



**Art at the German Bundestag**  
**Antony Gormley**



The German Bundestag has the British sculptor Antony Gormley to thank for one of the most remarkable art-for-architecture projects in the parliamentary buildings: the installation *Stands and Falls* of 2001. Gormley flooded the floor of an inner courtyard of the Jakob Kaiser Building, which contains the offices of members of parliament. The courtyard can be entered only along a concrete walkway. Five life-size sculptures are attached at right angles to the walls, their images reflected in the black pool of water. The installation has imbued the courtyard with a distinctive life of its own. Without the sculptures and their reflections in the water, it would amount to nothing more than an essentially abstract space defined by geometrical architectural elements. The sculptures lend it a human dimension and a human scale. Protruding from the walls, they have an unsettling effect and make a space otherwise devoid of life perceptible in sensory and rational terms.

When members of parliament look down into the courtyard from their offices, the sculptures appear to be moving towards them, walking up the wall like something out of Stanley Kubrick's 2001: *Odyssey in Space* – and it is certainly no accident that Gormley's installation dates from the year named in the title of that movie. If an MP then walks into the courtyard along the walkway, which permits movement only back and forth, like a catwalk, he or she appears as part of the installation to viewers gazing from the windows. In this way, observers become objects of observation, a change of perspective not at all rare in the world of politics. Gormley uses different views of this kind in his sculptural installations to set up spatial relationships, enabling space to be experienced directly, granting the installations the character of events and allowing them to encapsulate social processes.

The figures in *Stands and Falls* were cast in iron from the artist's body. Such casts play an important part in Gormley's work as witnesses to the authentic nature of his artistic concerns. The artist multiplies a single cast several times, including such clearly visible evidence of their making as joins, ridges and troughs, because the figures embody a spatial and intellectual concept rather than reproducing the image of a specific person. They acquire a rusty patina, so that in the Jakob Kaiser Building, for example, they counteract the smooth perfection of the architecture in an almost subversive way. The installation thus exemplifies Gormley's visual and social use of sculptures to involve people in his aesthetic and philosophical concerns, giving them an opportunity to gain an actively physical, spatial awareness of surroundings in which they often feel out of place.

Gormley is one the most important sculptors at work today. A contributor to the documenta exhibitions, he first came to prominence when he received the Tate Gallery's Turner Prize in 1994 for a series of installations entitled *Field*. In this project, carried out at venues around the world, he produced small clay figures with the help of large numbers of local collaborators and filled each exhibition space with them. Visitors could not enter the display area, but found themselves gazed at by hundreds or thousands of eyes, belonging to sculptures that resembled each other yet were also individual and had resulted from a collective creative process. Two subsequent works likewise created a stir. *Angel of the North* (1998), a twenty-metre-tall figure with a wing span of fifty-four metres, was erected near Gateshead in north-eastern England and seems to embrace the surrounding countryside when seen from afar, while *Quantum Cloud*, set up a year later near the Millennium Dome on the

north bank of the Thames, rises to a height of thirty metres. Gormley's installation *Another Place* (1997) was a work of beguiling beauty that featured one hundred cast-iron figures distributed over a square kilometre of mud flats near Cuxhaven (Germany). Some of them were positioned so that they disappeared when the tide rose and emerged again when the water receded; others stood on the beach among visitors, who thus became part of the work. Here the artist's sculptures prompted physical and emotional responses from visitors in direct contact with nature, evoking humanity's isolation vis-à-vis the infinity of the natural world with a compelling immediacy reminiscent of Caspar David Friedrich.

## Antony Gormley *Stands and Falls*





Stands and Falls, 2001, cast iron,  
water in black plastic, concrete  
walkway (left and above)



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Flare, Drift I and Feeling Material  
XXIX, 2007, strips of stainless steel,  
at the exhibition Feeling Material



The same mood informs Gormley's latest installation *Horizon Field* (2010-2012) which consists of one hundred iron casts of his body set up over an area of 150 square kilometres in the Swiss Alps at a height of exactly 2,039 metres. Exposed to the rigours of the weather, the figures evince a pensive melancholy and yet appear defiantly confident amid the spectacular natural surroundings.

Gormley works in a conceptual mode. In the context of this approach, he has developed ever new images to convey his artistic concerns, including the examples described briefly here. His art acts as a medium of spatial and existential experience by siting the human body within a series of social and aesthetic coordinates. He gave this basic idea a new form in 2007, in a number of delicately beautiful sculptures.

That year the artist showed three of these works, *Feeling Material XXIX*, *Drift* and *Flare*, at an exhibition in the Art Room of the German Bundestag (on which occasion he was also awarded the 2007 Bernhard Heiliger Prize for Sculpture in the Marie-Elisabeth Lüders Building). Now his body could only be sensed, as an empty shape at the heart of the sculptures. Like some invisible halo, it seemed to emit rays of thin metal strips, forming a second skin and drawing fine lines in space. Essentially ambiguous, these pieces were both drawings and sculptures, both space-enfolding and space-occupying, both fragile and vibrantly energetic, both fixed and highly kinetic, both solid like any metal sculpture and proliferous like organic or crystalline forms.

The display in the Art Room of the German Bundestag contrasted with and complemented the installation in the Jakob Kaiser Building.

Together, they illuminated the work and development of Britain's leading contemporary sculptor. The sculptures in the exhibition amounted to more than simply further variations on the human body as a subject of scrutiny: they showed the artist broaching a novel view of space and volume, using it to convey a new feeling for the relationships of people to their surroundings, space and time – and, not least, of people to other people. Gormley establishes meanings by rendering spatial and temporal connections visible and, in particular, by making them retraceable. According to Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), such 'sense relations' give rise to the state of 'being-in-the-world'. In this sense, artists are creators in the original meaning of the word: they generate new worlds. Joseph Beuys, whom Gormley greatly admires, would have been the last to object to such a far-reaching definition of the artist.

