

## **Sculpture: Carvings and Controversy**

### **Photographs by David Hurn**

By Bill Jay

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David Hurn has a longstanding, international reputation as one of Britain's leading reportage photographers. He is particularly well known for spotlighting the ambiguities and eccentricities of the human condition and showing us how they are reflected in the objects and traditions with which we surround ourselves. His thought-provoking images of everyday life, colored by his own wry sense of humour, make us question the logic of some of the things we take for granted. This is particularly evident in one of his more recent major projects, **Sculpture: Carvings and Controversy**, selections from which we are pleased to present via this electronic exhibition.

David Hurn first received international acclaim for his photographs with his 1956 story on the Hungarian Revolution, published in Life magazine. Since then he has travelled extensively and worked for the world's picture press. Now he spends most of his time in Wales, taking few assignments and working on his own ideas. In 1971 he was given an award by the Welsh Arts Council 'for outstanding merit in a living artist' and his work has been widely exhibited nationally and internationally. He has been a member of Magnum Photos Inc., an exclusive co-operative of photojournalists, since 1967. Between 1973 and 1990 he was Head of the School of Documentary Photography at Gwent College of Higher Education in South Wales. In 1979 he was awarded a UK-US Bicentennial Arts Fellowship by the British Council to enable him to photograph for a year in America. He chose to spend that time in Arizona where he established a continuing close relationship with the Photography and Photo Studies programs and students at Arizona State University, where he has been a Distinguished Visiting Professor.

His project **Sculpture: Carvings and Controversy** was first exhibited at the National Museum of Photography in Bradford, England. The accompanying catalogue contained the following remarks by Paul Glazzard:

*Carvings & Controversy began with David Hurn's appointment as the Bradford Fellow in Photography in 1992/93. He hoped to gain a better understanding of sculpture,*

*probably the most enigmatic of all art forms, through this his latest ambitious body of work - or at least try to discover why it provokes such polarised opinion.*

*It could be argued that sculptures crop up in our living environment with surprising frequency considering how difficult it seems to be for people to explain why they are the way they are; how few people have a clear idea of what makes sculpture good or bad; or even what sculpture is and what it isn't.*

*Could it be that people in general are intimidated or alienated by sculpture because they are neither capable of understanding the intellectual concepts involved nor blessed with the skills to create sculptures themselves? - Or is sculpture all too easily surrounded by myths because a natural instinct in everyone is sadly ignored - the instinct which enables us to construct complicated sand-castles, lifelike scarecrows and elaborate flower arrangements?*

*David Hurn soon discovered there is no easy way of locating all the possible kinds of sculpture in Britain, let alone finding out what people think of them. Nothing that resembles a reasonably comprehensive listing is available - no 'tour guide' as it were. There are only a few books with picture-postcard images of particular sculpture types, which appear isolated from their surroundings and are photographed in a way which carefully avoids any sign of human interaction.*

*The irresistible challenge of rectifying this omission set him off on a seemingly endless journey back and forth across Britain to seek out examples of sculpture. The zeal with which David Hurn approached this task has become so unstoppable that he continues to explore every possible avenue although, as we prepare this exhibition for its own tour of Britain, David already has five or six times as many photographs as he could possibly need.*

*From the start, David Hurn realised there was no single unequivocal definition of sculpture, but countless variations from different standpoints. His pictures therefore explore all of its manifestations: from standing stones to statuettes; from primitive carvings and naive creations to commissioned works of public art; from natural stone monuments shaped by the elements to gargoyles and garden gnomes...*

*David Hurn's photographs show how sculpture in all its possible guises is an integral part of our living experience, and how our appreciation of sculpture depends a great deal on the circumstances in which we see it. Producing a meaningful two-dimensional image of a three-dimensional art-form was never an easy task, but David Hurn's images capture the interplay between sculpture, the landscape, the elements and people in a way which has never before been accomplished so successfully.*