



ART IN STONE

4 October 2024
to 2 February 2025

Exhibition

Since ancient times, stone has been fundamental to humanity's material and spiritual development. Consequently, it has acquired symbolic and social significance that goes beyond its material nature. But stone has also played a fundamental role in the evolution of modern sculpture.

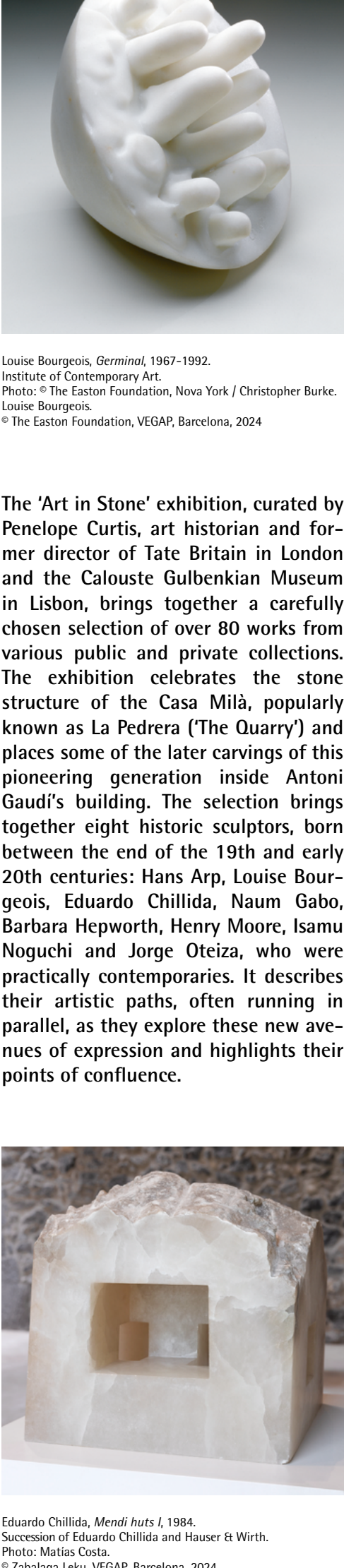
In the early 20th century, several sculptors returned to direct stone carving, working without intermediaries. Instead of making clay or plaster models from which qualified technicians created the definitive work, they started carving their own works, inspired by the abstract, marking a new attitude towards modernity.

Barbara Hepworth, the standard-bearer for the new generation that revitalised sculpture in the 1930s, said:

A chance remark by Ardini, an Italian master carver whom I met there [in Rome], that 'marble changes colour under different people's hands' made me decide immediately that it was not dominance which one had to attain over material, but an understanding, almost a kind of persuasion, and above all greater co-ordination between head and hand.

Henry Moore, with whom Hepworth maintained a close friendship, both sculptors mutually influencing each other's careers, took the appreciation of direct material work a step further:

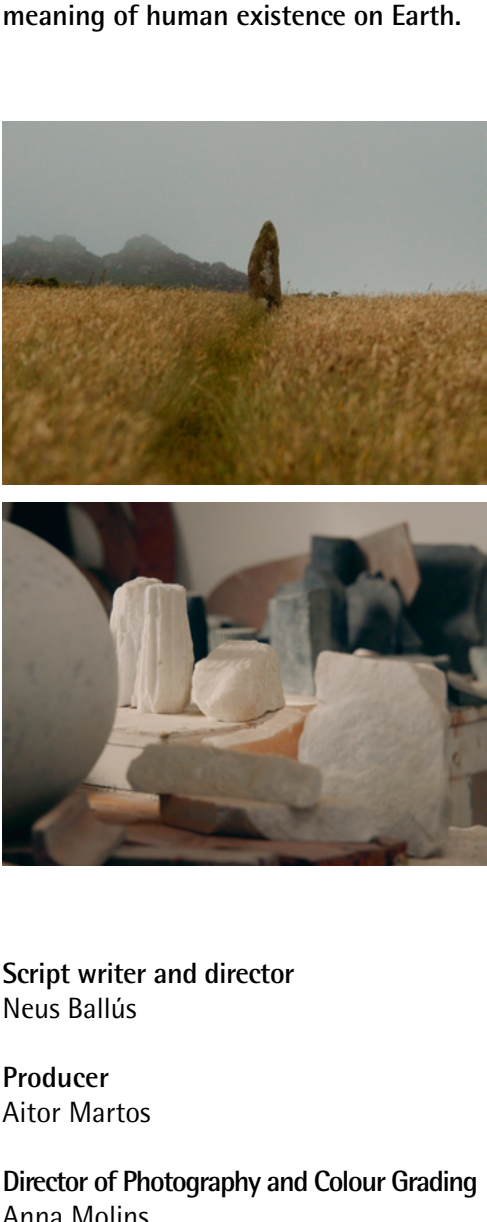
Every material has its own individual qualities. It is only when the sculptor works direct, when there is an active relationship with his material, that the material can take its part in the shaping of an idea.



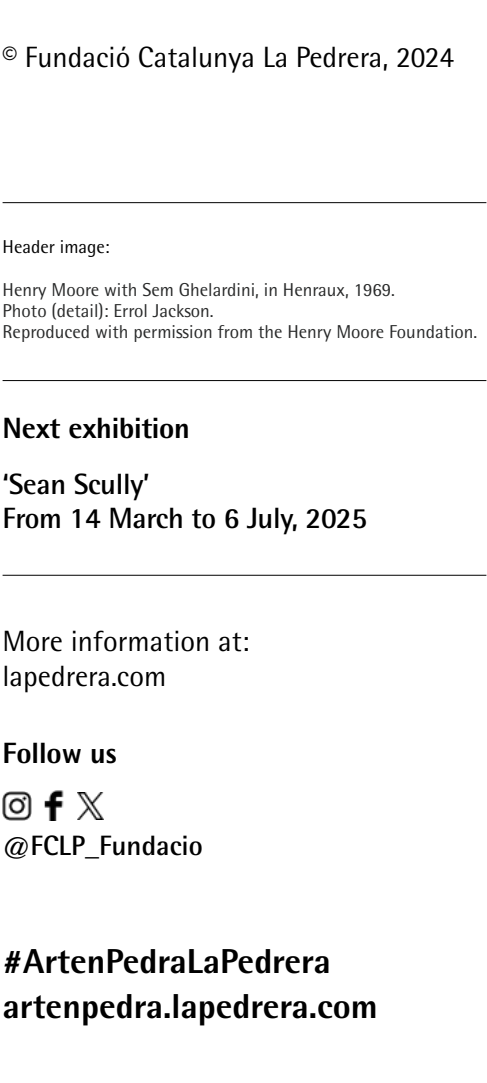
Barbara Hepworth working on *Memorial Sculpture to Duncan MacDonald*, 1950. Photo: Peter Keen. National Portrait Gallery, Londres. © Succession of Peter Keen

The artist, who controls all phases in the creative process, deeply values and understands the material used for their creation, as they must decipher its potential and extract the meanings held within it. Thus, the new sculptors proposed a different conception of the sculptural object, creating new, abstract forms. One of the most innovative features is the use of voids as a volumetric compositional element: an invisible volume that is nonetheless present in the sculptural structure. Another feature is how large monumental projects now conceive sculpture as a spatial whole rather than an exempt or isolated object: the work is approached as an element inseparable from the landscape.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, many of these artists – Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore in England; Hans Arp in Switzerland; Naum Gabo, Isamu Noguchi and Louise Bourgeois in the United States; and Eduardo Chillida and Jorge Oteiza in Spain – returned to working with stone and adopting a more flexible attitude. They realised they gained considerable freedom by drawing on the technical knowledge of professional stonemasons, as this allowed them to better select shapes and varieties of stone, often harder ones.



Hans Arp, *Cobra-Centaure*, 1952. Kunst Museum Winterthur. Photo: © SIK-ISEA, Zurich / Jean-Pierre Kuhn © Hans Arp, VEGAP, Barcelona, 2024



Louise Bourgeois, *Germinal*, 1967-1992. Institute of Contemporary Art. Photo: © The Easton Foundation, Nova York / Christopher Burke. Louise Bourgeois. © The Easton Foundation, VEGAP, Barcelona, 2024

The 'Art in Stone' exhibition, curated by Penelope Curtis, art historian and former director of Tate Britain in London and the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon, brings together a carefully chosen selection of over 80 works from various public and private collections. The exhibition celebrates the stone structure of the Casa Milà, popularly known as La Pedrera ('The Quarry') and places some of the later carvings of this pioneering generation inside Antoni Gaudí's building. The selection brings together eight historic sculptors, born between the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries: Hans Arp, Louise Bourgeois, Eduardo Chillida, Naum Gabo, Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, Isamu Noguchi and Jorge Oteiza, who were practically contemporaries. It describes their artistic paths, often running in parallel, as they explore these new avenues of expression and highlights their points of confluence.

Eduardo Chillida, *Mendi huts I*, 1984. Succession of Eduardo Chillida and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Matias Costa. © Zabalaga Leku, VEGAP, Barcelona, 2024

Anish Kapoor, *untitled (III)*, 1997. Courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery. © Anish Kapoor, VEGAP, Barcelona, 2024

Alongside these abstract works, which engage in dialogue with La Pedrera, and the photographs taken by Aglaia Konrad in the Carrara quarries, a supplementary section illustrates how the 'pioneers' of modern sculpture have inspired subsequent generations (Xavier Corberó, Stephen Cox, Luciano Fabro, Barry Flanagan, Cristina Iglesias, Anish Kapoor, Ettore Spalletti and Alison Wilding), and how stone has inspired new conceptual ways of working.

Audiovisual

The Catalonia La Pedrera Foundation produces its own series of produced audiovisual projects related to its exhibitions. These documentaries provide an enriching perspective in which art, creation, reflection and dialogue with the architecture of La Pedrera converge, seeking to enhance the exhibition experience.

For the 'Art in Stone' exhibition, director Neus Ballús (b. Mollet del Vallès, 1980), known for her unique and compelling perspective in the current audiovisual scene, has created a sensory collage using the voice of British sculptor Barbara Hepworth to reveal how the artist perceived sculpture. Her stone works are also inseparable from the unique landscapes of Cornwall and engage in direct dialogue with the creations of prehistoric men – and perhaps women – who, like the sculptor, found in stone carving a way to explore and express the profound meaning of human existence on Earth.

Script writer and director
Neus Ballús

Producer
Aitor Martos

Director of Photography and Colour Grading
Anna Molins

Sound design, mixing and direct sound
Agost Alustiza

Editor
Tomás Longato

Producers
Catalunya La Pedrera Foundation
El Kinògraf

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Header image:

Henry Moore with Sem Ghelardini, in Henraux, 1969. Photo (detail): Errol Jackson. Reproduced with permission from the Henry Moore Foundation.

Next exhibition

'Sean Scully'
From 14 March to 6 July, 2025

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