



As in nature, there is no variation in the size of the metal flowers.



Ruth bolts the individual flowers to the metal stems by hand.

A PATCH OF GLITTERING light splashes against a tangle of hollyhocks and lupins in the borders of a country garden. The summer sun is shining on a dazzling metal allium, glinting off the crown of steel petals which surround its head. More than 6ft (2m) in diameter, the giant sculpture dwarfs its surroundings, adding a touch of make-believe and theatre to the tranquil setting.

The eye-catching structure is the work of Lancashire-based artist Ruth Moilliet, who fashions the delicate shapes and patterns of nature in steel. Focusing mostly on flowers, she aims to give a deeper picture of the world around her, highlighting the way in which form and function combine to create beauty. Her work is often large-scale, inviting the viewer to walk among supersized sunflowers and anchor-like dandelion seeds, getting up close to parts of the flower usually passed unseen.

Natural design

Ruth started working in metal while studying fine art sculpture at Manchester University. Here, she first created the giant alliums which remain her signature piece. “I love the fact there’s an outer sphere with a hidden inner structure, a hidden thing going on within the flower,” she says. “And there’s also that wonderful repetition of form. The amazing thing about nature is that it follows set patterns and proportions. I duplicate those patterns within my designs. A metre-tall allium will always have a centre of 10cm and the flowers will be 10cm. It’s all scaled accordingly.”

This sense of nature being highly engineered underpins her work. “Every part of a flower, down to the smallest component, is designed to fulfil a specific purpose, and ultimately to ensure the plant continues to grow and survive,” she says. “My pieces are very much about bringing this engineering to light. It’s about looking at the plant, taking stock, seeing all the different structures within it, and piecing them together again.”



Stems are welded onto a central core, making sure they are spaced correctly. Some have different lengths and finishes that can create an interesting light effect.

“Although we think of flowers as delicate, fragile things, as a whole, they’re actually incredibly tough. They’re among the oldest species on our planet. They can thrive next to busy roads and on rubbish dumps, so the steel reflects their strength and permanency.”

Pathway to creation

Ruth’s love of nature goes back to her childhood, when she would collect things from the garden and look at them under a microscope. Making rose perfume was a favourite hobby, and she always pressed and drew flowers. “I fancied myself as in *The Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady*,” she smiles. “At school, my arts education was very traditional. We used to do botanical drawing and fine line drawing, which stood me in good stead. I still do things the same way now. At university they obviously push you to stretch your ideas, so I didn’t do that kind of work for years. But part way through my degree I thought ‘why not go back to what interests me?’”

Following her degree, she completed an MA in art as environment. This helped develop her interest in the way people, plants and animals interact with each other and with the wider landscape. “The way a flower looks, its shape, colour, scent and markings, is a design to attract a specific pollinator, usually an insect, which carries the pollen to that same species of plant elsewhere,” she explains. “It’s why so many different types of plant continue to exist. I want to celebrate the harmony of the >