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## Artist Profile - Giles Penny Sculptor & Artist

When my satnav developed a fault, I covered the flickering screen with a post card which I stuck on with a bit of BluTack. The post card is of a sculpture, Man on a Bench, in Bruton. The sculptor is Giles Penny. Being newish to the area I had no knowledge of sculpture or Sculptor, but I liked the tranquil image of the Little Human very much - I found it calming in traffic jams.

Four years later the postcard, now rather faded, remains stuck to the dashboard and I've just spent a couple of hours talking to the creator of the sculpture.



Giles in his studio



Man on a Bench

When I was invited by Giles to visit his studio, my first impression was how orderly and how calm it felt in the midst of so much intensive creative activity. While I wandered about trying to take it all in, we talked about early influences and what drives him. *"We are all human,"* says Giles, and it is the everyday activities which are his inspiration.

He vividly remembers a day at school when his class teacher asked *"who enjoys cutting out?"* Every single little girl's hand shot up - but Giles was the only boy.

Cutting out has continued to come in useful, as he prepares the paper models and then the metals for his sculpture. Giles left school at 16, attended the Heatherley School of Fine Art in Chelsea for a one year foundation course and went on to Bournemouth and Poole College of Art to do another one year foundation course, then attending Newport College of Art from 1980-83.



*"After leaving art school, I became interested in portrait painting and was commissioned, among others, by Richard Branson and Anita Roddick. While painting Anita's portrait, she asked me if I could make some sculpture for her garden in Sussex. I had only dabbled at sculpture at college, but I said yes, so after discussing her whimsical ideas I got a book out of the library about how to make sculpture and after a couple of years had filled her garden with sculpture. Anita later asked me if I would like to make sculpture for the Body Shop HQ. I was employed as resident artist for two years and made a total of 23 life like life-size figures. Having set up my first studio I never looked back and after finishing my time at The Body Shop I set up another larger studio and cracked on making sculpture of my own subjects and ideas."*

In 1994 he was elected a member of the Royal Society of Sculptors.

Inspiration continued to come from the everyday. *Man at a Gallery* resulted from an intriguing image on the internet offering the challenge of how this reflects the feeling or thought within the action - how to read the person from behind, not just from the face, as Giles' work rarely shows much facial emotion. Therefore the emotion or feeling of a piece has to be able to be read through the body language, a passive moment leads to a reaction, the essence of the work being paired back as much as possible without losing anything.

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Giles continues *“I was asked to take part in ‘The Shape of the Century’ exhibition which started out in the grounds of Salisbury Cathedral, then went to Canary Wharf, the two sculptures I exhibited were ‘Man with Arms Open’ and Two Men on a Bench’, both of which were bought by Canary Wharf as part of their permanent collection.”*



*Man with Arms Open*



*Man in a Gallery III*



*Man with Head in the Clouds*



*Two Men on a Bench*

*“It is a coincidence that Worthing Museum and Art Gallery recently asked me if I would like to hold another One Man exhibition. When I had my first exhibition there in 1996 I was interviewed on TV and asked “If being more recognised would lead to complacency?” my answer was, “ask me that when I am 65.” “It is quite a coincidence that 30 years later and nearly 65, I can say that there is no room for complacency as there are still so many ideas and work to get done.”*

*“In summary, making a sculpture requires correcting, honing and refining. Ephemeral. Mind, body and spirit and material.”*

**Eleanor Milton**

[www.gilespenny.co.uk](http://www.gilespenny.co.uk)