

Sculpting Art History: Essays in Memory of Benedict Read

Edited by Katharine Eustace, Mark Stocker and Joanna Barnes. 468 pp. incl. 250 col. + b. & w. ills. (Public Monuments and Sculpture Association, London, and Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2018), £68.95. ISBN 978-1-912-79300-6.

by **DAVID J. GETSY**

It is easy to fall prey to the delusion that all information is easily accessible to us. The practice of scholarly research has been transformed over the last decade, and millions of books, journals and newspapers can now be read from portable screens. In contrast to the current ease with which information can be accessed, the research Ben Read conducted for his *Victorian Sculpture* (1982) was a profound achievement.¹ As the first comprehensive study of the period, it set the terms and laid the foundation for Victorian sculpture studies. Read was part of a group of committed historians, which also included Philip Ward-Jackson, Alison Yarrington, Terry Friedman, Peyton Skipwith and Susan Beattie, who established an archive for the study of British sculpture. Read's book became the starting point for any scholar, and it is easily forgotten today how much work was required to compile and survey that material.

Read's impact was not just as a foundational scholar but also as a mentor and supporter of others' work. He was not a jealous gatekeeper, but rather encouraged younger scholars and entertained new viewpoints. He demanded attention to the object and to the archive, but he was always open to being convinced about other perspectives and interpretations. His greatest compliment was to say that he learned something from you.

Read's scholarly contribution to the study of British sculpture and his mentorship of generations of other historians are the twin testaments of this *Festschrift*, carefully edited by Katharine Eustace, Mark Stocker and Joanna Barnes. Across its thirty essays, this book brings

together scholars of different generations and evidences the importance of personal custodianship of scholarly networks. The anthology not only gives a sense of the field of sculpture studies in Britain; it also demonstrates the vast amount of material still to be examined and debated.

Space permits only a few mentions. Many authors point to Read's encouragement of a global view of sculptural production, with three excellent analyses of sculpture in Australia by Alison Inglis, Juliette Peers and Mark Stocker; a discussion of the blind spots of American Neo-classical architecture by Irish art historian Paula Murphy; a comparative study by Jyrki Siukonen of a Finnish monument; and an exemplary essay on the patronage of Aga Khan III by Mary Ann Steggle. In addition, there are focused studies of the complexities of the local, with standouts being Jane Winfrey's meticulous analysis of the history of Leeds City Square and Katherine Eustace's expansive and fascinating account of the sources and innovations of Hew Lorimer's reliefs for a hydro-electric station at Fasnakyle in the Scottish Highlands. Other authors address sculpture through philosophy, with adept essays by Rowan Bailey on Hegel and Michael Paraskos on Herbert Read. Cases are made for scholarly reassessment throughout, most notably by Gillian Whiteley (for Peter Péri), Marjorie Trusted (for Lorenzo Bartolini), Barbara Bryant (for G.F. Watts), Joanna Barnes and Harriet Ruth Israel (for Thomas Woolner), Patrick Eyres (for Eric Kennington) and Julius Bryant's unpacking of the vicissitudes of M.C. Wyatt's dog sculpture *Bashaw* (c.1832–34; Victoria and Albert Museum, London). In keeping with Read's own scholarly priorities, many authors provide detailed and insightful accounts of the institutions and networks of sculpture, such as Sandra Berresford's examination of the marble trade, Ann Compton's institutional history of the Sculptors' Institute of the Royal Society of British Sculptors and Sarah Crellin's episodic tracking of the émigré artist during the Second World War. A paragon is Philip Ward-Jackson's discussion of the sourcing of marble for Victorian sculpture, which works in tandem with Berresford's to pose new and fundamental questions to the field about just what a history of sculpture should be.

Sculpting Art History offers less of a field survey than points on a map still being drawn about British sculpture's global reach, but its authors carry on Read's legacy by expanding

on the foundations he helped to establish. It is to be hoped that this important contribution to sculpture studies serves to encourage others, just as Read himself did.

¹ See the Ben Read Archive, available at <https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/380550>, accessed 7th October 2020.