



PICTURES: BOB CATCHPOLE

ABOVE: Reliquary XI, a typically intriguing work by the acclaimed North Walsham based sculptor Bob Catchpole (opposite)

The wonderfully weird world of Bob Catchpole

Thanks to the work of local sculptor Bob Catchpole, you may never look at your garden forks and spades in quite the same way again. But that's the whole point, as **Emma Barnard** discovers

From a young age, Bob Catchpole was naturally gifted at drawing and he's been creating art since he was a small boy. His talent eventually grew into a love for sculpture, a field that Bob's now been exploring for some 50 years. But the kind of imagery the word 'sculpture' immediately brings to mind isn't what comes out of Bob's North Walsham studio, however.

Bob himself puts it best. "It's fundamentally surreal but firmly planted in the Norfolk landscape," he says of his work. "In fact, it's a metaphor for the landscape. It's also about the

relationship between the landscape and the churches which are so much a part of it."

For many years, Bob's been using agricultural tools in his sculptural works, something which is a surreal and wonderful sight at the same time. After attending both Norwich School and Norwich Art School, he studied Fine Art at Newcastle University before going on to a post-graduate degree at the world-renowned Slade School of Fine Art in London.

With such a strong background in academia, Bob was fully equipped to take up a career in teaching himself, and was the Head of Sculpture at

Windsor's Eton College for 30 years.

"Whilst continuing to make sculpture myself, I taught it at various places before retiring from teaching in 2005," he says. "I thoroughly enjoyed teaching and found it stimulating and rewarding. I've always believed that to teach well one needs to gain the trust of the students and to learn from them – teaching art should be a two-way proposition, I think."

With such an open-minded approach, it's no wonder Bob's art is so dynamic. Or that he's so hands-on. When he found himself in need of somewhere to keep his creative juices flowing, he created his own space.



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ABOVE: "As I'm fascinated by man's relationship with his environment, it's rather inevitable that I ended up manipulating tools," says sculptor Bob Catchpole. Below is his Fork of the Medusa XII, a typical example of his remarkable work.

"During the last few years of my teaching," he says, "I became a real Bob the Builder and built myself a studio in the centre of North Walsham."

He's been living and working there since 1985, and it's the inspirational home of his humorous work drawing on the agricultural heritage of Norfolk.

Although Bob doesn't have a background in agriculture himself, his father was bought up on a farm along with five brothers – and was the only one of them not to work on the land, spending his working life at Jarrod in Norwich.

Even though he doesn't have a direct personal connection to agriculture, Bob's family history and life in rural Norfolk has paved the way for his captivation with tools, farming and our relationship with the land which surrounds us.

"The tools are fascinating because they're evidence of our link to the land – the landscape we love was man-made with these

tools," he says. "As I'm fascinated by man's relationship with his environment, it's rather inevitable that I ended up manipulating tools!"

It's difficult to imagine where Bob's unique work draws its artistic inspiration from, but he professes to being influenced by people as varied as David Smith, Kazimir

Malevich and Pablo Picasso – and from the 17th century Italian sculptor Bernini to the American pop artist Jim Dine.

Bob's remarkable collection of sculptural work uses 'ordinary' tools such as forks, spades and axes and transforms the mundane world of the toolshed into a magical and enchanting creative environment – with wonderfully playful and intriguing titles such as 'Catchysaurus', 'Sunnyside Scissors' and 'Fork of the Medusa.'

A browse through Bob's website is a wonder to behold, with work of different shapes and sizes and a certain puzzle-like quality to keep the mind busy.

In creating his work, Bob uses actual tools and locally-sourced

oak – and he always likes to retain the identities of the original object itself. Recent works have seen him explore themes of architecture, particularly related to churches in Norfolk which he says he loves. Another branch of his recent sculpture has seen Bob create a series of interlocking forms based around the idea of a daisy chain, but (as you would expect!) using tools as the base unit.

If you were looking to get your hands on a piece of Bob's work, you'll be pleased to learn that he's a regular local exhibitor – although works are also available via his website or even from his North Walsham studio. Even better, Bob is currently exhibiting (until 11th April) at the King's Lynn Arts Centre.

When asked what the future holds for Bob Catchpole and his amazing sculpture, the answer's typically elegant and simple.

"More sculpture!" he says. "I've spent my life doing it and I just wouldn't know what to do if I had to give it up. I work seven days a week and I was even in the studio on Christmas Day. It's my life. It's what I was born to do."

And that's the sign of a true artist.

For more details on Bob Catchpole and his fascinating work, visit his website at www.bobcatchpole.com

