

BOWMAN SCULPTURE

JOHN SKEAPING (English, 1901-1980)

John Skeaping was a British sculptor and painter. He first began to study sculpture in 1914, at Blackheath School of Art in London. Skeaping then attended the School of Art at Goldsmiths College and the Central School of Arts and Crafts. Finally, he secured a place at the prestigious Royal Academy School from 1919 to 1920. In 1924 he was awarded the prestigious Prix de Rome from the Royal Academy. While in Rome, Skeaping met a young Barbara Hepworth, who was the runner-up of the scholarship. The two sculptors began a relationship and went on to marry each other in Florence the following year.

In the 1920s and early 1930s John Skeaping and Barbara Hepworth's creative activities profoundly influenced one another. Both artists began to move away from the tenets of academic sculpture prevalent at the time, adopting a more 'modern', as the critics categorized it, approach instead. They exhibited together at recognised galleries and joined influential exhibiting societies such as the London Group (1928 to 1934) and the 7&5 Society (1932). Increasingly they became the leading figures of the British Modernist movement who were associated with direct carving, together with Richard Perry Bedford and Henry Moore. During these intensely creative years, John Skeaping was ranked alongside Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore as one of the most promising young sculptors of the day. It was Moore himself who commented that *'no sculptor of his generation was born with greater natural facility than John Skeaping'* (John Skeaping, 1991, p.13)

Throughout this period Skeaping's work centred around animals, whose forms and dynamics fascinated him. Among the animal figures he carved there were antelopes, buffalos, deer, monkeys, tigers, and polar bears. Works of this period are characterised by the great variety of exotic and local stones - Roman and soap stones, polyphant, Cornish serpentine, Cumbrian alabaster, Irish fossil marble, Sicilian jaune lamantine -, that he carved with great care and ability. In the words of Jonathan Blackwood: *'At this stage, the sculptor was intent on mastering as many materials as he could, in the manner of a mountaineer conquering unknown peaks.'* (Blackwood, 2011, p. 32)