

ANTONY GORMLEY

MAX HOLLEIN - SCULPTOR OF THE MIND

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We live in a time when human ambition is focused on decreasing our dependency on and attachment to the human body. Be it overcoming the physical decay brought on by the realities of aging, enhancing our physical performance via wearable or implanted tools of augmentation, or dematerialising corporal experiences via virtual reality, entire industries and the world's best technological innovators are working in this field, habitually dreaming up and realising new and varied ways to fundamentally renegotiate the relationship between our physical bodies and our inner selves.

Antony Gormley's work strives to achieve the opposite: he approaches the body as his most authentic medium of representation and reflection. His sculptural practice circles around the conclusive physical and psychological experience of being in the world and in ourselves. Although his figures are calculatedly simplified - artificial physiognomies lacking a specific age, ethnicity, history or locality - they nevertheless underscore the emergence of the individual. In manifesting the very notion of being human, they reaffirm the great possibilities of subjective experience.

Focusing on the body as a platform for human representation, Gormley creates his work using the most logical and also the most archaic and charged form of artistic expression. Artistic practice began with the depiction of the body, be it in cave paintings and imprints of the human hand or in prehistoric sculpture of the human figure. Similarly to the very first artists, Gormley uses the material and motif he has most readily available - his own body. Overcoming obvious possibilities of individual representation, he does this not as an act of self-reference or introspection, but as an attempt to simplify and universalise.

Creativity and authenticity are most persuasive when articulated as the outcome of a set of voluntary boundaries and limitations. Gormley's highly methodological process, which maintains an insistent focus within a set of purposeful confinements and rules regarding motives, materials and fabrication, produces an astonishingly emotional response in the viewer. In their simplification and structural build-up, Gormley's sculptures simultaneously represent multiple mental states. Dispensing with representational logic, they reflexively establish an openness to the viewer and an intensity of presence in the space they inhabit.

Gormley's sculptures don't depict or express emotion, rather they evoke it. They initially proffer a moment of stillness and concentration, a sense of inner life defined and confined in an outward-facing shape. Not at all expressionistic, they are conduits through which the empathy and self-awareness of the viewer may arise. Their bodily forms, constructed from surface elements, represent a special, almost archaic relationship to materiality, space and scale. Locating the most abstract and structured elements within the figurative, Gormley maps the body in space, highlighting the psychological realities and possibilities of such forms and connections.

While the sculptures' physical forms are grounded and static, our perception of them is always provisional, shifting and ephemeral. Sidestepping mere appearance, the objects replace simple anatomy with other forms of accretive matter, as the body becomes a space shaped and formed by experience. Nowhere in Gormley's oeuvre is this more true than in his 'Polyhedra' sculptures, which continually oscillate between figural presence and formal resolution. Relying on natural hexagonal forms constructed through a design process based on an underlying structure, these works reflect the artist's use of complex computational geometry. The result is a sculptural meta-surface that both attracts and repels our desire to associate individual human experience with traditional ideas of anatomy. Through these amplified and over-structured surfaces, Gormley conjures not corporeal objects but a contained space that can mutate at any moment into various aggregated versions of our perception of the human being. Through these alternative methods of constructing the body, it becomes increasingly apparent that our experience of it is more complex, fluid and changing than we have realised.

The configuration between the sculpture and the space it inhabits and shares with the viewer contributes to this sensation. Sculpture should always be understood as having been placed, and should be read in relation to the area it occupies. An exhibition is always a testing ground, an examination space for both the viewer and the artwork. In Gormley's case, the exhibition is first and foremost a provider of this relationship, a well-staged enhancer of reaction. The theatricality of the setting arises from the sculpture's simple postures, its normative bodily configurations with an effect that is amplified by the relationship orchestrated between the object, the space and the viewer.

Gormley's sculptures dematerialise and expand, reshape and formalise, but always remain true to their intention of expressing non-corporeal states of mind. They are senders, mediums for emotional discourse, suggesting the moment when a provisional, transient experience assumes representational form, a universal yet utterly individual experience.

Gormley is ultimately less a sculptor of the body than one of the mind. His works represent the human figure as a possible space of aggregated states of being, thinking and understanding. He is a constructor of sensibilities, a creator of psychological sites - an architect of human experience.
