

Meet Louis

Carving his way to success.

Louis was at Mary Hare for seven years and left in 2007. During 6th Form he studied A Levels in Art and Design, Product Design and Photography. After leaving Mary Hare, he studied a Foundation Diploma in Art and Design at Central Saint Martins University of the Arts, London, followed by three years at The City and Guilds of London Art School studying Historical Stone Carving.



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Why stonemasonry?

My love of art was influenced and encouraged by my teacher Ms McKenna at Mary Hare. Without her, I don't think I would have had such a keen interest in art! After school, I went on to do a Foundation Diploma at Central St. Martins Art School, followed by a three year City & Guilds Diploma in Historic Architectural Stone Carving.

What influence did your time at school have on your career choice?

I remember when the visiting sculptor Simon Cooley from Wales came to the school and I was fascinated with the work he produced - how it was sculptured and the process that went with it. I still use some of the techniques that he showed us all those years ago. Again, another inspiration that I must thank Ms McKenna for.

Mary Hare gave me the early skills and confidence to show the hearing world that although I am deaf, I can still succeed in life. My deafness has never been a barrier and I can honestly say that there is every possibility to do whatever it is you want to do in life, and no one can tell you any different. I hope that the future students of either of the school really embrace their skills as I know Mary Hare will support them and push them as much as they can to achieve their goals.

Where do you get your inspiration from?

I take my inspiration from the world around me but more specifically I love to visit art galleries and museums.

I often visit the V&A in London where I love to visit the replica 'David' by Michelangelo. 'David' is one of my favourite sculptures.

Do you produce mainly commissioned work and if so, where do these come from? UK? International?

I work on mainly commissioned pieces. I meet with the customer with an interpreter and take a brief from them. I then give them some of my ideas and between us we come up with a final design. I have done work for people all over the UK.

I also do work for companies. I was contacted by a company to carve memorial stones at a place called Willow Row Barrow (www.sacredstones.co.uk).

This was a beautiful project where I was approached to carve individual and unique pieces for members of the public who are laid to rest in a more natural way. Their ashes are placed in a full stone-built place of worship and I am the appointed stone carver for all of the work there.

What is your favourite piece you have worked on and why?

I love everything I work on! I don't have a lot of time to work on my own projects but have been working towards an exhibition which was due to take place in November at the Gallery Different in Fitzrovia, London. Due to Covid the exhibition is now no longer a live event but it was shown online,

(www.gallerydifferent.co.uk/exhibitions/second-annual-stonemasonry-exhibition)

This is the second annual exhibition of stonemasonry in conjunction with The Worshipful Company of Masons.

The exhibition is for stone work and sculpting, it's showcasing work that has been produced during lockdown. I had to apply and was successful in getting chosen to exhibit - they were very keen to have my work on show!

Any work sold will have a percentage going towards a charity for art funding

and supports work for stone masons. I have exhibited in a few smaller exhibitions, this one however is big, it's a gateway to meeting other artists. It's a very exciting time.

What is one of your proudest moments?

My proudest moments? Well it has to be the commissioning for Windsor Castle. This was a programme set up to replace some of the Victorian grotesques whilst retaining the original medieval conception.

When I was approached for that I was very pleased that I had been chosen to represent a piece that will remain within the grounds until long after I am gone and for the world to see whenever people go and visit.

We were all invited to create our own designs and the brief was to produce something a bit frightening! My design was of a cobra. I was invited to St. George's Chapel for a grand ceremony on the reveal.



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Tell us about one of the best parts of your job.

The best part is watching the delight on a customer's face when I finish a headstone for them. Even if it's a refurbishment of an old headstone it's pleasing to see the reaction when it's completed. There are some emotions attached in gratitude and sometimes that's worth more than the payment at the end of the job. I do go out of my way to help with intricate detailing and sometimes this can cost me time and money but I do a job I love and that is more than a reward on most occasions.

What has your journey so far been like?

I cannot say it has been an easy journey. I have struggled for recognition and in the early stages of my business I fought tirelessly - communication being the biggest problem. I had a lot of support from friends and family sharing my work on social media and I guess it has grown strongly ever since. I never gave up though. I kept on pushing and I am pleased to say that my new projects have kept me so busy that I now have a six-month waiting list from customers all over the world!

What do you love about being a Stonemason?

I love the carving of the stone and the fact that there is just me and the stone. I find it very meditative. There is something magical about seeing words and letters literally 'carved in stone.'

To find out more about Louis and his work, please visit the links below:

www.francisstonedesign.co.uk
www.facebook.com/francisstonedesign/
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