

ANTONY GORMLEY

IN FORMATION, WHITE CUBE MASONS YARD, ENGLAND, 2019 - 2020

IN FORMATION IS an exhibition of new cast iron work that questions to what extent we are the product of our environment, and to what extent we are makers of it.

On the ground floor are four 'Stack' works: massive, one and a half life-size sculptures built from solid cast iron blocks that each weigh between 11 and 700 hundred kilos. The component parts are loose and use dead weight as a principle of construction; it is the subtle inflection of how one block takes the load from another that suggests the attitudes of repose, lamentation or alertness of the whole. Freshly unearthed from foundry sand, the blocks have the appearance of stone in their organic, silvered surfaces. Evoking the idea of the column, the artist sees them as 'reverse caryatids', sculpted figures that served as architectural pillars in the ancient world, but rather than offering reinforcement these 'Stacks' lean on the walls for support.

If the works on the ground floor reflect our dependency on the built environment, those in the lower gallery investigate the consequences of our ability to manipulate matter. The nine new blockworks, called 'Aggregates', are made up of aggregated blocks that treat matter as information and use the language of code to suggest both struggle and symbiosis between body and block. Each rusted figure appears to extricate itself or to take support from a material mass, referencing Michelangelo's famous 'Slaves', where a body seems to be emerging out of the solid block. Here Gormley asks, 'Is the body the product of the block, or the block the product of the body?'

Discussing his interest in the transformation that digitalisation has engendered in the way we relate to the world and ourselves, Gormley has spoken of this 'not as a noble conflict between spirit and matter, but an overturning of fixed principles that gives way to a continual and fluid translation from information into form and from form into information'. Works such as PACK (2019) admit to the ability of our technology to reveal and confound, just as HOLD (2019) suggests a tussle between code and iron, where form and medium are so locked together as to be indistinguishable. In making the pixel physical, the 'Aggregate' works make palpable the ways in which we are now engaged with a new way of being and becoming in the world, what Gormley calls 'a mortal struggle between the immanent and the manifest'.
