



Rocks in my Bed
Peter Randall-Page



Canvas, rocks and paint: each element 4m x 2m x 2m

Rocks in my Bed is a new departure for Peter Randall-Page. The project developed out of an initial suggestion that he create a small exhibition to help put his new large-scale public sculpture 'Give and Take' into context. Peter, however, had a much more creative idea! He realised that 'Give and Take' had already established its own context within the surrounding landscape of Trinity Gardens (which he had helped to design in collaboration with landscape architect Ros Southern). He noticed that people had started taking 'ownership' of the new sculpture, sitting out on the stone terraces and enjoying the sunshine; 'Give and Take' was already becoming an integral part of the city. And so, instead, Peter responded to the light-filled atrium of One Trinity Gardens by creating four monumental wall hangings weighted down by four rocks each painted with a complex black and red pattern. There is an elegant ease with which Peter has incorporated natural forms into this very urban setting, creating an architectural presence that complements the scale and dynamics of the atrium.

It takes a special kind of artist to enjoy and value the relationship with his/her client and to see this as a positive part of the process. It also takes an unusually forward looking client, like Silverlink, to recognise the catalytic role an artist can play in a major development: This has been, in every sense a model project.

Mike Collier
University of Sunderland and Curatorial
Advisor for Silverlink Properties

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Two images stick in my mind from the official opening in September 2005 of Peter Randall-Page's 'Rocks in my Bed' exhibition at 1 Trinity Gardens in Newcastle, the new office building where his massive granite sculpture 'Give and Take' will stand permanently within the terraced landscaping of the square outside.

The first thing I remember is a girl of eight or nine sitting reading her book on one of the steps, officially oblivious to the sculpture and yet taking proper advantage of the space for contemplation it had created in the middle of a busy city. My second memory is of a small chamber orchestra playing in the lobby of 1 Trinity Gardens a composition by Jim Althchison inspired by the works in the 'Rocks in my Bed' exhibition.

For me, both of these extra-artistic pictures go to the heart of what Peter Randall-Page's art is trying to do. The young reader's use of 'Give and Take' as an open-air library is typical of the way that Randall-Page's outdoor sculptures slow down the pace of



life: whether in the city ('Beneath my Skin' outside BUPA Head Office, Bloomsbury, London) or the country: 'IIMW' on Dartmoor and Exmoor in Devon.



Such is the size of his recent sculptures that the commuter or fell-walker is almost bound to stop. These are obstacles but, importantly, friendly blocks rather than threatening ones. I've often thought that Randall-Page's outdoor work could borrow that slogan used by the BBC at the launch of its BBC4 television network: 'A Place to Think.'

But, in fact, 'Give and Take', a title the artist only used for the landscape installation at 1 Trinity Gardens, could also stand as a generic banner for his work. The phrase speaks of inter-action and collaboration and these exchanges are central to his projects.

The very fact that a classical music premiere should be commissioned to mark an artistic launch is one such cultural conversation. The siting of a permanent art-work outside commercial premises is another and, while collaborations of that kind are now relatively common, Randall-Page characteristically took it further by setting up an interplay between an ancient piece of stone and offices which will seem new for years to come and also by working with the landscape architect Ros Southern on the space outside the building. It's not a case of her terraces being a plinth for his sculpture: this is give and take.

The major case of giving and taking in Randall-Page's recent work, however, has been between art, science and nature and this is fundamental to the pieces in 'Rocks in my Bed'. These latest works continue a concern apparent in 'Sung-Woon', his 2004 piece for South Korea, which combined a

Fibonacci sequence from mathematics (an infinite run of numbers in which each figure is the sum of the previous two) on a naturally eroded rock. Because most of Randall-Page's public commissions have called for a massive, single, central impact, much of his work - as far back as 'Where The Bee Sucks' (1991), in the Tate collection - has been based on a huge, isolated piece of rock. 'Rocks in my Bed', though, uses four smaller boulders, each placed on the foot of a red and black painted rectangular backdrop which suggests either a door or wall: admission or blockage.

The red and black patterns imposed on rocks and rectangles are derived from chemical reactions. As often in this artist's work, the image suggests an ancient association (aboriginal art) and a modern one (the mathematics of growth).

In this work and other recent pieces, Randall-Page's interest in natural patterns reflects the artist's fascination with geometry, biology and geology.

The astonishing permanence of rock reminds us that biological patterns change through time by merging to begin another sequence. By shaping and painting the immortal materials he takes from the earth, the artist is giving some kind of human meaning to a process which offers us none. Give and take, again.

Mark Lawson



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