

ANTONY GORMLEY

MICHAEL NEWMAN - ANTONY GORMLEY'S DRAWINGS

From GORMLEY, Seibu, Tokyo, Japan, 1987

About 500 years ago Leonardo da Vinci made a drawing of a man. With his feet together and his arms stretched apart, the outer limits of his body are juxtaposed on a square. Superimposed on this is the same body with feet apart and the arms stretched slightly higher, this time a circle is drawn joining the outer tips of his limbs. Leonardo drew the ideal image of man in a universe described by mathematics: man is seen from the outside in terms of an abstract ideal of perfection at the beginning of the modern technological age.

In Antony Gormley's remarkable drawings the body is not so much seen from the outside as felt from the inside. The drawings express physical and spiritual experiences of what it is like to be a human being in the world, with fear and loneliness as well as joy and sharing. The figure is not standardized and ideal, but can be small or large; it is not isolated and complete in itself but interacts with the space and the light and dark areas around itself. The world is a container for the body which in turn is a vessel, for which perhaps the drawing TWO FLASKS (cat.no.30) is a metaphor. The body can be opened up, the inside extruded into the outside, or it can be joined with another body in sexual activity. The process of making the drawing is an analogy to the state of becoming and change in which we all live.

The drawings like the sculpture to which they are a parallel activity, deal with such fundamental experiences that they are universal, yet as marks made by the brush and charcoal on soft, hand-made paper they are also very specific. While each of the sculptures, which most often take the form of a mould of one or more figures or objects encased in lead, involve planning and laborious work to execute, the drawings allow for a faster and more fluid way of working. Intuition and imagination are very directly communicated through the touch of charcoal and brush and the liquid spreading of the oil paint: thinking becomes as much a physical as a mental activity. Somewhere between a sign and an image, the way in which human figures are drawn is sometimes reminiscent of the pictographic art of prehistoric painting in caves and on rocks. Although each drawing is unique, sharing a universal experience with the viewer in a particular way, the drawings tend to form groups as the outcome of a single burst of intense activity.

Gormley is fascinated by the extent to which the parts of the body form pairs: not only two arms, two legs and so on but also two lungs, two hemispheres to the brain and two testicles. These pairings relate to other, more general polarities contained within the single human being, such as body and mind, and even male and female - not only are there men and women, but each one of us also contains both sides. The delicate series of charcoal drawings stained with pure, semi-transparent paint medium (cat.nos.4-8) follows the thought: if we have two lungs, why not two heads. And if we had two heads, what would it be like if they were looking in opposite directions? Or one above the other? Or if they were kissing each other? The drawing becomes a metaphor for self-division and self-relation. Through conveying how he feels about himself, the artist enables us to understand ourselves better.

Other drawings are more concerned to the way in which the body related to the surrounding space. That space is prior to the abstract space of science: an experience of space at one physical and psychic before measurement. It is typical of Gormley's drawings that, rather than using a range of colours the works in terms of light and darkness, another indication of fundamental pairing and opposition. In the double drawing (cat.no.23) a curled white female figure in a black field appears to be pulling something in two lines from the ears of a male figure standing rigidly upright drawn in black on white. In cat.no.24 something seems to be being pulled out from the mouth, heart and genitals of the figure which is out-lined against the darkness.

The play of light and dark in the drawings gives rise to the experiences of the division and joining of inside and outside. The relation of inside to outside, self to world, need not be one of difference or opposites: the body itself is made from water, as drawings cat.no.2 and 3 seem to remind us: the bodies of the figures in cat.no.3 are under the waves of water, while a cloud rains on their heads above. That man is made of earth and returns to the earth could be the theme of drawing cat.no.12 where in a dark ground a huddled figure surrounded with a little light, as if curled up in the mown or in a cave in the earth. By contrast, in drawing cat.no.11 it looks as if the limbs of a dark figure have been extended, surrounded by a spreading stain, into the whiteness. Two crouching figures in cat.no.10 are drawn in a dark area, their heads touching a lighter circular area as if it is something which they share in common. In drawings cat.no.9 there is a curve of black on the left hand side which looks as if it might continue beyond the picture, and a stain of medium like the atmosphere of a planet, and then nearer the middle of the picture a single mark of black paint. Instead of there being a figure in the drawing, it is as if we who are looking at the drawing have taken the position of the figures and are recreating for ourselves the experience of the artist.

In the drawing entitled HOME AND THE WORLD (cat.no.14) the head and shoulders of a figure seen from the back are painted in solid black; a thin black line seems to indicate the horizon towards which the figure is looking, as if feeling, from home, the attraction of that which is far away. The motif of cat.no.1 is similar, only here the sky is not clear but filled with dark clouds. In drawing cat.no.13 the outline of four heads have what may be the brains and spinal cords painted in black. Over them hangs a black cloud: Is this an image of a collective mind - mind as no longer divisive but rather unifying - as in the lead sculpture of a similar shape which is titled MIND, or is it something ominous and threatening? By leaving the decision up to the individual viewer Gormley is inviting him or her into an imaginative participation with the work.

Sexuality and procreation are recurring themes in both Gormley's sculpture and drawing. In the drawing title EYE (which could be a pun on "I" - the self) where a figure is standing in a hollowed out container, like a womb, with a line which seems to be moving towards its eye. That this is a sexual image is suggested by the pairing of this drawing with cat.no.15, where an outline of a head is penetrated by the dark form resembling a penis. We are linked to the universal process of creation and decay through sex, but the eye as well can engender, just as looking at these drawings can sow a seed in the mind.

Sex is one of the ways in which we are joined with others. The group of drawings cat.nos.17-22 explores the ideas of aloneness, joining through the sexual act, and the resultant creating of another being. In cat.no.17 a female figure in outline embraces from behind a black male figure as a cloud threatens to overwhelm them both. In two of the drawings (cat.nos.18 and 20) a male figure is arched over backwards in a form reminiscent of certain figures in Egyptian art. In cat.no.18 the shape underneath the body is that of a house with a table and two chairs; in cat.no.20 a dark female figure is crouched over the erect penis. The body of the man in cat.no.21 is as rigid as a corpse, and the sexual act appears to have already produced a

foetus: the meeting of death and new life in procreation is a recurring theme in Gormley's work.

Gormley particularly likes the word "haptic" to describe his work. It derives from the Greek verb haptain which means "to touch" and describes that which is related to or based on the sense of touch. Gormley's drawings are literally made by his touch with brush and charcoal; in cat.no.27 we find the impress of his own hand in the yellow medium over a crowd of tiny figures drawn in outline. And through the drawings we are touched in our minds and bodies and imaginations.

Gormley's aim is to overcome the division of mind and body in our culture through an approach to more primal aspects of being. His ambition is nothing less than that we should be enabled to reinvent ourselves through his work. As in the earliest myths, Gormley makes an analogy between sexuality, the creation of the universe, and the making of art. Through the primal processes of the body we can participate in the great cosmic dance. Since Leonardo's time the world has become a set of objects to be understood and used rather than something in which we participate. For Antony Gormley art furnishes a free imaginative space in which to reachieve unity, balance and the reconciliation between man and the cosmos.
