



Michael Cooper
Out of the Block

2023



Stone and sensuality may not be the foremost association of words conjured up in a word game. That is of course until you see a stone carving by Michael Cooper whereupon the words seem completely naturally aligned. Starting with a rough block using nothing but a chisel and sandpaper Cooper brings incredible tactility and subtle sensuality to the sculptures he creates. Forms flow from one into another, magically suggesting a feline flank, a canine quizzicality, primate personality or pachyderm power.

The stone itself carries within it a structure of crystalline elements, colour and texture that attract this sculptor's sensibilities. He knows from long experience how to expose the attributes of his different 'rocks', marbles, limestones or serpentine to name but a few among attractive minerals and, how best to combine shape and form with surface and colour.

Using such primal materials and methods Michael Cooper taps into his instinct to draw out images of a parallel primal nature. Haughty gorillas look down at us their puny cousins, languid lions and tigers recline as they do in midday sun, lumbering bears sniff the air alert to all around them, each carving homes in with unerring focus onto the essentials of its subject.

This ability to characterise a species in as difficult a medium as stone is not accidental. I have had the pleasure of travelling and carving with Michael in Uganda and have observed first hand how he completely identifies with his chosen subjects. On a rainy morning in Kibale forest we watched a chimpanzee huddled on a log staring into the distance, waiting for the drizzle to ease. His fur frosted by the fine droplets of water seemed already mineralised, his expression frozen into impassive patience. Michael crouched low, crept close, hid behind tree trunks, looking; possessed by this opportunity to get to know his potential future subject.

Indeed a few months later a magnificent Chimp duly arrived at the foundry, our whole experience condensed into the hunched form whose features captured both the dignity and character of our closest relative without a hint of anthropomorphism or sentimentality. The latent power suggested by the strong forms and restrained energy imbued in the stone. Several other subjects were explored on that epic trip, from enormous buffalo and elephant to a humble nightjar or lizard.

Chimpanzee
Marble
Unique
49 x 38 x 34 cm



Stone carving workshop
2011
Rwenzori Founders
Uganda



Part of the purpose of the visit to Uganda was to engage with the soapstone carving tradition of the Tepeth people of Eastern Uganda. Michael connected instantly with Henam and Loriko, elders of their clan and accomplished carvers themselves. Their Tepeth tradition hews out fecund forms of bulls, character portraits of ancestors and relatives, extols the beauty of young women or warriors and replicates the lean power of their herds predators, all from soft talc stone with the basic tools of machete and knife. Through a shared ability to carve and a direct connection with nature there was no need for any other language, indeed words just got in the way.

Outline drawings in the dust and pointing at suggestive shapes in the rocks were communication enough; the catharsis as each carving took shape and was finished was a non-verbal delight to the whole camp and a powerful example of the universality of art.

In the solitude of the studio and the hard graft of carving Michael goes into a zone where perhaps he channels his experiences into another sumptuous form, partly inspired by the lump of stone, partly from memory. The rest is down to responding freely to the activity itself like free-form poetry or music; the stone responds to the carving and Michael responds to the stone. Memory, process, material and a particular aesthetic coalesce to create objects of unavoidable presence, irresistible tactility and compelling individuality.

Such hard-won objects necessarily take a lot of time and the most successful of his carvings Michael selects for casting into bronze. This gives us in the foundry a tremendous challenge in finding new and as vital resonance of image and form, colour and texture and to this end we harness the depth and colour of the patination spectrum. The organic colours and random textures possible with this chemical colouring process brings a new dimension to the forms created by Michael and allows us the dynamic collaboration of working closely with him in order to give his bronzes the integrity and beauty of their stone originals.

I have always felt instinctively drawn to Michael's vision of nature, indeed I live with a cast of his wonderful baboon. The ancient Egyptian's saw the baboon as sacred and worthy for worship. In Michael Cooper's hands base rock and natural beauty are elevated in a contemporary act of veneration.

Rungwe Kingdon
2023

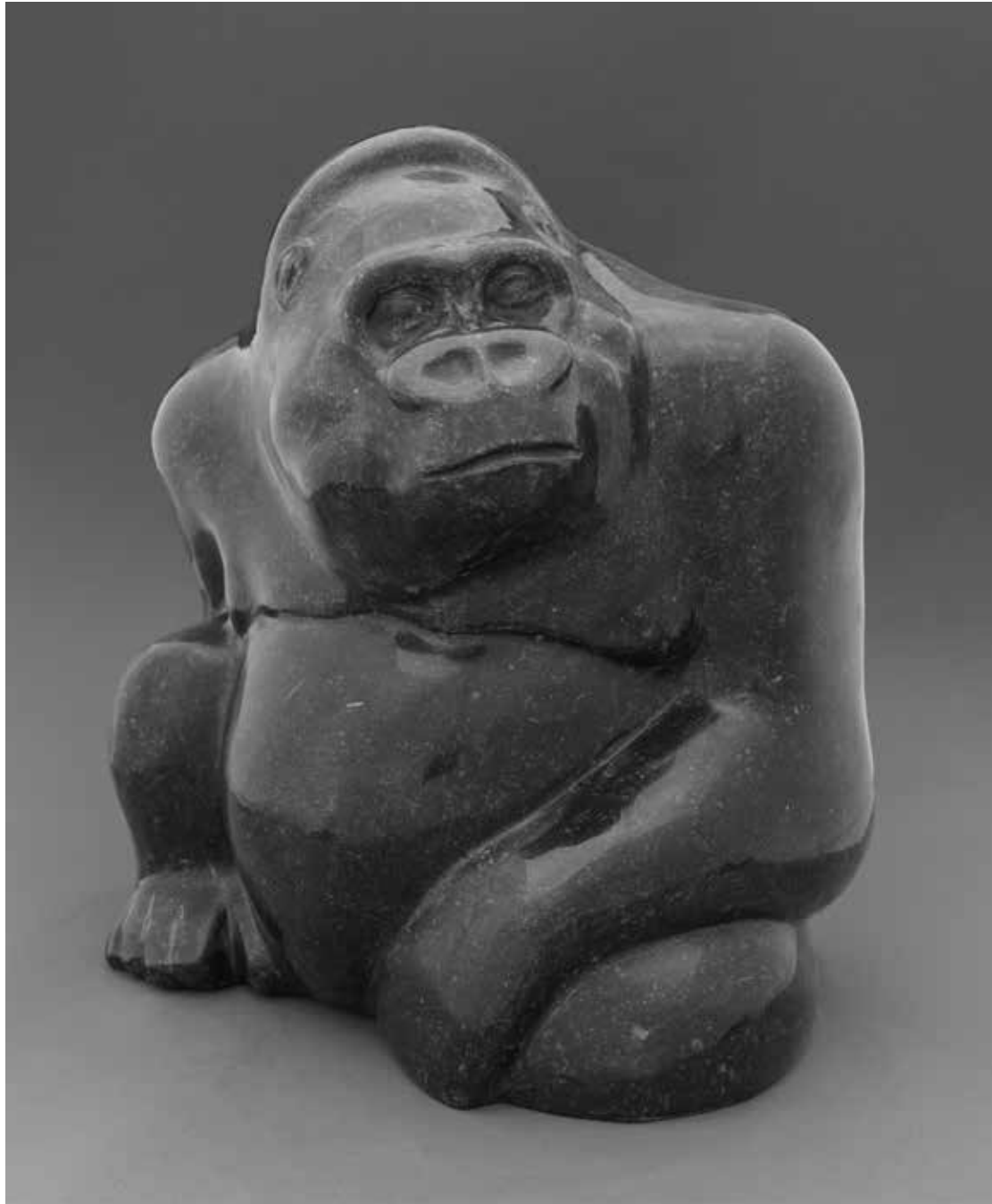
Nightjar
Bronze
Edition of 6
7 x 23 x 11 cm



Reclining Gorilla
Kilkenny Limestone
Unique
96 x 112 x 155 cm
Photography Kate Cooper



Stalking Jaguar
Bronze
Edition of 9
26.5 x 34 x 72.5 cm



Seated Gorilla
Marble
Unique
43 x 42 x 32 cm





Snail
Bronze
Edition of 9
20 x 34 x 16 cm





Mandrill
Bronze
Edition of 9
38 x 32 x 24 cm





Falcon
Bronze
Edition of 9
40 x 30 x 25 cm





Albatross
Marble
Unique
20 x 41 x 17 cm





Camel III
Bronze
Edition of 9
23 x 19 x 49 cm





Anteater
Bronze
Edition of 7
24 x 68 x 17cm





Octopus
Bronze
Edition of 9
22 x 18 x 17 cm





Seated Leopard
Kilkenny Limestone
Unique
37 x 25 x 20 cm





Swan
Bronze
Edition of 9
15 x 34 x 23 cm





Asian Rhino
Bronze
Edition of 9
22 x 37.5 x 66 cm





Baboon
Bronze
Edition of 9
88 x 48 x 54 cm





Reclining Polar Bear
Marble
Unique
16 x 40 x 13 cm







Pig
Bronze
Edition of 9
15 x 50 x 17 cm





Cape Buffalo
Bronze
Edition of 9
28 x 62 x 38 cm





Fox
Bronze
Edition of 9
50 x 68 x 41 cm





Torso
Marble
Unique
12 x 40 x 16 cm





Lemur
Bronze
Edition of 9
37 x 30 x 30 cm





Sea Lion
Bronze
Edition of 9
35 x 33 x 73 cm





Wolf
Stone
Unique
45 x 20 x 20 cm







Small Orangutan
Sterling Silver
Edition of 9
12 x 10 x 6.5 cm





Hippo Standing
Bronze
Edition of 9
27 x 22 x 49 cm





Siberian Tiger
Bronze
Edition of 9
16 x 50 x 18 cm





Seated Otter
Bronze
Edition of 9
45 x 37 x 40 cm





Gorilla (Large)
Bronze
Edition of 6
94 x 95 x 74 cm







Mother and Child
Marble
Unique
32 x 26 x 36 cm



Meercat (left)
Sterling Silver
Open Edition
5.5 x 2 x 2 cm

(right L-R)
Gorilla Seated
Sterling Silver
Open Edition
4 x 3.2 x 2.2 cm

Gorilla Standing
Sterling Silver
Open Edition
2.4 x 2.6 x 3.4 cm

Owl
Sterling Silver
Open Edition
7.2 x 2.2 x 2.2 cm

Snail
Sterling Silver
Open Edition
3.5 x 2.7 x 6.5 cm

Meercat
Sterling Silver
Open Edition
5.5 x 2 x 2 cm

Pig
Sterling Silver
Open Edition
4.3 x 2 x 4.5 cm

Camel
Sterling Silver
Open Edition
3.4 x 2.2 x 6.5 cm





Lar Gibbon
Bronze
Edition of 9
53 x 49 x 39 cm





Bison
Bronze
Edition of 9
21 x 31 x 55 cm





Octopus
Marble
Unique
32 x 22 x 18 cm







Warthog Seated
Bronze
Edition of 9
39 x 29 x 33 cm





Snail (Monumental)
Bronze
Edition of 6
92 x 160 x 155 cm





Brown Bear
Bronze
Edition of 9
34 x 25.5 x 53 cm





Michael Cooper was born in Dublin in 1944, before moving to England where he studied at Heatherly's School of Art from 1969 until 1971. He now lives and works in Buckinghamshire, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Sculptors. His work is held in public and private collections around the world, and he has exhibited widely, including: Jersey and London Zoos, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, the Royal Academy of Arts, and the Gloucester Cathedral Crucible exhibitions (2010 & 2014). Cooper is also acclaimed for his public commissions, notably a reclining figure in Travertine marble at Covent Garden, and three bears in Belgian Fossil Marble at Bicester Village, Oxfordshire.



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Sculpture measurements are: height x width x depth

Gallery Pangolin are proud supporters of the Ruwenzori Sculpture Foundation
www.ruwenzorisculpture.com



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