

# dominic welch

meditations in stone

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## the sculpture of Dominic Welch

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THE FLUID FOLDS and curvilinear incisions of Dominic Welch's sculpture seem to imply a secret life budding within the stone. There is a positive energy in these pared-down shapes, a condensed strength that hints at an unfolding into future growth. His carved pods and spheres suggest seeds, eggs or embryos, while plumed shapes appear to uncurl like new-sprung bracken. Fishy shapes have the dense muscularity of bodies adapted to cleaving water. Lightly-poised discs and serpentine spirals appear to defy gravity. Although much of it looks completely abstract, Welch's sculpture invariably derives from particular objects and organisms that he has seen in nature. Stripped down to their simplest attributes, the radical simplifications of these forms both intensify and add layers of meaning. Each finished piece seems to touch on archetypes to which all humans are attuned. Each contains that mysterious talismanic power found in the sacred stones worshipped by many ancient cultures.

These elegant yet powerful sculptures are created in isolation, in deepest Devon countryside. Dominic Welch works in a huge open-sided barn, the leaky corrugated iron roof covering a large flat space abutting a steeply rising field that abounds with wildlife - deer, foxes, boxing hares. Birds hop around his workspace and sometimes steal his sandwiches. The muddy ground around the workshop is strewn with shards of stone, offcuts from his sculpture, and the dust and detritus is gradually spreading outwards. Enfolded by nature, he works long hours alone, only the many

1 **Blue Angel III** (Work in progress)  
Kilkenny Limestone 140 x 140 x 25 cms 55 x 55 x 10 ins

power tools necessary for cutting and polishing the stone breaking the rural silence. Covered in stone dust, with ear- and eye-protectors on his head, Welch resembles a spaceman working in some remote space station. He uses angle-grinders to break the surface of the stone in series of lines, following the direction of the form in his mind. Air chisels are useful for finding the form, and rotary sanders can take off whole areas quickly. He often draws on the stone block using his air tools as lightly as a pencil, the delicate watery lines gradually bringing the stone to life. The whole business is very physical and, on his feet all day, he finds himself almost dancing around the shapes. After the 'industrial' stages of cutting and shaping the stone he finishes each piece by hand, preferring the softer sheen that this gives, as well as the chance to slow down and contemplate the form fully. He is aware that sometimes he will have to move back through these stages to make big changes.

The stone Dominic Welch favours is the limestone from Kilkenny in Ireland, although he occasionally uses Portland stone, Ancaster Weatherbed, or marble obtained from Carrara. He prefers Kilkenny limestone because, like marble, antediluvian heat and compression has changed its molecular structure to a smooth consistency, with very little grain. A finished piece will turn out a subtle bluey-black, coming to life when sunlight picks out the mica. Welch is less keen on pure white marble, nor does he like stone with too many markings in it, commenting that ' a lot of artists rely on the interest in the stone to complete the sculpture. I find that distracting - there can be so much going on in the stone that you can't really bring out the subtle, simple forms that I make because your eye is drawn to the markings on the stone rather than the sculpture. You can't ignore the particular qualities of the stone you are working in, but that shouldn't be the main factor. Most important is the form.'





2 **Ancaster Angel**  
Ancaster Weatherbed Limestone 36 x 46 x 10 cms 14 x 18 x 4 ins