



The Duke's Designs Uncovered

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

It's that chance of piecing together the past because we wanted very much ... it wasn't just the, the sculptures, but it was how the sculptures were viewed in particular places within the gallery, on particular plinths, at particular heights. And the wonderful thing was that when we started putting them in place, suddenly some things made absolute sense. The decision that we took to lay the gallery out as it would have appeared immediately before the duke's death in 1857 was in order to capture the whole of a collecting career.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM BAKER

It really was quite new to create an interior that was designed specifically and solely for the display of sculpture.

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

We were looking at the archive that's here at Chatsworth, which contains Adam's *Gem of the Peak*, a very important guidebook which had an edition in 1857, which gives us a sense of what the gallery was like in that year, the year before the duke's death. But there was also visual evidence that we had. There's a wonderful album of photographs, which were taken, we think, in the 1870s, which show the interiors very much corresponding to the description in *Gem of the Peak*. That allowed us, in a sense, to recreate the interior at this culminatory point.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM BAKER

Very often the plinths, the socles, that's the bases of sculptures, and their settings has been lost but at Chatsworth, and this seems to me to be one of the great triumphs of this newly instated display, you have the sculptures placed on the bases and socles for which they were designed.

There are different ways of viewing these sculptures. There are different narratives that one might read on to them. If you can imagine being taken round the gallery, you might be told a different story.

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

The *Hebe* is now on her proper porphyry pedestal that the duke intended her to be on, so she's now at the right height so when you look at her she's raising the cup of nectar, which gives perpetual youth to the gods, to the bust of the duke set up in the wall behind her, which of course we would never have realised, you know, just from reading or ... or looking but actually by having things in place then the narratives start to ... to make complete sense.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM BAKER

It might also be a story about contemporary figures like Madame Mère, Napoleon's mother. They could be told in terms of biography.

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

The Napoleonic narrative, which we'd always known about, was there, suddenly became much sharper because when you put the bust of Napoleon back between his mother and his sister, and you see that Paolina is holding in her hand a profile medallion of Napoleon and she's comparing the two, which we would never have known about. There's also behind that, there were two tazze, two bowls, large bowls on columns, which we knew were there from the design, but then we hadn't realised that actually these were produced by Bartolini, exactly the same design as those that he produced for Napoleon's house on Elba when he was in exile.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM BAKER

There's another biography that might be told and that is in terms of these being masterpieces by one of the towering artistic figures of the period: Canova.

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

The sixth duke adored Canova's work. He liked him as a man, he felt he ... he always had an engagement with his ... his sculptors, as he called them, and whilst he admired all the other sculptors you see here, Thor ... Thorvaldsen particularly, but he loved Canova. We know about the kind of memorial to Canova which the duke put with the copies after the lions from the tomb of Clement XIII in St Peter's, the bust of himself and Canova, you know at that very important junction between the gallery and the conservatory. So Canova, a key figure for everyone, but particularly so for the sixth Duke of Devonshire.

GREG SULLIVAN

For the Duke of Devonshire who did have geological interest it was entirely plausible that his geological understanding of the material was feeding into his conception of this space, not least because he also ornaments the area with local stones which are from quarries that he owned.

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

This house is in Derbyshire where there's a very important industry, which is the marble industry, and also creating inlaid work in marble. The duke was a man of absolute discernment about what he bought but he loved the quality of stone. The duke's stepmother, the Duchess Elizabeth who ... who lived in Rome sent him as a birthday present a wonderful column of this beautiful verde antico, this soft, green-coloured marble, and he used it as a pedestal for the *Head of Laura*, putting on top of it another piece of marble in a different colour from the Parthenon. You know he obviously loved colour.

GREG SULLIVAN

The attraction for many of the sorts of collectors that we're talking about in this period towards the antique world is that it provides a kind of membership of a club; Latin and Greek are not open to most people, far-reaching travel is not open to most people, and many of the subjects take a lot of effort in order to understand

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

It was impossible really to get good-quality ancient works at that particular juncture so he decided to go for new works. So there's that connection between the ancient world and the evolution of this gallery, and the particular kind of sculpture that the duke liked. You've got to take your time because a viewer, at the time at which these sculptures were being produced and looked at, were looking at things very closely, what we might call a connoisseurial gaze, is something that meant a lot of attention being paid to details of surface, and this room is full of wonderful works which give you very different surfaces.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM BAKER

A work like the *Endymion* makes use of different stages of finish, or there are different textures which can be read as different stages in the carving of the sculpture, so you look at the block on which Endymion lies and that's quite roughly carved and then other parts of it like the drapery are far more finished, but then the real high finish is on the torso of the figure itself.

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

Quite extraordinarily highly polished. Now why would a sculptor do that, you know what's the purpose of that? Is it just that he just got carried away; you know and he was rubbing away and it just got shiny? No, he did it for an exact purpose which was it's a figure of Endymion, who is in perpetual sleep and of course is being embraced by his lover Selene, the moon, and so it ... it's more reflective, it has a shinier surface.

Every sculpture will have different qualities and that's something that you see when you look up close on something like *Madame Mère*, you know it's extraordinary, you just have to look at the kind of ... the arm and you can almost see it's like skin, it's extraordinary but, you know, it has this wonderful clean, clear outline but it's still subtler under that, there's still nature, nature and the antique coming together.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM BAKER

The way in which the gallery assumes close attentive viewing reflects a different position, different status of the artists involved. So, in a sense, the whole idea of the heroic artist, which you might associate with romanticism, is there even though in style these figures are Neo-classical.

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

The experience we were trying to create in the gallery was one that would allow a sense of how a visitor would have come perhaps on an occasion when they were eating in the dining room with the duke. There was an entertainment. They would come through and they'd come into the sculpture gallery. There'd still be music playing so you get that sense of walking through rather than something where you're looking object by object without any sense of the whole entity of it.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM BAKER

One of the striking things about these sculptures is that they're intended to be looked at closely in a way that earlier you would look at something small scale. You would take an ivory group or figure and turn it in your hand. Now we can't turn these in our hand but we can do the turning ourselves, so walking round them and in some sense thinking about how the viewing of such sculpture simulates the process of ... of making. The sculptures are lit from above and that's really quite important. Now that's one type of lighting during the day, but you can create very different effects when the sculptures are shown by torchlight so you're, as it were, animating the sculptures.

CHARLES NOBLE

... flicker the light across the body ...

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

I'm just thinking if I move it ...

CHARLES NOBLE

It's stupendous.

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

Isn't it wonderful, especially I think if you can get it on the face, a two-pronged attack. It's interesting, isn't it, because they would have actually been smaller candles than this. They would have been tapers, and they'd have flickered hugely more.

CHARLES NOBLE

Giving out much light ... much less light, do you think?

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

Much less light so that they're kind of, you know, it's interesting though what it does to the ... because we've spent so much time looking at the bases, thinking about the bases and the colour, but that's very much a natural light thing, isn't it, 'cos they kind of disappear.

GREG SULLIVAN

There are accounts of Canova's works being viewed by candlelight and there's a very famous account of Thomas Lawrence and Francis Gentry in Italy being taken to see one of Canova's works at night-time and watching it by candlelight, the flickering over the surfaces and the possibility of understanding it as ... as flesh and as surface as well.

CHARLES NOBLE

Shall we see what Achilles looks like?

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

Yes. That's quite different again, isn't it, 'cos it ... you've got this light coming from here. Look at that ... yeah.

CHARLES NOBLE

Great shoulder.

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

Oh it is, look at that, and again that's something you don't see, isn't it? What is that, the bone?

CHARLES NOBLE

The bone, the area of bone coming out ...

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

... It's absolutely based on nature, isn't it, but back to the ...

CHARLES NOBLE

... Back to the classical antecedent.

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

Exactly. You have an idea you know what it will look like before you come to actually look at it in this way, and actually it isn't how I imagined it, funnily enough.

CHARLES NOBLE

No, it gives you a chance for personal exploration, really.

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

Yes ...

CHARLES NOBLE

... In that sense.

PROFESSOR ALISON YARRINGTON

I think, you know, viewing something by candlelight can often give it a sense of mystery, twilight, of moving between life and death, of something, you know, rather melancholic, I suppose, and that's something which perhaps is ... is all part of what we might generally call Romantic sensibility. That's why they call them poetic sculptures of course, isn't it, if you think about it, that it's really bringing out the poetry of the object.

CHARLES NOBLE

Of the object, yes.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM BAKER

By looking at them under the flickering light of a torch, the way in which you might move from one figure to another and play off the contrast between figures, you might be told a different story about them. There isn't one way to look at these sculptures, there isn't one way now and there wasn't one way then.