











**2003-2004**

Private commission of life-size bronze figure + numerous other private commissions

**1995-2001**

Environmental art projects including Womad Festival, Las Palmas, Sicily, NZ and UK

**1999-2002**

Theatre commission animal/figurative costumes for Aardman, Bristol Old Vic

**1996**

International Sculpture Symposium, Granite, Wood and Bronze Workshop, Aberdeen

## FURTHER WRITING

### Romancing the shadow through the work of Beth Carter

Anyone who shares Beth Carter's fascination with the human condition must surely embrace the invitation to be found in her body of work. For here, among the richly detailed drawings and careful sculptures, we discover an unfolding meditation on those existential dilemmas that beset us all, and a world of its own in the making. This starkly beautiful and haunting world is both particular and universal, at once strange and immediately familiar, because it so powerfully evokes that forever surprising annexe of our own lives: the chambers of our night dreams, our subconscious imaginings, and our performances of gender and personhood.

These Carter chambers, magical and haphazard though they might at first appear, are constructed with considerable imaginative care. The use of charcoal in her drawings reinforces the night theme, as if the maudlin women, the strange animal-men, the consuming eyes are beckoning us into the shadows of our perceptions which sleep gives way to...and we aren't always sure we want to follow. The peculiar and seemingly random choices of figures in the composition build to create a sense of willful arbitrariness, akin not just to dreams but the playful irreverence of childhood, another of Carter's preoccupations. In 'The Long Way Home' for example, a fox-man and a young girl hold hands while she steps away: are they dancing, or is he pulling her into the shadows of the woods beyond? So much of this imagery parodies the strange precariousness of a time when we were small – when we wanted to play but we could not be sure of our own perceptions and didn't know who to trust.

The destabilization of classical mythology within the lineage of sculpture is a consistent theme in Carter's work, with bird-heads and cat-heads appearing as her less predatory take on the Minotaur legend. Cleverly, she can conflate and complicate those classical myths and those of contemporary masculinity at the same time. For example in 'Minotaur on a Box', we see one of history's great symbols of rapacious hyper-maleness reduced to a slumping, flabby figure – evoking connotations of abashed, middle aged manhood. Perhaps, too, Carter's 'Free Reign' horse-man sculpture could be read as an embodiment of the partly self-imposed constraints of personhood in society – on our physical, essential natures and desires – or, perhaps in gendered terms, the shackles of contemporary 'manhood' itself. Such questions could occupy the viewer for hours, and this is work far more rewarding than much of the 'art for artists' that still claims so much space. In the accomplishment of Carter's technique – the humanity in the faces, even the animal faces, through the careful lines, through the shading – she prompts a rare kind of empathy towards her subjects, making her a distinct force to be reckoned with in the world of figuration.

In many ways Beth Carter's work is like a Jungian dream forest, where the shadow waits, and the ghosts of strange beings beckon and frighten, beguile and terrify in equal measure. Indeed, it was Jung himself who counselled the courting of the psyche's shadow. Such Carter images as the minstrel at the entrance to the skirt-tent bring to mind the dwarf of Jung's visions, who guarded the door to his unconscious. Except that in these visions, we are not kept *out* but invited *in*. To gaze, to meditate upon the work of Beth Carter is indeed to meet, to romance, the shadow.

Bonny Brooks