

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

theguardian

High heels and pink pitchforks adorn Chatsworth house lawns
Giant objects in the gardens of one of Britain's grandest houses form part of an exhibition by artist Michael Craig-Martin

Mark Brown



Michael Craig-Martin's giant high-heel at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire. Photograph: Christopher Thomond for The Guardian./Christopher Thomond

A giant high-heeled shoe has been planted in the gardens of one of Britain's grandest houses, near the out-sized purple, orange and blue umbrellas.

The objects at Chatsworth house are the work of artist Michael Craig-Martin who on Wednesday recalled first being asked to stage an exhibition at the stately home. "I thought that would be nice, I'll just have a few sculptures. In the end what's happened is it's become one of the most important projects of my career."

There are three strands to Craig-Martin at Chatsworth, the Derbyshire home of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. In the gardens he has installed 12 giant sculptures of commonplace objects, all based on drawings – so they appear oddly two-dimensional. They include a pink pitchfork, blue scissors, a red wheelbarrow and the shoe.

He has also gone through the house's vast collection of old master drawings to curate a small display of head portraits.

And in the house he has clad all of the traditional marble and mosaic sculpture plinths in magenta. The changes are most noticeable in the house's sculpture gallery where 20 stunning 19th century sculptures, including *Sleeping Endymion* by Canova, now have bright magenta bases. "You can see how it clarifies the sculptures," Craig-Martin said. "You can see them so much more easily than normal."

Craig-Martin, a former teacher at Goldsmith's, in London, who is often labelled as their godfather of the YBAs, has also been to work on a sculpture in the house by one of his former pupils, Damien Hirst. The work Exquisite Pain, which now also has a magenta plinth.

Craig-Martin said it had been a daunting project. "It is a challenging house. It is not easy to improve on it. It takes a bit of arrogance to change anything ... I felt very, very nervous."

He said the duke had said "what would you do without any constraint", but Craig-Martin had not expected him to say yes to making all the plinths magenta. The duke admitted he would miss them when they went.

Chatsworth and the Devonshires have a tradition of displaying contemporary art and the Craig-Martin exhibition follows a show of works by Anthony Caro last year. Both the duke and duchess's parents commissioned contemporary artists and both have memories of works being extremely badly received by friends of their parents, they said.

"A great friend of my mother would not sit opposite a Francis Bacon portrait in the dining room," said the duchess. "She always sat so she didn't have to look at it she thought it was so hideous."

The duke said their experiences taught them it did not matter what other people thought, adding that if it got people talking that was a good thing.

In the small drawings room, 12 Old Master head portraits are on display including one of a man who looks like an alarmed Stephen Frears but is in fact Leo X.

Craig-Martin said that as he looked through the collection, regarded as one of the finest in the world, he kept being struck by the "stunning" portraits. When he found out there were only 12 head portraits in a collection that runs in to the thousands he realised he had found his "show".

Also unveiled on Wednesday was an installation in Chatsworth's north sketch gallery by the artist Jacob van der Beugel. He has installed 659 textured and handmade panels which represent DNA – a project that took four years and became, he said, something of an obsession.

The duke called it the most important addition to the house since 1832 and it will be part of the permanent collection.

Craig-Martin's interventions will be on display from Sunday 16 March until 29 June. The artist admitted it had become a much bigger project than he anticipated but one he was proud of. "It touches on a lot of things I do, I make paintings and sculptures, I do installations, and I have curated drawings. It has allowed me to play with different aspects of the repertoire of things I do in an extraordinary place."