, but carries away the memory to work on later. The figures have taken part in exhibitions in St Martin in the Fields, and also for the charity "Crisis". Alec Worster has moved on to other work now, but considers that these figures still have a job to do. He is currently in consultation with the Prince's Trust.

Before becoming a sculptor, Alec Worster was a creative director of the advertising agency Ogilvy and Mather. He had done no artistic work for himself since National Service. In the early 70's he began life classes at The Institute with Len Wilshaw and

then John Brown, followed by sculpture and drawing classes. He says, "I remember a class being given a plaster cast of the mouth and left eye of Michelangelo's David and being told 'copy that'." He continued this by resigning his directorship, building a small studio, pursuing a certificate and diploma at the Sir John Cass School of Art, and now a Fine Art Degree at Middlesex University. He considers that he is lucky and says, "I wonder what I would have done if I had gone to Art School instead of reading English at New College, Oxford." The range of materials he uses include resin, plaster, terracotta, wood,

stone, glass fibre, cement and metal. He does painting, etching, engraving and collotypes. His work is impressive and inspiring.

Three Worster daughters are all using their considerable artistic talents in their work. Alec Worster himself does commissioned work for individuals, or organisations like insurance companies. He has a vast reservoir of ideas from which to draw. His eyes shine as he says, "I would like to do a figure as big as this room, or at least a head as big as this sofa."

Jackie Norman



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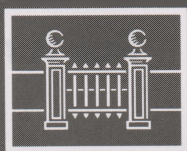
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