

Lynn Chadwick: the Makers Studio

June 2014

Lynn Chadwick : the Maker's Studio

Internationally acclaimed sculptor Lynn Chadwick lived and worked here in Gloucestershire for much of his life. His inspiring work can be seen in major public art galleries around the world, yet many people locally have never heard of him. We wanted to mark his centenary with an exhibition which would celebrate Stroud's connection to this world-renowned artist.

We were delighted when Gallery Pangolin generously agreed to curate an exhibition here at the Museum in the Park, and intrigued and excited when we discovered what they had in mind. Rather than present a collection of Chadwick's finished sculptures, why not recreate his studio, the place where he actually worked?

This unusual exhibition brings us the privilege of a secret 'peek behind the scenes,' a chance to step inside the private workspace of a remarkable maker. It offers us a fascinating window into Lynn Chadwick's world and the story of how his sculptures were made. This is a rare chance to experience the atmosphere of a very special studio and to imagine the sculptor at work, surrounded by his tools, materials and work-in-progress.

Our warmest thanks go to Gallery Pangolin for presenting this wonderful opportunity to celebrate Lynn Chadwick's centenary, and to Lypiatt Studio without whom the exhibition would not have been possible. We thank Claude Koenig, Chadwick's studio assistant, for sharing her memories of working with him, and thank everyone who helped make this unique exhibition happen.

Whether you know Chadwick's work well, or are discovering him for the first time, we hope you enjoy exploring 'The Maker's Studio'.

Ann Taylor & Abigail Large
The Museum in the Park



Stable Block
studio
Lypiatt Park
Photo Dutton

**Abigail Large and Ann Taylor in conversation with Claude Koenig
Lynn Chadwick's studio assistant 1983 -1995.**

What attracted Lynn Chadwick, do you think, to live and work in rural Gloucestershire?

When he moved out of London shortly after the war with his young family, it was in effect to search for a place conducive to making work. He knew it relatively well and had spent many childhood holidays in this area of Gloucestershire with his parents and as it happened his wife knew someone who had cottages available near Edge.

When and how did you first meet him?

I was a student in Cheltenham in the very early eighties and the man who ran his foundry at Lypiatt Park at the time also taught at the Art School. Rungwe and I regularly helped him out in our lunch breaks for a bit of pocket money and he liked the way we worked. After a while he offered us summer work at Lypiatt. It was then that I first met Lynn Chadwick; I was at the top of a ladder re-painting the walls of his studio.

How did you come to work as his Studio Assistant?

I first assisted him in April 1983 on the maquette for Jubilee IV which will be in Crucible 2 this year. He was returning to work after heart surgery. Rungwe was already working there running the Lypiatt Foundry and I came to stay during my Easter break from college.

I think he was sounding me out to see if this could work for him later on when I finished my studies.

We got on well. I had reasonable hand-eye co-ordination and most of all I understood how to dose the level of help he needed. Let's say I had the measure of how to be un-invasive.

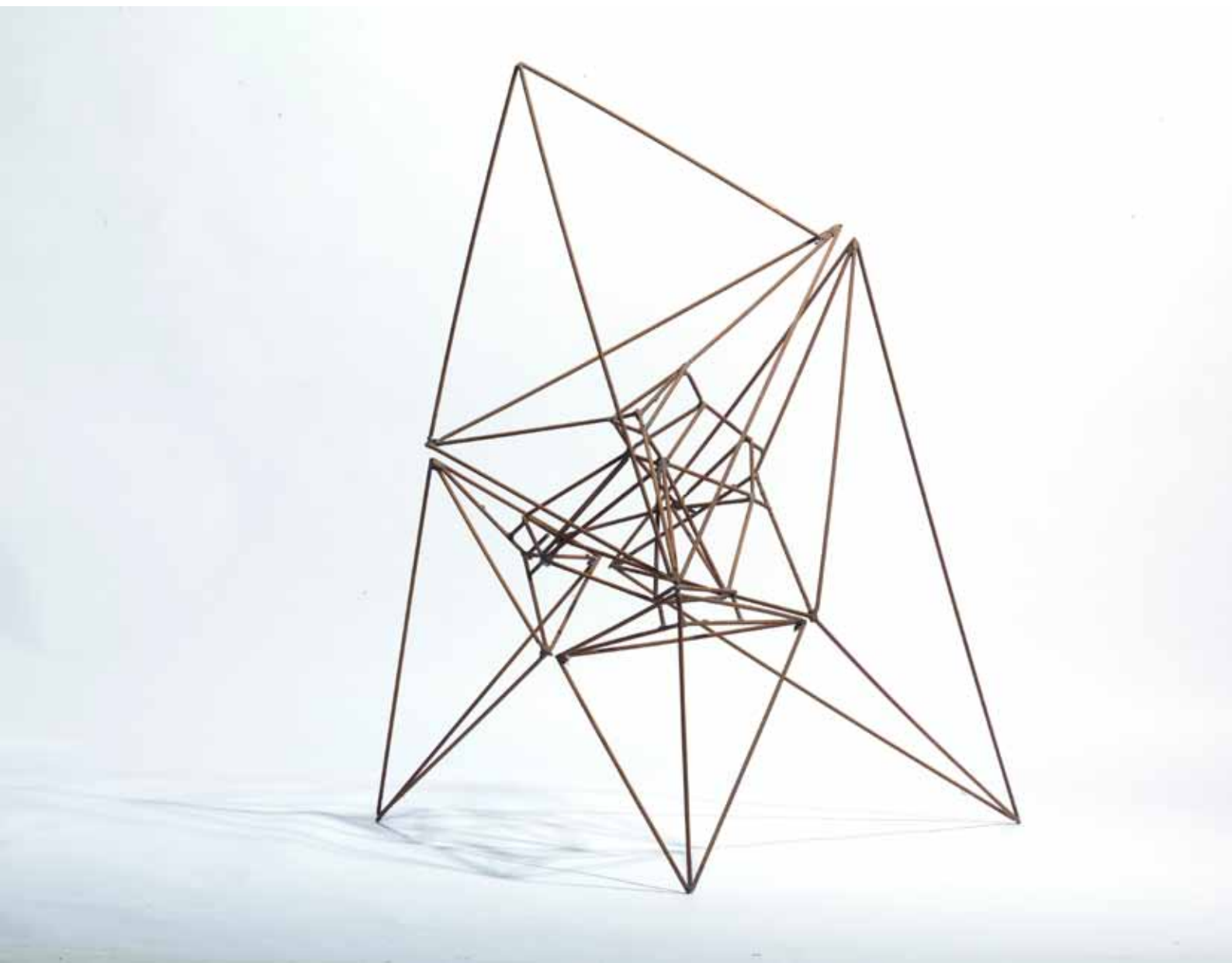
What did it feel like to be working for such a world-famous artist?

When I had spoken to him in my spells of summer work at Lypiatt, I had no idea that it was him I was speaking to. He could be quite shy and unassuming and I thought he just worked there too. So, when eventually I was introduced to him properly, the ice was already broken and things were immediately comfortable. In retrospect this sounds very cheeky but perhaps this lack of self-consciousness did help us to get on well. It all happened very naturally and my first day was very plain sailing.

Can you describe a typical working day in the studio?

Work always began at precisely eight in the morning - being late was not a good start. The timetable was clear, you knew exactly where you stood; coffee break at eleven, lunch at one and tea at four, by five in the afternoon you were tidying up ready for the next day's work.

My role was essentially focused on speeding up the making process. I helped him with the aspects of his work that are invisible so to speak. I fitted the armatures and frames with a surface suitable to receive the outer coat.



Can you tell us about the studio space?

I worked in three of Lynn's six studios. First in the stable block at Lypiatt Park, for a short while in Nailsworth and finally in Chalford where he worked until the end. They all had a similar kind of engineer's workshop atmosphere, equipped for purpose, sparse, white -washed, tidy and with no frills or decoration.

At the heart of every studio was the welding table with nearby gas bottles and torch and the anvil with its pink base on which he hung his leather apron. His sculpting materials, steel rods were neatly stacked on an A-rack with welding rods, tubs of 'stolit' stored near the mixing table and hand tools neatly hung on tool boards with an outline to help keep things in the correct place and also to determine if any were missing, or worse, had been borrowed! There was everything related to working metal bar and plate, for mixing, working and grinding the surface of the sculptures. There was a mobile gantry, crane and other equipment for moving heavy sculptures and of course extraction.





What provided Chadwick with inspiration for his sculptures? When he was embarking on a new work, how would he begin? Did he carry out research? Could you describe the journey of one particular sculpture – say 'High Wind' – from idea to finished work?

His main themes, throughout life, took root in human behaviour, even his beasts say more about the beast and animal in us rather than specific creatures.

I was never aware of him researching ideas, they 'came' to him and that was the beginning of every piece.

Sometimes, if he was in the process of making say a figure like High Wind - inspired by the Mistral blowing into women's skirts in the South of France - he might need to look closer into the subject and observe it in real life. Virtually everything around him could give rise to an idea and that would have a bearing on what he made.

What was Chadwick's working process? Can you explain his unique working method for us?

Chadwick was a maker to the core. He did everything simply and did not like complicated solutions to problems. It was astonishing to see him pick up a steel rod, heat it up and bend this straight line into shape as if something was flowing out of him. I guess some days that flow was more even than others but he never seemed to hesitate while the basic outline was being drawn. Pure instinct!

He never discussed ideas with me, only solutions to problems. It was rare for me to be in the studio at the start of a new sculpture and apart from the sound of his welding torch and hammering we did not speak. He was in his own world and I felt party to something very private as if I should not be there. It was only when he was ready, when he was happy with the frames, that my work could begin.

In fact, later on, we found the ideal working arrangement for him by providing help only when he needed it. We worked next door on the estate and I would come in with a team and fill the frames very quickly and leave him to make his next sculpture.

Chadwick is unique in this working method. A combination of welding his frames freehand with no initial fore planning or drawing give his welds unusual character in that they are more than a practical means of fusing two pieces of metal together and he 'modelled' the metal as it were, into characteristic sharp points, into claws, wings and beaks while he was at it. If you then also add an unusual material like stolit to this, you have a very particular kind of handwriting.

Stolit is a versatile and slow-setting plaster compound enriched and strengthened with iron filings. It was commonly used in the foundry industry for pattern-making.



In the time we worked together, we used several different methods to fill in the frames; he was always searching for the most time-efficient means of doing this. A quicker way to build his sculpture would free up time and enable him to create new work.

Before I worked with him, he used scrunched up newspaper which worked well but later this turned out to be a fire hazard when the sculptures came back from the foundries in need of welding repair.

He then came to the idea of using coke for in-fill. This was a material he was familiar with, his father had been a solid-fuel boiler engineer and Lynn had often seen him at work. It was light and relatively inexpensive. He found that he could build a wall with it, not unlike a Cotswold wall, by stacking pieces of coke on top of each other with a bit of stollit for mortar. By building it just shy of the internal edge of the frames, it provided a perfect surface on which to plaster the final coat. Although this worked adequately well, it was a time-consuming game of balance and a frustrating one at times too; entire walls sometimes collapsed and you were back to starting all over again.

We tried one or two other methods for a short while but the real breakthrough came when we were introduced to expanded metal by his friendly builders. Expanded wire mesh was new in the building industry and was used to reinforce plaster. It lent itself beautifully to the making of his working models. It was strong, light, economical and was easy to attach to the frames, the quickest method by far. Very efficient!



In the early stages of his career he designed textiles and furniture. Was this something he ever talked about, can you tell us more about his designs? How did he use printmaking in his work?

His textile designs were mostly based on plant and natural forms and although not directly connected to my work with him, they were often referred to in anecdotes and in conversation. It is very clear, however that they influenced not only his work on paper, his block printing and mono prints but also in a kind of similar vein, the way he used fanned patterns in his welding, as a texture for the surfaces of his sculpture.



Did he keep written and visual records of all his works?

Meticulous records - from the first ever sculpture he made and latterly also photographs which he took himself. His note book was never for ideas, only as a record of what had been realised; a very useful tool for identification and tracking work and one which is referred to on a daily basis to this day.

250

maquette for
female dancing figure.

May 56

Feb 58

ht. 11"

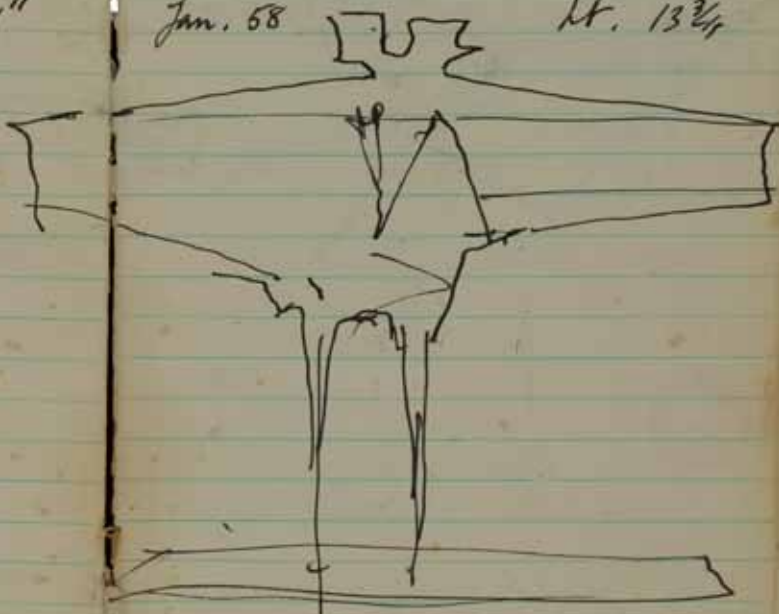


251.

maquette II for R. 34 memorial

Jan. 58

ht. 13 3/4"





What, to Chadwick, was most important in a sculpture?

Stance and poise - the body language of a figure or a beast and the message it projects - what he aptly said gives his sculpture 'attitude'.

How would you describe Lynn Chadwick?

A tall man with a presence you could not ignore. Fundamentally shy with a sharp, if not sometimes, crushing wit but essentially he was always, simply himself. No pretence.

I think we understood each other. When he sometimes came to an impasse in solving problems and could not see a way around them I managed to convince him to let me have a go while he did something else.

I responded to his work routine and discipline which he also knew how to break up. He brought interest to the day by involving me in other things, like the pruning of a rose bush or shopping for tools. I learnt a lot from him and mostly, that a lot can be achieved out of discipline.

What is Chadwick's legacy as a maker? In the new digital age, what can we learn from him and his working method?

What we can all draw from his working method is that there is no template for character. Whatever the method, it always comes out of personal vision and the language in which you express it.

Have you a favourite story about working with Chadwick?

When we were working on the filling in stages of the last High Wind, we reached a point where he suddenly announced that he needed to go to Stroud to see how the wind - it was a windy day - worked on the bottoms of women wearing skirts and off he went.

He came back an hour later, pacing up and down the length of the studio but looking preoccupied and very silent. Nothing was said for a while, I broke the silence tentatively and asked if he had reached any conclusions. There was a marked pause, he stopped dead and we looked at each other: 'Everyone is wearing trousers in Stroud today'! Enormous laughter!

June 2014





'Lynn Chadwick - The Maker'

It is the public face of Lynn Chadwick that most of us are familiar with, the architectural draughtsman, the Fleet Air Arm serviceman, the 1952 Venice Biennale participant and of course the Venice Grand Sculpture Prize-winner of 1956. Behind all this, Lynn fiercely defended his privacy, privacy to create and privacy as a protective device against the vagaries of whatever sculpture movement was fashionable at the time. This was a deliberate choice which allowed him to remain true to his own creative essence.

Entering a sculptor's studio is always fascinating. Being allowed so close to the creative process, sharing in the methods, ideas and materials sculptors use in generating their work, is always an intimate experience and a privilege.

Lynn Chadwick's studio, or rather studios (he had several over his long career), were very specific environments. The space was relatively bare, apart from the sculptures in progress, with not too many things to distract him, and the space was organised around the sculptures: welding bottles, his anvil, a few tools hung on the wall or carefully arranged on a low table, his leather apron, grinder, goggles and dust masks. Depending on the size of the sculpture Lynn was working on, the floor space seemed either to shrink around a small sculpture on a stand or to expand around a larger piece, with the tables and other equipment pushed to the walls.

The studio was not a sanctuary; it was a work-place. The industrial methods Lynn used dictated a workshop-like space, efficient, simple and clean. Ever-practical, this was the environment in which he solved the technical problems his instinct and creativity brought forth. He was only there to work; meals and evenings were spent at home and didn't overlap. In this disciplined manner Lynn Chadwick made nearly a thousand sculptures.

'Of course, the other idea of having a studio crammed full of work is a fascinating idea too. But I don't like that, I don't like to work with a lot of things around me. I like to clear it all out and work in more or less a workshop.'



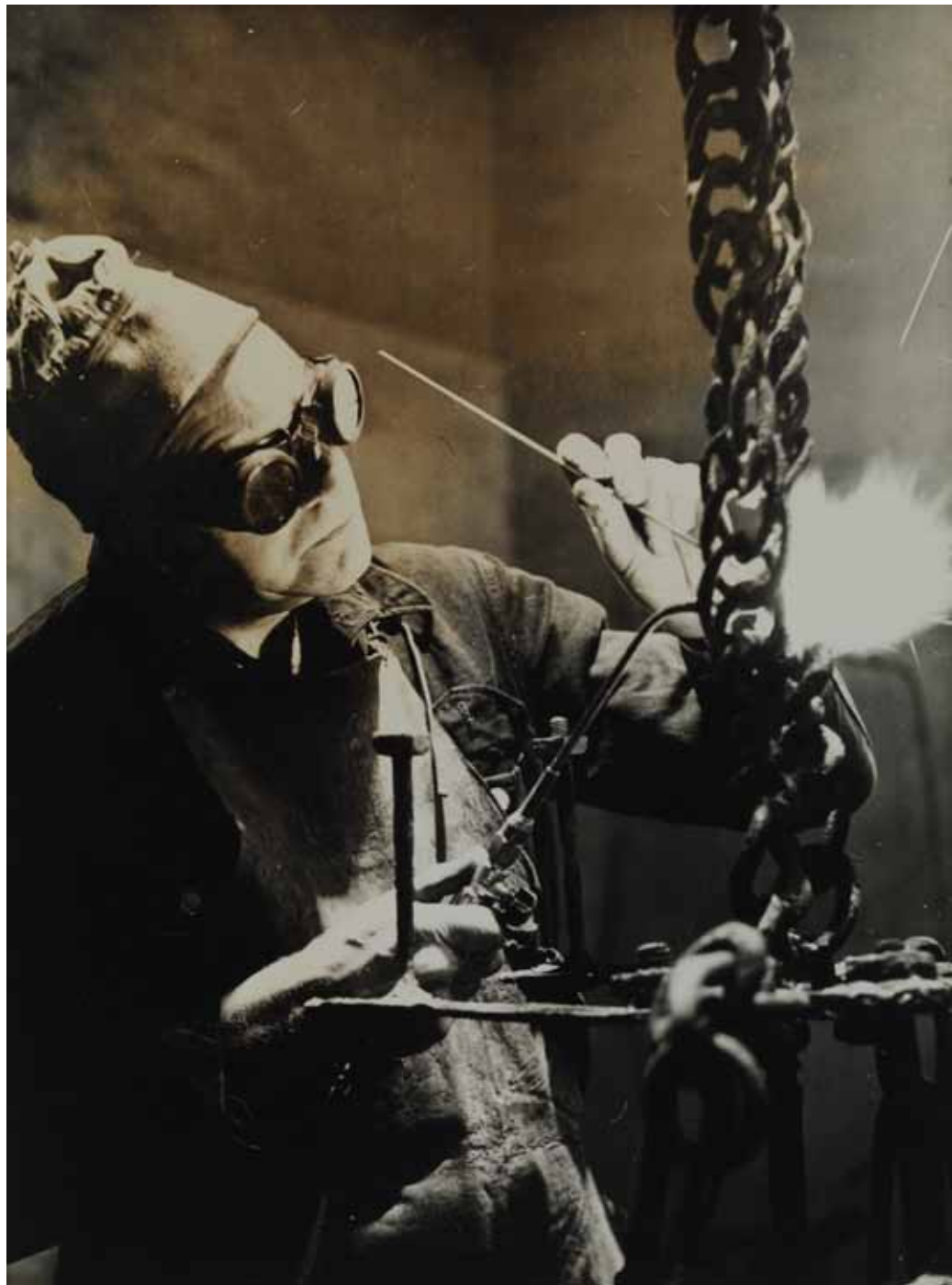


The studio would take on a different character depending on which sculpture Lynn was making at the time, and also on the part of the process he was engaged in. Elegant, spare steel frames, like crazy bird cages, evoked a calm, designed environment, his welding work creating a smell of fire and metal not unlike that of an ants' nest. The filling-in process was more organic, the stolit, plaster and iron filings, smelling like flint struck by metal, while the grinding of the frames and stolit made a smell like sparklers on bonfire night and a fine powdery dust that coated everything in sight.

The main challenge Lynn faced in the early days, was to find a way to make his mobiles and structures strong. In order to make metal forms large and stable enough for outdoor and public spaces he decided to learn to weld. A formal course at the BOC Welding School in Cricklewood provided him with the technical skill needed to join pieces of metal together but, in typical Chadwick manner, joining metal sheets and rods was only the beginning. He quickly discovered that the flame of the welding torch in his hand was as versatile a tool as a brush in that of a painter. The blue cone in the centre of the oxyacetylene flame is hot enough to change the nature of steel from solid to liquid and this renders intractable steel into a fluid and malleable material. With his torch, Lynn could simultaneously melt off an unwanted section, add on more metal, build up or cut out a hole.

Many of his early welded sculptures are the product of an original and exciting exploration of this novel technique: small plates of scrap metal fused together to form new quilted sheets of steel, that in turn support more linear elements of forged and welded metal, becoming legs, beaks, heads and spikes. Old nails, scythe blades and other agricultural implements were joined together in transformative associations. The fused, melted and beaten surfaces were versatile enough to create delicate mobile sections or rugged igneous constructions in which no part was predictable. Subtle colour and sheen were further teased out of the materials by applying plaster, phosphoric acid or by rusting the steel, sometimes while it was still hot.

Hand image here
instead?



Caption here



Mobile 1951
Metal and Wood
Unique

Lynn's inventive use of the welding torch as a modelling tool, with forged details hammered and beaten red-hot on the anvil, has not received as much attention as the weblike structures he developed for his later sculptures. Looking at the self-portrait hand he made out of recycled nails, fused and welded together, shows just how dextrous he became at 'modelling' the steel; his expressive use of flame, welding rod and base metal is as distinctive as handwriting and can be instantly identified as his.

Gradually, Lynn's evolution towards an increasing three-dimensionality led to his trademark frames; web-like armatures of rods that define the exterior contours of his sculpture. This versatile, strong and completely individual method became the process by which Chadwick built almost all of his sculpture from then on and came directly from his very earliest work, the mobiles.

These delicate constructions are all supported on thin metal rods. As they move in the air, the rods begin to imply the fanned planes of an imagined form in space. This suggestion of solid form is what Lynn began to harness and make solid, by welding rods together into permanent arrangements of pyramids, squares and other geometric shapes. These could then be assembled into figures and beasts. Once complete as a structure, like a figurative climbing frame, the spaces in between could be filled with stilit.

This language and its personal calligraphy of welds, exoskeleton structure and tautly-modelled skin, has remained unique to Chadwick. With its direct, efficient simplicity he explored many themes and invented an extraordinarily varied collection of sculptures.

Rungwe Kingdon

June 2014

Acknowledgements

Gallery Pangolin is extremely grateful to:



Museum in the Park
Straud District (Cowle) Museum Service



A Member of The Linde Group

Catalogue Design: Gallery Pangolin

Photography: Steve Russell

(except where stated)

Printing: Healeys Print Group



GALLERY PANGOLIN

9 Chalford Ind Estate Chalford Glos GL6 8NT

T 01453 889765 F 01453 889762 E gallery@pangolin-editions.com

www.gallery-pangolin.com