

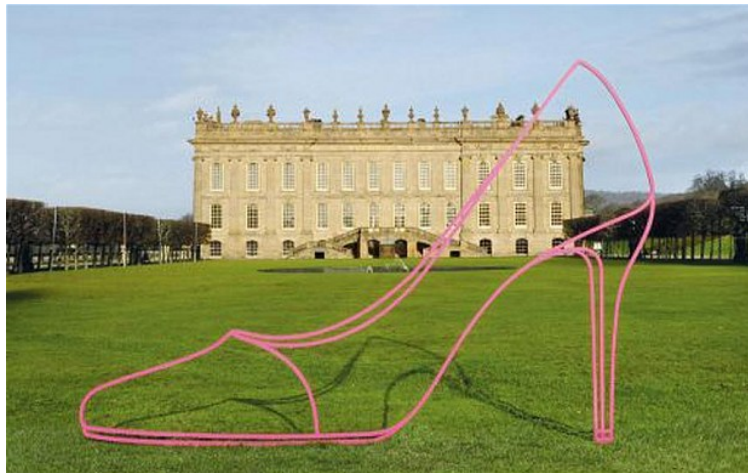
## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

# The Telegraph

### Michael Craig-Martin, Chatsworth House, review

*Michael Craig-Martin's Pop sculptures for the grand Chatsworth House grounds may be playful – but they also make a deeper point, says Alastair Smart*

Alastair Smart



*Well-heeled: One of 12 sculptures installed by Michael Craig-Martin in the Chatsworth House gardens*

★★★★★

It can seem unsatisfactory, crude even, to paraphrase the world's great thinkers, so let's quote Lord Grantham in full. "I'm a custodian, my dear, not an owner," he once expounded to Lady Mary – aware of his responsibilities as a steward of Downton Abbey's past, through whatever economic challenges in the present.

His Lordship was speaking in (a fictional) 1912, but he raised an issue still confronting stately home owners today: how to secure for posterity their familial piece of heritage, in the face of death duties, agricultural decline and other factors that have left them cash-strapped over the last century.

The Duke of Devonshire's strategy at Chatsworth House has been as impressive as anyone's. He has turned its 100-acre gardens – landscaped by Capability Brown in the 1760s – into a haven of contemporary sculpture. Works by the likes of Allen Jones and Richard Long are on long-term display, while each summer a different artist is given the freedom of his Derbyshire greensward for temporary exhibition.

Following Anthony Caro and William Turnbull, in 2014 it's Michael Craig-Martin, who has installed 12 steel sculptures. Each is painted in a bright Pop Art hue and each dotted about the

grounds, with a map to guide you to them. The Pop influence can also be felt in the mundane objects Craig-Martin has chosen to sculpt: including outsized takes on a light-bulb, high-heeled shoe and pair of scissors.

Craig-Martin, 71, is best known nowadays for having been the Goldsmiths College tutor who fostered the Conceptual excesses of Damien Hirst and the YBAs. Yet, his own artistic career is long and distinguished, and marked by challenging conventional ways of seeing. His most famous work, 1973's installation *An Oak Tree*, featured a glass of water that, despite appearances, actually was an oak tree. (How so? Because the artist said so.)

It seems rather apt, then, that Craig-Martin's new works should be set amidst the very real oak trees of Chatsworth. His most eye-catching piece is the huge pink shoe, found between the South Lawn and Canal Pond. It's the wrong size, material and milieu for us to mistake it for real footwear - and, like many of the 12 works, it has only been sculpted in outline frame rather than *in toto*.

All of which is to say, the object's functional purpose is zero, if the Duchess of Devonshire ever fancied wearing it to dinner. Yet, still something cognitive in our brains recognises it instantly as a shoe. For the artist, footwear - like lightbulbs and scissors - "are the things that make up our world", and however "ubiquitous and low we rank them on the horizon of importance", they are so rich in association and memories they're ripe for artistic treatment.

For more traditional visitors, who prefer a clear connection between sculptures and the context they're displayed in, Craig-Martin has also installed two pitchforks and a wheelbarrow. And these, perhaps, are his most successful works, the visitor half-expecting one of the Duke's gardeners to set to work with them at any moment.

Outdoor sculpture is much less established in Britain than elsewhere. In part, it's because of taste: innate conservatism means a fondness for Classically inspired statuary or (most radically) garden gnomes. Yet, it's also down to practicality: the indifferent weather hardly lends itself to a thriving culture of outdoor art.

That said, on the crisp spring day I visited, Chatsworth was bathed in sunlight under a blue sky, and there was joy to be had in throwing the map away, wondering the gardens at leisure and waiting for the Craigs simply to find you.

Much of the Duke's success in transforming his home into a destination for art pilgrims is due to the playful face-off between old and new. Chatsworth House dates back to 1687 and his family have been avidly collecting sculpture for centuries - neoclassical pieces, in large part, which are on display throughout the home. (Among the finest is *Veiled Vestal* by Raffaello Monti, in which it's hard to tell if the female's face-covering is real or a continuation of the sculptor's marble.)

In addition to his work outdoors, Craig-Martin has encased the plinths of many of these sculptures in magenta boxes. The effect is to shake off our austere reverence and revisit the days when Greco-Roman statues were alive with painted colour.

Craig-Martin gave up teaching in 2000 to concentrate on his own work, and he has also just opened a prints show at Alan Cristea gallery in Mayfair (to May 2). Its key work, *Objects of our Time*, is a screenprint series, again in Pop Art hues and again depicting everyday objects: from

credit cards and memory sticks to wheelee suitcases. The title is instructive. These are objects of *our* time, but probably not of *all* time. We shouldn't take them for granted as we do, the artist moots, because sooner or later they'll become defunct and relics.

Craig-Martin's work may lack the emotional investment many of us want from our art, but – like the high heel on Chatsworth's lawn – it sure leaves an impression on the mind.

*'Michael Craig-Martin at Chatsworth', to Jun 29; chatsworth.org; 01246 565 300*