

## 2002–2003 Audientia (Arts Council England-West Midlands)



### IRON MAN Report

"We are delighted to present this unique gift to the people of Birmingham and we hope that it will become part of the City's culture, to be enjoyed by generations to come."

Sir Nicholas Goodison, Chairman of TSB Bank plc quoted in 'Public Art & the Private Sector', Department of Planning and Architecture, Birmingham City Council.

### DATES & ACTIONS

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| 02/10/02 | initial photo documentation                  |
| 16/10/02 | PACA Archive plus initial observation        |
| 28/10/02 | further observation plus initial engagements |
| 29/10/02 | graphics test plus engagements               |
| 05/11/02 | 'eye-catchers' plus further engagements      |

### TYPES OF ACTIONS

#### OBSERVATIONS

William Whyte's strategy for learning about public places, now incorporated into the working practices of Project for Public Space in New York:

"You Can See a Lot Just By Observing. We can all learn a great deal from others' successes and failures. By looking at how people are using (or not using) public spaces and finding out what they like and don't like about them, it is possible to assess what makes them work or not work. Through these observations, it will be clear what kinds of activities are missing and what might be incorporated. And when the spaces are built, continuing to observe them will teach even more about how to evolve and manage them over time."

In this instance, the process of observing informed the strategy for intervention.

## INTERVENTIONS

For the majority of passers-by, The Iron Man is now part of the established streetscape – it was sited almost 10 years ago (2nd March 1993). Whilst the sculpture still functions as 'unexpected event' for children and tourists, for the majority of the pedestrian traffic the sculpture has become invisible.

My strategy for intervention was based on the need to 'catch the eye' of passers-by and I produced nine 'eye-catchers' which were displayed on site. Each 'eye-catcher' was a numbered maroon square, 10cm X 10cm, containing white text statements by the artist. Although these statements were not specific to Gormley's making of The Iron Man, they identified issues or aspects of his practice relevant to the sculpture and its situation. These statements were taken from the following sources:

<http://www.f davidpeat.com/interviews/gormley.htm> (a 1996 interview with the artist)

<http://www.antonygormley.com/> (the artist's website)

The nine statements were used in sets of three and categorised thus:

### VISUAL APPEARANCE

- 1A the other side of appearance
- 1B like a seed or a bomb
- 1C the body is a spaceship

### KINAESTHETIC

- 2A you are always falling when walking
- 2B the weight running through your knees
- 2C a question of balance

### INSTRUCTION / OBSERVATION

- 3A circle and navigate
- 3B things are off balance
- 3C there is somewhere outside the outside.

Each group of three 'eye-catchers' was attached to the sculpture and two neighbouring lampposts using super strong magnetic discs from Abel Magnets. The decision to include the two lampposts was based on the observation that passers-by visually engaged with the sculpture some distance away from its actual location. The two lampposts, 15m and 31m away from the sculpture, more or less matched the minimum and maximum distance of viewer recognition.

During the processes of working out and then using the 'eye-catchers' I realised a number of things:

- the 'eye-catcher' cards functioned as my calling cards, a means of introduction. This was not of inconsiderable importance given that I was a man approaching complete strangers in the street;
- the texts set the terms of reference for the discussions with passers-by, shifting the engagements away from bigger issues (public art, regeneration, etc.) towards something more specific. This was particularly true of the kinaesthetic texts;
- the display of three texts at a time created new contexts for the sculpture, spatially and discursively.

### ENGAGEMENTS

There were two types of engagements, those that were simply me approaching and engaging with passers-by who I had observed had made some sort of contact with the sculpture (a glance, a survey, a comment, etc.) on the 28th October, and those who had been caught by the 'eye-catchers' on the 5th November.

### UNDERPINNING

My actions were underpinned by desk research at the PACA Archive at UCE. The archive contains a wealth of information on the commissioning of The Iron Man. The commissioning process, what I have called elsewhere the 'moment of public art', involved the artist, the commissioning agency (PACA), the client (TSB) and the planning authority (Birmingham City Council).

## CIRCUMSTANCE

During the period of the actions, two things of some importance occurred. Firstly, Katharina Grosse painted the south-west corner of the Central Library. "...Birmingham Central Library has become a vast canvas to be covered with this luminous field of strongly coloured spray paint. Over 5 metres high and 20 metres in length it covers glass, concrete and metal, making a strong impression on the pedestrian experience of Chamberlain Square. The painting was commissioned by Ikon as part of its off-site programme..."

No matter what the implications (material seepage from art galleries) or assumptions (the impression on the pedestrian experience), Grosse's work marks a significant shift in how the City's authorities are prepared to use their key buildings. And I can say this as somebody who fixed an artwork to the Central Library twelve years ago!

Secondly, the current issue of Urban Studies (Vol. 39 No. 10) includes what I believe is an important essay, Patsy Healey's 'On Creating the City as a Collective Resource'. The essay starts with a quote from Bridge & Watson, "Cities are feats of imagination and they affect the ability to imagine." Healey's essay had considerable impact on how I understood and delivered my actions.

REPORT – David Patten, November 2002

## FINDINGS #1 – OBSERVATION

The writer D. L. Doctrow once said of people and cities, "There is a universe of totally disparate intention with everybody going about his or her business in the silence of their own minds with everybody else and the street and the time of day and the architecture and quality of light and nature of the weather as kind of a background or field for the individual consciousness and the drama it is making for itself at that moment. If you think about that, that's what happens in the city and that somehow the city can embrace and accept and accommodate all that disparate intention at one and the same time."

For the majority of passers-by, The Iron Man did not intrude on "the individual consciousness and the drama it [was] making for itself" during the period of the actions. It is difficult to know whether this is an issue or not for this research programme. Are we engaged in some sort of 'bums on seats' equivalent for public art, or can we relax in the knowledge that The Iron Man is part of the background or field to the individual consciousness.

Without exception, everybody who 'spent time' with The Iron Man was 'time-rich' – the tourist, the child, the elderly rough-sleeper. On occasion a member of a family group would comment on the sculpture to the other family members, but this was no more than a bonding of the family unit during the experience of being in the city.

"I propose to construct a three times life-size cast iron body case-piece from approximately 20 sections in 3/4" thick cast iron. The piece will be placed centrally on the apron in front of the TSB building. It will be buried up to its calves and will lean 10 degrees backwards and 10 degrees to its left. It will face the end of New Street."

Antony Gormley: Proposal, May 1991

The Iron Man sits slightly angled to the east – west axis (essentially the line of New Street), deflecting passers-by towards Chamberlain Square (the Central Library and Museum & Art Gallery). At its base, there is a plaque set into the brick paviors that says:

IRON MAN  
by  
Antony Gormley

A gift from TSB

to the people of Birmingham  
to mark TSB Bank Plc's  
relocation to the City  
2nd March 1993

The main flow of pedestrians is east to west, approaching the 'front' of the sculpture. Those that engage with the sculpture do so initially at a distance of approximately 15 metres, ie. a distance that equates to about twice the height of the sculpture. The approach towards the sculpture is like the child approaching a parent or teacher, or, maybe, the devotee approaching the deity. The Iron Man does have that sort of presence. [SEE APPROACH PHOTOS]

Approaching from the front, the engaged passer-by will then stand approximately one metre away from the sculpture, will look upwards (at the sculpture's head) and then downwards where they will read the plaque. He/she will then half circle the sculpture in an anticlockwise direction before returning to the front and glancing upwards once again. If accompanied by somebody else, the engaged passer-by will then comment on what they have seen or felt or thought.

Passers-by not engaging with the sculpture pass by within a couple of metres of it. Nobody uses The Iron Man as a bike rest, and only one person obviously used it as an agreed rendezvous (and her companion failed to arrive!).

There are moments when there is absolutely nobody in close proximity to the sculpture – The Iron Man standing alone. At other times, people rush past it and traffic hurtles away behind it. [SEE MOVIE]

As The Iron Man is located on the lower level of Victoria Square, it is in shadow for a large part of the day. At this time of year, the sun will peek out from behind the Old Post Office Building to light the right-hand side of the sculpture at about 11.30am. The sun then moves behind other buildings, leaving the sculpture once again in shade.

The statue of Queen Victoria at the higher level of the Square is in the sunshine for longer, and most tourists favour this statue as a backdrop for their holiday snaps. Nobody photographed The Iron Man during the periods of observation.

When the sun does hit The Iron Man, the surface quality (a major consideration for the artist during the period of manufacture) and the structural elements of the casing are exquisite.

As a stand-alone object I had expected The Iron Man to 'gather' in some way, like the jar in Wallace Stevens's poem, but this is not the case.

Wallace Stevens: Anecdote of the Jar

I placed a jar in Tennessee,  
And round it was, upon a hill.  
It made slovenly wilderness  
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,  
And sprawled around, no longer wild.  
The jar was round upon the ground  
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.  
The jar was gray and bare.  
It did not give of bird or bush,  
like nothing else in Tennessee.

The Iron Man is not a destination and it does not gather. Except when the staff of Wragg & Co are gathering around it as part of their fire drill (The Iron Man is a gathering point for that organisation's evacuation procedures). [SEE CROWD PHOTOS]

The Iron Man is, at best, a marker along a thoroughfare. It marks a shift of direction for the pedestrian along the framework of pedestrian linkages and open spaces identified by HLN/LDR Inc in 1988 in their report 'Pedestrian Movement and Open Space Study'. My photographs of The Iron Man tell a false story –

the framed object. The little movies are better at showing the stillness of the sculpture amidst the rush of pedestrian activity around it.

The Iron Man also marks (as a gift to the people of Birmingham) the relocation of a bank to the City Centre in 1993 (the TSB has since relocated again, this time to Bristol). A gift from a bank is probably a difficult concept to grasp.

The Iron Man has good sides and bad sides, and the change in levels across Victoria Square alter dramatically the sculpture's apparent scale. It also changes significantly with the weather. It can appear as silhouette. It can also appear simply as colour.

"...the Panel discussed the context of the work re. coming out of the paving tiles and lack of legs/plinth and its being an additional figurative work which would contrast strongly with the Mistry sculptures." [Ogilvy & Mather Public Relations: Meeting Notes 21/08/1991]

In the context of Mistry's 'River' ensemble and the bronze copy of Thomas Brock's Worcester statue of Queen Victoria, The Iron Man extends a limited vision of public art. If a city is many cities, this city has failed to acknowledge the many possibilities of public art. We are locked into the traditional conventions of 'statues and monuments'. The Iron Man does not encourage an imaginative encounter with the place.

So how to engage with the larger proportion of passers-by? What are the possibilities of breaking the routine of individual consciousness and silent dramas? And how to I get into conversation about The Iron Man?

Do I stand outside the action of the street (like a war photographer detached from the content of the action), or do I become part of the action and simply extend the standing, sitting, watching activities into new content?

#### FINDINGS #2 – CONVERSATIONS 28 & 29/10/02

Of this first group of conversations, all but one (an elderly rough sleeper) were overseas tourists. And of these, the vast majority were Japanese. Although each conversation started from the micro (somebody's initial engagement with the Iron Man), they very quickly took on the macro issues of regeneration, world cities, public art, and, probably not surprisingly, the 'Angel of the North'. That the Angel should come up in so many of these conversations did surprise me initially, but clearly Gormley's piece in Gateshead has now taken on the status of national symbol.

One of the two Swedish men I spent the longest period of time with (escorting them down to the fishing tackle shop on Carrs Lane) had visited Birmingham 14 years earlier. This was the best of the macro conversations – measuring the change in Birmingham since the late 1980s as we walked through and out of the city centre; the pros and cons of World Cities; the amount of construction work currently underway in the city centre (hence their difficulty in getting to Carrs Lane!).

For the majority of the Japanese tourists, the Iron Man was simply part of the city centre ensemble. At no time was the sculpture used as a backdrop for their holiday snaps (a role given to the statue of Queen Victoria without exception).

For the elderly rough sleeper, the Iron Man was a lengthy pause during a long shuffle eastwards. He was clearly enthusiastic about talking with somebody, but the conversation drifted in all sorts of directions and I have to admit I didn't see it through to the end.

At one point during this first phase of conversations, Wragg & Co (who are currently based in the neighbouring Old Post Office building, held a fire drill. The Iron Man is used as a gathering point for Wragg & Co employees. There was a spectacular few minutes when a whole mass of people moved out of the building towards the sculpture, and then formed chattering subgroups for the purposes of head counting. At this point, the Iron Man was at the centre of enormous excitement and bustle ('I placed a Jar in Tennessee'). The conversations I had with a handful of Wragg & Co employees were stilted – I became very aware that I was trespassing on work time and that the Iron Man played absolutely no role in the consciousness of these people.

It is worth reporting that, during the course of these initial conversations, I shifted away from saying anything that suggested I was asking for an opinion on public art (ie. 'what do you think of this?'). Instead I became more interested in asking what people knew (ie. 'what do you know about this?').

Obviously this changed the psychology of the conversations. It also recalled something of Jeff Kelley's keynote address to the 1993 University of Westminster conference, 'Public Art – The New Agenda':

"...art is re-conceived as a tool by which some half-forgotten layer of our public life is unearthed...site-specific art has been transformed into a place-particular practice which represents the domestication and/or socialisation of the art site, and defines approaches to art making in which the social and cultural contexts of places are acknowledged and worked as the materials of human exchange. To acknowledge the contents of the place is to move...into a more concrete (and politically complex) relationship with those whose place it is. Therein the abstractions of art are literalised: viewers become constituents; art history gives way to local memory, and public opinions about art are suddenly less important than community values about place."

### FINDINGS #3 – 56 CONVERSATIONS & 103 INDIVIDUALS 05/11/02

The Iron Man doesn't gather (in terms of 'I placed a Jar in Tennessee'), it is 'approached', as one would approach a stern parent or a strict teacher (or, even, a merciless god, as one person said!).

The Iron Man doesn't smile.

It has landed, the Iron Man's velocity as it penetrated the earth's atmosphere has embedded it into the pavement. It didn't grow out of, or spring up from, the earth. It landed. It came down, at an angle, from the sky. Like a seed or a bomb.

The Iron Man doesn't walk, nor does it reach out.

The Iron Man is falling.

Stupid, isn't it?

The Iron Man is being blown over by the wind.

Following the initial conversations, I wanted to create a mechanism for engaging with the broader public who approach and pass by the Iron Man. What this mechanism should be – how it looked and functioned – became as important to the action as the conversations it subsequently initiated. I wanted something that extended the Iron Man in terms of its location (particularly the approach to the sculpture) and the understanding of the artist's intention.

In the PACA Archive, the material relating to the Iron Man is primarily administrative and bureaucratic – it deals with problem solving, risk management, funding and profile raising. The only significant text from Gormley was an edited version of a PR text, and this was limited in how it illustrated the artist's thinking.

I widened my search to the Central Reference Library, and this was useful in locating the Iron Man in Gormley's wider body of work although there were no texts specifically relating to the TSB commission. In the end I trawled through various websites and pulled out an interview with the artist and the text of a Gormley lecture.

Although neither mentioned the Iron Man directly, both texts provided useful insights into Gormley's concerns at the time of the Iron Man. From these I culled nine phrases and grouped these into sets of three under the headings: appearance, the act of looking, and kinaesthetic. Each set of three texts was attached in turn with magnets to the sculpture and the two lampposts leading up to the Iron Man (at 15 and 31 metres). I came to think of these things as 'eye-catchers' – something to catch the eye of the passer-by, and an invitation to enter into conversation.

I did an initial graphics test on site before deciding on a square format card 10cm x 10cm for each text. The text was in white uppercase Comic Sans MS on a maroon background. The inherent and contextual quality of these small interventions became obsessively important to me – the size and colour of the magnets, how the maroon background colour worked with both the sculpture and the lampposts, etc..

During the course of a three hour session, the 'eye-catchers' permitted the best of the conversations. Although these conversations followed the previous pattern of micro to macro, the texts allowed us to come back to the specific – so, does it look like a seed or a bomb? don't you feel you are falling when you are walking, etc.. And, in general, it was possible to get into real discussion about Gormley's practice – body cast, scale, presence, etc..

Of the nine texts, the most 'successful' were the most obvious:

like a seed or a bomb, and

the body is a spaceship.

The most interesting conversations were around the text, 'you are always falling when walking'. And the most fascinating of these conversations was with a woman in a wheelchair who had lost the understanding of what it is to walk and/or fall. Generally, exploring the mechanics of walking/falling with passers-by proved to be the single most effective connection between the sculpture and the public. The audience was built around something most of us do most of the time, and it was through this that on occasion we also came to understand the importance of the angle that the sculpture is set into the ground – so, this is what it feels like to be at 10 degrees off vertical. Interestingly this sort of extended conversation happened with walking/falling more than with the text 'things are off balance'. From this evolved the shared recognition that the angle of the Iron Man connected it more with ourselves as living and moving organisms than it did with every other object (building, street furniture, etc.) in the area, all of which respected the vertical.

The least rewarding texts were the more obscure statements:

the other side of appearance, and

there is somewhere outside the outside.

These simply proved irritating!

On only one occasion was a text removed – 'you are always falling when walking' was taken by a City Council street cleaner. One text was modified – 'the body is a spaceship' was ripped in half, with the word 'spaceship' being reapplied to the sculpture with the original magnet. I was back in Birmingham the following day and was amazed to see that one of the texts still remained on the nearest lamppost.

Most conversations included the question, 'why are you doing this?' and initially I explained the research programme. This seemed to flatten, and on occasion even end, the conversation. After a while I answered the question by saying I was trying to create a perfect moment – something that simply connected the passer-by ("the individual consciousness and the drama it is making for itself" [Doctorow]) with the here and now of being in this place at this moment in time. This was a much better answer, and people seemed genuinely grateful for the experience!

"Once you dispense with the idea of narrative, and certainly I would dispense with all narrative, and you have to then reconsider this stillness not in terms of an isolated moment that has to capture the whole dramatic narrative in a single frame, but a moment taken out of the continuum that has to endure, and that duration has to interface with the stream of consciousness of the viewer." [Antony Gormley]

A perfect moment – a moment in our lives when the reality lives up to the fantasy or when the everyday is heightened above the mundane. [Henley Centre: 'Arts Landscape in 2010].

And maybe this is how audiences and permanent public art come into some sort of meaningful relationship. Not through the mega agendas and grand projects of regeneration or city image building. And not through trying to explain the complexities of the artist's or commissioner's intentions (initial content and meaning). But through actively exploring walking/falling in proximity to a sculpture that leans.

Maybe the pavement plaque in front of the Iron Man should simply state, 'you are always falling when walking' and avoid what are now irrelevancies like the 'who, what, why and when' of the initial commissioning activity. Maybe it is like a birthday present, after a while you don't really care who gave it to you as long as it is still enjoyable and/or useful.

#### SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is a 'moment of public art'. This is a one-off moment for each situation, never to be repeated. It is the moment when 'things come together' – when there is a shared view and determination to make something happen. Traditionally this 'moment of public art' occurs when the commissioning of an artwork creates an audience around the commissioning activity. This initial audience comprises (in the

case of the Iron Man) the artist, the client, the commissioning agency, the PR company and media, the fabricators, the installers, the planning authority, and those invited to the initial artist selection process and the final 'unveiling' of the completed artwork. This 'moment of public art' is high energy stuff.

The audience is primarily administrative and bureaucratic. And when the commissioning process is completed and legal responsibilities discharged, this audience separates – the client to other business interests, the commissioning agency to other hustles, etc.. At this point all that is left is the artwork. And for the main body of the general public, not party to the administrative and bureaucratic processes involved in commissioning (and consequently not part of the 'moment of public art'), the sculpture arrives without fanfare. One day it isn't there, and the next day it is.

The artwork "...never sleeps but keeps a watchful if critical eye on the world, bemoaning the fact that people take no notice...". Kevin Hetherington: Spatial Hauntings.

Maybe there is a problem here. Maybe because permanent public art arrives through the same administrative and bureaucratic process as, say, a building or a highway scheme, it has little opportunity to create audience along the way. Maybe there should be a different process underpinning the commissioning activity. Maybe we should relax the commissioning process and have more public art which is speculative, and then commit energy to understanding the possibilities around that artwork post-installation.

Whatever the alternatives, it is certainly true that in contemporary commissioning practice we never repeat 'the moment of public art'. The only resourcing and effort directed at a 'completed' artwork once the 'moment of public art' is over are to do with the maintenance of the art object.

Maybe we need to delay the notion of 'completion' and stretch 'the moment of public art'. Maybe public art should be adaptive ("device allowing connection of pieces: not originally designed to be adaptive"). Maybe, to misquote something I heard the other day, public art should be a verb and not a noun.

The Iron Man is contextualised by a plaque set into the pavement stating the 'who, what, why and when' of 'the moment of public art'. How does this statement enhance the post-event experience of the public – how does it build, out of the main body of passers-by, an audience for public art?

And how does the residual meaning left over from 'the moment of public art' get replaced by something else – a patina of personal association and/or local myth? Or, better still, extended content and meaning.

When a pavement wears out, it is replaced. When a building wears out it is either dropped and replaced or refurbished. What do we do when public art (or in this case, the public art work) wears out – when residual meaning and memory of event (the moment of public art) are finally eroded .

We could replace it. At 1993 prices, the scrap value of the Iron Man was calculated as £1000.00 per ton, or £5000.00 in total [Firth Rixson Castings Ltd].

We could refurbish it – in terms of content and meaning.

A previous Director of Ikon Gallery once commented, "Perhaps local authorities should stop worrying about how long the [public art] work will last and consider how long it will have an impact. The former is an inevitable consequence of the language of regeneration in which arguments for the support of public art have been made." [Elizabeth A. MacGregor: 'Public Art & Gallery Art', Public Art Journal Vol 1 No 1 March 1999]

Too often the completed public art object is a closing down. The act of installing/unveiling is understood as an end point of an often difficult and intensive activity (the commissioning process) – 'the moment of public art' immediately shows a potential audience the exit door. The completion of administrative and bureaucratic tasks linked to the commissioning process preclude any other sort of activity around public art. We've done that, now what? And while commissioners have attempted to extend 'the moment of public art' through post-event dissemination of information (leaflets and labels, plaques and information guides) this has achieved little more than to over emphasise an aesthetic function for the permanent public artwork.

Gormley's preoccupation is "to bear witness" to his own existence and, from this, to advocate the social collective. This is difficult stuff. Like locating The Iron Man at the centre of something like Heidegger's 'fourfold'.

"...a sense of being held in the presence of something that is greater in terms of time and more resilient in terms of space, rooted, present." [Antony Gormley]

"Go to the ant, O sluggard;  
consider her ways and be wise."  
[Proverbs 6:6]

Instead of being the exit door, the artwork should be the point of entry into new social activity. Instead of closing down, the public artwork should be opening out or extending possibilities. The 'completed' artwork should be like an ant's pheromone trail leading towards new forms of social investigation and expression.

The sculpture's only real place is in the imagination of the viewer." [Antony Gormley]

## BACKGROUND – COMMISSIONING & INITIAL PUBLIC CONSULTATION

In a survey carried out by the Birmingham Post in the summer of 2001, The Iron Man was the most popular piece of public art in Birmingham. Originally five artists made proposals for the TSB commission, and these were put on public display as at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery as part of the 1991 exhibition 'New Meanings for City Sites'.

"The challenge that faces art placed in the shared spaces of our constructed world is that it should recapture a sense of the collective body: to make visual statements that can act as a cohesive force within the self-questioning and self-determination of a people and a place. I believe this piece to be such a work because it addresses itself to a future stripped of utopianism and exploitation. I wish it to belong to all and be an active catalyst toward the future." [Antony Gormley: Proposal, May 1991]

As part of the process of public consultation, 499 exhibition visitors commented on the six proposals. In answer to the two questions: Which one of the sculptures which you have seen to day do you like the most? and, Of the sculptures you have seen today, which one do you think would look best in Victoria Square?, the untitled proposal from Antony Gormley scored the second lowest marks. For the record, the scores were:

|                  |       |        |
|------------------|-------|--------|
| Miles Davies     | 37.3% | 36.6%  |
| Paul de Monchaux | 15.2% | 13.0%  |
| Athena Tacha #1  | 13.0% | 11.2%  |
| Philip King      | 10.6% | 11.2%  |
| Antony Gormley   | 5.8%  | 6.2%   |
| Athena Tacha #2  | 4.6%  | 3.8%   |
| [none            | 13.2% | 17.0%] |

Over 84% of visitors who complete the questionnaire liked the development at Centenary Square, and almost the same percentage liked the idea of redesigning Victoria Square. 92% of respondents answered the question: What do you believe art in public places achieves?, with selected comments being:

- "art is a human achievement – everyone should be able to participate, to see, to enjoy, to argue about."
- "gives pleasure, excites interest, makes art accessible, should contribute to a sense of community."
- "it evokes an awareness and pride in one's cultural and civic environment."
- it evokes an awareness and pride in one's cultural and civic environment."
- "a sense of place and time."
- it shouldn't have to achieve anything - it gives a place more of an identity and interest."
- "it makes you think there's more to life than shopping!"
- "a celebration of the people and the City."
- "allows one to stop and reflect on it."

- "an income for artists."

In terms of those who responded negatively to the TSB proposals, the following comments were made:

- "bring back more traditional; statues, these are all too modern and intrusive."
- "no sense of civic pride."
- "they'll all be vandalised."
- "they're meaningless."
- "I hope none of them ever get built, they are all self-glorifying."
- "inaccessible and forgettable."

Positive comments on Gormley's untitled proposal included:

- "its unique, mystical."
- "superb colour, human, clever, reminds me of rising or falling."
- "tactile, original, a strong statement which people can interpret as they want."
- "the other sculptures seem attractive but don't encourage any thoughts about the human condition."
- "an accessible form, sympathetic to the environment."

In his proposal statement, Gormley had also commented:

"This work naturally has resonance with the industrial history of Birmingham, the transformation of that history and the beginning of something else. It is purposefully enigmatic suggesting both a rise and a fall.

It will be attached to the earth, not raised above it and most importantly it will, I hope, act as a focus for collective feeling. Ideally it should be made in Birmingham by local people."

Antony Gormley: Proposal, May 1991

"Sir, - I have seen the 'Thing' in Victoria Square. I have walked around it and viewed it from all angles - and I have thought...'The Thing' is from outer space. Soon, in the night, it will glow, then throb, turning yellow, red, then white. Crowds will assemble in fear and awe in Victoria Square, TV cameras will whirl. 'The Thing' will burst open at the seams..."

Joe Binns, Edgbaston

Following installation of The Iron Man in 1993, the Birmingham Post, under the heading 'Beauty or Beast Is it art for artists' sake?', ran a letter's page on readers' thoughts 'about our city's monuments'. Beth Hendley of Coton Green felt the Iron Man "symbolises Birmingham's new enlightened support of the arts", while Joe Binns commented, "No one will convince me that anyone in the TSB had the imagination to tell an artist that they wanted a steel mummy to plunge down from the sky, landing at an angle...etc.". More interestingly, somebody called PHOENIX wrote:

"Almost every day there is some contributor to these columns deprecating some element of architecture, public art or political management. Although debate of these issues is naturally healthy, most demonstrate 20/20 hindsight and an inept conservatism that can only lead to cultural stagnation."

More recently, 'spagfunk' (<http://www.spagfunk.co.uk/art/publicart.htm>) has commented:

"Developments like Victoria Square have helped to cocoon Birmingham, by creating a focal point which anchors the City in it's golden, industrial past. Directly adjacent to the Council House, it would be unsurprising if the City's Elected Members felt less than visionary when constantly weighed down with the preconceptions of local history.

The challenge, then, was to snap Birmingham out of its' reverential, humble origins, and treat the population like intelligent adults, giving them an environment which is both provocative and stylish. It is with this in mind that I believe Anthony Gormley's Iron Man is such an important landmark in the revitalisation of Birmingham City Centre.

Here, in close proximity to Victoria Square, we have an awkward, rusting structure which unsettles the surroundings and draws attention to its inherent imperfections. In its' name and material the sculpture refers to the industrial history of Birmingham but without glorifying or simplifying. By allowing the material to corrode, the artist has confronted us with our own mortality and by siting it in an imperfect, leaning pose, we are denied perfection or sanitisation. Here is an unknown everyman alone and vulnerable in a godless universe; cast from unspectacular steel and left uncultivated. Here is the lowest denominator of Birmingham, humanity itself, naked and unfettered.

The local media has long claimed that the people of Birmingham hate the Iron Man. Good. I would rather it incited even the most unqualified judgement than have the citizens of the City continue to meander mindlessly around in a nightmare of purely functional urban planning.

The recent improvements in Birmingham are partly down to people wanting more beauty from their environment. An area peppered with sculpture breaks up space and provides a focal point for locals and visitors alike. Art like the Iron Man denies us the easy option of becoming automata: for in the economic cityscape it is difficult to ignore something which serves no practical purpose.

It is nice for our City's leaders to give us these gifts - it shows that we are being treated like adults. The exponential effects of that acknowledgement could yet be spectacular."

BY ANY OTHER NAME

"August 1997 - I asked Tom Crowden, who looked up from his shoe pedestal hammering block, "Is modern art cobblers?"

"That Damien Hirst's always on the telly. I don't like him. I like that Iron Man statue in Birmingham though."

<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~phayes/oldeds.htm>

Gormley's original proposal was untitled, although by the 18th of February 1992 the sculpture was being called 'Body of Mind' (an image of human potential and transformation from the materials and skills at hand). In an interview with Tony Butler for Radio WM, the Production Director at Bradley & Foster Foundry (later Firth Rixson Castings) who were making the sculpture, Chris Sadler commented:

"The title of the statue is 'Vision' and as far as I am aware the artist's meaning of the status is that its a chrysalis of man. The emergence of man."

An exchange of correspondence between Gormley and Public Art Commissions Agency details the artist's dislike of the title 'Vision' and the agreement to allow the people of Birmingham to agree a name.

"It will be an unnamed work (by preference) until such a time as usage give it one. It will become not what the artist or a dominant iconography make it, but what the people of Birmingham perceive it to be."

Antony Gormley, May 1991

Earlier, the Birmingham Focus of 27th September 1991 had run a competition to find an alternative name for the sculpture. The most popular suggestions were 'blob' and 'lump', although David Workman of Albert Road suggested 'Joy & Hate' - "The joy of living in Birmingham and the hurt that we brummies feel at being subjected to such ugliness."

Locally, The Iron Man shares its name with Iron Man Records at 78 Alcester Road, Birmingham, and the title of a track from Birmingham band Black Sabbath's second album, Paranoid, released as a US single in early 1972.

OVER TIME

The material of the Iron Man (an austenitic cast iron known as Ni-Resist, containing 3% carbon and 20% nickel) reacts very differently to the local light than any other material in the area of Victoria Square. Whilst the surrounding buildings, hard and soft landscaping and other art works seem to bounce light back, the surface of the Iron Man appears to absorb light. It also changes colour throughout the day – sometimes appearing a drab grey, and at other times a striking red-oxide.

Gormley was very particular about the surface quality he wanted for the Iron Man, and, initially, the sculpture was damned for its rusting surface (the assumption being that the artwork would gradually rust away). The period of oxidisation (in fact the creation of an oxide skin which, once formed, prevents further oxidisation) has paralleled the gradual acceptance of the Iron Man by a large number of people in Birmingham over time. And this phrase 'over time' is critical. Whilst the Iron Man is constant in terms of most things, its surface appearance changes over time – hour by hour, day by day, and year by year. But reading these changes takes time (an hour, a day, a year) and for most of the potential audience time is in short supply. It is the time rich (the tourist, the rough sleeper) who probably see the sculpture better than the time poor shopper, office worker or business visitor.