

Rubus Five

A 6 metre-high sandstone, limestone and stainless steel sculpture by Simon Hitchens. The stone elements were carved, shaped and polished by hand.

Made in 2001

Situated in front of the Rubus Court building on London Road, RG12 2UP



There are two **buzz-words** in sculpture: the first is **'formal'** and the second is **'site-specific'**.

What does 'formal' mean?

When the word 'formal' is applied to a sculpture, it means that its shape, structure and materials are of over-riding importance. As a consequence of this, a 'formal' sculpture is usually not intended to resemble anything. Instead, a 'formal' sculpture will have a kind of internal logic, and the qualities of the chosen materials, such as hardness, texture and colour will be exploited to the fullest extent.

What does 'site-specific' mean?

The term site-specific is used when the artist has considered the surroundings that a sculpture will have to a very marked degree. They become a component part of the work — and a site-specific sculpture would not really make sense if it was relocated elsewhere.

We interviewed Simon Hitchens, the sculptor who created *Rubus Five*, about how he tackled the commission. His whole approach could be described as formal, and site-specific. Here's how the conversation went:

What was your starting point, Simon?

The design of this sculpture is a union between the front facade of Rubus Court and the work I was making in my studio at the time. I was making sculptures which used capsule/cylinder-like forms, as a kind of lexicon [or vocabulary] for me to explore my creative ideas. It struck me, when looking at the front of Rubus Court (which is where the majority of traffic, both pedestrian and vehicular, would see the sculpture), that the two large green columns supporting the gabled roof were very similar in presence to my sculptures.

So can you tell us something about how you decided on the shapes and arrangement of the components of your sculpture?

I decided to make five cylinders, each with the same diameter as the building's columns, and vary the height of the cylinders so that a line drawn between the top of them made a shallow 'V', mirroring the apex of the roof gable.

How did you choose the materials that you used?

I chose to use a warm-coloured sandstone for the two outer cylinders of the sculpture, to echo the warm colour of the brick of the building. I chose a darker limestone for the middle height cylinders to echo the colour of the darker brick band of the building. The mirror polished stainless steel cylinder was complementing the reflectivity of the glass work.

Could it be shown anywhere else?

In short it is a very 'site-specific' sculpture, designed and built exclusively for Rubus Court.

Tantalisingly, the artist leaves us to speculate about what this grouping of tall cylindrical forms might mean. One clue might be found in the differences between the five forms. The two outer cylinders give the impression of being rooted deep in the ground because their sides are absolutely straight. The two cylinders inside these outer ones taper slightly inwards at the base, to suggest that they are only just resting on the ground. Finally, the central, shorter, metal cylinder is much more rounded at the base, and this gives the very strange illusion that it is rising up. It also looks rather pod-like and this adds to a sense of some kind of emergence, or birthing.

But there will be different meanings for different viewers, and everyone is free to decide for themselves.

Information about the artist

Simon Hitchens was born in 1967 and predominantly worked in stone until 2000 when he started to use other materials, including glass and resin. He has exhibited his work throughout the world and recent commissions include works at Boscombe Pier entrance, Bournemouth (2008), for the Ability Group, Isle of Dogs, London (2007), and at Workington, Cumbria (2006).