

ANTONY GORMLEY

SUM, CONVENT OF ST AGNES, NATIONAL GALLERY PRAGUE, PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC, 2018

Antony Gormley's passion is to ask whether a human form - as both a vessel for the body and a container for the mind - can be a contemporary subject for contemplation; questions that are essentially spiritual.

Gormley speaks of "being" in its widest context, exploring the now. He works with life, making body moulds and body casts, by implication life-size, in various subtle, undramatic states, and places them in a range of settings. These locations are never random; Gormley selects them for their associations. He treats the body as a house and invites the viewer's participation. For Gormley:

"How the sculptures are disposed in space is perhaps more important than what they represent." ['Vessel', Antony Gormley, Galeria Continua, San Gimignano, 2012, p.42]

This thinking is relevant for the works installed at the Convent of St Agnes, founded at the beginning of the 13th century and situated at the edge of the Old Town. The Church of St Salvator, the earliest Gothic building in Prague and the oldest part of this magnificent historical space, is the perfect site for the 'Reflections' series, in which contemporary art will be seen in a context that speaks to the uniqueness of both art and architecture. The viewer is left alone to reflect.

Antony Gormley's two works on paper - the woodcut REACH (2016) and the imprint FEEL (2016) - resonate with the cast iron sculpture SUM (2012), the show's central motif. "Sum" in Latin stands for "I am" in English, or "being", the title of this show.

REACH is made from shuttering plywood, minimally inked, so that the print reveals the grain of the wood. The overlay of the individual blocks makes a cross-hatched image of a building tailored to the body.

For FEEL, the artist's body was covered in crude oil and petroleum jelly and then dropped onto the paper to leave a trace the body's impact.

SUM is a good example of Gormley's deconstruction of the "statue" and his determinably anti-heroic sculpture. Here is a body as a landscape; the body not figured against a ground but as a ground and therefore subject to transformation and entropy. He offers a crystalline human core in a field of polygonal rocks. Gormley is interested in how the work can stimulate emotional engagement: "Art can stimulate feelings that were unknown to us until the work was there to render them available." (Antony Gormley, 'The Financial Times', October 3-4, 2015, p. 11)
