

PROFILE

RUTH MOILLIET — SCULPTOR

IN HER STUDIO IN THE LANCASHIRE COUNTRYSIDE RUTH MOILLIET RECREATES DELICATE FLOWERS AND SEEDHEADS IN STEEL. SHE TALKS TO LISA AMPHLETT ABOUT HOW NATURE CONTINUALLY INSPIRES HER. *PHOTOGRAPHS BY JANE SEBIRE*

One look at Ruth Moilliet's larger-than-life steel flowers and seedheads is enough to convince you that nature is her sole inspiration. "There's a wealth of form within the plant kingdom," says Ruth, "and it's of amazing interest and inspiration to me."

Ruth's love of nature began when she was a child, growing up on a hilltop farm in Cheshire. "I was always painting and drawing," she explains, "and because I was surrounded by plants and flowers, that's what I painted and drew." Ruth, who completed a masters in Art as Environment at Manchester Metropolitan University in 2001, continues to be fascinated by the natural world, and her steel sculptures reflect this. "I like to think of my work as a celebration of the life cycle," she says. "Plants are the longest surviving organisms on the planet and I'm interested in the strength of nature and its ability to survive." This goes some way to explaining why Ruth chooses to work with steel to create her sculptures. "I think it reflects

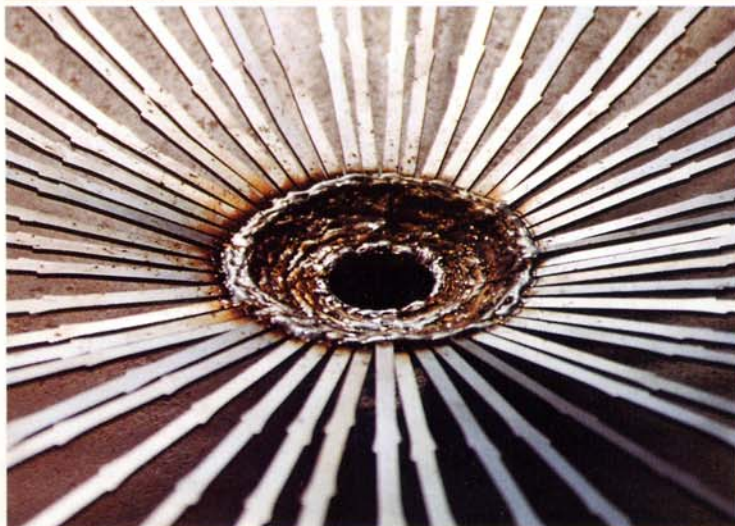
the strength of plants and their ongoing cycle," she adds. However, Ruth often leaves the steel seedheads untreated, so they rust naturally in the garden: "It demonstrates the delicacy of the individual structures."

Ruth has been focusing lately on alliums and seedheads, although she has just completed a two-metre, steel-and-brass sculpture called *Dandelion Parachutes* for the *Adventurous Wild Flowers* touring exhibition. "I seem to be concentrating on seedheads and flowers because they're the source of reproduction, which links into life cycles," she muses. Currently based in a studio at Myerscough College, in the countryside of north Preston, Ruth is able to take advantage of the college's facilities to create her sculptures. "They have about 20 greenhouses, as

well as a science block with microscopes and photography equipment. They even have a mechanization department that's got all the welding equipment I need."

Before she begins sculpting, Ruth performs an in-depth examination of the plant in question: "I'll start by looking closely at the plant, drawing it, photographing it, even looking at it under the microscope to see the intricate structures." She then goes on to make a model and, once happy with that, begins the welding process. One allium structure, which was 1.35 metres in diameter, required 500 laser-cut flowers to be welded on to 500 steel rods, which in turn were individually welded on to a central sphere. Some pieces, such as the alliums and *Dandelion Parachutes*, are then

PREVIOUS PAGE: A 1.5-METRE-DIAMETER ALLIUM. BELOW, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: RUTH AT WORK. PRESSED FLOWERS PROVIDE INSPIRATION FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF RUTH'S SCULPTURES. IN THE STUDIO WITH SEEDHEADS. DANDELION PARACHUTES IN PROGRESS.



zinc coated and sprayed with a polyurethane lacquer to enable them to stand outside for 25 years without rusting. Others are treated with a basic spray to slow down this process. The seedheads, however, are powder coated, so they'll begin to corrode naturally after a couple of years. "After a while, they take on a lovely rusty appearance and blend into the natural environment," Ruth says. "I have one in my own garden and a number of times people have asked me what type of plant it is. I find that very flattering."

For Ruth, creating larger-than-life sculptures is like stepping through the looking glass. "I sometimes feel like Alice, being able to shrink in size and become engulfed by flowers. Too often, we take plants and

flowers for granted, and I want to magnify them, to bring floral architecture to people's attention." Yet although nature provides Ruth with a never-ending source of inspiration, it also has its downside. "I often feel a sense of panic that there's too much to look at and not enough time to do it." ■

• Prices for Ruth's work start at £100 for a 65cm seedhead, rising to £1,000 for a 1.5-metre-diameter allium. Contact her on 07973 908839 or visit the studio at Myerscough College, Myerscough Hall, Bilsborrow, Preston, Lancashire PR3 0RY.

• Adventurous Wild Flowers, a touring exhibition exploring the links between humans and wild flowers, is at Gallery Oldham, Greaves Street, Oldham until February 22. Telephone 0161 911 4662 for more information.

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: EXAMINING PLANTS. GRINDING. ALLIUM ON DISPLAY AT THE BOX WORKS COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN MANCHESTER. A PAPER AND CARDBOARD MODEL. STEEL DANDELION SEED – IT WILL ALSO BE MADE IN BRASS. DANDELION PARACHUTES.

