



**‘I never tire of carving this incredible creature of the wild. They’re so elusive but playful and funny!’**

➤ elephant calf. “It reminds me of Babar,” Laurence says, with a grin. “It’s a bronze copy of a green marble sculpture which is on the ninth deck of the Royal Caribbean Cruise Liner, Enchantment of the Seas,” he adds. In fact it’s just one of nine stone carvings Laurence has on three huge liners which sail our oceans.

Elsewhere in his landscaped garden is the Goddess Athena and Owl, another jewel of the seas, which Laurence masterfully sculpted from white mocha limestone. The Goddess has a distinct Egyptian feel about her, which he puts down to childhood influences. “For part of my childhood I was brought up in Bloomsbury, London, and my playground was the British museum. I loved going inside and looking at the Egyptian sculptures. When I started sculpting the goddess I never expected her to look so Egyptian so it’s like my childhood experiences are coming out in my subconscious mind,” he explains.

Making our way back up the garden towards the studio, there is a beautiful fountain featuring a water goddess wrapped around a pole, with water cascading down her.

“She is beautiful from every angle isn’t she?” says Laurence.

There is an air of excitement as Laurence opens the doors to his studio, preparing to unveil the inner sanctum. He shows me his early work from the 70s, which is tubular in design, then leads me to a glass-fronted cupboard containing many of his maquettes; predominantly playful-looking otters.

Laurence’s studio is a bit like Dr Who’s tardis; just when you think you’ve seen everything, another door opens, revealing somewhere more magical, namely his gallery. Mounted on plinths are countless beautiful female nudes, Adam and Eve (fittingly carved out of one piece of alabaster stone), the famous bull in miniature and many animals. Chatting about the nudes, Laurence explains that they are all concoctions of his imagination. “I’m a direct stone carver so I don’t work from pictures. I see a lump of stone and a shape in it and let it evolve.”

In a glass cabinet in his gallery Laurence is particularly proud of the bronze trophies he

created for the Tennis Federation. “They’ve been presented every year to the world tennis champions,” he enthuses. “Roger Federer has got five now!” he beams.

Amazed at the diversity of his work, I am dying to find out more about Laurence’s life so we retire to a comfy leather sofa in his gallery to chat about his fascination with art, over a freshly brewed coffee.

“From the age of four I could draw perspective, and that’s the difference between children that can and can’t draw. Most children draw flat objects on paper, they can’t see the top or sides, but I could,” he recollects.

Early signs of his love affair with stone were evident when Laurence went to live with his grandparents after his mother and father divorced. “My mother’s parents had a house near the sea in Portishead so I’d spend a lot of time playing on the beach and I loved the smooth pebbles and the stones. Also my granddad was an osteopath so I was always looking at the bones he had in his office.”

Laurence’s burgeoning talent was spotted years later when he was studying for a BA in sociology at Hatfield College. “The secretary to Lord Salisbury at Hatfield had seen some of my work and she said ‘you shouldn’t be doing this course, you’re wasting your time and energy.’” After a subsequent run-in with a course tutor, Laurence took the secretary’s advice and gave up the course.

But it wasn’t until fate intervened and sent him off to the beautiful Isle of Skye in Scotland that he was able to start sculpting full time. Working as Director of Art at the Haberdashers’ Aske’s School for Boys in Elstree, Hertfordshire – having met and married his wife Ingrid – Laurence was invited to exhibit at the first Living Craft exhibition at Hatfield House.

He proved very popular and was invited back the following year, when he struck up a conversation with a farmer who had just bought two islands off the coast of Skye. Impressed with his creative talent, the farmer invited Laurence to Skye to carve from the Scottish stone. It was too good an offer to refuse. “Here was me, a simple old art teacher in Elstree, with a wife and three boys, so I said ‘wonderful’ and went.”

Laurence immediately fell in love with Skye – and in particular Camusfearna, one of the Sandaig Islands, where the author Gavin Maxwell lived. “It is one of the most beautiful and magical places on earth,” Laurence says. It was there that Maxwell wrote *Ring of Bright Water*, later made into a film. It was also there that Laurence’s love affair with the then endangered otter began.

He carved his first otter by the harbour wall, which was bought by Sir Iain Noble, whose hotel overlooked the bay. “I remember he asked if the otter was for sale. I thought quickly and said, ‘yes, it’s £200’. In 1978 that was a lot of money!”

The sculptor’s first exhibition followed at An Talla Dearg on Skye... and it was a huge success. “I earned a year’s salary in six weeks!” he says incredulously. “We averaged 150 people a day. After that I exhibited there every year for 25 years. After 10 years it was so successful some of the Skye guidebooks even put me on the cover.”

Laurence’s otters were by far his most popular piece, and, concerned by the rarity of the creatures (at one point there were only 100 left in Britain) he decided to create a collection of 100, and for each one sold donated £340 to the Otter Trust. It wasn’t long before he earned his nickname The Otter Man of Skye – and was appointed joint president of the International Otter Survival Fund. “I never tire of carving this incredible creature of the wild.

They’re so elusive but they’re so playful and funny,” he enthuses.

The sculptor, who now splits his time between Wareseley and Skye, has since created at least 200 otter sculptures, although the one animal he seems to be associated with most is the famous bronze bull, which stands proudly outside Birmingham’s Bullring Shopping Centre.

He is still incredibly proud as he recalls the day it was unveiled in front of 279,000 people in Birmingham in 2003, and he delights in showing me the front page stories he has kept from the *Birmingham Mail*. So he should be, as the bull is simply exquisite; twice the size of a Hereford Bull and weighing five tonnes. “He’s incredible isn’t he?,” says Laurence, patting his smaller model in the gallery, with a paternal pride.

Laurence was invited to enter a competition to design a sculpture that would fit the ethos of Birmingham after architects saw his 20ft long leaping salmon sculpture at Chester Business Park, unveiled in 1990.

“I went to a farmer up the road who breeds Hereford bulls to study the animals. He had some young ones in the barn that were about four months old. They’d come up to the railings and had the most beautiful long eyelashes, and they sniffed the edge of my sketchpad. They were so endearing I wasn’t sure how I’d get them to look powerful. I did some rough drawings and made a sculpture out of clay. It took me two weeks during a heatwave and I worked until about 2am in the morning, only having about four hours sleep a night.”

His hard work paid off as the competition organisers were delighted with his results and he won the £100,000 commission. “I was elated. The organisers said I’d done exactly what they wanted and that the bull was perfect and represented Birmingham in



◆ Above: Indian elephant calf

every way.” Inevitably, producing and casting ‘Bully’, as he is affectionately known, ended up costing Laurence the full £100,000 so he never made any money out of it. “So I effectively gave them the bull,” he says. “I decided that I’d live off the prestige of it.”

Today, the bull has become a British landmark – and Laurence still finds it hard to believe how popular his bronze masterpiece has become. “Someone told me that the bull was the third most photographed image in Britain. Apparently they can record this because they have cameras watching. The Houses of Parliament are first, then the London Eye and third is my bull. Isn’t that incredible?”



◆ Laurence is opening his studio and sculpture garden weekends and weekdays, Saturday, May 9th to Sunday, May 17th. The Black Barn Studio, behind The Forge, Eltisleys Road, Wareseley, Cambridgeshire. [www.laurencebroderick.co.uk](http://www.laurencebroderick.co.uk)

STYLE MAGAZINE



◆ Don’t miss next month’s Style magazine to find out about Laurence’s exciting new project – a stainless steel windmill which he hopes will become East Anglia’s version of the Angel of the North.