

ANTONY GORMLEY

LIVING ROOM, XAVIER HUFKENS, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

09 March - 08 April 2017

Thirty years since his first solo exhibition with Xavier Hufkens, Antony Gormley asks: 'if a mind occupies the body and the body occupies a building, how does it feel if we substitute building for body? To what degree are we sheltered and contained by our structures and to what extent are we controlled by them?'

The exhibition borrows its title from *LIVING ROOM* (2016), the new two-part sculpture that the exhibition is centred around. As is typical of Gormley's work, this installation departs from a concrete and tangible given: the artist's own body. Working from three-dimensional scans, the resulting bodies have been reduced to a series of interpenetrating cell-like structures, some solid, others open. The formation of *LIVING ROOM* calls to mind, in both plan and elevation, any number of utopian buildings. Whereas the work resembles a three-dimensional architectural model when viewed from the side, an altogether different view can be gained from the upper floor of the double-height gallery space. From here, the work is not dissimilar to an aerial view, or ground plan of a modernist housing ensemble. This lofty vantage point is also the ideal position from which to study the perfect symmetry of the two forms and the subtle but corresponding differences in negative and positive space. This key work alludes, both literally and figuratively, to the notion of the 'house', here articulated as a man-made construction and shelter, that we would ultimately perish without. It also alludes to the bodily 'shell' that protects something infinitely more remote and enigmatic: the cerebral inner 'space' where thought and emotion reside. In his exploration of the points of contact between these two spheres, the work bears witness to Gormley's on-going investigation of geometry, abstraction and our metaphysical relationship to the built environment. Through materials, gesture and spatial relationships, the artist strives to give form to that which is least visible and most profound: the sensation of occupying a body that, in turn, inhabits the world.

The visual language of *LIVING ROOM* is also evident in the eight free-standing 'Open Blockwork' sculptures on view. Described by Gormley as 'conflating the body that occupies space with the vessels that contain it', these works are a further iteration on the theme of interiority and exteriority, and the notion of a vessel (body) within a vessel (building) - and vice versa. But just as our physical and emotional states alter, so too do the figures, with the open and closed surfaces supplying different degrees of transparency or opacity. In this exhibition, the abstracted human figures can be heavy and solid, as in the cast-iron pieces, or tenuous and insubstantial to the point of appearing to disappear into the surrounding space. As we circulate these beings, they invite us to enjoy the interplay of mass to void, dark to light, and open to closed.

The 'Blockwork' sculptures are complemented by recent linear works in square-section stainless-steel bar. Collectively known as 'framers' and 'liners', the artist describes these as the 'objective mappings of subjective space'. Either free-standing or suspended, they structure and energise the intimate and domestic spaces of the gallery. Upstairs, a new work *SET* (2016) is shown alongside *CONSOLE III* (2016), an open framework evocation of the 'Tanker' entitled *FALL V* (2015). A series of related drawings completes the display.

Permeating the exhibition is the language of modernity, most notably De Stijl and American minimalism, which is here harnessed to evoke pathos. Gormley's work can thus be viewed as a continuation of this abstract tradition in the sense that his geometric constructions and sculptural voids eschew illustration and mimesis, while allowing an open ground for projection and reflection.
