

# ANTONY GORMLEY

## *LEARNING TO SEE: AN INTERVIEW WITH ANTONY GORMLEY BY ROGER BEVAN*

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

Roger Bevan: There are three new sculptures in your exhibition at Thaddaeus Ropac's gallery. Will you identify them?

Antony Gormley: There is *STILL FEELING (PROP)* which is inclined at an angle to the wall near the gallery's reception desk. In the small space, *STILL FEELING (CORNER)* faces the conjunction of the wall and floor and, although it lies on the floor, also stands against the wall. *LEARNING TO SEE* is a standing piece for the main gallery.

R.B.: Did you select these three sculptures ...?

A.G.: I made them specifically for this exhibition. I went to see the gallery and discussed two alternative proposals. This is the result of those discussions.

R. B.: Then the three sculptures are intended to be seen in some form of a relationship with each other?

A.G.: Certainly. Each work was conceived for a different space and, in each case, I have adopted a different attitude to the sculpture's architectural context. But although each sculpture is related to the others, each is also quite independent.

R.B.: Will you describe the technical steps which you follow in your work?

A.G.: It is important to know that, like all my work, the sculptures in this exhibition are made from my own body. Each work starts with a real body in real time and comes from a real event. It is not dissimilar to a photograph. I adopt the position which I have selected for a sculpture and am wrapped in scrim, which is an open-weave jute cloth, and plaster. Because the plaster dries quickly, within ten minutes, the work is divided into different sections. Usually I stand on a piece of scrim which wraps around my feet. Then my torso is covered. There are two sections for my legs, front and back. Finally my assistant wraps my head. The whole process takes about an hour, perhaps an hour and a half. Then I am cut out of my mould and it is reassembled.

R.B.: Do you have a picture of the sculpture while you are being wrapped?

A.G.: Up to a certain stage, I do, and then I have to rely on an internal feeling.

R.B.: You are forced to be absolutely immobile. Is it difficult to maintain?

A.G.: It is a bit like going to hospital to have an X-ray. Breathe in and hold it, the technician says. You are aware that there is a transition, that something that is happening within you is registering externally. But for accuracy, it must be a moment of stillness, of concentration. I am trying to make sculpture from the inside, by using my body as the instrument and the material. I concentrate very hard on maintaining my position and the form comes from this concentration.

R.B.: Do you regard being wrapped in scrim as a spiritual exercise or merely as a functional necessity?

A.G.: It is functional, of course, but it has become ritualised and I do find it very therapeutic. It is a meditative experience and I suppose that I learned about the space within the body from meditation, but it is not a replacement for meditation.

R.B.: So you have created a mould or a shell around your body ...

A.G.: The mould has the same relationship to my body as a violin case to a violin. It is not a representation of my body, but a case around the space which I occupied. Then I simplify and consolidate the feeling in the piece.

R.B.: Iron out the irregularities?

A.G.: No, that's not the idea at all. I am trying to make the presence more active, more profound, less distracting.

R.B.: What do you do with this shell?

A.G.: I add layers of scrim and apply by hand coats of a mixture of mica and plaster until I reach a point which lies somewhere between individual identity and total generalisation. The degree of generalisation varies with each work. *STILL FEELING (CORNER)* is the most generalised. The standing figure is the least generalised but, curiously, the most idealised.

R.B.: Because it adopts a perfect pose of equilibrium?

A.G.: In *LEARNING TO SEE*, I was trying to do something which really might make the other side of appearance present, might make visible the darkness of the body. I have acknowledged the eyes which I usually avoid. They are closed but suggest that I am becoming conscious of the space within the body. I am acknowledging that the body is a vehicle through which consciousness passes. I hope this exhibition will set up a dynamic between the body as a thing and the body as a space.

R.B.: *LEARNING TO SEE* and the other sculptures are not, however, concerned with your own identity...

A.G.: But it is deeply concerned with identity, because that is its origin and that is the question it asks: who am I? It is the idiosyncrasy of my own appearance which I do not want to be the subject of the sculpture. It is about being.

R.B.: Over the shell you beat thin sheets of lead...

A.G.: I used to do that, but now I make a plaster mould of that shell and then take a fibreglass cast from the inside of that mould. I am working with more traditional sculptural methods because it gives me greater accuracy. The lead sheets are beaten over the fibreglass cast which is firm and resilient, and then soldered by section.

R.B.: Two of the three sculptures in the exhibition are titled STILL FEELING. There is an ambiguity in that title. Do you mean that there is still a feeling in an inert sculpture, a trace of your own living presence in the mould which you occupied? Or still in the sense of being static or quiet?

A.G.: Both of those things. Those are the two meanings which interest me.

R.B.: You have placed each of the sculptures in a different space.

A.G.: I like the idea that the experience of the exhibition is a progress through these spaces. Each space has its own nature and each work its own nature, too.

R.B.: The space which you have chosen for STILL FEELING (PROP) is the entrance room with the gallery's reception desk.

A.G.: It is a room which resembles a passage. It is an in-between place, not quite the gallery but not the street. STILL FEELING (PROP) is the most undeclared of the works. It, too, is in a state of in-betweenness. When a broom leans against a wall, it is out of action, ready for action but out of action. It suggests a certain redundancy, a removal from direct life. I like that. It suggests that it has been used or is about to be used.

R.B.: So you are testing the places where you can place sculpture?

A.G.: I am asking where sculpture can belong in life.

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