

ANTONY GORMLEY

ROOTING THE SYNAPSE, WHITE CUBE, HONG KONG, 2018

'Rooting the Synapse' begins with a nod to Goethe's botanical analogy, which compares the body of man to a tree planted in the sky. Goethe describes the hemispheres of the brain as being like a seed from which the central nervous system extends. This idea reversed the traditional notion of anatomy and allowed a limbed body to be likened to an 'unknown space' that is searched out by the antennae-like tendrils of nerves.

Applying this idea of alternative anatomy, Gormley's new works, such as SIGNAL (2017), acknowledge the internal structure of the body as a central torso with extensions into its five extremities. Others, like ROOT (2016), installed in the first room of the exhibition, supplant this structure with multi-directional, space-searching tendrils that reach out beyond the body's boundaries.

Rather than simply mimicking the branching systems of plants, these new works reveal their dynamic nature through a series of 90-degree bends and through a deliberate, proportional scaling of limb to branch. This idea is also translated into the actual process of making the work, whereby the feeding and rising systems of the metal casting process determine how far metal can travel within the sand mould before it solidifies. All works in the exhibition are made from iron: the core material of the Earth. Gormley's sculptures celebrate the action of time and elements on matter; incorporating both a rusted patina, formed through aerobic oxidation of the iron, and a darker surface that has been created through the sculpture's immersion in a tank of tannic acid, a process that simulates anaerobic oxidation.

The 'Rooter' series of sculptures draws on a wide range of cultural references, echoing our fascination with repeated patterns that can be found in both the manmade and natural world. From Greek key patterns to the cloud patterns of ancient China or the vine patterns of the Maya, the desire to translate natural systems into mental diagrams inspires Gormley as much as it did these ancient cultures.
