

Visual Arts

Emily Young, We Are Stone's Children, Fine Art Society, London – review

Britain's greatest living stone sculptor has achieved new grandeur and depth



'Red Mountain Head' (2013)

Jackie Wullschlager SEPTEMBER 1, 2013

This superb show of new work by Britain's greatest living stone sculptor comes from Venice, where monumental, hieratic, yet strongly individualised heads were displayed this summer in the cloister of the Madonna dell'Orto church. Recalling [Rodin's expressiveness and Moore's abstracting drive](#), these have a fugitive, fleeting quality – with beauty paradoxically trapped in ancient, solid stone – redolent of Giacometti and Hans Josephsohn.

Modernist to the core in humanist impulse and commitment to “truth to materials”, [Young](#) carves half-finished heads to allow geological accident – veins, splits, crevasses – to determine the character and energy of each work. A sweeping, abbreviated, figurative profile is suggested but part of the rock is left raw, unpolished – an art of process, questioning, subservience to time and chance. “Wild Mountain Head” has Grecian features hewn from clastic igneous rock, with flamboyant hair flaring behind like an angel's wing, giving the piece a soaring, upward thrust. “Dark Forest Head” and “Dark Lightning Head”, in dolomitic limestone, streaked with gold, are black, flattened faces, eyes closed, definitive as primitive statuary; those carved in red limestone (“Red Mountain Head”, “Earth Song”) are more turbulent, laced with fractures. An onyx “Honey Head” glows, reflecting light; “Crystal Head” exposes the crystalline structure of quartzite, its hardness offsetting the fragility of an incomplete, rough/smooth face in a piece laying bare the experience of its making.

Young's work has always compelled by its formal simplicity and directness; revealing the mineral occlusions of millennia – how dust settled, water dripped, forces pushed – her sculptures meditate on time, nature, memory, man's relationship to the Earth.

Since moving four years ago to Santa Croce in Tuscany, where her studio is a disused hillside convent, she has achieved new grandeur and depth. Her gravitas and mastery of form and composition stood in contrast to much of the biennale's conceptual drivel: she would be my choice for a really original British pavilion for Venice 2015.

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