

FASHION AND FAMILIARITY: POST-WAR GARDEN AND PARK SCULPTURE IN LONDON

By Ian Leith

Compared to the richness of the information about the plants in London's parks and public gardens, making an assessment of the sculptures to be found there is curiously inverse. The RHS Horticultural Database bibliography contains no less than 814 pages, but any audit or bibliography relating to the hundreds of works of art placed within those gardens after World War II would currently amount to no more than a few pages.

The great absence of information on outdoor sculpture should be contrasted with the glut pertaining to private and public collections of sculpture indoors – one is driven to the conclusion that man-made aesthetic objects placed in public view are much less culturally significant than plants or architecture or ecology.

A few cases illustrate the wealth and the vagaries of taste – dealing just with pieces erected after 1945 one might mistakenly assume that these had received more attention than older commissions. Nearly all research embarked on here almost immediately becomes original – there are few signposts, and only sporadic hits online: beyond the websites of sculptors and dealers there are thin gleanings from this now 'definitive' source. So London squares and parks and gardens remain a challenge for all those wandering through them – with no sculptural Baedeker who knows what one will discover – or find removed.

Some sculpture attains a public fondness that protects it, but other pieces are actually more ephemeral than the plants whose species have at least been scientifically defined. The *Venus Fountain* by Gilbert Ledward (1888–1960) erected in Sloane Square in 1953 has achieved this level of approved familiarity: (fig. 39) it was recently listed Grade II, and the furore regarding its proposed repositioning to improve the square only served to confirm its popular regard. Ledward himself proposed the funding and the site and then also won the competition to provide this well-proportioned figure, which now seems a quite essential and humanising element of the square. For this

project he identified the Leighton Fund, established by two sisters of Lord Leighton, whose object is to place works of art in or near public buildings. He hoped that such an important gesture would set an example to local authorities whose spending on the arts in a civic context was likely to be restricted just after the war. Such efforts did indeed take place, but the existence or survival of this post-war modernism in London, and well beyond, is open to question. The foremost patron of outdoor sculpture in London was the London County Council, who consciously provided sculpture for those living in the new post-war council estates.

The man or woman on the 137 bus to Clapham passing through Sloane Square should give this sophisticated fountain a little more attention: according to the monograph on Ledward by Catherine Moriarty,¹ the difficult twisting pose of the figure is quite precisely measured, knee to ankle, wrist to elbow, collar bone to nipple, along with a whole series of detailed facial measurements. She notes that the pose shares elements in common with the *Cupid* formally attributed to Michelangelo at the V&A.

Another functioning fountain, *The Joy of Life* by T. B. Huxley-Jones (1908–1969) erected in 1963 in Hyde Park, was also recently listed and restored. Huxley-Jones's fountain appropriately celebrates outdoor activities but in the 1970s one of the figures was stolen (and replaced), and for many years it remained dry like many other London fountains. Fountains, in particular, require stringent maintenance agreements, but the will to actually provide water now seems almost entirely absent – many are now the province of WI gardeners.

A series of thefts of sculpture has punctuated post-war history in London but astonishingly little is known about the statistics or the motives, which were certainly not purely linked with the scrap value of bronze. Dozens of major pieces have been lost since 1945 and only some have been replaced.

Similarly protected but much less well-known is the fountain by the same artist that sits outside Hornsey Library near Crouch End in what is described as a 'sculpture garden'.

1. Catherine Moriarty, *The Sculpture of Gilbert Ledward* (Lund Humphries in association with The Henry Moore Foundation, 2003).



39. Gilbert Ledward, *Venus Fountain*, Sloane Square, 2008
(PHOTOGRAPH: SALLY WILLIAMS)

This term should always be used with caution since it has no authoritative meaning in any formal planning or listing sense. Like Conservation Areas, a series of official Sculpture Parks could easily be designated but unlike all other 'assets' official interest remains low. Places containing three or more sculptural representations that could be deemed worthy of such an appellation might include Cheyne Walk, Battersea Park, Belgrave Square, Broadgate, Hyde Park, Green Park, Kensington Gardens, Canary Wharf, and the area around The Royal Exchange. In nearly all these locations pieces have been stolen or removed since 1945 – whether the removal has been authorised or is criminal or whether these absences relate to owners who subsequently relocated is almost entirely unknown outside local historians of the area in question. Sculpture in public view but on private property ought to come under the heading of 'corporate responsibility', but that has been insufficient to ensure consultation on possible re-use or retention of public works by artists such as Henry Moore (*Sundial*, Queen Victoria Street, now outside a bank in Brussels), Barbara Hepworth (*Meridian*, State House, Holborn), Maurice Lambert (attic figures on Grosvenor Place building by A E Richardson) and Bernard Sindall, whose series of nine figures of muses above the entrance to the Barbican only lasted four years before they were removed by the new 'arts' management in 1997. An illustrated list of the losses since the 1960s would accurately reflect the whims of fashion that rejected both figurative and abstract works and a list of pieces removed after 1945 that had been erected prior to the war would be even longer. Consultative mechanisms might allow patrons to understand the views of the public who paradoxically only become aware of sculpture when it is removed.

There is no Greater London Authority with responsibility to monitor or audit public art. An exception to this absence of information is the admirable Hammersmith and Fulham public art website, which was jointly funded by the Borough and English Heritage.³ This sort of public art audit is necessary for the whole of London if we are to understand, conserve and monitor what has been erected or

what is proposed – there is little point in suggesting removals of the unfashionable until we know the extraordinary diversity of what currently exists. The Public Monuments and Sculpture Association (PMSA) has been attempting to remedy this since 1991, but as a small charity its resources are quite limited.³

Osbert Sitwell's semi-jocular call in 1928 for a *Controller of Inanimate People* still has a relevance: 'just as traffic has now...to be regulated, so should the mob of statues have adequate police supervision'.⁴ Many hundreds of 'inanimate people' have since appeared and not only is there still a lack of control but more to the point neither is there any adequate statistical overview of what has gone up, come down, been stolen or put 'in store' – another locus where public audits would be useful. Perhaps the National Audit Office might agree that such audits are theoretically desirable – until then, and despite escalating values, public sculpture does not constitute a serious asset unless, of course, it is privately owned and insured.

In the 1930s, the German writer Robert Musil acutely noted that all statues were actually invisible. This is easily proven on Google. At some point after 1981 we lost a bronze figure of *Pocahontas* of 1956 by David McFall (1919–1988) reclining in Red Lion Square. (fig. 40) Like most sculpture it was too minor to be mentioned in any of the early Pevsner volumes and like much sculpture deliberately erected in public view it appears to have been removed at the whim of a private owner – did anyone object to the loss of this striking asset? Perhaps it was yet another victim of sculptural fashion, which automatically questions the values of any work of the last generation – often to the detriment and chagrin of later generations. Even if we lose such as these artistic assets the creation of audits would at least allow adequate records. So quite apart from the WWII bombing that partly removed a church by G. E. Pearson – St John's, Red Lion Square – we have also lost something that was put up to refurbish this ravaged square. In 1952 Pevsner was not being ironic when he mentioned that the ruins of the

3. For a recent PMSA online database of nearly 700 sites in Norfolk and Suffolk go to www.racns.co.uk/public.asp.

4. Osbert Sitwell, *The People's Album of London Statues* (London: Duckworth, 1928), p.56.

2. www.maps.lbhf.gov.uk/Sculptures/search.asp.

church were worth retaining as a memorial. To lose within living memory the iconic Princess Pocahontas in the same square is unfortunate – but also very typical of London.

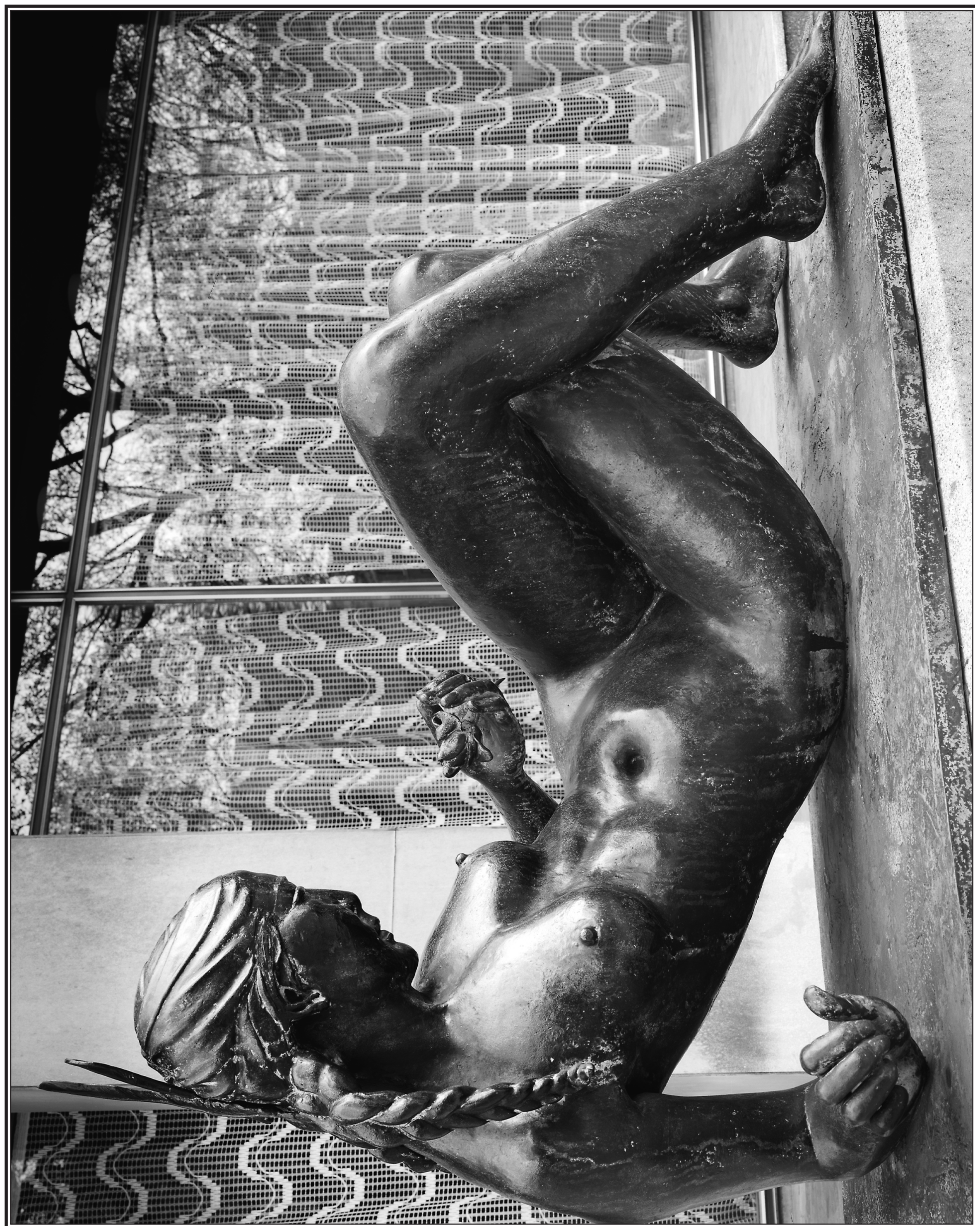
The Pocahontas story remains that of one of those semi-mythic London personages who no doubt has or will appear in the writings of Peter Ackroyd. However, she was quite real and attended many London functions in 1616 – but even the *Pocahontas Archive* website is unaware of her recent very physical manifestation in Red Lion Square that lasted at least 20 years as the free-standing logo of the publisher Cassell who had originally been based where she had lodged off Ludgate Hill. The name derivation of the yard once known as *La Belle Sauvage* is now the only historical allusion to her – and was inscribed on the lost bronze. Fortunately, she is also commemorated by a more conventional statue in Gravesend, where she died about to embark on her way back across the Atlantic, put up by an American sculptor who erected the first memorial to her in Jamestown, Virginia in 1922. But even if her links with Red Lion Square are now doubly obscure this story does serve to remind us about whether we can afford to casually lose such a historic London association. To erect any sculpture involves negotiating a whole series of planning and funding regulations, which historians or archaeologists may uncover in years to come, but there is as yet no Controller who can tell us much about this or many other quite recent stories. London narratives appear to be almost exclusively literary or historical or mythical – fashion precludes them being sculptural.

Cadogan Place reveals another little known story. Two sets of figures by David Wynne in the private gardens off Sloane Street can be easily seen from the bus, but the fact that these squares are faced by a series of 18 abstract shapes in sheet copper by Dame Elisabeth Frink (1930-1993) is not well known. They are not listed. They were attached to the wall of what is now the Jumeirah Carlton Hotel in 1961 and must remind us of the hugely important architectural and sculptural ensemble of the *Time-Life* building on Bond Street, which exhibits works by Henry Moore and others. The reason we are reminded is the architect: both *Time-Life* in Bond Street and the hotel in Cadogan Place were designed by

Michael Rosenauer, who remains one of the most important early post-war designers in London because he combined art and architecture. Located just above a canopy on the entrance front of the hotel, Frink's panels are so well integrated that they easily escape notice; there is no visible plaque to remind the well-heeled about these less portable works of art (it would appear that art collectors must also observe the laws of Robert Musil cited below). It can be guessed that the incorporation of this art was one of the compensations agreed by planners for raising a very high building at the north end facing the squares. The hotel is thus endowed with a virtue beyond its architecture, but despite the legal precedents of the *Time-Life* case more than a decade ago this sculptural factor is rarely taken into consideration for the listing of not so worthy buildings, thus a unique but unfamiliar ensemble by Frink could disappear like the one that was removed from the architecturally undistinguished St Swithin's House on Walbrook in the City of London in 2007. There, a series of stone figures of socialist workers on two levels graced an otherwise undistinguished office building, one of the first put up after the war. They were *The Arts and Manual Labour* by Siegfried Charoux (1896-1967) and constituted some of the last evidence of 1951 and the great post-war re-building of London. (fig. 41) At the time they were erected these stone Stakhanovite workers faced idealistically West towards a great empty bombed space punctuated by St Paul's.

One of the most recent statues put up in the sliver of a garden opposite South Kensington Station is the distinctive attenuated figure of the composer *Bela Bartok* (1881-1945) who stayed nearby. (fig. 42) This was put up in 2004 and is by the distinguished Hungarian sculptor Imre Varga (b. 1923) who also created similar figures in Budapest, Paris and Brussels. London is full of such sculptural surprises but this one passes the sternest test: rendering a suit in bronze and reminding us of the London existence of eminent foreigners in unlikely metropolitan purlieus. One hopes that it has been given sufficient maintenance protection to ensure it survives until it too is eligible for listing protection – in 2026.⁵

5. Structures are normally eligible for listing after 30 years.



40. David McFall, *Pocahontas*
(REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF EH.NMR)



41. Siegfried Charoux, *The Arts and Manual Labour*, St Swithin's House, Walbrook,
erected 1951, removed 2007
(REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF EH.NMR)

42. Imre Varga, *Bela Bartok*, South Kensington, 2008
(PHOTOGRAPH: SALLY WILLIAMS)

In such monumental matters Robert Musil should always have the last word: 'what strikes one most about monuments is that one doesn't notice them. There is nothing in the world as invisible as monuments'.⁶ In 1936 he could also say that 'one can realise how backward the art of monuments is compared with the contemporary development of advertising'. Not much has changed in 2008: unless authorized by familiarity 'monuments and sculpture are still impregnated against attention'.

Ian Leith is one of the founders of the
Public Monuments and Sculpture Association
(www.pmsa.org.uk),
a small charity whose remit is to define
and protect this
curiously ill-defined sector.
A series of online and published resources
are available via the website.

PARLIAMENT SQUARE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GREY WORNUM LANDSCAPE

By Barbara Simms

In 1998 Foster and Partners were appointed to develop a masterplan for the civic centre of Westminster - Trafalgar Square, Whitehall, Horse Guards Parade, Parliament Square, Old Palace Yard and the Sanctuary - entitled *World Squares for All Masterplan (WSfA)*.¹ Phase One included the enhancement of Trafalgar Square, completed in 2004, work on Whitehall is underway and Parliament Square is planned for completion by 2011, ready for *London 2012*. Proposals are emerging that seek to introduce a new design for Parliament Square, removing the existing 1949 English Heritage grade II registered landscape by architect George Grey Wornum (1888-1957). Wornum was appointed consultant architect for the redesign of Parliament Square in December 1948, his brief determined by the history of the site and the requirements

of a number of government departments and outside agencies. This article reviews the restraints and philosophy that informed his design and appraises its historic significance.

The development of a designed civic space linking Westminster Abbey and Parliament from an early nineteenth-century 'garden square' and Charles and Edward Barry's later mid-nineteenth century designs for a new Parliament Square have been well documented.² (fig. 43) Edward Barry's 1868 amendments to his earlier design (and the construction beneath the Square of the Metropolitan District Railway) resulted in a central garden of two symmetrical plots, decorated with statues of past prime ministers and enclosed by railings, with a separate western lawn displaying a statue of George Canning (known as the Canning Enclosure). During the 1930s several plans for alterations to Parliament Square were put forward to improve traffic flow, including a Ministry of Transport proposal for an enlargement of the rectangular design of the railed area to a square, with a consequent reduction of the western lawn.³ Discussions on possible improvements, interrupted by the outbreak of war in 1939, were continued when the Abercrombie and Forshaw *County of London Plan* (1943), commissioned by the London County Council (LCC), proposed the diversion of traffic from the area and the creation of a pedestrian precinct, 'a more tranquil setting without the distractions associated with great volumes of quick-moving and heavy traffic'.⁴ The report also emphasised the need 'for ceremonial occasions, a dignified and reasonably spacious environment'.

Post-war, the LCC developed these plans in a proposal entitled 'Roundabout at Parliament Square' (1946), which, incorporating additional land from the demolished Westminster House site on the west, showed a similar square-shaped central island and

2. See, for example, 'Parliament Square, Past, Present and Future', *Journal of the London Society* 376, October 1966, pp.93-104. See also *Illustrated London News*, 6 September 1851 and 8 March 1862, for illustrations of the space as a garden square.

3. See *Ground Plan of Parliament Square* showing the Ministry of Transport's proposals for enlarging the central island and improving traffic conditions, London Metropolitan Archives MCC/CL/L/CC/10/04.

4. Patrick Abercrombie and J. H. Forshaw, *County of London Plan* (London: London County Council, 1943).

6. Robert Musil, 'Monuments' in *Selected Writings*, edited by Burton Pike (New York: Continuum, 2004), vol.72.

1. Foster and Partners, *World Squares for All Masterplan* (London, 1998).