

David Mach  
Burning Down the House



**Burning Down the House**





## Burning Down the House

installation, print and sculpture

Festival Gallery, Galway International Arts Festival, Galway, Ireland

14–27 July 2025

## Preface

Few artists have reshaped the boundaries of contemporary sculpture and installation like David Mach. A creative force of staggering energy and invention, Mach is one of the UK's most celebrated and prolific artists, renowned for his bold, large-scale works that turn everyday materials into explosive visual experiences.

Born in Fife, Scotland – where he now lives once again – Mach grew up amid the muscular industrial landscape of a mining family. Colliery shafts, oil rigs, steelworks and dockyards formed both a backdrop and a blueprint for his future artistic vision. His fascination with mass, form and material has evolved into a signature style that transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary, whether working with newspapers, tyres, coat hangers or entire vehicles.

At the heart of this year's Visual Arts programme is *Burning Down the House* – a commission of epic scale and ambition. This monumental installation erupts with energy: a cottage mid-explosion, spewing a fridge, television, sofa, and more through its shattered roof, engulfed in smoke and flame. Cinematic yet sculptural, it is a visceral spectacle of chaos, domesticity, and destruction in a single visual punch.

Also featured in the exhibition are several of Mach's iconic coat-hanger sculptures – including the arresting figure of *The Thief*, and *Spike* [the cheetah] – works that combine brute force with delicate intricacy, continuing his lifelong interrogation of material, myth and meaning.

David Mach's creative journey with Galway International Arts Festival spans nearly two decades. We first introduced

his work in 2006 with *Hell Bent* at the Galway City Museum Plaza. In 2012, audiences encountered the awe-inspiring *Precious Light*, headlined by the immense *Golgotha*, a crucifixion rendered in steel coat hangers. Then came *Rock 'n' Roll* in 2018, a spectacular GIAF commission that packed a boat, caravan, car and over 165,000 newspapers into the Festival Printworks Gallery. Most recently, in 2023, Mach's explosive *The Oligarch's Nightmare*, another GIAF commission, stunned audiences with a detonating Range Rover in the Festival Gallery.

Each of these major installations is the result of extraordinary collaboration and effort. These are not solo acts, they are collective feats. We are especially grateful to the dedicated team of artists who worked alongside David to bring this ambitious project to life: in particular Vincent Bell and Mark Molloy, alongside Simon Kennedy and Ciara Holland. Their skill, passion and commitment are an integral part of this work's success.

It is always a thrill to welcome David Mach back to Galway. This new commission isn't just a Festival highlight – it is a bold declaration of scale, daring, imagination, and the fearless ambition that defines Mach's work.

**Paul Fahy**

Artistic Director  
Galway International Arts Festival  
July 2025



**The Second Homeowner's Nightmare**

Lithograph, 17 colours  
Paper size 420 x 595 mm  
Edition of 50



## Burning Down the House

Travelling to Poland in 1961 with my mum, my dad and my sister we'd eventually arrive at Berlin and have to go through numerous stops and checks on the train. Guards would come onto those trains armed with Schmeisser machine guns while more patrolled on the platforms, restraining black Alsatian dogs on leashes at the stations between East and West.

They'd shout, 'Passport Control! Passport Control!' We were about to go through the Iron Curtain.

I'd watch as we gradually made it through the various stops, the changes, from a brightly lit, vibrant west, the Mercedes Benz sign glittering from the top of a tall building to a dark and dilapidated east with dirty buildings all in need of repair, ruins barely standing.

We must have gone through the wall, but I can't honestly say that I remember actually doing it. I've seen too many films and documentaries about that. I think they've interfered with me to the point that I can't now claim the memories that I have to be my own.

It doesn't really matter, the overall effect of that short journey is one of unbearable excitement and the whole journey, 2 to 3 days on a variety of trains was unbearably dramatic and romantic, dark and dangerous, exciting and

thrilling. It was as if we were in *The Ipcress File*, *The Great Escape*, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* and *From Russia with Love* all rolled into one.

The run up to Berlin from the Dutch coast was marked with the bells of level crossing's ding, ding, dings receding into the distance as we passed them, lights accompanied the bells ding, flashing at night as I tried to sleep but couldn't really. I didn't want to, it was all far too exciting.

We were passing through a land in which my father as a Polish Paratrooper had been dropped from the skies to fight in the Battle of Arnhem. That battle had been catastrophic for the combined British force, a failure, it had seen the Polish Force shredded into such small numbers that it couldn't be reformed. Instead the Poles were farmed out to the other nations taking part in that military legend and my dad shot into Germany with an American unit to catch fleeing Nazis.

I didn't know at 5 years old that my dad had been involved with any of that and Sean Connery wasn't James Bond yet. He wouldn't appear as the British Secret Services agent, 007 until the next year in *Dr No* and not in *From Russia with Love* until 1963. *The Great Escape* wouldn't appear until 1963 either. *The Ipcress File* and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* not until 1965. I wasn't aware of any of that

but apparently I was already all anticipation for impossible action and drama, those journeys feeding my child's imagination.

I still look for that drama today and I'd go as far as to say I'm addicted to it. *Burning Down the House* is definitely inspired by my need for it. It's inspired by those trips through the Iron Curtain, it's inspired by my life in super industrial East Fife with its triptych of industry, Scottish Riviera coastline and gorgeous farmland all wrapped up in its lavish and fierce light, the best in the UK and its definitely inspired by film and comics.

I would take 10–20 Commando books on those holidays, D.C. Thomson's superbly drawn war comics, full of battles and explosions and tales of daring, of revenge, of heroism, of spy's on the trail of espionage, of resistance fighters against evil regimes, the comics themselves small in scale but epic and inspirational in spirit and design. I'd look at them and read them over and over and over.

*Burning Down the House* follows on from a previous work we made for the Galway International Arts Festival, *The Oligarch's Nightmare*. I wanted to make sure that work wasn't a 'one-off' so I've 'upped the ante' for this year, increasing its narrative and my repertoire to create yet another branch of sculpture. It is essentially sculpture but

its roots spread out to include film, comics, animation and installation and bizarrely it's also the closest I think I will get to making a painting.

That's a lot of inspiration and should push me dangerously towards confusion but just the same as a director controlling a scene in a film, telling off an actor for under or overdoing things, himself not trying to include everything in the shot or a painter shifting her material around a canvas getting dangerously close to turning all the beautiful and blended colours she's already applied into mud or a musician trying too hard to squeeze the number of syllables into a tune accidentally changing the rhythm and pace the band originally intended, composition and editing are kings.

Composition and Editing are Kings in an endeavour like *Burning Down the House*. Add Pace and the possibility of ad-libbing to that and you might veer towards confusion again. It's a heady mix of controls but I think we've managed to hold ourselves back enough to not 'overdo' it and still leave plenty, more than enough I think, for the audience to chew on.

The narrative for this piece is much larger than *The Oligarch's Nightmare*. *Burning Down the House* might be a dream, a desire for something ideal that we can all buy into. An escape, a way of living somewhere we can find peace,

somewhere we can be in harmony with nature. Who knows what it is that people really want. Is it something that eludes us, something we want to get that we don't have? That might be the real question and if it is then there's a 'be careful what you wish for element in the piece that makes *Burning Down the House* a cautionary tale.

The way it's has been made with a sizeable team of 10-12 people all with a great range of skills applying those abilities, at speed, against the clock, to make this sculpture believable is also telling. It's perhaps a comment on how we view things in the world. How we watch things through screens. How we see through televisions, through computers, through the screens of our iPads. There's a second-hand information thing going on there that's not witnessed by us but delivered to us that, when joined on to the things we hope for and dream about becomes very powerful.

I hope I have managed to buy into that powerful combo and that the inbuilt excitement of that duet has come through. It works for me and now I'm faced with a heady stream of ideas inspired by it.

Enjoy *Burning Down the House* and look forward to floors being ripped up by typhoons inside a building hurling objects to the far corners of a room, to a beautiful, Hi-Tech motorbike being crushed by a giant multicoloured boa

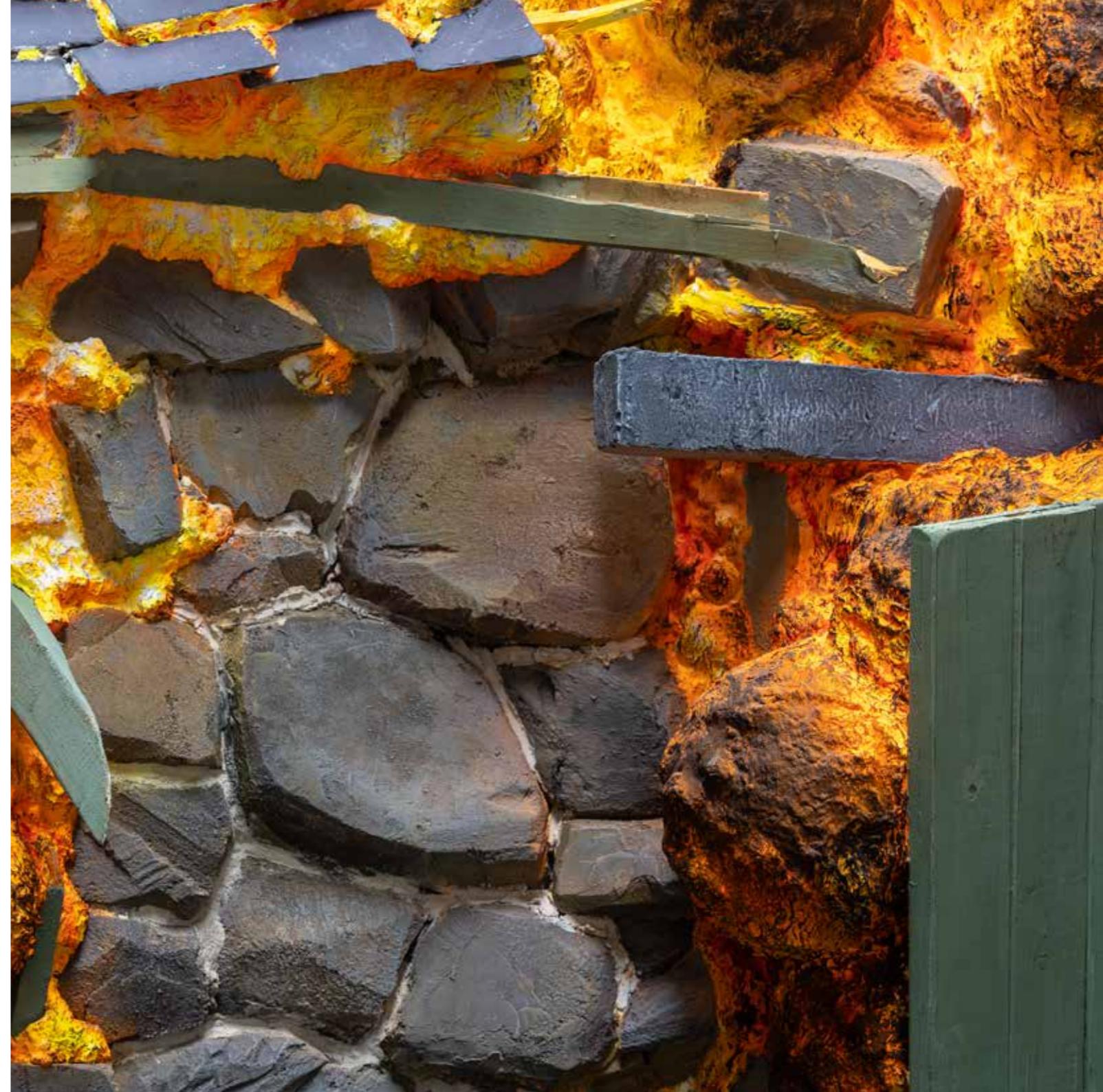
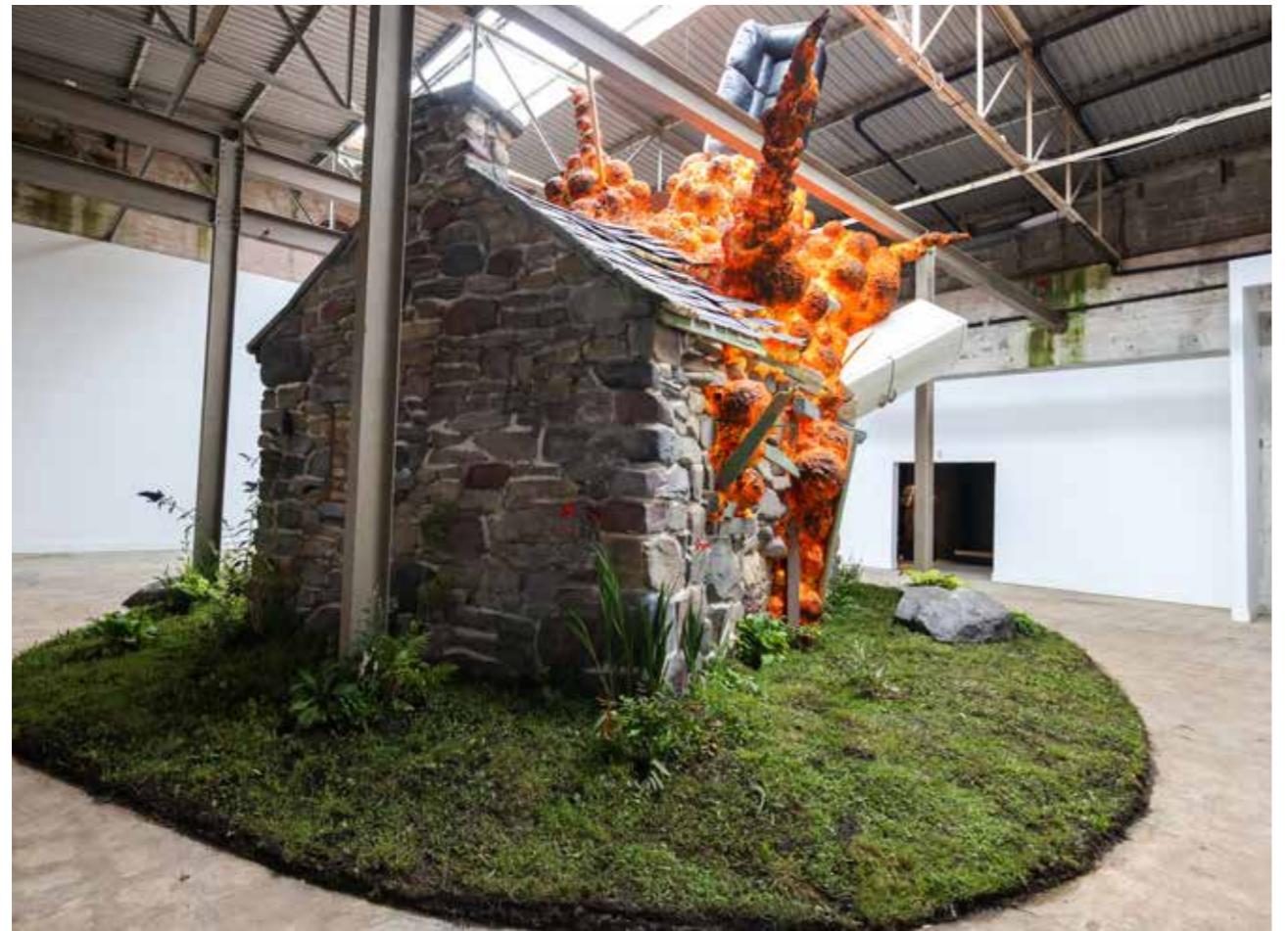
constrictor crushing the life out of it, to trees, sideways beanstalks bursting through gallery walls pushing golden ornate framed works of art of the walls and more.

**David Mach**

Galway, July 2025





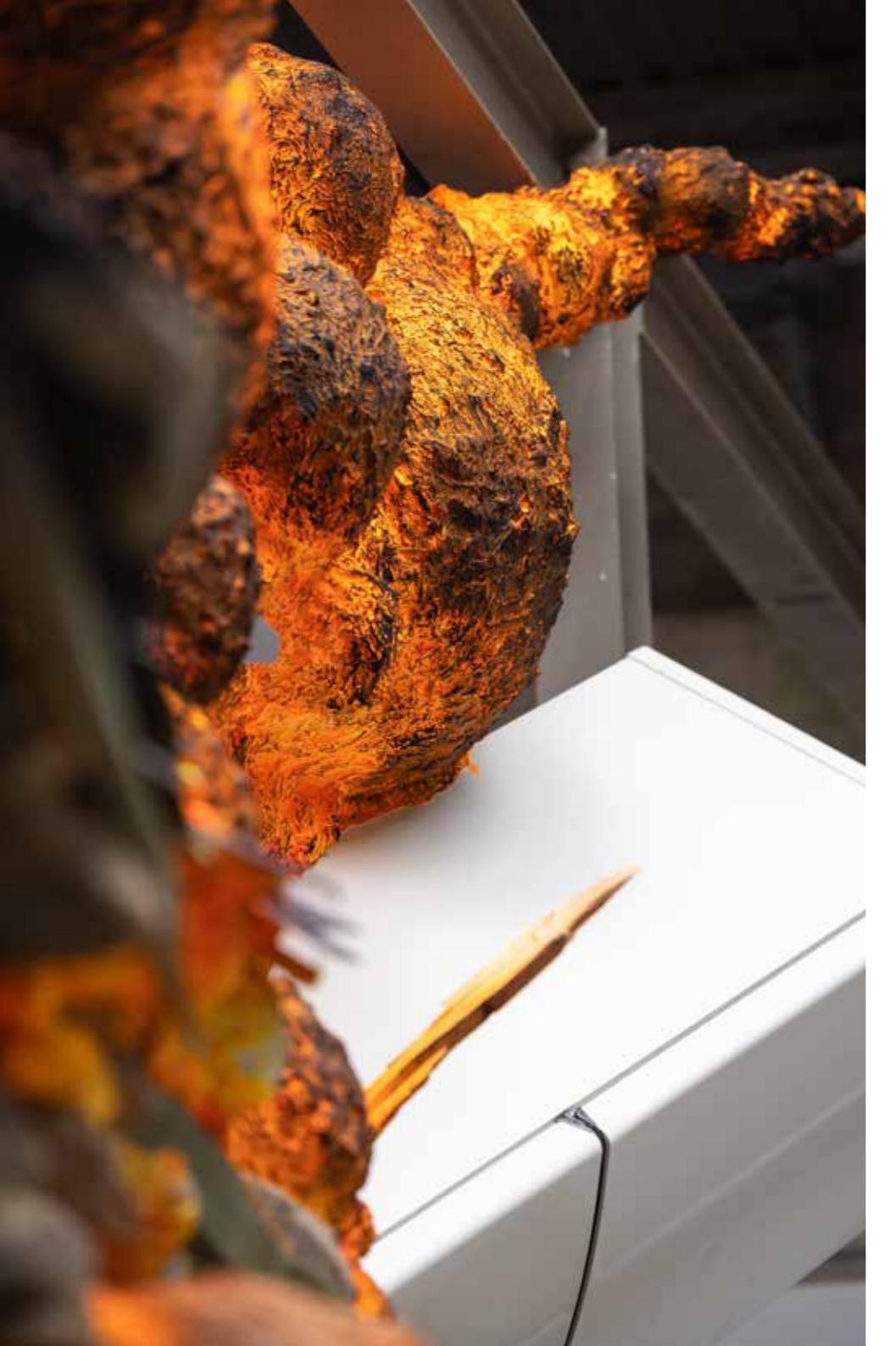














# David Mach

## Burning Down the House

### List of Works

---

**Burning Down the House**

2025

Installation

Fibreglass, timber, stone, metal, plastic,  
jesmonite, soil and plants**The Second Homeowner's Nightmare**

Lithograph, 17 colours

Paper size 420 x 595 mm

Edition of 50

**Spike**

2012

Coat hangers [mild steel] and steel

228.5 x 85 x 105 cm

Unique

**Male Bust 2021**

2020

Coat hangers [mild steel]

Unique

**Female Bust 2021**

2020

Coat hangers [mild steel]

Unique

**The Thief**

2011

Coat hangers [mild steel]

Unique

**Heads I-II**

2020

Coat hangers [mild steel]

Unique

**Arms I-IV**

2020

Coat hangers [mild steel]

Unique



## David Mach

### Biography

Born March 1956 in Methil, Fife, Scotland, David Mach joined Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art from 1974 to 1979. He experimented with ideas and techniques claiming them as his own, continuing to develop them today. A graduate of the Royal College of Art in 1982 Mach became a Royal Academician in 1998 and has been appointed professor of Inspiration and Discovery at Dundee University.

One of the most prolific artists of his generation, Mach has extensively exhibited his work worldwide developing his artistic style based on flowing assemblages of mass-produced objects from magazines & newspapers, car tyres, matches to coat hangers, soft toys, pins, nails, etc.

Selected major public installations include *Temple at Tyre* in Edinburgh, *Here to Stay* made with 145 tonnes of the Daily Record and *Polaris*, a submarine made out of tyres outside the Hayward Gallery on London's South Bank.

Public commissions sculptures include the sumo wrestlers *It Takes Two* in Paris and Marseilles, *Out of Order* in Kingston upon Thames made out of telephone boxes, *Train* in Darlington, the *Big Heids* of Scotland's M8, the UK's *Portrait of a Nation* commissioned for the Millennium Dome, *Precious Light* at the CAC in Edinburgh, *Incoming* in London and *No Place Like Home* in St Austell.

Mach continues on a furious schedule constantly developing new ideas and new works including this latest work, *Burning Down the House*.





## David Mach Taking Shape

### Taking Shape

Coat hangers are just one of the endless stream of materials I have managed to get through in the last 50 years of making sculpture. To call myself a materials junkie would underrate my addiction to STUFF. Wading through tyres and books and newspapers and magazines and matches and postcards and containers and dolls and toys and goodness knows what else I arrived at coat hangers, reluctant to use them because I knew they would require a detailed, lengthy and costly process to produce sculpture out of them.

I kept them at arm's-length for a while but they eventually lured me in, their biggest attraction, in a way, that they were so unbearably ordinary a thing to use to make art. They beat hard on arts door battling against the snobberies to be found inside its galleries. I like battling with that snobbery. You don't have to be a painter of oils or cast your sculpture in bronze to make a great work of art, we all know that now I guess but I admit, it sounds terrible when someone asks the question what do you use to make your art? And I say coat hangers. It does sound terrible. Naff, maybe even embarrassing.

I love them now of course, partly because we construct, the royal we, since I have never welded a single coat hanger to another to make a sculpture, they are welded together by a very skilled set of assistants under instruction from me into crazily detailed and completely unlikely works of art.

I love them because ridiculously ordinary as a coat hanger is it brings with it surprise elements for the viewer. It will depend on how you use such a material but the way we construct with them allows for a degree of actual movement. An audience will inevitably touch a sculpture made with coat hangers and find they spring, they bounce like a nodding dog in the back of a car. Try getting bronze to do that.

Coat hangers are full of life! Not something you will find out until you start making art with them and see that they bring an extra need along for the viewer. Because they are not entirely welded together into a solid metal unit, because you can see through the cage structure of a coat hanger sculpture, you can see the back and the front and the inside all at the same time. That provides the need for a physical examination that describes to you exactly what it is and infuriates you by trying to hide itself at the same time. That's a very odd combination and of course delightful to me. It means that when you're confronted by a coat hanger sculpture you will really have to spend a lot of time figuring out what the hell this thing is. You have to scrutinise these works. You can't be lazy about it.

My own 'take' on these works? I love the way each hook acts like the hairs on your arm, on the back of your neck. They're like hundreds of antennae reaching out into space to find out what the hell's going on, they're aerials seeking communication and knowledge. I'd say for the large figure that is particularly pertinent. There's an agony too about the way the hooks behave, how they reach out that's almost excruciating. In the other works, the two figures, kind of like the remains of sculpture one would find in museums, the coat hangers are calmed down but the Cheetah, *Spike*, has the same electric, hairs standing on end display, the hooks stretched out to points this time.

There's definitely something about this material's desperate ordinariness that attracts and inspires me. It's been a delightful surprise to me how something so ordinary as a coat hanger can, when used for constructing art, turn into something quite special. They're challenging for the viewer, they challenge our preconceived ideas about what art should be and they definitely challenge arts multifarious snobberies.

**David Mach**  
Galway, July 2025

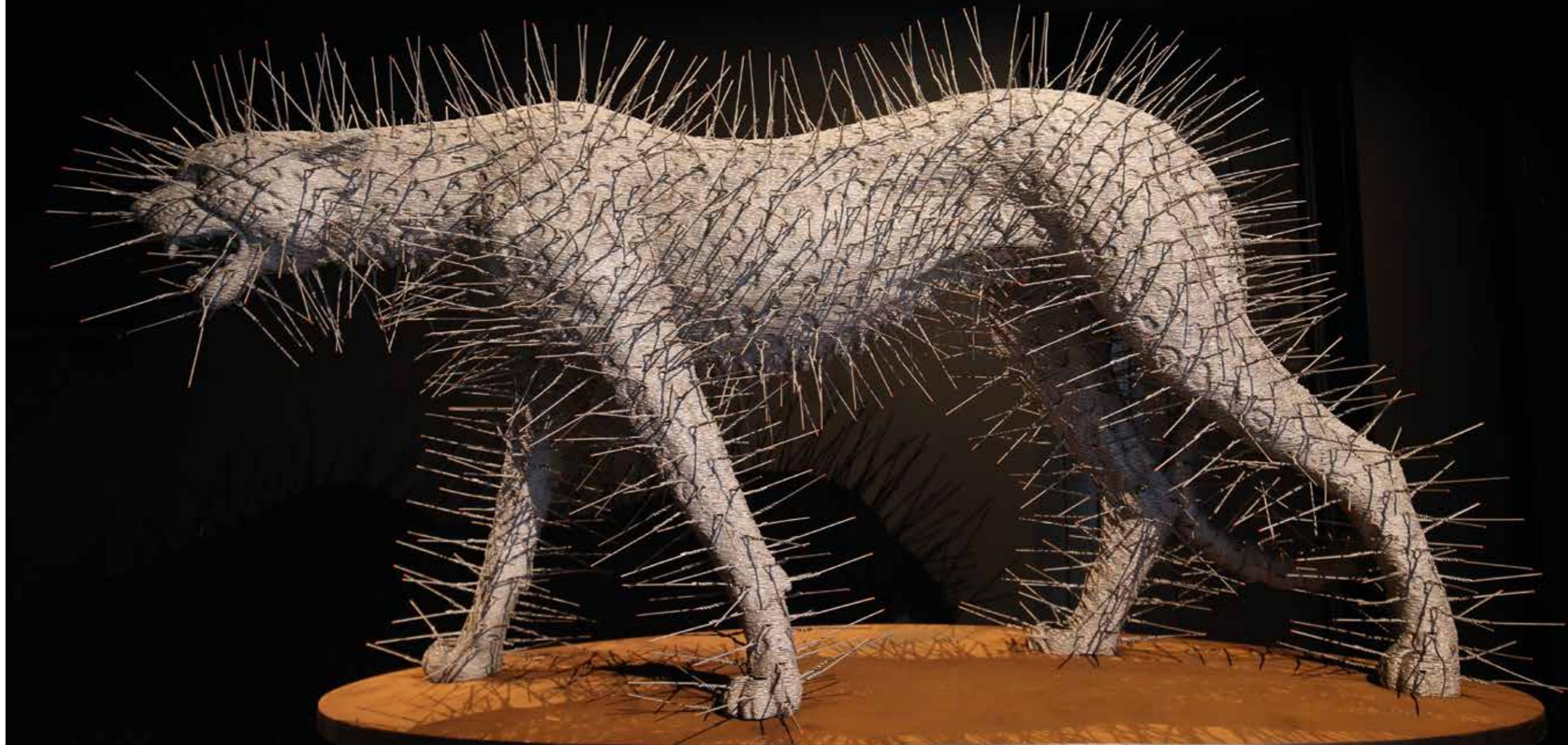
## **Spike**

2012

Coat hangers [mild steel] and steel

228.5 x 85 x 105 cm

Unique





**Male Bust 2021**

2020

Coat hangers [mild steel]

Unique



**Female Bust 2021**

2020

Coat hangers [mild steel]

Unique



**Heads I-II**

2020

Coat hangers [mild steel]  
Unique



**The Thief**

2011

Coat hangers [mild steel]  
Unique

### Arms I-IV

2020

Coat hangers [mild steel]

Unique

[detail]

[opposite]

### Arms I-IV

[detail]

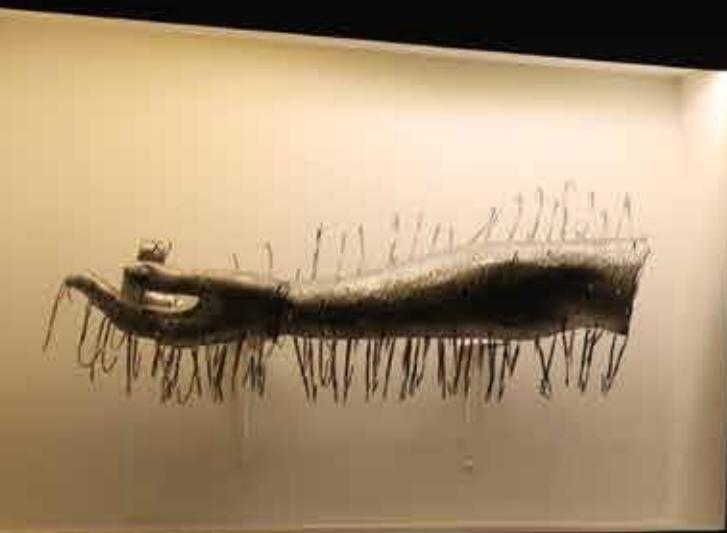
[overleaf]

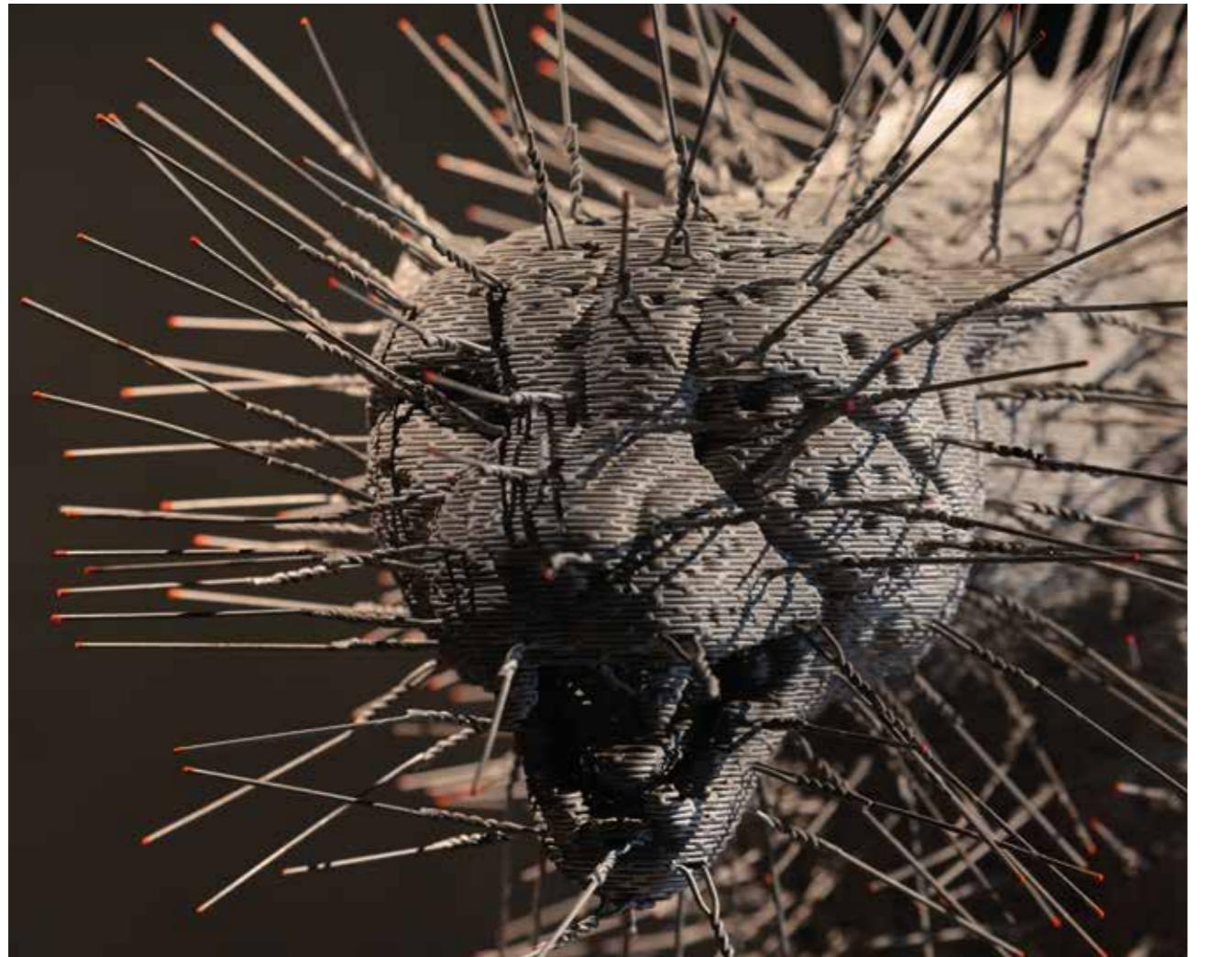
### The Thief

[detail]

[back page]

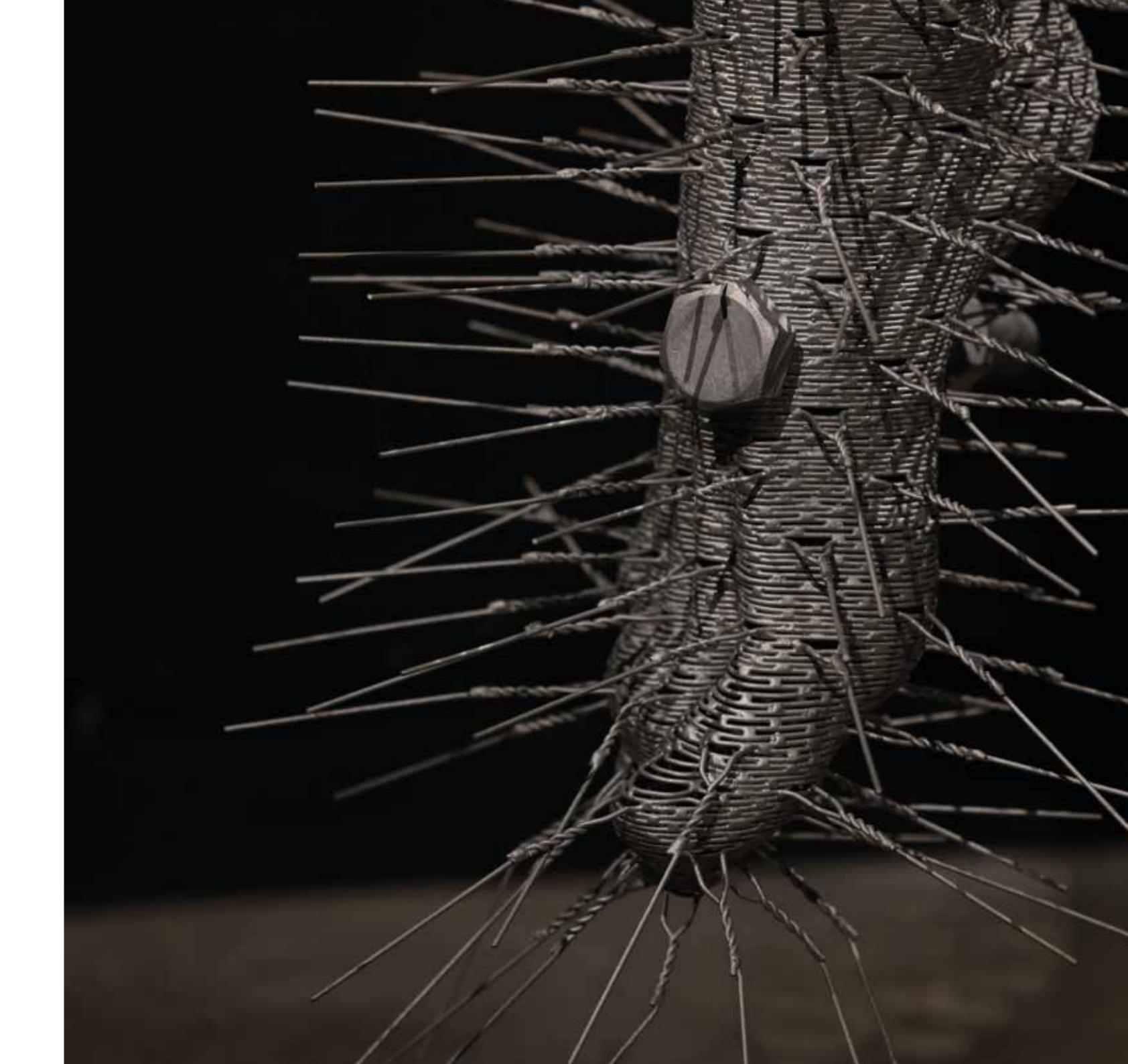






**Spike**

[detail]



# David Mach

## Biography

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 1956      | Born in Methil, Fife [Scotland]  |
| 1974/79   | Duncan of Jordanston College of Art, Dundee [Scotland]                                       |
| 1975      | Pat Holmes Memorial Prize  |
| 1976      | Duncan of Drumfork Travelling Scholarship  |
| 1977      | SED minor travelling scholarship   |
| 1978      | SED major travelling scholarship   |
| 1979/82   | Royal College of Art [RCA], London.  |
| 1982      | RCA Drawing Prize  |
| 1988      | Nominated for the Turner Prize, Tate Gallery, London   |
| 1992      | Won Lord Provost's Award, RGI, Glasgow   |
| 1998      | Elected Member of the Royal Academy of Arts  |
| 1999      | Visiting Professor, Sculpture Department, Edinburgh College of Art                           |
| 2000      | Appointed Professor of Sculpture, Royal Academy Schools, London                              |
| 2002      | Honorary Doctor of Laws, University of Dundee University                                     |
| 2004      | Made Honorary Member of the Royal Scottish Academy   |
|           | First Visiting Professor of Inspiration and Discovery at the University of Dundee [Scotland] |
| 2006–2010 | Elected to the board of the National Portrait Gallery  |
| 2011      | Bank of Scotland Herald Angel Award 2011 winner for <i>Precious Light</i>                    |
| 2011      | Glenfiddich Spirit of Scotland Award for Art   |

## SELECTED PUBLIC ART PROJECTS & COMMISSIONS

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 2022 | <i>No Place Like Home</i> , Whitegold Project, St Austell   |
| 2015 | <i>Phantom</i> , commissioned by Morrisons Supermarkets, UK   |
| 2012 | <i>The Vinadio Giants</i> , VIAPAC Project, Regione Piemonte, Italy   |
| 2000 | Unveiled <i>Good Guys, Bad Guys and Scramble</i> , sculptures commissioned by Chesterfield Council, UK  |
| 1999 | Installed <i>A National Portrait</i> , a 70m x 3m collage of Britain, commissioned by the NMEC for the Self Portrait Zone of the Millennium Dome at Greenwich, UK       |
| 1999 | Unveiled <i>Big Heids</i> , three sculptures sited by the M8 motorway in North Lanark, Scotland, commissioned by North Lanark Council, UK                               |
| 1998 | Installed <i>Gargoyle Sculpture</i> commissioned by the town of Nicosia, Cyprus   |
| 1997 | Unveiled <i>Train</i> , Britain's largest contemporary public sculpture in Darlington, commissioned by Darlington Council, Morrisons Supermarkets and Northern Arts, UK |
| 1997 | Installed <i>It Takes Two</i> , on Circular Quay, Sydney, Australia, for Sydney International Arts Festival   |
| 1996 | <i>Urn</i> , commissioned for their collection by McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton, Ontario   |

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 1994 | <i>Temple at Tyre</i> , Leith Docks, Edinburgh, commissioned by Edinburgh City Council to support their bid to be City of Architecture and Design, UK |
| 1989 | <i>Out of Order</i> , Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, commissioned by the Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames, UK                                     |

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 2025 | <i>Burning Down the House</i> , Galway International Arts Festival, Galway, Ireland               |
| 2023 | <i>The Oligarch's Nightmare</i> , Galway International Arts Festival, Galway, Ireland             |
| 2023 | <i>Heavy Metal</i> , Pangolin London  |
| 2021 | <i>The Return – No Rest for the Wicked</i> , Andata Ritorno, Geneva                               |
| 2019 | <i>Waves</i> , Newspaper Installation, Chester Cathedral  |
| 2018 | <i>Against The Tide</i> , Newspaper Installation, CassArt, Glasgow                                |
| 2018 | <i>Rock 'n' Roll</i> , Galway International Arts Festival, Galway, Ireland                        |
| 2017 | <i>Incoming</i> , Newspaper Installation, Griffin Gallery, London                                 |
| 2013 | <i>David Mach, New Works</i> , Forum Gallery, NY  |
|      | <i>Precious Light – Palazzo Frangini</i> , Venice   |
| 2012 | <i>David Mach – Precious Light</i> , Galway International Arts Festival, Galway, Ireland          |
|      | <i>Mach-Mania: the David Mach Show</i> , Opera Gallery, Hong Kong                                 |
| 2011 | <i>David Mach – Precious Light</i> , City Arts Centre, Edinburgh                                  |
| 2010 | <i>Iconography</i> , Opera Gallery, London  |
| 2009 | <i>Mach</i> , Opera Gallery, Geneva   |
| 2008 | <i>Size Doesn't Matter</i> , Art Center de Vishal, Haarlem, Holland                               |
|      | <i>Breaking Images</i> , The Cat Street Gallery, Hong Kong  |
|      | <i>David Mach</i> , DUTAC, Dubai  |
| 2007 | <i>David Mach – In Seine</i> , Opera Garnier, Paris   |
|      | <i>Postcard Collages</i> , Jill George Gallery, London  |
|      | <i>David Mach</i> , Forum Gallery, NY   |
| 2006 | <i>Visit London</i> , Touring exhibition, London, Milan, Berlin, Barcelona                        |
|      | <i>The State of Heads</i> , Jill George Gallery, London   |
|      | <i>Fortune</i> , Mint Club, Hong Kong   |
|      | <i>Hell Bent</i> , Galway International Arts Festival, Galway, Ireland                            |
| 2005 | <i>New Collages and Sculpture</i> , Forum Gallery, NY   |
| 2004 | <i>New Collages</i> , Jill Georges Gallery, London  |
| 2003 | <i>Straight Up</i> , Galerie Jérôme de Noirmont, Paris  |
| 2002 | <i>Hell Bent</i> , Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow   |
| 2001 | Touring exhibition of original artwork of <i>Portrait of Britain</i> – 17 different venues        |
|      | <i>David Mach</i> , Galeria Communale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome                        |
| 2000 | <i>The Mild Bunch</i> , APT Gallery, London   |
|      | <i>Species</i> , Galerie Jérôme de Noirmont, Paris  |
| 1999 | <i>The National Portrait</i> commissioned for the Self Portrait Zone, The Dome, Greenwich, London |





**Festival Gallery**  
**Galway International**  
**Arts Festival 2025**

Galway, Ireland