

Sculptor Paul Day – Monument to the Battle of Britain etc

U3A Art Appreciation Group

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Paul Day was born in Horsham, Sussex, in 1967.

He lives and works in a village near Dijon in France, with his wife, Catherine, who is half French.

Having first studied art at Colchester and then Dartington art schools, Paul Day completed his training at Cheltenham in 1991. It was there that he turned his attention from painting to sculpture and where he first started to explore the representation of the figure in architectural space using high relief, an art form that combines drawn composition and fully rounded sculpture.

Upon finishing his education Day began working professionally at once, aided by a grant from the Prince of Wales Business Trust. There followed a commission from the Gloucestershire authoress Jilly Cooper to make a large scale relief-sculpture for her home. This, coupled with a commercially successful show at the Cheltenham Museum Art Gallery, enabled Day to move to France and establish a base there for himself and his French wife.

His working environment is the antithesis of the items he tends to produce which are largely cityscapes – with a narrative (often telling a story within a story).

He has always wanted to take his work into the contemporary arena of fine art.

1995: Bill Bond MBE got the idea of commissioning a sculpture to commemorate “the Few” and formed the Battle of Britain Historical Society to perpetuate the memory of the Battle for he and his contemporaries had come across school leavers with no idea of what the battle entailed or its significance.



There was nowhere in the world where the names of the 3000 who flew in the Battle of Britain had been inscribed in one place. Bill Bond was certain that the monument should be located in London. Trafalgar Square was one site offered but there was nowhere there that the names of all involved could be included. However, near the Houses of Parliament, along the Embankment, there was a large wall near the, which was ideal. November 2002, the application for use of the site was submitted – the wall and a huge granite plinth, the capping for an underground smoke outlet. Technically, it wasn't owned by anybody!

The Society began negotiations to acquire the site and meanwhile began to search for an artist who could capture absolutely the spirit of what they wanted to portray.

5 were chosen to go through to the selection stage from a brief sent out to all who expressed interest. They had produced maquettes of their proposed sculptures. One, unfortunately, was much too like the horrific events of September 11th – though had been produced before the events of that date.

Paul Day's first proposal was a bit fragmented but gave ideas capturing the essence of what was wanted.

Living in France enables him to live without restraints and relatively cheaply – and also it has brought him to the attention of Europeans who have commissioned him as, for instance, Brussels – who have commissioned a 20 metre long work called “**Urban Comedy**”.



He is an artist who generally works on contemporary subject matter. His main concern is to make a work of art that is for now – but resurrects the spirit and moment of the Battle of Britain.

Paul Day researched meticulously and then produced drawings to illustrate the subject matter. Only then does he begin to work with the clay - every 4 feet in length equates to 3 – 4 kilograms of clay. He then starts to feel the flow of the images and underpinning scenes of human activity he creates structures to speed up or slow down the work.

Eventually it was discovered that Transport for London owned the site required and they transferred ownership to the London Council. Lord Tebbit became Chairman of the Fundraising Committee. Ordinary individuals throughout the country sent in donations – largely anonymous. As the fundraising effort gathered pace, Paul Day had two huge



structures beginning to take form in his studio in France. He used one to concentrate on the military effort and the other relief was to be more dedicated to the Home Front – the Observer Corps, the factory work, etc. He spent seven months putting in 10 hour days in his studio. The work has to be kept moist and has to be continued – there can be no going away in the midst and leaving things. When the relief was finished, it then had to be cut out, hollowed and dissected so that it could be transported.

Paul Day always does all the work of transportation himself so that he can mend anything that is accidentally broken. He knows the resistance and tolerance of the clay and prefers not to trust others who do have his understanding. First of all, he takes the work to his molder in Paris who makes a rubber negative image from his positive image.

At the foundry, the silicone molds are painted with hot liquid wax in a process called **Lost-wax casting** sometimes called by the French name of *cire perdue* (from the Latin *cera perdata*). Layers of wax are built up which harden to an exact wax copy of the artist’s original work. Then again, the entire work is broken down and each delicate wax piece is covered in silica and then plaster. The process is along the following lines:

1. **Model-making.** The original model is made from clay,
2. **Moldmaking.** A mold is made of the original model or sculpture. The rigid outer molds contain the softer inner mold, which is the exact negative of the original model. Inner molds are usually made of latex, polyurethane rubber or silicone, which is supported by the outer mold. The outer mold can be made from plaster, but can also be made of fibreglass or other materials. Most molds are at least two pieces, and a shim with keys is placed between the two halves during construction so that the mold can be put back together accurately. In case there are long, thin pieces sticking out of the model, these are often cut off of the original and molded separately. Sometimes many molds are needed to recreate the original model, especially for large models.

3. **Wax.** Once the mold is finished, molten wax is poured into it and swished around until an even coating, usually about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch or 3 mm thick, covers the inner surface of the mold. This is repeated until the desired thickness is reached. Another method is filling the entire mold with molten wax, and letting it cool, until a desired thickness has set on the surface of the mold. After this the rest of the wax is poured out again, the mold is turned upside down and the wax layer is left to cool and harden. With this method it is more difficult to control the overall thickness of the wax layer.
4. **Removal of wax.** This hollow wax copy of the original model is removed from the mold. The model-maker may reuse the mold to make multiple copies, limited only by the durability of the mold.
5. **Chasing.** Each hollow wax copy is then "chased": a heated metal tool is used to rub out the marks that show the parting line or flashing where the pieces of the mold came together. The wax is dressed to hide any imperfections. The wax now looks like the finished piece. Wax pieces that were molded separately can be heated and attached; foundries often use registration marks to indicate exactly where they go.
6. **Spruing.** The wax copy is sprued with a treelike structure of wax that will eventually provide paths for molten casting material to flow and air to escape. The carefully planned spruing usually begins at the top with a wax "cup," which is attached by wax cylinders to various points on the wax copy. This spruing doesn't have to be hollow, as it will be melted out later in the process.
7. **Slurry.** A sprued wax copy is dipped into a slurry of silica, then into a sand-like stucco, or dry crystalline silica of a controlled grain size. The slurry and grit combination is called ceramic shell mold material, although it is not literally made of ceramic. This shell is allowed to dry, and the process is repeated until at least a half-inch coating covers the entire piece. The bigger the piece, the thicker the shell needs to be. Only the inside of the cup is not coated, and the cup's flat top serves as the base upon which the piece stands during this process.
8. **Burnout.** The ceramic shell-coated piece is placed cup-down in a kiln, whose heat hardens the silica coatings into a shell, and the wax melts and runs out. The melted wax can be recovered and reused, although often it is simply burned up. Now all that remains of the original artwork is the negative space, formerly occupied by the wax, inside the hardened ceramic shell. The feeder and vent tubes and cup are also hollow.
9. **Testing.** The ceramic shell is allowed to cool, then is tested to see if water will flow through the feeder and vent tubes as necessary. Cracks or leaks can be patched with thick refractory paste. To test the thickness, holes can be drilled into the shell, then patched.
10. **Pouring.** The shell is reheated in the kiln to harden the patches and remove all traces of moisture, then placed cup-upwards into a tub filled with sand. Metal is melted in a crucible in a furnace, then poured carefully into the shell. If the shell were not hot, the temperature difference would shatter it. The filled shells are allowed to cool.
11. **Release.** The shell is hammered or sand-blasted away, releasing the rough casting. The spruing, which are also faithfully recreated in metal, are cut off, to be reused in another casting.
12. **Metal-chasing.** Just as the wax copies were chased, the casting is worked until the telltale signs of the casting process are removed, and the casting now looks like the original model. Pits left by air bubbles in the casting, and the stubs of spruing are filed down and polished.

For the first time ever, a list of all the aircrew who took place in the Battle of Britain had to be drawn up.

The monument was finally unveiled on 18 September 2005, the 65th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, by the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall. Many of the veterans themselves attended.

Having created the monument 64 years after the event, allowed the sculptor to step back and not just produce a stiff and starchy "official" portrayal but a sometimes humorous overview of everything involved – a Bayeux tapestry of the Battle of Britain.

Paul Day has said it has made him look at what he does differently and look at someone else's history – giving shape to the endeavours of a past generation.

It is certainly not the "bland and the abstract" – an immensely interesting piece of art. About 100 yards along from Big Ben.

2007

At the south end of the upper level of **St. Pancras Station**,

Paul Day's 9 metre high, 20 tonne bronze statue named **"The Meeting Place"** is intended to evoke the romance of travel.



2009: Memorial to the Queen Mother: Paul Day created two large friezes including the following detail:

