



*Georgie*, Supai limestone, 143 x 91 x 78cms. Collection of Nicola Horlick. Photo by Nigel Hillier

# DAWN ROWLAND

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Dawn Rowland describes her sculptures as her ‘emotional c.v.’ in which she openly expresses her feelings about being a woman, a mother, a daughter, and a wife. In short, her work is about relationships and life-experiences. It is charged with intense emotion and executed with extraordinary skill.

Dawn Shane was born with her twin brother, Barry, in 1944 in London. She was the older twin and she now jokingly remarks, ‘It’s the only time Barry ever said to me “Ladies First”’. - As a child, Dawn was acknowledged by her parents as the artist of the family and Barry as the scientist, roles they both fulfilled as adults. Encouraged by her creative mother to develop her talents, Dawn attended evening classes in order to pursue the study of art.

In 1965 she married Malcolm Rowland whose post-doctoral research took them to San Francisco, supposedly for one year. They stayed for ten years, bringing up their two small daughters there. San Francisco offered Dawn her first real chance to pursue a more creative path. Whilst the girls, Lisa and Michelle, were babies, she found time to take up life drawing classes near their home in Marin County across the Golden Gate Bridge. Attending a charity coffee morning in the form of a ‘clay-in’ to raise funds for the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, Dawn had her first experience of modelling a piece of clay. She immediately loved its tactile quality and the sensation of working in three dimensions. Her piece of work was donated to raise funds for the charity, and sold immediately.

In 1974, Malcolm’s career brought the family back to London for a year, at the end of which, Dawn was to have a significant and life-changing experience. On arriving in London, she decided she wanted to take sculpture classes and enrolled at Camden Arts Centre where she began modelling in clay and drawing from a life model. At the end of the year, a two-week course in stone carving was advertised. Dawn enrolled and thus began her lifelong love affair. From the first moment that she held a mallet in one hand and a chisel in the other, all her instincts and emotions told her that this was what she was destined to do.

Her first piece of sculpture was carved in white alabaster. Initially intimidated by the enormity of transforming this nondescript block into a work of art, Dawn spent the first two days just looking at it, trying to imagine what the finished piece might be. Referring to her own experiences and emotions, the alabaster became a mother and child, the two entwined forms depicting a total involvement with each other.



*The Warrior Dreams...His Mother Waits*, 1996, bronze, 51 x 54 x 26cms. Edition of 6, 2 in private collections in UK and USA. Photo by Steve Russell

After the year in London, the family moved back to San Francisco for what was to be its final year there before a planned move to Manchester. This proved to be a wonderful and inspirational year for Dawn. Determined to explore and develop her new-found vocation, she searched for sculpture classes and found, close to their home, an atelier run by Guy Schwartz, a sculptor from New York. He was an excellent teacher, encouraging Dawn to explore and exploit her own creativity. Under his gentle guidance her confidence and ability blossomed.

On arrival in Manchester in 1975, Dawn's prime concern was to continue stone carving. Again, she joined life drawing and modelling courses where she drew and sculpted from the model in order to glean as much anatomical information as she could in her quest to perfect the skill of accurately recreating the human figure. By 1976 she had her own studio where she worked in stone with dedication and enthusiasm in the development of her work, which



*An Emotional Year*, 1995, alabaster, 56 x 87 x 25cms. Photo by Ian Tilton

*My Sister... Myself*, 2003, bronze, 56 x 118 x 30cms. Photo by Steve Russell





*Letting Go*, 1996, Indiana limestone, 112 x 69 x 46cms.  
Photo by Ian Tilton



resulted in her being elected a Member of the Manchester Academy of Fine Arts in 1977, and a Council Member from 1980–1999. She was a member of the Selection Committee and the Hanging Committee for many years.

Her work is predominantly based on the human form, or some part of it, especially heads and hands which she finds most expressive. Dawn continues, to this day, to regard drawing as an important and fundamental part of her work. She produces very impressive life drawings, some larger than life and twice as powerful. However, she doesn't use preliminary sketches when making her carvings, preferring to draw directly onto the stone, changing the form if necessary as the work progresses. Nor does she use a maquette, a preliminary small-scale model upon which to base the sculpture. This style of working explains much about Dawn; her work is intuitive, expressive and emotional and would be too constrained by the process of working from a maquette. Her preferred materials are marble, limestone, alabaster and soapstone, sometimes having selected pieces cast in bronze if she thinks they will work well in that medium.



*Father and Son*, 1990, limestone, 138cms tall. Collection Jeffrey Archer.  
Photo by Ian Tilton

She has always been, and continues to be, exhilarated by the exciting process of working with a piece of stone and watching her emotions gradually emerge as a tangible image. She is so emotionally connected to her work that creating a piece of sculpture is rather like giving birth. Of the immense satisfaction that Dawn derives from working with stone, she says, 'I even love the pain that inevitably must come with this pleasure.' Carving stone is an arduous task that requires an enormous amount of physical effort and concentration, not to mention great skill and time; one false move with the chisel could have a devastating effect, obliterating weeks, if not months, of hard work.

The 1980s saw a steady development of Dawn's recognition as a sculptor. In 1983 she had her first solo exhibition at the Pitcairn Galleries in Knutsford, Cheshire, and in 1984 a solo exhibition at Salford Art Gallery. In 1985 she became a Member of the National Artists

Association. In the same year she was awarded the Coopers & Lybrand Award for the piece of sculpture included in the Manchester Academy of Fine Arts Exhibition. Her third solo show took place in 1986 at the Ginnel Gallery in Manchester and in the same year she gained the National Westminster Bank Award for her exhibit at the Manchester Academy of Fine Arts. Throughout the 1980s her work was exhibited in galleries throughout the country, including several in London. During this period her work was also exhibited on three occasions at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in London.

The 1990s were no less eventful for Dawn; in 1991 she was made a member of the Royal Society of British Sculptors (now the Royal British Society of Sculptors), and was elected a Fellow in 1994. She was a Council Member from 1993 to 1999 and was re-elected to the Council in 2006. She was presented to the Queen at the opening of the Royal British Society's International Sculpture Exhibition, 'Chelsea Harbour Sculpture 1993'. Her impressive 138 cm limestone carving entitled *Father and Son* was purchased by Jeffrey Archer. Although Dawn doesn't have any sons, she enjoys expressing, through her sculptures, the relationship between father and son. In Mediterranean cultures, an outward show of affection between men is quite common. Here however, it is more unusual and in *Father and Son* Dawn portrays this special bond as the boy's head nestles tenderly against the father's strong and protective shoulder.

A major solo exhibition of Dawn's work took place at the end of 1993 and the beginning of 1994 at the Konishi Gallery in Kyoto, Japan. One of the pieces entitled *The Silent Scream* aroused the curiosity of a Japanese visitor who wanted to know the meaning of the title. Dawn explained that the sculpture depicts one of those moments of intense frustration experienced by most women, when there is so much to deal with, and so much going on, that there is a need to retreat somewhere private and scream, but with our social conditioning, no sound comes out. The Japanese woman smiled empathetically; the sculpture bridged the cultural divide. In the year 2000, a large and important retrospective exhibition of Dawn's work was curated by Davies and Tooth at the Air Gallery on Dover Street, London. The exhibition attracted critical acclaim.

Dawn's intuitive understanding of her own emotions has been fundamental to the production of her sculptures. Often working in a series, with a number of variations and sequences, Dawn explores a range of emotions until the theme comes to its natural conclusion. However, she may find herself returning to those issues several years later, as she explains, 'I suppose the basic sentiments underlying my work are part of me and therefore can never be totally resolved.'

*Letting Go* worked in Indiana limestone is one such series which explores the feelings that

arise when a child leaves home. The mother's hands are raised to gently push the child forward towards a new life – to let go – but are still there to cushion and protect if necessary. The child's head is wrapped with a blindfold, covering the child's eyes; this blindfold is often used by Dawn to denote the unseeing innocence of childhood as the young ones venture out into an unknown world. Dawn says 'parts of the blindfold are still attached to the mother's hands. That is because mothers never really, totally let go.' *Mother and Daughter* refers to the same emotions.

'The Warrior Dreams' series deals with the ultimate in 'letting go'; that of a mother who has nurtured and taken care of her son through his childhood years and then has to deal with the trauma of his going off to war. In most of this series the 'dreamer' is blindfolded.

*The Warrior Dreams...His Mother Waits*, 1987, was carved in soapstone and depicts a blindfolded young warrior; in his hand is a staff, denoting war, whilst the forefinger of his hand is resting apprehensively in his mouth. It is a powerful and moving sculpture that symbolises youth, innocence and vulnerability. His mother's face is carved on the reverse of the sculpture, and there is another emotional element which came out of the stone by chance, as Dawn explains

As I was working on this sculpture there was a piece of stone at the top which I would normally have just lopped off. Yet something inside me told me that I must not do this. At the time it wasn't apparent why I had to leave it there. Eventually I realised what it was for –



*Mother and Daughter*, 1991, soapstone, 61 x 38 x 21cms. Private Collection. Photo by M Hollow



*Despair*, 2000, bronze, 148 x 33 x 23cms. Photo by Nigel Hillier



it became the hand that joined the mother to her son.

This sculpture was also cast in bronze in 1996.

Other sculptures in the 'Warrior' series show the inevitable path of war. In *Fallen Warrior*, the boy, still blindfolded and still holding his staff, is seen mown down and in *The Final Dream* 1988, in Ancaster limestone, hands over his eyes like a blindfold, he prepares for death.

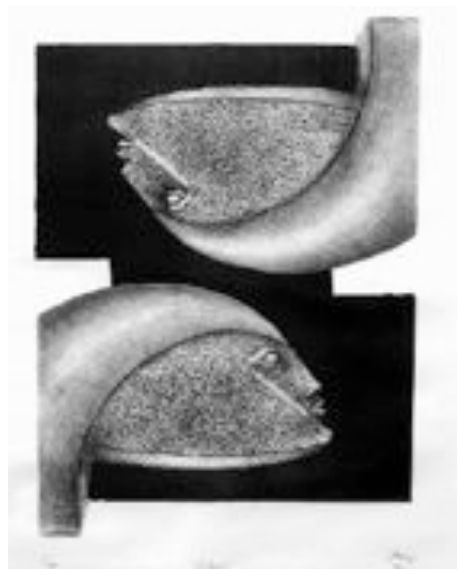
Many of Dawn's sculptures use double images; a subconscious development of her work, which, it has been suggested, is rooted in her twin status. Ultimately though, Dawn's interest in the nature of human interactions and those within families in particular, is at the foundation of these images. *My Sister...Myself* falls within the double-image category and was based on Dawn's magnificent *Femme de Rocher* series of 'knife-edge' sculptures, with sharply carved profiles that exude a strength and power associated with ancient sculptures. The contrast of rough and smooth textures and the subtle colours that come to light through the polished surface add various elements of interest. Both *Femme de Rocher* and *My Sister...Myself* were cast in bronze from the stone carving *Femme de Rocher*. *Sisters* 1994, carved in Ancaster Limestone, is another double-image sculpture, featuring two serene faces, one upright, the other horizontal, tenderly held together by a hand. Another carving produced in 2000 was also entitled *Sisters*. This was carved in Richemont limestone and shows two faces side by side. One is wearing a broad, textured blindfold over a beautifully smooth face, whilst the other is wide-eyed but has a face blemished with layers of braiding, like strips of plaster, pulled across her face. Each has a different set of advantages and disadvantages. They are the same, but different, and each is possibly dependent on the other. An example of 'The Family Unit' is portrayed in the sculpture *Embrace*, 2000. In this piece, which measures 143 cms high and is carved in Anstrude Clair Limestone, the family members are joined together by hands which encircle and weave through the sculpture.

Dawn's work is never purely ornamental; there is always a deep-rooted meaning in what she creates. *Never Again*, 1991, in Ancaster limestone, is another such example. Frustrated one day, Dawn screamed 'Never Again' and realised that those two words could apply to all kinds of situations. It has been the cry of people after atrocities like genocide and the holocaust. Dawn's own grandfather died in Auschwitz and she naturally feels particularly deep emotions about this atrocity.

*An Emotional Year* was carved from alabaster in 1995 during the year her father died. It shows four heads depicting the array of emotions Dawn felt during this difficult period when she would go to London to visit him in hospital and then come home and work on the sculpture. Dawn loves the beauty of alabaster, not the pure white variety, but the more highly



*My Sister...Myself*, 2002, stone lithograph, 68 x 56cms. Photo by Nigel Hillier



*Sisters*, 2002, stone lithograph, 68 x 56cms. Photo by Nigel Hillier



*My Sister...Myself*, 2003, limestone, 62 x 112 x 42cms. Photo by Nigel Hillier



*Embrace*, 2000, Anstrude Clair limestone, 143 x 79 x 49cms



*Sisters*, 1994, Ancaster limestone, 33 x 56 x 28cms.  
Photo by Nigel Hillier



*Sisters*, 2000, Richemont limestone, 31 x 61 x 16cms.  
Photo by Matthew Hollow

coloured, earthy type with its amazing markings and translucency. She likes to use this delicate material to make strong statements and images. This sculpture was also cast in bronze.

*Despair*, 1982, carved from alabaster and cast in bronze in 2000, and *Fragile Emotions*, 1993, carved from soapstone, show the universal feeling of vulnerability when faced with difficult and demanding situations. The angular face of *Despair* has sharp contours that suggest introspection and suffering. *Fragile Emotions*, with the cracked relief on its surface, literally shows the cracking facade of a person no longer able to cope, but the hand is there again for protection and comfort.

Dawn sees family relationships as a complex affair; they can both nurture and destroy, heal and wound, give pleasure and create pain. *My Mother, Myself...My Daughter, Myself* carved in 1992 from alabaster, depicts the natural progression from a girl to womanhood and the relationship that ensues with each stage between mothers and daughters. The sculpted rope entwined around them, symbolically binds them together emotionally, and for generation after generation as the one becomes the other. Perhaps this is prophetic as Dawn's daughters are both artistic; Michelle went on to become an artist.

Dawn grasped the opportunity to use stone in a different way when, in 2003, she went with Malcolm on a three-month trip to Washington DC where she worked on a lithography series. In this technique, the stone is rubbed down with different grits of carborundum powder and sanded by hand with the help of a levigator (a steel plate with a handle) to produce the smoothest of surfaces. The image is then drawn directly onto the smoothed stone with special grease-based pens and inks so that the oil-based printing inks only adhere to the



*Torso*, 2000, charcoal on paper,  
145 x 109cms. Private Collection

marks made by the pens. Under the pressure of the press, the image is printed onto paper. Wanting to use a familiar image while becoming accustomed to the process, Dawn used the 'Femme de Rocher' series on which to base the images for her exquisite stone lithographs.

In 2000, a meeting with Nicola Horlick, who made her name whilst working with Morgan Grenfell Asset Management, led to a huge and important commission for Dawn. Nicola's eldest daughter, Georgie, had died of leukaemia in 1998 when she was only twelve years old. Nicola wanted a sculpture as a lasting memorial and a celebration of Georgie's life. Having seen the emotional and sensitive qualities of Dawn's work at a gallery in London, Nicola realised that this would be the right person to produce the sculpture she wanted.

Initially Dawn was unsure about accepting this commission because her work was generally about her own feelings and emotions. She felt this was different from most commissions as there would be a huge responsibility to capture Georgie in the way her family saw her, with their deep and very strong emotions being intrinsic to the sculpture. It was a daunting prospect to work on such a sensitive subject. She thought long and hard about it and eventually decided to accept the commission.

The two women looked at pictures of Georgie and began initial discussions about the vision for the sculpture. Dawn does not work in portrait sculpture, so it was decided that the finished work would be a representation of the essence of the child, as opposed to a true likeness; Nicola spoke of Georgie's constant smile and her beautiful hands and hair which 'was like sunshine.' Underlying this outer beauty, was an inner beauty, a kindness that shone through despite her ten years of illness and pain.

Displaying a huge amount of trust, Nicola accepted Dawn's desire that the piece should not be viewed until it was finished. During the early stage of carving Dawn has described being 'paralysed with worry about all of Nicola's feelings involved with the sculpture' and terrified of the weight of the responsibility before her. Following philosophical words from Malcolm she was encouraged to continue and finish the sculpture.

Nicola's visit to Dawn's studio to view the completed work was a highly charged meeting for both of them. Taking her time to walk around the piece, Nicola made no initial comments and Dawn was concerned that she found something disappointing about the sculpture. However, Dawn need not have worried as Nicola declared herself delighted with the work; the momentary hesitation was due to the carving of Georgie's cheeks that Dawn had depicted as full and round. Dawn could not have known that the effects of Georgie's medication had caused an accentuated fullness in Georgie's face. Using the photographs that she had of Georgie through all the stages of her childhood, Dawn had focussed on the fullness of the face as representing a young Georgie. Once Nicola saw the sculpture in this way too, she accepted Dawn's portrayal of her daughter.

Nicola had spoken of her desire that the stone sculpture should be a timeless piece in the tradition of ancient carvings, so that Georgie's presence would be with the family forever. Carved in creamy white Supai limestone from a quarry in Italy and completed in 2004, the three-tonne sculpture shows Georgie with her wonderful long hair, wound round her parent's hands at the back of the piece.

In a moving interview on 'Woman's Hour' on Radio Four Dawn and Nicola spoke of their own feelings about the sculpture; Nicola's comment, 'I knew I had the right sculptor' is surely a profound testament to both Dawn's empathy and her technical expertise.



*The Silent Scream*,  
1992, alabaster,  
46 x 16 x 16cms.  
Photo by Ian Tilton



*The Final Dream*,1988,  
Ancaster limestone,  
56 x 21 x 26cms.  
Photo by Ian Tilton



*The Final Dream*  
(view 2)



*Fragile Emotions*,  
1993, soapstone,  
46 x 31 x 26cms.  
Photo by Matthew Hollow