

Barry Flanagan, British Sculptor of Sly Works, Dies at 68

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Barry Flanagan, a British sculptor who abandoned the idiosyncratic arrangements of common materials that characterized Postminimal sculpture to make sly if relatively traditional bronzes of exuberant, loose-limbed hares, died on Aug. 31 in Ibiza, Spain. He was 68 and had homes and studios in Ibiza and Dublin.



The European Fine Art Foundation
Sculptures by Barry Flanagan at the European Fine Art Fair.

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The cause was a motor neuron disease, said the Paul Kasmin Gallery, his New York representative.

Mr. Flanagan's apostasy was in many ways the defining characteristic of his career. It perplexed and dismayed his admirers, turning many of them into detractors. But the hares also made him popular and wealthy, with work represented in scores of museums, several urban plazas and a few corporate lobbies. In addition, these works injected an unusual formal whimsy and subversive irreverence into the often staid convention of bronze figurative sculpture.

Mr. Flanagan did not consider his early work experimental and saw no reversal in his development, a word he seemed to find suspect. In an often quoted statement published in *Studio International* in 1967 he wrote: "One merely causes things to reveal themselves to the sculptural awareness. It is the awareness that develops, not the agents of the sculptural phenomena."

He put it more directly in a 2006 interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, director of the Serpentine Gallery in London: "I enjoy the third dimension and I appreciate material in time and space. I find it exciting to the eyes."

Mr. Flanagan was born in 1941 in Prestatyn, in North Wales near Liverpool, where his father worked for [Warner Brothers](#). He studied architecture and then sculpture at Birmingham College of Art in 1957 and 1958, and attended St. Martin's School of Art in London from 1964 to 1966.

His early works included a pile of sand, stacks of folded burlap and dozens of short lengths of thick rope spread on the floor. He was then perhaps best known for sewn burlap shapes filled with sand, which he called "an elegant solution to the problem of

making a three-dimensional form.”

His efforts paralleled and sometimes preceded innovations of Americans like Robert Smithson, Carl Andre, Eva Hesse and Richard Tuttle. His pieces were variously classified as Process Art, Arte Povera or Anti-Form.

He was represented in groundbreaking exhibitions including “When Attitude Becomes Form” at the Kunsthalle Bern in Bern, Switzerland, in 1969. His first solo show was at the Rowan Gallery in London in 1966; his first in New York was at the Fischbach Gallery. He represented Britain in the 1982 [Venice Biennale](#).

Mr. Flanagan began sculpturing hares in 1978 or '79, working from a dead one bought from a butcher, partly because there wasn't much else to buy that day and partly because of a vivid memory he had of watching a hare leap across a field in Sussex. He capitalized on the animal's elastic, elongated form, implicit humor, libidinousness and sometimes demonic energy. He showed it stretched horizontally at a full bound, or raised on its hind legs like a human, leaping around and sometimes dancing or boxing with other hares.

Part of the sense of movement came from Mr. Flanagan's emphatic modeling, which seemed indebted to [Matisse's](#), but was freer; the animal sometimes resembled a looping, abstract line, achieving the modernist ideal called “drawing in space.” His bronze pedestals often introduced heavier forms and meanings: pyramids, anvils, a helmet, a computer and the Empire State Building. He also presented a hare in the pose of “The Thinker” by Rodin, his favorite artist.

But there was more to Mr. Flanagan than hares; his bronze menagerie included elephants, cougars and unusually graceful horses. Beyond bronze, he roamed through the history of sculpture and its materials, carving in stone, working in ceramics, moving between abstraction and figuration and occasionally even using found objects. He was also a fluid draftsman, a frequent etcher and a sometime photographer. Little of his work beside the bronzes has been exhibited in the United States.

He is survived by his companion, Jessica Sturgess; two daughters from a marriage to Sue Lewis, Flan Flanagan of London and Tara Flanagan of Begur, Spain; a son and a daughter with Renate Widmann, Alfred Widmann and Annabelle Widmann, both of Dublin and Ibiza; a brother, John; and two grandsons.

Profoundly peripatetic, Mr. Flanagan often maintained apartments in several cities at once, including Amsterdam, Paris, London, New York (at the Chelsea Hotel) and Barcelona and periodically traveled around Europe in a Rolls-Royce pulling an Airstream trailer.

When he turned to bronze, he became, as he put it, “a tradesman,” as if his main task were to perfect a valued craft and earn his livelihood. But he more accurately characterized himself as “an English-speaking, itinerant European sculptor.”