

The Mussel, Musselburgh

Sculptor Michael Johnson has created *The Mussel*, a 12 feet high stainless steel sculpture, of a mussel shell. Michael explains:

“The outer shell of the sculpture depicts aspects of Musselburgh’s history, images of agriculture, people, connections to the sea, the river, the Romans. The inner face of the sculpture is mirror polished and reflects whatever stands before it, yourself, the sky and sea. These two aspects of the shell, the *Memory of place* and the *Reflection*, I see as strong metaphors for a work which interprets the history of the town and also considers our relationship with the sea and land.”

The sculpture features bronze casts with images created by children from local schools, set into the paving surrounding the artwork. Michael worked with both primary and secondary school children to produce relief prints. The students created small collages of images that related to some aspect of the town or themselves as people who live there. As a result the images produced were varied and included seashore images such as shells, fish and ice cream. From these collages prints were produced which the school kept, and Michael kept the collaged work which by its nature was a shallow relief, which was used to cast a bronze panel. Therefore the end result in the bronze was produced by children's hands.

Michael Johnson has been making artworks for public spaces since 1991. His first commission, for the Duchy of Cornwall, a 25 feet high sculptural work for the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham, won the Birmingham Design Award and has been featured in many publications. He has now completed over 180 commissions for both rural and urban sites throughout the UK and Ireland, Clients range from national institutions, banks, property developers, to local authorities, landscape architects, community groups and schools. In 2014 he was shortlisted for the Marsh Award for excellence in public artworks.

East Lothian Council’s Arts Service brought together a working group to select and commission an artist to create this public artwork for Musselburgh. The group included representatives from Musselburgh Area Partnership, Community Council, Musselburgh Conservation Group, local people from the community, Council Officers and elected members. The commission was for £38,000, funded by Tesco Ltd as part of East Lothian Council’s Percent for Art Policy.