

ANTONY GORMLEY

A Field for the Art Gallery of New South Wales

A Room for the Great Australian Desert

Artist in Residence, October 1989



Presented by the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Sir William Dobell Art Foundation, assisted by the British Council, sponsored by Qantas and the Sydney Intercontinental Hotel.

Being the world

Nature is within us. We are sick when we do not feel it. The sickness of feeling separate from the world is what is killing it. We are earth above ground, clothed by space, seen by light. The distance inherent in sight has made us treat the "outside" as different. The dominance of reason depends on the continued externalisation of the world. The light of reason is balanced by the darkness of the body. The unknownness of the mind and the unknownness of the universe are the same. If we are to survive, we must balance outer action with an inner experience of matter. This is the great subjectivity and the great unity. This unity is expressed by those who live close to the earth in living ways. We must integrate our perceptions of the dynamic interpenetration of the elements with the workings of the mind and realise them in the workings of the body. We must become consciously unconscious and unconsciously conscious. We are the world, we are the poisoners of the world, we are the consciousness of the world.

Antony Gormley



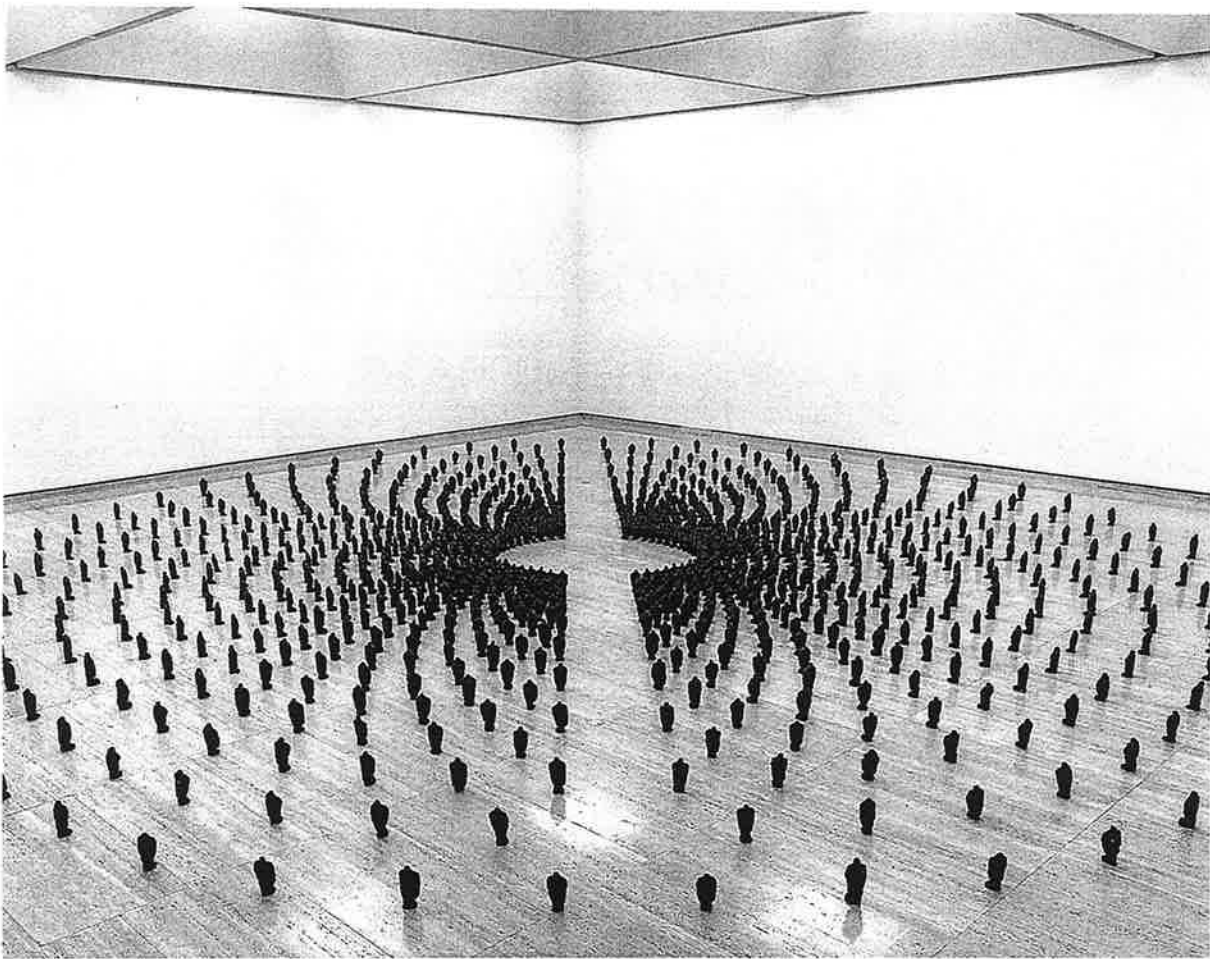
A Room for the Great Australian Desert 1989
re-inforced concrete, 91.5 x 58.4 x 71 cm

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 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 prefabricated 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 spaces, 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" 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



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1100 clay figures, each 22 cm high

installation: approx. 11 x 10 m

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.

The formal key to Gormley's work is always in the spatial coordinates of identity. He conceives of man as standing between the primal earth of material existence and the realm of conception. The figure of man can be used as a focus for the energies of these two realms. It can also be an analogue for the world. Man as the measure of the universe and man in the image of God the absolute expression of pure concept. By creating a shell or housing for the figure he denotes the boundary between matter and its conceptualisation. He also speaks of the inner world within which the whole may be conceived through contemplation.

These two works are linked together in their reciprocal meanings. For the viewer in Sydney the concrete room remains an object of the imagination. In its location it acts as a strong focus for a place which has always been there unknown to us but which has now entered the conceptual domain through our imagining of the work. The eyeless casing implies a centre of inward looking meditation at the core of an energy field.

The clay figures in the Gallery only have eyes and these are all focused on the observer who stands at their centre. The observer then becomes the focal point. The apparent generator of the field of energy. In the two works we see the visible manifestation of man and the consciousness he holds in the centre of the material world on its immediate surface surrounded by an imaginary field of energy. In the Gallery installation we can see the field of energy and find ourselves called upon to give its centre meaning through our own presence.

Anthony Bond
Curator of Contemporary Art