

# ANTONY GORMLEY

## YEHUDA SAFRAN - HERCULES OF THE SURFACE

From LEARNING TO SEE, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg, 1993

'You taught me language:

and my profit on't

is, I know how to curse:

The red plague rid you,

for learning me your language.'

Shakespeare, 'The Tempest'

Antony Gormley's figures are a memory of the flesh. Where what has not yet been written is inscribed, what has no discourse to wrap itself in, what has not yet been born into language, what has a place, has taken a place but has no language.

The felt, that which expresses itself for the first time, declares itself to us often in silence. These pleasures and pains at a distance, placed within a parenthesis of the unthought which separate and delineate the surface against the horizons of height and depth, are creatures of the surface, objects of the depths.

Hercules is stranded relative to these realms of the internal abyss, the unreachable interiors of the lead-clad figures, the celestial height, the unmeasurable distance of the beyond and the surface of the earth from which the figures rise from and return to.

On earth we come across frightening combinations and confrontations, on earth the sculptor is the pacifier and surveyor, he who always ascends or descends to the surface in every conceivable manner. Reality is not, it has to be searched for and to be won. It is the definition of the human body to appropriate in indefinite series of discontinuous acts, seeds of significance which outgrow and transfigure its natural powers.

He who brings back between heaven and hell the serpent of hell and the celestial serpent. It is the sculptor for whom it is no longer a question of Dionysiac magic and wisdom down below or of Apollonian power and artifice up above but of concentrating on the surface in his dual battle against both depth and height; reorientating thought and charting a new geography.

Not unlike the hero of Stoic tragedy, these sculptures do not distract us with likeness, they have no distinctive feature, they make us aware of the whole. They invite our particularity, our souls are invited to dwell in these bodies, our weightlessness to dwell in their weight, our light to equal their darkness.

What we cannot see in them finds its voice in what we can see in them. They are cases that enclose space just as our body does.

Indeed, sculpture occupies a place in the world just as our bodies do, but it does not exist in the same way. Our bodies, at once instrumentalities for knowing and things known, hold the dual role of subject and object. Sculptures are the objects that enable us to transcend our peculiar position in the world. They recover and uncover for us the knowledge of things as they are, as they are in human experience. As Wallace Stevens writes in "The Man with the Blue Guitar" (XII):

'... where

Do I begin and end? And where.

As I strum the thing, do I pick up

That which momentarily declares

Itself not to be I and yet

Must be. It could be nothing else.'

In order to enter deep into the confidence of things, these things whose essential life we want to reproduce, we must be free in order that they will speak to us, we must take a thing through a certain time as the only one that exists, as the only phenomenon which through our diligent and exclusive love finds itself set down in the center of the universe and which in this incomparable place on that day 'the angels serve'.

Antony Gormley's sculptures exist in a dimension close to Hermann Broch's sense of time not as an inner sense but, on the contrary, time as it assumes the true function that is ordinarily ascribed to space. Time is the innermost external world. That is the sense by which the external world is given to us internally.

This externality which manifests itself inwardly does not belong to the real make-up of the ego nucleus any more than death, locked though death is within life, hollowing out life from inside and belonging to it as such.

In a period in which external collective reality is incapable of providing an otherness which allows the self to reside in external objects of experience, the boundaries of one's identity are less free in allowing the movement from internal to external reality and vice-versa. The boundary itself becomes the focus; the membrane, (the skin), that separates an object from its not-being.

If this analogy between the object and the body, the body as alive and the body as a thing, is to be pursued, a caesura between collective and individual experience has to be established. When transgression of personal boundaries is no longer ritualised in an acceptable cultural form, the boundary surfaces themselves become the site of an elaboration or working through of the conflict. A predicament noted in Kafka's penal colony, a society in which there are no other means of internalising the law but to inscribe it in the skin and flesh by the penal colony machine.

Some of us always have felt continuities that have nothing in common with the course of history; it is an open space that provokes new interpretations and evokes, in its incompleteness, the void on which the work depends. This void is the unnameable, nameless on which the transition of the perceptible thing to a vision depends. Gormley's own body is his Readymade.

The irony of a singular choice which in the course of fulfilling itself, its unique particularity, becomes an anonymous vessel or better still a synonymous figure - the figure as a mask.

Even Antaeus, the giant son of Poseidon and Gaia, the sea and the earth, who compelled all comers to wrestle with him and kill them when overcome was defeated and killed by Hercules. Antaeus was made strong through contact with his mother the earth. Hercules lifted Antaeus from the earth. As if the body has to be lifted away from the earth before it can be felt, in order for what is carved to be carved from the inside and to be led increasingly to the outside, away from the expression of the inside, toward the material alien to the self. The inner measures are incorporated into the carving and the will to form that, risen to the surface, endows our life with its shape in time.

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