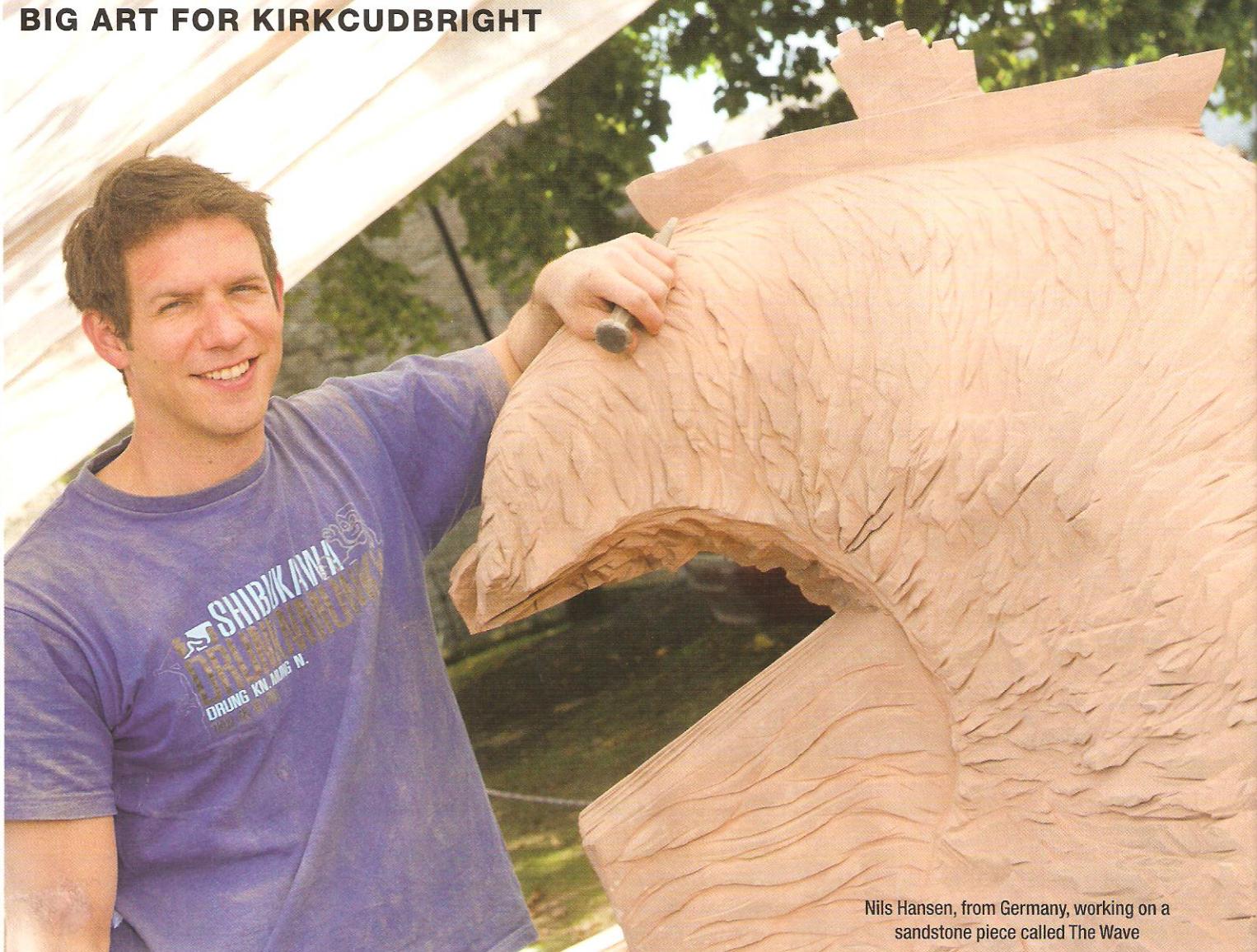


**BIG ART FOR KIRKCUDBRIGHT**

Nils Hansen, from Germany, working on a sandstone piece called The Wave

# THINK BIG

The first Big Art sculpture symposium in Kirkcudbright, which brought together artists from near and far, has been hailed as a great success. **Nichola Hunter** reports

**Photography by Jenny Woolgar**

**T**all started with a seemingly simple request: “Can we get some sculpture in the town?” It was an innocuous question from Kirkcudbright’s Chamber of Commerce. Andrew Macdonald, owner of The Scottish Showcase Gallery, thought he could help in this quest but after speaking to sculptor Tom Allan, the idea grew arms and legs and Big Art for Kirkcudbright was launched.

“Tom suggested hosting a symposium rather than asking a sculptor to create a piece and paying for it,” says Andrew.

“A symposium is usually an academic conference but in the world of sculpture it’s

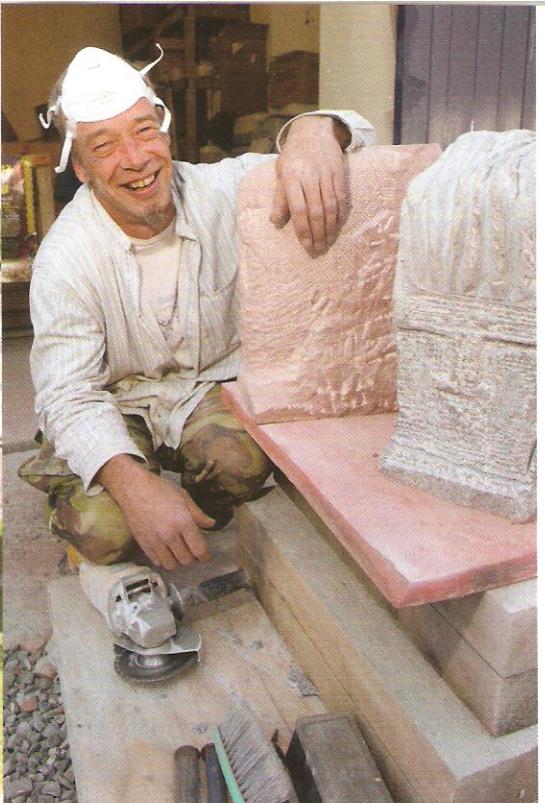
an artistic, creative event where sculptors come together to share ideas and practise new techniques.”

With this in mind, Andrew and Tom cast the net out for six sculptors to come to Kirkcudbright and create some new art for the town. The concept was simple: the town would host the sculptors, providing them with travel expenses, bed and board, materials and a place to work. In return the sculptors would, over a period of nine days, create seven new artworks for the town.

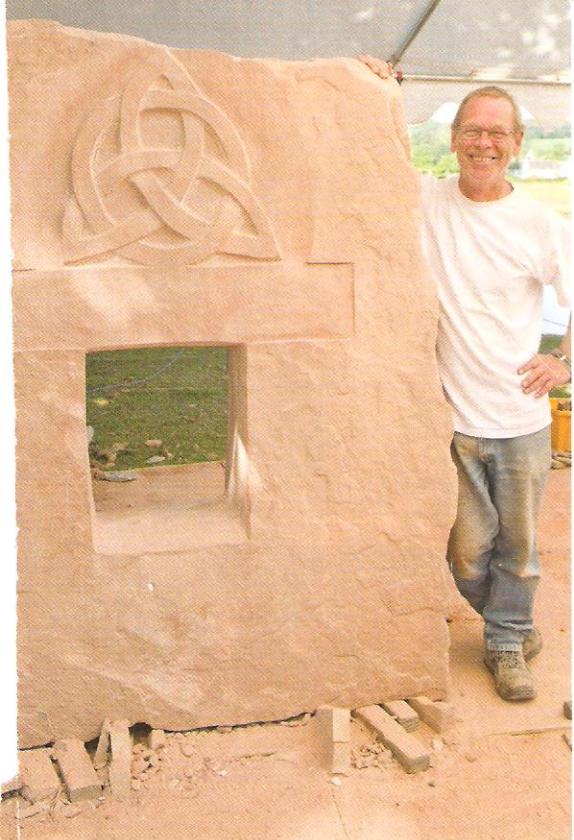
The original line-up consisted of Marina Weir, Tom Allan, Mike Cairncross, Nils

Hansen, Andy Breen, Peter Dowden and Dmitri Broe. But sculpting is noisy, dangerous work (as I discovered when I visited the symposium, and I was glad I wasn’t having to wear the protective clothing in the sweltering sun) and when Marina had to pull out suffering from tinnitus, and Dmitri broke his arm, Linda Watson was brought in to step in for Marina and Peter Dowden took on Dmitri’s piece in conjunction with his own work.

The sculptors hailed from near and far – the local representatives being Andy Breen and Peter Dowden. Tom Allan came from Glasgow, Mike Cairncross from Easter Ross,



Above: Peter Dowden, from Dalbeattie, with his Swedish granite and Locharbriggs sandstone piece, Twins; Left: Tom Allan from Glasgow with Five Red Herrings, a Locharbriggs sandstone work based on the book by Dorothy L Sayers



Mike Cairncross of Tain, near Inverness, with The Wee Door

Linda Watson from Cumbria and Nils Hansen from Germany.

"I wanted to make it an international event," Andrew explains.

"It was unfortunate that Dmitri had to pull out but Nils made it here and next year we hope we'll have a number of sculptors from across the globe."

It shouldn't be hard to entice both the sculptors and the audience to watch them if this year's event is anything to go by. Seeing the stunning works that have been produced and the public's interaction with the sculptors, Big Art has had a big response; it's even been followed on Twitter!

However, the sculptors on the ground were the real stars of the show – so what was their experience of the event?

Linda Watson, who created Shell Form, says: "It was nice to work alongside fellow sculptors; it's something I haven't really done since college. It was a good opportunity to work on a larger piece. At home I work alone and the stone needs to be of a weight that two people can move so this gave me an opportunity to work on something bigger. The highlight was being around like-minded people and having a concentrated timescale.

I would definitely like to be involved again."

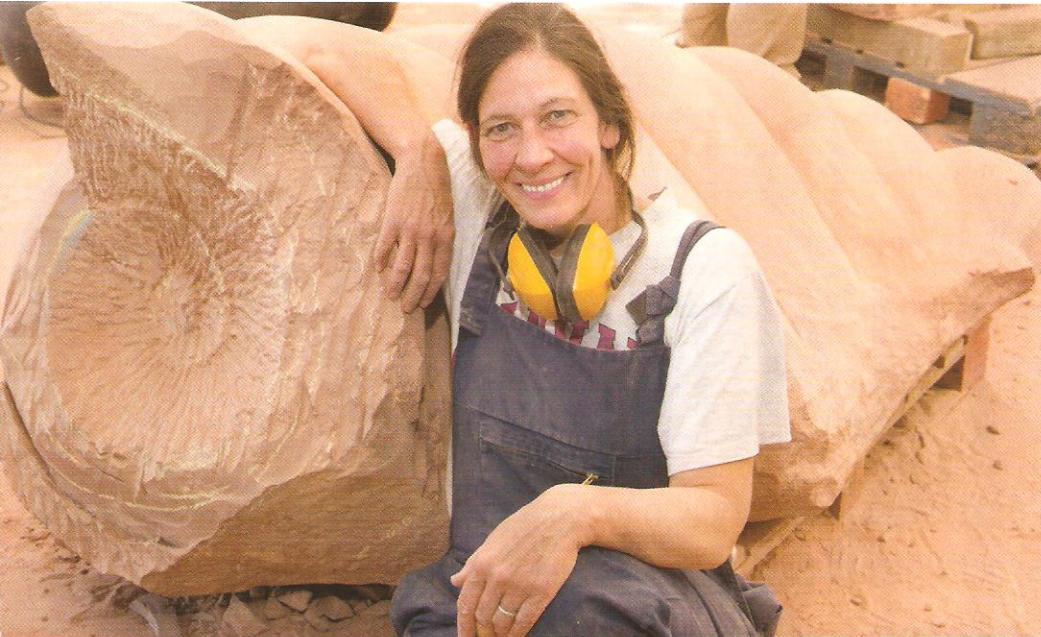
Tom Allan has been sculpting for 33 years and has participated in several symposia. However, Big Art has been a little unusual: "Big Art is different because it was sponsored by the town and for the town. In Scotland the other events that I've taken part in have been for private estates and most of the ones abroad have been on private land; although Eastern Europe bucks that trend."

As with Linda, Tom's sculpture appears to have a sea theme but there is more to his Five Red Herrings than meets the eye.

"My piece is linked to the book by Dorothy L Sayers, Five Red Herrings. As you'll see there are six fish and the final one is in reverse. Dorothy L Sayers based the artist in her book on EA Hornel but she didn't like him and had the character murdered. There are six suspects and one is the guilty party, just like my six fish, there's one odd one. On the reverse of the stone are cup and ring marks which are indicative of the marks found on the rocks on the hills at the back of the town. It's a secret map for people to work out, which is what I've been telling the primary school classes who came to watch us work."

"That's been a really great part of the event. It was lovely to talk to the pupils about what we were doing and hopefully these sculptures will be here forever and they can tell their grandchildren they saw them being made."

Fellow sculptor Peter Dowden agrees: "The interaction with the public has been brilliant. People have been so interested in what we're doing. Sculpture is a dying art and ➤



Top: Linda Watson, from Cumbria, with *Shell Form*, a sculpture made of Locharbiggs sandstone.  
Above: Kirkcudbright artist Andy Breen, left, with his Elm wood sculpture of 'King of the Gypsies'  
Billy Marshall. Marshall's descendant Billy Parkhill, right, served as a model for the piece

this has really opened people's eyes to it again."

Peter is a regular exhibitor at the Scottish Showcase Gallery, and his piece, called *Twinned*, is the progression of his earlier work *Twins*, which was part of the inspiration for the symposium.

For Mike Cairncross, this was his first symposium although he started wood carving when he was only 14. His piece, *The Wee Door*, explores going through the stone rather than simply shaping it.

"I wanted to create the idea of a doorway going from one existence to another, changing from inside and outside. I purposefully made the opening quite small so children and youngsters are intrigued to see if they can fit through it! The feedback from the locals has

been great, everyone has been really friendly and it was nice to work with such a talented group of sculptors – it's been an enjoyable experience."

Andy Breen decided that the stone guys were a bit noisy and he would work in a garden off the High Street to create his wooden likeness of Billy Marshall, so-called King of the Gypsies. Legend has it that Marshall deserted from the Army seven times, the Navy three times and was married 17 times. So what was the appeal for Andy?

"When I was told the theme was Kirkcudbright, Billy Marshall immediately sprung to mind. Perhaps because I have friends living that lifestyle! Or perhaps because I live in a caravan too – but Billy

Marshall seemed like a good subject.

"This has been a really great experience and brilliant to meet so many people who are interested in what you're doing. I'd love to do it again."

**I**ils Hansen was the only foreign collaborator, but he took this role in his stride and is enthusiastic about the whole event.

"I've participated in a number of symposia before; some with Tom Allan in Scotland and also in Thailand, Russia and Belgium. Kirkcudbright was different in that it was quite family-like, which was nice. Most of us stayed together in a self-catering cottage so we really got to know each other.

"I took my inspiration for my piece from Kirkcudbright as a harbour town. However, The Wave and the idea of the rocking boat with its family in it are a general metaphor.

"It's been a great event and I think it would be a good idea to bring more international sculptors next year to exchange further ideas and techniques."

This year's Big Art has been funded partly from donations of materials – the stone came from Locharbiggs Sandstone and Galloway Granite – and partly from the proceeds of an art auction held earlier in the summer. It featured more than 50 original works and 100 prints generously donated by Scottish artists, makers and local galleries. The auction raised over £6,000 and along with donations, funds reached a total of £7,000.

Planning for next year's event is already underway with the start date being moved forward a month to coincide with the town's Summer Festivities.

Andrew explains: "We're just finalising homes for this year's sculptures. Five Red Herrings has already found a site in the garden at Daar Lodge which has prompted me to think about possibly a sculpture for EA Hornel's garden for next year. Perhaps it would be of interest to a Japanese sculptor?"

Andrew's ideas are growing arms and legs again but if it's Big Art you can't think small.

"It's been an amazing success and I'd like to say a huge thank you to everyone involved, especially the sculptors and the artists who donated their time and works," he says.

"We can't guarantee the same exceptional weather for next year but we will guarantee a great event."

"We're already looking for sponsors and we can offer them the chance to have a plaque on their specific sculpture. Sponsorship will be around £1,000 to £1,500 per sculpture – but considering these works would normally sell for about £5,000 and they should last forever, I think it's a good price for immortality!" **D&G**

■ For more information about Big Art 2011, contact Andrew Macdonald on 01557 339400 or email: [info@artnewsscotland.co.uk](mailto:info@artnewsscotland.co.uk).