



Lion I

Lynn Chadwick

On display

Title/Description: Lion I

Artist/Maker: Lynn Chadwick

Born: 1990 - 1990

Object Type: Outdoor sculpture, Sculpture

Materials: Stainless Steel

Measurements: h. 1625 x w. 1320 x d. 3455 mm

Accession Number: L.92

Historic Period: 20th century

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Credit Line: On long loan from Lynn Chadwick Estate

Lynn Chadwick (1914–2003) was one of the foremost sculptors working in Britain after World War II. Having trained as an architectural draughtsman, he established his reputation with a mobile and outdoor sculpture, *Stabile* (Cypress) that were commissioned for the 1951 Festival of Britain. He went on to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale of 1952 as part of the so-called 'Geometry of Fear' sculptors. He became internationally renowned when he was selected to represent Britain at the 1956 Venice Biennale, where he became the youngest artist ever to win the International Prize for Sculpture.

Chadwick was primarily a figurative artist inspired by both human and animal forms. But he insisted that he would begin from abstract shapes rather than from a naturalistic subject. Thinking in terms of pure form, pure shapes, yet at the same time adding he 'can't resist adding something'. Abstract shapes supported on legs begin to acquire movement, and hence to suggest birds, animals, or human figures. (1) The beast theme helped to conjure a mood of forbiddance and unnerving anxiety that had particular resonance with the artistic landscape of the mid-twentieth century in sculpture and literature. (2)

Sculptures with the title of 'Beast' were a theme continuously re-visited by Chadwick throughout his career. Chadwick explored the form and gesture of the theme with the subject often shown stalking their prey or head turned to howl or roar. The animals are captured in states of action, latent energy and raw power. The vitality of a living creature is caught somewhere between movement and stasis. Sculptures with this title appeared from 1952 when Chadwick completed a maquette for Unknown Political Prisoner. (3) This was made in iron and Stolit, Chadwick's signature style from the 1950's of iron armature with infill with Stolit with a distressed surface. (4) There was a series of seven versions in 1953 in welded iron and one in 1954. (5) The first version in bronze appeared in 1955 and one in iron. There are four iron examples and three in bronze from 1958. There are two in iron from 1959, three in bronze from 1960 and one from 1961. The theme re-appears in the mid-sixties, one bronze in 1965, fourteen bronzes in 1967, one in 1972, two bronzes in 1972 and 1986, a final bronze in 1990. The welded stainless steel 'beasts' appear from 1989 starting with *Rising Beast*. They vary in size but were all plinth-based works until 1989 when they became monumental. In stainless steel, there are fifteen smaller beasts and eleven that are monumental and can be shown outdoors. (6)

Crouching Beast II (1990) , Lion I (1990) and Beast Alerted I (1990) are from this later period, made of welded stainless-steel sheets. The origami-like stealthy triangular and trapezoidal shapes form a recognisable animal-form created by folding a pleating the metal sheets. Each is carefully balanced and poised on tapering legs that touch the ground on fine points. They are so well articulated that there is an impression the welded joints are hinged and moveable, and likely to spring into action at any given moment. (7) Unlike the earlier versions in iron or bronze, the stainless steel sculptures were scaled up from smaller maquettes. (8) The multi-faceted surfaces are fragmented by the play of light and shadow on the surfaces. Chadwick delighted in the properties that steel afforded; no matter how dull the weather some facet of the sculptures would catch and reflect the light. The engineered appearance has an affinity with the hi-tech architecture of the Sainsbury Centre. The works are on Long Loan from the Chadwick Estate and are located in the east-end sculpture garden.

Calvin Winner, October 2021

(1) Dennis Farr and Eve Chadwick, Lynn Chadwick Sculptor, with a complete illustrated catalogue, Lund Humphries, 2014. The list of sculptures with the title beast or Lion. P. 23

(2) Calvin Winner, Elizabeth Frink: Humans and other animals, the link between sculpture and literature is explored in the essay Black Wings, p.20

(3) Dennis Farr and Eve Chadwick, Lynn Chadwick Sculptor, with a complete illustrated catalogue, Lund Humphries, 2014. The list of sculptures with the title beast or Lion. P. 22

(4) Stolit was an industrial product made from gypsum and iron filings and when set could be

worked.

(5) Dennis Farr and Eve Chadwick, I have recorded just those works with the title beast or Lion but there are other untitled works that are related.

(6) Dennis Farr and Eve Chadwick, The list of sculptures with the title beast or Lion.

(7) Jon Wood, The sculptural imagination of Lynn Chadwick, Lynn Chadwick: Retrospectives, Blain Southern 2014. P.19

(8) Michael Bird, Lynn Chadwick, Lund Humphries, 2014, p.168

Further Reading

Michael Bird, Lynn Chadwick (Lund Humphries, 2014)
