

Altared images

SARAH FEELEY explores an unusual exhibition at Salisbury Cathedral

Sean Henry is one of Britain's most exciting and innovative sculptors and his new exhibition in the spectacular setting of Salisbury Cathedral is a definite must-visit.

It's the largest exhibition to date of this Wilton-based sculptor's work, and features more than 20 figurative sculptures of dramatically different scales placed in and around the cathedral occupying vacant plinths both inside and outside this iconic 13th-century building.

The exhibition is entitled *Conflux: A Union Of The Sacred And The Anonymous*. Canon treasurer Mark Bonney, chairman of the cathedral's exhibitions committee, said: "Sacred" refers to the cathedral's medieval and classical sculpture which celebrates historically important men and women and the glories of faith. Sean Henry's figures, which depict the humanity of the common man and pay homage to the anonymous and unknown, will be found positioned amongst and alongside them.

"His large-scale sculpture *Catafalque* proved hugely popular when it was exhibited here last autumn, so we are particularly delighted that he has brought so many of the sculptures he has created over the past 12 years – including new works which will be seen for the first time – to the cathedral."

Sculptor Sean said: "The timeless atmosphere of Salisbury Cathedral is a fascinating environment within which to display sculpture, but the building is nothing without its relationship to the lives of those who use and visit it.

"By placing my figures on existing empty plinths and platforms and in areas where other, older sculptures would once have stood, I'm interested in memorialising the everyday – in drawing the viewer's attention to the significance of our own experience of the here and now.

"Sculpture occupies the same space, the same air that we do, and I hope the figures will provoke a degree of self-contemplation



Sculptor Sean Henry

"I'm interested in memorialising the everyday ... lifting the viewer into a different place"

in the viewer, temporarily lifting them from the sphere of daily life into a different place. To recreate oneself in front of a work of art is at the root of the experience of art and its affinity with religion."

Sean creates his sculptures in clay, casts them in bronze and paints them. This innovative approach to representing the human figure has helped revive a long tradition of polychrome sculpture.

All of Sean's figures are based on real people. "What's in their heads is what I'm interested in," he says.

"We think of sculptures being made of heroes and famous people, but some of the most powerful sculpture has an unknown quality, something we relate to instinctively."

Sean stresses that you don't need to be knowledgeable about art to enjoy this exhibition. "I'm non-elitist in my attitude to art," he says. "This exhibition is for everyone and it's very accessible."

And there will be no velvet rope keeping viewers at a distance. "I'm happy for people to touch the figures," he says. "For me, it's very exciting putting work in the public realm as people are much more forthcoming when you put things in their space. There's a kinship instinctively with painted figures. Hopefully they lift some of the barriers people might feel between art and real life."

In recent years, Sean has increasingly used architecture to frame and enhance the open narrative in his work. His latest piece and the largest in this exhibition, *Folly*, displayed outside Salisbury Cathedral, continues this theme, a skeletal outline of a building providing the framework for a theatre of life within. **SL**

Conflux: A Union Of The Sacred And The Anonymous is at Salisbury Cathedral until 31 October, tel: 01722 555120, www.salisburycathedral.org.uk. There is a programme of events to support the exhibition including tours, workshops, talks and discussions.



All the figures in the exhibition are based on real people and are dotted around the cathedral

