



Kate Montagne-MacDonald Progress report for the Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation

Thanks to generous funding from QEST and the Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation I have been able to spend the last year and a half training with plaster and stucco artist Geoffrey Preston. The work has been varied and extremely enjoyable. The first few months of my apprenticeship were spent working on the Great Drawing Room ceiling at Great Fulford, the largest and most spectacular project I have yet been part of, which subsequently won the 2013 Plaisterers' Trophy and was commended in the 2013 Georgian Group Awards. The lively design and deep relief of this ceiling made it a fantastic opportunity to develop my modelling in clay, the central skill of my apprenticeship. I also practised my modelling on a pair of densely decorated fruit and flower drops, which were completed last March for a house in Surrey.



In addition to modelling, there are many supplementary skills which my apprenticeship has helped to bed down. I can now confidently mould and cast even awkward and difficult forms. Parts of the Great Fulford job in particular required careful mathematical setting out and pushed my carpentry skills to a new level and I have also learnt a lot from helping to design and set up several exhibitions, at Lawrence House in Launceston and the Royal Academy.



Work like this has been wonderful but I have felt the benefit of my funding most in the spaces between jobs, when my funding allowed me to continue working and to focus on some of the aspects of my apprenticeship that, whilst important, will always be overlooked during the rush of a big job. Most significantly I was able to begin learning how to work in stucco, a specialist technique of which Geoffrey Preston is one of very few UK practitioners. Because stucco hardens within a few hours, it calls for very rapid and precise modelling and therefore requires a great deal of practice to master. Working up from a drawing and then a clay model, I made my first stucco piece last summer and the experience will be invaluable in the event of a new stucco commission. I have also been developing my drawing skills, practising both accurate geometric drawing and sketching from life. More broadly, I have had the chance to expand my

knowledge of the history of architecture, sculpture and interior design, both through reading and through a number of field trips, to Wilton House and Mompesson House in Salisbury, and to London, where I was able to spend time exploring museums and other sites featuring historic plasterwork.

In the last few months I have helped Geoffrey Preston move to new premises just outside Exeter where we are beginning work on an exciting new ceiling for a house in Henley upon Thames, as well as preparing for an upcoming exhibition at the Harley Gallery near Welbeck Abbey.

*Report submitted by Kate Montagne-MacDonald,
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