

ANTONY GORMLEY

VESSEL

Opening: Saturday 28 April, 2012, Via del Castello 11, 6pm-midnight

Until 20 August 2012, Tuesday-Saturday, 2-7pm

Galleria Continua is pleased to present, for the first time in its San Gimignano gallery, the work of Antony Gormley, one of the greatest contemporary English sculptors.

Following the exhibition at GALLERIA CONTINUA / Beijing in 2009 and the solo show currently on view at GALLERIA CONTINUA / Le Moulin, Gormley is presenting *VESSEL*, which includes a major new work specifically conceived for the former theatre-cinema of San Gimignano. With this exhibition the artist is adding to a rich programme of special events in Italy and around the world: between April 2012 and January 2013, Gormley's work will be presented in a group show at the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence, at the Deichtorhallen Hamburg GmbH in Germany, and in Brazil at the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and in Brasília.

Antony Gormley's explorations of body, space and time continue to test environment, form and feeling often pitting one against the other. This exhibition interrogates the body through architecture, asserting it as a model both of spatial organisation and a subject of gravitational force and articulating the tensions as well as convergences between the human animal and his or her habitat.

In a sequence of twelve new solid iron blockworks Gormley puts the formal purity of Modernist abstraction to work to evoke and provoke inner states. These works use the language of stacking, propping and cantilevering and a similar use of mass and somatic affect as found in Richard Serra's work. The works attempt to objectify the experience of embodiment: the sense of containment or conditioning that exists within urban man.

Exploring space frames as well as mass Gormley blurs the distinctions between content and context. The twelve massive castings are contrasted with a new BREATHING ROOM. Sited in the empty tower at the north of the Galleria Continua and constructed from five interconnecting luminous space frames all equal volume it encourages self-observation on the part of the viewer within a luminous matrix. The work is a concentration chamber for an abstract and temporal evocation of the second body of architecture.

The exhibition also contains some foundational works. *BASE* is a two metre square solid concrete slab that encloses a void impression of an absent body, identifiable through the holes created by the soles of the feet, palms of the hand and the brain cavity and *PARALLEL FIELD*, in which two leaning, unstable bodycases address each other across a twelve metre space. Also on view are two versions of *EDGE*, both lying on the floor and attached to the wall, providing a haptic destabilisation of the architecture.

The fulcrum of the show is a large-scale work entitled VESSEL, which also acts as a *trait de liason* between the exhibition project at San Gimignano and Gormley's project for Galleria Continua's French venue. At Le Moulin, his investigation of the different variables in the relationship between the human body and living space is articulated in SPACE STATION a vast 23 tonne sculpture, enterable by a small passage in the side of the work. VESSEL is made out of thirty nine interconnecting rectangular steel boxes that meditate on the renaissance trope of the city in the form of a man, by making a man in the form of a city. This recumbent anti-monument, perhaps seen at first as an off kilter Donald Judd, now provokes greater questions about the social and inspirational role of sculpture and its potential to provide direct bodily experience.

Four new works use the bubble-matrix principle to explore the way in which the most fugitive of forms, bubbles, coalesce to create cloud forms. Here is a language derived from the structure of matter and applied to the body to illuminate its temporal nature. They are complimented by FUSE, made from an association of solid polyhedral forms expanded and arranged directly on the floor.

In the gallery's garden Gormley will install a double sculptural work in marble. The work tests the evolution of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, transforming bone, skin and muscle into a finished work of crystalline geometric rigour, not dissimilar to the structure of marble itself. As in 2 x 2, shown at the 2010 Carrara Biennale, Gormley creates the image of a body that is inspired by the great artistic tradition of the nude, but at the same time reflects our new knowledge about the sub-optical properties of matter.

Recalling past projects such as FAI SPAZIO, PRENDI POSTO (MAKING SPACE, TAKING PLACE) from 2004, the exhibition will continue outside the gallery and into the streets and cells of San Gimignano with an invasion of six identical body forms, including one placed on a tower close to the town's main piazza. This installation considers how the social role of sculpture has shifted from that of memorial and heroism to that of a reflexive object which encourages the viewer to be aware of his or her own position in space and time. This installation and the exhibition sees the artist trying to reconcile the subjective space of the individual with the idea of the expanding universe, questioning how the human project fits in the scheme of things.

On the occasion of this solo show, a symposium on the relationship between the city and human beings will be held on the morning of 29 April at the Teatro dei Leggieri in San Gimignano.

Antony Gormley was born in London in 1950. In a career spanning nearly 40 years, Antony Gormley has made sculpture that explores the relation of the human body to space at large, explicitly in large-scale installations like *Another Place*, *Domain Field* and *Inside Australia*, and implicitly in works such as *Clearing*, *Breathing Room* and *Blind Light* where the work becomes a frame through which the viewer becomes the viewed. By using his own existence as a test ground, Gormley's work transforms a site of subjective experience into one of collective projection. Increasingly, the artist has taken his practice beyond the gallery, engaging the public in active participation, as in *Clay and the Collective Body* (Helsinki) and the acclaimed *One & Other* commission in London's Trafalgar Square.

Gormley's work has been widely exhibited throughout the UK with solo shows at the Whitechapel, Serpentine, Tate, Hayward Gallery, British Museum and White Cube. His work has been exhibited internationally in one-man shows at museums

including Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (Denmark), Malmö Konsthall (Sweden), Kunsthalle zu Kiel (Germany), National Museum of Modern Chinese History (Beijing), Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso (Mexico City) and Kunsthaus Bregenz (Austria), The State Hermitage Museum (Russia). Gormley has also participated in group shows at the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Venice Biennale and Documenta 8 (Kassel, Germany). Major public works include *Angel of the North* (Gateshead), *Another Place* (Crosby Beach, Liverpool), *Habitat* (Anchorage, USA) and *Exposure* (Lelystad, Holland).

Gormley was awarded the Turner Prize in 1994, the South Bank Prize for Visual Art in 1999 and the Bernhard Heiliger Award for Sculpture in 2007. In 1997 he was made an Officer of the British Empire (OBE). He is an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, an honorary doctor of the University of Cambridge and a fellow of Trinity and Jesus Colleges, Cambridge. Gormley has been a Royal Academician since 2003 and a British Museum Trustee since 2007.

**For further information about the show and for photographic material:
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