

Plant Metamorphosis in Relief

Jonathan Chequers

Sculptures, text and photography by
Jonathan Chequers



Expectant Seed

Width 42 cm x Height 61 cm

The relief is of a slightly darker colour than the remaining sequence, indicating its position below ground. The sculptural motifs are soft, quiet and passive, implying patience, yet still showing the expectancy and immense potentiality of the seed. There is only a slight acknowledgement of any up/down orientation, and hence the overall form appears to “float”.



Germinating

Width 46 cm x Height 62 cm

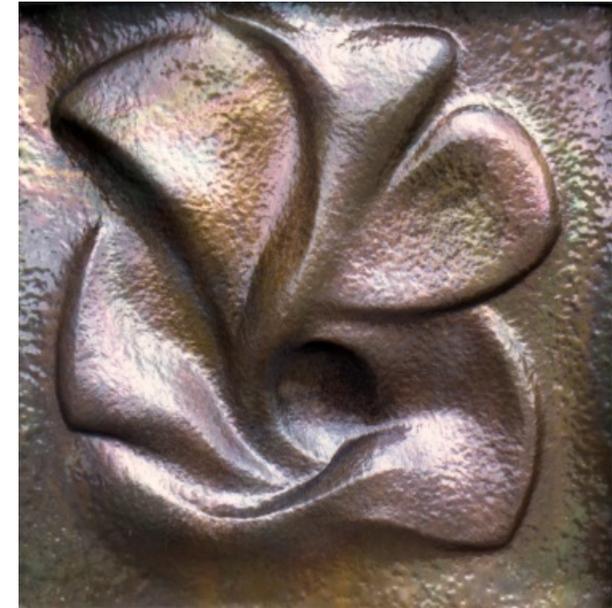
With germination vigorous growth suddenly starts with both a yearning, upward thrusting gesture towards the light, and similarly there is a corresponding strong growth and attachment to the ground below. The curving forms in the upper space indicate the energy of this stage and hint towards the as-yet-unformed leaves and overall shape that the plant will produce.



Unfolding of the Leaves

Width 57 cm x Height 64 cm

For the first time the motif now fills the whole sheet, not only with an up/down orientation but also into the width with a left/right orientation too. Complexity of the form gestures increases with the newly unfurled leaves bursting out across the whole sheet. However, a space has already been created to indicate that blossoming is to follow.



Blossoming

Width 66 cm x Height 66 cm

Strong, clearly defined, open petals fill the whole sheet with a hint of a stamen in the top/middle. In a sense this is the culmination of the previous three stages. But now, after all that dynamic growth and energy, there is again a moment of stillness, patience and receptivity for a new hoped-for external force to enter the flower. The flower just is. This relief has the only square shape of the sequence reflecting the quiet, receptive mood and also the typical symmetrical shape of flowers. The lower central concave indicates the receptivity for pollination by the calyx, the site of the bearer of the growing fruit.

These sculptural reliefs, worked 1994-95, are an artistic interpretation of the motif or gesture for each of the seven archetypal or developmental stages that most annual plants undergo during the course of their life-cycle. Each stage is distinct yet a metamorphosis from the previous state, although there are variations to this sequence within individual plants. The reliefs were created in the same sequential manner as the plant goes through naturally. The stages are the Expectant Seed, Germinating, Unfolding of the Leaves, Blossoming, Pollinating, Fruiting and finally the Ripening Seed.

Whilst working on one relief I was conscious that I (like the plant) had to prepare or indicate the following stage, and so each relief includes a slight suggestion of the next development.

The relative size and orientation of the reliefs are important as they reflect the content and dynamics of a particular stage. Opposite pairs of the sequence in many ways reflect yet reverse each other's gesture. For example, in Germination the form qualities are thrusting upwards and overcoming gravity, whilst in the Developing Fruit relief gravity and heaviness are the dominant motifs.

The reliefs, formed of copper sheet, were inspired by the archetypal plant form sequence at the base of the columns in the great auditorium of the First Goetheanum building (for further details see relevant chapter).



Pollinating

Width 57 cm x Height 65 cm

This relief expresses this moment of intense, vigorous excitement with hectic, rhythmical, dynamic movements. It shows how the forces coming from outside the plant (top right of the sheet) meet the receptive elements of the flower and react in their mutual pollination process. The receptive calyx/concave has now enlarged from the earlier Blossoming relief and despite the inherent dynamics of the situation there is a mood of tenderness in the giving and receiving. The orientation of the relief has lost the square shape and now has a slight vertical orientation that is similar to its opposite pair, Unfolding of the Leaves. But, in contrast to that earlier relief, Pollinating has a point of intense focus which orchestrates the dynamics of the whole relief.



Fruiting

Width 44 cm x Height 67 cm

After all that energetic excitement things now start to slow down. The main focus is on the steady growth and swelling of the fruit and it is starting to get heavy. For the first time in the whole sequence a sense of heaviness and weight prevails, with gravity overcoming the upward forces in the previous reliefs. Hence a stronger vertically orientated relief is used to acknowledge the downward pull of the fruit's eventual resting place on the earth. Within the outer fleshy fruit, inside a tough, almost crystalline seed is also developing.



Ripening Seed

Width 39 cm x Height 60 cm

At this point the focus is on the fruit/seed pod that is about to split open to release the seed to the receptive, yet hard earth below. The seed pod appears to just hang, tired and exhausted. This is another quiet form with the earth's receptivity shown by the large concave formed by great depth in the copper sheet and the upward "arms" welcoming the seed in an warm embrace to conclude the plant's annual cycle. Whilst at the same time, this new seed is ready to commence its own metamorphic process when the time and conditions are suitable.

Creative Process

The copper sheet, 1.2mm thick, is beaten from both sides using a selection of specialist round-headed hammers to create different forms in the copper. The copper sheet when pushed and worked stretches slightly, and hence becomes thinner in places. After beating the metal it eventually becomes stiff or "work-hardened" and requires annealing. This is a process whereby through heating the sheet with flame and then rapidly cooling with water the copper sheet is relaxed into its new position and hence its workability and ductility is restored.

The various colours in the reliefs are the result of oxides formed by differing temperatures

through the above annealing process. The straw or yellow oxide are formed from the coolest temperature, whilst the deeper reds and blue are formed through the copper being much hotter.

Working the copper sheet from both sides is a surprising artistic experience. Because the sheet reflects both the outcome of a particular action on one side, say, for example, beating the sheet and creating a concave impression, whilst on the reverse its opposite is being formed e.g. a convex shape. Hence I had to be attentive to the side I was working on and also be aware of the resultant and opposite effect this was having on the reverse side. My artistic consciousness had to be in two places at once and hence I had many surprises!