

Showing at Berg Apton Sculpture Trail this year reminds me of the special qualities of the individual gardens and their creators. It is another example of personal expression. You begin, as the artist or writer does, with a space or material that you can change and build something- an object, idea, image or environment that is an aspect of yourself, a kind of communication with others about your own aesthetic, social, sometimes political self.

We are all mostly social beings and our relationships focus our own identities. Meeting our 'gardeners' and installing our work during the sculpture trail, talking to visitors and other artists and developing these relationships lets the sculpture become a vehicle for exchanging ideas, discussing interests and common ground. It is also, vitally for me, a way of removing the stuffy and sometimes pretentious gallery context and replacing it with a vibrant, growing natural context. This means that a wider group of people want to visit the work because it is a good day out, a chance to indulge in another great British obsession- the garden (and also other people's houses)- and make a journey through what are really the visual forms of a living community- the layout of housing, roads, fields and paths, the village hall, the church, the post office- and see how art might successfully be integrated into 'the real world', not as an elitist and expensive luxury but as a part of life.

If an artist might strive to make work that is socially engaged, he should first, to my mind, become socially engaged himself. The public sculpture trail is an excellent way to do this. It is a clear aim of the trail at Berg Apton to encourage social cohesion and the huge success that it has become is due to the good natured and generous inclusiveness of the organisers and the artists. Artists need some organisers- we are often solitary in our work habits- and so for us this is a good opportunity to socialise and make friends. It also helps us to put our work into some kind of context. The range and ambition of the work is wide. Scale, materials, techniques and styles vary widely and the challenges and surprises of the gardens offer a chance to re-evaluate contexts and meanings.

Long life and success to the Berg Apton Sculpture Trail! And many thanks to the organisers and the inspiration behind it. With this kind of support, let the sculptor stride forth from his damp and dusty studio to embrace the world!