



Hollow Men

Lynn Chadwick

Not on display

Title/Description: Hollow Men

Artist/Maker: Lynn Chadwick

Born: 1951

Object Type: Sculpture

Materials: Brass, Copper, Iron

Measurements: h. 1050 x w. 335 x d. 200 mm

Accession Number: 104

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

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Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

This tall, slender sculpture is formed from a series of four sail-like curved copper sheets and has a lovely rich green patina. Chadwick's linear style of sculpture was informed by his adoption of welding brass rod that provide a supporting armature for the sculpture. In 1950, Chadwick went on a short welding course, learning how to use oxy-acetylene equipment. It was a skill that allowed him to build linear structures where the welding joints would become an essential part of the character of the finished sculpture - so much so that in time the authenticity of his sculptures could be identified by his welding signature alone.

Welding had been used in industry since the 1800s. The Catalan artist Julio González is credited as one of the earliest developers of welded sculpture and learnt this skill through his heritage, coming from a line of metalsmiths. In the inter-war years, he was associated with artists such as Pablo Gargallo and Pablo Picasso, who he helped and encouraged with ironworking and welding. But it was still largely outside of artistic training concerning sculpture. In Britain, Chadwick, Reg Butler and Geoffrey Clarke all met in the summer of 1950 on a welding course organised by the British Oxygen Company in Cricklewood, London. [1] In the post-war period, it was a more viable and economical option for sculptors due to advances in technology. Welding offered a completely different approach to traditional methods of sculpture such as carving or modelling. As a method of construction, Chadwick was able to sketch an outline in space and rapidly build up a three-

dimensional form. This form of sculpture was developed and advanced in the 1940s by the American artist Alexander Calder. But in fact, it was Jean Arp who applied the term *Stabile* to this type of stationary abstract sculpture, usually characterized by simple forms executed in wire or metal rod. This was in contrast to kinetic variations that were called mobiles, made famous by Calder, but a term coined by Marcel Duchamp. [2]

This sculpture by Chadwick is related to *Stabile (Cypress)*, a sculpture commission for the 1951 Festival of Britain. [3] The strong verticality of the structure is reminiscent of a cypress tree. The Sainsbury sculpture and a similar work in the Tate collection are often perceived as maquette's for this large-scale commission but Chadwick considered them independent works. The title, *Hollow Men*, was given to the Sainsbury sculpture by the artist in correspondence with Robert Sainsbury, from April 1955. Chadwick states, 'Hollow Men would be a suitable title for the maquette.' [4] It has also been known as *Stabile (Maquette II for 'Cypress')* 1951 [5]. It seems certain that Chadwick had in mind a line from the T.S. Eliot poem of 1924 that Herbert Read referenced *The Hollow Men* in his celebrated 'Geometry of Fear' essay of 1952. [6]

The sculpture had been included in the now famous exhibition at the 1952 Venice Biennale. [7] The seminal exhibition, *New Aspects of British Sculpture*, held at the Venice Biennale in 1952 and selected by Herbert Read, introduced the 'Geometry of Fear' generation to the international stage. The term, coined by Read, encompassed a group which included the older Henry Moore alongside eight young sculptors - Lynn Chadwick, Bernard Meadows, Geoffrey Clarke, Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler, Robert Adams, as well as William Turnbull and Eduardo Paolozzi. Read proposed that this new generation had learnt from Moore as well as Picasso and Calder, 'Their art is close to the nerves, nervous, wiry...They have seized Eliot's image of the Hollow Men, and given it isomorphic materiality. They have peopled the Waste Land with their iron waifs.' [8]

Calvin Winner, July 2021

1.Exorcizing the Fear: British Sculpture from the 50s and 60s. Exhibition catalogue published by Pangolin, 2021, p.11

2.Tate Art and artists, www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/alexander-calder-848/who-is-alexander-calder retrieved 19/07/21

3.The final version of *Cypress* was made with rigid brass rods and four copper sheets supported on iron struts welded to a base plate which was covered by rocks and plants when sited in the Regatta garden at the Festival of Britain, 1951 (reproduced in Farr and Chadwick, p.67 cat.50). Since destroyed.

4.Personal correspondence, Lynn Chadwick letter to Robert Sainsbury, dated 19/04/1955. The sculpture was later ascribed the title 'Three Hollow men' upon its arrival at the Sainsbury Centre in 1978 and thus in the 3vol catalogue but this is believed to be an error.

5. Listed as *Stabile* (Maquette II for 'Cypress'), 1951 in Lynn Chadwick Sculptor: complete Illustrated Catalogue 1947-1988 by Dennis Farr and Eva Chadwick published by Lund Humphries, 2014, p.78

6. *The Hollow Men: A penny for the Old Guy* by T.S. Eliot, published 1925

7. *New Aspects of British Sculpture*, Venice Biennale June-Oct 1952 (listed as no.120, Maquette for festival Composition), Farr and Chadwick, p.78

8. *Alberto Giacometti and Britain*, an essay by Calvin Winner in *Alberto Giacometti: A line Through Time* Giacometti, published by Bloomsbury, 2016, p.69

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

Hollow Men is a smaller version of Chadwick's important commission for the Festival of Britain, *Cypress* (1951). *Cypress* was placed outside the Regatta Restaurant of the South Bank exhibition. This was a high profile position, as the South Bank was described as the centrepiece of the Festival. Its elegant, elongated ovoid shape suggests the tree of its title, but in its context resembles the Skylon, the iconic structure that became the symbol of the Festival of Britain. The Skylon seemed futuristic in its engineering and style. Its long, slender forms represented the achievements of new engineering techniques and were echoed in the contemporary design across the Festival site.

The sculpture is known by the Chadwick Estate, and published in the catalogue raisonné of Chadwick's sculpture, as *Stabile (Maquette II for Cypress)*. It is in fact not a maquette, as it was produced later in the same year. Robert Sainsbury, who bought the sculpture in 1954, wrote to Chadwick the following year to ask for its title. Chadwick replied giving the title *Hollow Men*, although it had not been referred to as such previously. [1]

Hollow Men refers to T.S. Eliot's poem *The Hollow Men*. Published in 1925, the poem is a forlorn response to the First World War, ending in the lines 'This is the way the world ends / This is the way the world ends / This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper.' Chadwick's work was also associated with T.S. Eliot in Herbert Read's catalogue text accompanying the exhibition 'New Aspects of British Sculpture' at the British Pavilion in the 1952 Venice Biennale. Read wrote, 'These new images belong to the iconography of despair, or of defiance; and the more innocent the artist, the more effectively he transmits the collective guilt. Here are images of flight, or ragged claws "scuttling across the floors of silent seas", of excoriated flesh, frustrated sex, the geometry of fear'. [2] The lines in the quotation marks are taken from Eliot's 1915 poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*.

There is an earlier version of this sculpture in the Tate collection titled *Stabile with Mobile Elements (Maquette for Cypress)*. As an architectural draughtsman, Chadwick had made mobiles for exhibition stands. He did not consider them sculpture until one was exhibited at Gimpel Fils gallery, London in 1949. Chadwick, then considered his work sculpture and began to make stabiles. He welded metal rods together, a technique that he learnt on a course with the British Oxygen Company. In *Hollow Men* the rods are exposed, covered with sections of curved copper sheets. In his later work, Chadwick filled his sculptures with a mixture of cement and iron filings, so the rods became an internal skeleton.

Tania Moore, June 2021

[1] Letter from Lynn Chadwick to Robert Sainsbury 19 April 1955, Sainsbury Research Unit archive.

[2] Herbert Read, 'New Aspects of British Sculpture', in *Exhibition of works by Sutherland, Wadsworth, Adams, Armitage, Butler, Chadwick, Clarke, Meadows, Moore, Paolozzi, Turnbull, organised by the British Council for the XXVI Biennale, Venice* (London: British Council, 1952), unpag.

Exhibitions

'Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951', Sainsbury Centre, UK, 02/10/2021 - 17/07/2022

Further Reading

Tania Moore and Calvin Winner (eds.), *Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre, 2021), p.23.

Michael Bird, *Lynn Chadwick: A Sculptor on the International Stage* (2019)

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1954. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
