

REFLECTION

Transcription of interview recorded at De Cordova Museum Sculpture Park & Museum

12 November 2010

Q. You use your body as a model for many of your sculptures. Can you describe the casting process and what that entails?

A. I am looking to concentrate a moment of being. My primary subject is my body: the only bit of the material world that I inhabit completely. The idea is to capture a moment of being. Recently I've been simply trying to stand. Not taking the standing of a statue for granted, but actually trying to be aware of the load paths of my standing body and through that becoming aware that in being a vertical animal all locomotion is a mode of falling. The human body is dynamic even if not moving. I try and become this vertical, still animal. I cover myself in cling film and two assistants cover me in plaster and scrim mixed with hot water. It takes about an hour and a half for the whole process. I used to do it all in one go but for safety and simplicity I now do the torso and legs in one part and the head and arms in another.

The work attempts to talk about that moment of confrontation. There is the Lacan-ian moment called the mirror stage in which the individual becomes aware of him or herself as an independent being through self recognition. There are multiple stages of individuation: we are born into a body but we only mature through self consciousness. This work is about body self-consciousness in a completely mature body: the moment where Robert de Niro in *Taxi Driver* says: 'you looking at me?' There is a sense of both contest; confrontation and sizing up and the conceit; carried by the name REFLECTION.

Here is the human body at a moment of self possession which is both about realisation and reflexivity mixed with a perceptual puzzle: whether the image that lies the other side of the glass is actually a material thing or a reflection; this only becomes clear when you, the viewer, have passed across the threshold.

Visible from the outside of a building, the work presents an uncertain confrontation from both sides: the internal man looking at the external man whose body is contextualised by space, light and nature and the natural man looking at the conditioned, nurtured and cultured man. REFLECTION interrogates inside and outside both as state and concept and also what constitutes a human habitat. If you see the human condition as being mind internalised within a body and the status of our built environment as buildings that contain bodies, the installation asks what is the nature of human nature immersed in this secondary body, architecture? What does it mean that the human animal chooses to live within this second body? There is a confrontation from both sides: the internal man looking at the external man whose body is contextualised by space, light and nature and the natural man looking at the conditioned, nurtured and cultured man.

Q. you mention the secondary figure and a primary figure, do you see one as priority?

A. No, they are totally equal.

Q. You have worked in a wide variety of material, why did you choose iron for this piece?

A. I am interested in bodies in space, planetary and human. The material I choose to use is the material we find at the core of this planet. I use it at the same temperature that it is in the magma about 1300 degrees Celsius. Iron is an earth material with a crystalline mineral structure. It is not associated with art but with industry. At a time of mechanical reproduction this material has relevance. These works are evidently cloned objects. Combining body and industrial production is important. The history of the making of the work is readable on its surface – you can see traces of the cling film, you can see the way that the plaster mould was divided and reassembled, you can see how the sand mould on which the iron cast was divided and reassembled. In the back that faces you from both sides you can see the risers where the molten iron left the mould and was finally broken off with a sledge hammer: a brutal umbilical separation not unlike a belly button.

Iron comes with sidereal, mineral and geological properties but also an association with the second law of thermodynamics – the relationship between energy and matter exploited in the industrial age, but in these objects it links with a fossil-like quality. These are industrially made fossils that are indexical registers of a lived moment of a living body that I hope convey some kind of future shock: this work reflects on human kind's inevitable extinction.

Q. why is leaving evidence of the casting process important to you?

A. It is very important that this is not virtuous work, there has been little or no interpretation, there is little or no craft work in its production, it is in the manner of a footprint, thumbprint or shadow, it is forensic; an empirical sign or trace of the existence of a particular human body. The degree to which the processes by which this thing has come into the world are evident is the work's truth claim.

Q. Do you see the figure as universal even though it's a very specific figure, cast from your own body?

A. Universality suggests an archetype or generic figure. I think there is only one truth and that of our individual and subjective experience. I treat my own life as a test case, a test site for human being, a particular example of a collective, subjective condition, as good as any other example. The work depends on a degree of empathy; recognising here is where a particular body once stood and therefore the work proffers the invitation to imagine that this is a place where you could also stand.

Q. You've seen this piece sited at several different locations – what do you think of this placement?

A. As it is part of the daily systolic, diastolic life of the building I am very happy. If we think of the building as a surrogate bi-valve structure which is breathing in human energy, life, interest, emotion, intelligence and expelling it too, the presence of this obstacle is a kind of

otolithic implant acting as a catalyst for a degree of self-awareness, then the work has a kind of purposeful function. Can the stillness and silence of sculpture make our engagement with the museum more reflexive? I hope so. When placed in an institutional context REFLECTION implicates the function of the institution. Maybe it's ambitious to think that anybody would understand this. But for me that's the only excuse for its existence here. I have no interest in sculpture parks, or in sculpture that tries to make the world prettier. We are at a critical point for the future of human life. Our position is parlous and we are the last generation who can do something about it. The central nuclear reactor, the sun which provides all life on this planet, has 6 billion years to run and we have to decide how long the human species is going to participate in the evolution of the biosphere. At the moment we are bent not only fouling our own nest but also on destroying a good part of that biosphere.

So the question that the work poses is: what is a human being and where do we belong?