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Antony Gormley sculptures to mark 50 years of Landmark Trust

Life-sized iron figures will be installed at five waterside sites including charity's buildings in Suffolk and Bristol Channel



Work in progress on Land, Antony Gormley's work for the Landmark Trust. Photograph: Landmark Trust

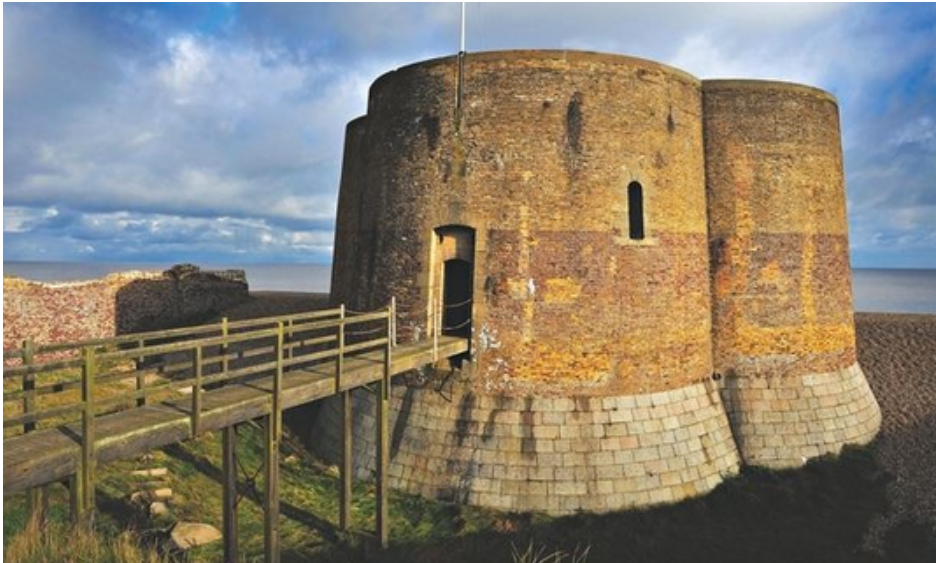
Five life-sized iron figures by the sculptor Antony Gormley will be installed at waterside sites including the roof of a Martello tower in Suffolk, and Lundy Island in the Bristol Channel, next year to mark the 50th anniversary of the Landmark Trust, the charity that rescues derelict historic buildings and restores them as holiday rentals.

Gormley has chosen the sites himself for Land, his only new work that will be shown in the UK next year, and is not charging the charity. His sites represent four compass points at the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland, Wales and England, with a central point by the canal at Lawsonford in Warwickshire where the trust owns the old lock keeper's cottage.

One of the figures will stand gazing out to sea from beside the Clavell Tower, high over Kimmeridge Bay in Dorset – a favourite property of the crime writer PD James who often stays there. The 19th-century folly tower was one of the trust's most epic projects: it was not only derelict but about to topple over the eroding cliffs, and so was dismantled stone by stone and moved inland.

Gormley said the figures – like all his works, based on his own body – were lightning rods for thoughts and feelings at the sites. "The sculptures identify the place where a particular human body once stood and anyone could stand, and in that respect they are open spaces empty of content and waiting for your attention."

His most famous work is the towering Angel of the North, but his human-sized sculptures have been as popular. His Another Place figures, half submerged at every tide at Crosby Beach on Merseyside, have become a permanent installation, after the local authority backed down on claims that they were too expensive to maintain and could be a danger to wildlife and windsurfers.



The Martello Tower in Suffolk, one of the buildings where an Antony Gormley figure will be erected.
Photograph: Marcus Stanton/Landmark Trust

The Land figures are intended to remain in place for a year.

“We are completely thrilled to be working with Antony Gormley,” the trust director Anna Keay said. “We wrote to him two years ago apologising for contacting him out of the blue, and he wrote back immediately and said he had already stayed at some of our properties.”

The Landmark Trust has now restored and runs 200 properties including a pigsty disguised as a Greek temple; a gardener’s shed inside a giant stone pineapple; Cawood Castle in Yorkshire where in 1530 Cardinal Wolsey was arrested for treason by a trembling representative of Henry VIII; and a terraced house in Penzance covered in Ancient-Egyptian-inspired ornament. The insertion of an unashamedly modern structure making the ruined Astley Castle in Warwickshire habitable again won the Riba Stirling prize last year.

The trust was founded in 1965 by Sir John Smith – as Keay said, almost certainly the only Conservative MP who was also a member of the union of fairground showmen – at a time when historic buildings were being swept away by the score. Smith thought the grandest buildings could be left to national bodies such as the National Trust, and concentrated on smaller, often eccentric, structures, horribly expensive to restore but without any obvious economic use.

The celebrations will include an open weekend on 16-17 May. The trust is also offering 50 free holidays to charities, who are invited to nominate people who deserve a break, including volunteers, carers and struggling families.

Two restored properties will open: St Edward’s Presbytery in Ramsgate, the last building designed by Augustus Pugin before he was confined to a mental asylum soon before his death, and Belmont, an ornate Regency house in Lyme Regis, doubly famous as the home of Eleanor Coade, the businesswoman who invented an artificial stone widely used in architectural ornament, and later the home of the author John Fowles.

The trust has also launched a £600,000 appeal towards the restoration of one of the most ruinous properties it has ever taken on, Llwyn Celyn, a Grade I listed 15th-century manor house in the Black Mountains, virtually untouched since the 1700s, and propped with scaffolding for the last decade to prevent total collapse. When Keay made a last-minute check before a visit by Prince Charles last summer, she discovered that most of the ceiling of one room had collapsed since she last stood in it half an hour earlier. "This is a typical Landmark Trust challenge," she said. "Nobody else would touch it."