

Thirsk Hall Sculpture Park

Curated by Willoughby Gerrish

15 May - 25 September 2021
Thursday - Saturday, 11am - 5pm

Willoughby Gerrish Ltd is excited to announce the opening of **Thirsk Hall & Sculpture Park**, with the inaugural exhibition of **Michael Lyons'** monumental sculptures.

Thirsk Hall & Sculpture Park is located in the centre of Thirsk, North Yorkshire. The park is a commercial venture curated and run by Willoughby Gerrish Ltd. The site covers over 20 acres of open parkland, woodland, formal and walled gardens offering a concise outdoor space for exhibiting museum quality sculptures in the open air.

In addition to Michael Lyons's work, this year the park will host a number of sculptures by internationally acclaimed artists Emily Young, Austin Wright, Gerald Laing, Geoffrey Clarke, & Richard Hudson.

For the 2021 season the organisation is also delighted to be hosting an exhibition of Norman Ackroyd CBE RA's etchings of Thirsk Hall and surrounding grounds.



Michael Lyons, *Amphitrite*, 1993

Michael Lyons (1943–2019) was born in Bilston, Staffordshire. As a youth, he trained for Roman Catholic priesthood, then attended Wolverhampton College of Art and Hornsey College of Art before studying at the University of Newcastle. Lyons gained recognition in the 1960s with his inclusion in exhibitions such as the Institute of Contemporary Art's *Young Contemporaries* and the Whitworth Gallery's *Northern Young Contemporaries*, and by the 1970s, he had solidified his reputation as one of the finest steel sculptors of his generation.



Michael Lyons, *Mayflower*, 1983



Michael Lyons, *Ace* 1982

In contrast to the tendency for artists to relocate to more popular cities like London, Lyons continued to live and work in Yorkshire and forged a successful career from his non-metropolitan base, consistently maintaining a connection with the land. Growing up in the West Midlands, the post-industrial landscape of the Black Country along with his strong Catholic upbringing and his later interest in mythology and cosmology, had an undeniable influence on his life's work. His sculptures command attention in relation to landscape and, whilst rigid in medium, recognise the powers of nature and ritual. For the painter and writer John Clark, Lyons' dedication to his landscape distinguished him from the more architectural sculpture of Anthony Caro's students at Saint Martin's School of Art in London, declaring it to be a 'romantic and expressionist reaction to nature'.

Lyons' work ranges from steel constructions to cast bronzes; and from small and medium pieces to monumental public works. Steel was arguably his master medium - cut, bent and folded in a direct and almost organic manner and exploitative of the way in which light brings its metallic surface to life; lines are created by the cut edge of the metal or by folds in its planes. The formal strength of Lyons's sculptures is supplemented by references to many sources including landscape, natural forces, art history and mythology, showing a sensitivity to place and time.

Lyons' fundamental belief in man's connection with the surrounding landscape in which he lives, led him to have an instrumental role in the founding of Yorkshire Sculpture Park. The ability to produce sculpture in the outdoors provided Lyons with, in his own words, 'the freedom to cut metal and smoke cigars'. Lyons spent much of his career teaching at numerous art colleges, both in the UK and internationally, and took up the position of Head of Sculpture at Manchester Metropolitan University's

Fine Art department in 1989. Teaching stints in China, Canada and the USA – places where he once again found a deep affinity for the landscape – greatly influenced his practice. Similarly, residencies in Mexico, Germany, Turkey and Cyprus resulted in Lyons producing large-scale works which speak to the cultural and sculptural traditions of their respective countries.

From 1994 to 1997, Lyons served as the Vice-President of the Royal British Society of Sculptors. The long-standing rapport which Lyons built with the countries he visited is evidenced by his various accolades, including first prize at the 2003 Guilin Yuzi Paradise International Sculpture Awards in China and the Premio Fondo Nacional del las Artes at the 2006 Chaco Biennial of Sculpture in Argentina, and commissions, notably his *Voice of the Mountain: Sudden Storm* for the Shanghai Sculpture Park. Today, Lyons' work is held in both private and public collections, including those of The Arts Council, The Hepworth Wakefield, The Henry Moore Institute and The Yale Centre for British Art.

Willoughby Gerrish Ltd represents the estate of Michael Lyons.

Willoughby Gerrish is an independent art dealer and consultant, specialising in artworks from the Impressionist, Modern and Post-War periods, with a specific focus on sculpture. He also deals in a select group of established contemporary artists.

With two decades of experience in the London art world, Willoughby Gerrish started his career at The Fine Art Society on Bond Street; rising to the position of Specialist. During this time he also ran The Crate Gallery in Notting Hill, exhibiting a program of emerging contemporary artists. In 2015 he joined Bowman Gallery as Director, where he was Head of Modern and Contemporary Sculpture. Willoughby formed his eponymous company in 2019, with a focus on museum-quality artists.

In 2020, the company announced its representation for the estates of Gerald Laing (1936–2011), Michael Lyons (1943–2019) and Austin Wright (1911–1997) and will continue to offer a wide ranging program in promotion of each artist's careers. For over fifteen years Willoughby Gerrish has enjoyed a close relationship with the artist Emily Young arranging multiple public exhibitions and museum projects.

Willoughby Gerrish holds a regular stock of paintings, sculptures, drawings and editioned works available to view by at our Jermyn Street and North Yorkshire premises.

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Thirsk Hall has been home to the Bell family for over 300 years. The objective of recent developments and planning at Thirsk Hall is to diversify the site for the benefit of the local community and heritage of the grounds and buildings. The approach is to build Thirsk Hall as a hub for culture; based around the visual arts, music, and literature. By creating a historical and cultural destination within Thirsk, the organisation aims to bring further tourism to Thirsk as well as more employment and opportunities for local businesses.

The focus is on placing arts and culture at the heart of the reopening and prosperity of local communities' post lockdown. The ultimate intention of the Thirsk Hall is to create the widest possible access to the arts over the years ahead, to place culture at the heart of the community and to celebrate the creativity of those within the region by uniting as many different performers from across the region as possible.

Thirsk Hall and grounds are located in the centre of Thirsk, North Yorkshire. The site covers over 20 acres of open parkland, woodland, formal and walled gardens offering an important historical site and access to a large outdoor area - all within close proximity of the centre of the historic market town of Thirsk, and it's excellent transport links via train, bus and road.

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