

PRESS RELEASE

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ALBERT PALEY: Heavy Metal, light lines

14 October 2023 – 14 January 2024

Messums West



Messums Wiltshire is pleased to present an exhibition that traces 50 years of Master Blacksmith, Albert Paley, working in metal; from making intricate pieces of gold and silver jewellery measured in centimetres to sculptures the size of houses, 30 feet high.

At the root of all his designs are his drawings in pencil, that filled the drawers and sketchbooks of his 50,000 square foot studio in Rochester, New York. 'Drawing is fundamental – it gives you a vocabulary so you can understand what you see,' he said. Thinking through doing is how he works, and as his technical skill has grown so has the ambition of his sculptures. 'Technique is a way to manage thought development; I don't know what I'm doing until I start working,' he explains.



With 2020 marking the closure of his Vulcan like artisan workshop and the end of producing work, now is the time to take stock of his output and understand the extraordinary journey on which he took this base material. Whilst Paley's work has been a global one for a long time, there have been few opportunities on this side of the Atlantic for the public to see it. The presentation of large scale sculptures will be accompanied by a display of the artist's medium and small sculptures and gates, together with his drawings.





ABOUT Albert Paley

Born in Philadelphia, Paley attended the Tyler School of Art where his earliest works were direct carvings in wood and stone in the tradition of Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth. Paley remembers carving a delicate, sensuous Rodin-esque sculpture of a woman from white marble. Paley's training was not only manual but academic with an education in the techniques of Renaissance masters like Cellini, Leonardo and Michelangelo as well as the Mannerist and Viennese Secessionist painters of which he is particularly fond.

Early in his career Paley had imagined he would be a goldsmith 'for the rest of my life,' but irked by the perception of jewellery as a 'minor art, rather than what it truly is – a fine art,' he started making bigger pieces starting with a set of enormous gates facing the White House. 'Using metal is like drawing in space' Paley says. 'Punching, ribboning and blasting, the gates allowed me to interface with architecture, pushing me into a new arena. Going through gates is an act of passage, they are ceremonial archways.'

Consistently throughout all his work appear flowing, sinuous, natural forms - in particular vegetation - within ordered, mathematical structures. 'My design philosophy is organicity in that one line begets another whether it is in metal or any other material,' he says.

In 1979, Paley was asked to make two gates for the antechamber of the New York Senate. The Albany gates, as they are known, reflected the nascent fear of terrorism in public spaces in their spiky, thorn-like design protecting the heart of government. Paley went on to create an astonishing array of gates and fences, benches and

grills and freestanding 'sentinels' or sculptures in his career, all have an unerring sense for form, with institutional commissions pushing his scale ever bigger. The Fence of the Hunter Museum is one of Paley's wildest works to date where the lines of metal seem to hover in space like banners or whips.

Paley uses design to bring a sense of modernity into historic spaces and is interested in the play of light and shade in his work and the beauty of rustification. In his recent works, Paley has tended increasingly to paint metal and patinate it in a range of hues. 'Colour solicits emotion' he says. 'Shadows are beautiful but ephemeral and colour adds into that.'

'Fundamentally, art deals with the human condition' says Paley, 'whether it's a personal response in canvas or in the public arena like the music of Wagner. Metal articulates emotion beautifully; there is an honesty and integrity to being a blacksmith. It's all about sharing that language.'

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MESSUMS WEST is a leading multi-purpose gallery and arts centre set inside a restored thirteenth-century tithe barn and surrounding buildings with exhibition space, sculpture garden and restaurant.

MESSUMS LONDON is a 2,000 sq ft exhibition space on Cork Street behind the Royal Academy. It hosts a rolling programme of exhibitions for our contemporary artists.