

# Own It, Keep It, Love It

A member of the Royal British Society of Sculptors, Leeds artist Gareth Griffiths' work can be found in prestigious galleries, Michael O'Hare's The Man Behind The Curtain and Manchester United's dressing room. Now he wants it to appear in your house

Picture this... You've just finished decorating your living room. You've replaced the carpets, painted the walls and treated yourself to some gorgeous wallpaper, now it's time to add the finishing touches: knick knacks, soft furnishings and art. What do you go for? A painting above the fireplace? Photography on the walls? Maybe it's time to think outside the box. Maybe it's time to buy a sculpture.

'When a painter paints a landscape, it's almost like a photograph with their artistic vision,' explains Griffiths, a Leeds sculptor who's on a mission to get sculpture into more homes. 'But with sculpture you can walk around the object and every way that you look at it it's different. It changes from morning to afternoon because of the way light hits it, and it can appear different in the summer than in the winter. The pieces I do are stainless steel polished to a mirror finish, so the landscape they reflect changes throughout the day.'

At just 36 years old, Gareth Griffiths is one of the most exciting new artistic talents in this country. Originally from North Wales, he came to Leeds to study in 1999 and has never looked back. 'It offers the best of both worlds for me,' he explains, 'I come from the hills in the middle of nowhere in Wales so living in a city was completely new to me, but it only takes you 10 minutes in a car and you're back in the middle of the countryside again.' But while Gareth seems settled, his artwork is clearly going places. His work has been exhibited across Europe, recognised by the Royal British Society of Sculptors, and he was commissioned to design and create a tile mosaic of Manchester United's club crest for their training ground

dressing room (a blessing in disguise for Gareth, an Everton fan). His work has been heralded but although it is admired, like most sculpture, it's rarely bought by the public.

'Trying to make a living creating art is one of the hardest things,' Gareth laments, 'and it's particularly difficult for people to imagine a sculpture on a mantelpiece or in a house. People can visualise a painting on their wall as they might have a space above a fireplace to fill, but they rarely look at an empty space in the corner of a room and think, "Let's buy a sculpture to go in the corner", they're more likely to put a chair there instead.'

Gareth was originally a painter but switched mediums and completed a degree in fine art sculpture at Bretton Hall College. He then completed a Masters in design to look at the relationship between aesthetic and functional objects. 'If you buy a designer chair to put in your living room but don't allow anyone to sit in it because it was so expensive, then it loses its function. Does that mean it becomes a piece of artwork or sculpture?' Gareth muses. 'Those crossovers really interest me.'

So it's not surprising that Gareth mixes up different art forms in his own work. Architecture, product design, painting and sculpture all collide in Gareth's creations. His latest works are influenced by Googie architecture; a series of bright, bold and abstract buildings used for bowling alleys, coffee shops and leisure facilities in Los Angeles in the Sixties.

'I think the architects were trying to create a joyful fun-ness with their buildings,' he suggests,





**‘I want my works to be aesthetically pleasing. They’re bright and attractive and I’d like people to look at them and smile’**

‘and that’s exactly how I want people to imagine my work. I want my works to be aesthetically pleasing. They’re bright and attractive and I’d like people to look at them and smile. Sometimes you have to have a degree in art history to understand a work, but I want people to be able to imagine my sculptures in their own home.’

A bit of a coup for the young artist, Gareth’s works are now on display at Michael O’Hare’s The Man Behind The Curtain in Leeds, which was recently awarded its first Michelin star. ‘My wife and I went to a restaurant called Osteria Francescana in Italy,’ Gareth explains, ‘It’s one of the best restaurants in the world and the place is like an art gallery with contemporary artwork all over the place. I’d been keen to promote my artwork away from galleries so when I got back I contacted Michael O’Hare. He’d just come back from Bilbao in Spain and was inspired by the public artworks there, so it was perfect timing.’

It was a partnership that clearly worked, and enamored with Gareth’s artistic style, Michael let him include as many pieces as he liked in his restaurant. ‘He really liked the way that they fitted in with his style of cooking,’ Gareth says, ‘He’s already got some graffiti on one of the walls that was done by a friend of his, and he felt that the contrast between the sculpture and the graffiti would work really well.’

It clearly makes an impact, but importantly, all of Gareth’s pieces in the restaurant are available to buy, as he continues his campaign to encourage people to buy British sculpture. ‘I want my sculptures to go to a nice home,’ he reiterates. ‘I want someone to enjoy them as much as I’ve enjoyed making them.’ It makes a rather unique memento.

**For more information about Gareth and his work visit [www.garethgriffithsartist.co.uk](http://www.garethgriffithsartist.co.uk)**