

Ian Hamilton Finlay Special

This year marks the centenary of the birth of Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925–2006), one of the most beguiling and confounding of modern Scottish artists. It's an honour to have been invited by the Fleming-Wyfold Art Foundation and Scottish Art News to co-edit this special centenary issue, and to have commissioned a suite of articles on Finlay's life, art, and legacy

As a specialist on concrete poetry and the visual in literature, my love for Finlay lies in the extraordinary new possibilities he suggested within written language for graphic and sonic expression. My own contribution therefore delves into the years of his interaction with the concrete poetry movement, considering how Finlay's friendship with another major Scottish modernist poet, Edwin Morgan, informed his thinking.

Magnus Linklater has for 24 years served as chair of the Little Sparta Trust, ensuring that Finlay's poet's garden in the Pentland Hills is maintained to his exacting standards. Magnus considers how the dual aspects of Finlay's persona play out in the complex symbolic landscapes of the garden. The writer and publisher Alistair Peebles, meanwhile, is currently working towards the first biography of Finlay. In his exploration of Finlay's 1980 work 'Nature over again after Poussin', Alistair considers the emergence of photography as an integrated element of Finlay's visual-literary aesthetic.

Elsewhere, we shift focus to the present, touching on Finlay's legacy in Scotland's contemporary art scene. Kirstie Meehan, senior archivist at National Galleries of Scotland, talks us through the objects and ephemera that have helped her to reconstruct life at Little Sparta for the centenary exhibition, *Ian Hamilton Finlay*. Nicky Wilson, co-director of Jupiter Artland in West Lothian, traces the origins of that site to a chance encounter with Finlay during her student days, and talks about the inspiration that Finlay offered to another artist featured at the park, Andy Goldsworthy.

Greg Thomas

The garden at Little Sparta is considered by many admirers to be Ian Hamilton Finlay's greatest work of art. As we celebrate Finlay's centenary, Magnus Linklater, chairman of the Little Sparta Trust, reflects on the importance of this magical seven-acre site in the Pentland Hills

Little Sparta

MAGNUS LINKLATER



1

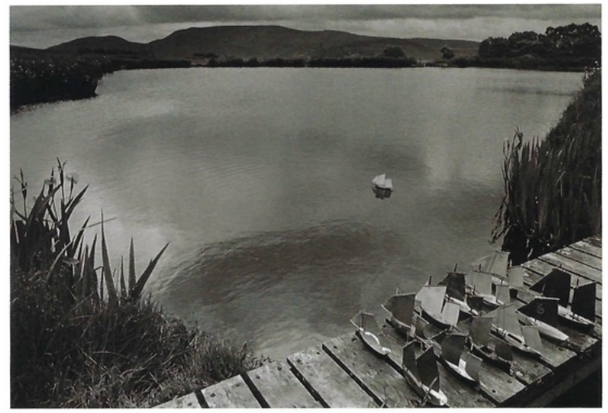
There are two sides to the creative genius of Ian Hamilton Finlay, and both, I think, are critical to his work. The first is a gentleness, laced with humour, which fits with my early memories of him. I see him leaning over the gate at Little Sparta, ragged jersey, gumboots, uncombed hair, greeting a visitor, and directing her to find her own way around the garden – he liked people to make their own discoveries, rather than guiding them. He points to an inscription beside a pool: 'Please do not Feed the Boats.'

That gentleness and that humour is reflected in the pastoral side of Finlay, his love of shade and solitude. There are tributes to be found to the traditions of the peaceful English garden, as well as the power of nature. One simple quotation from the German poet Hölderlin reads: 'Calmly before his cottage in the shade/The plowman sits; smoke rises from his modest hearth/Hospitably, the evening bells are chiming/To the wanderer in the peaceful village.'

In the woodland garden, there is a little tomb, with lines taken from St Anselm, the 11th-century Archbishop of Canterbury, dedicated to a pet cat: 'Here I rest/Here I stay.' Close by is an inscription to a hare, which was adopted at Stonypath (where Little Sparta is based), rather as the 18th-century nature poet William Cowper once did, and so the dedication is to him, with a twist at the end: 'Hic Lepusculus Noster/Requiescit/Qui Testudinem Exspectet' – 'Here our little hare is resting, to wait for the tortoise.'

> 'The frequent hypocrisy of the establishment irked him; he was saddened by man's despoliation of nature; and beneath beauty he detected war. From these conflicts came some of his most provocative art, and they are scattered throughout Little Sparta'

That gentleness, however, could give way to fury and contempt when he encountered institutional obduracy or the philistinism of those who did not see eye to eye with him. The campaigns he waged against the critics and the 'high heid yins' of the artistic world, bristle with anger, and often produced some of his most striking work. Throughout Little Sparta, and in collections across the world, are monuments, not just to the beauty of nature, to romanticism and the rural world, but to the way mankind has wrought havoc, inflicted violence and ridden roughshod over the natural world.



2

He would react to the smallest slight. He fell out with the Arts Councils, both of Britain and Scotland, because they failed to note that a collection of his poetry had been wrongly described as a first edition; he reported a critic to the Press Council after he had dismissed Finlay as 'a sort of Morningside version of Ossian'; and he cancelled an Arts Council exhibition on the eve of a private view because *The Spectator* magazine had refused to accept the Press Council's ruling.

His larger battles were prompted by a genuine sense of injustice. He staged his famous 'first battle of Little Sparta' when the then Strathclyde Regional Council charged commercial rates on his Temple of Apollo, and he defied the council's sheriff officer in front of television cameras; he sued the French government when they cancelled an installation he had planned to mount in Paris to mark the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution; and for the critic who had described him as a fascist, he portrayed a guillotine, with her head in a basket beside it.

The frequent hypocrisy of the establishment irked him; he was saddened by man's despoliation of nature; and beneath beauty he detected war. From these conflicts came some of his most provocative art, and they are scattered throughout Little Sparta. The names of flowers turn out to be references to warships; a cherry blossom is the word once used to describe Japanese suicide bombers; a pair of pineapples become, on closer inspection, hand grenades; the slim sculpture beside the little loch is the conning tower of a nuclear submarine; into Poussin's idyllic painting 'Et in Arcadia', he introduces a Panzer tank.



3

If all of this suggests an edge of bitterness to Finlay's work, then that is to misunderstand its complexity and the lightness of touch that can be detected wherever the visitor goes in the garden that he and his wife Sue created 60 years ago. He loved children's toys, particularly sailing boats, which he collected obsessively, and there is a delightful photograph of him in a tiny sailboat, scudding across the Lochan Eck. He enjoyed playing on words, and there are little verbal jokes everywhere: 'bring back the birch' instructs a grove of trees; a stile is 'an escalation of the footpath'; 'huff lane' is where you go to recover from a bout of irritation.

So manifold are the references at Little Sparta, from classical Greece and Rome to the French Revolution and the Second World War, the works of Rousseau and the Romantics, the German poets or the English country garden, that a single visit is not enough.

Yet, even as you stand on the very edge of the garden, looking out to the bare Pentland Hills from which it was carved, you are reminded that, for all the sculpted beauty you have witnessed, nature, in the end, may reclaim its own. The quotation from the French revolutionary St Juste, etched into flat stones lying on the sward, proclaims: 'The Present Order is the Disorder of the Future.'

Magnus Linklater has held a number of senior journalistic roles in British newspapers over the past 50 years and is chairman of the Little Sparta Trust.

Little Sparta
1 June–28 September
Stonypath, Dunsyre, ML11 8NG
T: (0)1899 810711 | littlesparta.org.uk
Open: Thursday to Sunday 11am–5pm

1
Robin Gillanders, *Ian Hamilton Finlay, Little Sparta* (1995).
2
Robin Gillanders, from Ian's Fleet (2012)
3
Robin Gillanders, from *Little Sparta: Portrait of A Garden* (1998)
Images courtesy Robin Gillanders

GREG THOMAS

WAVE, ROCK, TELEVISION: IAN HAMILTON FINLAY, EDWIN MORGAN AND CONCRETE POETRY

Greg Thomas considers Ian Hamilton Finlay's relationship with the concrete poetry movement in the 1960s, which stands at the root of his engagement with word, image and sculptural form


rockrock
rockrock
rockrock



2



3



4

> 'Finlay had embraced concrete poetry during the early 1960s as a means of metaphorically securing the figurative and emotional power of words'

that might gather along a shoreline) suggested at their meeting point. Typical of the precise visual-linguistic play of Finlay's early concrete poems is the fact that the v's and w's of 'wave' occupy the highest positions in the fluid letter patterning to the left, as if they were jagged breakers at the surface of the water.

Finlay had embraced concrete poetry during the early 1960s as a means of metaphorically securing the figurative and emotional power of words. His previous writing – in prose and linear verse – had dried up in 1961. So, when Morgan introduced him to the concrete poetry of the Brazilian Noigandres group around May 1962, he seized upon the idea of graphic rather linear arrangements of words and letters with almost religious fervour. The idea of a 'rock' of linguistic truth or profundity, impervious to the waves of social discourse or cultural chatter breaking upon it, indicates the kind of illumination – forged through stillness and self-sufficiency – with which Finlay quickly came to associate concrete poetry.

A turn to classical motifs and allusions in the forms being created for the garden by the close of the decade – from sundials to columns – consolidated this emphasis on immutable truths. The swinging Sixties would not be welcomed at Dunsyre. Finlay held the anarchistic ethos of the contemporary avant-garde at arm's length – from sound poetry to auto-destructive art and happenings – even as he coolly imbibed and mastered many of its techniques.

It was inevitable, perhaps, that Morgan and Finlay would not, in the end, see eye to eye on the merits of concrete poetry. Morgan was a secularist and leftist, with a suspicion of any notion of absolutes. He welcomed concrete poetry – among myriad other poetic styles during the 1960s – precisely for its capacity to record the new: the visually arresting language of advertising culture, for example, or the way short, sharp messages flashed across the television screen.

Fittingly, when Morgan returned from Dunsyre and purchased a version of Finlay's 'Wave/Rock' in orange lettering, he placed it on top of his TV set. For Morgan, concrete poetry was a herald of the McLuhanite age in art and language. For Finlay, it would be transfigured into a sentinel of classical order that held the present order to be one of hopeless nihilism. Still, in the summer of 1967, the two friends – later the two most famous Scottish poets of the late 20th century – met in a converted dairy on a windswept hillside in Lanarkshire, and a moment of delight at the creative possibilities of the new was shared.

Greg Thomas is a writer and editor based in Glasgow. His new selected edition of the concrete poetry of Edwin Morgan, co-edited with Julie Johnstone, is published by Reaktion in spring 2026.

1
Ian Hamilton Finlay
Wave, Rock. Image courtesy National Galleries Scotland

2
Ian Hamilton Finlay
Nature over again after Poussin. Image courtesy National Galleries Scotland

3
Ian Hamilton Finlay at Stonypath, August 1967

4
Edwin Morgan at home, Christmas 1967. Reproduced by permission of the Edwin Morgan Trust with acknowledgements to Glasgow Life Libraries



1

Writer Alistair Peebles reflects on 'Nature over again after Poussin', a key work in Ian Hamilton Finlay's catalogue, and muses on where the concept might have originated

'the word "glimpse" must remind one of the camera's shutter'

Ian Hamilton Finlay, September 1979

ALISTAIR PEEBLES

Ian Hamilton Finlay's 'Nature over again after Poussin' (1979–80) forms a major element of the centenary exhibition of his work at the National Galleries of Scotland. Accompanied by a recording of 'The Julie Theme', composed by Wilma Patterson and played by flautist David Nicholson ('reminiscent of Satie': birdsong, air in movement) the work comprises eleven black-and-white photographic landscapes. These were created in the garden at Stonypath and 'signed' in each case with a stone-cut monogram. The landscapes were 'prepared' by Finlay and his partner and collaborator Sue Finlay, the stones inscribed by Nicholas Sloan, and the photographs made by Dave Paterson.

Finlay's title plays on Cézanne's ambition to 'paint Poussin over again after nature', a characteristic gesture of homage, something obviously crucial to the concept as a whole. In a catalogue essay of 1980, which in its scope exemplifies the raison d'être of the work, Finlay's friend, the English poet and scholar Stephen Bann, notes that the series 'exists to draw the visitor into the perspectives of a shared cultural inheritance'.

The painters evoked are mostly 17th century but range from Dürer (1471–1528) to Corot (1796–1875). Each photograph (c.50cm square) is divided vertically and presented in a V-shape on a white-painted, metre-high plinth. Shown under reduced lighting, the photographs are arranged, reverentially, in an arc.

The work really is a remarkable accomplishment, not least because a decade and a half earlier, the location in question was bare hillside, with few material resources to hand. Despite the difficulties, Finlay and Sue established the garden that made possible these pictorial 'discoveries': itself even then being reinscribed as Little Sparta. Previous conflicts, and those evolving into the 'Little Spartan War' (Finlay's well-documented battle with bureaucracy), are not directly referenced, but as Bann indicates, they form part of the work's polemical context. The core issue for Finlay was 'the complete secularisation of our culture': the loss, in other words, of the 'shared cultural inheritance' that he was intent on reactivating.

Explanatory material is provided at the gallery, with audio introductions online. But not having Bann's 1980 essay to hand, what really got me looking again at this work – and Finlay advised that it was 'crucial that one looks at each [photograph] for a long time' – was an opportunity to read the gallery's additional curatorial information.

> 'Finlay's title plays on Cézanne's ambition to 'paint Poussin over again after nature', a characteristic gesture of homage, something obviously crucial to the concept as a whole'

In a letter to David Brown, a former curator at NGS, Finlay explains: 'The photos fall into two clear categories – those, like the Watteau, which are a kind of wit, (as with the sail in the background, the Watteau-type items, etc.) and those like the Claude and Guercino which have an authentic lyricism and an almost magic way of evoking the original artist.'

The whole letter might be quoted for its clarity of thought and reminder that, even in so sombre-seeming a piece, Finlay's humour is in play. Here too, as Finlay advised another collector-friend, Ronnie Duncan, in 1976, such work offers 'a slow excitement, a kind of seep (as it were) of meaning . . . '

Apart from books and cards, 'Nature . . . ' is one of perhaps only two exhibition pieces created by Finlay in the medium of photography, a precursor being the film 'Carrier Strike' (1977). Wall-mounted prints seem never to have been envisaged, although an earlier idea was to vary the angles of presentation. Expansive views, including the Corot – overlooking the lochan, garden and donkey paddock, towards Tinto Hill – would be more openly displayed; 'the enclosed views [by contrast] a quite steep V'.



2

A note by Fiona Wilson for the work's first presentation distinguishes between 'a corner (as in the Guercino), vista (as in the Corot), "assemblage" (as in the Fragonard and Watteau).' Reference to 'corners' is often made in describing the structure of the garden, and in 1966 Finlay explained the 'one-word poem' as a corner 'open on all sides': the series is perhaps a development of that form.

Where might the concept have originated? Finlay's lifelong absorption in art history may be taken for granted, as can Sue's parents' gifts not only of the property but also of trees to create shelter. Space permits brief reference to two sources, which partly coincide in the year the Finlays spent at Gledfield Farmhouse (1965-66) in Easter Ross. First, generating a momentum that accompanied them to Stonypath, the move made possible the couple's first endeavours in gardening. These included Finlay's construction of ponds and placement of poetic forms, as Bann argues, in significant environmental and pictorial contexts.

Second, Finlay's use of photography to record and to help visualise his work (and publicise it) also began then: most importantly, if fleetingly, with Jonathan Williams. At Stonypath, Dave Paterson, an advertising professional, began collaborating with Finlay in the early 1970s. His photographs were used to illustrate the first decade of the garden's development in the publication *Selected Ponds*, (1975), and at Finlay's major 1977 Serpentine Gallery exhibition. Two photographs in particular, singled out by Bann in his introduction to both the book and exhibition – 'Elegiac Inscription' ('See Poussin/ Hear Lorrain') and 'The Great Piece of Turf' – may have helped considerably in the conceptualisation of 'Nature . . . ', a key expression of what Alec Finlay has called the garden's 'first maturity'.

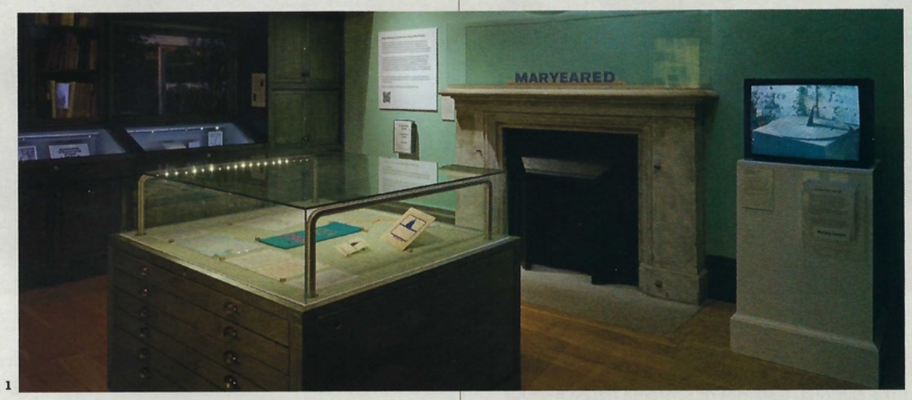
Alistair Peebles is a writer and publisher, currently working on a biography of Ian Hamilton Finlay, as well as being involved in a documentary about aspects of the poet's early career.

1
Ian Hamilton Finlay, *The Great Piece of Turf, in Selected Ponds*, 1975. Photo © Dave Paterson. Reproduced with thanks and acknowledgements to Mayumi Paterson and the Wild Hawthorn Press

2
Ian Hamilton Finlay. *The Horizon of Holland is All Ears*, Gledfield Farmhouse 1965-66, Photo © Jonathan Williams

KIRSTIE MEEHAN

Talismans and signifiers: Ian Hamilton Finlay in the NGS Archive



1

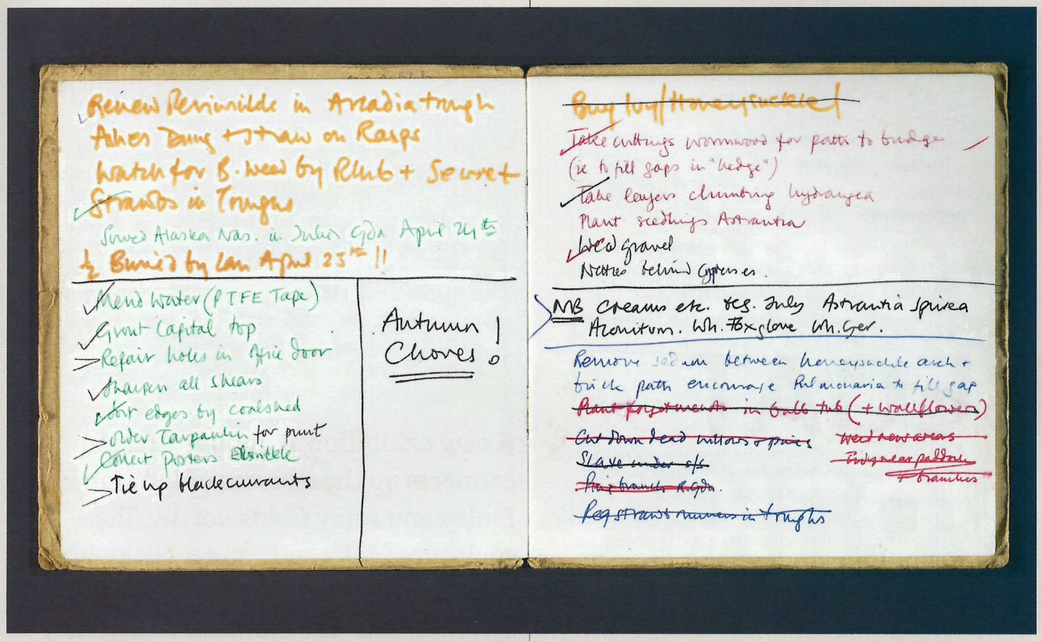
In co-curating the National Galleries of Scotland exhibition celebrating the centenary of Ian Hamilton Finlay, Kirstie Meehan discovered Finlay's extensive correspondence ran the gamut from playful to vitriolic and helped the curatorial team build a more rounded picture of the artist

Can you sketch a picture of a person through the objects they leave behind? Archives can provide an intimate insight into an artist's life, revealing preoccupations, joys and anxieties through scraps and fragments. My colleague Dr Patrick Elliott and I curated the recent exhibition *Ian Hamilton Finlay* at Modern Two. It draws on our extensive holdings of Finlay's sculptures and prints but also included a dense display of objects from our archive of 20th and 21st-century art. We aimed to set out the chronology of Finlay's life and career, while hoping to give a sense of the man himself through the letters, photographs, manuscripts and publications that survived him. Finlay himself might have objected: he possessed an abhorrence for the biographical, 'all of which is of no interest to me at all', he stated.

Finlay's public persona is well represented in the archive by the cards, prints and booklets he produced under the Wild Hawthorn Press. But perhaps it is in his correspondence that we can attempt to flesh out a more rounded portrait of the man himself: letters were Finlay's preferred means of communication, flowing between his home at Stonypath (later renamed Little Sparta) and the outside world in a steady stream over the decades. In the audio guide which accompanied the exhibition, Alec Finlay recounts his father's routine and emphasises how important this correspondence – and the regular arrival of the postie - was: 'In the morning he would work, and work would be at the typewriter. Everything was typed. And then at 11am exactly or five to 11am was elevenses, because that's when the postman would come. And the post was hugely important, was when ideas left in little envelopes, you know, to different collaborators, to curators. And that's when the work would arrive.'



2



3

Indeed, Finlay's voluble correspondence is scattered throughout the National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) Archive and reflects the complexities of both his public and private relationships. His conflicts with Strathclyde Regional Council, Scottish Arts Council and indeed NGS are represented in those sometimes-vitriolic letters he circulated widely to both enemies and supporters. In contrast, his personal correspondence with friends and artistic collaborators – such as the embroiderer Pamela Campion, acquired by the NGS Archive in 2006 – is cordial, playful and exacting, providing a valuable insight into his working process.

But even in his personal correspondence, Finlay was aware at the time of writing that there would ultimately be a public readership: as early as 1965, Mike Weaver and Stephen Bann were selling his correspondence to the University of Kansas, the proceeds of which helped to support Finlay in the impoverished early years of his career. Archive material acquired from Finlay's family and close friends perhaps gives a more intimate insight into his life and the earlier, less comprehensively documented, years: a snap of Finlay posing with toys he had crafted in the early 1960s was gifted to us from family members and displayed for the first time in the exhibition.

In addition to conveying a sense of Finlay's character, archive material can also serve to foreground the roles that his family and collaborators played in his life and art. Sue

'In the morning he would work, and work would be at the typewriter. Everything was typed. And then at 11am exactly or five to 11am was elevenses, because that's when the postman would come. And the post was hugely important, was when ideas left in little envelopes, you know, to different collaborators, to curators. And that's when the work would arrive'

Swan's densely packed planting diary for Little Sparta from 1981 highlights her crucial importance and hard labour in establishing and maintaining the garden, an importance that has perhaps been understated in the past.

The diary is one of over 80 objects on display in the Gabrielle Keiller Library at Modern Two. Adjacent to the main galleries, it is a dedicated space for showing archive and special books with low lighting and environmental controls working to preserve its contents. Its warm, domestic interior complements the small-scale postcards, pamphlets and booklets on display, encouraging an intimacy between viewer and object. It is housed within the neoclassical grandeur of Modern Two (designed by Thomas Hamilton as the Dean Orphanage in 1831), which seems an appropriate setting for Finlay's work. Indeed, Finlay had a personal connection with the building, visiting later in life after his agoraphobia lifted and executing the commissions 'Idylls' (commissioned 1999) and 'Six Definitions' (2001) in its grounds.

Since the exhibition opened, we have been approached by Finlay's friends and collaborators – and even one of the targets of his wrath – who have shared both their memories and their personal archives with us. We hope that the exhibition will continue to encourage further gifts and bequests to the NGS Archive, available for leisurely consultation by anyone who wants to see them in the Reading Room at Modern Two, as well as for exhibition and loan.

Kirstie Meehan is Senior Archivist (Modern & Contemporary Art) at National Galleries of Scotland and co-curator of the Ian Hamilton Finlay centenary exhibition at Modern Two.

Ian Hamilton Finlay
Until 26 May
National Galleries of Scotland: Modern Two
73 Belford Road, Edinburgh, EH4 3DR
T: (0)131 624 6200 | nationalgalleries.org
Open: Daily 10am–5pm

1
Ian Hamilton Finlay exhibition at Modern Two, National Galleries of Scotland

2
Ian Hamilton Finlay posing with toys he had crafted in the early 1960s. Gifted to NGS from family members and displayed for the first time in the exhibition

3
Sue Swan's diary for Little Sparta, 1981

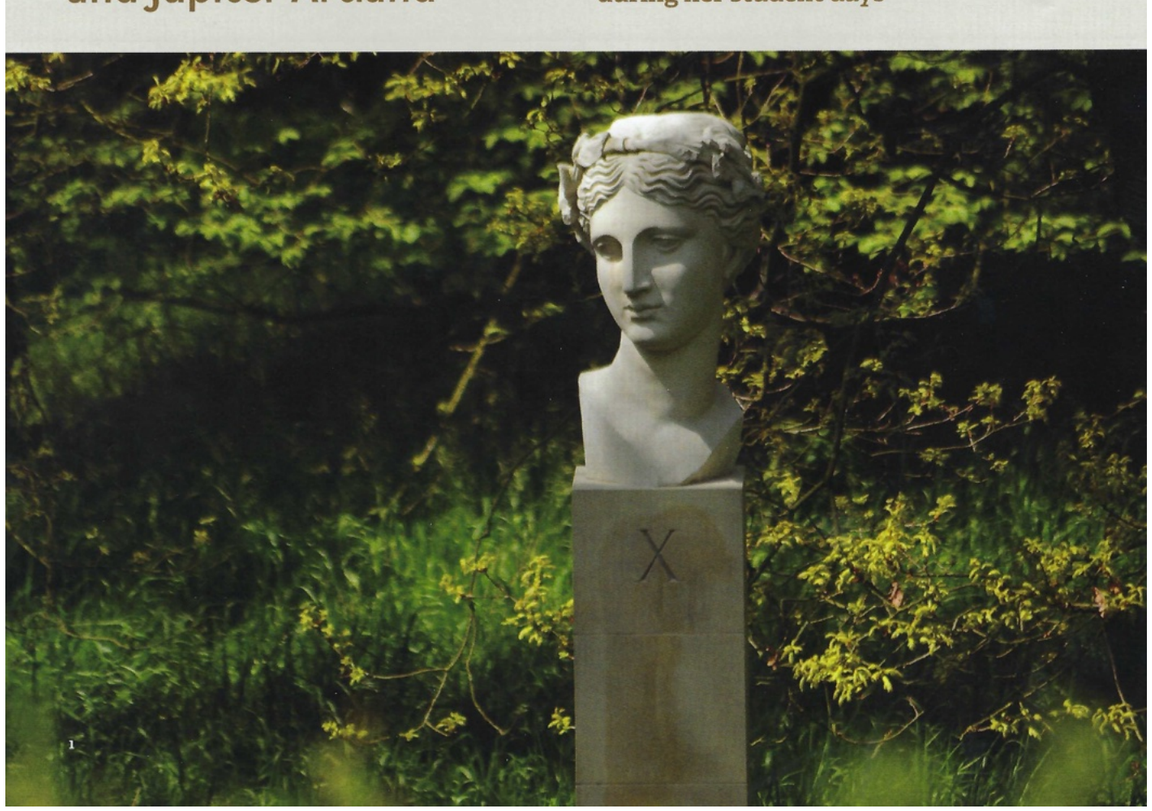
All images courtesy of National Galleries of Scotland

NICKY WILSON

WORK BEGAT WORK:

Ian Hamilton Finlay and Jupiter Artland

A new exhibition at Jupiter Artland connects up the oeuvres of Ian Hamilton Finlay and Andy Goldsworthy. The sculpture park's co-founder Nicky Wilson tells Greg Thomas that its origins lie in a startling chance encounter with Finlay during her student days



1

How did Ian Hamilton Finlay inspire Jupiter Artland?

Well, the story is that I climbed over the wall of the garden at Little Sparta when I was at art college. We'd gone a long way to visit the garden and the gate was shut, so I thought, 'well, we're here now, let's get in'. I was a practicing sculptor at that time, and it just felt very important to go there.

Having very rudely broken in, we bumped into Ian Hamilton Finlay almost immediately, who gave a nod as if to say 'go on and have a look'. By that point, around 1990–91, he was already aware of his huge reputation and the excitement around the garden. Going to Little Sparta was something that made me realise, having been making sculpture for a time, how important the setting of the work was. I hadn't realised art could become a whole landscape, that the landscape could become inextricably linked with the work.

Finlay then became integral to the siting of early works at Jupiter Artland, didn't he?

Yes, after many years of working in other areas, my husband Robert and I purchased an area of woodland, Gala Wood, with a derelict house, and started doing it up. The landscape was really magical, which is not something you often associate with our county, West Lothian, which is robust and industrial.

We decided we wanted to populate this place with artworks, and Ian was one of the first artists that we asked. He was alive when we first showed him the site, but was by then living in an old people's home. We drove him all the way out to the woodland in his slippers because he couldn't walk very well, and we came upon this beautiful beech tree, and he said, 'I would like to put a temple here.'

He had had a Temple of Apollo installed at Little Sparta some years previously, to be placed beside the lochan. But he had decided the dimensions didn't work for the garden, so it had been in storage for some years, literally covered in moss. Finlay redesigned it for us, adding a dome and an inscription. As we were placing the final work ['Temple of Apollo' (2005)], he turned to Robert and said 'work begat work', meaning, I suppose, that the presence of this piece would suggest more. We now also have 'Xth Muse' (2008), on a spot which Finlay conceived of when looking down from the portico of the temple through branches onto lower ground.

Finlay also decided during that visit where another work of his, 'Only Connect' (2008), would be placed. It's a little stone arch that passes over a fault in the rockface under the grass. We drove Ian up to this little ravine and had to get out and walk from that point. He said 'I'd like to make a bridge for this', and at that point he suggested the 'Only Connect' idea, which has to do with the importance of connections between people and within society, based on the closing lines of EM Forster's *Howards End* (1910).

That work, in turn, inspired Andy Goldsworthy didn't it?

Absolutely. When Andy Goldsworthy visited us around 2008 and was deciding what he might create for us, he initially seemed a little flummoxed and went for a walk around the site. He came upon me supervising the installation of the bridge, during which we had discovered that, across the whole of Gala Wood, the bedrock is very close to the surface of the soil. Suddenly, he realised, there's bedrock everywhere. So, he built a house over it ['Stone House (Bonnington)' (2009)], framing a rectangle of exposed bedrock as if it were the floor.

What can visitors expect from the show bringing these two artists together, Work Begat Work?

The title references the moment when Finlay stood, almost like Moses, making that pronouncement by the temple. And he's right – when you start to populate a place with artworks, artists respond to each other's work, because each work changes the environment so completely.

We have two artists who are obsessed by nature but in very different ways. For Finlay, nature is the setting for work that is incredibly intellectually rigorous, profoundly political, but also spiritual and often comic. Goldsworthy has an obsession with the material properties of nature and the way that humans shape it in a physical way, as craftsmen. The two resonate really beautifully.

Nicky Wilson is a sculptor, curator and co-founder of Jupiter Artland.

Work Begat Work: Ian Hamilton Finlay and Andy Goldsworthy
Until 28 September
Jupiter Artland
The Steadings, Bonnington House, Wilkieston, EH27 8BY
T: (0)1506 889900 | jupiterartland.org
Open: Daily 10am–5pm



2



3

1
Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Xth Muse* (2008)

2
Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Temple of Apollo* (2005)

3
Andy Goldsworthy, *Stone House (Bonnington)*, (2009)

All Images © Allan Pollok-Morris, courtesy of Jupiter Artland

NEIL COOPER

Andy Goldsworthy: Fifty Years

Acclaimed for his work over the last five decades, using found objects and materials in a natural environment, Andy Goldsworthy is honoured this summer with a major exhibition in Edinburgh. He tells Neil Cooper why he's excited about creating new works that respond to the Royal Scottish Academy's grand rooms and – while acknowledging their very different approaches – his delight at being exhibited alongside Ian Hamilton Finlay at Jupiter Artland

Few artists have altered the physical landscape more than Andy Goldsworthy. For half a century now, the Cheshire-born, Scotland-based sculptor has used natural materials to alter outdoor spaces in ways that are both temporary and monumental. To mark the occasion, Goldsworthy's work is celebrated at the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh with *Andy Goldsworthy: Fifty Years*, which opens in July and will mix old and new creations to create its own environment.

Prior to this, in April, Jupiter Artland sculpture park outside Edinburgh opened *Work Begat Work: Ian Hamilton Finlay & Andy Goldsworthy*. The exhibition presents Goldsworthy's permanent commissions alongside work by Finlay, bringing together two of Jupiter Artland's great inspirations in tandem. The duo also both star at the National Galleries of Scotland this year, with Goldsworthy's upcoming RSA show and a display of Finlay's work at Modern Two, marking the centenary of his birth.

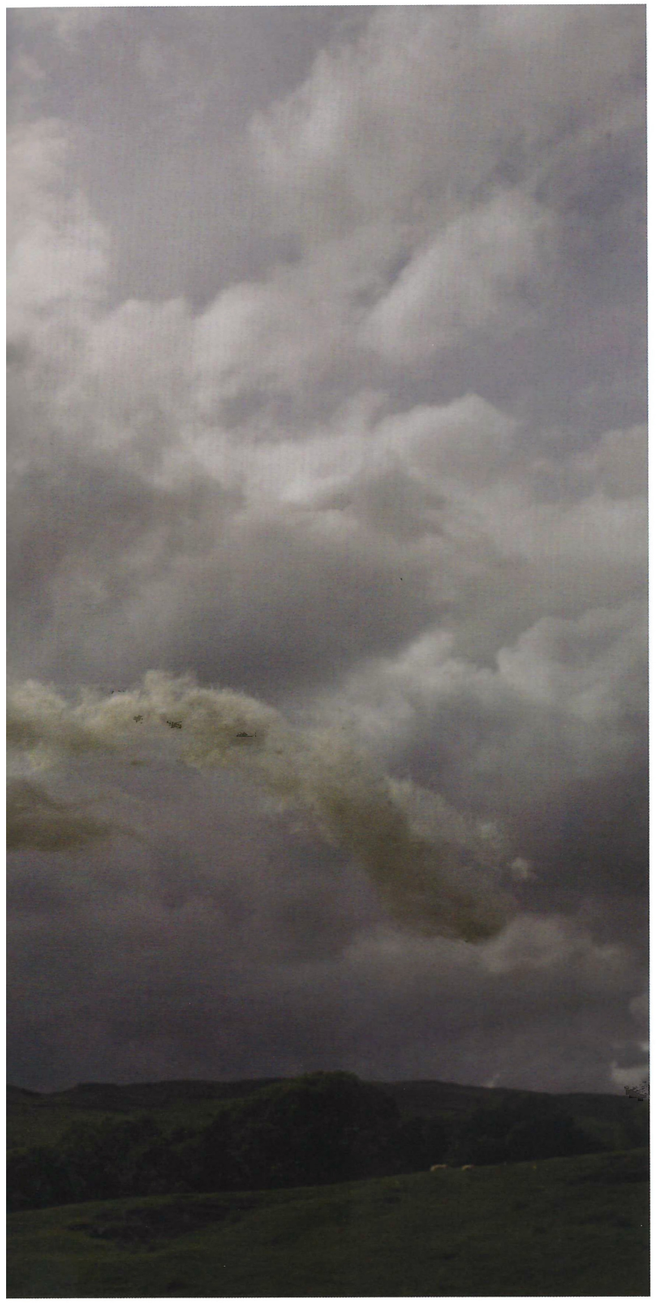
Speaking at the end of a working day at his Dumfriesshire home, Goldsworthy says of *Fifty Years*: 'We've been working on it now for a couple of years, so it's a bit more than an exhibition. There will be quite a bit of early work, and a lot of new work as well, but it's new work that couldn't have been made other than after working for 50 years. Making the things I'm making now is so bound up in the things that I've done previously, so it's not a conventional retrospective.'

Initial selections of older material are being sourced by Goldsworthy's partner and studio manager, Tina Fiske. These will sit in the RSA's lower gallery, with new work upstairs. 'I found it difficult to even think about the older stuff,' Goldsworthy says. 'I'm much more interested in what I'm making upstairs. That's where my love and my passion and my energy are. Once Tina has made a selection, I will look at it. That will be interesting, because I think, for a retrospective, you have to stand aside from it and look at it from a different view.'

Goldsworthy adds: 'They're massive galleries in the RSA, and the new works are a response to those spaces. They're new works that are going to be created there, and a lot of them will evolve. I'm collecting the materials that I will use in the installations, which is also a way of figuring out what I want to make. That's the process that I love most; going around, looking for things, finding things. As I think I said in the interview in the catalogue, collecting materials is a way of collecting ideas. The final ingredient of the work is the room. It won't just be objects to sit in the room. They connect with the nature of the building and hopefully will reveal that nature in some way.'



1



Over at Jupiter Artland, they have four works by Goldsworthy on display: 'Stone House (Bonnington)' (2009); 'Clay Tree Wall' (2009); 'Stone Coppice' (2009); and 'Coppice Room' (2012). 'I'm very proud of the works that I made at Jupiter Artland,' he says. 'That time really marked a moment where things just rose a few levels, and the works became stronger.' And while Goldsworthy expresses delight at being shown alongside Ian Hamilton Finlay, he also points out the differences between the two of them.

'I love Ian's work, but I would say that he had a very different way of dealing with land than I have, but isn't that wonderful? There was a time when there was Ian Hamilton Finlay, myself and Charles Jencks all working in this kind of area, and you couldn't get three more different ways of dealing with it. I thought that was just fantastic, and I was always surprised that nothing was made of it. When the university was set up here in Dumfries, I suggested they should run a course around those three artists as a way of examining the different ways of looking at the land and dealing with the land, and the different possibilities of what can happen.'

While Goldsworthy and Finlay never met in person, there was contact. 'I had a brief conversation on the phone with him once when I wanted to go and see him,' recalls Goldsworthy. 'I had some American friends from a gallery with me, and he said, "Andy, you can come, but the people from the gallery can't", because at the time he was banning art-world people from visiting him.'

Like Finlay, Goldsworthy is robust regarding the social aspects of the land where he works and creates. 'The perception is I'm this kind of romantic figure wandering lonely over the landscape, dropping a few leaves here and there, but that's not what it's like,' he says. 'I work in a very socially rich landscape that has a strong social nature to it. People are bound up in that and I acknowledge that in the work. Not only through what I make, but I also realise that I am part of that as well.'

Neil Cooper is a writer and critic based in Edinburgh.

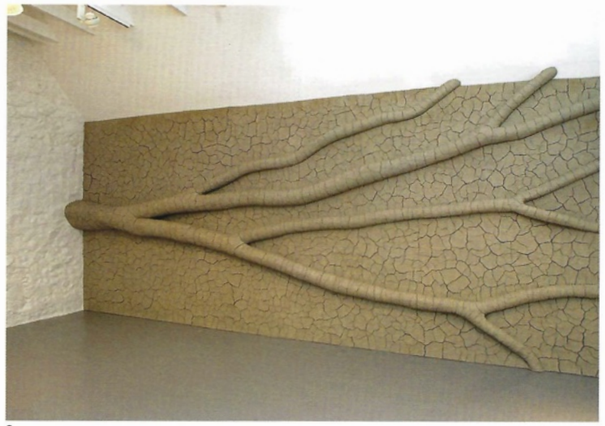
Andy Goldsworthy: Fifty Years
26 July–2 November
National Galleries of Scotland:
National (Royal Scottish Academy)
The Mound, Edinburgh, EH2 2EL
T: (0)131 624 6200 | nationalgalleries.org
Open: Daily 10am–5pm

Work Begat Work: Ian Hamilton Finlay & Andy Goldsworthy
Until 28 September
Jupiter Artland
The Steadings, Bonnington House,
Wilkieston, EH27 8BY
T: (0)1506 889900 | jupiterartland.org
Open: Daily 10am–5pm



2

Ian Hamilton Finlay
Until 26 May
National Galleries of Scotland: Modern Two
73 Belford Road, Edinburgh, EH4 3DR
T: (0)131 624 6200 | nationalgalleries.org
Open: Daily 10am–5pm



3



4

1
Andy Goldsworthy, *Wool. Hand*. Dumfriesshire, Scotland.14 June 2019. (2019). Image courtesy of the Artist

2
Andy Goldsworthy, *Rain Shadow* RSA, Edinburgh, 10 June 2024, (2024). Image courtesy of the Artist

3
Andy Goldsworthy, *Clay Tree Wall* (2009). Photo courtesy Jupiter Artland

4
Andy Goldsworthy, *Stone House* (Bonnington), (2009). Photo © Allan Pollok-Morris, courtesy of Jupiter Artland