APOLLO

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Maro (2014), Christopher Le Brun

Beyond Limits: Sotheby's sculpture park at Chatsworth

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The proliferation of sculpture parks around the country – from Jupiter Artland outside Edinburgh to Barbara Hepworth's garden in St Ives – has confirmed that

it is not just collectors who enjoy the encounter with sculpture in the landscape. The public seems just as keen on historic gardens that offer the additional lure of contemporary art. One of the happiest marriages is at Chatsworth, where, since 2006, the Duke of Devonshire has hosted every year a display by Sotheby's of large-scale sculpture, entitled 'Beyond Limits'.

As well as being a committed collector of contemporary art, the Duke is Deputy Chairman of the auction house. He could see that within Chatsworth's picturesque landscape, constructed in the 18th and 19th centuries by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown and then by Joseph Paxton, Sotheby's would be able to display its large sculptures to their finest advantage; it would also be possible to entice a new audience to Chatsworth by providing an opportunity to view outstanding examples of modern and contemporary sculpture before they disappear back into private collections.

By all accounts, the strategy seems to have worked. Sotheby's clients have not been deterred by the logistics of reaching Derbyshire's Peak District, while the number of visitors to the estate seems to have risen, thanks to this annual visitation of strange and inspiring constructions.

Hoop-la (2013), Alice Aycock

Large-scale sculpture of any kind seems to be enhanced by these surroundings. Christopher Le Brun's giant wing, Maro (2014; named for the poet Virgil), carved in grey rippled white marble, eagerly assumes its place in this romantic landscape, on one side of the Canal Pond. Phillip King's bold red-painted steel abstract work, Slant (1966) is a cogent comment on the geometries of both the house and garden; at the head of the pond, American artist Alice Aycock's painted aluminium Hoop-la(2013) whirls and twists like an Italian futurist painting chopped up and reconstituted in metal.

Tao Hua Yuan: A Lost Village Utopia (2013–14), Xu Bing

Eduardo Chillida's memorial to the Basque Nationalist, José Antonio de Aguirre (1978), a cast-iron stele pierced by deeply incised, interlocking lines, offers a resolutely rectangular dialogue with the space around it. It's a direct contrast with the Irish artist Eilís O'Connell's swooping smooth white Wingblade (2008). Nearby, one of the highlights of the show isLa Montagne (1955–56), a raw expressive work by French sculptor Germaine Richier, which shows two frightening, humanoid chimera locked in battle.

One coup for the show has been the exhibition in the Duke's more usually private garden, in front of the house's gilded front elevation, of Xu Bing's monumental landscape piece, Tao Hua Yuan: A Lost Village Utopia, which was first exhibited at the end of last year in the John Madejski Garden of the V&A. This subtle and persuasive work creates in rocks, branches, flowers, water, real fish and ceramic animals, the lost utopia of a 5th-century fable. It is particularly resonant at Chatsworth – another highly constructed vision of utopia.

'Beyond Limits', Sotheby's 2014 Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition atChatsworth, is open until 26 October.