

STEVE DILWORTH  
OFF THE ROCK



(LEFT)  
Steve Dilworth  
in his studio with  
*Giant's Rattle*,  
July 2017

## STEVE DILWORTH OFF THE ROCK

*I want to retrieve that moment of understanding, not by describing, but by making. Of course I'll fail, but in the chemistry of making another moment will appear. These objects are drawn from an internal landscape, of shifting sands. Connections are constantly being discovered.<sup>1</sup>*

Steve Dilworth

On the edge of the wild North Atlantic, a tide of ancient stone rises to meet the unearthly blue sky. Tendrils of cloud become synaptic nerves, fused to vertebrae along the undulating spine of a cresting wave. A coiled surge of unbridled energy is held in the mind, just below the swell, an incalculable moment before the wave breaks, turning in on itself, borne aloft on currents of air. Mountains are inverted, plunging into mirrored lochs of unfathomable depth, still pools of evolving life rooted in the collective unconscious. A tracery of light beckons, dancing across the water, disappearing beneath the hills and over the horizon, far out to sea. As in the real-world ecology of the Dreaming<sup>2</sup>, everything is alive and intimately connected. This terrain of metamorphosis and memory lies deep within us all, on an island sculpted by raw elements and Nature's pure, unforgiving will. The human mark shrinks in relation to 3000-million-year-old Lewisian Gneiss<sup>3</sup>, massive boulders or 'erratics' that have come to rest precariously far from their place of origin, carried on the backs of migrating glaciers. This is Steve Dilworth's home and studio, on a shoreline curve of the world, pounded by waves, storms and the North wind, cold as the icy moon of Jupiter.

Born in 1949 in Kingston Upon Hull, Dilworth has walked a singular, uncompromising path over the last fifty years to become one of the UK's greatest living artists. Since the 1970's his unique process and approach to materials have created some of the most exciting, challenging and illuminating Art of the late 20th and early 21st Centuries. In the world of Contemporary Art he's an incomparable rarity, an artist for whom concept and craft are exceptionally equal. His attitude to making objects



“complete from the inside out”<sup>4</sup> originates in grappling with the nature of material and the human condition. From the lightning strike of the *Hanging Figure* (1978-79), composed from a human skeleton, bovine heart, liver, meat, horse hair and sea grass, Dilworth has produced work of enduring presence, profound insight and astonishing beauty. He’s a radically sensitive, fiercely intelligent and insatiably curious artist, who has always believed that his job is “not to provide the answers but to find the questions.”<sup>5</sup> Dilworth’s work embraces contradiction, humour and the accidental, courageously excluding nothing, even aspects of life we may fear or despise. If acknowledgement of death and mortality are present in his work, then they are simply part of the wheel of waking life, like the positive and negative anodes of a battery, storing regenerative hope for a post-truth world.

Dilworth has always been adamant about making objects, not as Visual Art or Sculpture in the traditional, representational or symbolic sense, but as something living, experienced with all our senses. His work aligns with what defines us as a species; the drive to create and understand as a matter of survival. Like psychic weaponry “cast into an internal landscape”<sup>6</sup>, Dilworth’s throwing objects share a kinship with prehistoric cave paintings or the earliest, hand held objects crafted in clay, with no separation between the physical and metaphysical. The artist describes himself simply as “an imperfect channel.”<sup>7</sup> His pioneering, transformative work using found and once living materials, together with elusive elements like water, air and darkness, explore the boundaries between concept and material. The “real strength and power of what sculpture is about”<sup>8</sup> in Dilworthian terms lies in “what an object is in its entirety, not what it looks like.”<sup>9</sup> The raw energy and origins of material are the nucleus of his objects, sensed and felt via the nervous system. Redefining “materials as sources of power” and “construction as ritual”<sup>10</sup> the act of making invokes a “physical connection to the mysteries”<sup>11</sup> of life. The beauty, dynamism and essential value of a *Calm Water* object resides in the energy, substance and idea invested within. Melding beautifully into the palms of our hands, this isn’t a passive Art object to be admired from afar. It was made to be held in response to human need, to soothe, comfort and reassure, achieved in Dilworth’s unique fusion of materials, craft and intent. The artist’s integrity in “making real things”<sup>12</sup> is realised in the universal, timeless appeal of highly tactile, tacit objects, transcending their own time, place and maker.



(RIGHT)  
An ‘erratic’ near  
Steve Dilworth’s  
home



(LEFT)  
*Three Herons*  
 2003, Heron,  
 Dunite, Fishing  
 hooks, swivels  
 & gold leaf  
 Unique  
 70 cm high

Crafting materials according to their natural charge to create “three-dimensional poetry”<sup>13</sup> is an obsessively meticulous and devotional process. Dilworth’s *Water Skull* in emerald bronze is a sublime example of interlocking aquiline forms, like the highly evolved exoskeleton of a creature at one with the fluid, emotionally conductive element of water. The carving within is as immaculate as the outer carapace. “Everything connects.”<sup>14</sup> Even what cannot be seen from the outside is given loving attention, honouring the whole.

In *Scored Stone*, the fluidity between human marks and natural forces evoke landscapes where ancient cup marks, the placement of burial stones, rock clefts and fissures create imaginative pathways, heightening our perception of the world around and within us. The sonic element in *Walrus Tooth Rattle*, an object bound in ebony and rope cruciform, combined with porous, still breathing whalebone, can only be activated by human hands. The aroma of salt reminds us of our humble, primordial origins and essential vulnerability, shared with all life on earth. From an intimate to a mythic scale, *Giant’s Rattle* faithfully follows the aged wood grain, reverberating in the imagination and physically grounded in the primacy of touch.

Dilworth’s *Three Herons* may look like an artefact brought back from a previously undiscovered tribe, but their real power lies in the authenticity and creative charge of raw material, triggering genetic memory. The birds came from a nearby fish farm where “they had broken their necks trying to take farmed fish out of a cage.”<sup>15</sup> First they were injected with sodium fluoride and formaldehyde to preserve them, then left to dry for six weeks. Twenty-five feathers on each heron’s wing and twelve tail feathers were removed by the artist in numerical sequence. The birds were then encased in fibreglass, a nautical, protective layer befitting their habitat. “Each feather has a fish hook and line bound to it, nearly 200 in total, re-hooked into place.” “The composition is such that if unravelled, [the birds] would stretch into a fishing line of sorts.”<sup>16</sup> What we experience viscerally in the repetitive ritual of Craft woven into the object, incorporates substrata of ancestral knowledge. In indigenous cultures, a species is understood as part of a holistic ecosystem, incorporating folklore, mythology, divinity and science. Each heron has its own fishing sequence, a precise, structural rhythm of lines and movement “linked to how feathers are used in fishing.”<sup>17</sup> Like Dilworth’s bronze encased *Eels and Puffin*, where the predator is being devoured by its prey, the *Three Herons* are bound, as we are, to natural cycles of birth, life, death, decay and renewal.





Collective memory, folk history and mythology are part of the unconscious lore of material. There is an old story, retold by the artist, about men who took their wives out to a reef in the Sound of Harris at low tide to harvest winkles. They were to return to pick them up before high tide, but went to Rodel drinking and forgot. They returned to the reef to find the women balanced on sacks of winkles, trying to keep their heads above water. Eternally poised upon a single piece of Harris stone, the *Three Herons* entwine like fan dancers on elegant tippy toe. Their embrace circles the world in the ancient mythology of the Three Graces, or the Moirai, spinning, measuring and cutting the thread of life. In the artist's mind, there is also a conceptual "quasi-religious" aspect to the herons, "like angels on pinheads"<sup>18</sup> as a medieval argument, grounded in the contradiction of belief.

Belief and perseverance are an integral part of the intensive preparation, construction and transfiguration of raw materials. The beaks of preserved *Sparrowhawks* protrude from hooded shrouds of precious metal, decloaking death and illuminating life. Although we may associate this trinity of forms visually, as figurative remnants of a religious order or in relation to ancient death rites, they defy the representational in being potently alive. They feel newly discovered, as though they have been dug out of the earth with an eroded patina of fineness, glowing in the dim,

(ABOVE)  
Rock formation,  
Isle of Harris

(RIGHT)  
*Scored Stone*  
2016, Dunite  
Unique  
21 x 26 x 14 cm





(LEFT)  
Steve Dilworth's  
studio, July 2017

stilled light of the awakening mind. Their presence is knowing, swift in its connectivity to human instinct and the mythology of all that remains unseen. These are objects of unparalleled richness, artistry and vision, acknowledging forces greater than ourselves and expanding our perception of the world from the inside out.

Georgina Coburn  
www.georginacoburnarts.co.uk

- 1 Dilworth, S. (2015) www.stevedilworth.com, available from <http://www.stevedilworth.com/home.htm> 13/12/2015.
- 2 The Australian Aboriginal Dreaming or Dreamtime, as an interconnected system of relationships between the physical world and the metaphysical, encompassing creation, ancestral spirits and time past, present and future.
- 3 Lewisian Gneiss is the dominant rock found in the Outer Hebrides and around the artist's home on the Isle of Harris. It is the oldest rock in Britain, three billion years old, two thirds of the age of the earth.
- 4 Steve Dilworth in conversation with Georgina Coburn, Isle of Harris, 25/08/2006.
- 5 Dilworth, S. (1992) *Acts of Faith* Exhibition Catalogue, An Lanntair, Isle of Lewis.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Steve Dilworth in conversation with Georgina Coburn, Isle of Harris, 25/08/2006.
- 8 Steve Dilworth talking to students at Wimbledon School of Art 13th November 2001(VHS recording).
- 9 Steve Dilworth in conversation with Georgina Coburn, Isle of Harris, 16/05/14.
- 10 Dilworth, S. (1992) *Acts of Faith* Exhibition Catalogue, An Lanntair, Isle of Lewis.
- 11 Dilworth, S. (2015) www.stevedilworth.com, Available from <http://www.stevedilworth.com/home.htm> 13/12/2015.
- 12 Steve Dilworth (2012) interviewed in *Steve Dilworth - A Portrait*, a short film directed by Paul Cox, available at <https://vimeo.com/40810322>, 06/08/17.
- 13 Steve Dilworth in conversation with Georgina Coburn, Isle of Harris, 25/08/2006.
- 14 *Northern Inspirations: A Conversation* with Steve Dilworth by Robert Preece, Sculpture Magazine July/Aug 2009.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Steve Dilworth in conversation with Georgina Coburn, Isle of Harris, 06/10/14.



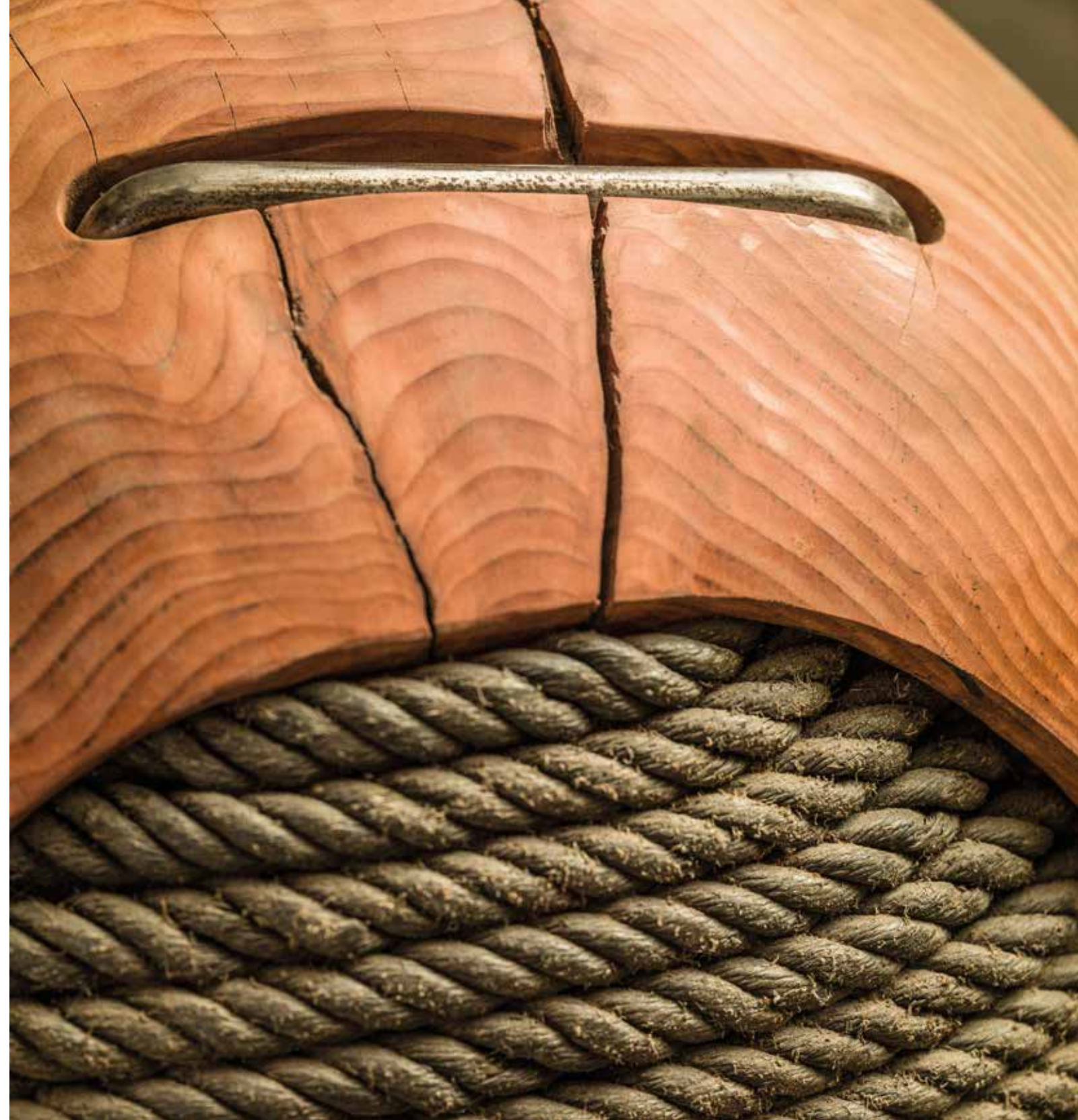


CATALOGUE





*Giant's Rattle*  
2017, Douglas Fir,  
rope, iron & Jacks  
Unique  
70 x 68 x 68 cm





*Water Skull*  
2016, Bronze  
Edition of 3  
40 x 30 x 54 cm







*Kestrel*  
 2016, Kestrel, wood,  
 leather, silver, iron  
 & glass dome  
 Unique  
 65 x 32 x 32 cm



*Throwing Object 3 & 4*  
2016, Bog Oak, bird  
& brass  
Unique  
7 x 9 x 6 cm

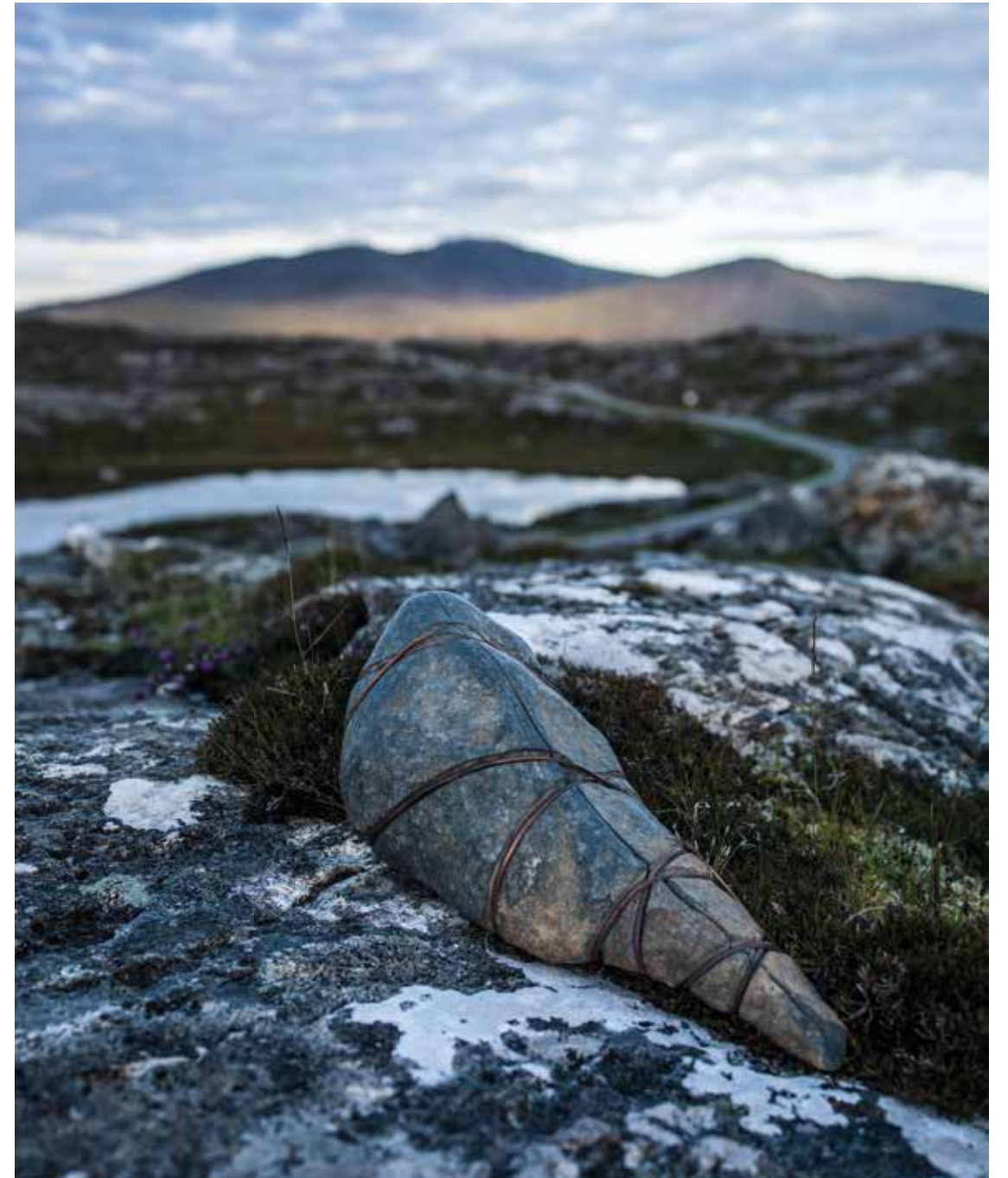






*Sea Form*  
2016, Bronze  
Edition of 5  
24 x 50 x 37 cm

*Lapwing*  
2017, Dunite, Lapwing  
& copper wire  
Unique  
18 x 46.5 x 17 cm



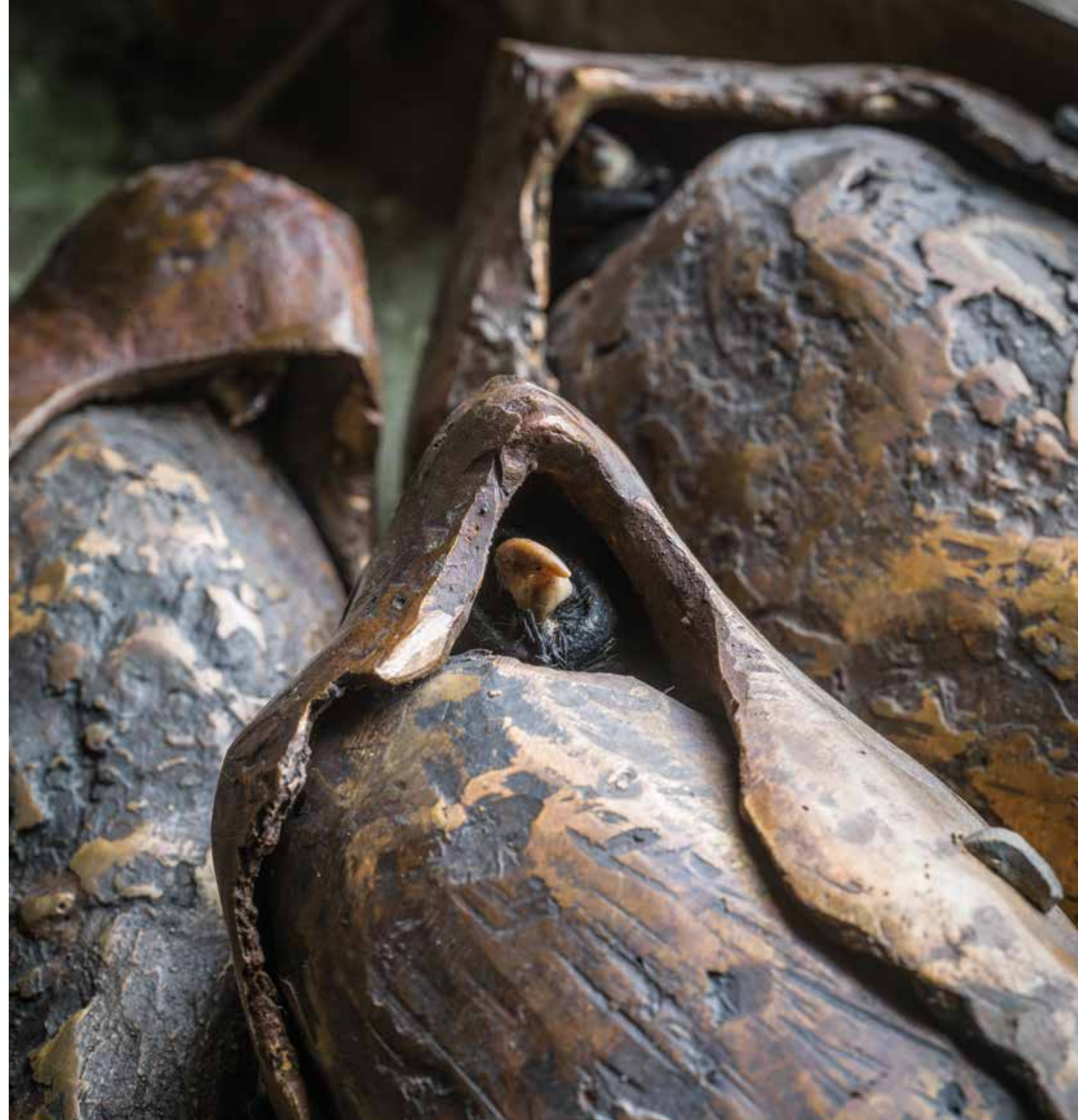




*Calm Water 1 & 2*  
2017, Harris stone,  
Jesmonite & Phial  
of Minch Water  
Unique  
5.5 x 12.5 x 12.5 cm



*Sparrowhawks*  
2016-2017,  
Sparrowhawks  
& bronze  
Unique  
11 x 34 x 11 cm







*Revolving Form*  
2017, Bronze  
Edition of 8  
19.5 x 21 x 21 cm

*Walrus Tooth Rattle*  
2016, Whalebone,  
Ebony, Rope  
& Walrus Tooth  
Unique  
8 x 16 x 14 cm







*Burn Water*  
2016, Harris stone,  
sterling silver  
& Burn water  
Unique  
9 x 30 x 20 cm



(LEFT)  
*Throwing Object 2*  
 2016, Yew, iron,  
 copper & bird  
 Unique  
 11 x 11 x 12.5 cm  
 Private collection

(RIGHT)  
*Throwing Object 1*  
 2016, African Flamewood,  
 iron & bird  
 Unique  
 11 x 12.5 x 9 cm







*Multiple Carapace*  
2016, Bronze  
Edition of 5  
23 x 47 x 36 cm



(LEFT)  
*Silent Rattle*  
 2016, African Blackwood,  
 brass & tooth  
 Unique  
 7 x 9 x 6 cm

(RIGHT)  
*Axe Head Rock*  
 2017, Harris Stone  
 Unique  
 4.5 x 27 x 25.5 cm





*Seal Tooth Cups*  
1978 - 2017, Bog Oak,  
Bronze & Seal Teeth  
Unique  
7 x 48 x 32 cm









STEVE DILWORTH

b. 1949

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2012	‘Mortal Remains’ Retrospective, An Lanntair Arts Centre, Stornaway
2001	‘Extracted from Cinnabar’ Hart Gallery, London
1997	‘Earthing Memories’ - Ferens Art Gallery, Kingston upon Hulll, Yorks
1996	Belloc Lowndes Fine Art, Chicago, USA
1995	‘Diversions in Natural History’ - The Booth Museum, Brighton
	‘Diversions in Natural History’ - The Gallery in Cork Street, London
1994	‘Close to the Edge’ – The Gallery in Cork Street, London
1994	‘Close to the Edge’ – Apex Gallery, Portsmouth
1991/2	‘Acts of Faith’ - Touring Exhibition, Scotland
1990	Euskirchen eV Koln, Germany

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2017	‘Ark Sculpture Exhibition’ at Chester Cathedral, curated by Gallery Pangolin
2016	‘Jubilee’ Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire
2012	‘Morbid Curiosity’ Museum of Culture, Chicago, Wellcome London
	‘Sculptors’ Prints & Drawings’, Pangolin London
2010 -11	‘Re-enchantment project – Cillein’ Paul Hamlyn Foundation
2010	‘Stirred for a Bird’ Pangolin Gallery
	‘Art at the Edge’ Olympic collaboration
2008	Royal Academy Summer Show
	Sterling Stuff II, Pangolin London
2006 -7	‘Evolution’ project with Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire
2005	‘Stone Works’ Canary Wharf, London
2003	‘Friends Gallery’ Royal Academy of Art, London
2002	‘Thinking Big’ Peggy Guggenheim, Venice
	‘Great Book of Gaelic’ book, film and exhibition
	Royal Academy of Art, London ( Summer Show)
2001	‘In Praise of Trees’ Salisbury Cathedral, Wiltshire
	‘Living the Land’, Duff House, Banff, Scotland [touring Scotland & W.Isles]
2000	‘Sculpture, An Abbey and a Cathedral’ Malmesbury Abbey & Tewkesbury Cathedral
1999	‘Grand Opening Exhibition’ Beatrice Royal Gallery, Eastleigh
1997	‘6th International Shoe Box Exhibition’ University of Hawaii, Manoa (touring USA)
1995	‘Calanais’ An Lantair, Stornoway [tour Scotland & France]
	‘Objects of Love’ The Gallery in Cork Street, London
1993	‘Worlds in a Box’ South Bank Centre [touring UK for the Arts Council of Gt.Britain]

1991	‘The Shamanism of Intent’ Goldmark Gallery, Uppingham
1980	‘Imagination is the Venom’ Ikon Gallery, Birmingham

SELECTED COMMISSIONS & PERMANENT COLLECTIONS

‘Venus/bird skull’ Leavers Sculpture, Tonbridge School
‘Fever Bird’ Knox Collection, Edinburgh
‘Case’ Aberdeen University
‘Venus Stone’ Sculpture at Goodwood Cass Foundation, W.Sussex
‘Claw’ Sculpture at Goodwood Cass Foundation, W.Sussex
‘Ark’ King’s Place, London
‘Dailly Bridge’ Dailly, Ayrshire, Scotland
‘Walrus’ Ferens Art Gallery, Hull, Yorkshire
‘Fishbox’ Scottish Arts Council
‘Swan’ and ‘Cormorant’ Scotia Pharmaceuticals
‘Tick’ Dundee City Council

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2012	Short film portrait by Paul Cox - <a href="http://vimeo.com/40810322">http://vimeo.com/40810322</a>
	Atlas café interview – <a href="https://www.mixcloud.com/atlasradio/atlas-arts-cafe-15-interview-with-steve-dilworth-r/">https://www.mixcloud.com/atlasradio/atlas-arts-cafe-15-interview-with-steve-dilworth-r/</a>
2012	‘Northings’ Georgina Coburn - <a href="http://northings.com/2012/10/23/mortal-remains/">http://northings.com/2012/10/23/mortal-remains/</a>
2011	‘The old ways’ [ Gneiss chapter ] Robert Macfarlane
2009	‘Sculpture’ magazine July-Aug [cover & article] Robert Preece
2003	BBC2 ‘The Great Book of Gaelic’
	Independent on Sunday ‘Talk of the Town’ ‘Savage Beauty’ Kevin Jackson
2002	Sculpture@Goodwood ‘A Vision for 21st Century British Sculpture’ book
2001	London Review of Books Vol.23 No.22 ‘In Hackney’ Iain Sinclair
	Mare No.20 magazine ‘Geschichten und Geduld’ Hansjorg Gadiant
1998	Channel 4 ‘The Falconer’
	World Sculpture News, Vol.4 No.3 ‘From the Ancient Land’ RobertPreece
	Entropy Magazine ‘Acts of Faith’, Vol.1 No.6
	Stornoway Gazette ‘Marshall Anderson’s Hebridean Encounters’
1993	Art Review, xmas edition ‘93 Vol.X1V ‘A terrible Beauty’ Charles Hall
1992	The Scotsman ‘A Question of Answers’ Murdo MacDonald
	Aquarian Harper, San Francisco ‘Dreaming with Open Eyes’ Michael Tucker
1990-91	Late Show BBC2 ‘Alternative Turner Prize’
	Modern Painters [special sculpture edition] ‘A New Vortex’ Iain Sinclair
	Exhibition Catalogue ‘The Shamanism of Intent’ Iain Sinclair

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost our thanks go to Steve Dilworth for all his hard work in creating this body of new work for this exhibition. We would also like to thank both Steve and his wife Joan for all their support and hospitality on our visits up to the Isle of Harris. Our special thanks also go to Georgina Coburn for an illuminating essay, Steve Russell Studios for the beautiful landscape and studio photography, Paul Cox for allowing us to screen his film about Steve during the exhibition and finally to Pangolin Editions for their skillful craftsmanship in bringing Steve's bronze and sterling silver works to fruition as well as their help with the installation.

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