

ABOUT: HOLGER LÖNZE



‘A compression and direction of cooperative energy, the ‘meitheal’ was the natural, old way to solve specific problems. The leaders got things started, then removed themselves entirely, leaving action wholly in the hands of teams of men who worked in anonymous unity, according to traditional rules, who symbolised community while bringing community into order.’

Sometimes we gain a deeper appreciation of our own culture through a voice that comes from another place. The work of the sculptor Holger Lönze engages with Irish tradition on levels that bring an added depth of understanding to those of us who have grown up with the objects and practices of our own country. Originally from Germany and



“The ability to motivate and inspire a working group, and to give them the space to operate independently, is core to Lönze’s process. These skills, which evolved through the work that he has done with community groups, transfer to his sculpture.”

now living and working in County Cork, his reading of Irish culture goes beyond the simple interpretation of language and myth to an engagement with ancient forms and ways of making. The building of currachs, for example, is a core element of his practice. In 2005 Lönze initiated Lough Neagh Boating Heritage

Association, a group dedicated to researching and building the local clinker fishing boats. In his sculptural work, Lönze predominantly works in bronze, but rarely uses a foundry. Instead he casts smaller pieces himself, using a Bronze Age casting process which involves an outdoor charcoal pit and a casting mould ▶



This page / Miniature street art series (2010), Armagh City Centre



This page / People of the Sea (2011), Portrush

▶ made from clay, sand and horse-dung. From this ungainly chrysalis, the finished piece emerges. He is not wedded to ancient techniques for the sake of it – his adaptation of the process includes the use of a silicon mould – but the reinvention of old ways of working gives the finished pieces a sense of belonging within the landscape, similar to that of buildings made from native stone.

Lönze’s recent miniature street art series for Armagh City Centre – twenty-two bronze gargoyles and angels installed in June 2010 – was made using Bronze Age casting techniques. The commission came as part of Armagh’s recent regeneration of its city centre, based on the decorative tradition of the city’s two cathedrals: the Catholic cathedral has angels on its ceiling; the Protestant one has gargoyles on the roof. These characters, both angelic and demonic, were ecumenically invited to participate in the regenerated streetscape. They are small sculptures, lurking on corner stones, in brick walls, door knockers, and attached to fencing. ‘Big is not always better for work in the public domain,’ says Lönze, ‘Gargoyles are shy creatures hiding at great height while the nature of guardian angels is not to be seen.’ The sculptures are visible but



shopping bag, and car parts – and also relate to the building to which they are attached. ‘I looked at the history of the roads, the history of the buildings, and the use of the buildings and then found a concept for each angel that reflected this,’ Lönze says. ‘I suggested a burglar gargoyle for the Northern Bank, but the bank felt that it was a bit close to recent history and complained, so they got a money-vomiting banker instead, which I felt was even more appropriate in these times, and they didn’t mind that at all.’ An angel on the cathedral fence takes the form of a monk and carries a miniature version of the ancient bell of Terryhoogan, County Armagh, but his wings are those of a First World War triplane.



not obvious. You have to seek them out. Their forms echo the familiar objects of the modern street: coins,

In contrast to the small scale of Gargoyles and Angels, Lönze’s recent sculpture, To the People of the Sea (2011), Portrush, is massive in ▶





This page / People of the Sea (2011), Portrush

► scale. The project, made as part of the redevelopment of the Victorian promenade on Portrush's East Strand, is based on the sail formation of the Drontheim, a double-ended yawl that was traditionally built locally. In Lönze's sculpture, three sails made of sheet bronze – the largest of them some 4 metres in height – rise from a boat-shaped terrazzo base. The piece reflects the form of a traditional boat, but also the wave formations of the sea: the patina is a deep blue and one side of the sculpture is raised in the form of waves, textured and gilded on the foamy crest. Each sail is made of two layers of sheet bronze,

sandwiched like an aircraft wing with ribs in between and everything about the project, Lönze admits, was a challenge in terms of scale. 'We were using a jewellery technique that we lifted to architectural size. I'd never worked with repoussé sheet metal to that scale before!' First the bronze sheets were laid out and welded into a sail-shape. Then, because repoussé is worked from the back, the piece was lifted into a vertical position using a system of tackle and pulleys and at considerable risk to the shed. 'We started annealing it first – you soften the metal to red heat – and then let it cool down. Then we attacked it with hammers. This was another challenge

because you can't get mallets that size, so we had to make them out of fence posts.' As the piece gradually took shape, Lönze adapted traditional sail-making techniques, folding and stitching, to the bronze until it assumed the form and the belly of a sail.

The cultural value of *To the People of the Sea* extends beyond its aesthetic impact and its honouring of traditional craft practice. The piece engages with the process of making in a way that is close to the concept of *meitheal*. Unlike many contemporary sculptors, Lönze makes his own work, but larger pieces like this require the assistance of a team. *To the People of the Sea* was fabricated in James Walshe's workshop in Coalisland, County Tyrone, by Lönze with a team of five. Walshe was in charge of organisation and logistics; Pat Hughes worked on the concrete foundations and steel work, as well as arranging the handling of the work; Joe did the steel welding; the sculptor Alan Milligan did repoussé work and photography; and Vincent Fitzpatrick, of Uniqrete Ltd, Mountrath, made the terrazzo base. The project engineer was Donal Lynch from Cork. 'It was an excellent team because everyone had experience,' Lönze says. 'I didn't have to make decisions all the time. They knew what we wanted and then they just did it.' The ability to motivate and inspire a working group, and to give them the space to operate independently, is core to Lönze's process. These skills, which evolved through the work that he has done with community groups, transfer to his sculpture. Much of the power within his work comes from the way in which he uses contemporary practice as a way to continue traditions, and this is reflected both in the forms of the work and also in the methods that he employs in its creation. ●



Eleanor Flegg
Craft NI

