

Alex Chinneck: A distorted Georgian facade at this year's Clerkenwell Design Week is just one example of how the Kent-based artist and designer plays with architecture and illusion in his work. Interview by Sonia Zhuravlyova

'I've always been excited and liberated by the notion that your ideas are not limited to your technical, physical and spatial capabilities,' says artist and designer Alex Chinneck from his home in Kent, a medieval farmhouse ('a terrible idea!') and clutch of barns where he works with a revolving cast of craftspeople, technicians and engineers.

Illusion and surrealism are Chinneck's stock in trade; he is known for his reality-bending architectural interventions, from the melting brick house in Borough, south London (A Pound of Flesh for 50p, 2014) and an 'unzipping' building in Milan (Rock and Roll, 2019) to knotted lampposts and twisted telephone booths.

One of his latest public sculptures was A Week at the Knees, an undulating brick building commissioned for Clerkenwell Design Week 2025, which revisited the bending brickwork and sculptural language of his 'sliding house' in Margate (From the Knees of my Nose to the Belly of my Toes, 2013), which first brought him global acclaim.

Commissioned as a temporary installation for Charterhouse Square in Clerkenwell, and modelled on the Georgian architecture that surrounds it, A Week at the Knees playfully bent a four-storey facade.

'Distortion and disruption are best served on a bed of familiarity,' says Chinneck. 'So, I use the surroundings and the language of the context to provide the narrative and the norm that's then ripe for sculptural disruption.'

Much of his work involves working with a vast array of collaborators, from structural engineers and bricklayers to welders, a process that he particularly enjoys. His ideas are 'never not possible',

ABOVE Chinneck's A Week at the Knees (2025) at Clerkenwell Design Week

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he adds. It's just that he's not found the right partner to buy into them. But once he does, whether it's creating bricks out of wax or crafting a vast upside-down electricity pylon out of steel, they need 'to have a curiosity and an appetite for risk and experimentation'.

Although they might give the impression of being simple, Chinneck's sculptures are deeply complex. He is involved in the entire design process and often calls himself more of a project manager, or, endearingly, 'a likeable pain in the ass'.

To date, many of his pieces have been temporary, but

increasingly, he is working on public art projects that are permanent. He admits that transitioning to working on permanent installations has been an artistic struggle.

'It's a very public sketchbook. With impermanence, there's a large dose of creative freedom because it's free from the responsibilities of material and conceptual durability, and that allows more sculptural exploration and theatricality,' he says.

But with time and more projects and material understanding under his belt, he has found his feet. 'I like to explore materials and processes as much as possible – partly because of creative curiosity, partly because different locations require different responses,' he says.

He often finds that public art can be something of an afterthought, so he's particularly pleased that his First Kiss at Last Light series of intertwined lampposts, which made their debut in Bristol in 2024, bring together both playfulness and functionality.

'I think that they're the most intelligent public artworks I've ever made,' says Chinneck, who is working on more for a project in Canada. He is thinking about exploring more 'functional sculptures' in the future and even branching out into architecture proper.

Although he remains tight-lipped, there is plenty more work on the horizon. It seems that for Chinneck, imagination has no limits – and the world is all the richer for it.

LEFT The undulating four-storey brick facade was installed in Charterhouse Square



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