

THE FIELD

JANUARY 2015 £4.40

WORKHORSE GAME GUNS

The 12 shotguns that handle brilliantly and don't break

Going to the bogs

Why hunting on the moors is so magical

Old Kent elephant

Can we recreate the English mammoth?

Rock steady on the peg

How to stop your dog becoming a nightmare



www.thefield.co.uk



9 770015 064205

The Muses, in bronze, by
David Williams-Ellis





SPORTING ARTIST

New techniques and effects ensure that David Williams-Ellis's latest sculptures are as much a part of the landscape as the shapes and forms carved by nature, as he explains to **Janet Menzies**

THE connection between fish cakes and fine art may not be an obvious one but for sculptor David Williams-Ellis it is sometimes inevitable. His silver sculpture of a salmon fighting the fisherman captures perfectly the gleamingly muscular flank of the fish as it turns but it wasn't an easy feat – hence the salmon fish cakes.

"I have fished all my life and I know the feeling of having a fish right at your feet and it starts to work away from you," says Williams-Ellis. "You are just about to tail it by hand and there is that very powerful wiggle a salmon has when it is just about to escape from you. That is what I was looking for."

Inevitably, Williams-Ellis was going to lose a lot of fish as he sought visual inspiration for this sculpture. "I was trying to catch the right fish but in the end I had to buy some wild salmon from the fishmonger. You can't waste them so we did stash rather a lot of fish cakes in the freezer."

His sporting activities inform much of his work. "I am lucky enough to go grouse-shooting and they are such great-looking birds. They have that power and are so exciting on the wing with their acrobatic skills. When I sculpt them, silver is the ideal medium because you can give the feeling of movement and show that magical shape the grouse makes on the wing."

The Williams-Ellis family has combined art and sport for generations. "My sister, who is an artist herself, was surprised when, at the age of 17 or so, I decided that I wanted to become a sculptor. She thought my love of country sports would take over and I must admit that when I am shooting I rarely think of it in artistic terms – I think the game-shooter in the boy takes over. Where I do daydream the landscape is here at home. I am lucky enough to live on a wonderful escarpment on the edge of the Eden Valley in Cumbria and that landscape inspires me."

It is that landscape and the shapes, forms and figures within it that feature in Williams-Ellis's current exhibition, *Elemental*, which includes many bronzes. "I am particularly inspired by the human figure within the landscape," he explains.

"Where I live we are very much affected by the weather and I wanted to show this interaction between the landscape and the figures and the weather." This meant that patination became an important part of the works created. "I have been using a lot of different patination effects and working closely with the forging specialist. There is a lot more to sculpture than just shape but I wanted to get colour and texture into the bronzes without them looking painted, so we are mixing old techniques with new, using chemicals and pigments to create the most amazing finished effects. I find it very exciting and, of course, if you go back into history, statues and sculptures were usually coloured in some way, often simply by being painted.

"I wanted my colours to be very natural but we did make some mistakes at first. I found an amazing green that I was excited about but only when it was hot. By the time it had cooled down it had become a horrible, lurid shade."

Finally, Williams-Ellis and his team were able to develop techniques and pigments that gave him exactly what he was looking for to express the idea of "elemental". "We have come up with some fire-red patinations and some wonderful yellows that look like fiery embers. It is a wonderful moment when you see the finished sculpture and think, yes, that is what I wanted to achieve. With bronze, especially, it is so versatile and it accepts the colour. I'm particularly interested in some of the wonderful rust colour effects that you can achieve."

Williams-Ellis is known for the massive scale of some of his outdoor pieces, which seem to be landscape features in themselves. With the huge, wild landscape of Cumbria as his inspiration, Williams-Ellis is not intimidated by size. Surprisingly, however, he says, "I conceive everything small, with the idea that it can be big if it feels right. If a piece really works, this holds true throughout the different scales."

Elemental by David Williams-Ellis is at The Portland Gallery, 8 Bennet Street, London SW1, 3 to 23 December; his website is www.dwe.com.