

GLOBAL ART

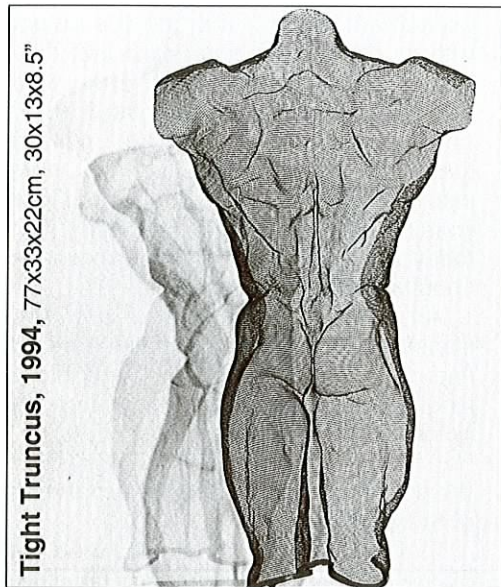
NEWS

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This issue of Global Art News features the artwork of David Begbie - the sculptor "in the Flesh."

Born in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1955, David Begbie's earliest memories and experiences as an artist were at the ripe age of 13. "I had to get a letter of permission from my parents so that I could go to evening classes where I was confronted with a naked live model for the first time - there was a flirtatiousness that existed between myself and one of the younger models - these experiences made a very lasting impression, particularly from the point of view of subject matter."

Already talented, Begbie proceeded to complete seven years at art school where he emerged with the unique sculptural technique - he had discovered the ability to work with steelmesh. Since his graduation in 1982, he has worked almost exclusively with the human form, primarily sculpting in steelmesh but also producing monoprints, etchings, ink and charcoal drawings and mixed-media work. But it is for his distinctive steelmesh bodies that Begbie is most renowned.



Tight Truncus, 1994, 77x33x22cm, 30x13x8.5"

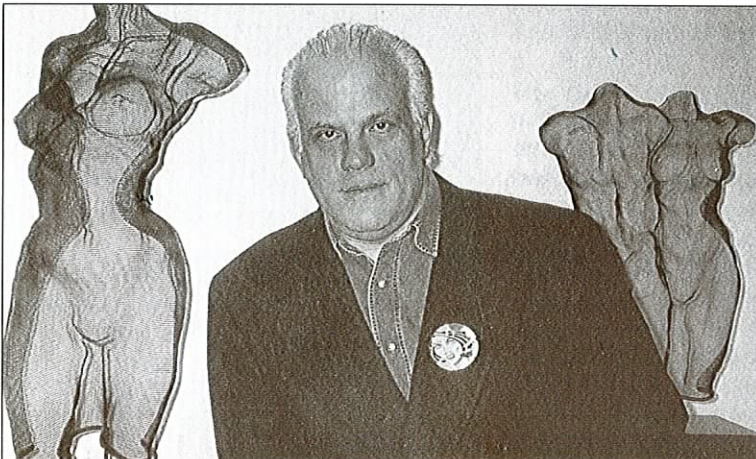
The preoccupation with the human form as his subject stems from an early age, the fascination for reproducing figurative bodies in steelmesh has developed extensively over the last ten years. Looking back at his early work, there is an element of crudity as he fashioned the flat steel grid into three dimensional form. Recently Begbie has achieved the fine sculpting detail of musculature and human form which has already been compared to Michelangelo and Rodin.

The real thrill of Begbie's work is the experience of seeing it "in the flesh", the sculpted bodies are powerful, erotic, tactile and intimate. For the viewer the steelmesh material adds intrigue yet is somehow familiar; when you first experience Begbie's bodies you are curious to know how the perfection of form is achieved. On looking further you become familiar with the properties of the sculpture - the wiremesh creates a liveliness and sense of movement that is further enhanced by the use of shadowplay with strategic lighting.

Begbie creates images of people in good physical condition - his bodies are the modern archetype, and this is why they appeal. "Individually people like one sculpture and not another, because often they're looking at the shape of the body or the sex of the body - they're choosing characteristics they like."



Easel, 1993, 215x50x63cm, 84.5x19.5x25"



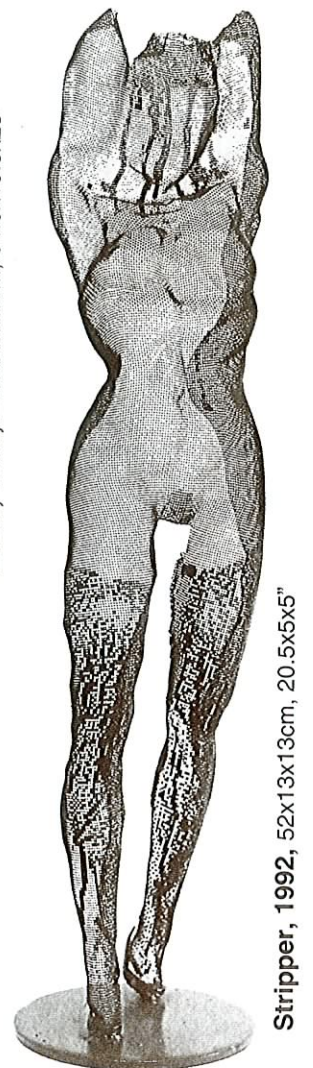
Bruce R. Lewin in his gallery.

"David Begbie's sculptures have attracted more attention and have elicited more enquiries than any other artist's work in recent memory.

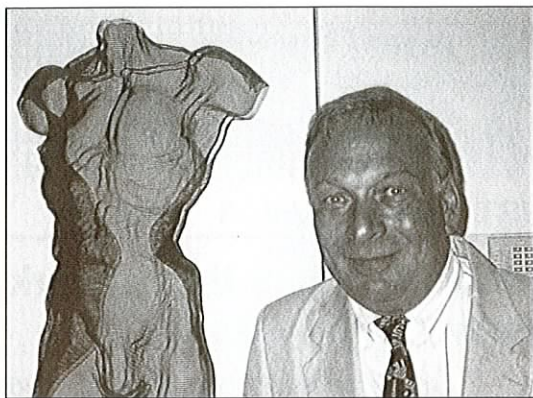
He is at once a sculptor and a renderer of shadows - incredible drawings which aren't.

Most other artists sculpt from the outside in, Begbie not only sculpts from the inside out but utilizes lighting to create dramatic shadows."

— Bruce R. Lewin
Bruce R. Lewin Gallery
New York, New York



Stripper, 1992, 52x13x13cm, 20.5x5x5"



Joel Kessler in his gallery.

"Visitors to the gallery are overwhelmed by the great detail in David's work. His sculptures are being studied carefully by the entire artworld."

Begbie's artwork certainly attracts the most attention of visitors to the gallery.

Begbie's sculptures and graphics are some of the most exciting new pieces of art I have seen in many years.'

— Joel Kessler
Joel Kessler Fine Art
Miami Beach, Florida

"Begbie has an incredible mastery of the human form bringing out beauty, strength and figure, like no artist has before, from steel wiremesh."

There is such a high demand for his work that we have a tremendous problem keeping pieces in our gallery."

— Arij Gasiunasen
Arij Gasiunasen Fine Art
Palm Beach, Florida

BEGBIE IN CONVE

Have you always had a preoccupation with the human form?

Yes, despite the trends during my Art School years for non-figurative, abstract, minimal and multi-media activities. There are two main reasons for this preoccupation:

1. Because I can only work on things and subjects which I have a feeling and passion for.
2. I like to be involved in what interests me, not necessarily what is fashionable and popular - therefore, my commitment as such enables me to explore the possibilities extensively.

Would you say you are not interested in current trends?

I take notice. It is possible that my art influences trends in some respects - this should be true of any contemporary activity which integrates into the culture. Trends are often inventions based on a desire for society to categorize - or in some cases a way of justifying plagiarism. In general artists work with a very individual approach.

When did you first start working in Steelmesh, what year?

I discovered the particular properties of steelmesh in 1977 at art school, at that time, I was working with more conventional solid materials - such as: plaster, wood, bronze, stone and fiberglass casting.

One of the reasons wiremesh is in art schools is because it is the traditional material for armature (the structure used for plaster sculpture where chicken-wire composes the basic skeletal form).

At any one time I would see many unsophisticated armatures for plaster sculptures - I thought these were completely unappreciated as a potential art form and decided to reinterpret the guts of the sculpture, as I saw it - a strong and important statement in its own right. At the time, I had no idea that this observation would eventually be the basic 'armature' of my future work and career.

In my own work I was composing figurative sculptures in space frame structures (still present today), and unlike conventional compositions, I was screening off the object with semi-opaque materials such as: frosted glass and plastics, cloth and fabrics and, of course, steelmesh. It was during this

period I discovered that steelmesh could be modelled to a degree of sophistication - you can imagine the excitement, when I merged the object with its diaphanous screen so that they become one statement. This was important for its sheer sculptural economy and stunning visual succinctness and has continued to be an inspiration for me since. The ideas I was working with then and am working with today sprang from the initial discoveries about the material at that time.

All visual media is about the transformation of an ordinary material (industrial, domestic or otherwise) into a language expressing and communicating in a way that no other medium can.

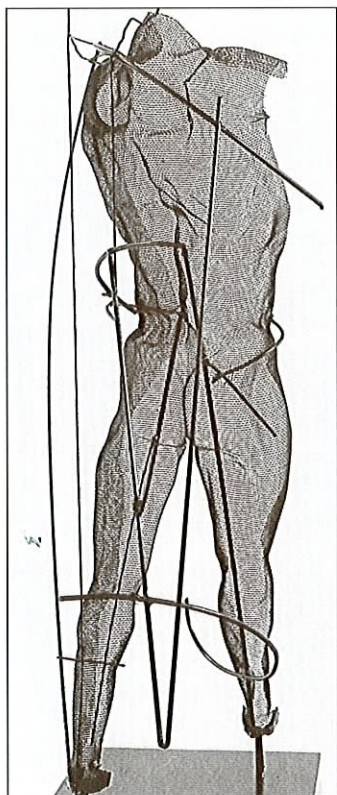
What are the unique/special properties of the Steelmesh?

Firstly, the mesh is manufactured flat off the roll and is a uniform grid structure machined with a relentless integrity. When the mesh with all its lines stretch into three dimensions, it has the psychological effect of creating a completely new type of space - that is space which it newly occupies when stretched.

Secondly, it is transparent - 90% thin air, yet it has as much and possibly more presence than a conventional solid form.

Because of this, I have been able to introduce the use of lighting as an integral part of a particular composition, combining two and three dimensions by using shadows - an optical fusion of image and object.

Figure in Apparatus, 1993, 56x21.5x16cm, 22x8.5x6.5"



Nullus, 1992, 60x35x20cm, 23.5x14x8"

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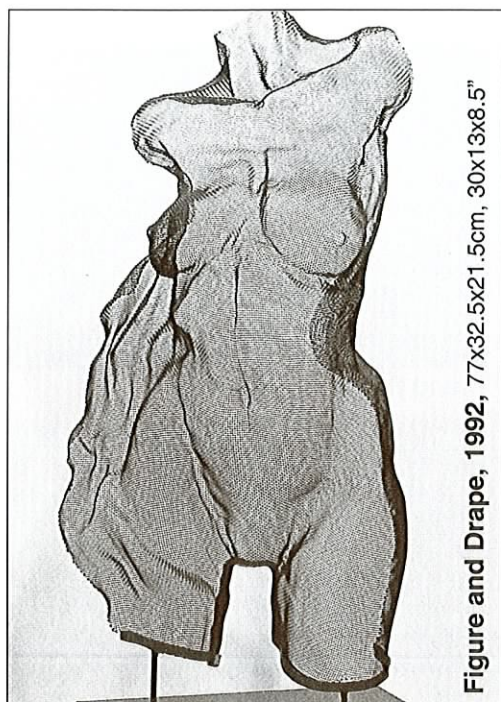


Figure and Drape, 1992, 77x32.5x21.5cm, 30x13x8.5"

Do you sculpt a series of bodies or are they one off creations?

I often work on more than one at a time - that is variations of the same idea. Working with more than one sculpture enables me to achieve subtleties in each individual version which would otherwise be lost if each facet was contained in one piece.

Basically it stops me from overworking one piece, so that I can bring out particular characteristics separately over several subjects. Therefore, each sculpture is obviously unique.

Where do you study Human Form?

Sometimes I use models. I am generally very aware of people - body movements and expression. Artists develop a way of seeing for their own purposes. Good sources of day to day study are: social contact, working out in the gym, the use of photos, TV and video, plus an unknown degree of subliminal intake. I am also inspired by the work of artists such as: Rodin, Michelangelo, Medardo Rosso, Egon Schiele, many other painters and obviously my contemporaries. My sources perpetually evolve along with my experiences.

Would you say you have a pre-occupation with Health and Fitness?

Yes, well not a preoccupation, I am very interested in anatomy and it is a way of learning how my own body works - not just functionally, but also how we express ourselves on every level through body language.

We confront the world with our bodies on many levels, what we individually look and feel like, and how we see each other, is astonishingly important.

I am interested in how partial figures/fragments can become powerful forms of expression. I often deal with heads and torsos, hands and feet separately, because interestingly, they can say very different and surprising things; particularly if you understand that a torso alone has its individual character, moreover a 'personality'.

In the past you have been compared to Rodin, Medardo Rosso and Michelangelo, how do you feel about these comparisons now?

Obviously there are similar concerns, particularly as Rodin was the first and most successful artist to consciously use a fragmented form as his subject, he also went on to deal with emotional, physical, passionate and violent expression.

Using wax as his medium, Medardo Rosso has been an intriguing influence. The majority of his mature works appear 'softly eroded' or transformed as if by the elements and evocative of the mysterious workings of the imagination - half formed personalities from the deep subconscious.

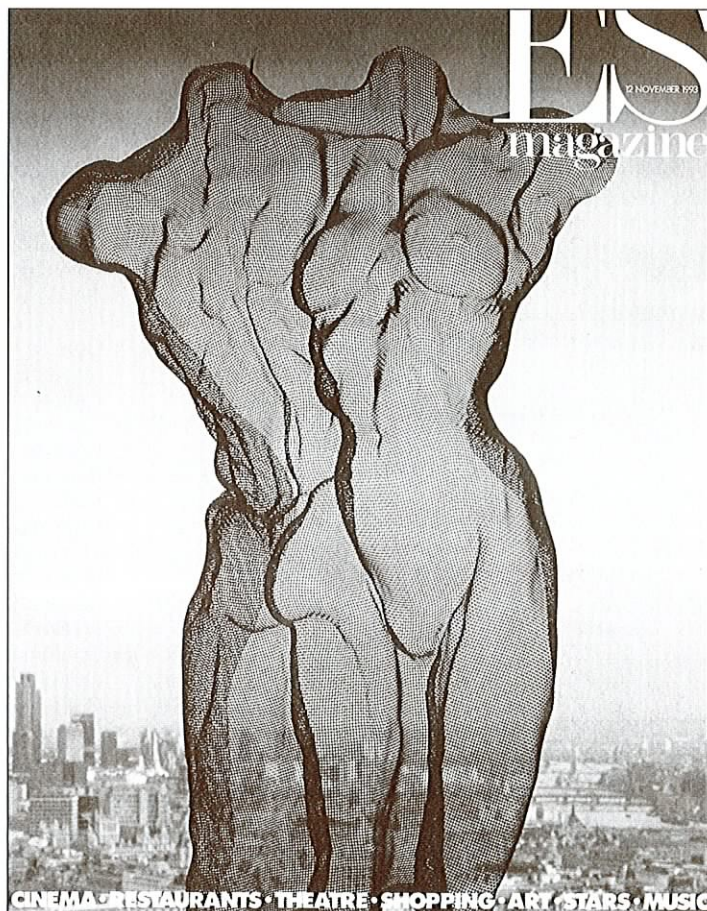
I look to Michelangelo who was the exponent of exaggerated physical form (mannerism). This is because I often have to exaggerate physical features due to the inherent properties and the nature of working with steelmesh. My concerns are precisely contemporary in that I am transposing a modern industrial material, in a much wider context in today's society. My sculpture is completely different because of the nature of the material although the results do sometimes strike the same chords.

Is this the reason for your success?

My work is successful because it is a fascinating mix of classical qualities with a contemporary material. It is sculptural economy and succinctness with an ebullience of content and subtlety. It is also a marriage of figurative and minimal art. ▲

"On one hand we have the monumental, the dignified, the awesome. We also see in his work the intimate, the affectionate. The use of shadowplay, the shadows cast by his figures, is an element that helps to convey liveliness, a sense of movement. There is also the nearly abstract, the refinement, especially in the works on paper, whether monoprints, monoprint collages or drawings - into a paradigm of the figure, a pattern of outline shaded in with varying textures, and a rich sense of color although all is black and white and grays in between. And there is that exhilarating touch of kitsch from time to time; a sense of going beyond the acceptable, out of the rarified gallery into some other world."

— Lady Marina Vaizey, 1993
(Britain's leading art critic)



The November 12, 1993 cover of *ES Magazine*, the weekly supplement to the *London Evening Standard* newspaper, features David Begbie's "Back to Front". The *Evening Standard* is Britain's largest circulation afternoon paper with a circulation of over 600,000 copies.

BEGBIE EXHIBITIONS

Commonground I, 1993, 65x32x26cm, 25.5x12.5x10"



"His work is quite unlike anything else being done at the present moment. His figures and figure - fragments are moulded from fine wire mesh. This material turns out to be extraordinarily sensitive: Begbie is able to shape it with his hands to produce the illusion of rippling musculature. He makes it seem as sensitive and pliable as wax. But the mesh provides a whole range of other effects as well - the sculptures become translucent - they are simultaneously there and not there. In this new series of works, Begbie has become much bolder - the figures are deliberately fragmented, metal armatures are used to 'draw' with, so that the spatial interaction becomes more complex. Every time the viewer shifts position, a new set of relationships appear. The fascinating thing is that these relationships remain coherent."

— Edward Lucie-Smith

"Begbie has explored a further range of possibilities - his figures are transparent, made of wire mesh, modelled, painted and galvanised: the light both ripples on the surface and passes right through them. The effect is of a presence which is not quite of this world. It is real, but also surreal."

— Mary Rose Beaumont

Selected Exhibitions

Museum Collections:

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Mezzanine Gallery, MOMA, New York
Primates Gallery, Natural History Museum, London — permanent installation
National Gallery, Canberra, Australia
Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, Italy

One Man Shows:

- 1994 • Fire Station Gallery, Sydney, Australia
• Tower Bridge Piazza, London
- 1993 • Catto Gallery, London
• Tower Bridge Piazza, London
- 1992 • Tower Bridge Piazza, London
- 1991 • City Place House, London
- 1990 • Salama-Caro Gallery, London
- 1989 • Salama-Caro Gallery, London
- 1988 • Winchester Cathedral, England
- 1987 • Salama-Caro Gallery, London
- 1986 • Forum, Zurich, Switzerland
• Navy Pier, Chicago, Illinois
• Brompton Gallery, London
- 1985 • Brompton Gallery, London
- 1984 • Brompton Gallery, London

Group Exhibitions:

- 1994 • Bruce R. Lewin Gallery, New York
• Galerie Pierre Nouvion, Monte Carlo, Monaco
• Arij Gasiunasen, Palm Beach, Florida
• Joel Kessler Fine Art, Miami, Florida
• Joel Kessler Fine Art, Art Miami 94
- 1993 • Philip Samuels Fine Art, Art Miami 93
• Charles Whitchurch Gallery, Huntington Beach, California
• Arij Gasiunasen, Palm Beach, Florida
• 20th Century Art Fair, Royal College of Art, London
• The Olympian Art Fair, Royal College of Art, London
• Masks Exhibition, The West Soho Gallery, London
- 1992 • Contemporary Art Fair, Los Angeles, California
• Salama-Caro Gallery, London
• Variety Club of Great Britain, Christies, London
• The Inventive Spirit, Autodrome, Brussels, Belgium
- 1991 • Salama-Caro Gallery, London
• Art Basle, Ponte Gallery, Rome, Italy
• Contemporary Art Fair, Los Angeles, California
- 1990 • Galleria 57, Madrid, Spain
- 1989 • 20th Century Gallery, Victoria & Albert Museum, London
• Galleria 57, Madrid, Spain
- 1988 • Salama-Caro Gallery, London
- 1987 • Salama-Caro Gallery, London
• Serpentine Gallery, London
- 1986 • M.O.M.A. Palma, Mallorca
- 1985 • ICAF, Barbican Centre, London
- 1984 • ICAF, Barbican Centre, London
• A.R.C.O., Madrid, Spain
- 1983 • Metro Show '83, London
• Brompton Gallery, London
- 1982 • Christies Inaugural Exhibition, London



David Begbie

"As he is a splendid sculptural draughtsman, the shape is exquisitely outlined. It has the rightness and the adjustment to observation which in their absence we always miss in visual art. The steelmesh that makes these bodies also constitutes their imaginative clothing. It creates an iridescent fabric, with a fluttering sheen that is wantonly voluptuous, harsh yet silky, both at once. David Begbie weaves for imperial nakedness an optical garment, which is more illusory and stylish than ever."

— Sir Lawrence Gowing

Torso, 1993, 74x32.5x21.5cm, 29x13x8.5"

