

AFTER NYNE

THE ART LOVER'S MAGAZINE

afternyneadmin / 22/01/2019 / art

Abstract vs Figure at Pinsent Masons Juxtaposes Contemporary Work Alongside Late Modern Icons



Pinsent Masons has announced an exhibition of sculptural work curated by the fourth Artist in Residence, Nick Hornby. The exhibition features work by key Modernist sculptors: Arthur Fleischmann (1896 – 1990), Henry Moore (1898 – 1986), and Eduardo Paolozzi (1924 – 2005) alongside that of contemporary artists Oliver Beer, Nick Hornby, Alex Massouras and Zuza Mengham.

In this exhibition, Hornby brings together late Modern sculpture alongside contemporary artists' work to highlight the continuation of conversations between form and concept, and between figuration and abstraction, often associated with Modernism.

Henry Moore's Relief No.1 is a bronze head relief from 1952. It was made by pressing a chalk pebble and other natural forms into wet plaster, and modifying the resulting shapes with the drawn lines of a face. In Moore's work there is an interplay between the visibility of the pebble shape, a recognition of a face and the openness of its abstraction. Juggling a similar array of concepts—nature, process and author—but almost the reverse trajectory of Henry Moore, Zuza Mengham creates work whose organic, natural vocabulary belies its fabrication from artificial stone: those forms have different temporalities—what appears old and slowly-formed, like coral or gongshi, is man-made and new.

Paolozzi's Vulcan, the Roman god of fire and metalworking, is a half-man and half-machine. Nick Hornby's bronzes also unify multiple characters into one form, but split them phenomenologically—in doing so, they give physical form to the beholder's role in the comprehension of work, and fragment the work's perception across different moments—like cubism, but backwards. Alexander Massouras likewise responds to sculptures' polychronic qualities: the canonic sculptures he takes as subjects become familiar through multiple mediations made at different times, complicating notions of a single, 'original' work around which so much Modernism pivots.

Fleischmann started his career as a figurative sculptor, modelling the human body in clay, but by the 1970s his work was exploring futuristic abstraction—one of his sculptures even stands at the centre of a scene in *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) set in a fictional cloud-city of the distant future. Fleischmann pioneered the use of Perspex—first carving, then later stacking the material: *Lion and Unicorn* (1979) is typical of these later pieces made from acrylic sheets which have been cut to a profile and layered on top of each other. Oliver Beer's sculptures give ordinary objects mystery, reconfiguring something familiar such that it becomes strange and rich in narrative or historical potential: a piece of railway track is dissected at an oblique angle, cut to a new profile, so that the sculpture retains its figurative reference but is abstracted and opened up to new meanings.

Situating work by these contemporary artists alongside major Modernist sculptors demonstrates how modernist debates persist. Contemporary artists are re-animating those debates through reference, both to their predecessors and to narrative structures that frame their work. The recurrence of these debates is echoed by the plural

temporalities these artists inhabit: Beer's track is angular and futuristic but recalls past uses and journeys, Fleischmann's work straddles the 1970s and sci-fi futures, Hornby's sculpture is viewed across moments, while Massouras divides a single canonic object into the periods and iterations of its image.

Mengham evokes an organic-geological time in objects that are made in human time, while Moore and Paolozzi, to contemporary eyes, are artists with both historical connotations of a mid-century aesthetic and a critical contribution to the abstract idiom which remains as visible in contemporary art today as it was at its inception. Pinsent Masons Artist in Residence programme was founded in 2013. Nick Hornby has been appointed fourth Artist in residence. Each residency lasts for 12 months, and is organised with the assistance of independent art consultant Maggie O'Regan.

Abstract vs Figure 1952–2019
12 Jan–22 Feb 2019

Pinsent Masons, 30 Crown Place, London EC2A 4ES

Artists: Oliver Beer, Arthur Fleischmann (1896 – 1990), Nick Hornby, Alex Massouras, Zuza Mengham, Henry Moore (1898 – 1986), Eduardo Paolozzi (1924 – 2005)