

Special bond sees artists join forces to carve out a giant mission

By Deborah Anderson

IT is a sculpture which has brought two people who share a common bond together.

World-renowned sculptor Mark Stoddart linked up with artist Angus Hepburn this year to work on a project to raise awareness and help Mr Hepburn break through as a sculptor.

Both are dyslexic and through the charity Dyslexia Scotland, the pair were brought together in a mentoring project earlier this year.

Mr Stoddart, the Ayrshire sculptor known for his glass-topped coffee tables which can fetch thousands of pounds at auction, has marked his 30th anniversary and this year wanted to give something back after a career which has brought him much success.

Knowing how difficult it is to get a break as a sculptor, he decided he wanted to work with young up-and-coming artist Mr Hepburn.

More than nine months later, the mentoring and partnership has resulted in a bronze Goliath head and Scottish gold David sculpture being unveiled at the Scottish Parliament.

Mr Stoddart said: "As part of Scottish Dyslexia Awareness Week, I am delighted that Angus's sculpture has been put on display at the Scottish Parliament.

"It has been a race to the finish as we were still at the foundry at Powderhall Bronze on Wednesday

and Hamilton & Inches jewellers in Edinburgh were still working on the Scottish gold sculpture with hours to spare. Everything came together.

"Angus brought forward ideas to create a sculpture of David and Goliath, symbolising his own victory over dyslexia, using a small plastic toy from his childhood for the David, set on top of a huge head.

"It had a real resonance with me and I saw much of myself in Angus, so I worked with him to bring this powerful piece to a finished sculpture, cast by Powderhall Bronze in Edinburgh."

Mr Hepburn, from Angus, spent months working on the project which is called A Desirable Disadvantage and is about dyslexia, interpreted through the story of David and Goliath.

Mr Hepburn said: "For me, it is very validating as an artist to see the completed piece of work and people's reaction to it. It has certainly been grabbing the attention of politicians at the Scottish Parliament and the hope is that it will tour with future exhibitions.

"It was all about the idea that you could turn your weakness on its head and it actually becomes your strength."

With his aim of helping others in his own anniversary year, Mr Stoddart decided to cover all the costs of the sculpture, from the moulds and bronze all the way through to the



Angus Hepburn's bronze was unveiled at the Scottish Parliament as part of Dyslexia Week

casting of David in an extremely rare Scottish gold.

Mr Stoddart added: "The idea of a huge head cast in bronze, being adorned by a triumphant David, is a powerful statement in itself.

"However, the notion of a small David cast in gold having a significantly higher value than the whole head seemed appropriate, as he overcame significant odds, inexperience and prejudice to win his battle.

"The parallels with my own experiences of dyslexia and those of Angus experienced are perfectly captured in this piece".

But his desire to give back does not end there. He is also helping Bali Dyslexia Foundation by sponsoring a young student, Widjayah, to go to school and has gifted him with a

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laptop to help his education. When he learned there were a further 20 students with different artistic interests, he stepped in and is working to mentor three of them, providing materials to help them succeed, with further support for their business plans.

With his own work influenced by and rooted in his experiences of travelling in Africa, Mr Stoddart has now gone on to help the RareGem Talent School in Kenya.

To help raise funds for the school, Mr Stoddart organised a raffle for a coffee table he created, featuring a hippo and her calf.

Known as the Hostage Hippos, the valuable table had originally been loaned to a hotel, but the owners had refused to return it and had locked it away as a "hostage" for many years.



Renowned sculptor Mark Stoddart with Angus Hepburn's finished work in bronze



Work on casting the bronze sculpture

The raffle is run in collaboration with Cincinnati Zoo, voted one of America's best zoos, and the winning ticket will be drawn by Fiona – the zoo's much loved hippo – with all funds going to charity.

Mr Stoddart added: "With time to spare in lockdown, I've also been mastering my computer and have been delighted by invitations to speak to a number of schools and organisations".

These include the Odyssey School in Lutherville, Maryland, USA and an online talk to support National Creativity and Innovation Day.

The theme of Dyslexia Awareness Week, which runs until Sunday, is to help make Scotland a dyslexia-friendly destination. One in 10 people has the learning condition that can cause problems with reading and writing.