

Six of the best SCULPTURE GARDENS

From contemporary sculpture in Norfolk to the National Sculpture Prize contenders in north Devon, **Rhiannon Batten** reveals the best places to immerse yourself in art and nature



ABOVE FROM LEFT A 2019 exhibition at Houghton Hall in Norfolk was host to one of Henry Moore's most celebrated sculptures, *The Arch* (1963–1969); *Pavillon de Vin* (2011) by Joana Vasconcelos sits in the 500-acre Yorkshire Sculpture Park; sculptures by William Peers and Jordi Raga are perfectly at home within Ashall Manor's celebrated gardens.

ABOVE FROM LEFT Little Sparta in South Lanarkshire is an ode to ancient civilisations, philosophy, literature and history; Barry Flanagan's *Large Left-Handed Drummer* (2006) – a hare cast in bronze – stands proudly at the New Art Centre; *Hiiccup* (2014) by National Sculpture Prize-winner Zhu Tian, on display at Broomhill Sculpture Garden, near Barnstaple.

Houghton Hall

One of Norfolk's grandest buildings, Neo-Palladian Houghton Hall is also home to one of the county's most majestic gardens: both were designed for British prime minister Robert Walpole in the 18th century. The parkland was originally laid out to a plan by garden designer Charles Bridgeman and, while his twisting wilderness paths and formal hedging remain intact, if 18th-century visitors were teleported to the gardens today they might be surprised to find them not so much the star attractions, as botanical backdrops to striking works of contemporary sculpture by Richard Long, James Turrell and Rachel Whiteread. houghtonhall.com

Yorkshire Sculpture Park

While some sculpture gardens focus on the works of individual artists, this 500-acre institution is an excellent one-stop shop if you're keen to see a wider range. Part of the 18th-century Bretton Hall estate, it's been going since 1977 and cleverly blends contemporary works with older inhabitants of the parkland, such as follies and ice houses. Long-term installations include works by Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Eduardo Paolozzi, David Nash and Andy Goldsworthy, while a programme of temporary works means there's always something new to see; this year heralds the first UK sculpture exhibition by American artist Robert Indiana. ysp.org.uk

Ashall Manor

The childhood home of the Mitford sisters, this Jacobean manor house sits among romantically wild-edged gardens in Oxfordshire's Windrush Valley. Home to distinct woodland, meadow and kitchen garden areas, and peppered with artworks, the Julian and Isabel Bannerman-designed gardens are worth a visit on the garden's occasional open days. Every other year, Ashall also hosts an On Form ticketed outdoor exhibition featuring hundreds of sculptures (onformsculpture.co.uk). Highlights this year (12th June–10th July) will include Tania Mosse's powerful natural forms, Joshua Locksmith's leaf carvings and William Peers' fluid marble pieces. ashallmanor.com

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Little Sparta

One of the more unexpected attractions of Scotland's central belt is this whimsical garden, hewn out of South Lanarkshire's Pentland Hills from the 1960s onwards by the late artist, poet and 'avant-gardener' Ian Hamilton Finlay and his wife, Sue. The name is a retort to Edinburgh's nickname as the Athens of the North and there's a cerebral, philosophical foundation to the five-acre site. Poetry, sculpture and water are tightly choreographed through the landscape and, with even the grass shaped into sculptural forms, every visit is a sensory treasure hunt. Playful eye-lines, scented plantings and the sounds of wind and water are put to great use. littlesparta.org.uk

Andrew Lawson, Little Sparta; New Art Centre; Broomhill Estate Sculpture Garden

New Art Centre

Beginning life as a London gallery, the New Art Centre moved to Roche Court in Wiltshire in 1994. While the site includes some indoor art spaces, outdoor sculpture is the major focus. Throughout the gardens and woodland of the house, originally built in 1804, you'll find pieces by Antony Gormley, Edmund de Waal, Gertrude Hermes, Conrad Shawcross and Camilla Low. It's also one of the best places to see works by Barbara Hepworth (beyond the artist's Cornish sculpture garden) since the centre represents her estate. This year's exhibitions include a survey of British Sculpture from 1960–2000 and a display of large works by Anthony Caro. sculpture.uk.com

Broomhill Sculpture Garden

This garden in north Devon is organised across two different areas: in the valley in front of the house are a mix of permanent outdoor sculptures and works for sale, while the lower river meadows accommodate the National Sculpture Prize, each year hosting 150 or so pieces by established and emerging artists. There's often a slightly surreal feel to the surroundings, and to the sculptures in situ. Meander through the verdant grounds and you're as likely to come face-to-face with Zhu Tian's super-sized, upturned teacup as Dorcas Casey's mythical-looking beasts (actually domestic textiles painted with jesmonite). broomhill-estate.com