

GARDEN INSPIRATION, GARDENS

## How To Commission Art For Your Garden, With David Williams-Ellis

 SHARE  TWEET  PIN  EMAIL

As his spectacular new sculpture ‘The Ram’ in unveiled at Royal Ascot, the celebrated figurative sculptor David Williams-Ellis shares his expert advice for commissioning art for your garden. By Jessica Jonzen

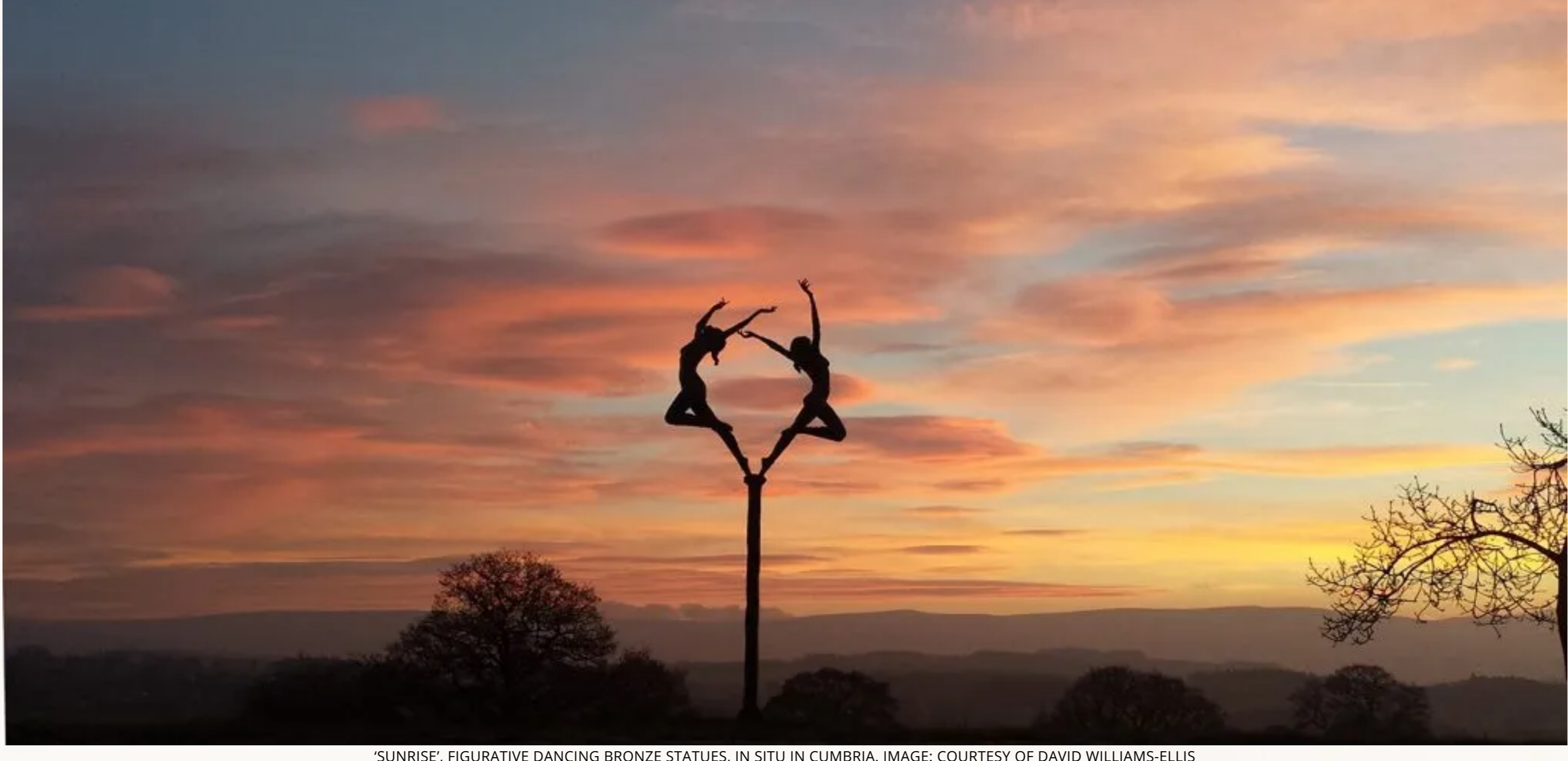


SCULPTOR DAVID WILLIAMS-ELLIS WITH HIS LATEST PIECE, ‘THE RAM’. MADE FROM TWO TONNES OF CLAY AND A FURTHER TONNE OF STEEL, IT IS HIS LARGEST PIECE TO DATE IS UNVEILED TO THE PUBLIC FOR THE FIRST TIME THIS WEEK AT ROYAL ASCOT. IMAGE: MARK C. O’FLAHERTY

There is nothing quite like art to create a visceral connection between a home and its occupants. Similarly, art in a garden can express the personality, tastes, values and life of its owner in a way that plants simply cannot.

If you have a milestone birthday, anniversary or important occasion on the horizon, marking it with a specially commissioned piece of sculpture can have a transformative effect. “A commissioned sculpture can bring life to a home, garden or landscape,” says figurative sculptor David Williams-Ellis.

“The excitement I get from being a sculptor is the opportunity to give people that visceral feeling of the human figure within its environment – whether it’s still and serene, or seemingly moving with masses of energy,” David says. “With a commissioned piece this is intensified, as the sculpture not only brings the space to life, but it brings to life the vision the client might have had for that space in the first place.”



‘SUNRISE’, FIGURATIVE DANCING BRONZE STATUES, IN SITU IN CUMBRIA. IMAGE: COURTESY OF DAVID WILLIAMS-ELLIS

David’s figurative sculptures, always modelled from real life and created in his studio at his Oxfordshire home, are held in private collections around the world as well as commanding attention in public spaces. His powerful larger-than-life *D-Day Sculpture* to commemorate the thousands of lives lost during the Normandy campaign was unveiled in 2019 by Prime Minister Theresa May and President Emmanuel Macron in the town of Ver-sur-Mer.

David’s most recent large-scale commission, *The Ram*, made using more than two tonnes of clay and another tonne of steel, is David’s largest sculpture to date. Cast in bronze as an edition of nine, *The Ram* will be unveiled to the public for the first time at Royal Ascot, following which it will be on show at the Grange Opera in Hampshire.

Away from these vast commissions, however, David works on smaller pieces for private homes. Here, he shares his advice for commissioning sculpture.

DAVID WILLIAMS-ELLIS IN HIS OXFORDSHIRE STUDIO. IMAGE: ALUN CALLENDER PHOTOGRAPHY

*What should people consider before approaching an artist?*

The priority is that they have chosen someone whose work they seriously enjoy. On a practical level probably the most important thing to consider is that the sculpting process takes time, and that a significant part of this is the conception of an idea that both the client and artist believe will really work in the space in which it is intended to reside. This can either be instantaneous or can take several months.

*How does the commissioning process work?*

A client may see something in a magazine, on social media or the internet, or even in a friend’s garden. They may then approach me with a rough idea based either on a specific location or subject matter. I will then come up with drawings that in turn becomes a physical small sculpture/maquette, which finally then evolves into a full-scale sculpture.

*Do clients usually commission a piece to mark a milestone birthday or occasion?*

Many of my smaller pieces, such as my *Cirrus* sculptures, are given as presents. With larger pieces, clients usually approach me with a specific location or idea in mind. The idea for my recent commission, *The Reader*, for example, was based on the small *Cirrus* sculptures which I made for an exhibition nearly eight years ago. For the monumental sculptures, it is often for an event, either an anniversary as in Normandy, or a major construction, such as the building of a house or redesigning of a garden. This was the case with *The Ram*. However, having said all of this, people can often come out of the blue with a very specific idea of a sculpture that they would like for their garden.

(LEFT) ‘THE READER’ IN DEVELOPMENT AT DAVID’S STUDIO, PHOTOGRAPHED BY ALUN CALLENDER. (RIGHT) ‘THE READER’ IN SITU. IMAGE: COURTESY OF DAVID WILLIAMS-ELLIS

*What have been some of your favourite commissions for homes and gardens and why?*

My most recent commission, *The Ram*, stands out as a current favourite. This was different to the work I usually do in the sense that it was more contemporary and, although still figurative, was also far bigger than anything I have made in my studio to date. It required two tonnes of clay on top of another tonne of steel.

Part of the joy of sculpting is the physicality of the work and the creative problem solving, such as finding the right scale for the site. The creative challenges of a life-sized piece can equal the artistic problems of any monumental piece, although the engineering and physical aspects play a far larger role with bigger work.

Another recent piece of mine, *Mercury*, a just over life-sized figure of the classical god, stands at the end of a very large, rectangular pond, which is itself at the end of a beautifully landscaped garden and it focuses the eye away from a large house, through their exquisite garden onto the landscape beyond.

*How do you decide which medium to work in?*

Because of its classic, timeless nature I tend to cast most of my work in bronze. Bronze is extremely robust so will last forever if taken care of, and it can be patinated in a variety of different finishes to suit the environment. I also cast pieces in silver and in glass, however these are usually smaller because of the expense of silver and the fact that glass expands and contracts in the heat, which means that larger pieces may shatter.

*How long might the process take?*

My largest and longest might take three to six months to decide on the composition, six to eight months making a clay, and a further three to six months to cast it, which happens in a process known as the “lost wax process”. This involves taking a silicone mould of the clay sculpture, which is used to cast a wax version. The wax is dipped into liquid silica which is fired to create a heat-resistant mould, into which the molten bronze will be poured. The cast bronze is then patinated (a process using heat and chemical to oxidize the surface of the bronze) and polished before being shipped to its new home. Having said this, a life-sized figure could take as little as six months from start to finish.

‘THE WOOD NYMPH’ BRONZE FIGURATIVE SCULPTURE BY DAVID WILLIAMS-ELLIS. IMAGE: COURTESY OF DAVID WILLIAMS-ELLIS

*How much might a commissioned piece cost?*

There are two ways to pay for a commissioned piece. In order to help keep the cost down, I sometimes will sell the piece as the first of an edition of nine, and in this case, it would normally be sold at approximately three times its casting cost. In the second case, a unique commission would be sold as a one-off piece, giving it a higher value and therefore a higher cost. The figure can be anything from £50K for a life-sized piece to very much more for a monumental sculpture.

*Can you tell us about pieces you’ve created for your own home or garden?*

The exciting thing about sculpture is that it can and should work in almost any environment. I use my garden a bit like a gallery and therefore the sculptures are in constant flux, however I do miss them when they have departed to a new home. My garden in Oxfordshire is quite architectural with a symmetrical system of paths cut into a large field of long grass and scattered groves of oak, chestnut, beech and various fruit trees. It is very open, providing us with an expansive view of the hills that stretch into the distance. At the moment, my sculptures *Squall*, *Hurricane Girls*, *Mary*, *Diana* and a portrait of *Sir Kyffin Williams* are residing in the field, with the *Three Graces* in a more formal part of the garden. *The Ram* was temporarily dominating the landscape.

*How does seeing a client’s response to your work make you feel?*

I feel very rewarded and blessed when somebody loves and enjoys my work and feels that it fulfils their yearning for visual excitement. Good art shouldn’t be a gimmick and is something that one should always be able to come back to. I feel fortunate that many discerning art collectors have purchased a number of my works of art.

dwe.com

Know someone who’d enjoy this feature? You can share it using the buttons at the top of the page. Discover more inspirational garden features on [The Home Page](#) here...

### More from The Home Page...



An Artist’s Oxfordshire Farm, Brimming With Creativity



How To Display Art In Your Home



Artist Camilla Perkins On The Timeless Inspiration Of Charleston



Inside The Home Of Vintage And Antique Art Expert Natalie Williams

Sign up to our newsletter and let us come to you. Enter your email address to have the very best of The Home Page come straight to your inbox.

EMAIL ADDRESS

GO

Please read our [Privacy Policy](#)

