

ANTONY GORMLEY

LEARNING TO SEE: BODY AND SOUL

Learning to See: Body and Soul (cat.), Contemporary Sculpture Centre, Tokyo, 1992

If late modernist painting conflated the figure and the ground in the interests of a single unequivocal surface, I propose that the body is the ground and that at the other side of appearance is a space far greater than the space against which, traditionally, the body is figured. If Casper David Friedrich's *Monk and the Sea* is a Rothko with a man in it, I am trying to make a case for a man containing the boundless space of consciousness.

I know all of this is in profound opposition to the post-modern sign-reading, language-oriented currencies, but I hope neither in any nostalgic nor negative way. Perhaps I feel that the world out there is getting pretty good at interpreting itself as we are sold images of ourselves from soaps on television to knitwear ads on the street and I want to explore something else - it's as if the sophistication of culture feeding on culture has left Being out.

Being is rather a vague term. What I am asking is rather than Being engaged with acting in the world, is it possible to express consciousness with no object but itself? Being contained in the body and its feelings, Being conveyed as immersion, where questions of culture become irrelevant.

We have long considered art objects as things in the world. Minimal self-referentiality has been replaced by an enjoyment of judging an object's relation to other objects. In a deconstructive world, art objects have become part of deconstructing process and a reflection of the plurality of languages and the relativism of value.

I still like the essentialising tendency of modernism because it is a way of feeling more alive. The problem with it was that it all got channelled into finding an objective formal language. I propose an absolute subjectivity allowing existence to become the material, subject and generating principle of art. This is an essentialising process but turned towards internal balance and survival; towards intrinsic value.

This exhibition brings together two works, *Body and Soul*: a series of nine etchings which I made between February and September 1990, and the sculpture *Learning to See* made in 1991. They are both works that evoke the deep space of the interior of the body. In the sculpture for the first time I have kept the lead-covered mould very close to my body and indicated the eyes looking within. I hope its held breath conveys a feeling of the infinity that consciousness inhabits and that you feel included in it. The etchings (my first) try to express touch as gravity made conscious and gravity as the attraction that binds us to the earth. The five dark plates are impressions of the five main orifices: a vision of the inner realm of the body irradiated by the light and energy of what Blake called 'the windows of the soul'.
