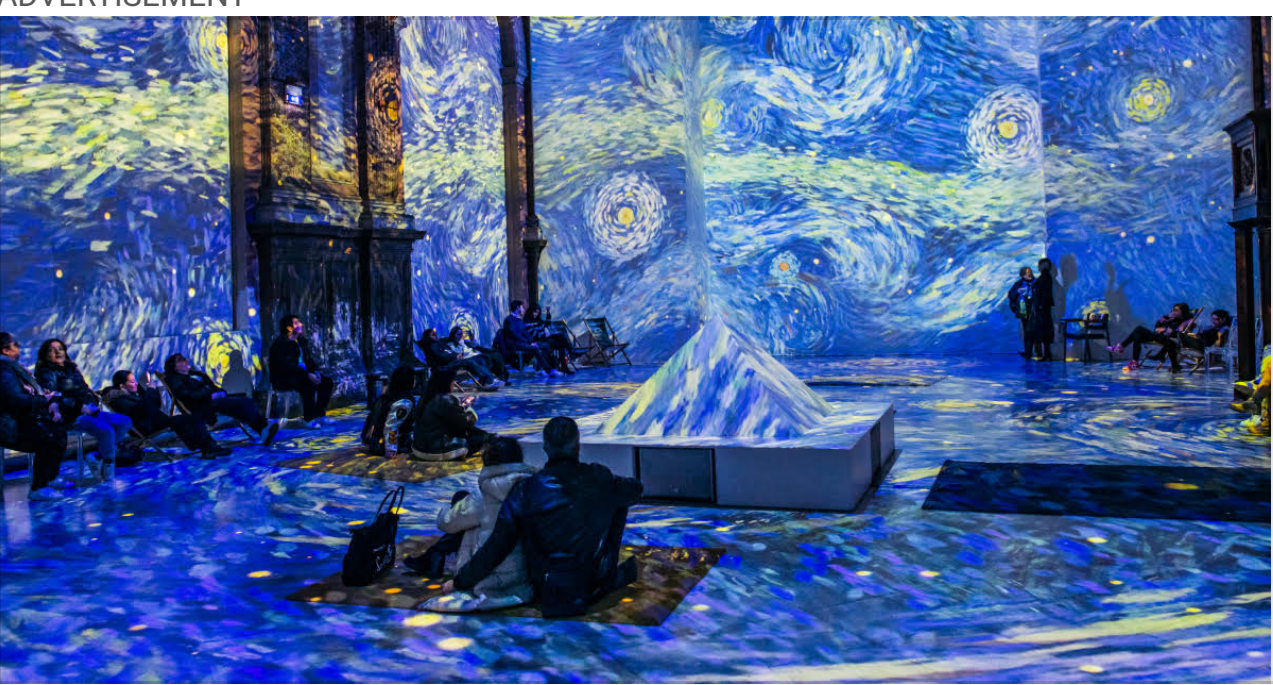


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Art

Art in focus: Dark Forest Head (2013) by Emily Young

Young’s carved stone sculptures are meditations on time, nature and humanity



Dark Forest Head (2013) by Emily Young



Aidan Dunne

Sat Sep 22 2018 - 05:00

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What is it?

Dark Forest Head

is a 2013 sculpture by Emily Young. It is carved in dolomitic limestone.

How was it done? Young is that relative rarity

: a contemporary sculptor who carves stone in a way that extends back through pre-history. Technology helps, but the fundamentals remain the same.

Where can I see it? Dark Forest Head is included in On a Pedestal: Celebrating the Contemporary Portrait Bust

, an exhibition that was originally conceived for and shown in the Long Gallery at Castletown but is now on view in the State Apartments at Dublin Castle until November 4th ([dublincastle.ie](#)). It consists of contemporary reinterpretations of the classical portrait bust by more than 30 Irish and international artists, offering an array of media and approaches.

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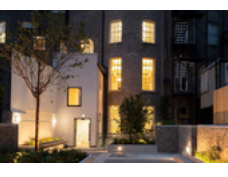
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Is it a typical work by the artist? It is typical. Young has been plausibly described as Britain’s greatest living stone sculptor. She was born in London, into a “a family of writers, artists and politicians.” Her grandmother, Kathleen Scott, was a sculptor (and the widow of Scott of the Antarctic), although, working with clay, she was a modeller rather than a carver. At one the London Free School concerts, aged 15, Young met Syd Barrett (“like Puck in A Midsummer Night’s Dream”

she later described him to journalist Sean Walsh). He was a member of what was then The Pink Floyd Sound, and Young was the inspiration for his song *See Emily Play*. It's not her only musical connection. Simon Jeffes of the Penguin Café Orchestra (she did several album covers) was her partner for a considerable time and they had a son.

Young’s work brings to mind Michelangelo’s famous account of his working method: “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.” But for Young the angel is not separable from the marble – they are one and the same. She first applied herself to painting, briefly attending Chelsea School of Art and Central Saint Martins in the late 1960s. Then she travelled extensively and, in the early 1980s, turned to stone carving. To her amazement, it came naturally to her: “I seem to know what to do, how to find a form I like,” she wrote. Travelling had left her with a deep appreciation of stone, not as an inert, functional material but as a dynamic, varied substance that embodies vast reaches of time and the earth’s history.

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The human forms she finds in the stone are not something distinct from it. While stones “exist in an utterly different way to us ... to me they’re kinds of ancestors”. Our environment shapes us and we too embody our galactic history.

She carves many kinds of stone – marble, onyx, agate, alabaster, lapis lazuli – usually sourced in Italian quarries. Rather than looking for blocks that suit preconceived designs, she lets the stone speak to her. Her Italian studio is a 17th century one-time convent in Santa Croce, Tuscany (previously a tenant there, she bought it in 2013). Carving is intensely and inescapably physical. She has a battery of power tools at her disposal but there is no way around the hands-on nature of hammering, chiselling, grinding and polishing, all of which she seems to relish.

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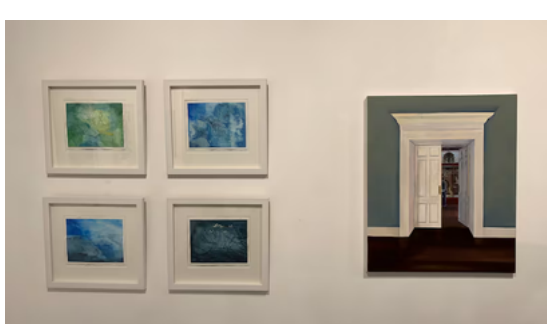
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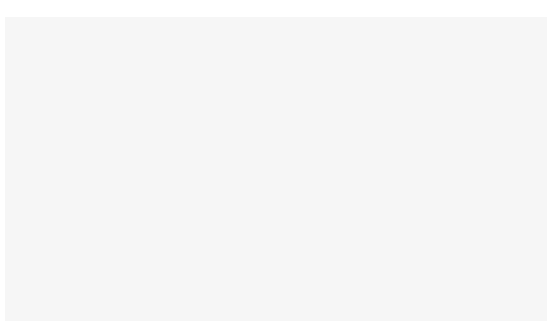
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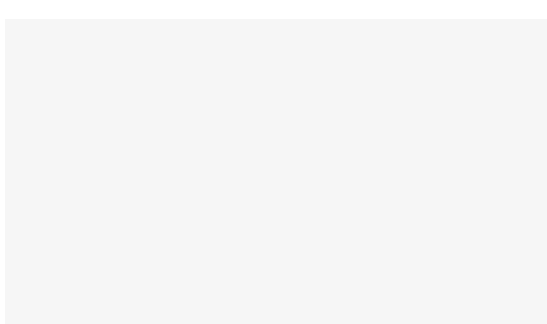
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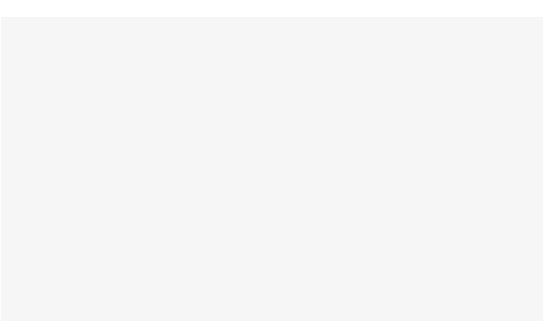
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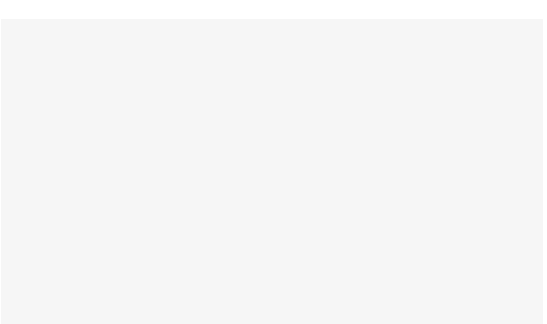
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