

Constellation

A 2.1 metre-high bronze sculpture by John Ravera

Made in 1991, and commissioned by Grosvenor Square Properties Developments Ltd.

Located on London Road, to one side of the entrance to an office block called Greenwood House



What type of sculpture is *Constellation*?

The shapes and forms have been freely made and the sculpture as a whole is not intended to represent anything specific.

However, there is the strong suggestion, at the sculpture's centre, of the outline of a human eye, the iris of which is formed by a circular hole in the middle.

But as it is primarily freeform, the sculpture can be classified as abstract.

Is it just random, then?

The sculpture might at first glance appear to be just a random assemblage of shapes, but if you look a little longer, it's possible to tune into the artist's careful decision-making processes.

Constellation has a definite front, which faces the path to the offices. This side is the most detailed, with sweeping, arching shapes that point in multiple directions.

As you start to walk around the sculpture, you notice that it looks markedly different from each angle. From the back, it looks much simpler and more bulky, and – especially as it has holes in the middle – it starts to resemble a sculpture by Henry Moore or Barbara Hepworth, perhaps. From the side that faces the road, it's at its most dynamic, with the ends of the main curved elements jutting out towards you.

From wherever you view it, the sculpture is balanced in composition (meaning that the elements work together to achieve harmony). This is not as easy to achieve as it sounds!

Furthermore, Ravera has given the sculpture a stem that raises it up and makes it seem to seek our attention. The narrow stem also gives the circular shapes a freedom from the ground and a kind of 'lightness' that is surprising in a heavy, metal object.

The artist has added still more interest by varying the texture and colour. Some surfaces are rough, others are smooth, and you can see circular machine-made marks in places. There are also patches of brown and grey patination – an effect that results when certain chemicals are applied, followed by a hot flame.

Are there any clues in the title?

The main meaning of constellation is a group of stars that forms a recognisable pattern, the best known of these being the signs of the zodiac. The sculpture does not seem to resemble any of the better-known constellations, however.

A second definition of the word – a group or cluster of related things, such as a constellation of medical symptoms – may be more helpful. Given this information, we can start to see the sculpture as a cluster of similar, layered and interleaving shapes.

How would it have been made?

Ravera would have first created the sculpture in clay (on a wood or metal framework), and he seems to have cut and shaped the clay in great slabs.

The sculpture would then have been cast in bronze using the 'lost wax' process, a technology that dates back 6000 years. First of all, a mould is taken of the sculpture, which is then created in wax. The wax replica is then surrounded by a liquid ceramic and clay material that sets hard to form another mould. This is put in a kiln, the wax melts away and vapourises, and molten bronze is poured in to fill the space where the wax originally was. Finally, the ceramic/clay form is broken to release the sculpture, which is then carefully finished and polished.

Information about the artist

John Ravera (1941-2006) trained at Camberwell School of Art in London and worked mainly in clay or bronze. He was a Past President of the Royal Society of British Sculptors and his public monuments can be seen throughout London and the South East, and in Hong Kong and Tokyo.

Since Ravera tended to make representational works for public settings, and abstract works for other situations, it seems that he was given unusual freedom when he was commissioned to make *Constellation*. It's interesting to compare the sweeping shapes of *Constellation* to those in *Man of our Time*, which Ravera made twelve years later.