

# ANTONY GORMLEY

*A FIELD FOR THE ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, A ROOM FOR THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN DESERT, ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA, 1989*

02 November - 17 December 1989

An exhibition of two works, *A FIELD FOR THE ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES* (1989) and *A ROOM FOR THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN DESERT* (1989), created while Antony Gormley was Artist-in-Residence at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, in October 1989.

Speaking on these two works, the gallery's former Curator of Contemporary Art, Anthony Bond, once wrote:

'Somewhere near the arid centre of Australia there is a flat plane of red dust and clay pans. Normally the red is relieved only by the indigo-grey-green of salt brush. In October of 1989 it was still spotted with wild flowers and slowly drying grasses that have burst into brief life after the heavy summer rains.

Antony Gormley walked back and forth on the plane until he found a spot in one of the red clay pans which had the possibility of becoming a focal point within an otherwise undifferentiated landscape. This was his chosen site for *A ROOM FOR THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN DESERT*. This concrete shell construction had been pre-fabricated in Sydney for just such a location. It is a container that has been exactly proportioned to accommodate the crouching figure of a man (the artist) with the knees up close to his chest. There is a square section on top for the head and a rectangular form for the rest of the body. It stands like a small pill box in the vast open space, a silent presence which articulates the focusing potential of man in the land.

The two inch shell is entirely closed except for four orifices: the ears, the mouth and the penis. It is as if the eyes have turned inwards but there remains the possibility of concourse with the world. While it appears at first sight to be an architectural form, this can give way to a very strong image of the human figure. Once this has been seen, it is impossible not to engage with its presence as human. In this way there is a permanent source of energy out there unobserved yet potent in the imagination of those who come to know of its existence.

At the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the artist has made 1,100 clay figures each about 9 inches high from the red clay of the centre. The figures, each one different, were made by the urgent bringing together of the two hands in which the nature of the material and the immediacy of the process are equally telling. The figures are arranged in two hemispheres around a central path which traverses the gallery space diagonally. The figures are spaced most densely near the centre of the room and radiate out like the lines of force of a magnetic field. When a viewer stands at the centre of the space they find themselves at the epicentre of an extraordinary field of energy. Although the field seems to radiate out from the centre, the eyes of the figures are all raised towards the viewer's face. It is an overwhelming sense of responsibility to be the recipient of so much mute appeal.'

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