



British Art Studies

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British Sculpture Abroad, 1945 – 2000

**Edited by Penelope Curtis and Martina
Droth**

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Cover image: Installation View, Simon Starling, Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima), 2010–11, 16 mm film transferred to digital (25 minutes, 45 seconds), wooden masks, cast bronze masks, bowler hat, metals stands, suspended mirror, suspended screen, HD projector, media player, and speakers. Dimensions variable. Digital image courtesy of the artist

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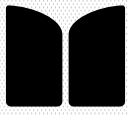
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British Sculpture Abroad: An Introduction

Penelope Curtis and Martina Droth

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Figure 1.

Henry Moore Institute, flyer for 'British Sculpture Abroad' conference at Tate Britain, 12-13 March 2004, featuring Tony Cragg's, *Postcard Flag (Union Jack)*, 1981, in the collection of Leeds Museums & Galleries (City Art Gallery) Digital image courtesy of Henry Moore Institute

This project goes back a good way, and we are delighted it has now come to fruition. To review its history will go some way to explaining its format, but will not quite explain why we thought it was important. It began when we were colleagues at the Henry Moore Institute (HMI), and continued after we both went elsewhere. Three events have shaped the content: the first, a two-day conference, *British Sculpture Abroad: 1945 to Now*, was organized by the HMI and held at Tate Britain in 2003. The second, a related but more focused event held at the Getty Center in 2008, was again a collaboration with the HMI. This was *Anglo-American Exchange in Postwar Sculpture, 1945-1975*, and has since been published on the Getty website. The last, held in 2012 at the Yale Center for British Art (YCBA), was a smaller, more private event organised with the precise intention of returning to the subject of British sculpture abroad, and to develop a publication around it.

British sculpture of the twentieth century has been so thoroughly established as a collective grouping—through exhibitions, catalogues, and related writing—that it has become a category. It appears readily identifiable, even if its terms may differ more or less subtly over time and place. The conjunction of these two words has an immediate resonance, which calls to mind in particular Henry Moore, who has become the organizing principle for British sculpture of the twentieth century—both when he is at the centre, and when he is intentionally set aside.

Although the Henry Moore Institute was not, and is not, exclusively focused on British sculpture, it very often found itself dealing with the category, whether through its collections, exhibitions, archive, or its programme and fellows. And it was very much because the category had become enshrined nationally, notably after 1945, that we felt it should be examined internationally. In many ways, activities on the international field consolidated the nationalism of the category, and yet, ironically enough, very little attention has been paid to how the category acquires or shifts meaning once it moves beyond the national terrain. This group of responses is, therefore, a deliberate attempt to understand more about the development of a national category internationally. Individually the different articles reveal how the category shifted over time, and according to its geographical context. Taken together they assert, we believe, the international bases of what might otherwise look like a home-grown product.

The start date, 1945, seemed fairly clear to us from the outset: the immediate postwar period is when “British Sculpture” really became consolidated as the category we now take for granted. The closing date was less easy to determine, but we settled for around 2000, to give us the scope to trace first the hardening and then the natural dissipation of the category. As the “global” has eclipsed the national, even a gold mark standard, like that of British sculpture has become dispersed and slipped off stage. Thus these articles begin with the rise of Henry Moore and his promotion by the British Council, and look in some depth at the phenomenon of the “New British Sculpture”, again promoted by the Council. They close with a recognition—whether in the form of the 1989 *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition, or the many different Biennales which have been established since that date—that the category no longer has the market value or recognition which it had much earlier, and even as late as 1998, when *Sensation* moved from London to Berlin and Brooklyn. And yet, despite the obsolescence of the national category, it is clear from the case studies that the British still offers a more concrete framework than the global.

Throughout this period, a sculpture which was almost always English has been called “British”, perhaps to reflect the institutional role of the British Council. Although the English designation has recently become more rather than less explicit—with the emergence of national pavilions for the Irish,

Welsh, and Scottish—the umbrella term is retained by the British Council for the British Pavilion in Venice and in its name and work more generally. We have accepted the existence, indeed inescapability, of this category, and rather than apologizing for its name, have instead sought to examine it, by exploring its shifting character across different times and places.

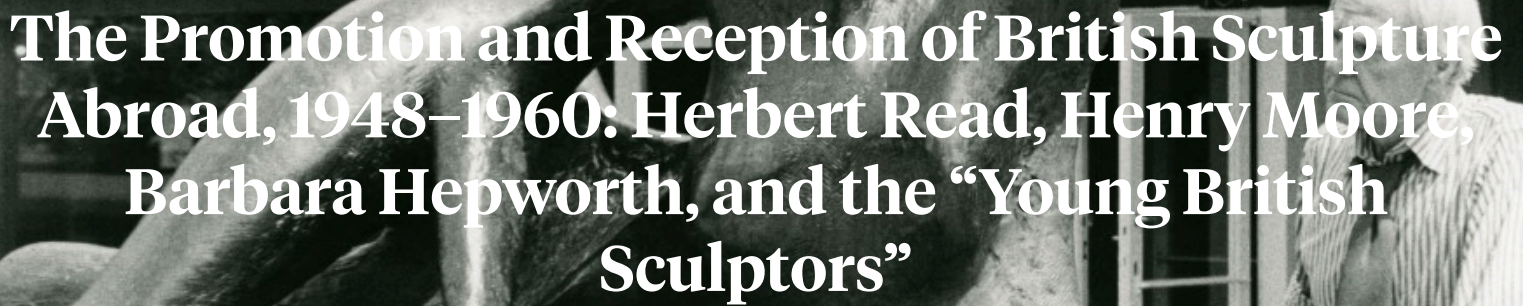
We asked our contributors to look critically at all three terms, but to pay special attention to them in combination. What happens to “British Sculpture” when it is shown abroad? Does it acquire new meaning? Does it reverberate locally, or back at home? How do we understand the distinctions between the meaning of Moore in 1950s Yugoslavia and in 1970s America? How does the Englishness intrinsic to the language of conceptualism affect its reception relative to place? We sought to find commentators who themselves reflect a variety of national contexts and positions relative to the subject. We readily acknowledge that we move from those who have studied the period as art historians, to those who were physically on the ground, involved as witnesses and sometimes as protagonists. It seems like a pertinent moment to examine a phenomenon which may now be seen to have run its course over the second half of the twentieth century, precisely because of the changing global dynamics around it.

The language issue is an interesting one, and goes beyond the use of English in conceptualism. Several of the contributions make reference to the fact that critics talked of the “modesty”, “discrimination”, “reticence”, or “restraint” of English sculpture, and we can speculate to what extent this represents a conflation of language with the national characteristics of a people and/or its artistic production. The question is stimulating but not easily assessable. The exhibition *Un Certain Art Anglais*, shown in Paris in 1979, had a clever title in that it pointed to something and nothing at one and the same time. It was particular, but it was ambiguous. Perhaps this neatly sums up the state of affairs by the 1970s, and might be seen to represent a kind of midway stage in the evolution of a category which began unapologetically, indeed determinedly, and then shifted as it was both used and questioned, ultimately to dissolve.

Zelimir Košćević points to the human quality, which we associate with the postwar reading of Moore, but only Arie Hartog makes the connection with the popular; that is, that British art, and especially sculpture, could, in its motifs, be an easier way for new audiences to learn about Modernism. This may be what Lawrence Alloway was unknowingly, or unwittingly, picking up in his attempt in 1961 to de-theorize the Constructivist work on show in Tallahassee (see Sam Gathercole’s essay). When abroad, the inner complexities of a national school can more easily be smoothed out and even jettisoned. But, and equally, there may well be a non-theoretical quality to British sculpture which has made it a successful avatar.

In fact one might go so far as to say that we do think that the national category is a useful one, but that understanding it through its internationalism has been insufficiently exploited. There has been a tendency over the last generation to reject the national as a sustainable category, but it has nevertheless been used. It is therefore unhelpful not to examine what it means and why, especially in its wider usage. Even some of our own writers, despite accepting the invitation to write up case studies, have been wary of the category. They have been more or less explicit in their examination, but we believe that, taken together, these case studies do a job of clarifying and examining a category which was largely made abroad.

The format should be easy to follow: five chronological sections, each confined to a decade, apart from the first, which establishes the new terrain marked out by Herbert Read and Henry Moore. Each section carries four or five case studies, devoted most usually to individual exhibitions or artists. Each section is introduced by its editor, with a more synthetic essay drawing on these case studies, among others, to consider the subject in the period. Two artists, Simon Starling and Gerard Byrne, provide a different kind of material view on to the same area. The twenty-five case studies cannot hope to add up to being comprehensive, but they do make an important contribution to thinking about British sculpture abroad, and we thank all our authors for their patience and forbearance with the long gestation of this project. We also thank the team at the Paul Mellon Centre, notably Hana Leaper and Sarah V. Turner, for helping us with all its complexities.



The Promotion and Reception of British Sculpture Abroad, 1948–1960: Herbert Read, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and the “Young British Sculptors”

Abstract

In 1945, Europe lay in ruins. Networks needed to be established, new alliances forged. UNESCO was a child of that time, and the idea of a united, democratic Europe took wing. During the period 1948–60, Modernism was at its height, and its shape was defined in a number of important exhibitions and publications. Herbert Read and others, with the support of the British Council, established an international presence for Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and the postwar generation of “the Geometry of Fear”. In doing so, they introduced a particularly “English” flavour to the debates about European moral and spiritual reconstruction.

Britain pioneered new forms of public patronage and display. In West Germany, the new British sculpture was interpreted as an expression of Western, humanist values, though it also carried intimations of the threat of nuclear war and destruction. Moore’s moderate Modernism and social democratic credentials went down well with artists in communist countries, who were seeking to escape from the narrow prescriptions of socialist realism. Over time, the British Council helped to create, and support, the notion of a self-regenerating sculptural tradition that was carried over until the full impact of globalization began to be felt, towards the end of the 1990s.

Authors

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When hostilities ended in the spring of 1945, those who reflected on the European situation from the social, political, and philosophical point of view could not help wondering whether the deeper community of the creative forces which make culture possible, in the first place, had not been destroyed in the general collapse. (Will Grohmann) ¹

The individuals in whom the spirit of modernism is embodied still survive, still work, still create—however obscurely and intermittently. When the cloud of war has passed, they will re-emerge eager to rebuild the shattered world. (Herbert Read) ²

Introduction

It is hard now to conjure up in words a sufficiently overwhelming image of the postwar European continent, with its destroyed cities and economies and its starving, uprooted peoples. The redrawing of boundaries after the Second World War led to untold hardship, but also called for international cooperation and exchange. The idea of Europe came to acquire new meaning and attraction, as an antidote to the various forms of nationalism to which the Continent had fallen prey in the course of the previous century and a half.

This essay suggests that Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and a new generation of postwar British sculptors associated with the catch-phrase, “The Geometry of Fear”, were able to profit from the new networks that were created after the War and to speak to a wider and often more receptive audience than they ever had at home—first, in war-torn Europe, then farther afield. They gave expression to many of the hopes and fears of the age, and their message was magnified, in part, through the activities of the British Council and the personal charisma of two dominant figures: Henry Moore, already hailed as Britain’s leading sculptor by the end of the 1940s, and his supporter, the writer and critic Herbert Read. The background to this was provided, first by the campaigns against Modernism of the previous decades, then by the ideological battles of the Cold War, whose frontier was drawn through the middle of occupied Germany and Austria. To a certain extent, the sculptors were able to capitalize on a sense of common identity, as Britain emerged from wartime isolation—hence the commonly held view that a “school” had appeared where none had existed before. Still more significantly, perhaps, this was the period when the Modernist canon was being comprehensively re-examined, redefined, and extended for a large public.

Reconstruction and Building a Network

Britain had survived the War with its economy in ruins, but its reputation intact, and offered a successful model of a functioning democracy. Much of the planning for postwar European reconstruction was undertaken in London, which had offered asylum to exiled governments from countries that had been overrun by the Nazis. It also served as a forum in which Allied ministers of education could plan new forms of European collaboration. The creation of the United Nations in 1945 and its offshoot, UNESCO, in 1946, was partly the outcome of those earlier wartime discussions in London.³

Reconstruction had to take place on many different levels. In the arts, “Zero Hour” meant just that—renewing artistic and critical activity from scratch. Among the formidable tasks, then, was the need to forge new networks out of old, and to recast the old histories to reflect new aspirations. Modernism now became identified with progressive liberal opinion and was easily identified with a supra-national agenda, just as abstract art—while hotly fought over—appeared deceptively value-free, beside the various forms of figurative art that had been exploited for propagandist purposes by illiberal regimes, of the left and the right.

Modernist art had remained a minority concern for much of its existence, and in England it had been constantly under siege, from the time of the half-forgotten Vorticists onwards. Herbert Read, as a leading internationalist and the apostle of a specifically English strain of Modernism (“provincial modernism”, to use David Sylvester’s term), played a prominent role in changing all this. However, it was only after renewing some of his prewar contacts on the Continent and striking up an informal alliance with the British Council that he was able to expand his sphere of activity.

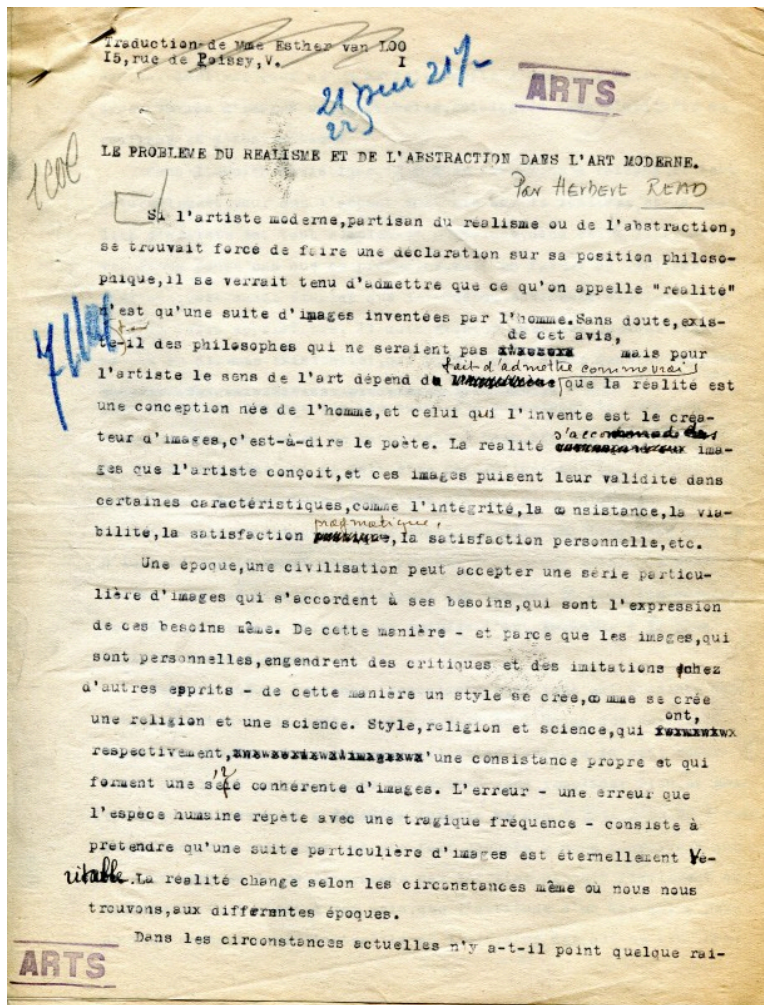


Figure 1.

Herbert Read, The opening page of paper, "Probleme du Réalisme et de l'abstraction dans l'art moderne" Digital image courtesy of Institut national d'histoire de l'art - Collection Archives de la critique d'art

UNESCO played an important part in building new links.⁴ It pressed for the creation of an International Association of Art Critics (AICA), alongside comparable associations for museum directors (ICOM), and, a little later, for artists (AIA/AIAP). The members of all three associations—and particularly AICA, as far as the promotion of contemporary art was concerned—played a key role in developing global networks for promoting their members' views, exhibitions, and publications. Herbert Read was a founding Vice-President of AICA in Paris and one of its most active members (fig. 1). Many of his colleagues in the Association, drawn from all over the world, had been opponents of totalitarian rule and suffered professional hardships—among them, some of the most distinguished art historians, critics, and museum directors of the day—and this was not foreign, perhaps, to a certain *esprit de corps*. They would meet annually in a different city at the time of the

Association's Congress and General Assembly, and informally on numerous other occasions, on the juries of the many prizes, competitions, biennales, and festivals that were launched in these years, as a stimulus to international cooperation.⁵

The British Council and Herbert Read

Travel was difficult and expensive in the early postwar years. This meant commercial galleries played only a minor role in the promotion of artists abroad. Even the internal market for British sculptors was limited to a handful of galleries, none of which were in a position to break into the international market by themselves.⁶ This left a gap, which cried out to be filled.

The British Council for Relations with Other Countries, as it was initially called before the abbreviation of its name to "The British Council", was set up in 1934, as the UK's belated riposte to French cultural promotion and the Axis Powers' more blatant cultural propaganda, in a period of mounting national and international rivalries. It could present itself, like the BBC, as operating at a distance from government, but usually pursued its objectives with the discreet, but effective, support of local diplomatic missions. In wartime, its sphere of influence had been severely curtailed by the scale of Nazi conquests; however, after 1945, with the onset of the Cold War, it treated expansion into newly liberated Europe as a top priority, as the entire region had been, in the words of the economic historian, R. H. Tawney, "the chief source and breeding-ground of the world's afflictions".⁷ By March 1947, the British Council had established "Representations" in no fewer than twenty-two European countries (East and West).⁸

Although Herbert Read was only formally invited to join the British Council's specialist Fine Arts Advisory Committee in autumn 1941, he had already played a role, as an outside selector for the British contribution to the Venice Biennale, in 1940 (withdrawn at a late stage).⁹ In 1940-41, at his own suggestion, he had selected, and written for, a British Council exhibition, *The Art of British Children*, for touring in several instalments to the Americas and the Dominions.¹⁰ Subsequently he took part in almost all the selection committees for the Council's overseas exhibitions, as well as playing a decisive part in enriching the Council's loan collection with major works by Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and other British sculptors. Quite apart from his commitments to other institutions, including, notably, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, which he and Roland Penrose launched in 1946, he was involved as a selector and, frequently, author, lecturer, and publicist for at least ten British Council exhibitions, several of them large and most of them touring, between 1947 and 1953 alone, when most of the

groundwork was laid for the future development of the British Council's visual arts work. And for the rest of the 1950s, the hard core of artists selected by the Council to show at numerous international exhibitions, including biennales, and in major touring exhibitions of British sculpture, was largely restricted to various combinations of the same ten, whom Read and his fellow selectors had first proposed for the Venice Biennales of 1948, 1950, and 1952.

Key Postwar International Exhibitions

From the late 1940s, a series of major international exhibitions played a crucial role not only in bringing together new constellations of artists, critics, and audiences for the first time, but also in stitching together a plausible narrative for the disrupted past and establishing the Modernist canon.¹¹ The key exhibitions, in this respect, were Rodolfo Pallucchini's first three Venice Biennales (1948, 1950, 1952),¹² Arnold Bode's and Werner Haftmann's first two editions of *documenta* (1955 and 1959—especially the former, with its retrospective, restorative character),¹³ and *50 Ans d'art moderne*, for the 1958 Brussels Expo, which was the only large exhibition of the decade to succeed in including a substantial number of artists from the Soviet Union and its East European satellites.¹⁴ National selections played a prominent part in all these exhibitions, and British sculptors were represented in all of them—often exhibited as a closed group (as in Venice) or perceived, written about, and seemingly displayed as a national “school”, or tendency. In every case, Herbert Read was involved in the initial selection.¹⁵ All of these exhibitions were supported by the British Council's Fine Arts Department. From 1948 to 1970 this was headed by Lilian Somerville, and had its own growing collection, a workshop and fine art handlers, its own government-backed indemnity scheme, and its recourse to the global network of “Representations”.

These early international exhibitions may be viewed as part of a Western European programme of moral and spiritual reconstruction, which gave Britain a unique opportunity for showcasing its artists. Of course, the British Council was as anxious to show painters as sculptors, but whilst Ben Nicholson, Graham Sutherland, Paul Nash, and others, commanded respect in Britain, they were viewed by many overseas critics as faintly *retardataire* and unable to bear close comparison with their French peers, who carried off the most prestigious awards. Sculpture was an altogether different matter. Henry Moore's well-timed emergence on the international scene—first with his Museum of Modern Art retrospective of 1946 in New York, and then, most importantly, with his prize-winning contribution to the British Pavilion at the 1948 Venice Biennale—filled a gap left by the ageing of the pioneers associated with the School of Paris, and created an opening from which his

younger colleagues were able to profit in subsequent years. Better still, Moore's outstanding success in Paris at the end of 1949, ¹⁶ with the Council's first major touring exhibition of his work, assured him a place in the line of continuity that had been established by the sculptors of the interwar period, and provided him with legitimation in the one place that really still mattered, in received opinion. ¹⁷

British Sculpture in the First Postwar Venice Biennales

The 1948 Venice Biennale was the first pan-European exhibition of modern art since the War, and it had the ambition to inform and enlighten a broad public. Behind this lay an intention to exorcize the ghosts of the recent, fascist past—symbolized by their appropriation of the vacant German Pavilion for a major survey of French Impressionist painting—and to privilege all forms of abstraction and individual forms of expression, in preference to the figurative styles associated with totalitarian regimes. This Biennale was to be a celebration of the “new climate of freedom” and the “hard conquest of the European spirit”, in the words of Rodolfo Pallucchini, the general secretary of the exhibition and a Christian Democrat. ¹⁸ Similarly, the Biennale's President, Giovanni Ponti, stated: “Art invites all men, irrespective of national frontiers and ideological barriers, to share in a language designed to unite them all in a universal family and an intense humanism, as opposed to some form of Babelish disunity and disharmony.” ¹⁹ In the British Pavilion, Henry Moore's sculpture fitted in perfectly with this programme, and was paired with a selection of paintings and watercolours by J. M. W. Turner, in response to a request from Pallucchini for work by Turner, John Constable, or Richard Parkes Bonington, to serve as a preface to Lionello Venturi's exhibition of Impressionists. Moore could be viewed at the time as the latest, and, at the age of forty-nine, youngest offshoot of the Modernist sculptural tradition, in terms defined as the School of Paris, from Rodin to the present.

Moore was at hand to help with the installation of his work: a total of thirty-six sculptures, dating from 1925 to the present, and fifty-three works on paper, from 1930 to 1946. Herbert Read wrote the short introductory essay for the catalogue, which was to become a standard point of reference for many foreign critics writing about Moore's work: his humble origins as a miner's son, his attachment to the British landscape, his cosmopolitan connections, his discovery of “primitive” and archaeological sculpture in the British Museum, his indebtedness to the artists of the Renaissance (notably, Michelangelo), and his assimilation into the grand European lineage of modern sculpture, from Constantin Brancusi to Alexander Archipenko, Jacques Lipchitz, Hans Arp, Henri Laurens, and Alberto Giacometti. Read showed due respect for Moore's adherence to the doctrine of “truth to materials”, and commented on his references to the natural landscape and

the morphological processes of nature. Above all, he paid tribute to Moore for his “humanism” (whatever that meant) and preoccupation with the human figure. In sum, Read concluded that only the painter Pablo Picasso could rival the sculptor Moore, in his ability to combine formal dynamics with an “animist” spirit.²⁰ Reactions to the exhibition as a whole, and to Moore’s success in carrying off the sculpture prize, in stiff competition with, among others, the Austrian figural sculptor Fritz Wotruba, were rapturous, and paved the way for a reappraisal of the “English” contribution to European Modernism—the terms “English” and “British” being henceforth virtually interchangeable, from the Continental perspective.

For the main exhibition of the 1950 Venice Biennale, the organizers again tried to create links with the past and to round out the picture of historic Modernism, with exhibitions of work by the Cubists, the Fauves, and Der Blaue Reiter, and a small, but choice, selection of sculpture by Arp and Ossip Zadkine (who won the Grand Prize), with an accompanying essay by Giulio Carlo Argan, and thirty-six sculptures and drawings by Laurens. The British Council did not quite pull off its earlier success with Moore in the British Pavilion. This time round, they showed sculpture and drawings by Hepworth in the same long room at the back of the building that had been used for Moore, and paintings by the colourist Matthew Smith in the side rooms. As before, the contemporary works were offset by a historical display in the main, central space—this time, of English landscapes by Constable. Hepworth’s contribution comprised a strong selection of twenty-two sculptures, dating from 1927 to 1949, eleven abstract drawings, eleven hospital drawings, and fifteen drawings of the human figure. The interpretation put on the work by the author David Lewis in his catalogue introduction, basically conformed to the prevalent call for a new humanism, though it also touched on her formal treatment of light and space and hinted at a speculative, cosmic dimension.²¹ The exhibition came at a difficult moment for her in her professional and personal life. It is possible that the hospital and figure drawings in particular—all of them completed in the preceding two to three years—gave the impression of a retreat from more radical positions in her work, and the public response appears to have been mixed. Whatever the reality, Herbert Read put a positive spin on it when he reported to the British Council’s Advisory Committee that “there were some who said that she would have been given the sculpture prize but for the fact that the prize went to an English sculptor last year, or (alternative explanation), but for the fact that she was a woman.” Somewhat tellingly, he added that: “There was an inclination to regard her work as derivative from Moore.”²² Hepworth herself seems to have provided some confirmation of this, when she wrote from Venice to a friend: “I’m a fair success so far . . . The Italians have never heard of an emancipated or intelligent woman, for another they won’t believe I am 47 & refer to me as the young BH & again they presume I am pupil of H.M.”; and, again, on 5 June: “the Moore situation

pursues me also.”²³ Yet Read’s visit to the pavilion in the company of a large group of fellow AICA delegates, who were in Venice for their annual conference, seems to have been a success. Included in the group were a number of professional colleagues, who, soon enough, were themselves to be directly involved in exhibiting and writing about Hepworth’s work.²⁴ In the absence of the usual stack of foreign press reviews in the archives, it is hard to gauge the true measure of Hepworth’s success, but it is safe to say that for her, as for Moore, the international exposure she received marked a turning point in her career and meant that she would be permanently associated in people’s minds with the new “school” of British sculpture.²⁵

By 1952, the number of countries participating in the Venice Biennale had risen from fourteen to twenty-six. The French included sculpture by Emile-Antoine Bourdelle, Lipchitz, and Germaine Richier in their selection, though it was Raoul Dufy, in their pavilion, who surprisingly carried off the painting prize. The Americans scooped the sculpture prize with a display dominated by fifteen mobiles by Alexander Calder. This time, the British Council gave up on the idea of combining old with new. Instead, it led on a retrospective of paintings by Graham Sutherland in the main room at the front of the building, with some further, vaguely surreal (or “super-real”) paintings by Edward Wadsworth in the rooms at the side. For the long room at the back of the pavilion overlooking a wooded area of the *Giardini*, which had previously been occupied by Moore and Hepworth, in 1948 and 1950, Herbert Read brought together a selection of sculpture and drawings by eight younger artists (Robert Adams, Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick, Geoffrey Clarke, F. E. McWilliam, Bernard Meadows, and Eduardo Paolozzi) under the somewhat inauspicious title, *New Aspects of British Sculpture* (fig. 2).²⁶ By way of an introduction to this selection, two new monumental works by Moore (*Double Standing Figure*, 1950) and Butler (*Woman*, 1949), were stationed outside the entrance to the building at the front. Most of the “young” sculptors (young in career terms, that is) had emerged since the end of the War and had spent their formative years in military service. Their work, in a variety of different cut, welded, and collaged materials, might be described as a reaction against the earlier work of Moore. Whilst influenced by his example, it also took elements from other artists of the School of Paris, including Calder, Giacometti, and Richier, and exuded an altogether different atmosphere of existential uncertainty. The essayist Egon Vietta was among several European critics to comment on the success of these sculptors and on their sudden emergence: “It is not the French but the young English sculptors who are the sensation of the Biennale.”²⁷



Figure 2.

Installation View: New Aspects of British Sculpture display in the British Pavilion, XXVIth Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy, 1952

The young sculptors' collective success and branding by the critics as a "school" caught even the British organizers unaware, in part, since they had expected Graham Sutherland, with his Continental connections, to be the star of the show. ²⁸ As British Council records explain: "The inclusion in the British pavilion at Venice in 1952 of a group of works by various young sculptors was considered necessary, as a demonstration of the fact that Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth are not isolated phenomena but parents of a considerable school", with its own distinctive characteristics. However, "there was little expectation of the extent of its success abroad." ²⁹ Much of the success was due to Read's short catalogue essay, which captured the darkening mood of the time, with its intimations of war and nuclear annihilation. He warned that "the monumental calm that a Winckelmann had imposed on the formal imagination of Europe", and the dreams of the Constructivists, who had "turned away from the ruins to create new values, to create the images of a civilization not yet born, perhaps never to be born", had "gone for ever". These younger artists had adopted more of a linear, cursive style, preferring metal to stone, and construction and assemblage to carving and modelling, in keeping with their "avoidance of massiveness, of monumentality". Like the majority of the young sculptors he was writing about, Read had been exposed, early on, to the existential philosophy and the stylistic innovations of the French sculptors, and he found apt expression in words for the "iconography of despair" and the "geometry of fear" that served temporarily to mask their individual differences. ³⁰

Not everyone at home was impressed with the achievement in Venice, however. The British public and conservative establishment were still hostile to contemporary art in general, and the British Council always felt vulnerable to criticism from the right-wing Beaverbrook press. Therefore, an article on 24 June by the Rome correspondent of the normally sympathetic, left-leaning *Manchester Guardian*, criticizing the British Council for its choice of artists for the British Pavilion, called for, and received, an immediate reply from Herbert Read, who declared, no doubt truthfully, that: "As commissario I was overwhelmed with congratulations. Again and again I was told that the British Pavilion was the most vital, the most brilliant, and the most promising in the whole Biennale"—an opinion that was evidently shared by many of the British and foreign delegates to the International Artists' Congress in Venice at the end of September.³¹ As if that were not enough to allay the anxieties at home—and it evidently was not—it also spurred Alfred Barr into a ringing defence of his British colleagues, in a letter to the newspaper, published on 3 September, in which he declared that: "As an American I can scarcely express my astonishment at [your correspondent's] half-querulous, half contemptuous critique of what seemed to many foreigners the most distinguished national showing in the whole Biennale." He gave fulsome praise to the British Council, for their "extraordinary work", not least in being the only country to publish its own special catalogue, and declared that, "the exhibition was astutely planned, boldly selected, and installed with exceptional taste and intelligence." He concluded: "Finally, instead of some public official or administrator, the Council sent as British Commissioner one of the most distinguished philosophers of art now writing in English, Herbert Read."³² The critic Robert Melville recalled: "When the works of several young British sculptors were brought together for the first time at the Venice Biennale in 1952, the occasion seemed to mark the rise of a new British school with well-defined characteristics of its own." He suggested that all these young sculptors "were involved in a violent yet methodological struggle to eradicate from their work every stylistic, doctrinal and philosophical connection with the art of Henry Moore. The British exhibition faithfully reflected the climax of that rupture."³³ In reality, it was never as simple as that, and there was both continuity and a temporary convergence between the generations. A similar exhibition with the title *Young British Sculptors*, that toured six centres in Germany between 1955 and 1956, enjoyed considerable success, as did the numerous occasions on which these artists were included in group exhibitions throughout the decade. However, the collective atmosphere, and the occasion provided by Venice, could not be repeated, after these sculptors had been launched on their individual careers.

British Sculpture at the São Paulo Bienal, and South American Responses

One outcome of Herbert Read's success with the sculpture selection for the 1952 Venice Biennale, was his appointment as British Commissioner and international jury member for the second São Paulo Bienal. This Bienal was founded in 1950–51 in a mood of optimism and competitive rivalry, after the successful revival of the postwar Venice Biennale—along similar lines to it, and with some of the same structures, including the national selections, international ambitions, and Cold War rivalries (in this case, largely a regional struggle for influence, between the Old World and the New). Read had been in touch with the Italian-Brazilian founder, Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, from the beginning and had possibly ventriloquized Matarazzo's request for significant British participation, with representative work by, for example, Moore, Hepworth, and Ben Nicholson. Only at the time of the second Bienal in 1953, however, was the British Council in a financial position to do much about this, by sending out a small retrospective of Moore's sculptures and drawings (including his recent, important, *King and Queen* and *Draped Reclining Figure*, both 1952–53), along with work by five prominent painters of different generations. Read served on the jury which awarded the Grand Prize to Henri Laurens—possibly as a result of French lobbying, and a reflection of the fact that two of the rival candidates, Moore and Calder, had already carried off the Grand Prize in Venice in 1948 and 1952 respectively—though Moore received widespread praise for his contribution and was rewarded with the Prize for a Foreign Sculptor, in compensation. In 1955, the British Council sent a retrospective of Ben Nicholson's work, which was rewarded with the Prize for a Foreign Painter, and, in a further echo of its 1952 selection for Venice, accompanied this with an enlarged version of work by seven of the eight original participants in *New Aspects of British Sculpture*, with the addition of two others: Leslie Thornton and Austin Wright. The entire British section in São Paulo then toured to Rio de Janeiro, as the inaugural exhibition of the new Museu de Arte Moderna, and on to Montevideo, Lima, and Caracas, in keeping with the Council's practice of touring its main contribution to São Paulo to a number of capital cities in the region, largely at the expense of the local hosts—a practice that continued up until the abolition of national sections at the Bienal, around the turn of the century.

Ana Gonçalves Magalhães, in her essay in this issue of *British Art Studies*, gives a detailed description of the reception of Barbara Hepworth's work at the 1959 fifth São Paulo Bienal, which was of capital importance to her subsequent career—not least, in influencing her nomination to create a memorial to her friend, Dag Hammarskjöld, whom she first met in New York that autumn, fresh from her triumph in São Paulo.³⁴ In this instance, Hepworth's exhibition of sculptures and drawings, which were practically all

new (in contrast to the retrospective character of her Venice showing in 1950) went on to the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, under the direction of Jorge Romero Brest, and museums in Venezuela, Chile (Valparaiso and Santiago), and Uruguay, meeting, in general, with a warm critical reception, often enough, however, simply based on the catalogue text by J. P. Hodin, rather than any direct knowledge or experience of the artist's work or its context—something the Council had tried to counter, for instance, by lining up sympathetic academics to talk about her work and, in one or two cases, inviting them to visit the artist in Cornwall.³⁵ The Chilean sculptor Lorenzo Berg Costa, who came into the latter category, was awarded a grant to visit Hepworth in St Ives, and reported on his return that she showed a spiritual affinity to classical fifth-century BC Greek sculpture, at the same time referring also to her friend and contemporary, Henry Moore, as “possibly, the main global influence on contemporary sculpture”.³⁶ The critic Victor Carvacho, writing one month earlier for the same newspaper, did not have the good fortune to travel to England or meet the artist behind this “artistic event of the greatest possible perfection”, but he did have the benefit of earlier attending a lecture by Read, that “most transparent of historians of modern art”, at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Washington, where he also heard mention for the first time of artists including Paolozzi, Armitage, and Chadwick.³⁷ Several other commentators, in the course of the tour, referred to the existence of an English “school” and to the British Council's touring exhibition, a couple of years previously, of work by the group of young artists (Armitage, Butler, Chadwick, and Paolozzi among them), for whom Moore and Hepworth had paved the way. María Luisa Terrens, writing enthusiastically and perceptively for *El País* in Montevideo (27 April 1960), remarked that local audiences were woefully unprepared for an exhibition of this quality, given the lack of exhibitions of work by foreign artists and the fact that there were only three modern (male) sculptors worthy of the name in her country—Eduardo Yepes, Germán Cabrera, and the late Nerses Ounanian. On the other hand, an anonymous reviewer for an English-language newspaper in Buenos Aires considered that the exhibition there “looks fussy and appears to lack space”, as well as being “less likely to appeal to prevailing Anglo-Argentine tastes”. Whilst expressing his appreciation of some of the later works (presumably, the figural drawings), he advised visitors to the exhibition to ignore the catalogue altogether, as it gave the impression, either that its author (J. P. Hodin) thought the whole exercise to be meaningless or that what he was trying to do for the artist was “what an imaginative advertising writer does for Scotch whisky”!³⁸

Henry Moore and German-speaking Audiences

Henry Moore's international career took off after Venice, in 1948. His success at the Biennale was such that the British Council quickly decided to arrange a new, touring exhibition of his work in Europe, starting in autumn 1949, in response to a number of requests it had received from leading museums in Brussels, Paris, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Düsseldorf, and Berne. Budgets were contained by introducing standard arrangements for sharing catalogue and transport costs between venues, except, initially, in Germany, for which special funding was required. Thus, the British Council was able to establish a durable system and an expanding network, which could easily be reinforced with occasional loans to museums for their own projects and displays, and a regular supply of smaller-scale travelling exhibitions, drawn from the Council's own growing collection of contemporary artists' work.

Everywhere, this initial exhibition tour of Henry Moore's work was an outstanding success, but held a special significance in Germany. It reached the still half-destroyed city of Hamburg in March 1950 at a moment of particular tension, when the British authorities were attempting, controversially, to demolish the largest dock in the city. This may have kept down the number of visitors, but the response of the critics was also equivocal: they "stalked round the subject, well-disposed, but cautious, striving to define".³⁹ Carl Georg Heise, the Director of the Kunsthalle, which hosted the exhibition, urged visitors to go to the exhibition with an open mind, and called this "a question of enlarging our artistic horizon, badly narrowed through the War and Hitler's influence". The dilemma was well expressed in an article in the *Lübecker Freie Presse*, on 22 March: "Modern art is again and again a riddle, because we still feel and deplore the loss of representational reality." According to the British Council's Liaison Officer in Germany, several of the critics were "overcome by the idea of the machine-age" and "haunted by the tension between East and West". Not a few felt disturbed by the difficulty they had in distinguishing between art and life; in the words of the critic for *Die Welt*, on 22 March: "Look around in the tram: everywhere Henry Moores. What he experienced in the shelters during the blitz we should be able to understand, too . . . Sweat, blood, and tears. That's what it is: man hunted by the machine taking refuge in the earth!" By far the most upbeat account was given by Werner Haftmann, the "young critic from Munich", whose long speech, delivered at the opening, was reprinted as an article in *Die Zeit* on 12 March, in which he concluded: "If art can express the peculiar humanity of a period in a spiritual form, then this expression is to be found in the work of Moore." Summing up, a Mr Murray-Paillie of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Branch of the Control Commission (one of the now celebrated "Monuments Men") concluded that: "Political crisis both external and internal did not help much. But we have had 297 visitors in the first week." He added that, although the exhibition had not

been notably popular with the general public, it had caught the attention of artists, collectors, and dealers—two artists, making the journey on foot from Berlin, to see it (a distance of some 300 km).

By the time the exhibition reached Berne, at the end of its European tour, the Director of the Kunsthalle, Dr Arnold Rüdinger, had no hesitation in placing Moore's work in the company of Lipchitz, Marino Marini, and Giacometti, declaring that: "Since the decline of England's world power, however, a new world power seems to be proclaiming itself in England: that of sculpture and painting. And the messenger who bears the glad tidings is no limping cripple."⁴⁰ Intriguingly, however, reports in the local press of a *contretemps* at the opening of the exhibition brought to light a sharp difference of opinion about the merits of Moore's newest work since his turn from an experimental phase, typified by the abstract string pieces of the late 1930s, to a more popular accessible style, anticipated by the wartime "Shelter Drawings", when he had stopped making sculpture for a while. Namely, the principal speaker at the opening, the Munich-based British critic, John Anthony Thwaites,⁴¹ who had known Moore since the early 1930s and had once owned some of his works, had the temerity to point out that, from the time of the Shelter Drawings onwards, "Moore has consistently moved away from abstract sculptural form towards a 'more stylized naturalism', because 'he wishes to be understood not only by the small group of the friends of art who are filled with enthusiasm by his abstract sculptures, but also by the great mass of the public.'"⁴² The works Thwaites had in mind included the *Madonna and Child* (1943–44), that Moore had created for St Matthew's Church, Northampton, and certain of the recent "Family Groups", represented in the exhibition in eleven large photographic blow-ups; as well as (it might be surmised) the *Three Standing Figures* (1947–48) from the open-air sculpture display in Battersea Park, here represented in replica. Needless to say, the artist, who was present at the opening, "strongly disagreed with Mr. Thwaites' statement, but did not have any opportunity for saying so in public".⁴³ And it was the large-scale works—increasingly editioned, and in bronze—that Moore turned to making in the decade that followed, partly under the pressures of success and partly in response to the numerous commissions that started to flow in.

Sculpture Parks and Public Art

The stylistic debate over figuration versus abstraction was a notable feature of the 1950s, and is reflected in Thwaites's comments. However, there were also arguments within the Modernist movement itself, between those who were trying to reach out to a new public and those who were perceived to be more hermetic in their concerns (often associated with varying degrees of geometric abstraction). Many artists, like Moore, who had belonged to the

beleaguered avant-gardes of the 1930s, now sought to break out of their self-imposed—or -induced—isolation, by experimenting with more “accessible” styles and large-scale “public” work that courted social and social democratic engagement. Sculpture parks, open-air sculpture displays, and sculpture commissions, formed a part of what became a widespread movement to build new audiences for modern art; to provide public amenities; to promote urban regeneration; and, on occasion, to offer restitution for the ravages of war. The first international open-air display of sculpture on the Continent took place in a wooded park at Sonsbeek on the outskirts of Arnhem (The Netherlands) in summer 1949, and was repeated at three-yearly intervals thereafter, until 1958. It was directly inspired by the London County Council’s first outdoor exhibition in Battersea Park the previous year, and had similar aims. As was common, artists were grouped by nationality, and a recent cast of Henry Moore’s *Three Standing Figures* was sited (like the Darley Dale stone originals in Battersea) in a prominent position on top of a gentle mound, with trees behind ([fig. 3](#)).



Figure 3.

Henry Moore, *Three Standing Figures*, Darley Dale Stone, h: 213.4cm, 1947

A similar institution, with similar motives, was launched in Middelheim (Belgium) the following summer, again with Battersea Park as a model, and with the explicit intention of making modern art “accessible” to ordinary people. The parkland was a former military depot for German and Allied forces, now returned to the public. In his inaugural speech, the Burgomaster of the town declared: “Where stupidity and hatred have lain waste works of

the spirit, born in different lands, have found a meeting place.”⁴⁴ The initial advisers on the project included Moore himself, Henry Moore, Ossip Zadkine (soon to become universally known for his bronze memorial to the destruction of Rotterdam, *De Verwoeste Stad* [The Destroyed City], 1951–53), and two critics and AICA members closely connected to the Venice Biennale: Umbro Apollonio and Rodolfo Pallucchini. Over the years, Middelheim succeeded in building up a major international collection of Modernist sculpture, including, during the 1950s, a cast of Moore’s *King and Queen* (1952–53), Hepworth’s *Cantate Domino* (1958) (touched on in Ana Gonçalves Magalhães’s essay in the present publication), and others by Lynn Chadwick and Jacob Epstein. Other early initiatives of this nature included temporary outdoor displays beside the Alster in Hamburg (1953);⁴⁵ in the mining town of Recklinghausen, in the Ruhr (with British participation in 1952–53 and 1955–56)⁴⁶ and, most importantly, in the sculpture garden set up by Abraham Marie Hammacher at the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo (The Netherlands), which was opened to the public in 1961.⁴⁷

It is difficult, at this distance in time, to appreciate the extent to which Moore came to dominate the international field of sculpture in the 1950s. A great deal of this was due, not only to the exceptional accessibility of his work, through exhibitions and publications, but to his sheer force of personality, commented on by almost all he encountered: his humble origins, his evident sincerity, his simplicity and modesty, and his openness to colleagues’ ideas and concerns. He travelled with exhibitions of his work whenever possible (frequently, in parallel to his friend, Herbert Read) and took a personal interest in every aspect of its display and reception, usually making a special point of visiting professional colleagues in their studios and in the art schools where they taught. His visits, like the two-and-a-half weeks he spent in Greece at the time of an opening of an exhibition of his work in Athens, in February 1951, turned into triumphal tours. A good example of this was provided by his 1954–55 exhibition tour in Yugoslavia in 1954 (which Želimir Košćević describes in detail in the present publication), of which he remarked on his return to England, that he had been treated “as something between a film star and royalty”.⁴⁸ In his demeanour he seemed to exemplify the stereotypical Englishman, with his love of individual freedom and tolerance, and in his work he displayed a moderate form of Modernism that addressed a wide audience and offered them a measure of reassurance in a troubled world. Almost unwittingly, he was treated as a standard bearer for Western democratic ideals, and it was more than natural that his work should have been treated with such enthusiasm in countries like Yugoslavia in 1954 and Poland in 1959, that were shaking themselves free from the grip of socialist-realist aesthetics.

German Revendications and Cold War Tensions

Unquestionably, the most important field of activity for the British Council, and for the promotion of British sculpture in Europe in the 1950s and beyond, now became not Paris, but the newly established Federal Republic of West Germany, with its German-speaking hinterland in Austria and Switzerland and affinities to the Lowlands. Germany, with its numerous galleries and Kunstvereine, its publishing industry and strong regional media, its universities, its educated middle-class audiences, and, not least, its history and geography, offered the greatest number and variety of openings for contemporary art.⁴⁹ In the early days of economic recovery, even the more adventurous German museum directors were cautious about mounting exhibitions that might alienate the public, but found that audiences were genuinely keen to explore new ideas—possibly, as a way of forgetting the recent past. Cold War struggles in Central Europe added a strongly ideological dimension to the “hearts and minds” campaign of the 1950s, with Moore emerging in public perceptions as a champion of freedom, (social) democracy, and human rights. Otto Benesch, the Director of the Albertina Museum in the then quadripartite, occupied Austrian capital, Vienna, pleading for an exhibition of Moore’s drawings, wrote: “We are really a long way east. It is vital that we keep our relations with the great art centres of the West. If our museums are to lose this contact, then that is one more position that we surrender to the Powers of Darkness.”⁵⁰ However, the reactions to contemporary art—particularly, from this part of the world—could also take other forms of negativity, whose violent undertones were often far in excess of anything that could be thrown at modern artists in the distinctly cool emotional environment of postwar Britain. A prime example of this was the controversy about “degenerate art”, unleashed in the letter columns of the local newspaper by a certain Dr. med. Otto Müller, in connection with a touring exhibition of Henry Moore’s sculpture and drawings in autumn 1954. As Müller put it, rhetorically: “If all that is not degenerate art, what then is ‘degenerate art’?”⁵¹ Justifying his own position in the light of Emile Zola’s theory of realism (though he did not mention the novelist by name), he took as his starting point the notion that art was “nature seen through the temperament of the artist”, though the implicit reference was to a more recent, and more sinister, basis for aesthetic judgment. The editor allowed the correspondence to run for some days, before coming down on the side of the artist and closing it down, though not before allowing Dr. Müller to return to the attack, by likening Moore’s beechwood sculpture, *Figure I* (1932), in “strictly medical terms”, to a “pigeon-breasted creature with a hole in its head”.⁵² Examples of this kind of attack on foreign, Modernist art abounded in the 1950s, and were often

related to the Austrian art historian Hans Sedlmayr's pessimistic diagnosis of contemporary culture, in his influential book, *Verlust der Mitte* (Art in Crisis: The Lost Centre), first published in 1948.⁵³

***documenta* and Shaping the Canon**

The exhibition *documenta*, in Kassel in 1955 (the number “i” was only added later), was primarily intended to throw a bridge over the twelve wasted years of National Socialism and performed much the same function for Germans as the early postwar Venice Biennales had done for Italians, in trying to mend the fabric linking contemporary art with a forgotten, or occluded, past. At the same time, it brought together some of the scattered Modernist impulses from the Western capitalist democracies, in defiance of the state-sponsored realism that was favoured in the communist regime on the other side of the border, and in the Communist parties of Western Europe. It was intended as a lesson on the past and an experiment in the future, set in the context of a city which had been 80 percent destroyed and was undergoing a process of comprehensive redevelopment. The founder, Arnold Bode, had opted for installing the exhibition in the simplest possible fashion, with the kind of materials and techniques that he had learned to use in trade fairs, and with an eye to dramatic effect. As far as the sculpture was concerned, a sequence of spaces was inaugurated inside the main entrance to the not yet restored Fridericianum, with Wilhelm Lehmbruck's *Kneeling Woman* (1911), which had featured prominently in the *Degenerate Art* exhibition of 1937, followed by a marble *Venus* (1928) by Aristide Maillol in an adjacent corridor, leading to a large sculpture hall, in which the tone was set by Arp in the foreground, a Calder mobile in the middle ground, and Moore's upright *King and Queen* against the back wall, dominating the scene from afar (fig. 4). As Doris Schmidt, the critic for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, put it:

something new and exciting in this century is the fact that for the first time Europe is receiving new stimuli from England—a country that has traditionally been viewed as hostile to sculpture . . . Thus, a new door opens for sculpture in our time, in the soft light of the English climate. The range of Moore's influence is comparable to that of Picasso; in his figural works, Moore has turned into the counterpart of the painter around twenty years his senior, who casts a long shadow over the art of our time.⁵⁴

And partly in homage to Moore, no doubt, and the younger British sculptors, who were exhibited together as a group, some musicians from the Kassel opera house played the Phantasy Quartet, opus 2, by Benjamin Britten at the opening ceremony. Will Grohmann, writing in the Berlin newspaper *Der*

Tagesspiegel, declared that Moore, with a superlative display of ten sculptures, along with younger sculptors such as Armitage and Chadwick, were among the stars of the show. However, John Anthony Thwaites, whom we have encountered already, was again critical about Moore's transition from experimental, spatially daring forms towards a "not very felicitous" use of expressive ("ecstatic") line in *King and Queen* and his return to modelling. Overall, he saw this as a missed opportunity and regretted the absence of key figures such as Brancusi and Julio Gonzalez, and the inclusion of someone like Max Bill, at the expense of a mixed bag of sculptors, including Robert Adams, Robert Jacobsen, Norbert Kricke, Ibram Lassaw, and David Smith, and German academic modellers such as Gerhard Marcks and Hermann Blumenthal. ⁵⁵



Figure 4.

Installation View: Sculpture Hall at documenta I, at documenta I, Kassel, Germany, 1955, (showing works by artists including Arp, Laurens, Calder, Moore)

In some ways, *documenta ii*, in 1959, marked the watershed in the international presentation of a "school" of British figural sculptors in the 1950s, just as it signalled the highpoint and prefigured the rapid demise of European *informel* painting, in competition with new, partially market-driven, impulses from North America. ⁵⁶ In the same year, the Paris *Biennale des Jeunes* was launched, in a bid to reassert French—and European—cultural supremacy, but the times were clearly changing. And one of the things that *documenta ii* did was to stake the claim of West German artists to equal attention with the rest. As far as the sculptural component was concerned, Bode and Haftmann delegated their authority (and, broadly, their overall

approach) to the art historian Eduard Trier, whose book, *Moderne Plastik* (Modern Sculpture, 1955), took over where Haftmann had left off and laid the theoretical basis for the selection.⁵⁷ This time, the main display was in a specially created open-air arena immediately in front of the still-ruined Baroque Orangery in the parklands of the Karlsau, and, quite consciously, provided continuity with the open-air sculpture displays that had been such a feature of the decade (fig. 5). For the occasion, Arnold Bode constructed a stage in front of the ruins, at the centre of which Henry Moore occupied pride of place, as the pre-eminent sculptor of the postwar period, with the maquette for his UNESCO sculpture (*Reclining Figure*, 1958) and around ten other sculptures, including his significantly placed *Fallen Warrior* (1958) (fig. 6). Figurative sculpture predominated—especially, that of the “School of Paris”, with the inclusion of Brancusi and Gonzalez this time, as well as Arp and the recently deceased Henri Laurens—and the British sculptors were again present in force, and again received many favourable, though critically undifferentiated comments in the media.⁵⁸ Most of the sculpture was placed on brick and cement plinths, in a maze of whitewashed walls, offering a combination of close-up views and long vistas, to which the ruined buildings and tree-lined parkland provided a fitting backdrop.⁵⁹ This part of the exhibition, and the adjacent café with six Picasso “Bathers” (*Les Baigneurs*, 1958), standing in a pool of water, was unticketed, in keeping with Trier’s (and his colleagues’) view that “sculpture is public art, to a higher degree than any of the other visual arts and, as such, needs, therefore, to assert its presence.”⁶⁰ Like its predecessor, it was an enormous success with the general public, but *documenta ii* left historical gaps—this time, in its attempt to sketch out the entire panorama of “Art since 1945”. However, it evidently succeeded in one of its principal aims. As one critic put it: “At one and the same time, the past has been laid to rest and the present has us in its grip.”
61



Figure 5.

Installation View: Arnold Bode's open-air stage, at documenta I, Kassel, Germany, 1955

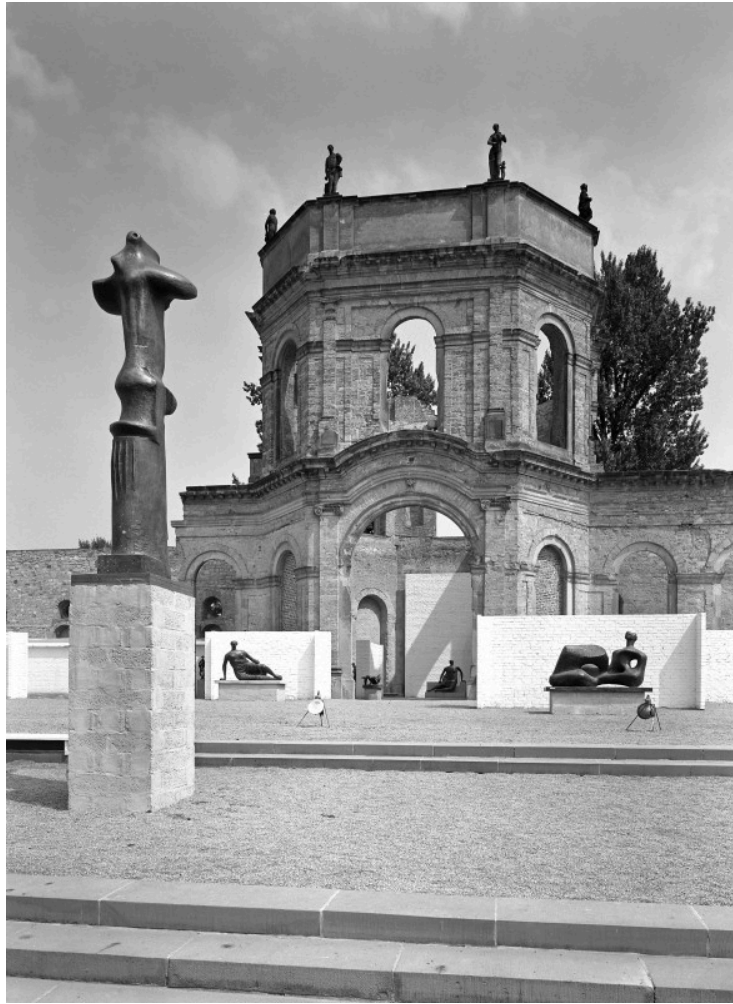


Figure 6.
Installation View: Arnold Bode's open-air stage, at
documenta I, Kassel, Germany, 1955, (showing works by
Henry Moore)

Berlin, and a Cold War Watershed



Figure 7.

Henry Moore, *Reclining Figure*, 1956, bronze, (LH402) at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 1971 Digital image courtesy of Reinhard Friedrich

A fitting end to this account is provided, perhaps, by reports on the showing of yet another touring retrospective of Henry Moore's works at the West Berlin Akademie der Künste, in the middle of its 1960-61 European tour. The artist, who had come out earlier to inspect the latest of his large-scale works to emerge from the Hermann Noack foundry (*Reclining Figure*, 1961), just in time for inclusion in the exhibition, was present at the opening, where he was made an Honorary Member of the Academy, and witnessed the unveiling of another of his bronze *Reclining Figures* (1956), which still rests on its plinth opposite the entrance to Werner Düttmann's newly completed Academy building, in the Hansaviertel (fig. 7). Unusually for the times, the entire ceremony was televised live, and the artist and his old friend Will Grohmann gave each other a fraternal embrace in front of hundreds of guests.⁶² Also present in force was a one-hundred-strong delegation of the International Association of Art Critics, headed by their President, James Johnson Sweeney, who had all made the trip from Munich at the end of their 13th General Assembly.⁶³ Herbert Readerbert was prevented by illness from attending, but his speech was read out for him by a British Council official. Later, Will Grohmann reported in a long appreciation, published in the West Berlin newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel*, that

No one can speak with more authority about Moore than Sir Herbert Read. Read's works display a deep understanding of Moore's work. In this he has given us a lead so that the Germans understand the British artist better than any other nation. After all, Moore is a northerner, but we have only seen this in English writers, up to now. Moore is in the last analysis a man of the north of a quality indeed that we have met hitherto only among the greatest English poets.

And he went on to say that today, Moore was "a European phenomenon like the Spanish Picasso and like him so far-ranging in his vision as to embrace opposites and reconcile them to one whole."⁶⁴ The exhibition received a (for the time) remarkable 10,000 visitors in the first week. However, "Later attendances were reduced by the Berlin crisis which from 13 August kept East Berliners away and West Berliners at home watching television. The final attendance figure was about 20,000. Even so, the catalogue was sold out and had to be reprinted."⁶⁵ The British Ambassador to Bonn, who came to Berlin for the event and also spoke at the opening, suggested that Moore's work should be viewed as an expression of "the Christian culture of Western Europe" and "a symbol of Western unity and cultural life".⁶⁶

A West German Postlude

This chapter in Moore's long creative life was closed, but the enduring impact of Moore's sculpture on the German public at large, thanks to its almost daily use as a backdrop to the televised news of events at the Federal Chancellery, means that it is deeply ingrained in the memory of anyone who was old enough to take an interest in current affairs, up to the time of the transfer of the German capital from Bonn to Berlin, in 1999 (fig. 8). As the journalist Heinrich Wefing put it:

The best-known work of art in the Federal Republic is presumably the British sculptor, Henry Moore's "Two Large Forms". Moore's sculpture was not merely a decorative adjunct to the Chancellery, but became the emblem of the symbol-impooverished Bonn Republic; the art historian, Silke Wenk, once described "Large Two Forms" (1969) as an allegory of the modern welfare state.⁶⁷

The old Chancellery, together with Moore's sculpture of 1969, is now a classified monument, and the circus has moved on. The reality of that state, and the political symbolism of the work, have now been irrevocably

consigned to the past. However, the later Moore's humanist vision of the "Family of Man" seems to have exercised a continuing appeal for Germans, weighed down by feelings of personal and collective guilt and anxious to forget the suffering they had inflicted and endured. According to one calculation, there are still eighteen freely accessible sculptures by Moore in public spaces in twenty-three West German cities—many of them, carefully located under the direct supervision of the artist.⁶⁸



Figure 8.

Henry Moore, *Large Two Forms*, 1966-69, bronze, (LH556) outside of the former Chancellery of the German Federal Republic, Bonn Digital image courtesy of Henry Moore Archive

By Way of a Conclusion

This account of the promotion of British Modernist sculpture in Europe has been conditioned by a reading of contemporary sources. It was only during the 1950s, and partly in reaction to the traumas of the previous decade, that a systematic attempt (however inadequate) could be made to establish a canon for Western Modernism ("*Westkunst*"), through a series of key exhibitions and publications such as those referred to above. Nowadays, as

far as sculptural histories go, any fresh assessment of the period would pay somewhat critical attention to Henry Moore's postwar output, which had arguably lost some of its edge (the 2010 exhibition at Tate Britain tended to support this view), and closer attention to the all-round achievements of his contemporary, Barbara Hepworth (this, too, was the intention of the exhibition of her work at Tate Britain, in 2015). More can be told today about both these artists' indebtedness to the early pioneers—Epstein and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, in particular. Closer attention might also need to be paid to the individual trajectories of the sculptors who were hastily packaged together under the generic label of the “Geometry of Fear” and were heavily promoted at the time, but who had until recently come to be viewed with generic indifference. The same goes for the interesting and dynamic British constructive moment that developed out of the 1950s, and whose significance has been persistently downplayed in historical surveys (see Sam Gathercole's essay on the subject in this publication). Above all, the reputation of Herbert Read, the most celebrated, the best informed, the most cosmopolitan, and one of the most generous writers about art in Britain at the time, deserves to be both thoroughly rehabilitated and soberly reassessed, in relation to a number of other excellent critics of the period such as John Berger, David Sylvester, and Lawrence Alloway (to name but a few), whose influence never reached far into Europe beyond the Channel. If for nothing else, Read should be remembered for contributing in so many ways to the idea of an “English”, or “British” (the terms were virtually interchangeable) sculptural tradition, where nothing of the kind had existed before. Long after his disappearance from the scene, but thanks, in large part, to his advocacy of a peculiarly insular brand of avant-gardism, there grew up an almost self-perpetuating myth that each successive generation of art school graduates would coalesce (with their teachers) around a new, national, artists' rallying point, from “New Generation” to “Saint Martin's”, to the “New British Sculpture”, down to the “Young British Artists” of the 1990s—after which, the outdated notions of sculpture as a discrete medium, and of national schools or groupings, seem finally to have imploded.

This story altogether leaves out of account the vital contribution of the Independent Group, which was nurtured by the Institute of Contemporary Arts, over which Read presided, but whose artist members, such as Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi, increasingly worked against his long-standing vested interests and commitments. These young Turks, who were working across the entire “long front of culture” (Alloway) were far more receptive than their mentor to the “winds of change” that blew in over the Atlantic. Also excluded from this account, as it was never acknowledged at the time, and is only now regarded as a fitting topic for research, was the growing importance and impact of the numerous artists and students who came to Britain from Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth after the War, and contributed, in ways that are still felt, to the richness of this country's

artistic heritage. All these fresh contributions to British sculpture from a wide variety of sources were largely excluded from the international Modernist canon that briefly took shape in the 1950s, then rapidly dissolved.

Footnotes

- 1 Cited in Werner Haftmann, *Painting in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd rev. English ed. (London: Lund Humphries, 1961), 311.
- 2 Herbert Read, "Threshold of a New Age", in *This Changing World*, ed. J. R. M. Brumwell (London: Routledge, 1944), 12.
- 3 The signing of the European Cultural Convention followed, in Paris, on 19 Dec. 1954 and was accompanied by the first in the Council of Europe's on-going series of large-scale pan-European exhibitions (now up to thirty), which was appropriately devoted to the theme of *L'Europe Humaniste*, at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 16 Dec. 1954–28 Feb. 1955.
- 4 Describing the circumstances which led to the creation of UNESCO and its offshoots, the Czechoslovak art historian Mojmir Vaněk recalled, in 1948: "Scarcely had the relations between artists and art critics that had been disrupted or severely limited by the recent War begun to be re-established than new international political tensions have started to impede their free development. The world is now tending to divide into blocs; travelling from country to country is sometimes becoming very difficult, not to say impossible; newspapers and periodicals are not often allowed across frontiers; even if only for monetary reasons, books are not put on sale outside the countries in which they have been printed; exhibitions going on tour to different countries often come up against insurmountable obstacles. And yet all these activities are indispensable, if art is to make any progress." Unpublished typescript paper, translated by Henry Meyric Hughes (hereafter HMH) from the French, delivered at the First International Congress of Art Critics, Paris, 21–26 June 1948. Archives de la critique d'art, Rennes.
- 5 The membership included art historians, such as Jean Cassou, the director of the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris, and a hero of the French Resistance; the Austrian, Otto Benesch, a member of the Vienna School of art historians, Director of the Albertina, and AICA's Regional Secretary for Central Europe; the Swiss art historian, Carola Giedion-Welcker, who had written the first analytical history of modern sculpture in 1936 (revised and enlarged, 1955); the Italian art historian, Lionello Venturi, who had published the first history of art criticism in the same year; James Johnson Sweeney, who had taken the lead with Henry Moore's retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1946; Palma Bucarelli, the Director of the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome, who provided a valuable staging post for exhibitions, including the Henry Moore retrospective of 1950–51; the Italian art historian, Giulio Carlo Argan (later, the first Communist Mayor of Rome), who published a short monograph on Henry Moore as early as 1948; the Dutchman, Abraham Marie Hammacher, the director of the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, who included a great deal of contemporary British work in the sculpture park he opened there in 1961 and in his 1969 publication, *The Evolution of Modern Sculpture: Tradition and Innovation* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1969); Jorge Romero Brest, from Buenos Aires, and Mário Pedrosa, from São Paulo, who both welcomed exhibitions of British sculpture in the 1950s (the latter, becoming curator of the Second São Paulo Bienal, where Read was a juror and Moore won the Prize for a Foreign Sculptor, in 1953); the classically trained Italian art historian Rodolfo Pallucchini, who became the General Artistic Director of the first five postwar editions of the Venice Biennale; Read's old prewar friend, the art critic, Will Grohmann, who likewise published a monograph on Moore, in German and English, in 1960; and the critic and art historian Werner Haftmann, who was the shaping force behind the first three editions of *documenta* in Kassel (1955, 1959, 1964), and whose *Painting in the Twentieth Century* (German, 1954 and English, 1960) was the first, and for many years the standard, account of the subject. (The German edition was dedicated to Herbert Read, along with Will Grohmann, Siegfried Giedion, and Jean Gebser.)
- 6 After 1945, a number of galleries with international connections, such as Lefevre, Mayor, Redfern, and Zwemmer, slowly got going again, but few of these, with the exception of Gimpel Fils, had a particular vocation for sculpture. Dealers were obliged to follow, rather than lead, and they were hamstrung by the paucity and conservatism of local collectors. Import restrictions lasted until 1956 and the procedures for moving goods across national frontiers were complex and lengthy. Throughout this period, many artists had to work with an agent, if they were fortunate enough to have one, rather than with a commercial gallery. However, the British Council stocked photographs of works by the artists it was primarily concerned with and, in Henry Moore's case, largely regulated the flow of foreign visitors to his studio.
- 7 See A. J. S. White, *The British Council: The First 25 Years, 1934–1959: A Personal Account* (London and Eccles: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1965), 65.
- 8 See White, *The British Council*, 65–66.
- 9 This project was dropped on the outbreak of war, and the planned exhibition was shown at Hertford House (the Wallace Collection) instead in May–June 1940. See the Minutes of the 14th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, 3 Sept. 1940. The German artist, Arno Breker, won the Grand Prize at the 1940 Venice Biennale, though in the absence of Russian, French, and British participation.
- 10 Minutes of the 16th and 17th Meetings of the Fine Arts Advisory Committee, on 3 Sept. 1940 and 4 March 1941.

- 11 For accounts of the history of the Venice Biennale, see Nancy Jachec, *Politics and Painting at the Venice Biennale, 1948–64: Italy and the Idea of Europe* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007); Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale, 1895–1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1968); and Enzo Di Martino, *The History of the Venice Biennale, 1895–2005* (Venice: Papiro Arte, 2005). For the British Pavilion at the Biennale, see Sophie Bowness and Clive Phillpot, eds., *Britain at the Venice Biennale 1895–1995* (London: British Council, 1995). For *documenta*, see Harald Kimpel, *documenta: Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (Cologne: Dumont, 1997) and Manfred Schneckenburger, ed., *documenta—Idee und Institution: Tendenzen, Konzepte, Materialien* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1983). For the São Paulo Bienal, see Margaret Garlake and Guy Brett, *Britain and the São Paulo Bienal/ A Grã-Bretanha e a Bienal de São Paulo, 1951–1991* (London: British Council, 1991). See also the exhibition catalogues of the Venice Biennale, 1948, 1950, 1952, 1954, 1956, 1958, 1960; *documenta* (1955, 1959); and the São Paulo Bienal, 1951, 1953, 1955, 1957, 1959.
- 12 Rodolfo Pallucchini, who was close to the governing Christian Democrats in Rome, was the Secretary-General of the Venice Biennale from 1948 to 1957. He was a classically trained art historian, favouring abstract styles over politically engaged figurative art, of the kind favoured by the Italian Communist Party and the *Fronte Nuovo delle Arti*.
- 13 Arnold Bode (1900–1977) was an architect, designer, and university lecturer, who organized the first four editions of *documenta* in Kassel (1955, 1959, 1964, 1968). For Werner Haftmann (1912–1999), see note 5 above.
- 14 *50 Ans d'art moderne: exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1958*, exh. cat. (Brussels: Palais International des Beaux-arts, 1958). The British contribution to this exhibition comprised seven out of the eight young sculptors from the 1952 exhibition at the Venice Biennale, described further on in this essay, to the exclusion of Geoffrey Clarke, but with the addition of Robert Clatworthy and Leslie Thornton.
- 15 Selection committees for these events were drawn from the British Council's main Visual Arts Committee and usually composed of the Chair of that Committee (often the director of a national museum) and two other individuals, including Herbert Read, who were closely connected with contemporary art (e.g. the Director of the Tate Gallery or another critic).
- 16 From Paris, Jean Cassou, at the Musée d'Art Moderne, reported on 18 Nov. 1949 that it had attracted record attendances for a living sculptor, with daily attendances of 254 visitors, in comparison with 60 for the recent Zadkine exhibition and 53 for the Wotruba exhibition. A record 1,500 guests attended the opening. See Report on Progress for the 48th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, 11 July 1950.
- 17 The French critic Franck Elgar could have paid no higher tribute to Henry Moore than when he declared, on the occasion of his Paris exhibition (see above): "Henry Moore is without doubt the greatest sculptor of our time. We are grateful to the British Council for convincing us of this by organising this very important exhibition", and "We can now safely say that Moore's name is a by-word of artist's fame in the International School of Paris." Quoted in Minutes of the 46th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee on Tuesday, 8 Sept. 1949.
- 18 "Il nuovo clima di libertà, dura conquista dello spirit europeo." See Rodolfo Pallucchini, Introduction to *Catalogo XXIV Biennale di Venezia*, exh. cat. 2nd ed. (Venice: Edizione Serenissima, 1948), xii (trans. HMH).
- 19 Giovanni Ponti, Preface to *Catalogo XXIV Biennale di Venezia*, x (trans. HMH).
- 20 In essence, these were the arguments Read put forward in the Preface to his *Henry Moore: Sculpture and Drawings* (London: Lund Humphries and A. Zwemmer, 1944). Copies of this publication were widely used by the British Council abroad for promotional purposes, and Read's interpretations formed the basis for the majority of critics' reviews.
- 21 David Lewis, text on Hepworth in the leaflet *Exhibition of Works by John Constable, Matthew Smith, Barbara Hepworth* for the XXVth Venice Biennale (London: British Council, 1950).
- 22 Letter of 3 July from Herbert Read to the British Council (Lilian Somerville), included in the Report on Progress for the 48th Meeting of the Fine Arts Committee, Tuesday, 11 July 1950.
- 23 Letter of 3 June to Norman Capener; quoted with thanks to Sophie Bowness.
- 24 AICA's Second General Assembly was held in Venice that year at the time of the opening of the Biennale, at the invitation of Rodolfo Pallucchini, Secretary-General of the Biennale and himself an AICA member. Members of AICA's Committee, the majority of whom may be expected to have attended both the Biennale itself and AICA's General Assembly, included Giulio Carlo Argan, Mário Barata, Palma Bucarelli, Jean Cassou, Paul Fierens, Clement Greenberg, Alfred Frankfurter, Carola Giedion-Welcker, Abraham Marie Hammacher, Sergio Milliet, Mário Perosa, James Johnson Sweeney, and Lionello Venturi.
- 25 The artist herself wrote enthusiastically to Lilian Somerville, after her return to England, to say that: "I came away feeling very satisfied—indeed more than satisfied for I felt a real appreciation of my work from many people and the visit to Venice was one of the major experiences of my life." Letter from Barbara Hepworth to Lilian Somerville, quoted in Report on Progress for the 48th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, Tuesday, 11 July 1950.
- 26 Herbert Read, Introduction to *New Aspects of British Sculpture* at the British Pavilion in Venice, exh. cat. for the British Pavilion at the XXVI Biennale di Venezia (London: British Council, 1952), n.p.
- 27 Egon Vietta, quoted in translation from *Das Kunstwerk* (Baden Baden, Part III), in Report on Progress to the 54th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, Tuesday, 9 Dec. 1952.
- 28 Read nevertheless was at pains to emphasize that whilst Henry Moore was "in some senses no doubt the parent of them all", these young sculptors were not members of any group, beyond sharing in "the iconography of despair or of defiance", transmitting a sense of "collective guilt", displaying a certain "cursive, linear quality" to their work, and avoiding monumentality. See Read, Introduction to *New Aspects of British Sculpture*, n.p.
- 29 Chairman's "Memorandum on the Function and Activities of the Fine Arts Department." Paper attached to the agenda for the 63rd Meeting of the Fine Arts Committee of the British Council, 24 April 1956.

- 30 See Read, Introduction to *New Aspects of British Sculpture*; also Margaret Garlake and James Hyman, *Henry Moore and the Geometry of Fear*, exh. cat. (London: James Hyman Fine Art, 2002).
- 31 Herbert Read, Letter to the *Manchester Guardian*, 26 June 1952.
- 32 Alfred Barr, Letter to the *Manchester Guardian*, 3 Sept. 1952. Report on Progress to the 54th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, Tuesday, 9 Dec. 1952.
- 33 Robert Melville, "A Note on the Recent Work of Henry Moore", leaflet, commissioned by the British Council, to accompany the touring exhibition of Henry Moore's works for Yugoslavia, 1955-56.
- 34 Barbara Hepworth's *Single Form* (1962-63), was unveiled on the United Nations Plaza, New York, 11 June 1964.
- 35 J. P. Hodin, Introduction to *Barbara Hepworth*, exh. cat. (London: British Council, 1959). The exhibition for the fifth Bienal do Museu e Arte Moderna, São Paulo, organized by the British Council, was seen in São Paulo from Sept.-Dec. 1959, then travelled throughout South America the following year.
- 36 Lorenzo Berg Costa, in *La Nación de Santiago*, 15 Oct. 1960 (trans. HMM). Press cuttings in British Council file ref. Gen/641/142R, in TLA 9712/2/191, Tate Archive.
- 37 Victor Carvacho, in *La Nación de Santiago*, 21 Sept. 1960 (trans. HMM). Press cuttings, as in note 36, above.
- 38 Anon., in *Buenos Aires Herald*, Sunday, 22 May 1960. Press cuttings, as in note 36, above.
- 39 Anon., undated British Council report. All quotations in this paragraph, including the quotations in English translation, are from the Report on Progress for the 48th Meeting of the British Council's Visual Arts Committee, Tuesday, 11 July 1950.
- 40 Arnold Rüdinger, quoted in translation from the Zürich newspaper, *Die Tat*, 17 June 1950, in the 49th Report on Progress for the British Council's Fine Arts Committee Meeting, Tuesday, 12 Sept. 1950.
- 41 John Anthony Thwaites (1909-1981) was a British-born member of the British diplomatic service, then "Monuments Man" in Munich, up until 1948. After that, he settled permanently in West Germany as a freelance critic and lecturer, and co-founder of the artists' group *Zen 49*. He had owned three of Moore's works, but lost them when he had to abandon his flat in Katowice in a hurry in 1939, in advance of the German invasion of Poland.
- 42 Report by Maria Netter, in *Luzerner Neueste*, 24 June 1950, cited in the British Council's 49th Report on Progress for the British Council's Fine Arts Committee's Meeting, Tuesday 12 Sept. 1950.
- 43 Report on Progress for the British Council's 49th Report on Progress for the Fine Arts Committee Meeting, Tuesday, 12 Sept. 1950, prepared by Lilian Somerville, to whom the artist presumably made this comment.
- 44 M. R. Bentein-Stoelen, Introduction to *Collection Catalogue of the Open-Air Museum of Sculpture, Middelheim* (Antwerp: Middelheim, 1993), ix.
- 45 The British contribution to this Hamburg event comprised Butler's *Girl and Boy* (1951) from the Arts Council's Collection, and Moore's own version of *Double Standing Figure* (1950); in parallel to this, Eduardo Paolozzi created a fountain, to a commission awarded to him by Werner Haftmann, at the Federal German Garden Architecture Festival in Hamburg, which prefigured the Federal Garden Festival in Kassel, in 1955, of which *documenta* was nominally a part.
- 46 The Ruhr Festival in Recklinghausen, in North Rhine-Westphalia, which continues to this day in a slightly different form, dated back to the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, when the Hamburg theatres sent representatives to the Ruhr in search of fuel for heating, to enable them to stay open to the public. The miners in Recklinghausen proved cooperative, and the first theatre festival there opened on Labour Day (as it has done, ever since) under the slogan, "*Kunst gegen Kohle*" (Art for Coal). See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruhrfestspiele> (accessed 6 May 2016). Henry Moore, himself a socialist and the son of a coal miner, exhibited work there in 1952-53 and again in 1955-56, both times with assistance from the British Council. His *Two Piece Reclining Figure No. 5* (1963-64) now sits in front of the Festival building, constructed in 1961-63 with funds from the Friends of the Ruhr Festival, whose founder, Theodor Heuss, was the first President of the German Federal Republic (1949-59), and had himself studied art history alongside economics and political science.
- 47 Hammacher, who purchased two carvings by Barbara Hepworth from her exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1954, went on to publish a monograph on the artist in 1958.
- 48 Letter to Lilian Somerville, quoted in the Progress Report for the 60th Meeting of the British Council's Visual Arts Committee, 24 May 1955.
- 49 Lilian Somerville to Controller Arts and Science Division, the British Council, on the Country Policy file for Germany ref. GTB/640/1, 24 April 1958, TGA/9712/1/6: "[In Germany] . . . the arts are held in far higher place in informed opinion than in this country."
- 50 Otto Benesch, in a letter, reporting on a travelling exhibition of drawings by Henry Moore, quoted in the Progress Report for the 53rd Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, 1 July 1952.
- 51 Dr. med. Otto Müller, letters to the editor, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 6 and 12 Oct. 1953 (trans. HMM).
- 52 Müller, letters to the editor, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 6 and 12 Oct. 1953.

- 53 Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte* (Salzburg and Vienna: Otto Müller Verlag, 1948). The old controversy surrounding modern art in Germany dated at least as far back as to the period before the First World War, and took on particularly virulent dimensions at the time of the parallel exhibitions of *Degenerate Art* and state-approved art in Munich in 1937. In postwar Western Germany, it was reignited by Werner Haftmann's attack on Sedlmayr's polemic, at the German Art Historians' Conference in Munich, in 1949. It then rose to two climaxes: the first, at the *Darmstädter Gespräche* (Darmstadt Conversations), a series of symposia that ran from 1950 to 1975, in which Willi Baumeister and Sedlmayr took pole positions; and the second, in the very public quarrel in West Berlin between the Modernist critic Will Grohmann and the figurative painter Karl Hofer, which began in 1952 and only ended with the death of the latter in 1955. See Steffen Dengler, *Die Kunst der Freiheit?* (The Art of Freedom?) (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2010).
- 54 Doris Schmidt, "'documenta'—Bilanz des Jahrhunderts: Fünzig Jahre abendländische Kunst, ausgestellt in Kassel" (*documenta* – Survey of the Century: Fifty Years of Western Art, exhibited in Kassel), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 July 1955; reprinted in Schneckenburger, ed., *documenta—Idee und Institution*, 40 (trans. HMH).
- 55 John Anthony Thwaites, "*documenta*—Grosse Internationale Kunstaussstellung im Fridericianum in Kassel" (*documenta*—Great International Art Exhibition in the Fridericianum, in Kassel), *Deutsche Zeitung*, 23 July 1955. Quoted in Schneckenburger, ed., *documenta—Idee und Institution*, 41–42.
- 56 Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). That New York should have "stolen" the idea of modern art in quite the way that Guilbaut imagined may be something of an over-simplification. Throughout the 1950s, there was a push-pull between European and American influences on British art, with only a gradual tilt towards the latter, as the decade progressed. Many British artists and the majority of artists on the Continent, and in countries with traditional links to France, still looked to Paris for cultural leadership until some time after 1960. See Alan Bowness, in relation to the second *Biennale des Jeunes* in Paris in 1961: "Biennales notwithstanding, it begins to look ominously clear that Paris is no longer the place to go to for what is new in modern art." *The Observer*, 8 Oct. 1961.
- 57 Eduard Trier, *Moderne Plastik* (Modern Sculpture) (Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1955). Trier, like Haftmann before him, benefited from the full support of the British Council's selection committee (including Herbert Read) for *documenta* and the Fine Arts Department's facilities, in arranging for him to meet artists and consult reference works and their photographic library, and in packing and transporting their works.
- 58 This time, the British sculptors were Armitage, Butler, Chadwick, Hepworth, Meadows, and Moore.
- 59 See Harald Kimpel and Karin Stengel, eds., *documenta 2 1959: Kunst nach 1945, Internationale Ausstellung, Eine fotografische Rekonstruktion*, Schriftenreihe des documenta Archivs 7 (Kassel: Edition Temmen, n.d.).
- 60 Eduard Trier, "Skulptur nach 1945" (Sculpture after 1945), exh. cat., II. *Documenta '59*, (Cologne: Verlag DuMont-Schauberg, 1959). Cited in Kimpel and Stengel, eds., *documenta 2 1959*, 56 (trans. HMH).
- 61 M. Buttig, "Das grosse Treffen der Abstrakten" (The Great Encounter of Abstractionists), *Der Monat* 11, no. 131 (1959): 75–82 (trans. HMH). Quoted in Kimpel and Stengel, eds., *documenta 2 1959*, 136, n. 4.
- 62 [Lucie] S[chauer], in *Der Tagesspiegel, Feuilleton*, Sunday, 30 June 1961 (trans. HMH), which also included Will Grohmann, "Magie und Gegenwart: Zur grossen Henry Moore Ausstellung in der Akademie der Künste" (Magic and the Present: On the Great Henry Moore Exhibition at the Akademie der Künste).
- 63 They included Pierre Francastel, from Paris, Palma Bucarelli from Rome, Mário Barata, the Brazilian Regional Secretary for Latin America, and Miroslav Mičko, the Czechoslovak Regional Secretary for Eastern Europe.
- 64 Will Grohmann, report on the opening ceremony, printed in *Der Tagesspiegel*, Sunday, 30 July 1961, quoted in translation in Report on Progress for the 75th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, 12 Dec. 1961.
- 65 Report on Progress for the 75th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, 12 Dec. 1961.
- 66 Speech by Sir Richard Steele, H.E. the British Ambassador to Bonn, reprinted in *The Morning Advertiser*, London, 24 July 1961, and quoted in the Report on Progress for the 75th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, 12, Dec. 1961.
- 67 Silke Wefing, "Warum Willy Brandt gern Heino hörte: Norbert Seitz befragt die Kunstliebe der deutschen Bundeskanzler" (Why Willy Brandt was pleased to listen to Heino: Norbert Seitz asks about German Federal Chancellors' artistic preferences), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Feuilleton*, Sunday, 16 March 2005 (trans. HMH). See www.faz.net/suche/?query=silke+Wenk&suchbegriffimage.x=7&suchbegriffimage.y=5&resultsPerPage=20 (accessed 8 May 2016).
- 68 Hans-Joachim Throl, ed., *Henry Moore unter freiem Himmel in Deutschland* (Henry Moore under an Open Sky in Germany), exh. cat. (Wolfsburg: Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg, 1998) 16.

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Note. All unpublished archival sources, with the exception of that cited in note 4 are either from British Council Fine Art Department files (Progress Reports, press cuttings, general correspondence, country policy files) in Tate Archive or in the minutes of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, in the National Archives, Kew. The author wishes to thank the staff in the British Council (Diana Eccles), Tate Archive, the National Archives, and the Archives de la critique d'art, in Rennes (Nathalie Boulouch and her colleagues), for their kind assistance.

See also the exhibition catalogues of the Venice Biennale, 1948, 1950, 1952, 1954, 1956, 1958, 1960; *documenta* (1955, 1959); and the São Paulo Bienal, 1951, 1953, 1955, 1957, 1959.

50 Ans d'art moderne: exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1958. Exh. cat. Brussels, Palais International des Beaux-Arts, 1958.

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Henry Moore's Exhibition in Yugoslavia, 1955

Želimir Košćević

Authors

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When Henry Moore's exhibition arrived in Yugoslavia in 1955, it seemed like the icing on the cake. The groundwork had already been laid by a visit to the artist's studio in Hertfordshire, some one hundred kilometres from London, in the first half of 1954, by Najdan Pašić (1922–1997), the then press attaché at the Yugoslav Embassy, and Stevan Majstorovic, a journalist from *Nedeljne informativne novine (NIN)* in Belgrade.¹ An informal proposal they had floated at the time soon turned into a formal invitation for an exhibition.²

However, the Yugoslav officials' visit to Henry Moore did not come out of the blue. It had been preceded by some correspondence between the Embassy of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and the British Council, in which the Embassy had suggested three possibilities for cultural co-operation to their British counterparts: first, an exhibition of historic British art from Hogarth to Turner; second, an exhibition of British painting; and third, an exhibition of British sculpture—"particularly, that of Henry Moore".³

The British Council had opted for the last of these three alternatives as the most expedient, as it could be based on a combination of the artist's works returning from the São Paulo II Bienal (1953)—where Moore had just been awarded the Sculpture Prize—and from a solo exhibition that was due back from Germany in July 1954.⁴ In 1955, the turbulent period in Yugoslavia that began in 1948 with the dramatic breaking off of relations with the Soviet Union and other nations from the Eastern Bloc, had already lasted for seven years, and Henry Moore's exhibition was merely the last in a series of important events resulting from the newly established cultural and political ties with Western nations. The tensions were moving to an end when a Soviet delegation, including the First Secretary of the Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev, paid an official visit to Yugoslavia on 26 May 1955, which would be followed in July by the signing of the so-called Belgrade Declaration, according to which the relations between the two countries were to be developed on the principles of mutual respect for sovereignty, independence, and equality.

Henry Moore (1898–1986) was the son of a miner. At the time the Yugoslav exhibition was proposed, he had already held a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1946, won the Grand Prix at the Venice Biennale in 1948, and participated in the Festival of Britain in 1951. His work in wartime Britain had been marked by the celebrated cycle of "Shelter Drawings" made in the London Underground. Finally, there was also his marriage to the Russian-born dancer, Irina Radetsky. On top of all this, since Josip Broz Tito's visit to the UK in March 1953, relations between the two countries had been steadily improving. Furthermore, the British Embassy in Belgrade was headed by Frank Roberts, a man of great culture and diplomatic experience, while the ambassador of the SFR Yugoslavia to London was an equally experienced and knowledgeable diplomat, Vladimir Velebit. Two other people who played a very important part in the organization of Moore's exhibition in Yugoslavia were Marko Ristić, the then

chairman of the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, and Ivo Frol,⁵ the then Secretary of the Federal Committee for Cultural Relations, who was about to take over a senior role in government protocol at the time of the Belgrade exhibition. These might seem to be matters of secondary importance, but they nevertheless played a definite part in the process leading up to the final decision taken by both sides, to hold the exhibition.

Announcements of the Henry Moore exhibition started to appear in the Yugoslav press in the summer of 1954 and continued into the first months of 1955. In the end, the exhibition comprised twenty-one sculptures, four bronze maquettes, forty drawings, two linocuts, and ten large-scale photographs. It was accompanied by a single catalogue, in two different—Serbo-Croatian and Slovenian—versions. This contained a text by Herbert Read, an extensive biography of Henry Moore, a selection of texts by the artist, and a list of works (nine of which were reproduced in black-and-white). Included among the drawings was a group that depicted Londoners sheltering in the Underground during the Blitz, which had been added at the request of the artist, who considered that “they would be of special interest to the Yugoslavs.”⁶

Henry Moore and his wife, Irena, arrived at Zagreb on Saturday, 19 March 1955. Moore’s exhibition came to Yugoslavia at a time when the ideological taboos associated with an aesthetics based on Socialist Realism had already been broken. Over and above the official welcome dictated by protocol in Zagreb, Belgrade, Skopje, and Ljubljana, the exhibition once more presented critics with an opportunity for publicly voicing their opinions. By the mid-1950s, these opinions had already been clearly formulated, and the critical parameters had been traced out within the central field of debate. In Belgrade, a polemical discussion took place in the pages of the magazine *Savremenik* and the newspaper *Delo*;⁷ in Zagreb, opinions were divided between the magazines *Krugovi* and *Čovjek i prostor* on the one hand, and the magazine *Republica* and the daily paper *Vjesnik* on the other; in Ljubljana, the polemics extended throughout the pages of the magazine *Naši razgledi*, in the daily papers, and at a number of public panel discussions. Although by then it was politically and ideologically clear that the old-style socialist model had already been more or less abandoned, the essential question in all the discussions kept returning to the issue of “the human dimension in art”. Henry Moore’s exhibition offered an answer to this question (fig. 1).



Figure 1.

Installation View, Henry Moore, Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana, 1955 Digital image courtesy of Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana / Henry Moore Foundation

Miodrag B. Protić rightly stated that Moore's exhibition was "not the beginning of an end to dogmatism, but a continuation of its demise".⁸ More time had to pass before an end was finally put to ideological dogmatism in art, and in the meantime the focus of debate shifted to the relationship between figuration and abstraction. Protić went on to assert that the exhibition had "encouraged artistic renewal and strengthened the freedoms won in the period from 1950 to 1954", and he was able to adduce many arguments in support of this claim. Since the early 1950s, the shift towards more democratic forms of socialism and culture had become visible in Yugoslavia.⁹ In Zagreb, this process had started with the appearance of the group EXAT 51 and their first manifesto in December 1951,¹⁰ and with the exhibition of fantastic paintings by Antun Motika a short time afterwards,¹¹ as well as with a joint exhibition by Josip Vaništa and Miljenko Stančić at the Museum of Arts and Crafts.¹² In Belgrade, an exhibition of works by Petar Lubarda in 1951 represented a significant shift towards creative freedom and expressionism,¹³ also displayed in the touring exhibition of contemporary French art that had been presented in Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Skopje in 1952.¹⁴ In Ljubljana, the confrontation between "modernists" and "conservatives" was not as pronounced, but some artists there also found an outlet in a tendency towards magical realism and fantasy—particularly in the field of graphics.

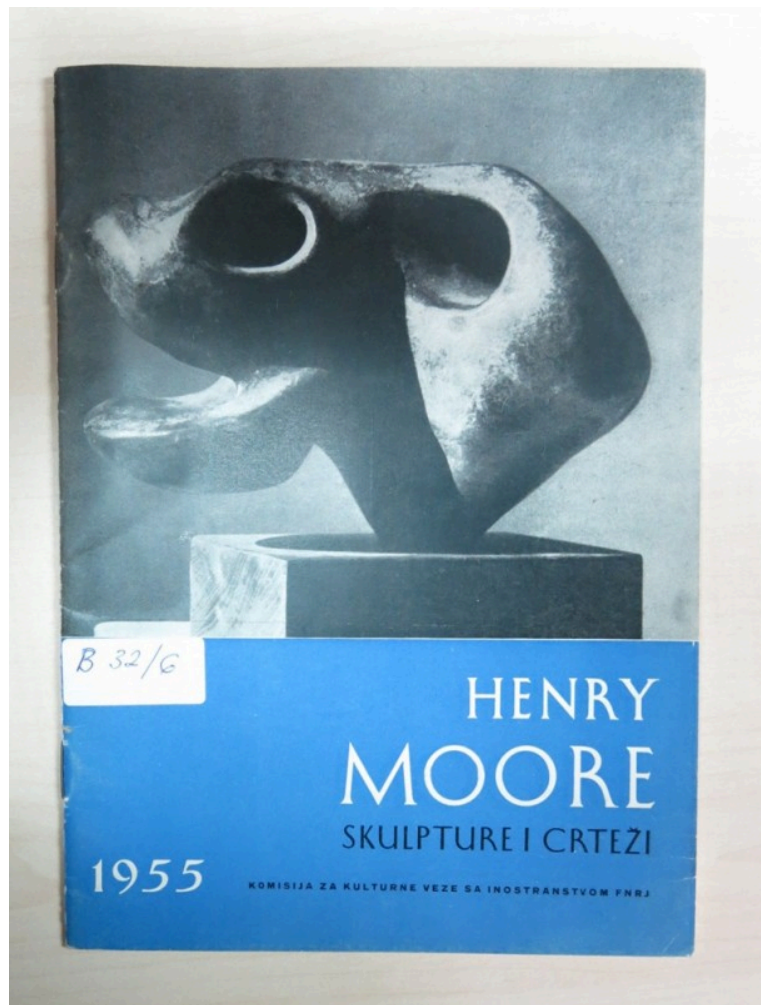


Figure 2.

Cover, Henry Moore: izložba skulpture i crteža (Henry Moore: exhibition of sculpture and drawings), (London: British Council, 1955)

In the mid-1950s, the “humanist” position in art, which had no place in the theory and practice of Socialist Realism, now came up against “the spectre of abstraction”. As early as 1951, the Zagreb critic Radoslav Putar had written that the path of art was determined by the tendency towards “a real abstraction of the physical aspect of things”,¹⁵ —a view that was reflected in certain comments by Henry Moore, in the catalogue of the exhibition in Yugoslavia, to the effect that “from a certain point of view, all art is abstraction”, and “abstract qualities of construction are essentially important for the value of the work.”¹⁶ Although the degree of abstraction was mitigated by reference to the search for a human dimension, Moore’s exhibition clearly showed that a synthesis was possible. Protić realized this, when writing about Moore’s exhibition in Belgrade: “While concrete in expression, he [Moore] also imbues his work with an irrational component. The functions of the concrete and the abstract are fully understood. The

concrete accelerates the psychological process and helps the abstract to gain the fascinating strength of reality.”¹⁷ As for the “human dimension”, Putar stated that: “Indeed, Moore’s works belong to the order of abstraction that is charged with human substance.”¹⁸ Dimitrije Bašičević (the artist, Mangelos) also joined in with his own reflections on Moore’s exhibition: “Moore has a tendency to penetrate reality, instead of adopting a popular form of realism. This was also what served to distinguish the art of the early 20th century from what went before.”¹⁹ In Ljubljana, some 4,200 visitors came to see the exhibition, according to a letter that the director of the Moderna Galerija, Karel Dobida,²⁰ sent to the British Council in Zagreb and Henry Moore in England. The exhibition was less favourably received in magazine reviews, although it “aroused great interest among visual artists and art lovers and gave them an opportunity for discussing questions of principle. Younger artists also felt a strong incentive to talk about the medium of sculpture and took the opportunity to do so.”²¹ However, in 1955 there still lingered a strong suspicion, which was publicly aired at the time of the contemporary French art exhibition in Ljubljana in 1952, that “a delight in such art is absurd and pathetic. There is nothing either joyful or beautiful in it, and anything about it that is new merely exudes despair, sickness and disgust.”²² Most of the debates were about the relationships between realism, figuration, abstraction, and humanism versus dehumanization, and so forth, but it was also clear that the orthodox ideology was gradually running out of arguments. In Ljubljana as elsewhere, the questions about the relationship between the socially advanced and the socially regressive, and between socialism and capitalism, seemed to be losing traction. More than once it was asserted that the visitors simply “succumbed to the idea of fashion” and that the works in Moore’s exhibition were “things that could hardly be called sculpture”.²³

Nevertheless, all contemporary reports of the events in Zagreb, Belgrade, Skopje, and Ljubljana distinctly stated that the exhibition aroused great interest.²⁴ In Zagreb it was inaugurated on 1 March 1955 by Ivan Leko, the then Secretary of the Council of Culture of the People’s Republic of Croatia, while the sculptor Vojin Bakić spoke about the importance of the exhibition. There were around one hundred visitors to the exhibition in the Zagreb Art Pavilion when Henry Moore went to have a look at it with his wife, and the artist was highly impressed. The final number of visitors in Zagreb was in the region of ten thousand. Moore’s stay there was not without its inconveniences, however: the Academicians refused to receive him, though he did pay a courtesy visit to the “master’s workshop” of Krsto Hegedušić, quite possibly because his hosts had sent him a copy of a publication about the latter’s work in advance of his visit.

The opening at the Cvijeta Zuzorić pavilion in Belgrade on 29 March 1955, where the work had been installed by the artist Djordje Papović, was a particularly ceremonious occasion. The exhibition was inaugurated by Marko Ristić in the presence of Henry Moore and his wife.²⁵ A rich programme was laid on for Moore's visit to the city, which lasted several days. He visited the atelier of the sculptor Toma Rosandić, in the company of Ivo Frol, and there the sculptor met the latter's wife, Olga Jančić.²⁶ He also visited Rosandić at his home. In Rosandić's workshop he met a number of the sculptor's young assistants, inspected their works, and held meaningful conversations with everybody present. He also visited the painters Petar Lubarda,²⁷ Milo Milunović, and Peđa Milosavljević, and the sculptor, Rista Stijović. Moore attended numerous receptions in the company of the painter Marko Čelebonović,²⁸ and charmed the guests with his courtesy and simple replies. Prior to the exhibition, Moore's work had already been known to artists in both Zagreb and Belgrade—especially to sculptors—but for many of them this occasion represented a real turning-point in establishing the new paradigm of “organic” or “vitalist” abstraction (terms favoured by the critic Herbert Read). Olga Jančić disagreed, however, with the subsequent suggestion that the exhibition of Moore's work represented a turning-point in Yugoslav sculpture, and she probably had a point; because Yugoslav sculptors in the first half of the 1950s had already acquired, if not fully articulated, the belief that their future creative path lay in the direction of an organic, vitalist sculpture. “In Belgrade, however, something ‘stupid’ happened”, wrote Miodrag Protić: “The National Museum [in Belgrade] had second thoughts and decided it would not be appropriate to accept a proposed gift [from Henry Moore] of one of his ‘decadent’ works.”²⁹

The third showing of the exhibition, in an old Turkish building, the Daud Pasha Hamam, in Skopje, was inaugurated by the President of the Council for Science and Culture of Macedonia, and apparently attracted an unusually large attendance of around four hundred guests at the opening and a total of around five thousand visitors in just under three weeks. (This showing made an especially strong impression on the artist Omer Kaleši, who was later active in Istanbul.) Then, for its final showing, the exhibition moved to the Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana, where the official opening on 17 May 1955 was likewise reported to have been a great success, though no attendance figures were made available.

Overall, Henry Moore's exhibition in Yugoslavia in 1955 acted as a powerful incentive to sculptors, in particular, and to those of the younger generation who wanted to continue along the path on which they had already embarked. Sculptors such as Vojin Bakić, Kosta Angeli Radovani, and Dušan Džamonja in Zagreb; Olga Jančić and Ana Bešlić in Belgrade; and Jakob Savinšek in Ljubljana, found in this exhibition a strong confirmation of the need to

experiment, as well as the idea of organic sculpture that they had already intuited. By around 1954, the voices raised against that “nothingness called the abstract art” already sounded rather anachronistic.³⁰ They had not yet been silenced, but they gradually faded away and eventually fell silent. However, there were relapses, too: the Yugoslav president, Josip Broz Tito, sharply attacked abstract art in early 1963:

I am not against the creative exploration and search for the new in, say, painting, sculpture and other arts, because it is necessary and good. But I am against investing public funds in so-called modernist works that have nothing to do with artistic creation, let alone with our reality.

Although this criticism came from the top, it was already outdated, and out of tune with current artistic practice.

Above all, Moore’s touring exhibition to the main cultural centres in Yugoslavia in 1955 strengthened the artistic drive for innovation and freedom of expression in painting, graphics, and sculpture. In culture and the arts, the decade between 1950 and 1960 was full of events, arguments, discussions, and polemics; but it was clear from the outset that Yugoslav art was gradually rejecting the dogmatic model of Socialist Realism, while searching for its own forms of expression. The avalanche had already been set in motion in 1952 by the exhibition of French contemporary art (also held in Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Belgrade), and Moore’s exhibition three years later merely served, in a magnificent way, to reinforce the development, already in train, of a completely different kind of Yugoslav art which faced towards the outside world and became steadily integrated into the different mainstream currents. This was borne out not only by the continuous presence of Yugoslav artists at all the great art festivals (Venice, São Paulo, Tokyo, Alexandria, Kassel, Paris, and so on), but also through the recognition awarded to them in highly competitive situations by successive international juries.

Towards the end of his stay in Yugoslavia, at a press conference in Belgrade, Henry Moore stated:

Prior to the São Paulo Biennial I was convinced that the art, and especially visual art, in Yugoslavia was created to order and that Yugoslav artists were under the influence of Soviet socialist realism. But, looking at Lubarda’s works at the Biennial and what I have seen in the course of my stay here, it has become clear to

me that the visual artists in Yugoslavia enjoy complete creative freedom, with an enormous variety of individual styles, and this is, for me, the true proof of each individual's freedom of artistic expression.³¹

This was a great, and important, realization for artists and critics in all the main centres in Yugoslavia, and a confirmation for all the parties involved in organizing this touring exhibition of Henry Moore's work in 1955, that they had made the right decision, to the benefit of all concerned. The British Council's Representative in Yugoslavia, in his Annual Report on activities for the year April 1955 to March 1956, summed up his impression that Henry Moore had "won the hearts of the Yugoslav artistic worlds". The artist himself reported on his return that he had been treated "as something between a film star and royalty".³²

Translated by Daria Torre

Footnotes

- ¹ "So, we were looking at it all while drinking tea and then we proposed to organise his exhibition in Yugoslavia. He accepted it wholeheartedly." From the interview with Stevan Majstorović, *NIN*, no. 2473, 21 May 1998.
- ² Najdan Pašić, press attaché to the Yugoslav Embassy of the SFRY in London, in a letter addressed to the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries in Belgrade on 25 May 1954, wrote: "Henry Moore's art causes considerable controversy with British art critics, but its high reputation is indisputable." For this quotation, I am indebted to Lora Mitić, from Belgrade.
- ³ Internal Memo from the Deputy-Director of the British Council to the Controller of Arts Division (YUG/641/85) of 28 April 1954 (TGA 9712/2/120). *British Painting from Hogarth to Turner* was the title of the first major exhibition of British art sent by the British Council to Hamburg, in the British Zone of Occupied Germany, in 1949. See C. N. P. Powell, memorandum on The British Contribution to the Arts in Germany, 14 March 1958 (GER/640/1, in TGA 9712/1/6).
- ⁴ Minutes of the 58th meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee on Tuesday, 4 May 1954 (YUG/641/85, TGA 9712/2/120).
- ⁵ Ivo Frol (1908–1986), was Secretary of the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and husband of the sculptor, Olga Jančić.
- ⁶ Letter of 10 Nov. 1954 (YUG/641/85), from the British Council's exhibition organizer, Margaret McLeod, to the collector and eventual lender, Peter Gregory (YUG/641/85, TGA 9712/2/120).
- ⁷ The magazine *Suvremenik* advocated realism and its socialist aspects. *Delo* was a "modernist" magazine.
- ⁸ Miodrag B. Protić (1922–2014) was director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade from 1959 to 1980.
- ⁹ Miodrag B. Protić, *Nojeva Barka/Noah's Ark* (Belgrade, 2000), 446.
- ¹⁰ This demonstratively advocated abstract art. The members of the group were Ivan Picelj, Aleksandar Srnc, and Vladimir Kristić; and the architects Vjenceslav Richter, Boško Rašica, Zvonimir Bregovac, Vladimir Zarahović, and Zvonimir Radić.
- ¹¹ In parallel to this, Antun Motika (1902–1992) exhibited his Archaic Surrealism at the Salon of the ULUH (Association of Visual Artists of Croatia), in Zagreb.
- ¹² In this exhibition, Miljenko Stančić exhibited his fantastic realism and Josip Vaništa presented one of the paintings from his series of abstracts, *Lanterna Magica*.
- ¹³ Petar Lubarda (1907–1974). Henry Moore saw Lubarda at the São Paulo Bienal in 1953.
- ¹⁴ Along with the classics of French contemporary art, works by Picasso, Miró, Hartung, Vasarely, and others, were also shown in this exhibition.
- ¹⁵ Radoslav Putar (1929–1994). From the review of the 6th Exhibit of ULUH, published in *Izbor*, Zagreb, no. 3, March 1951, 180–84.

- 16 Henry Moore, catalogue of the Yugoslav exhibition, Zagreb, Belgrade, Ljubljana, (1955), n.p.
- 17 Miodrag B. Protić, "Henri Mur/Henry Moore", *NIN*, Belgrade, 3 April 1955.
- 18 Radoslav Putar, "Henry Moore: crtež i skulptura velikog umjetnika na izložbi u Umjetničkom Paviljonu u Zagrebu/Henry Moore: Drawings and Sculptures by the Great Artist at the Exhibition in the Art Pavilion in Zagreb", *Narodni List*, Zagreb, no. 3013, 6 March 1955, 4.
- 19 Dimitrija Bašičević (1921–1987), "Skulptor gole prirode: Henry Moore/The Sculptor of True Nature: Henry Moore", *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, no. 3112, 6 March 1955, 7.
- 20 Karel Dobida (1896–1965). From 1952 to 1957, Dobida was director of the Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana.
- 21 From the Archive of the Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana.
- 22 Stane Mikuž (1913–1985), "Razstava del sodobne francuske umetnosti/Exhibition of Works of Contemporary French Art", *Ljudska pravica*, Ljubljana, 31 May 1952.
- 23 Prof. Dr Ramiro Bujas (1879–1959), "Gledalac i sugestija mode/The Viewer and the Suggestivity of Fashion", *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, 26 May 1955. Prof. Dr Bujas was director of the Institute for Psychology in Zagreb.
- 24 A draft of the letter that Karel Dobida addressed to Henry Moore, asserted: "Younger artists, sculptors in particular, felt strongly incentivised by this exhibition, as well as welcoming the opportunity to discuss the principles of sculpture."
- 25 Marko Ristić (1902–1984), Surrealist poet and author; chairman of the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries at the time of Henry Moore's exhibition.
- 26 Herbert Read included Olga Jančić (1929–2012), along with the Zagreb sculptors Vojin Bakić and Dušan Džamonja, in his book, *Modern Sculpture: A Concise History* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1964).
- 27 According to the journalist, "I.B.", Henry Moore commented that: "For me it was the strong individuality of Petar Lubarda's work, which best gave the lie to the prevalent view in the West at the time, that art in Yugoslavia was being produced to order", and went on to say: "In the best possible way, he contradicted various rumours about the dictated art in Yugoslavia that circulated in the West at that time." See I.B., "Puna sloboda umjetničkog izraza: britanski vajar Henri Mur napustio je sinoć našu zemlju/Full Freedom of Artistic Expression: British Sculptor Henry Moore Left Our Country Last Night", *Politika*, Belgrade, 13 April 1955.
- 28 Marko Čelebonović (1902–1986), was an eminent Serbian painter, Oxford graduate, and professor at the Art Academy in Belgrade.
- 29 Protić, *Nojeva Barka/Noah's Ark*, 447.
- 30 Ljubo Babić (1890–1974), Croatian painter, was for many years the director of the Strossmayer Gallery of Old Masters in Zagreb. Quoted from the text, "O progresu i tradiciji na likovnom području/On Progress and Tradition in the Visual Arts", *Republika*, Zagreb, no. 5, May 1954, 369–73.
- 31 B. Stojadinović, "Utisci Henryja Moorea o Jugoslaviji/Henry Moore's Impressions of Yugoslavia", *Večernje Novosti*, Belgrade, 4 April 1955.
- 32 Letter of 11 Aug. 1955 to Lilian Somerville, Director of the British Council's Fine Arts Department in London, quoted in the minutes of the 61st meeting of the Fine Arts Committee, 18 Oct., 3–4 (TGA/9712/120). Somerville wrote to Helen Kapp, Director of the City Art Gallery and Museum in Wakefield, and to other lenders to the exhibition: "The importance of the exhibition in Yugoslavia was not unnaturally far greater than in Switzerland [Basel], where Moore's work is already known, but nobody was quite prepared for its phenomenal success in Belgrade, Zagreb, Skopje and Ljubljana, where an estimated 45,000 people, in all, visited the exhibition."

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Barbara Hepworth in Brazil

Ana Gonçalves Magalhães

Abstract

This short essay analyses the reception of Barbara Hepworth's oeuvre in Brazil, in the context of her participation at the V Bienal de São Paulo. Her presence in the British delegation of the 1959 edition of the exhibition resulted in the acquisition of an exceptional piece, Cantate Domino, which would be interpreted by Brazilian art historian Walter Zanini in the light of Herbert Read's book Modern Sculpture: A Concise History.

Authors

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Dame Barbara Hepworth's relationship to Brazil is here exemplified by her bronze sculpture, *Cantate Domino* (ed. no. 3/6), which was exhibited as a part of the British representation at the V Bienal de São Paulo in 1959 (fig. 1 and fig. 2).¹ Hepworth was awarded the "Grande Prêmio São Paulo" on this occasion, and her sculpture was acquired by the then São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (MAM, founded in 1948), as one of the acquisition prizes for artists participating in the Bienal.² The work now belongs to the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo (MAC USP) that was founded on 8 April 1963, upon the dissolution of the MAM in December 1962.



Figure 1.

Installation View, V Bienal de São Paulo, 1959 Digital image courtesy of Athayde de Barros, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo



Figure 2.

Installation View, V Bienal de São Paulo, 1959 Digital image courtesy of Athayde de Barros, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo

The decision to select Barbara Hepworth (1903–1975) to represent Great Britain at the V Bienal de São Paulo was taken very early on, even before the names of her fellow exhibitors, the painter Francis Bacon and the printmaker Stanley William Hayter, had been announced.³ A quick look through contemporary reviews of the V Bienal and the British participation in it reveals how much comment she received in the Brazilian press. She was consistently presented as the most celebrated British sculptor, “along with Henry Moore”.⁴ The binomial Hepworth/Moore seems to have furnished the basis for the Brazilian art critics’ interpretation of her work.

In addition to this, the Brazilian press also emphasized that she was a woman sculptor. Two articles published in the main local newspaper pinpointed elements of sophistication and delicacy in her work, by quoting from J. P. Hodin’s catalogue text.⁵ Hepworth was one of the international names invoked in connection with Brazilian women artists, such as the early modern women artists Tarsila do Amaral (1886–1973) and Anita Malfatti (1889–1964), and her contemporary, the Concrete artist, Lygia Clark (1920–1988). Here Hepworth featured as “a rival to Henry Moore”, and Brazil was praised as a country where women artists had been accorded early recognition in their own right. However, on a number of occasions over the course of a long career, Hepworth herself went out of her way to deny that her work and practice had ever been driven by any such consideration.⁶

Still, local reviews insisted on her womanly traits. This was the case in a review on the British representation that appeared in *O Estado de São Paulo*, signed by the artist and critic, Lisetta Levi. Here, Levi creates some associations between Hepworth's forms and femininity, by quoting the artist herself:

Although her sculpture is abstract, from it flows life that lost terrestrial limitations, gaining cosmic traits Barbara Hepworth writes: "Perhaps the sensation of being a woman gives another facet to the sculptural idea. In some aspects, it is a way of being, instead of observing, which in sculpture must allow its own emotional development of form."⁷

Levi ends up tracing Hepworth's output from her depictions of mother and son, linked to curved forms. She then quotes from Herbert Read, and the issue of the vital form.

Although the Brazilian sculptor Maria Martins (1894–1973),⁸ was not mentioned in this context, it might be interesting to compare her work with that of Barbara Hepworth—not least, in view of the fact that she had been the winner of the main sculpture prize at the III Bienal in 1955. Martins had been awarded the title of National Sculptor in 1955, and donated her work of 1954–55), *A Soma de Nossos Dias* (The Sum of our Days),⁹ to the former MAM (fig. 3). It took the form of the skeleton of a primitive animal, and for all the apparent differences, it bore certain resemblances to Hepworth's *Cantate Domino* (fig. 4), as well as other pieces exhibited at the Bienal.¹⁰ Both titles suggest the fragility of human life on earth and the tense relations with nature; both works also suggest a narrative dimension, in which the idea of time is integral to their poetics; and both were the fruits of the artists' experiments with new materials.¹¹

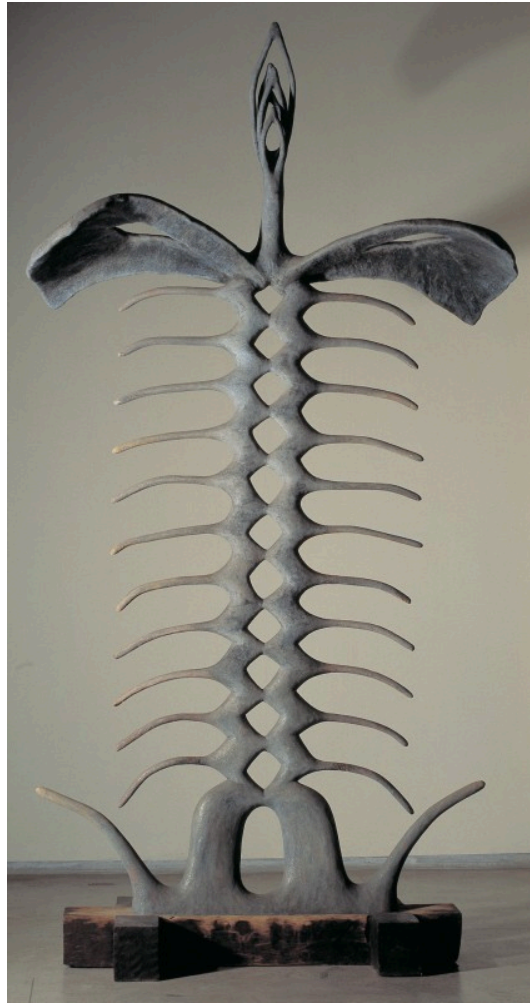


Figure 3.

Maria Martins, *A Soma de Nossos Dias* (The Sum of our Days), 1954/55, sermolite and tin, 330.9 × 190.7 × 64.9 cm. Collection of Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo Digital image courtesy of Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo



Figure 4.

Installation View, Barbara Hepworth's, *Cantate Domino*, 1958, exhibited at MAC USP, circa 1972. Collection of Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil Digital image courtesy of Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil / Estate of Barbara Hepworth / © Bowness

It is worth noting that Hepworth was being presented in a very special edition of the Bienal de São Paulo, which took place at the height of the confrontation between geometric abstract practices and the new Art Informel. This conjunction of circumstances—and the presentation of the National Painting Award to Lygia Clark at the IV Bienal de São Paulo, two years previously—took place towards the very end of the decade and followed close on the heels of the National Exhibition of Concrete Art in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (1956–57). In 1959, the invitation to Lourival Gomes Machado (1917–1967) to become the artistic director of the V Bienal was taken to mark a change of direction towards the more international trends of Abstract Expressionism and Art Informel, in the broader sense. ¹² The V

Bienal could thus be seen as the clash between this, which was then considered to be an “internationalist” fashion in the world of art, and the evolution of Concretist currents in Brazil. The vogue for the so-called Informel not only took hold of the Bienal de São Paulo, but was almost de rigueur for artists in the Venice Biennales of the 1950s. Revisionist historians of modernism have recently come to regard this as an expression of the internationalism of the art world conditioned by the politics of the Cold War; to be viewed on the US side as embodying the very essence of American culture, and by Europeans as the kind of art that was representative of European, or universal, values.¹³ In Brazil, Mário Pedrosa (1900–1981) acted as a major proponent of abstract geometric tendencies and spent these years campaigning for Brazilian Concretism and Neo-Concretism abroad, through the exhibitions he organized of some of its leading figures.¹⁴ Lygia Clark was, of course, one of these, and there could be no greater contrast than that between her *Plano em superfícies modulares no. 2* (Plain in modular surfaces no. 2; 1956, industrial paint, wood, and celotex) and Hepworth’s *Cantate Domino*.

Both Martins and Hepworth were mentioned in Herbert Read’s famous book, *A Concise History of Modern Sculpture* (1961), to illustrate the notion of “vitality”, taken from a statement by Henry Moore.¹⁵ One might argue that Read was trying to build a synthesis of both the Informel and abstract, geometric currents in contemporary sculpture.¹⁶ The “vital image”, he would say, was the way by which some artists sought to deal with the elements of subjectivity, the form in motion, and the numinous. Martins’s and Hepworth’s works, along with that of other sculptors, were used to illustrate this idea of the “vital image”, though in Hepworth’s case, Read seems then to have departed from his original script, by going on to talk about her rounded, pierced sculptures, and their links to Brancusi.¹⁷ The only recent sculpture by Hepworth that Read included in later editions of his book was the *Single Form* that she created for the Plaza in front of the UN Secretariat in New York in 1964—connected to *Cantate Domino* and other works of 1956–57.

By the end of the 1950s, Herbert Read had established long-standing, close relations with the Brazilian artistic milieu, dating from at least as far back as the 1953 Bienal, when he had served both as the British commissioner and as a member of the jury for the International Awards. However, it is quite surprising to see that Walter Zanini (1926–2013), the first director of the MAC USP, borrowed from Read’s *Concise History of Modern Sculpture* for his own comments on Hepworth’s work, in the book on modern sculpture that he published a decade later.¹⁸ Like Read, Zanini based his interpretation of Hepworth’s work on her relations with Brancusi and the Abstract groups of the 1930s, though he structured his chapters in a different way from the

British critic. This created quite a dissonant effect for the reader looking at his illustration of *Cantate Domino*, which showed the context in which the work was displayed in a gallery in his museum.¹⁹ In contrast to Read, Zanini examined Maria Martins's works in the chapter devoted to Surrealist experimentation with sculpture, whereas Hepworth appeared in chapter 10, which dealt with abstract practices in sculpture.²⁰ Thus he ended up using *Cantate Domino* to exemplify Hepworth's relationship to Brancusi and to illustrate the abstract tendencies in her sculpture. In the process, Zanini seems to have been trying to relate her work to current Concretist tendencies and to distance it from Art Informel.²¹

The genesis of Zanini's book had its origins in the negotiations conducted between the MAC USP and the Tate Gallery, London, to exchange a bronze cast of Umberto Boccioni's plaster of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* for a reclining figure by Henry Moore. The exchange was made between 1970 and 1972. One year later, Ronald Alley, the Keeper of the Modern Collection at the Tate Gallery, made a fresh proposal, for an exchange of Boccioni's bronze, *Development of a Bottle in Space*, for a sculpture by Barbara Hepworth. Negotiations for this second exchange never really got off the ground, leaving Brazil in possession of what probably remains the most intimate and uncharacteristic of her works.

Footnotes

- 1 Hepworth always considered *Cantate Domino* to be a religious work and later had the idea that she might use it for her own grave. In the end, a cast of the related sculpture, *Ascending Form (Gloria)*, was placed at the entrance to Longstone Cemetery, St Ives, where she is buried. See: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hepworth-cantate-domino-t00956/text-catalogue-entry>. Here it is also said that *Cantate Domino* was not Hepworth's own choice for her exhibition in São Paulo, but rather that of the British Council commissioner, Lilian Somerville, who also took part in the award jury of that edition of the Bienal de São Paulo.
- 2 See "Coube a Barbara Hepworth of Grande Prêmio da V Bienal; Mabe, Piza e Grassman os nacionais laureados", *O Estado de São Paulo*, 17 Sept. 1959, 9. The specific acquisition of *Cantate Domino* seems to have been decided later, to judge from the letter dated 22 Dec. 1959 from the general secretary of the Bienal de São Paulo, Arturo Profili, to Warren Shaw: "The Director of the MAM is studying the possibility of acquiring Barbara Hepworth's sculpture 'Cantate Domino'. Since this is a work of great value, which is certainly beyond the reach of our normal budget for acquisitions, we would have to ask the artist to make an effort to reduce the price, to reflect the fact that the work was destined for a museum collection. *Considering that we believe this sculpture to be highly representative of her work, we should be very pleased to see it go into our museum's collection*" (Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo; the emphasis is mine, as are all translations from the Portuguese). In the event, the artist offered the MAM a 10 percent reduction in the price.
- 3 See "Hepworth na V Bienal" [in the column, "Arte e Artistas"], *O Estado de São Paulo*, 11 Jan. 1959, 14. The article is illustrated with her *Orpheus*, which appears again in at least two other reviews of the British participation at the Bienal de São Paulo that year, but which was not eventually exhibited in her special room. See also the correspondence between Lilian Somerville and Arturo Profili, dated respectively 7 and 24 Nov. 1958, already mentioning the choice of Hepworth to represent Britain at the Bienal (Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo).
- 4 See also "Ideias de Barbara Hepworth" [in the column, "Itinerário das Artes Plásticas"], *O Estado de São Paulo*, 28 June 1959, 8: "The sculptor Barbara Hepworth will be England's big name for the V Bienal. Among British artists, *she is famous for her technique, which is only surpassed by that of Henry Moore*, who was awarded the Sculpture Prize at the II Bienal" (my emphasis).

- 5 See Maria Lucia Nogueira, "A mulher na V Bienal de artes plásticas", *O Estado de São Paulo*, 21 Aug. 1959 (illustrated with Lygia Clark's portrait). This article appeared in what seems to have been the women's section of the newspaper, and the journalist had interviewed the legendary figure of Wanda Svevo, general secretary of the Bienal de São Paulo and founder of the Bienal archives. The quotation from Hodin's text for the British catalogue reads: "the artist was thrown into the adventure of propounding twisting, open forms which express the pulsation of life rather than its order, the dynamic rather than the static, the stage at which *the fragrant shape of petals and flowers is discovered replacing the fruit and the body shapes, and at which a new material enters—metal*" (quoted in Nogueira; my emphasis). The same excerpt appeared in another article, also referring (as Hodin did) to her "calm, classical forms". See "A mulher brasileira nas artes plásticas", *O Estado de São Paulo*, 25 Sept. 1959. For J. P. Hodin's essay, see J. P. Hodin, "Barbara Hepworth" In: exh. cat. *Francis Bacon, S.W. Hayter, Barbara Hepworth. V Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo*. São Paulo/London: The British Council, 1959 (pages not numbered).
- 6 See, for instance, the article in *The Guardian* about her forthcoming retrospective in Great Britain, referring to her avoidance of the patronizing approach to her work that was evident in British Pathé's documentary of 1972: <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/jun/13/barbara-hepworth-finally-gets-her-due>.
- 7 See Lisetta Levi, *O Estado de São Paulo*, 10 Sept. 1959.
- 8 Maria Martins had spent most of her career abroad, and was connected to the Surrealists in Paris and to Marcel Duchamp in the United States. Only recently has her reputation been revived in this country by a number of new publications about her work. See, for example, Charles Cosac, ed., *Maria* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2010).
- 9 Sorel (or oxychloric) cement is a magnesium-based cement, created by the French engineer Stanilas Sorel in 1867, for use in civil construction. This is clearly not a traditional material for sculpture.
- 10 For example, Hepworth's *Curved Form (Trevalgan)* (1956, bronze) and, especially, *Figure (Oread)* (1958, bronze).
- 11 When it came to the Bienal de São Paulo, the members of the Brazilian art scene were looking for new developments in the work of well-known artists, and elements of surprise in the work of young, or unfamiliar, artists. Thus, the use of new procedures and materials was seen as a sign of "contemporaneity" and novelty, and this left its mark on the formation of the MAM's collection. Despite the fact that Hepworth was using a traditional material such as bronze, this was her first attempt at experimenting with this medium. Besides, especially in the making of *Cantate Domino*, she had to create a new kind of armature with aluminum foils, to create the sleek, long shape she was anxious to achieve.
- 12 For a deeper analysis of the accompanying debate and Gomes Machado's art criticism, see Ana Cândida de Avelar, "O informalismo no Brasil: Lourival Gomes Machado e a 5a Bienal Internacional de São Paulo", at <http://www.unicamp.br/chaa/eha/atas/2011/Ana%20Candida%20F%20de%20Avelar.pdf>.
- 13 See, for instance, Nancy Jachec, *Politics and Painting at the Venice Biennale, 1948-1964: Italy and the Idea of Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).
- 14 See Mário Pedrosa, *Mundo, homem, arte em crise*, ed. Aracy Amaral (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1975), especially 11-48. Most quoted is his review of the V Bienal de São Paulo, "Do 'informal' e seus equívocos" [On the "informel" and attendant misunderstandings].
- 15 See Herbert Read, "The Vital Image", in *A Concise History of Modern Sculpture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1961), chapter 5. Maria Martins's *Rituel du rythm* (1958, bronze; Alvorada Palace, Brasília) was reproduced there and came even closer to becoming a drawing in space, just like *Cantate Domino*.
- 16 As he did in his volume on modern painting, published two years earlier. See Herbert Read, *Modern Painting: A Concise History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1959).
- 17 Read also discusses the Concrete art group of the early 1930s in France, members of which Hepworth and her former husband, Ben Nicholson, had met in those very same years. This would be repeated by Brazilian reviewers and seemed to have been used to legitimate Hepworth's connections with abstract geometric practices in the 1950s.
- 18 See Walter Zanini, *Tendências da escultura moderna* (São Paulo: Editora Cultrix, 1972). Here Zanini attempted to fit the museum's sculpture collection into the narrative proposed by Read. Zanini had known the British critic since 1953, when, as a young journalist, he interviewed Read for a review of the II Bienal de São Paulo. See Walter Zanini, "Conversa com Herbert Read", *O Tempo*, 12 Dec. 1953. The influence of Read on Brazilian art criticism has yet to be fully investigated, though one can find numerous references to him in the relevant source materials of Brazilian art historiography.
- 19 See Zanini, *Tendências da escultura moderna*, 265.
- 20 Entitled "As posições construtivistas e abstratas" [Constructivist and Abstract Currents], where she would figure in the final extract, with the subtitle "Continuidade das tendências abstratas" [Continuity of abstract tendencies], alongside Max Bill and Robert Jacobsen (artists linked to Concrete art groups in their respective territories), and gestural/informal artists (who had previously appeared in Read's book on modern sculpture as illustrative of the "vital image", like Hepworth herself). His last chapter (chapter 14) was dedicated to Henry Moore.
- 21 Yet Zanini seemed to corroborate the notion of "vitalism" in Read's line of thought.

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British Sculpture Exhibited at the Venice Biennale after the Second World War, and its Impact on the Work of Italian Sculptors

Emanuela Pezzetta

Abstract

British sculpture gained an international reputation thanks to the exposure it was given at the Venice Biennale from 1948 to 1958, and proved capable of influencing sculptural developments throughout the 1950s. This essay will examine various aspects of the crucial impact it made on Italian sculpture, at a time when this had fallen badly behind the international field.

Authors

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Moore and the Validity of Figurative Sculpture

In 1946, the critic Giulio Carlo Argan asserted that Henry Moore was the most important sculptor in Europe, above all for his exquisitely English capacity for not shutting himself away within the confines of his own artistic tradition, but remaining open to innovations from the Continent, as a means of nurturing his own autonomous development.¹ The question of his relation to tradition was of particular importance to Argan. Italians' cultural isolation during the fascist dictatorship had contributed significantly to their relative backwardness, in relation to developments in other parts of Europe. For Argan, the crisis in contemporary Italian sculpture derived from the fact that instead of remaining open to all the latest innovations, it had fallen back on the traditional elements which had once propelled it to a level of excellence.
2

A quick tour of the Central Pavilion at the 1948 Venice Biennale would have sufficed to bear out the accuracy of Argan's claim. To be sure, Marino Marini would have stood out, for his allusive use of his sources, his assimilation of sculptural archetypes and his rigorous approach to combining form, mass, and line. So too would Giacomo Manzù, for his championing of sculptural *chiaroscuro*, for pursuing a dialogue between sculpture and painting, and for creating an intimate, lyrical atmosphere in his work. In the room devoted to the *Fronte Nuovo delle Arti*, visitors would have been struck by the novelty of Leoncillo Leonardi's neo-Cubist syntheses, Nino Franchina's fresh readings of archaic forms, and Alberto Viani's pure volumes. However, all things considered, the Italian sculpture presented in these international exhibitions, which were the most important postwar events of their kind, was shown still to be anchored in a stylistic repertoire and choice of themes, such as nudes, portraits, and mythological subjects that were heavily indebted to the sculpture of the previous decade and had not moved with the times.

When Argan learned of Moore's selection for the British Pavilion at the XXIV Biennale, he quickly got down to writing what became the first foreign monograph devoted to the artist, which appeared after the Biennale had opened.³ In this, Argan adroitly presented Moore as a sculptor of abstract forms, who had managed to stay aloof from the crisis in modern figurative art. The two apparently irreconcilable aspects of Moore's work conveniently embodied the value that Argan attributed to his sculptural experiments, in that, as he saw it, Moore had developed an intense form of abstraction that was capable, at a formal level, of bringing out the objective features of the sculpture, without sacrificing the references to nature or the human figure, or having to renounce his ambition of constantly experimenting with a figurative idiom.

One of the reasons, indeed, for the Italians treating Moore's work as a valuable visual resource was connected with this very issue of figurative sculpture, at a moment when the debate between figuration and abstraction in Italy had become more heated than ever, especially after 1947, when Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of the Italian Communist Party, which stressed the links between communist artists and different kinds of figurative or realist art, decided to join the fray. On top of this came the republication in 1948 of the celebrated tract, "Sculpture Dead Language" by Arturo Martini, the most innovative Italian sculptor of the first half of the twentieth century, one year after his death in 1947, which considerably complicated the situation for figurative sculpture.⁴ The harsh tone of some of Martini's remarks gave the impression that he had quite simply gone over onto the offensive against all use of images of people and animals in sculpture.

Italian sculptors learned two valuable lessons from the works that Moore exhibited in Venice: first, that figurative sculpture was still viable at the end of the fifth decade of the century, and that they could work in a figurative way without subscribing to a realist aesthetic; second, that it was possible to treat figural subjects in a contemporary manner, if they could find a way of overcoming what Martini had defined as "the prison of sculpture"—in other words, its overdependence on visual appearances. Moore's sculpture, in fact, addressed figural subjects in an organic language bordering on abstraction and offered an exemplary amalgam of these different elements, for Italian sculptors who still believed in the validity of a figurative style but neither wanted to subscribe to some form of realism nor to join in condemning different modes of abstraction. In Venice, Moore exhibited a representative selection of work going back to 1925, which showed how he had consistently experimented with new elements of forms of figurative sculptural language without allowing the figural elements (what Martini called "the image") to dominate the sculptural form. At the Biennale, Henry Moore also exhibited some abstract sculptures, which recalled his participation in Unit One and his experimentation with combinations of interpenetrating structures and pure volumes and organic forms. However, the numerical preponderance of works such as the *Standing Figures*, *Reclining Figures* and *Family Groups*—especially, those of the previous six years—confirmed the continuing relevance of figurative sculpture at the end of the 1940s.



Figure 1.

Installation View, Lynn Chadwick display in the British Pavilion, XXVIII Venice Biennale, 1956, showing Chadwick, *The Seasons*, 1955-56 Digital image courtesy of La Biennale di Venezia - Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee / Photo: A.F.I. (Venezia)

The Italian sculptor who most determinedly set about adapting his own work to Moore's formal objectives and espoused his theoretical principles was Aldo Calò. After travelling to London in 1950 to study Moore's work at first hand, and after visiting the sculptor whom he so greatly admired at his home in Perry Green, Calò began to formulate the preconditions for what he would go on to define, in the mid-1950s, as "living sculpture"—a kind of sculpture distinguished by its formal purity, in which the primacy of the material qualities might be supposed to contribute to a harmonious relationship between the different parts, and not to experimenting with geometric or constructive planes, in the manner of the abstractions of the historic avant-garde, or to the definition of a kind of archetypal sculpture, characterized by inorganic forms. Calò had assimilated two fundamental principles, which lay

at the heart of Moore's work—namely, the principles of *direct carving* and *truth to materials*. He did not abandon figuration, but he achieved a radical departure from the Italian sculptural tradition.

Carmelo Cappello made a careful study of the original sculptural elements in Moore's work, as a means of refreshing his own figurative sculpture without, however, feeling obliged to break with his favourite visual references, which were still inextricably linked to Arturo Martini's formal vocabulary. He grasped the fact that the voids inserted into the interior of the material imparted a greater dynamism to the work and triggered a new relationship to the surrounding space. The space itself, which flowed freely within the work, did not get caught up or absorbed by it, but set the interior and exterior of the sculpture in a relation of continual movement and flux. At the very least, Cappello learned from Moore the principles of direct carving and truth to materials and began to handle his materials with due respect for their physical properties, such as their elasticity, strength, veining, cracks, and irregularities—at the same time, opting for a broad range of different materials, such as a variety of alabasters, stones, marbles, and woods.

After 1950, Moore consolidated his reputation as one of the leading figures in the revival of monumental sculpture, both in theory and in practice, and in giving myth a new lease of life via the innumerable articles devoted to him in Italian magazines. Myth, archaism, and primitivism were endowed with new attributes in 1950s sculpture.

The sculptors of the 1950s gave further accretions of meaning to the existing repertoire of myths and archaic and primitive forms, which could serve as metaphors for the condition of mankind, afflicted by the ravages of the Second World War. This led to the representations of the proud, but lacerated human form, sustained only by an atavistic inner force, protecting its integrity of spirit from the brutal assaults to which its body has been subjected. Moore played an essential role in defining this myth: his *Helmet Heads* (1950) and *Warrior with Shield* (1953–54) make a play on the idealized theme of the Mycenaean warrior, whose praises Homer had sung, for his proud stoicism and obstinate refusal to submit, even after the mutilations he had suffered in battle. These works were at the root of his representation of the human figure, vulnerable but undefeated for all that, and opened up new perspectives for the sculptural treatment of heads and the nude male body. In fact, Moore's *Helmet Heads* explored the potential of the sculpted head, emptied of its internal volume. In *Warrior with Shield*, the implicit visual allusions to antiquity, from the Belvedere Torso to the linear patterns on the sculpture from the Apollo Sanctuary in Bassai (c. 410 BC), now in the British Museum, introduced a new dialectic between Ancient and Modern, an issue dear to the Italians. The antique fragment was thus used as an allusive device, or a metaphor through which to address, indirectly, the horrors of the Second World War and the tensions generated by the Cold War.



Figure 2.

Marcello Mascherini, *Guerriero (Warrior)*, 1961, bronze, 150 × 130 × 120 cm, Trieste Digital image courtesy of Pozzar

The theme of the warrior enjoyed particular success with Italian sculptors. Mario Negri, who was especially interested in exploring aspects of the fragmented and suffering human body, took Moore's warrior as a visual model for testing a mythical subject, to lachrymose effect. In fact, his sculpture *Leonida* (1956), which dealt with the theme of the Spartan king at the Battle of Thermopylae, at the head of a select band of combatants, who sacrificed his life in an effort to block the advance of Xerxes' troops, was treated by Negri as the mortally wounded hero, proud even in his final agony, as a modern symbol of humanity, affronted by the war that was reshaping his own identity and submitting to the judgment of history, but managing to hold his head up high. For Marcello Mascherini, in 1961, Moore's warrior provided the occasion for telling a tale of human tragedy. Around this time, Mascherini had begun to make sculptures with the aid of plastine moulds taken from the limestone surfaces of rocks in the Karst region of Trieste, which produced the characteristically lacerated, contorted effects of the *informel*. His *Warrior* (1961) took from Moore, not only the theme of the wounded and suffering male nude, proudly brandishing a huge shield, but his monumentality. For Luciano Minguzzi, Moore's *Warrior with Shield* and *Helmet Heads* provided a pretext for rethinking the motif of the sculptural head, in keeping with the 1950s style of presenting materials with all the marks of wear and tear. Minguzzi worked pictorial effects into the surfaces of his bronze heads, by drawing attention to all the bumps, perforations, and contrasting volumes, as a way of imbuing elements taken from antiquity with the tortured qualities of the *informel*.

The “Geometry of Fear” and Stylistic Characteristics of the 1950s

The year 1952 was crucial for Italian sculptors, who were once again confronted with the leading protagonists of the medium in the British Pavilion and at the Venice Biennale, in general. The selection of work by the new British avant-garde—the so-called sculptors of “the geometry of fear”—which had been totally unknown outside Britain itself, presented to the world a new way of thinking about, conceiving, and presenting sculpture, which was without precedent. These young artists changed the subjects and materials of sculpture, as well as of the figure of the sculptor himself, and his way of making sculpture. From that moment until 1958, the sculptors Lynn Chadwick, Reg Butler, and Kenneth Armitage were closely followed at every stage by their Italian peers, who considered that they held the new keys that would once again enable them to gain access to a climate of modernity.

The “geometry of fear” produced a diverse range of effects on Italian sculpture after 1952. In the first place, a certain number of Italian sculptors were spurred on to try and redefine the human figure, in line with the example set by the British sculptors, by resorting to corroded and distorted representations of the male and female nude. Secondly, the works of the British sculptors acted as a filter for a variety of vaguely expressionist stylistic traits, such as the eroded, pitted, and textured surfaces that were part of a more generalized sculptural lexicon that had already gained common currency in the rest of Europe, but had been slow to become established in Italy. Alberto Giacometti and Germaine Richier, for example, who had provided the models for the sculpture of the “geometry of fear”, along with Pablo Picasso, Julio González, and Alexander Calder, had scarcely been followed by Italian critics in the early 1950s. For an Italian sculptor, it would have been risky to become attached to this new vocabulary of forms, because he or she would not have been understood, would not have been able to exhibit, and would have been prevented from entering into the commercial circuit.

For the Italian sculptors, the undeniable international success of the new British avant-garde created an illustrious precedent for them to abandon their outworn linguistic conventions, in favour of a sculptural idiom that was neither traditional nor thought through in terms of volume and mass. Finally, they found that, by using the techniques of welding and assemblage, they could imbue their surfaces with a tactile quality and arrive at a new concept of sculpture, as something that was predominantly frontal, linear, and open on all sides.

Two sculptors, in particular, provided a focus for the Italians’ attention: Reg Butler and Lynn Chadwick. For a number of Italian figurative sculptors, the works that Butler exhibited at the 1954 Biennale (his reconstruction of the

prize-winning model for the Unknown Political Prisoner Competition and *Study for Two Watchers*, of 1952), with their depersonalized, heroic, even hieratic representations of the human figure, exercised a strong appeal. Butler presented the nude figure as degraded, mutilated, and inert and, like Francis Bacon in his paintings, presented a tormented image of humanity, as being self-obsessed and ridden with *Angst*. Alfio Castelli, for example, used Butler's works as a model for his representations of the mutilated male nude, rendered fragile in its nakedness. He reduced the dimensions of the head, depriving it of its physiognomic connotations; deformed the massive torso, supported by stick-like legs; and presented a surface appearance that looked thoroughly brutalized and abraded.

In Italy, Butler's *Girl* (1953-54), which was exhibited at the Third Antwerp Sculpture Biennale, in 1955, became one of his best-known sculptures. This work depicted an adolescent girl, standing up with her hands crossed over her head, one of them covering her face, in the act of removing her vest. *Girl* was literally plagiarized by Marcello Mascherini, in his *Gazzella nera* (Black Gazelle, 1960), where Butler's androgynous figure, traversed by sparse swellings of matter, was converted into a sensual woman, cast in a smooth, compact bronze.

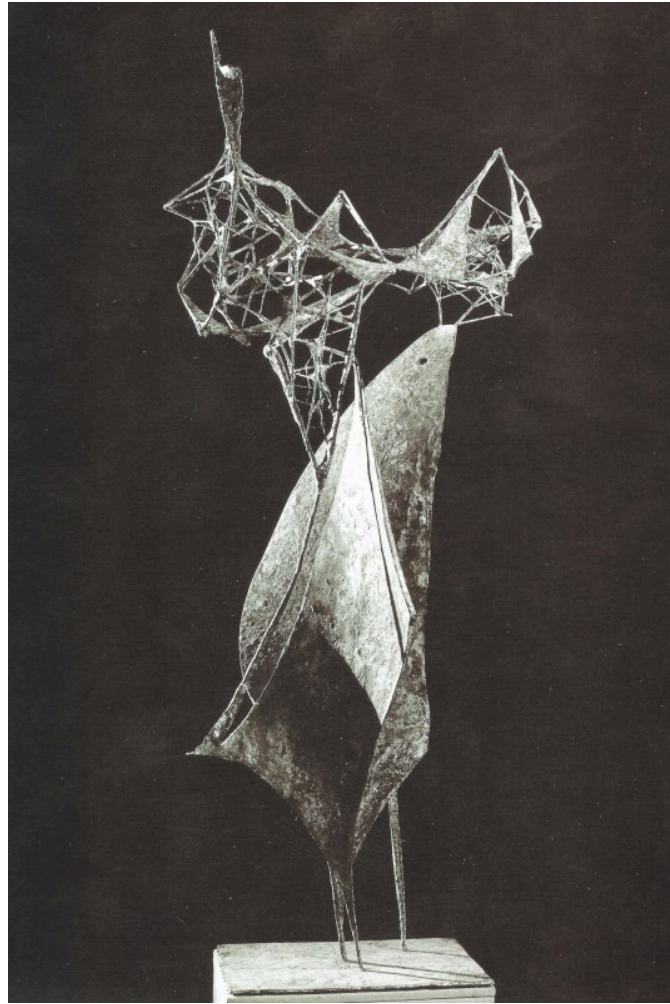


Figure 3.

Luciano Minguzzi, Ombre nel bosco n.2 (Shadows on the wood n.2), 1957, bronze, 220 × 96 × 59 cm, Collection of the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna di Ca' Pesaro, Venice Digital image courtesy of Buccio Fotografia Artigiana

The British sculptor who made the greatest impact on progressive Italian sculptors was Chadwick. At times, his work switched over to an exploration of non-figurative elements via a conjunction of human and vegetal forms and pushed Minguzzi into experimenting with tenuous rhythms, combinations of trapezoid volumes, filigree structures, and compositional extensions into the surrounding space. From 1956 to 1960 Roberto Crippa, for example, shamelessly referenced Chadwick's animal sculptures, at a time when his career as a painter still boasted solid roots. Thus, between 1950 and 1960, he took to producing objects in iron and steel that were obvious transcriptions of a group of machine-like "beasts" that Chadwick had made, flaunting his characteristic forked and barbed tails, broad wing expansions, and exposed areas of armour plating.

The revival of Italian sculpture after the Second World War, which was due, in part, to the presentation at the Venice Biennale of Moore's sculpture (1948), the "geometry of fear" (1952), and of Butler (1953), Chadwick (1956), and Armitage (1958), had run its course by the time that Italian sculptors found ways of overcoming tradition and adopting contemporary solutions that enabled them finally to be able to compete again at an international level.

Translated by Henry Meyric Hughes

Footnotes

- 1 G. C. Argan, "Arte Moderna in Inghilterra: Henry Moore" (Modern Art in England: Henry Moore), *Letteratura* 8, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1946).
- 2 G. C. Argan, "Difficoltà della scultura" (The Difficulties of Sculpture), *Letteratura* 2 (March-April 1950).
- 3 G. C. Argan, *Henry Moore* (Turin: Francisco De Silva Editore, 1948).
- 4 See Arturo Martini, "Sculpture Dead Language" (1945), in *Modern Sculpture Reader*, ed. Jon Wood, David Hulks, and Alex Potts (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2007), 165-79.

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1984 and Beyond (2005–07)

Gerard Byrne

Abstract

Gerard Byrne's 1984 and Beyond (2005–07) is a multi-media installation that includes a film produced at the Kröller-Müller Museum in the Netherlands. The project takes as its starting point an eponymous article published in 1963 in Playboy magazine, which featured a discussion between twelve science fiction writers. Dutch actors dressed in 1960s attire dramatize the original script, which is staged amidst the Barbara Hepworth sculptures in Gerrit Rietveld's Sonsbeek Pavilion.

Authors

Cite as

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The work *1984 and Beyond* was commissioned by *If I Can't Dance*, an inspired curatorial initiative addressing ideas of performativity in art based in the Netherlands, and the production of the work was heavily tied to this location. Rather than being a constriction, this tie turned out to be a highly fertile one, opening my research to the substantial legacies of mid-twentieth-century modernist architecture scattered amongst the polders. One of the principal locations for the filming was the Sonsbeek Pavilion by Gerrit Rietveld(1888-1964) at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo. The pavilion's chronology synchronized with the period I was referencing in my project. First built in 1955 for the Third International Sculpture Exhibition in Arnhem's Sonsbeek Park, the pavilion was subsequently reconstructed around 1965 by a group of Dutch architects as a memorial to Rietveld in the Sculpture Garden of the Kröller-Müller Museum. I was drawn to the open, porous character of the architecture, which seemed incomplete, as if a ruin. The various bronzes by Barbara Hepworth, which seem to have always been part of the pavilion, share this trait of fragmentary, ancient form, with edges rounded as if from wear. On the evidence of the ensemble, I had the sense that far from being "of their time", mid-twentieth-century modernists like Hepworth and Rietveld seemed more concerned with contriving a "timelessness" via their work. There was a clear appeal to the primeval in play, which, unlikely as it may seem, resonated strongly with the primary document I was referencing in my project: a round-table discussion on the world of the future, featured in the July/August 1963 issues of *Playboy* magazine.



[Watch Video](#)

Figure 1.

Gerard Byrne, 1984 and Beyond, clip, 2005-07, part of a multimedia installation featuring video, photography and text.



Introduction to British Sculpture Abroad in the 1960s

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Import/Export

In the 1960s, British sculpture enjoyed a complex transitional life, taking on a new, bold, and increasingly internationalized profile, at the very same time that its forms and meanings were being challenged and contested. Both in Britain and beyond its shores, sculpture experienced substantial reorientation at the same time as it developed a rich and complicated “import” and “export” life, conceptually, commercially, and curatorially. When “Sculpture” was “British” and “Abroad”, its “abroad-ness” was not always so explicitly visible, since its forms and concerns frequently chimed with sensibilities and approaches that were emerging elsewhere too, whether they were figurative or abstract, Constructivist or Pop. At the same time, when sculpture was being displayed in Britain, whether in terms of groups, schools, and/or recent tendencies, it was increasingly described as “British Sculpture”. Visual evidence of foreign impact and exchange gradually emerged at the same time as this national and generational trope became a cultural identifier on a broader cultural landscape.

Postwar debates around figuration and abstraction were central to these complicated sculptural developments. The 1960s saw a younger generation of inquisitive artists, born during the interwar years and coming through London art schools, especially Saint Martin’s School of Art, which were themselves undergoing significant art educational and curricular change. Young artists were looking increasingly not just immediately outside Britain but also beyond Europe for inspiration. There was an increased availability of travel grants, at the same time that British-born artists were enjoying the company of international art students coming from abroad. They devoured art publications, new art writing, exhibition reviews, photography, and ways of seeing and thinking about sculpture, at a time when the work of more established figures of British sculpture was being presented alongside foreign examples, as in the *Open Air Sculpture Exhibition of Contemporary British and American Works* in Battersea Park in 1963.¹ Younger artists were also relishing the new kinds of art and artists coming into this country, often encountered in the small number of commercial galleries in London, such as Signals Gallery (established in 1964) and Kasmin Gallery (established in 1963). These galleries showed work by South American and North American-born artists respectively, alongside that of British-born and London-based artists. Signals, established by David Medalla and Paul Keeler, for example, showed works by many artists, including Lygia Clark and Liliane Lijn.² This new work was often abstract and kinetic. It engaged its viewers either directly, by actively inviting their manual participation, or by harnessing their imaginations with optically puzzling works.

Sculpture Exhibitions

The power of the commercial gallery emerged with significance in this decade. The Rowan Gallery in London, for instance (established 1962), run by Alex Gregory-Hood and Diana (“Wonky”) Kingsmill, was dedicated to the support and championing of works by a younger generation of British-based sculptors including Phillip King, William Tucker, Isaac Witkin, Garth Evans, and Barry Flanagan—artists who were making work alongside Anthony Caro and others at Saint Martin’s School of Art, and who were highly in tune with the lives abstract sculpture was leading beyond Britain, as much as inside it.

³ The promotion of these artists abroad was striking too. In his review of 1960s art, Bryan Robertson gives a vivid sense of the hands-on support at stake as well as the importance attached to sculpture’s increasing promotional circulation through photography, recalling:

Barry Flanagan was represented in the *Biennale des Jeunes* in Paris in 1967 by a large soft, coloured sculpture stuffed with sand. When Flanagan arrived in Paris to set the work up, just before the official opening, the promised sand, to the artist’s precise specification, was not there and an unsuitable variety of sand had been delivered on site. Flanagan was under pressure, aggravated by the fact that his wife was expecting a child back in London, and he scrapped the sculpture, substituting another work. In London, Alex [Gregory-Hood] was incensed: the sand sculpture, after all, was reproduced in the catalogue as an official entry. He rang round Europe to find the correct sand and he and Wonky flew to Paris, made their way to the exhibition space, personally shovelled the offending incorrect sand away and painstakingly filled the large sculpture with the sand they had procured.⁴

Under the directorship of Robertson, the Whitechapel Art Gallery played an important role in these years, helping in turn to mediate the transit and display of sculpture between studio, gallery, and collection. As its director between 1952 and 1968, Robertson had overseen the series of influential “New Generation” exhibitions of painting and sculpture and through them had done much to promote and secure a generational identity for abstract sculpture in this country and also abroad, especially for the sculptors closely associated with Saint Martin’s School of Art, including the work of Caro, King, Tucker, Tim Scott, David Annesley, Michael Bolus, and Witkin. Such developments were lent financial support by non-British sponsors too, including the Peter Stuyvesant Foundation, which supported several exhibitions at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in these years. Peter Stuyvesant was the last Dutch Director General of the colony of New Netherland, until it

was ceded to the English in 1664, after which it was renamed as New York, and the year 1964 marked the 300th anniversary of this historic moment. The associative poetry of this was not lost, despite Peter Stuyvesant being a South African cigarette manufacturer.

The transatlantic symbolism of the Stuyvesant Foundation's role is striking and it supports an idea of British sculpture in the 1960s that was dependent upon the triumph and consolidation of Anglo-American cultural relations. The crucial impact of Clement Greenberg's art critical support of Caro's sculpture, and the exchanges not only between them but also between them and the American sculptor David Smith at Bolton Landing on Lake George in New York state, and also other Saint Martin's sculptors, such as Phillip King who visited him there in 1964, cannot be underestimated. The younger artistic rejection of Henry Moore's work, and what was seen as its monolithic compositions, its outmoded figuration and genres, and its use of the pedestal, was a complementary part of its new and generational endeavour and achievement. Nevertheless, the story of "British Sculpture Abroad" in the 1960s is much more than this particular Anglo-American case study, and this short introduction aims to highlight some of the alternative ways in which this interesting decade for sculpture outside Britain can be understood today, looking in particular to the potent, exciting, and transitional mid-decade moment between 1963 and 1966.

The 1960s was a very lively and changing decade not just for sculpture, but for modern art more generally, as it witnessed the emergence, consolidation, and coexistence of a variety of artistic tendencies and approaches, including Constructivism, Pop, Op, abstraction, conceptualism, and environmental art, and the rise of the incorporation of photography, film, and performance in art—and as art. Viewed schematically and in terms of successions of coinciding and often competing artistic tendencies, the 1960s can be (and has been) viewed as a decade that began with a wide preoccupation with Constructivism and systems art, that witnessed during the mid-decade years the international recognition and transatlantic success of Caro, King, and other sculptors from Saint Martin's (many of whom were born outside Britain), and that ended with a greater interest in conceptualism, land art, and performance. The idea of sculpture was changing in a decade that itself both started and ended in change. These artistic changes made a real impact, and in the 1970s decade that followed a significant number of British-born sculptors left Britain for abroad, many for North America and Canada, including Tucker, Evans, Brian Wall, and Peter Hide. These were some of the artists who had done much to shape an identity for contemporary sculpture in the 1960s, both as tutors and as exhibiting artists, and whose work was beginning to be seen beyond the gallery setting in large, outdoor group exhibitions such as *Sculpture in a City* (Birmingham, Liverpool, Southampton, 1967) and *New British Sculpture/Bristol* (1968).

An exhibition history of new tendencies in sculpture over this ten-year period gives a good indication of this and also shows how these gradual shifts were played out on an increasingly international stage. It also highlights the moments of overlap and shared concerns active at the time. In 1960, Victor Pasmore represented Britain at the Venice Biennale, and the next few years saw works by British Constructivist artists included in a number of group exhibitions, including: *Konkrete Kunst* (Zurich, 1960), *Experiment in Fläche und Raum* (Zurich, 1962), *Experiment in Constructie* (Amsterdam, 1962), and *Kompas 2* (Eindhoven, 1962) as well as in the dedicated travelling exhibition *British Constructivist Art*, which was organized by the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) and which toured the United States in 1962. The rethinking of an idea of “Britishness” was related to these artists’ allegiances to Europe, and more broadly to an internationalism that looked both east and west. In the work and attitudes of Constructivist artists such as Kenneth and Mary Martin, Pasmore, Anthony Hill, Gillian Wise (later Wise-Ciobotaru), and the Paris-based artist Stephen Gilbert, we find allegiances and affiliations at once to Russian Constructivism and to the abstract work of the American artist and writer Charles Biederman and new technological developments across the Atlantic. Sam Gathercole in his essay below analyses the impact of British Constructivism on its American audience. He shows how the work of the artists involved was distanced from Russian Constructivism in its presentation by Lawrence Alloway, by virtue of its more intimate, domestic scale. Gathercole argues, however, that its muted reception in the United States, due to a perception of its modest and restrained British nature, misunderstood the ambitions of the Constructivists’ work, which aimed at a complex negotiation of the environment through hand-made, small-scale work, and so was at odds with the expansive tendencies of American art at the time.

British sculpture also played a part in larger manifestations, where such particular artistic affiliations fell away for group effect. In *documenta iii* (Kassel, 1964), for example, the work of Robert Adams, Kenneth Armitage, Caro, Lynn Chadwick, King, Moore, and Eduardo Paolozzi was included from Britain. It represented a fascinating mixture of figurative and abstract tendencies. By *Documenta 4* (Kassel, 1968) things had become more abstract, as Caro and King were joined by Hill, Kenneth Martin, Michael Sandle, and Tucker. British artists were showcased in *Primary Structures* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1966. Caro himself had work included in the exhibition *American Sculpture of the Sixties* at the Los Angeles County Museum in 1967, dominated by American artists, and at this time several New York galleries were showing British 1960s sculpture. Richard Feigen showed William Tucker in 1965 and Phillip King in 1966; Robert Elkon showed Isaac Witkin in 1966; Kornblee showed Michael Bolus in 1966; Poindexter showed David Annesley in 1966, and then Lawrence Rubin showed Tim Scott in 1971. The kind of works that was being taken up commercially were bold, well-made, colourful abstract sculptures, free-

standing in welded steel or fibre-glass, some large but often on a small scale. In keeping with this, John J. Curley's essay below focuses on the transatlantic, Anglo-American hybridization of sculpture in the 1960s, through the exhibition *Primary Structures* and the work of Caro and the sculptural work of the British Pop artists Gerald Laing and Peter Phillips. Curley considers the ways in which the dialogue between British and American art led to the questioning of medial boundaries and the relationships between found objects and images and processes of making. In particular, Laing and Phillips's *Hybrid* (1965-66) encapsulates for Curley a kind of "fleeting transatlantic consensus" for 1960s sculpture. His essay ends, significantly, with Caro's small, transportable table sculptures, able to move with ease between the two cultural contexts.

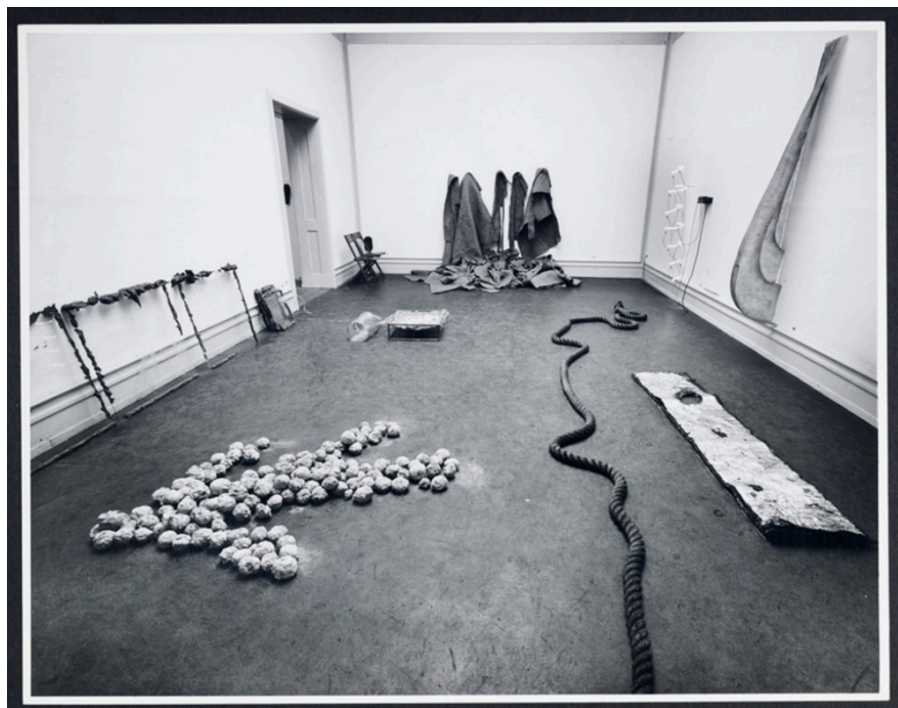


Figure 1.

Harry Shunk, Installation View, *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*, 1969, showing clockwise from left: Mario Merz, *Appoggiati*, 1969, Mario Merz, *Sit-in*, 1968, Richard Artschwager, *Blp*, 1968, Robert Morris, *Felt*, 1967, Bruce Nauman, *Neon Templates of the Left Half of My Body Taken at Ten Inch Intervals*, 1966, Bruce Nauman, *Untitled*, 1965, Bruce Nauman, *Collection of Various Flexible Materials Separated by Layers of Grease with Holes the Size of My Waist and Wrists*, 1966, Barry Flanigan, *Two Space Rope Sculpture*, 1967, Alighiero Boetti, *Io che prendo il sole a Torino il 19 gennaio 1969*, 1969 Digital image courtesy of Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2011.M.30(Series IV.A, Attitudes, Shunk)) / Photo: Harry Shunk

The 1960s would also witness exhibitions that promoted the work of British artists in the context of more international, conceptual, and ideas-based practices, such as Harald Szeemann's *When Attitudes Become Form* (Bern

and London, 1969), which included work by Barry Flanagan and Bruce McLean; *Op Losse Schroeven* ("Square pegs in round holes") (Amsterdam, 1969), which included works by former Saint Martin's students Flanagan, McLean, Richard Long, and Roelof Louw; *Land Art, Fernsehgalerie* (Berlin, 1969), Gerry Schum's art films for TV project which saw Flanagan making a hole in the sea in Scheveningen in February that year; and in the US *Earth Art* (Cornell University, Ithaca, 1969), which included the work of Long and Medalla). Holland and northern Germany were parts of Europe that were highly sympathetic to both conceptualism and abstract sculpture. Konrad Lueg, to become Konrad Fischer, based in Dusseldorf, was particularly influential, giving Richard Long his first one-person show in 1968, an exhibition which was followed in 1969 by five more exhibitions for this artist, all outside Britain, before his exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1971.

The Generational Life of Sculpture

Late 1950s and early 1960s reactions to the postwar sculptural example are well accounted for in the secondary literature on "British Sculpture". The art historian and curator Lynne Cooke, for example, has highlighted this: "Towards the end of the 1950s British sculpture was widely vaunted, not least by native critics, as the most flourishing school in the world."⁵ However looking ahead, she quotes Phillip King's response to *documenta ii* which took place at the end of that decade in 1959:

The sculpture was terribly dominated by a post-war feeling which seemed very distorted and contorted . . . And it was somehow terribly like scratching your own wounds—an international style with everyone sharing the same neuroses.⁶

There was clearly a widespread shaking off of the postwar sculptural legacy. The shift in sculptural mood between these decades is striking; a shift at once in attitude, sensibility, and materials, although it was also, in retrospect, a period of subtle continuation and development as much as of rupture. King, who was fluent in French and steeped in the sculpture of Pablo Picasso, Alberto Giacometti, and Constantin Brancusi, was an interesting figure in this transitional moment, making work that bridged figuration and abstraction, and that changed the mood of sculpture from figurative existential anxiety to robust and upbeat formal experimentation, from geometries of fear to geometries of liberation.

The public recognition of art and artists had increasingly national, European, and international dimensions, with different generations of artists experiencing attention and appreciation simultaneously. As each decade introduces the public to new work, so it can also see the further celebration and consolidation of the work and achievements abroad of more familiar names.⁷ This is well-demonstrated in the 1960s, as we witness different generations of British sculptors experiencing levels of success at the same time. It was also a decade of generational *coinciding* for sculptors, as much as generational succession, through which their work occupied the same historical moment: the mid-1960s is a particularly rich period for this. For example, Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth turned sixty-five and sixty respectively in 1963, whilst the mid-1960s saw Kenneth Armitage enter his fifties, Eduardo Paolozzi his forties and St Martin's sculptors Garth Evans, Tim Scott, and Bill Tucker their thirties. Arie Hartog's essay in this issue points to the prominence enjoyed in the United States in the 1950s and early 1960s by Reg Butler, whose first retrospective in 1963 was held at an American museum. Hartog shows how an understanding of the work of Butler and other British sculptors, like Chadwick and Armitage, served as a crucial foil in Greenberg's promotion of a specifically American tradition (via the work of David Smith). Reconsidering the role of Butler's work in the US during this period and of his crucial supporter, the curator Addison Franklin Page, enables us to complicate and broaden our views of a 1960s sculptural discourse dominated by Greenberg, and to re-engage with debates around sculpture's symbolic content, the role of figuration, and the potential of sculpture to communicate with a wide public.

The promotion of different generations of sculptors owes much to the work of the British Council, which often showed not only older and younger artists together, but also those working in different idioms. It also owed much to the Contemporary Art Society, and the work of Pauline Vogelpeel (who worked at the CAS between 1954 and 1982) and her colleagues. As Margaret Garlake's study of the São Paulo biennales in these years highlights, much was achieved for British sculpture through the work of British commissioner Liliane Somerville and committees that during these years included Alan Bowness, Sir Philip Hendy, Sir Herbert Read, Sir John Rothenstein, Roland Penrose, J. M. Richards, David Thompson, and Norman Reid.⁸ The sculptors included in presentations at Venice and São Paulo in the 1960s give some insight into this. In the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, Victor Pasmore, Eduardo Paolozzi, and Geoffrey Clarke were included in 1960; Robert Adams and Hubert Dalwood in 1962; Bernard Meadows and Joe Tilson in 1964; Anthony Caro and Richard Smith in 1966; and Phillip King in 1968: the "Ways of Contemporary Research" that year included Caro, Paolozzi, and Pasmore.⁹ Again we find an interesting mixture of artists, styles, and approaches to sculpture. There was a blend of figuration and abstract and figurative approaches, and a greater continuity between sculptural sensibilities than we

might today expect. Sculpture was presented in tandem: in the São Paulo Bienal, Chadwick was shown in 1961; Paolozzi in 1963. The year 1965 also saw a touring exhibition in India: *Nine Living British Sculptors* (1965–66), co-organized by the Lalit Kala Akademi and the British Council, included over thirty works (sculptures, drawings, and prints) by Adams, Armitage, Chadwick, Dalwood, Hepworth, Meadows, Moore, and Paolozzi.¹⁰ If the image of contemporary British sculpture that was touring the world seems out of step with currents back at home, it highlights the fact that versions of the contemporary were circulating in tandem. The list of sculptors, for example, who were included in the British Council's *Sculpture Anglaise Contemporaine* that visited Toulouse and Lille towards the end of this decade in 1968 makes interesting reading, made up of the same names, but this time minus Moore: Adams, Armitage, Chadwick, Dalwood, Hepworth, Meadows, and Paolozzi.¹¹

As the 1960s went on, Moore became less of a sculptural bearing or point of reference for other younger British artists, abroad as much as at home, as survey or group shows dedicated to British sculpture lost their “since Moore” tag. Nevertheless, as Moore’s mid-1960s saw him enter his own mid-sixties, he was still a significant presence internationally outside these British Council manifestations, and his work was increasingly in demand. Marble as much as bronze was Moore’s material of choice at this time. If marble (as opposed to other kinds of stone) strongly evoked a Graeco-Roman classicism, it was also a particular 1960s classicism. Marble had a “coolness” then, both literally and materially. For Moore it was Italy and the Carrara quarries that drew him, prompting him to buy a house at Forte dei Marmi on the coast nearby in 1965. Moore’s marble sculpture aimed to talk to an internationalist ethos and a universalizing modernist spirit while also chiming with a more immediate and geographically and culturally resonant Italian environment. He kept different materials in use at this time. His bronze *Reclining Figure* (commissioned in 1962) was installed outside the Lincoln Center in New York in 1965. His *Three Piece Reclining Figure: Bridge Prop* (1963) was shown alongside works by Auguste Rodin, Aristide Maillol, Brancusi and Picasso at *Sonsbeek '66*, the fifth International Sculpture Exhibition in Arnheim, in the early summer of 1966. The mid-1960s for Moore was a significant moment of publication too, seeing the artist’s views widely disseminated in print. Philip James, Art Director of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) and then (post-1945) of the Arts Council of Great Britain until 1958, was the editor of *Henry Moore on Sculpture* (1966), a collection of Moore’s writings that spread the word about Moore’s work as much as it inspired his detractors.¹²

During the later 1960s, both Moore and his work experienced particular criticism from younger conceptual artists, often made within their own art works. In the United States, Bruce Nauman made works such as *Henry Moore*

Bound to Fail (1967/70), *Seated Storage Capsule (for H.M.)* (1966), and a series of graphic and photographic “trap” works, which curiously relate to photographs by Gjon Mili, including *Henry Moore Trap* (1966), and *Light Trap for Henry Moore*, numbers one and two (1967).¹³ In Britain, twenty-five-year-old Bruce McLean made *Fallen Warrior* (1969), *Waiter Waiter There’s a Sculpture in My Soup* (1970), and *Reclining Nude Fully Draped* (1969). In the work of both artists we find a shared criticism of the ubiquity and overexposure of Moore’s work at that time, and in 1967 there was also a controversy surrounding the proposal to build a Moore Gallery at the Tate. The late 1960s thus saw considerable public attention to the staging, binding, and framing of Moore’s work in ways that a younger generation reacted to. Moore, we should recall, was seventy years of age in 1968, and so very much the older establishment artist for these two artists in their twenties. In Nauman’s works, “Moore” means “a work by Moore”, indicating a synonymous relationship between the man and the work, which is both a measure of his success and celebrity and of the personal directness of his statement.

Barbara Hepworth saw her *Single Form* (1962–63) unveiled at the United Nations Plaza in New York in 1964. But if Hepworth and Moore were beginning to be seen as representatives of a senior generation whose work talked to an earlier postwar moment, the mid-1960s were also challenging for sculptors who had enjoyed initial success in the 1950s in their slipstream, such as those who came to the public eye in 1952 in the *New Aspects of British Sculpture* exhibition in the British Pavilion of the XXVI Venice Biennale. Of this group, Paolozzi had widespread international attention in the 1960s. Represented by Betty Parsons Gallery in New York and the Robert Fraser Gallery in London, the attention Paolozzi’s work was receiving in North America was matched in the second half of the 1960s by his reception in West Germany. The year 1968 saw large exhibitions at the Galerie Neuendorf in Hamburg, and between 1968 and 1969 exhibitions of his sculpture and works on paper were held at the Stadtische Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf and the Württembergischer Kunstverein in Stuttgart.

Circles of Recognition

If Paolozzi was more than anything else a “British sculptor abroad” in these years, then the same can be said especially of Kenneth Armitage, who turned fifty years of age in 1965, and who of all the “Geometry of Fear” sculptors was seen as Moore’s natural successor as a Leeds College of Art-educated artist. The artist who featured in Bryan Robertson, John Russell, and Lord Snowden’s 1965 book, *Private View*, was a London-based celebrity sculptor.¹⁴ We see him standing, in plaster-covered overalls, working in his studio on *Pandarus (Version 4)* (1963) in a black-and-white double-page spread within a set of sculptor pages in the book that also feature Paolozzi, Turnbull, Butler,

Elisabeth Frink, Meadows, Chadwick, F. E. McWilliam, and Adams.¹⁵ But by this time Armitage's artistic celebrity was European and international as well as national, and looking back today over his biography, it is extraordinary how much he had achieved outside Britain by the mid-1960s, by the time he was fifty. By this point, Armitage had seen his work enter public collections in many major European cities, including those in Paris, Brussels, Antwerp, Rome, Turin, Lugano, Hamburg, Wuppertal, and Duisburg, and had seen his sculpture and drawings included in exhibitions such as the *International Open Air Sculpture* exhibition at Sonsbeek (1953), *documenta i* and *documenta ii* in Kassel (1955 and 1959), and several solo exhibitions, including those in Ulm, Copenhagen, Gothenburg, Stockholm, Zurich, Zagreb, Duisburg, Berlin, and Nuremberg. German art museums were particularly responsive to his work, and this was furthered by Armitage's successful proposal for the "International War Memorial Competition" in Krefeld in 1956, and later through his Berlin Fellowship (1967-69). Soon he would be using the services of Hermann Noack Foundry in Berlin, used by Moore also, for the production of his bronze and aluminium sculpture. The British Council played an important role here, giving Armitage twelve exhibitions in the 1960s, of which five were part of an ambitious touring show of his work across Austria in 1962, stopping at Linz, Graz, Salzburg, Klagenfurt, and Vienna. Having works made in the same continent in which they were displayed made economic sense, and shows another area in which British sculpture had a crucial practical European dimension.

It is striking that the first small monograph on Armitage (to which Penrose contributed) was published in Germany in 1960, in a series featuring other European artists (a number of whom are relatively little known today) such as Karl Hosch, Giacomo Manzù, Bruno Saetti, A. H. Pellegrini, Giuseppe Santomaso, Alicia Penalba, César, and Lynn Chadwick, the only other British artist in this series.¹⁶ The same year he would feature in Robert Maillard's *Dictionnaire de la sculpture moderne*, nicely sandwiched between Alexander Archipenko and Hans Arp, and in the company of twenty-two other British sculptors including Frink and Leslie Thornton.¹⁷ Armitage's pan-European success was also accompanied by increasingly international recognition. This broader profile was a growing one, as John McEwen underlines on the occasion of Armitage's Yorkshire Sculpture Park exhibition in 1996, stating, not without a note of poignancy, that "Armitage today is probably more revered in places as far flung as Caracas, Brasilia, Sidney and Tokyo than he is at home. But through the 1950s and into the 1960s the same applied here."¹⁸ The 1950s and 1960s witnessed not only solo exhibitions at Bertha Schaefer (between 1954 and 1956) and Paul Rosenberg (in 1958 and 1962) in New York, but also Armitage's inclusion in Peter Selz's *New Images of Man* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1959.¹⁹ They also saw him in the 1957 São Paulo Bienal and in the *International Sculpture Exhibition* in Buenos

Aires in 1960. The 1960s would end for Armitage with him being awarded a CBE in, bringing both appreciation and the end of a chapter in a highly prolific career as a sculptor, as younger generations come to the fore.

McEwan's poignant words have a resonance more generally here for artists whose sculptures were displayed outside Britain in the 1960s. It was a decade in which British sculpture abroad was active on many different levels simultaneously, and with variously widening and decreasing circles of recognition and acclaim, as reputations faded in and out of focus, rising and falling on the national and international stage. Looking at this decade in more detail and honing in on less familiar moments and case studies will enable us to look at it afresh, and help us to complicate some of our assumptions and expectations about sculpture, both abroad and also in Britain during this period.

Footnotes

- 1 *Sculpture in the Open Air*, London County Council Exhibition at Battersea Park, May–September 1963: “The American exhibits have been chosen by the Museum of Modern Art in New York and they can be accepted as representatives of the great achievements of contemporary American sculptors” (exh. cat.). They included: Harry Bertoia, Alexander Calder, John Chamberlain, Herbert Ferber, Joseph Goto, Dimitri Hadzi, Raoul Hague, Seymour Lipton, Reuben Nakian, George Rickey, José de Rivera, James Rosati, Julius Schmidt, Jason Seley, David Smith, Richard Stankiewicz, and Peter Voulkos.
- 2 Others represented included: Takis, Sergio Camargo, Li Yuan-Chia, Soto, Alejandro Otero, and Antonio Calderara, amongst others.
- 3 See Bryan Robertson, “The Sixties”, in *Twenty Five Years Annely Juda Fine Art/Juda Rowan Gallery: Masterpieces of the Avantgarde: Three Decades of Contemporary Art* (London: Annely Juda Fine Art/Juda Rowan Gallery, 1985), 179–90.
- 4 Robertson, “The Sixties”, 189.
- 5 Lynne Cooke, “New Abstract Sculpture and its Sources”, in *British Sculpture in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Sandy Nairne and Nicholas Serota (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1981), 167.
- 6 Cooke, “New Abstract Sculpture and its Sources”, 167, note 2 (originally cited in C. Harrison, “Phillip King: Sculpture 1960–1968”, *Artforum* 7, no. 4 [Dec. 1968]: 33).
- 7 Alan Bowness, *The Conditions of Success: How the Modern Artist Rises to Fame* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1989), 11. Bowness's text is a useful way of thinking about such change. In this essay he outlined what he called the “four successive circles of recognition through which the exceptional artist passes on his path to fame. . . . peer recognition, critical recognition, patronage by dealers and collectors, and finally public acclaim.”
- 8 Margaret Garlake, *Britain and the São Paulo Bienal, 1951–1991* (London: British Council, 1991).
- 9 Bowness, *Conditions of Success*, 110–19.
- 10 See <http://visualarts.britishcouncil.org/exhibitions/exhibition/nine-living-british-sculptors-1965> (accessed 12 June 16).
- 11 See <http://visualarts.britishcouncil.org/exhibitions/exhibition/sculpture-anglaise-contemporaine-1968>
- 12 Philip James, ed., *Henry Moore on Sculpture* (London: MacDonald, 1966).
- 13 See Robert Slifkin, “Now Man's Bound to Fail, More”, in *Anglo–American Exchange in Postwar Sculpture, 1945–1975*, (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), http://www.getty.edu/museum/symposia/pdf_stark/stark_slifkin.pdf
- 14 Bryan Robertson, John Russell, and Lord Snowden, *Private View* (London: Nelson, 1965), 94–95.
- 15 Robertson, Russell, and Snowden, *Private View*, 78–99.
- 16 The “Artists of Our Time” series was published by Bodensee-Verlag, Amriswil. The 1973 Alecto Monograph, in which Charles Spencer's text appeared, was also published abroad, in this case in Italy.
- 17 English version: Robert Maillard, *A Dictionary of Modern Sculpture* (London: Methuen, 1962), 9–10. Armitage's entry was by Michael Middleton and emphasizes the humanist message of his sculpture. The other British sculptors included in Maillard's book were: Robert Adams, Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler, Anthony Caro, Lynn Chadwick, Geoffrey Clarke, Robert Clatworthy, Hubert Dalwood, Jacob Epstein, Walter Gilbert, Eric Gill, Barbara Hepworth, F. E. McWilliam, Kenneth Martin, Bernard Meadows, Henry Moore, Eduardo Paolozzi, Victor Pasmore, William Turnbull, Leon Underwood, and Austin Wright.
- 18 John McEwen, “Kenneth Armitage”, *Kenneth Armitage: 80th Birthday Survey* (Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 1996), 4.

- 19 Peter Selz's subsequent *Art of Assemblage* (Oct.–Nov. 1961) included John Latham's *Shem* (1958), which was subsequently acquired by Museum of Modern Art in New York.

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- Robertson, Bryan, John Russell, and Lord Snowden. *Private View*. London: Nelson, 1965.

British Constructivist Art

Sam Gathercole

Abstract

This case study takes as its object the exhibition British Constructivist Art, which toured the United States and Canada in 1961 and 1962. The exhibition is discussed in relation to the interests apparent in the work that it presented, but the main subject of the essay is the problematic reception of the work in an American cultural context.

Authors

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The exhibition *British Constructivist Art* opened at the Florida State University Gallery, Tallahassee, in October 1961, and went on to tour the United States and Canada, ending its run at Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey, in September 1962. The exhibition presented constructed abstract works by six “British” artists: Stephen Gilbert, Anthony Hill, Kenneth Martin, Mary Martin, Victor Pasmore, and American-born John Ernest. Since the early 1950s, these artists had together developed theories and practices that responded to the material and aesthetic potential of geometrical systems. A common interest in the environmental consequences and architectural implications of their work further bound the informally constituted group. As reputations grew and networks expanded, the “British Constructivists” achieved international recognition: Hill, the Martins, and Pasmore participated in the *Konkrete Kunst* exhibition in Zürich in 1960; Ernest, Hill, and Mary Martin participated in *Experiment in Constructie* in Amsterdam in 1962. *British Constructivist Art* was the group’s first co-ordinated foray into the United States. The artists each lent between four and six works: Hill, Mary Martin, Pasmore, and Ernest lent relief constructions; Gilbert lent sculptural constructions; and Kenneth Martin lent sculptural constructions and mobiles. The works were “small to medium” in size, and “made of a variety of woods, metals and/or plastics assembled in combinations” (fig. 1 and fig. 2).¹



Figure 1.

Installation View, *British Constructivist Art*, American Federation of Arts, New York, April-May 1962, showing works by, left to right, John Ernest and Stephen Gilbert Digital image courtesy of American Federation of Arts records, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

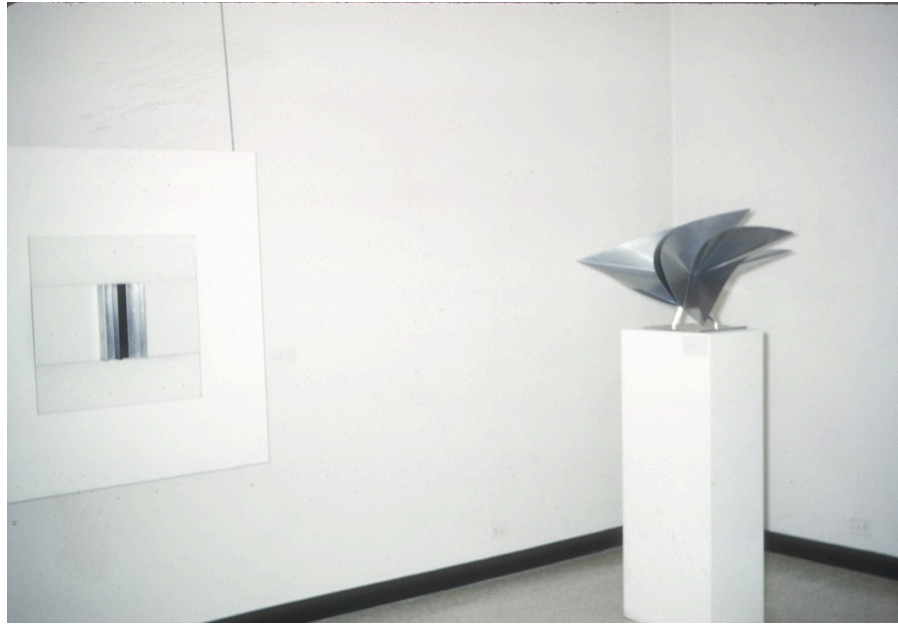


Figure 2.

Installation View, British Constructivist Art, American Federation of Arts, New York, April-May 1962, showing works by, left to right, Anthony Hill and Stephen Gilbert Digital image courtesy of American Federation of Arts records, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

British Constructivist Art was organized by the Exhibitions Committee of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, at the invitation of the American Federation of the Arts (AFA), New York, where the exhibition travelled from April to May 1962. The ICA had been founded in 1947 to, in part, “promote and define new trends in the arts”. It had represented American culture in London and acted as “a centre for the flow of cultural information” between the United States and Europe.² Within this context, the *British Constructivist Art* exhibition was organized to “help make more widely known a group of artists whose talent and invention has already been recognized in Europe”. The AFA was founded in 1907 “to cultivate the appreciation and foster the production of Art in America”.³

The critic and curator Lawrence Alloway was responsible for co-ordinating *British Constructivist Art*. An important figure at the ICA and a prominent member of the Independent Group, whose activities centred on and around the ICA, Alloway was also an enthusiastic champion of postwar British Constructivism. In the exhibition catalogue he defined Constructivism as “the act of *assembling*”; as “the compilation of separate elements which, as they are made to cohere, do not lose their individual clarity”; as “abolishing” the “continuous surfaces” presented by painting and “solid sculpture” in favour of “open, visible structures”.⁴

Alloway stressed the “environmental” character of the work produced by the British artists, but was keen to distinguish its “domestic” scale from the monumental scale anticipated by Russian Constructivism. The environmental claims of the British work were said to be apparent on a more intimate, human scale: “The light in the room in which a shiny-surfaced construction is placed, and the movement of the spectator, in relation to the light source and the art object, continually modifies the appearance of the work.” Alloway stressed the formal purity of the constructions over the social and political aspects associated with “the history and theory of Constructivism”, whilst also foregrounding the contingency of the work and the playful responsiveness of its reflective and transparent materiality. Such factors, it was here claimed, phenomenologically offset the “discipline”, “method”, and “precision”—the depersonalized formality—of the constructions: “Thus the construction becomes, in the experience of the spectator, a compound of the systematic and the unpredictable, of the formal and the unexpected.”

Alloway’s text for the *British Constructivist Art* catalogue can be read as an attempt to discuss the exhibition in terms consistent with those of the local (North American) culture. This necessarily involved a certain amount of de-theorizing of the work shown, so as to stress its visual interest, its material vitality, and its environmental sensitivity. In spite of his efforts—or perhaps, in part, because of them—the exhibition was politely, but rather indifferently, received in the press: a notice in the *New York Sunday Times* remarked upon “highly competent constructions”;⁵ another, in *Art News*, remarked upon “a pleasant, tidy exhibition”.⁶ The correspondent for the *Newark News* found more to marvel at, reporting on “an art as one might inspect in some cosmic terminal while changing missiles on route to Mars or Neptune.”⁷ However, such wondering was the exception, with commentators generally offering no more than faint praise for the exhibition. Indeed, such implicit damning was, on occasion, supplemented by a more explicit critique: “As pleasant as some of these constructions are”, *Art News* went on, “in their use of modern materials, in their craftsmanship, they are somehow non-vital.” It might be speculated that the quality of the works exhibited (as will be discussed shortly) in these particular exhibition conditions (as will be discussed later) could not transmit ideas sufficiently. The works needed theory, or at least something of the theoretical context that had informed their “method” of production (fig. 3).



Figure 3.

Installation View, British Constructivist Art, American Federation of Arts, New York, April-May 1962, showing works by, left to right, Victor Pasmore, Kenneth Martin, and Anthony Hill Digital image courtesy of American Federation of Arts records, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

The perception of the work as being “non-vital” comes, in part at least, from the constructions being handmade by the artists themselves. As they developed a constructive idiom, the artists had maintained a role as the primary makers of their work. Hill had experimented with ideas and practices of mass production in the 1950s, and the Martins both produced “multiple” works in the 1960s, but the artists predominantly fabricated the work themselves. The resulting combination of depersonalized geometries and (to an extent) rudimentarily skilled fabrication did not impress the reviewers: Brian O’Doherty (writing in the *New York Times*) reported on “weary” work of “a somewhat innocent vigor”.⁸ What O’Doherty referred to as the “very British”, “very proper” restraint of the work—the modesty of its materials, scale, and facture—lends the constructions an experimental and provisional quality. Indeed, one might regard the works as prototype forms towards architecturally scaled projects. Such a reading is not entirely inappropriate as the artists all declared an interest in working in architectural contexts and some realized notable architectural works, but it also implies that the work is somewhat unresolved. In this sense, there is a necessity to acknowledge the theoretical concerns as well as the material fact of the work.

In another respect, remarks such as those made in *Art News* and the *New York Times* might be understood in relation to the anti-European position taken in America by a number of established and emergent figures around this time. Art history tends to rehearse this position with reference to the American painter Frank Stella's characterization of "relational" European abstract art as "dreary" and "fussy".⁹ For Stella, the "non-relational" abstract work being produced in America in the late 1950s and 1960s was more vital than anything being produced in Europe. Alloway himself later summarized the relational as applying to works that "are subdivided and balanced with a hierarchy of forms, large-medium-small"; non-relational "refers to un-modulated monochromes, completely symmetrical layouts, or unaccented grids".¹⁰ He noted though that relationships persist in both categories, "even when the relations are those of continuity and repetition rather than of contrast and interplay". Stella had painting in mind in his remarks, but others around him like Donald Judd used similar terms in relation to sculpture. For Stella and Judd, European work fussed and fiddled within its space or frame, whereas American art was direct, assertive, and expansive.

The relatively modest spatial interventions made by the British Constructivists were, it would seem, undifferentiated from the broader (house-painter's!) brush cast over European abstract art. Although the British artists were, indeed, constructing internal relationships à la "relational" art, they were also—as Alloway was so keen to stress—extending the works' particular space into that of the immediate environment both physically in terms of projected elements and perceptually through the use of reflective and transparent materials. Such extension opened the work up to levels of contingency that move beyond the caricature of works of European abstract art as being preciously configured. The constructions physically occupied and extended into space, and the construction processes typically involved formal systems of indeterminate growth that were similarly open and expansive.

The few installation photographs that survive of the exhibition show wall-mounted reliefs suspended on wires (see figs. 1, 2, 3). The artists had intended the wall to read as the final level of the relief and as an integral part of the work. Works were therefore designed to be hung flush to the wall. The slight angle between relief and wall created by the suspension wires compromises this effect, as do the visible wires themselves. The potential of the work was not best represented in the installation, so its implications were not fully apparent to the exhibition's audience and respondents. The finer points of this are somewhat by-the-by: the more significant point is that the work of the British Constructivists did not register within the American cultural posturing of the time.

Alloway himself developed terms that sought to overcome any sense of continental difference. He distinguished a “platonic phase” of interwar abstract art from an “existential phase” of postwar abstract art.¹¹ In the interwar period, geometry was regarded as “a mysterious symbolising agent”; as “a code by means of which absolute values could be signified”. In the postwar period, geometry had been “humanised” and was regarded as being of “a specifically human order”. With reference to the British Constructivists, Alloway had, as early as 1954, noted a postwar emphasis on the “concrete”, material fact of the work in a physical environment.¹² Alloway’s model was developed in response to British Constructivism, but it accommodates (and anticipates) a range of postwar practices, including—latterly—American Minimalism. Again though, such modelling is not apparent in the reception of *British Constructivist Art*. O’Doherty (mistakenly) interpreted the exhibition in relation to interwar Constructivism instead of anything “existential”. Here, Kenneth Martin is described as “a good Pevsner-influenced constructor of spiral shapes around a vertical axis”.¹³ And, the absence of work made by Ben Nicholson in the 1930s (and beyond) rendered the exhibition as something like “Hamlet without the Prince.” What O’Doherty was apparently unaware of is the distinct ground occupied by these artists in Britain; the ground that they had negotiated in Britain over the previous ten years.

When the works returned to Britain (after some delay) in 1963, they almost instantly formed the core of another exhibition, *Construction England*, which was organized by the Arts Council and toured England and Wales that same year. For this exhibition, the “*British Constructivist Art Six*” were joined by eight others (several of whom had been taught by one or more of the “Six”). In his introduction to the catalogue for this exhibition, Alan Bowness took the opportunity to (indirectly) respond to some of the criticisms levelled at *British Constructivist Art* in the United States. He indicated, for instance, that Ben Nicholson’s work was not included as “his reliefs are patently the work of a painter, and do not seem to accord with the spirit of this exhibition.”¹⁴ More significantly though, Bowness remarked on “considerable progress” in the previous decade “in that kind of modern art most aware of new tendencies in scientific and mathematical thought”. He went on, “But for a variety of mostly very obvious reasons, this has also been the least fashionable kind of modern art, with much of the best work done away from the centres of New York and Paris.”

Out of step with the work celebrated in the “centres”, Alloway also remarked that the British Constructivists worked “in opposition to public and official taste” in Britain (where “the pressures of lingering Romanticism” prevailed).¹⁵ The artists thus occupied a peculiarly isolated position at home and abroad; an isolation that was unfortunate given the environmental and

internationalist ambitions of the work they produced. Mary Martin wrote of working in the 1950s, “surrounded by Romanticism, English provincialism, Paris School abstract art and the first waves of Tachism and Action Painting. Without some detachment one could not have survived.”¹⁶ Reviewing the period from the vantage point of 1969, Martin indicated that the situation had not changed (“only some of the names”). With “detachment” being thus regarded as a strategic necessity, it is unsurprising that the patient project being pursued by Martin and those around her (committed, as it was, to rapidly fading principles drawn from the European modern movement) failed to significantly register in the United States, where a more urgent cultural discourse was being asserted.

Footnotes

- 1 Anon., *British Constructivist Art* “Press Release”, in American Federation of Arts records, 1895–1993, bulk 1909–1969, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Box 50, Exhibition 61–21 (thereafter AFA).
- 2 ICA statement signed by Herbert Read and Roland Penrose (but likely written by Lawrence Alloway), in *British Constructivist Art*, exh. cat. (Tonbridge: Whitefriars Press, 1961), unpaginated.
- 3 AFA statement in *British Constructivist Art*.
- 4 Lawrence Alloway, “Introduction”, in *British Constructivist Art*, unpaginated.
- 5 Anon., “This Week Around the Galleries”, *New York Sunday Times*, 20 May 1962 (clipping in AFA records, see note 1).
- 6 “L.C.” in undated 1962 issue of *Art News* (clipping in AFA records).
- 7 Michael Lenson, “The Realm of Art”, *Newark News*, 15 Sept. 1962 (clipping in AFA records).
- 8 Brian O’Doherty, “British Constructivists Hold an Exhibition”, *New York Times*, 12 May 1962 (clipping in AFA records).
- 9 See Bruce Glaser, “Questions to Stella and Judd”(1966), in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (London: Studio Vista, 1969), 148–64.
- 10 Lawrence Alloway, “Systemic Painting” (1966), in *Minimal Art*, ed. Battcock, 45.
- 11 Lawrence Alloway, “Lawrence Alloway on Max Bill”, in *Max Bill*, exh. cat. (Buffalo, NY: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1974), 11–18.
- 12 Lawrence Alloway, *Nine Abstract Artists: Their Work and Theory* (London: Tiranti, 1954).
- 13 O’Doherty, “British Constructivists Hold an Exhibition”.
- 14 Alan Bowness, “Introduction”, in *Construction England*, exh. cat. (London: Arts Council, 1963), unpaginated.
- 15 Lawrence Alloway, “Introduction”, in *British Constructivist Art*. [fn] Lawrence Alloway, “Introduction”, in *British Constructivist Art*.
- 16 Mary Martin, “Notes on Biederman”, *Studio International* 178, no. 914 (Sept. 1969): 60.

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“Induced Tension”: A Forgotten Chapter in the History of British Sculpture in the USA

Arie Hartog

Abstract

This essay looks at the reception of the sculptor Reg Butler in the USA and the role of Addison Franklin Page. This art historian, who was the first Curator of Contemporary Art at the Detroit Institute of Arts, has been overlooked in the history of modern sculpture although (or because) his work represents an alternative narrative to dominant art history in the aftermath of Clement Greenberg. Page was an important exponent of the American tradition of art education. His core ideas were that art had a meaning for society as a whole and that every individual can read a work of art symbolically. Within this framework Butler became important. The decline of these ideas and the rise of new elitist ideals of art may explain why Butler’s reputation has been omitted from prevailing narratives of the period. Between them, Butler and Page suggest alternatives to dominant art history.

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The first retrospective of the British sculptor Reg Butler (1913–1981) was held in October 1963 in the USA. The J. B. Speed Art Museum in Louisville showed 104 works, including 61 sculptures. Afterwards a female benefactor gifted one of the exhibited works, the first cast of the bronze *St Catherine* (fig. 1), to the museum. In 2012 this work was discarded from the collection as a “secondary example” and sold through an auction house in New York.¹ A British artist who had ranked as one of the most important contemporary sculptors in the early 1960s had become irrelevant.²



Figure 1.

Reg Butler, *St Catherine*, 1959, bronze, 54.6 × 45.1 × 45.1 cm.
Private Collection Digital image courtesy of Christie's Images /
Bridgeman Images

Running in the background to this shift was the confrontation between the world's formerly pre-eminent empire, which was now using culture as its only remaining means of international influence, and a new global player which understood art as part of its foreign policy mix. This was evident visually from the international exhibitions of the 1950s and early 1960s, and is

reinforced in print by the exchange of views of two art critics, the British Herbert Read and the American Clement Greenberg.³ Both represented completely different views about the medium of sculpture: in September 1963, when the British sculptor Anthony Caro (1924–2013) brought the New York ideas about disembodied three-dimensional constructive sculpture back to his native country in his first solo exhibition at the London Whitechapel Art Gallery, it quickly became clear which view would shape the future.

Greenberg's verdict on the work of Reg Butler was scathing. But today's common knowledge of that condemnation has caused Butler's positive reception in the USA—reflected in the thirty documented museum acquisitions and an as yet unknown, but significant, number of purchases by private individuals—to be overlooked. When Butler began having his bronzes cast by Susse Frères in Paris in 1956, half of every edition went to the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York.⁴ The catalogue for the exhibition in Louisville mentions loans from twenty-five private collectors in the United States. A cursory glance at Butler's reception in the US brings to light processes and writings which are generally overlooked today. The dismissal of Butler's *St Catherine* as "secondary" in 2012 is symptomatic of today's relatively narrow art-historical narrative about the period post-1945, a time when conversely a very broad spectrum of artistic production was taking place. Butler's work around 1960 was rooted in a different narrative, which—once the bare bones of it have been reconstructed—yields pointers towards the forgotten diversity of sculpture at this period.⁵ The examples of the now-famous Caro and near-forgotten Butler also remind us in passing that the interplay between Britain and the US was more complex than is generally assumed. The understandable impulse to reduce artists to their national origins seems to cause this confusion. Sometimes sculpture that was ostensibly British either came from the US (Caro) or only exerted a particular influence across the Atlantic, as in Butler's case.

I

Clement Greenberg's famous essay of 1956 about the American sculptor David Smith (1906–1965) is probably the clearest indication of Butler's prominence in the US. In this piece, Butler and his colleague Lynn Chadwick (1914–2003) are appropriated as negative foils in order to prove the particular qualities of Greenberg's favourite: Smith is what Butler is not, and that is why he is good, according to Greenberg's line of argument. This only made sense because the author could safely assume that his readers knew the British sculptor's work. The reference is directed towards the 1955 exhibition *The New Decade* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, where twenty-two contemporary European painters and sculptors were presented; prominent among these had been the British sculptors Kenneth Armitage

(1916–2002), Butler, and Chadwick. In opposition to the expressive tradition that had emerged in Europe, Greenberg was setting a genuinely American tradition, which revolved around the essence of the given medium and a radical rejection of all and any content. The British sculptors, Greenberg wrote in his essay on Smith, were repeating the language of classic modernism without really having advanced it. Therefore he found even the works of classic European sculptors like Gerhard Marcks (1889–1981) and Fritz Wotruba (1907–1975) a good deal more convincing than the seemingly modern, linear work of the Brits.⁶ The fact that since 1952 Butler's work had moved away from welded iron frames and was now combining modelled bodies with constructions, had not been registered by the critic—or, more to the point, was irrelevant to his argument. From his perspective on the essence of sculpture, this was perhaps a retrograde step, whereas for Butler it was quite the opposite, a way to extend the possibilities of his medium.⁷

In 1959, Butler's work figured in the exhibition *New Images of Man* at the Museum of Modern Art, which brought together American and European expressive figurative art containing an existential message about humanity. Contrary to the developments in New York, content rather than media-specific aspects determined the selection. While the exhibition is now maligned for having constructed a false opposition between abstract and figurative art,⁸ art history took it as the basis from which to construct a somewhat oversimplifying contrast between an American formal and a European existential tradition. The latter certainly has some explanatory value but should be supplemented with details and intermediate positions.

II

Butler's retrospective in Louisville was the first exhibition of international contemporary art at the J. B. Speed Art Museum. It was initiated by Addison Franklin Page (1911–1999), the museum's director at the time. Nowadays largely forgotten, this art historian played an important part in the reception of British sculpture in the US, so it is all the more striking that his name goes unmentioned in scholarship. Born in Princeton, Kentucky, Page studied at Wayne State University in Detroit; initially painting and sculpture with Gilbert Alden Smith (1912–1993) and subsequently the history of art. In 1947 he became Junior Art Curator in the Educational Department of the Detroit Institute of Arts. His first documented publication of any size was a picture book about modern sculpture in the collection, which exemplifies attempts during the postwar period to communicate modern art to a wider public.⁹ In 1954, Page was promoted to the position of Assistant Curator in the Education Department. In the annual reports of the Detroit museum, he crops up as the initiator of panel discussions on contemporary art.

Page was well known as an expert on contemporary sculpture. In the summer of 1955 he had travelled to Europe, where he attended the third Biennale for contemporary sculpture in Middelheim Park in Antwerp, and probably also the international exhibition in Park Sonsbeek in Arnhem.¹⁰

The following year, the San Francisco Museum of Art invited him as a speaker on the subject. He also wrote book reviews of Henry Schaefer-Simmern's *Sculpture in Europe Today* and Carola Giedion-Welcker's *Contemporary Sculpture* in *Art Quarterly*.¹¹ Although the reviews are relatively short, they permit a cautious art-historical positioning of Page in the context of contemporaneous debates on modern sculpture. He emphasized the role of spatial perception and feeling over any form of verbalization. Furthermore, he explicitly distanced himself from two positions which were to dominate thinking about art: the idea that art is a self-contained system and the idea that literature and psychology have nothing to do with visual art; both of which left him unconvinced.

In May 1957 Page was appointed the first Curator of Contemporary Art at the Detroit Institute of Arts. The first contemporary sculptures to be acquired after this were British: Barbara Hepworth's *Curved Form with String* (1956) and Butler's *Cassandra* (1953).¹² His first exhibition with a supra-regional impact was *Sculpture in Our Time* from the collection of Joseph H. Hirshhorn.¹³ The exhibition was shown in the summer of 1959 in Detroit, and subsequently toured seven other North American cities in a reduced form. For the first time an American public could see the vast spectrum of contemporary sculpture. In his introduction to the exhibition catalogue, Page makes no mention of David Smith as an example of a contemporary American sculptor, citing instead Herbert Ferber (1906–1991), Seymour Lipton (1903–1986), and Theodore Roszak (1907–1981). The great diversity that characterized Hirschhorn's collection, he acknowledged, raised the question of the "community of spirit" that renders it accessible to the viewer. Page's writings are never resolute. The impression he gives is that he sees contemporary sculpture principally as an occasion to address questions to artworks, at a time when the roles of criticism and art history were in flux. While the wider public now accepts modern art—Page asserts—what really matters is that it takes on some meaning in their lives.

III

For Page, a modern artwork was first and foremost an object produced by an artist which enables a viewer to have a psychological response—this being the only way in which a work can transcend mere existence. This position is dismissed as utterly and self-evidently "romantic" today, but explains the success of modern sculpture with wider sections of the public: it is how this art acquired meaning. Since the viewer's individual psychological response is

undergoing a renaissance in present-day art education, it seems important to recall the origins of this approach in the mainly American-led field of art education since the 1930s.

Page was personally familiar with Butler's work, probably since his trip to Europe in 1955, and possibly even before that. In 1960 he visited the artist at his studio in Berkhamsted in Hertfordshire.¹⁴ Their contact intensified, and when the Pierre Matisse Gallery showed Butler's work in 1962, a questionnaire by Page and a detailed letter of reply from the sculptor were reproduced in the catalogue. Among other things, Page asked about the disappearance of Butler's floating figures and the statue-like heavy mass of his most recent works, and elicited from Butler a response in which he expressed his view of the psychological aspects (glances) of a figure as sculptural energies aside from the mass, and thereby gave an impression of his broader and thoroughly deliberated concept of sculpture.¹⁵

The first solo exhibition of a contemporary artist that Page organized as the new director in Louisville was about Butler. A remarkable catalogue was published for the exhibition in which Page linked all the works on show into a coherent narrative, and in the process articulated the existential feelings conveyed by the figures (fig. 2). The first chapter described Butler's development up to 1947 and the beginnings of a new style in his drawings. The main text guided the reader around the works in the exhibition and ended with a short epilogue, which presented the artist's newest ideas in plaster, more or less straight from the studio, and set out to elucidate the fundamental openness of Butler's development. These ideas related to six figures, three small heads (fig. 3), and the design for *Great Tower*.¹⁶ Page quoted the sculptor:

Perhaps a "face" can only be convincing any more in sculpture so small that it is on the threshold of vision; perhaps only so can it compete with the fleeting experience which passes across a television cinema screen . . . the dimension of time overcomes our disbelief in the cinema by perhaps the same effect as is achieved by the minuteness of these heads.¹⁷

The quote shows how Butler thought through the classic categories of his medium (perception in space and time) in relation to contemporary challenges. On the other hand, the architecture of the tower, he claimed, had been the only remaining possibility for a sculptor to continue working monumentally today. Both scenarios, however, are signs of a crisis of the figure for Butler: signs that the artist was on a quest for fundamental decisions and was running up against the limits of his art.¹⁸

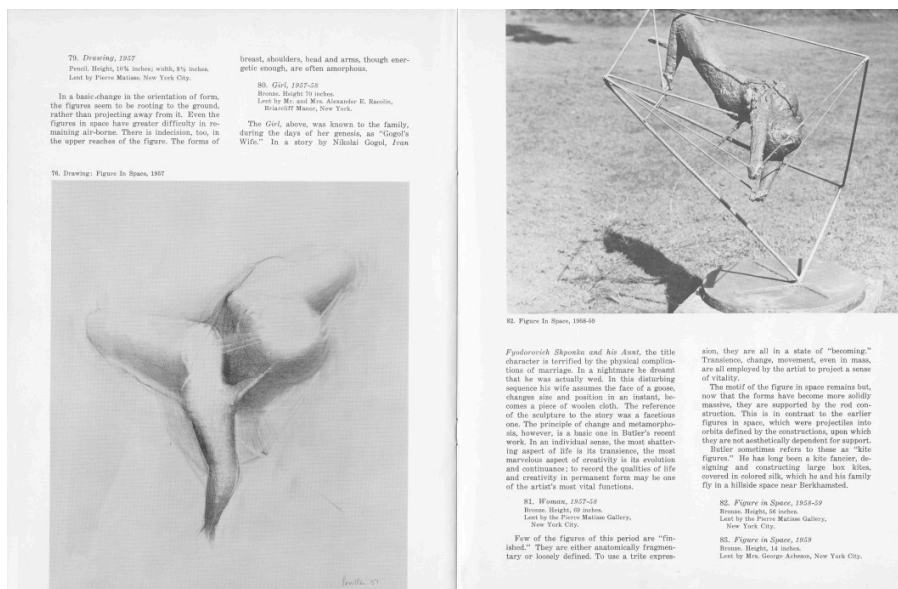


Figure 2.
Double-page spread, Reg Butler: A Retrospective Exhibition, exh. cat., J. B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY, 1963

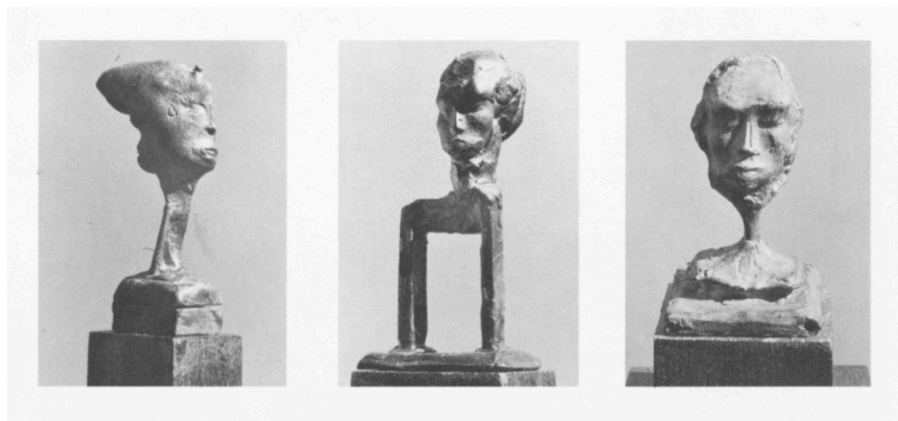


Figure 3.
Detail, Reg Butler: A Retrospective Exhibition, exh. cat., J. B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY, 1963

The exhibition in Louisville, a month after Caro's presentation in London, marked the peak of Butler's international career. After this, for unexplained reasons, the sculptor withdrew from the public eye and did not pursue further the scenarios that he was working on in 1963. Butler's fundamental idea of making individual modern art which could provide society with symbolic images appeared to have failed, despite the fact that in Addison Franklin Page he had found a partner who shared and actively propounded this view.¹⁹ Neither Butler in Berkhamsted nor Page in Louisville, however, played any role in the subsequent development of sculpture.

IV

In 1964, the Art Association of Indianapolis received Butler's *Figure in Space—Catapult* (1959; fig. 4) as an endowment, probably directly from the exhibition in Louisville. Page wrote a brief text about it, in which he said that the hallmark of all art was "induced tension". This tension could be "intellectual, physical, mental or any other conceivable kind". Although the *Figures in Space* were a series, he continued, Butler had taken completely different aspects as the theme in each of the sculptures. Some figures are perceived as flying, others as tortured, although this was not open interpretation but merely showed that unless completed by a communicative experience and the viewer's imagination, Butler's work only half exists. In this writing Page once again emphasized the communicative aspect of Butler's art.²⁰



Figure 4.

Reg Butler, *Figure in Space—Catapult*, 1959, bronze, 61 cm high.
Indianapolis Museum of Art Digital image courtesy of Indianapolis Museum of Art.

Page belonged to the category of art historians who saw a "Western" tradition that was determined by the human figure in the broadest sense. Communication not about, but with, the artwork was the aim. In 1965 the museum in Louisville presented the exhibition *The Figure in Sculpture, 1865–1965*, with twenty-five sculptures from Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) to Richard Stankiewicz (1922–1983) as representative of the most recent positions.²¹ In the same exhibition, Page also showcased works by Barney Bright (1927–1997), thereby continuing the tradition initiated in Detroit by

Clyde Burroughs (1882–1973) of including local artists in international exhibitions.²² The exhibition included just one work from the museum's own collection, however: Reg Butler's *St Catherine*.²³

The connection between the British sculptor Reg Butler and the American art historian Addison Franklin Page which has been alluded to only briefly here, gives three pointers for further research into the history of modern sculpture. Firstly, in the 1950s, museums in the US had a strong interest in modern art for the wider public. That need was met by the expressive tradition of the British sculptors from the generation after Henry Moore, because, secondly, its generally comprehensible images permitted individual perception and communication. Thirdly, the disappearance of this art from the museums and from art-historical consciousness is the logical consequence of developments after 1963, and of the radical constriction of the concept of sculpture to questions of media. Remembering Butler and Page keeps other alternatives in mind.

Translated by Deborah Shannon—Academic Translation

Footnotes

- ¹ Christie's New York, Sale 2576, Christie's Interiors, 28–29 Aug. 2012, lot 32. For references and support in obtaining material I am grateful to Mayken Jonkman (RKD, The Hague), Miranda Lash (Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY) and Amy Purcell (Archives, University of Louisville).
- ² The museum still owns four drawings by Butler, as I was kindly informed by Miranda Lash.
- ³ David Getsy, "Tactility or Opticality, Henry Moore or David Smith: Herbert Read and Clement Greenberg on *The Art of Sculpture, 1956*", in *Rereading Read: New Views on Herbert Read*, ed. Michael Paraskos (London: Freedom Press, 2007), 152–67.
- ⁴ Margaret Garlake, *The Sculpture of Reg Butler* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2006), 66.
- ⁵ On diversity as a hallmark of the period, see Arie Hartog, "Winners and Losers—On English and West German Sculpture Between 1945 and 1965", in *Those Early Years: British and German Art after 1945*, ed. Carina Plath (Cologne: Snoeck, 2014), 56–63.
- ⁶ Clement Greenberg, "David Smith", *Art in America* 69 (Winter 1956/57): 30–34; reprinted in John O'Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 3: *Affirmations and Refusals: 1950–1956* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 275–79.
- ⁷ See Arie Hartog, "Decent Sculpture: Der Bildhauer Reg Butler", in *Reg Butler: Decent Sculpture*, exh. cat. (Bremen: Gerhard-Marcks-Haus, 2006), 33–47.
- ⁸ Dennis Raverty, "Critical Perspectives on New Images of Man", *Art Journal* 53, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 62–64.
- ⁹ William A. Bostick and Addison Franklin Page, *Modern Sculpture: A Picture Book of Modern Sculpture in the Detroit Institute of Arts* (Detroit, MI: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1950).
- ¹⁰ A. F. Page, [Review of] Henry Schaefer-Simmern, *Sculpture in Europe Today*, *Art Quarterly* no. 16 (1956): 223–24, in which Page reports on his visit to Antwerp.
- ¹¹ Lecture: *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 36, no. 2 (Annual Report Number) (1956/57): 39. Reviews: Page, [Review of] Henry Schaefer-Simmern, *Sculpture in Europe Today* (1956), A. F. Page, [Review of] Carola Giedion-Welcker, *Contemporary Sculpture*, *Art Quarterly* no. 19 (1956): 326–28.
- ¹² A. F. Page, "Recent Gifts from the Friends of Modern Art", *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 36, no. 3 (1956/57): 70–72.
- ¹³ Oral history interview with William Bostick, 11–19 Aug. 1981, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-william-bostick-11715>, last accessed 28 June 2015).
- ¹⁴ Garlake, *Sculpture of Reg Butler*, 25. Contrary to her assumption, at that time Page was not yet the director at Louisville.
- ¹⁵ Butler's complex, shifting concept of sculpture is a worthwhile theme for further research.

- 16 The three heads are missing from the catalogue raisonné (Garlake, *Sculpture of Reg Butler*).
- 17 *Reg Butler: A Retrospective Exhibition*, exh. cat. (Louisville, KY: J. B. Speed Art Museum, 1963), [34].
- 18 On Butler's crisis around 1963, see Garlake, *Sculpture of Reg Butler*, 25, 84–85, 90–94; Hartog, "Decent Sculpture", 46–47.
- 19 Hartog, "Decent Sculpture", 40–46.
- 20 A. F. Page, "Figure in Space by Reg Butler", *Bulletin of the Art Association of Indianapolis* 51 (1964): 29–32.
- 21 *The Figure in Sculpture, 1865–1965*, exh. cat. (Louisville, KY: J. B. Speed Art Museum, 1965).
- 22 Interview with William Bostick (1981).
- 23 In 1965 the sculpture also figured prominently in an essay by Page. A. F. Page, "20th Century Sculpture", *Art Education* 18, no. 8 (1965): 25–27.

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Page, A. F. "Figure in Space by Reg Butler." *Bulletin of the Art Association of Indianapolis* 51 (1964): 29–32.

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---. [Review of] Henry Schaefer-Simmern, *Sculpture in Europe Today*. *Art Quarterly* no. 16 (1956): 223–24.

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Raverty, Dennis. "Critical Perspectives on New Images of Man." *Art Journal* 53, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 62–64.

Reg Butler: A Retrospective Exhibition. Louisville, KY: J. B. Speed Art Museum, 1963.

Hybrid Sculpture of the 1960s

John J. Curley

Abstract

In 1965-66, British artists Gerald Laing and Peter Phillips exhibited their sculpture Hybrid in New York City. This object was the result of gathering and tabulating the artistic preferences of over 130 critics, collectors, curators, and gallerists, mostly in New York and London.

Considering Hybrid's international scope, its origin as dematerialized data, and its participation in the mid-1960s penchant for confusing notions of painting and sculpture, it questions the very parameters implied by the term "British Sculpture".

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Cite as

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This special issue of *British Art Studies* is focused upon international notions of “British sculpture” in the postwar period. I want to begin this short essay by questioning the stability of this descriptive category. With a networked world of international exhibitions and art magazines in the 1950s and 1960s (at least among the United States and Western Europe), do national categorizations still make sense? Medium distinctions are equally unstable, as major figures at this moment were producing paintings that aspired to the condition of objects and vice-versa.

The work of Anthony Caro demonstrates the problems with the label “British sculpture”. While he is, of course, a British sculptor, his works—especially his painted steel sculptures from the 1960s—were until recently most often discussed in relation to American painters like Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland, as well as the American critics Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried.

¹ By this logic, his *Early One Morning* from 1962 is as “American” as it is “British”, considering its discursive position in the 1960s. Furthermore, Caro’s work during the decade was sometimes shown with paintings in major international exhibitions, whether British or American, and not always with other sculpture. In the British Pavilion at the 1966 Venice Biennale, he was the lone sculptor showing alongside four painters, for example. ² *Noland, Louis, Caro*, an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1968, demonstrates the fluidity of both national and medium designations. Caro’s work from this period, especially in international exhibitions, thus expressed two variants of hybridity: a transnational, Anglo-American hybridity and a transmedial one, residing between painting and sculpture. Thus, in an international context, Caro’s work can question the singularity of both the terms “British” and “sculpture”. This blurring of national and medium-specific distinctions in the 1960s was by no means unique to Caro; in fact, the important exhibition *Primary Structures* at New York’s Jewish Museum in 1966 brought together artists from both Britain and the United States under the rubric of reappraising “the inherent nature of a painting or a sculpture”. ³

For a further discussion of Caro’s work abroad, see [Sarah Stanners’s essay](#) in this special issue.

It is fitting that it took two British painters, temporarily residing in the United States in the mid-1960s, to create an object that fully encapsulates this hybridity and charts its implications. The artists were Gerald Laing (1936–2011) and Peter Phillips (b. 1939), and the sculpture is, almost too perfectly, entitled *Hybrid* from 1965–66 (fig. 1). In the early 1960s, Laing and Phillips had been loosely grouped with the second generation of British Pop painters such as David Hockney, Derek Boshier, and Pauline Boty. Both Laing and Phillips explored themes and motifs associated with the mass media, including starlets and car culture. What clearly interests Laing in his painting *Brigitte Bardot* from 1963 is the translation of the French starlet into a halftone newspaper image; as he said later, “We don’t know Brigitte

Bardot—we know her through the newspaper image.”⁴ As a handmade object resembling a mass-produced one, Laing’s mediated technique thematizes the image as information to be distributed. Choosing Bardot as his subject emphasizes the globalized nature of the image, since she was among the most famous faces in the Western world at this moment. Phillips, on the other hand, gained renown in the early 1960s for his paintings that incorporated the subject matter of machines and games. In *The Entertainment Machine* (1961), viewers see circuits and what appears to be an encryption apparatus in the lower right quadrant. In part, the painting suggests a correlation between the numbers and squares of colour visible on the spindle.

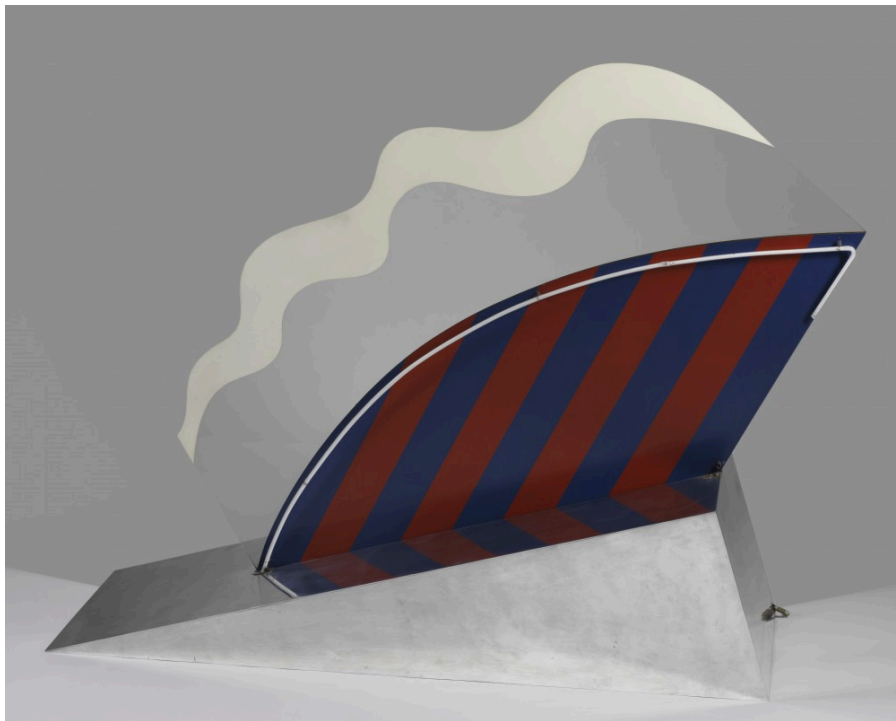


Figure 1.

Gerald Laing and Peter Phillips, *Hybrid*, 1966, aluminium, acrylic plastic, white neon, 132.4 × 175.2 × 43.7 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of The Collection of John and Kimiko Powers, 1977.16 Digital image courtesy of President and Fellows of Harvard College / Photo: Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum Imaging Department

Both Laing and Phillips, like many American and European Pop artists such as Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter, and Sigmar Polke, were thus interested in paintings that thematized the translation of found, pre-existing images into code or information, whether a transformation of Bardot into a halftone screen or depictions of playful encryption machines.⁵ And when these two painters made a sculpture in the mid-1960s while residing in the US, they addressed, among other things, thorny questions about how such an approach to art making could be applied to three-dimensional objects. In

what ways can a sculpture be transformed into information, into data? How can one make an object that addresses notions of image transmission, a theme so important to many Pop painters? Can the very process of cultural export and expectations create a work of art? Put simply, *Hybrid* is a transnational sculpture that can be reduced to transmittable information. And, furthering the implication of the title, the information was a tabulation of averaged Anglo-American artistic tastes.

Laing and Phillips set out, methodically, to make an ideal work of art based on market research. The painters first constructed two sample kits with numbered examples of different colours, materials, and finishes, reminiscent of the kind of boxes taken door-to-door by the era's salesmen (fig. 2). Laing and Phillips then spent ten months questioning 137 critics, curators, art publishers, and collectors, mostly from New York and London (although some were based in Los Angeles and Paris). Respondents included Lawrence Alloway, Ryner Banham, John Canaday, Leo Castelli, Max Kozloff, Norbert Lynton, and Robert Fraser.⁶ The only parameter the artists outlined was that the object would be for a "sitting room".⁷ As we can see in the completed questionnaire of Harry Abrams, the art publisher based in New York, respondents chose the quantity and type of variables within four categories for their ideal work: material, colour, pattern, and finish (fig. 3), using the corresponding number from the sample kit. Then, respondents coloured-in a percentage of a diamond-shape to indicate the desired proportion for each of the selected varieties. For instance, Abrams's wishes dictated a sculpture comprised of 25 percent of two colours and diminishing percentages of six more. On the left side of the questionnaire, there were simpler tick-the-box questions: two-dimensional or three-dimensional? Open or closed? Figurative or non-figurative? Finally, respondents could indicate the ideal size of the object. Each questionnaire, therefore, gathered a detailed account of the respondent's aesthetic preferences; in total, the 137 completed forms represent an overwhelming amount of data to process.



Figure 2.

Gerald Laing and Peter Phillips, Hybrid Sample Box, 1965, box with mounted Plexiglas wheel and various sample materials, box closed: 11.1 x. 25.4 x 27 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of The Collection of John and Kimiko Powers, 1977.16.1 Digital image courtesy of President and Fellows of Harvard College / Photo: Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum Imaging Department

hybrid		Peter Harrison						
NAME: H.N. ABRAMS		MATERIAL	54	57	58	10	13	8
ADDRESS: H.N. ABRAMS INC 6 W 57 N.Y.C.		PROPORTION						
RESEARCHER: GL		COLOR	60	2	9	14	11	15
TWO DIMENSIONAL <input type="checkbox"/>		PROPORTION						
THREE DIMENSIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		PATTERN	1					
OPEN <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		PROPORTION						
CLOSED <input type="checkbox"/>		FINISH	1					
FIGURATIVE <input type="checkbox"/>		PROPORTION						
NON-FIGURATIVE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
HEIGHT: 48"								
WIDTH: 12"								
DEPTH: 12"								

Figure 3.

Gerald Laing and Peter Phillips, Hybrid Answer Sheets (146 Forms), 1965, graphite and blue, purple, and black ink on blue paper, 21.5 x 27.9 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of The Collection of John and Kimiko Powers, 1977.16.3 Digital image courtesy of President and Fellows of Harvard College / Photo: Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum Imaging Department

The first page from a *Life* magazine article on the project captures the endless possibilities available for the work of art: “How do you want it to look? What format: Two-dimensional? Three-dimensional? What style: Figurative? Abstract? Pointillist? Pop? What material: Bronze? Plastic? Rubber? Feathers?”⁸ The data on each of the standardized forms was then fed into IBM computers at Bell Laboratories to come up with the parameters for the consensus object, which ended up, for example, as 28.6 percent aluminium, 30 percent Plexiglas, and 23.6 percent brass.⁹ Laing and Phillips made two full-size models (priced at US\$1,100 each) and ten maquettes (US\$150 each). These were exhibited at New York’s Kornblee Gallery in 1966, with the large ones “rotat[ing] on turntables like new cars on display”.¹⁰ The artists also mounted a marketing campaign with badges and a poster that, in the words of Phillips, mimicked the look and attitude of the now-classic Volkswagen ads from the period, even naming their company “Hybrid Enterprises”.¹¹ With coverage in national magazines such as *Life* and *Time*, as well as a cover story in *Arts Magazine*, such publicity methods were clearly effective. While it was reported as a novelty story in the mass press, *Hybrid* nevertheless exposed in clear and explicit ways the repressed links between fashion trends, marketing, and the seemingly rarefied realm of

contemporary art. And if the American press can be considered its own space of exhibition, perhaps no sculpture was more visible in 1966 than that of Laing and Phillips.

Of course, the finished sculpture did not materialize from the data alone. Lawrence Alloway reported on the unavoidable arbitrariness of the process: “Laing and Phillips made drawings from the collated statistics, translating the results into visual form, and of course there were many possible variables of interpretation.”¹² As Alex Taylor has recently noted, the realization of the sculpture was “laboriously manual”, involving numerous sketches by the artists.¹³ Phillips himself remembers that the computer calculations did not supply guide images.¹⁴ As with the translation of an object, portrait, or environment into a photograph, then into newsprint, and finally into a Pop painting (like a Warhol or Laing), the voyage from compiled survey data to finalized sculpture involves the friction and “noise” of mediation and artistic choices. Laing and Phillips could have realized *Hybrid* in many different configurations.

Hybrid functions on many levels—notably anticipating Hans Haacke’s and Komar and Melamid’s later work based upon polling data.¹⁵ For the purposes of this essay, however, it raises two crucial issues about British sculpture in an international context in the 1960s. First, we see an explicit attempt to give form to mid-1960s Anglo-American tastes, especially with the project’s focus on critics, curators, publishers, and collectors—those involved in what Phillips called the “business of art”, its marketing.¹⁶ What is particularly intriguing, as David Mellor has noted, is that *Hybrid* resembles the look of British New Generation sculpture, like examples by William Tucker, Phillip King, and David Annesley.¹⁷ Along these lines, *Hybrid* was on view in New York at the exact time of the opening of *Primary Structures*, the important show curated by Kynaston McShine at the Jewish Museum that I referenced at the start. The exhibition is best known for placing these New Generation sculptors alongside more hard-edged American artists that came to be associated with Minimalism. *Hybrid* and *Primary Structures* thus exemplify a brief, fleeting transatlantic consensus about what contemporary sculpture should look like in the mid-1960s.

Laing and Phillips each had sculptures on view in *Primary Structures*. Laing’s *Trace* (1965) is a ribbon-like form shown against a wall where optically it can appear flat; Phillips’s *Tricurvular* (1965–66) is a curved form that starts on the wall and then cascades to the floor. Both of these works, therefore, deal with the confusion between painting and sculpture, or between flatness and three-dimensionality. According to the *Primary Structures* catalogue, this was the point of the show: “Depending upon the way in which space is used and occupied by a form, the material means, and the artist’s intention, as we

may understand it, we name the work a 'painting' or a 'sculpture'." ¹⁸ The exhibition posited that medium distinctions were thus largely arbitrary. *Primary Structures* was full of transmedial works, and *Hybrid*, on view in New York at the same time less than a mile away, addressed these same issues in a different way.

Which leads me to the second important issue *Hybrid* raises about British sculpture abroad: it easily travels. It demonstrates one way that even a sculpture can be broken into a code and transmitted. If Pop paintings, like silk screens by Warhol (and the canvases of Laing and Phillips themselves), thematized the ability for media images to travel—whether by satellite, telephone lines, or an encryption apparatus—*Hybrid* is a sculpture that can be reduced to mere information, the tabulated results of a market survey. One could pack the computed aggregates of the survey in a folder and mail them anywhere for the consensus object to be produced, albeit with different results with each reconstitution. The project as a whole effects the dematerialized translation of an object into a code and then its realization back into an object. If the easily transportable materials of Conceptual art—its index cards, snapshots, and binders—would soon make international exhibitions easier to assemble, then *Hybrid* maintained a dialectical tension between a physical object and the weightless abstraction of data.



Figure 4.

Anthony Caro, Table Piece XXII, 1967, steel, sprayed jewelescent green, 25.4 × 80 × 68.6 cm. Caro Family Collection Digital image courtesy of Barford Sculptures Ltd. / Photo: John Riddy

In 1966, the same year as *Primary Structures* and the exhibition of *Hybrid*, Anthony Caro turned to making his table sculptures, such as *Table Piece XXII* from 1967 (fig. 4). While different, might we view such a work as a similar, albeit less conceptual, gesture? After getting the suggestion from the American critic Michael Fried in 1966, Caro began to make sculptures that were not maquettes of larger works, but rather small, autonomous sculptures. But crucially, they can literally be carried and easily transported for global exhibitions, as well as for overseas collections. *Table Piece XXII* even has a handle to make such portability explicit. Like Laing and Phillips's *Hybrid*, Caro's table piece is an Anglo-American sculpture aspiring to the portable conditions of painting.

Footnotes

- 1 See Bernard Cohen, Harold Cohen, Robyn Denny, Richard Smith, Anthony Caro: *XXXIII Venice Biennale 1966 British Pavilion* (London: British Council, 1966).
- 2 See Bernard Cohen, Harold Cohen, Robyn Denny, Richard Smith, Anthony Caro: *XXXIII Venice Biennale 1966 British Pavilion* (London: British Council, 1966).
- 3 Kynaston McShine, "Introduction", in *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1966), np.
- 4 Gerald Laing (1993), quoted in David Mellor, *The Sixties Art Scene in London* (London: Phaidon, 1993), 139.
- 5 For a discussion of Andy Warhol and Gerhard Richter in these terms, see John J. Curley, *A Conspiracy of Images: Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter, and the Art of the Cold War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013).
- 6 The completed surveys, as well as the sample kits, the realized sculpture, and other materials are in the collection of the Harvard Art Museums, gift of John and Kimiko Powers in 1977. Alex Taylor describes the sample kits in informative detail in "Reconsidering the Average Object of Art", delivered at the "Pop Art and Beyond" conference on 20 March 2014 at University College London. Text of paper is online at <https://popartandbeyond.wordpress.com/2014/04/21/reconsidering-the-average-object-of-art-1965-1966/>.
- 7 "Hybrid", *The New Yorker*, 30 April 1966, 35.
- 8 "Market Research Art", *Life*, 20 May 1966, 51.
- 9 "Everybody's Object", *Time*, 29 April 1966, 85.
- 10 "Everybody's Object", 85.
- 11 Peter Phillips, quoted in "Hybrid", 35.
- 12 Lawrence Alloway, "Hybrid", *Arts Magazine* 40, no. 7 (May 1966): 41. For another perspective from the art press, see Gene Swenson, "Hybrid: A Time of Life", *Art and Artists* 1, no. 2 (June 1966): 62-65.
- 13 Taylor, "Reconsidering the Average Object of Art."
- 14 Peter Phillips, interview with author via Skype, 18 June 2015.
- 15 Hans Haacke famously asked visitors to the Museum of Modern Art in New York their thoughts on New York Governor (and MoMA board member) Nelson Rockefeller's opinion on the Vietnam War in 1969. Komar and Melamid polled people in various countries to figure out aesthetic tastes; see *America's Most Wanted Painting* from 1994, for example. <http://awp.diaart.org/km/usa/usa.html>.
- 16 Phillips, interview with author.
- 17 Mellor, *Sixties Art Scene in London*, 114.
- 18 McShine, "Introduction," np.

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Sight Unseen: Anthony Caro's *Prairie*, 1967

Sarah Stanners

Authors

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Prologue: Out of Sight

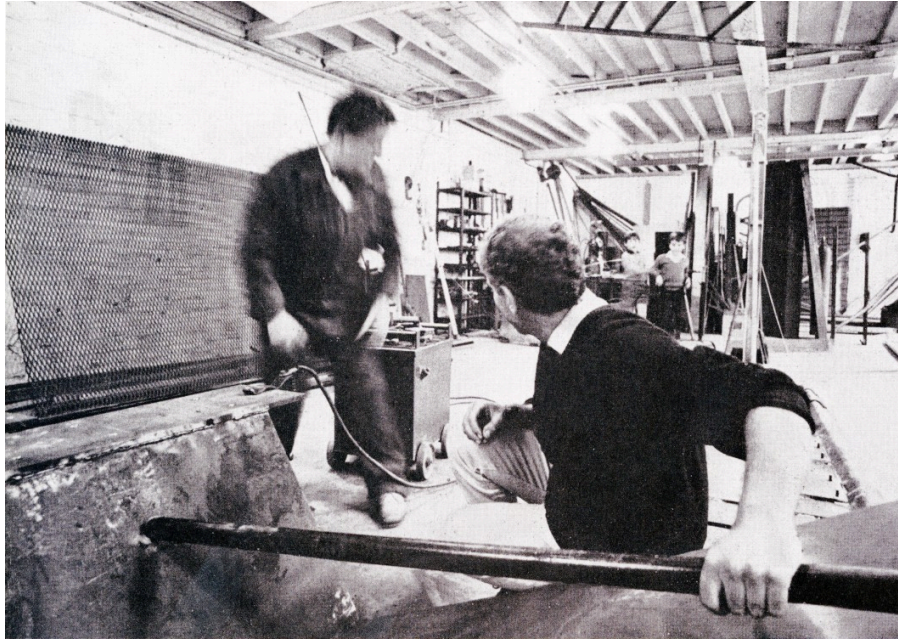


Figure 1.

Anthony Caro and assistant Charlie Hendy with *Prairie* in process at the Loudon Road studio, circa 1966-67. The artist's sons, Tim and Paul Caro, are seen in the background. Digital image courtesy of Barford Sculptures Limited

Prairie, a modern masterwork of painted steel by Sir Anthony Caro (1924–2013), has crossed the Atlantic no fewer than eight times since its making in London in 1967 (fig. 1). The international life of *Prairie* is extensive, especially considering the serious logistics involved in disassembling, shipping, and installing a sculpture that measures 38 x 229 x 126 inches (96.5 x 582 x 320 cm):

- *Recent Sculpture*, Kasmin Gallery, London, 1967
- *Anthony Caro*, X Bienal de Sao Paulo, 1969
- *Anthony Caro*, Hayward Gallery, London, 1969
- *Anthony Caro: A Retrospective*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1975
- *Anthony Caro: A Retrospective*, Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis, MN, 1975
- *Anthony Caro: A Retrospective*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1975
- *Transformations in Sculpture*, Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1985
- *British Art in the 20th Century: The Modern Movement*, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, 1987
- *British Art in the 20th Century: The Modern Movement*, Royal Academy of Art, London, 1987

- *Caro a Roma*, Trajan Markets, Rome, 1992 (fig. 2)
- *Anthony Caro*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, 1995
- *Anthony Caro*, Tate Britain, London, 2005



Figure 2.

Anthony Caro, *Prairie*, 1967, installed in *Caro a Roma*, Trajan Markets, Rome, 1992, painted steel, 96.5 x 582 x 320 cm Digital image courtesy of Barford Sculptures Limited

Prairie did not, however, make the trip for the 2015 double down of Caro survey exhibitions jointly organized by The Hepworth Wakefield and the Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP).¹ Titled *Caro in Yorkshire*, the aim of these complementary exhibitions was to celebrate and commemorate the career of Caro with a showing of notable works such as *Twenty Four Hours* (1960), *Sculpture Seven* (1961), *Month of May* (1963), and *Promenade* (1996), to name a few. Adrian Searle of *The Guardian* called the exhibition “Larger and more comprehensive even than the Tate Britain Caro retrospective of 2005”, and yet *Prairie* was conspicuously missing from this robust reunion.² Also obvious was the fact that an exhibition of Henry Moore’s work held the place of pride in the YSP’s main gallery at the time of this important survey of Caro’s work.³ Instead, Caro’s work could be found dwarfed throughout the YSP’s rolling fields and at the Park’s Longside Gallery, roughly two kilometres out from the YSP Centre. At The Hepworth Wakefield, Caro was deftly inserted within the canon of great British sculptors of the twentieth century as the exhibition there was indirectly framed within the superb permanent collection.

The myopic selection of works for the exhibitions held in Yorkshire in 2015, suggests that the best of Caro from the point of view of the UK is different than the best of Caro from an American point of view. Caro in the UK is a

crescendo after the major movement of Moore. Caro in America struck an all-new chord. In 2007, Caro recalled his close American connections, and the freedom of disconnection abroad:

When I went to America the excitement in New York was in painting not in sculpture. When I went to Bennington, my friends and neighbours were painters Olitski and Noland. At weekends, Noland would have people to stay, critics, and painters. I cannot think of a single sculptor. For me it was very interesting. I could almost divorce myself from the history of sculpture.⁴

His relations with David Smith are curiously missing in the above statement. This erasure implies that his “almost divorce” from the history of sculpture may not have been just a matter of new contexts (geographic and social) but actually a conscious decision of the artist who revelled in the disassociation from notions of patrimony in sculpture.

Was *Prairie* not included in the survey mounted by YSP and The Hepworth Wakefield because, to the British eye, it appears to be an outlier? Caro felt that *Prairie* was his most successfully abstract sculpture ever.⁵ Referring to nothing outside of itself, *Prairie* does not serve to demonstrate the patrimony of British sculpture. Even the title feels American, although it is a misnomer: not, in fact, referring to low-lying fields of golden crops, but actually pointing to the commercial name for the paint colour “Prairie Gold” that the artist had intended to use (though ultimately did not) after first painting the sculpture blue (fig. 3).⁶



Figure 3.

An advertisement for Jeep, painted in Prairie Gold, 1966 Digital image courtesy of www.paintref.com

While a relatively limited number of people had the opportunity to see *Prairie's* inaugural display in 1967 at Kasmin Gallery in London, a wide American audience for *Prairie* was cultivated just months later, in 1968, by the championing words of Michael Fried that landed the sculpture on the cover of *Artforum* (fig. 4).

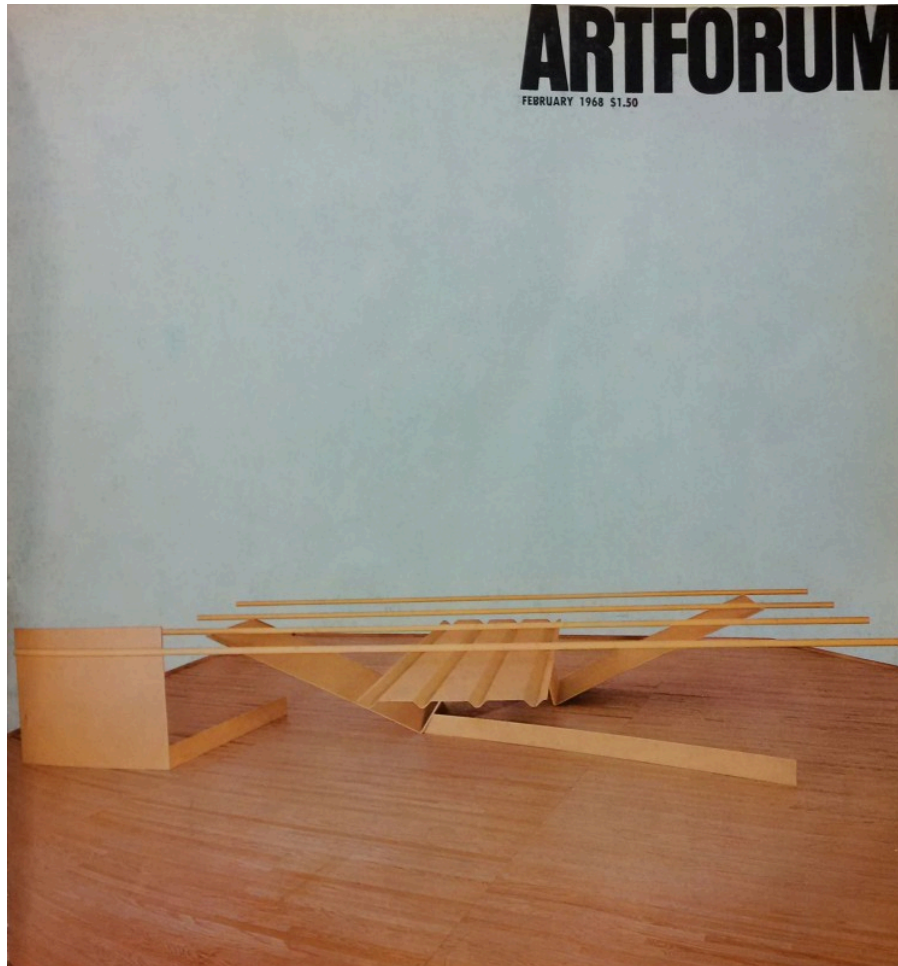


Figure 4.

Anthony Caro, *Prairie*, 1967, *Prairie* on the cover of *Artforum* (Feb. 1968), with the background wall evidently erased through doctoring of the original photograph (compare to photograph in fig. 5). While the choice to white-out the background may have been done for cover design purposes alone, it also acts to lend even more levity to the sculpture and unity with the ground. Digital image courtesy of Artforum / Lewis Cabot, USA / Kasmin Gallery / Barford Sculptures Limited



Figure 5.

Anthony Caro, *Prairie*, 1967, installed in the *Recent Sculpture* exhibition at Kasmin Gallery, London, 1967 Digital image courtesy of Artforum / Lewis Cabot, USA / Kasmin Gallery / Barford Sculptures Limited

The Eye's Mind: *Prairie* and Michael Fried

The American art critic and art historian Michael Fried first met Caro in 1961 in Hampstead, London.⁷ There, in the artist's courtyard, Fried had an epiphany of sorts, claiming to have seen two of the most groundbreaking abstract sculptures he had ever seen: *Midday* (1960) and *Sculpture Seven* (1961).⁸ Six years later, Fried would again be impressed by the progressive abstraction of two more Caro sculptures. After seeing Caro's *Deep Body Blue* (1967) and *Prairie* at Kasmin Gallery, Fried wrote a compelling (and now oft-cited) review titled "Two Sculptures by Anthony Caro" for *Artforum's* February 1968 issue (figs. 6-10).⁹ Both sculptures were displayed in one room, but *Prairie* caught Fried's eye most of all:

More explicitly than any previous sculpture, *Prairie* compels us to believe what we see rather than what we know, to accept the witness of the senses against the constructions of the mind.¹⁰



Figure 6.

Anthony Caro, *Prairie*, 1967, installed in the *Recent Sculpture* exhibition at Kasmin Gallery, London, 1967 (the sculpture's first ever exhibition) Digital image courtesy of John Kasmin / Barford Sculptures Limited

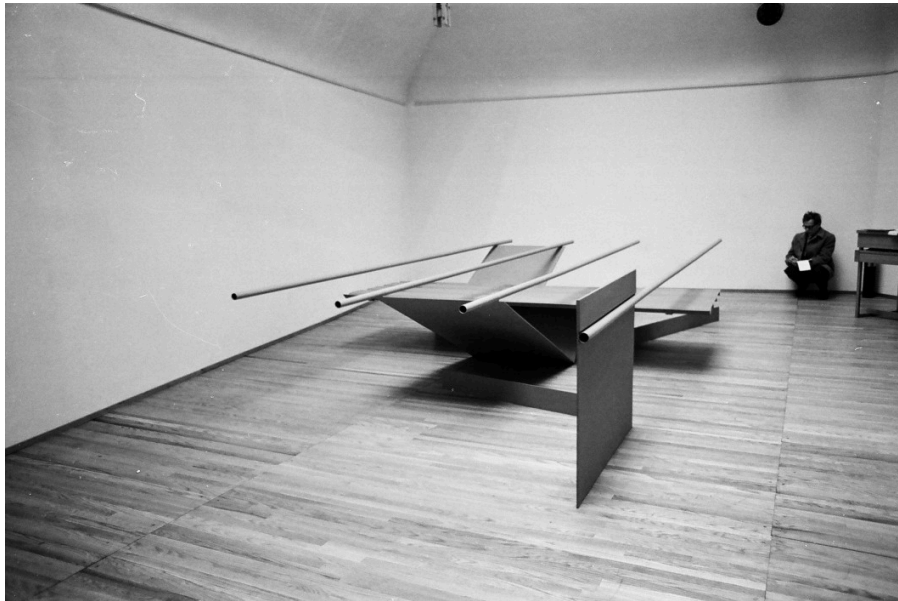


Figure 7.

Anthony Caro, *Prairie*, 1967, installed in the *Recent Sculpture* exhibition at Kasmin Gallery, London, 1967 Digital image courtesy of John Kasmin / Barford Sculptures Limited



Figure 8.

Anthony Caro, *Prairie*, 1967, installed in the *Recent Sculpture* exhibition at Kasmin Gallery, London, 1967 Digital image courtesy of John Kasmin / Barford Sculptures Limited

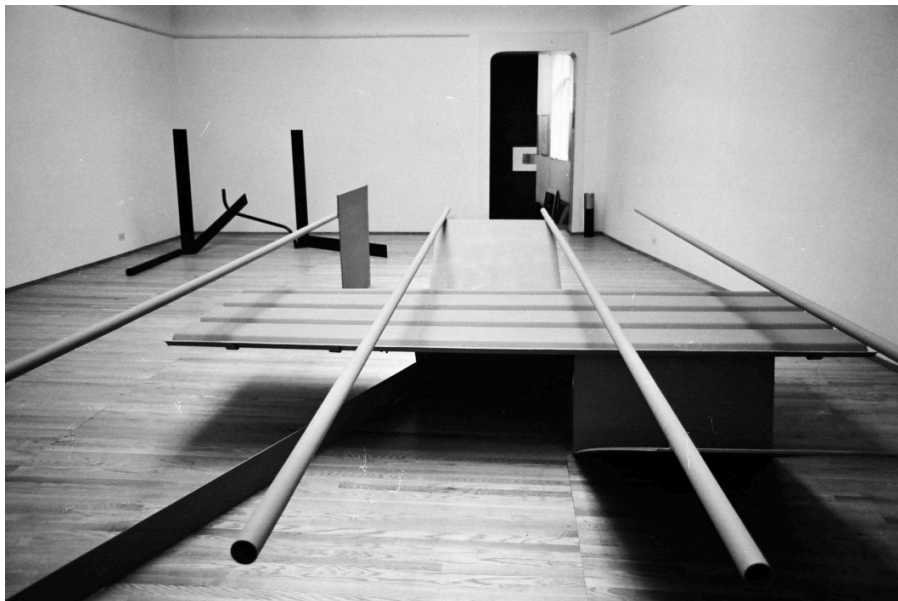


Figure 9.

Anthony Caro, *Prairie*, 1967, in the foreground, and *Deep Body Blue*, 1967, in the background, installed in the *Recent Sculpture* exhibition at Kasmin Gallery, London, 1967 Digital image courtesy of John Kasmin / Barford Sculptures Limited

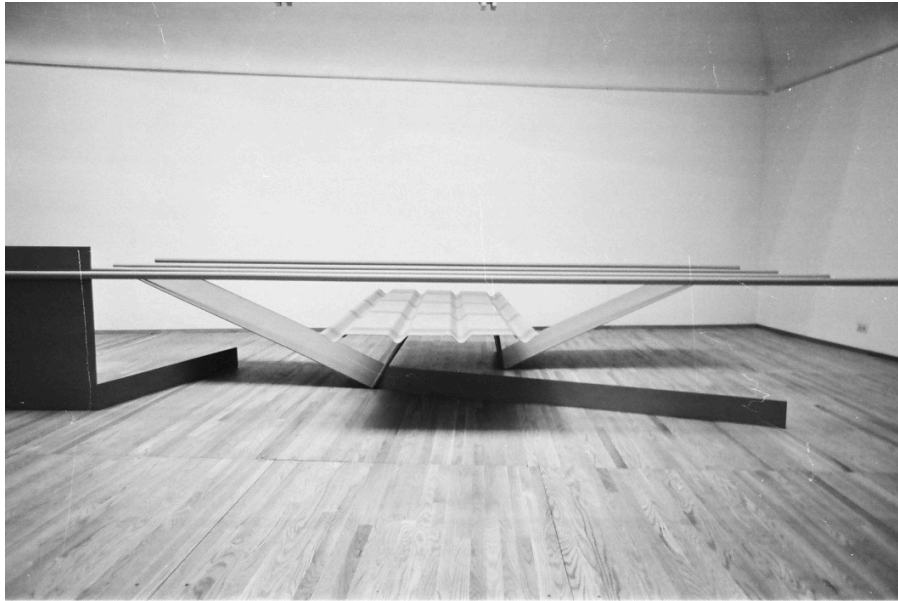


Figure 10.

Anthony Caro, *Prairie*, 1967, installed in the *Recent Sculpture* exhibition at Kasmin Gallery, London, 1967 Digital image courtesy of John Kasmin / Barford Sculptures Limited

Fried's review put *Prairie* on the map in America, bolstered by the fact that it made the cover of *Artforum*, making it the top model for abstract sculpture in the US, despite its English birth. Following the popular review in *Artforum*, Caro wrote two letters to Fried (29 February and 24 March 1968):

I am delighted that the sculptures meant so much to you—your description of *Prairie* is the first accurate one . . . except that, believe it or not—thanks to Charlie (Hendy)!—the poles are steel . . . The way you saw just exactly what the upright rectangle that supported the pole in *Prairie* was doing, and it gives me a real thrill of pleasure to have my work so accurately grasped. ¹¹

Fried's review had not pointed to the lineage of sculpture that came before *Prairie*. Instead, he pointed to philosophy and even briefly to architecture when describing the 1967 work by Caro. Fried celebrated *Prairie*'s "extraordinary marriage of illusion and structural obviousness", feeling no need to add significance to the work by weaving it within a history of sculpture and influences. ¹² Fried cast a purely American eye (or a purifying American eye) upon *Prairie* that allowed for a new generation of painters and sculptors to accept it as their own new way forward. It is fitting that a steel sculpture praised for its defiance of gravity would grant a certain amount of levity to young sculptors who were encouraged to feel unburdened by the history of building and shaping mass in their sculptures.



Figure 11.

Anthony Caro, *Prairie*, 1967, installed in the *Recent Sculpture* exhibition at Kasmin Gallery, London, 1967 Digital image courtesy of John Kasmin / Barford Sculptures Limited

In the spring of 1967, Caro would publicly protest against the Tate's proposal to permanently display (by facilitation of public funds) a large gift of Henry Moore's work. Along with about forty other British artists, Caro signed an open letter to the *Times* to declare, among other firm points, that:

Whoever is picked out for this exceptional place will necessarily seem to represent the triumph of modern art in our society. The radical nature of art in the twentieth century is inconsistent with the notion of an heroic and monumental role for the artist and any attempt to predetermine greatness for an individual in a publicly financed form of permanent enshrinement is a move we as artists repudiate. ¹³

Ultimately, Moore made a major gift of original plasters to the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) in Toronto, which built a permanent gallery with Moore's input on the architecture of the purpose-built space.

***Prairie* in the USA**

Caro had expressed his enthusiasm for *Prairie* to Lewis Cabot, a Boston-based connoisseur of Modernist art who would become a longtime supporter of Caro. ¹⁴ Remaining in the United States, Cabot purchased *Prairie* sight unseen from its 1967 London debut at Kasmin Gallery. ¹⁵ Cabot made the purchase with the understanding that he was building a careful repository of works by Caro, and waited several years before shipping *Prairie* to his own storage in the US. Before taking physical possession of the sculpture, Cabot lent *Prairie* to important exhibitions, including the X Bienal de Sao Paulo and London's Hayward Gallery in 1969.



Figure 12.

Anthony Caro, *Prairie*, 1967, installed at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 2016. Collection of Lois and Georges de Menil. In the background: Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Donna che indica* (Woman who points), silkscreen print on polished stainless steel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Henry Moore, *Three Motives Against Wall, Number 1*, bronze, National Gallery of Art, Washington; Maya Lin, *Latitude New York City*, 2013, Vermont Darby marble, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound*, 1914, marble, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC Digital image courtesy of the author

By 1975, when *Prairie* was shown in the artist's first American retrospective, which toured widely, ¹⁶ *Prairie* had changed hands to the collection of Lois and Georges de Menil, who were also based in the USA. ¹⁷ In 1977, the de Menils placed *Prairie* on long-term loan with the National Gallery of Art (NGA)

in Washington, DC, where it resides today (figs. [12](#), [15](#), [16](#)) The accession file on the sculpture and its history in the custody of the NGA is chock-full of firm letters from the de Menils, who consistently, and successfully, argue for the near-constant public display of *Prairie* at the gallery.¹⁸ While in the custody of the NGA, *Prairie* has continued to be shown far and wide, including Rome in 1992, Tokyo in 1995, and back to its birthplace in London, for Tate Britain's Caro retrospective in 2005. It is notable that *Prairie* was included in Tate's Caro retrospective but not in the most recent in-depth survey in Yorkshire. Posthumous large-scale exhibitions are, of course, quite a different thing from a major show during an artist's lifetime—when curators and museums must respect what the artist points to as being important. After death, alternate stories are much easier to articulate.

After *Prairie*: Kenneth Noland and *Cadence*

Prairie caught the eye of the American painter Kenneth Noland (1924–2010). His admiration of *Prairie* evolved into asking Caro to make something like *Prairie* for him— and *Cadence* (1968/72) was born ([fig. 13](#)).¹⁹



Figure 13.

Anthony Caro, *Cadence*, in process (circa 1968) in the courtyard of Anthony Caro's studio in Hampstead, London. This photograph has been published previously but the sculpture in view has often been misidentified as *Prairie*. Digital image courtesy of Barford Sculptures Limited

If not looking too hard, *Cadence* might be understood as an icon, serving to harken back thoughts of *Prairie*, yet held in equal reverie by onlookers. In 1967, Rosalind Krauss issued some critical pushback that could have served as a preemptive strike to anyone claiming to see *Cadence* as pale by comparison:

It has become a reflex action, a kind of literary tic, of current formalist art writing to consider a given work or a given juncture in an artist's style only from the point of view of a progression. ²⁰



Figure 14.

Anthony Caro, *Cadence*, 1968-72, and Kenneth Noland, *Stripe Paintings*, from left to right: *Untitled*, circa 1967, *Via Noon*, 1968, *Untitled*, 1967, *Via Imbound*, 1969, displayed by Mitchell-Innes & Nash, Art Basel, Miami Beach, 2010 Digital image courtesy of Car Pelleteri / Paintings: © the Estate of Kenneth Noland / Sculpture: © the Estate of Anthony Caro

Caro was close to the best formalist writers but certainly did not think twice about looking back in his work. Fried called *Prairie* “a touchstone for future sculpture”, lending it a superlative power that might have made other artists freeze up with the pressure of having reached a high watermark.²¹ Caro recalled:

I hoped at the time I made [*Prairie*] that I would be able to go even more abstract. But in the end I wanted to put something of the real world in my sculptures. Indeed, since *Prairie*, all my sculptures have a part that is directly linked to the world around.

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The link that *Cadence* made to the world was to point back at *Prairie*. By definition, “cadence” may refer to a slight change or inflection in one’s voice, or expression. *Cadence* is a variation on *Prairie*. It was also made with Noland in mind (fig. 14). *Cadence* remained in Noland’s possession for the rest of his life and now resides in a private collection in Canada.

The View

As addressed at the outset of this article, the exhibition *Caro in Yorkshire*, shared between the YSP and The Hepworth Wakefield in 2015, nestled the artist firmly within a British context. In the midst of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, *Prairie* holds court with a variety of masterful works of art from around the world (fig. 15). In the context of the NGA, *Prairie* is seen as a triumphant Modernist sculpture—displayed without narrative, but simply in conversation with other select works of art. If it were displayed at the National Gallery, London, would it be framed as a chapter within a wider history of sculpture?

Reviewing the photographs throughout this essay, it is apparent that *Prairie* looks different from every angle. The viewer has a similar experience in “walking” this sculpture (fig. 16). Round and round, and round again, *Prairie* takes up one’s entire field of vision at one moment and then effortlessly slips away with virtually no sense of mass from another view. For now, photographs will have to suffice, as *Prairie* has just come off display at the NGA. A “Caro in America” show may be due, or even overdue, lest *Prairie* remains sight unseen.

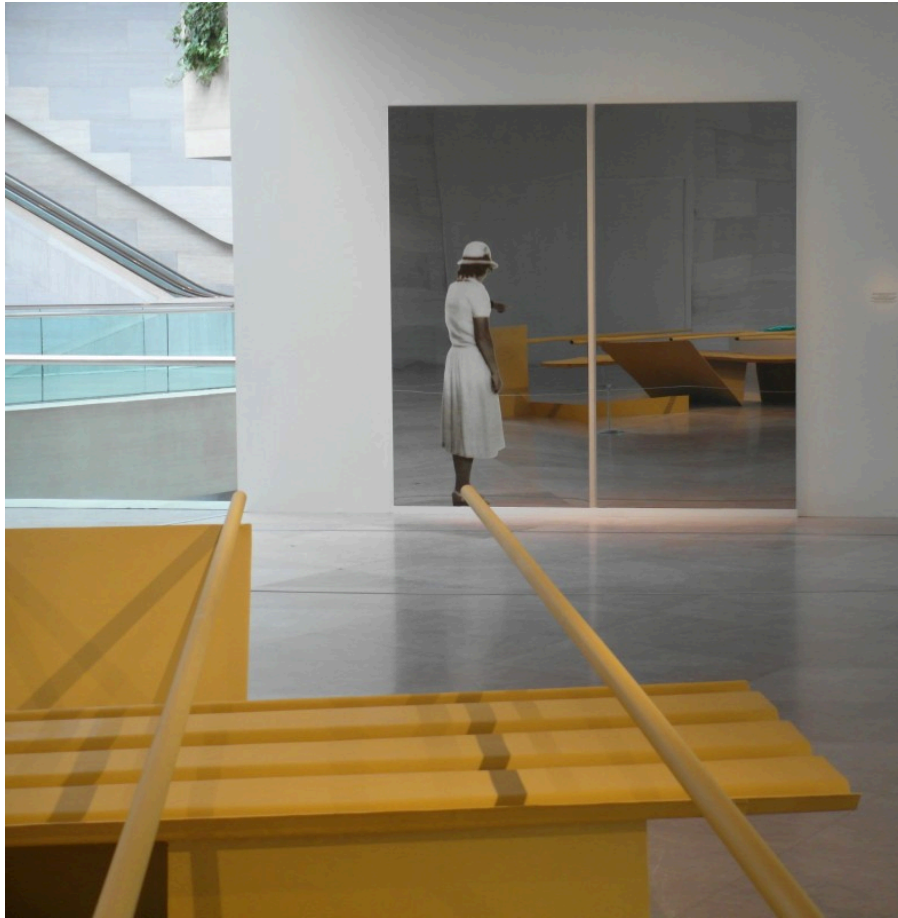


Figure 15.

Anthony Caro, *Prairie*, 1967, installed at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 2016. Collection of Lois and Georges de Menil. In the background: Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Donna che indica* (Woman who points), silkscreen print on polished stainless steel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC Digital image courtesy of the author



Figure 16.

Anthony Caro, *Prairie*, 1967, installed at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 2016. Collection of Lois and Georges de Menil. In the background: Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Donna che indica* (Woman who points), silkscreen print on polished stainless steel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC Digital image courtesy of the author

Footnotes

- 1 *Caro in Yorkshire*, The Hepworth Wakefield/ Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 18 July-1 Nov. 2015.
- 2 Adrian Searle, "Anthony Caro in Yorkshire review—Sculpture that can take your breath away", *The Guardian*, 16 July 2015.
- 3 *Henry Moore: Back to a Land*, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 7 March-6 Sept. 2015.
- 4 Anthony Caro in interview with Patrick Le Nouëne, Dec. 2007, Anthony Caro Association of Museum Curators in the Nord Pas-de Calais Region (2008), 30, quoted in *Caro in Yorkshire*, exh. cat. (Yorkshire Sculpture Park/ The Hepworth Wakefield, 2015), 23.
- 5 Anthony Caro, *Caro*, ed. Amanda Renshaw (New York: Phaidon, 2014), 168.
- 6 Caro, *Caro*, ed. Renshaw, 170.
- 7 Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 7.
- 8 Fried, *Art and Objecthood*.
- 9 Michael Fried, "Two Sculptures by Anthony Caro", *Artforum* 6, no. 6 (Feb. 1968): 24-25.
- 10 Fried, "Two Sculptures by Anthony Caro", 25.
- 11 Excerpts provided to author by Barford Sculptures Limited, 20 Feb. 2016.
- 12 Fried, "Two Sculptures by Anthony Caro", 24-25.
- 13 Open letter from Craigie Aitchison and others, "Henry Moore's Gift", *Times*, 26 May 1967, 11.
- 14 Author in conversation with Lewis Cabot, 11 Jan. 2016.
- 15 Author in conversation with Cabot, 11 Jan. 2016.
- 16 The exhibition *Anthony Caro: A Retrospective* was shown at Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1975, before touring to Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
- 17 Lewis Cabot recalls selling *Prairie* around 1973 or 1974 at the time of his divorce. Author in conversation with Cabot, 11 Jan. 2016.

- 18 *Prairie* was just recently taken off public display at the NGA in May 2016.
- 19 Author in conversation with Lewis Cabot, 11 Jan. 2016; and author in conversation with David Mirvish, 17 June 2016.
- 20 Rosalind Krauss, "On Anthony Caro's Latest Work", *Art International* 11, no. 1 (Jan. 1967): 26–29.
- 21 Fried, "Two Sculptures by Anthony Caro", 25.
- 22 Caro, *Caro*, ed. Renshaw, 168.

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--. "Two Sculptures by Anthony Caro." *Artforum* 6, no. 6 (Feb. 1968): 24–25.

Krauss, Rosalind. "On Anthony Caro's Latest Work." *Art International* 11, no. 1 (Jan. 1967): 26–29.



The Geography of Making or On Finding Moore Everywhere

Simon Starling

Abstract

"The Geography of Making or On Finding Moore Everywhere" charts the development of an artistic dialogue with the "omnipresent" work of Britain's most globally successful sculptor, Henry Moore. From Toronto to Mexico City, from Chicago to Hiroshima, Moore's work has served as way-finders whereby to orient my own interests in what were often, for me, new cities.

Authors

Artist

Cite as

Simon Starling, "The Geography of Making or On Finding Moore Everywhere", *British Art Studies*, Issue 3, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-03/sstarling>

Since moving to Glasgow in 1990 my practice has been increasingly preoccupied with the geography of its own making. This ongoing interest in tracking the trajectories of production processes, sources of materials, and the particular global geography of my own exhibition making, led to an interest in the truly global reach of the career of Britain's most prolific modern sculptor, Henry Moore.

From the beginning of my interest in visual art, Henry Moore seemed omnipresent—a state-endorsed global player. The first of his kind perhaps. His huge bronzes seemed to have dropped from the sky in great meteor showers, and felt to my young mind rather clumsy and anachronistic, even provincial. The Moore-related antics of Bruce Nauman and McLean¹ were more to my taste. I shut Moore out. However, the more I travelled with my own work, the more I realized that Moore had always got to where I was going first—his command of the public spaces of the world's cities seemed at times absolute. I started to use Moore's apparent omnipresence as a means to navigate. His works became way-finders whereby to orient my own interests in what were often, for me, new cities.

Infestation Piece (Musselled Moore)

Moore first reappeared on my radar when I was invited to Toronto in 2005. That most Anglophile of Canadian cities had embraced him in the 1950s and 1960s and immortalized him in an elegant concrete exhibition hall at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO). This space was designed to house over forty works donated by the artist, in no small part, it seems, to spite the British establishment, which had blocked plans to build just such a monographic gallery for his work at the Tate Gallery. Currently, not more than forty metres from the Moore gallery at the AGO sits my *Infestation Piece (Musselled Moore)* (2007/8) which evolved from the collision of two stories of alien introduction: Moore's domination of Toronto's postwar art scene and, in the dying days of the Cold War, the apparently unconnected infestation of the Great Lakes with Russian zebra mussels.

In 1939, Henry Moore installed *Reclining Woman* (1930), now also in Canada, in the garden of the architect Erno Goldfinger's newly completed home at 2 Willow Road, Hampstead, London. The modernist house proved unpopular with many residents, most famously with the writer Ian Fleming (golfing partner to Goldfinger's wife's brother) whose imagination led him to recast Goldfinger as the Cold War villain par excellence—Auric Goldfinger. In Toronto, however, Moore's connection to international espionage was far more real. His work was first introduced to the then Art Gallery of Toronto (now the AGO) by Anthony Blunt—Director of the Courtauld Institute, Keeper of the Queen's Pictures, and now infamous spy. In 1955, Blunt, an adviser to the Toronto museum, had proposed Moore's *Warrior with Shield* (1953-54) for

acquisition. Some thirty years later, undercover, in thousands of gallons of bilge water spewed out by cargo ships arriving from the Black Sea, came zebra mussels. Within less than two decades the “poster child” of invasive species, these shielded warriors from the East, fundamentally altered the “nature” of the waterways of North America. In 2006, a steel sculpture which I based on Moore’s warrior was tossed into Lake Ontario, and for almost two years played host to a colony of zebra mussels—the shells of which still valiantly cling to its rusted surface (figs. [1-4](#)).



Figure 1.
Simon Starling, Infestation Piece (Musselled Moore),
2006-8, steel and mussels, 162.6 x 76.2 x 76.2 cm
Digital image courtesy of the artist



Figure 2.

Simon Starling, Infestation Piece (Musselled Moore), 2006-8, steel and mussels, 162.6 x 76.2 x 76.2 cm Digital image courtesy of the artist



Figure 3.
Simon Starling, Infestation Piece (Musselled Moore), 2006-8,
steel and mussels, 162.6 x 76.2 x 76.2 cm Digital image
courtesy of the artist



Figure 4.

Simon Starling, Proposal for Lake Ontario – Infestation Piece/Warrior with Shield vs. the Zebra Mussel, 2005–06, collage Digital image courtesy of the artist

Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima)

While Moore was no doubt oblivious to his connection to international espionage, this most international of artists was not untouched by the machinations of global politics, and appears to have become adept at balancing his interests with those of people with money and power. While Moore was a public sponsor of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament he was also happy to receive a commission for a sculpture to commemorate Enrico Fermi's first self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction in Chicago in 1942 (*Nuclear Energy*; 1964–66). Even before that commission had been completed, Moore had, much to the distress of Chicago University, made an edition of a smaller working-model of the sculpture under the title *Atom Piece* (1963–65; pun clearly intended)—one of which he later sold to the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (Moore's ambivalence towards

his subject did not go unnoticed in Hiroshima, and *Atom Piece* has always been a controversial inclusion in the Japanese museum's very particular collection). And further still it could be observed that Moore amassed a considerable fortune from his association with Joseph Hirshhorn, whose own vast wealth had in turn come from the phenomenally profitable sale of uranium deposits in Canada, a sale bolstered by the frenetic activities of the Atomic Energy Commission during the 1940s and 1950s.

As is often the case with the evolution of my projects, it was from a specific invitation to make an exhibition at the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art that my next Moore-related project emerged. *Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima)* (2010-11) is a proposition for the performance of a play which collapses *Eboshi-ori*, the ancient Japanese tale of a young noble boy disguising himself to escape his troubled past, onto the Cold War saga that evolved around Henry Moore's sculpture *Nuclear Energy* (figs. 5-16). In *Project for a Masquerade*, each role in the original Japanese Noh play is played by one of a new cast, including James Bond, Anthony Blunt, Colonel Sanders, and Joseph Hirshhorn, which was assembled through a web of connections that all lead back to *Nuclear Energy* and its alter ego *Atom Piece*. Each of the new cast members is represented as a mask, made in collaboration with a master Noh mask-maker, Yasuo Miichi. The making of each of these masks was in turn documented in an accompanying film that weaves together the, at first, seemingly disparate narratives. It appears that it is at these points of intersection between global politics, big business, and art practice, at a moment when the Cold War has morphed into something altogether more elusive and our understanding of nature is so radically challenged, that Moore seems to be once again a fruitful subject for further investigation and redeployment. Within the context of the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, a museum for which Moore's work is both pivotal and controversial, this seemed doubly true.



Figure 5.

Installation View, Simon Starling, Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima) (film still), 2010-11. 16 mm film transferred to digital (25 minutes, 45 seconds), wooden masks, cast bronze masks, bowler hat, metals stands, suspended mirror, suspended screen, HD projector, media player, and speakers. Dimensions variable Digital image courtesy of the artist



Figure 6.

Simon Starling, Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima) (film still), 2010-11. 16 mm film transferred to digital (25 minutes, 45 seconds), wooden masks, cast bronze masks, bowler hat, metals stands, suspended mirror, suspended screen, HD projector, media player, and speakers. Dimensions variable Digital image courtesy of the artist

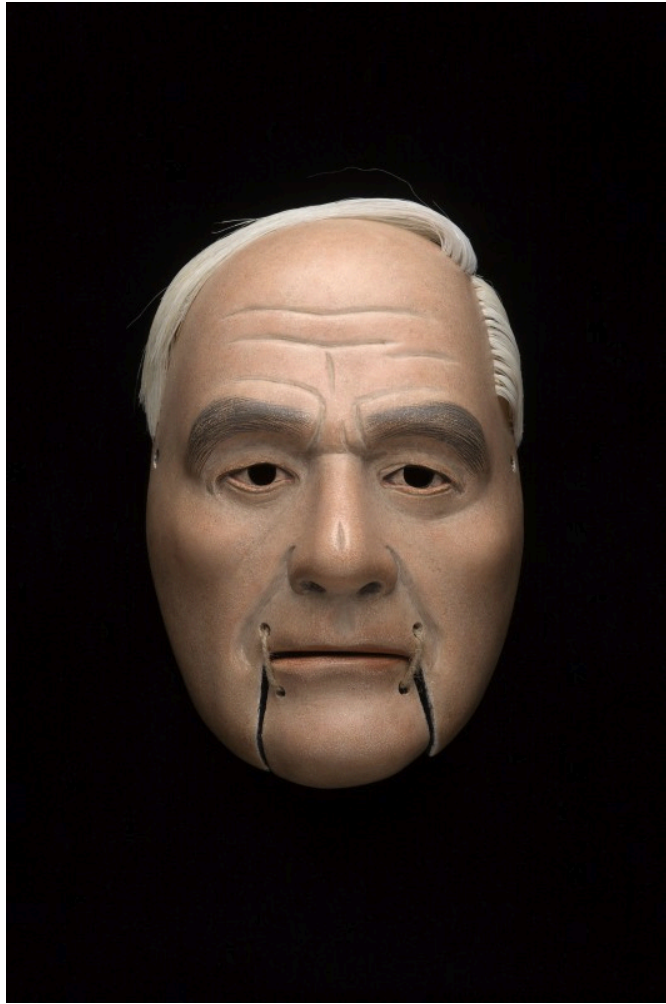


Figure 7.
Simon Starling, The Hat Maker - Henry Moore (front),
Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima), 2010-11,
wooden mask Digital image courtesy of the artist

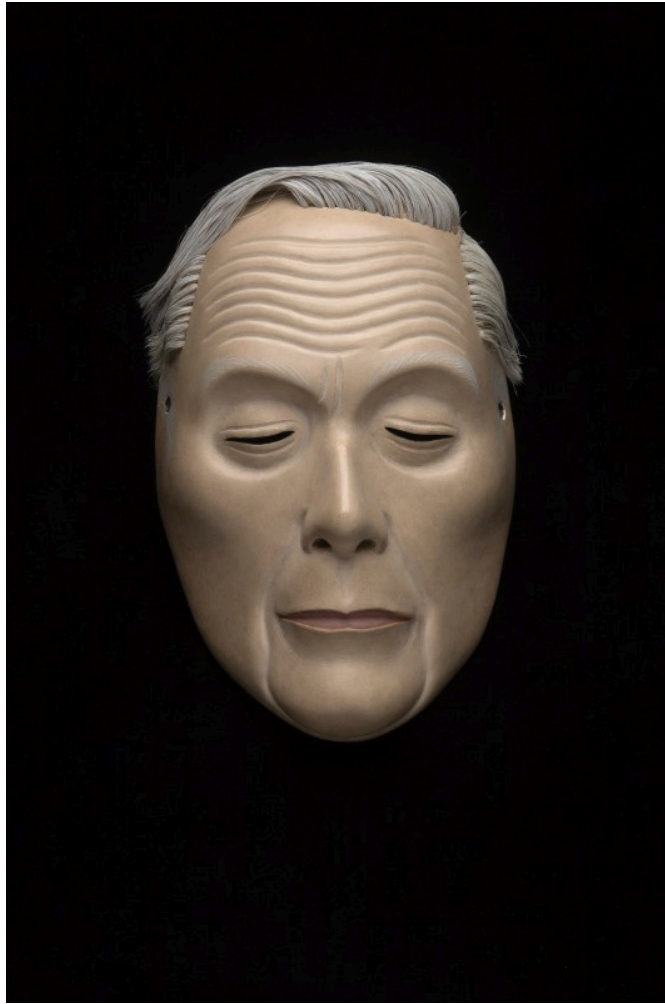


Figure 8.

Simon Starling, *The Hat Maker's Wife - Anthony Blunt* (front), *Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima)*, 2010-11, wooden mask Digital image courtesy of the artist



Figure 9.
Simon Starling, Kumasaka - Joseph Hirschhorn (front),
Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima), 2010-11,
wooden mask Digital image courtesy of the artist



Figure 10.

Installation View, Simon Starling, Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima), 2010-11. 16 mm film transferred to digital (25 minutes, 45 seconds), wooden masks, cast bronze masks, bowler hat, metals stands, suspended mirror, suspended screen, HD projector, media player, and speakers. Dimensions variable Digital image courtesy of the artist



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Installation View, Simon Starling, Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima), 2010-11. 16 mm film transferred to digital (25 minutes, 45 seconds), wooden masks, cast bronze masks, bowler hat, metals stands, suspended mirror, suspended screen, HD projector, media player, and speakers. Dimensions variable Digital image courtesy of the artist



Figure 12.

Installation View, Simon Starling, Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima), 2010-11. 16 mm film transferred to digital (25 minutes, 45 seconds), wooden masks, cast bronze masks, bowler hat, metals stands, suspended mirror, suspended screen, HD projector, media player, and speakers. Dimensions variable Digital image courtesy of the artist



Figure 13.

Installation View, Simon Starling, Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima), 2010-11. 16 mm film transferred to digital (25 minutes, 45 seconds), wooden masks, cast bronze masks, bowler hat, metals stands, suspended mirror, suspended screen, HD projector, media player, and speakers. Dimensions variable Digital image courtesy of the artist



Figure 14.

Simon Starling, Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima) (film still), 2010-11. 16 mm film transferred to digital (25 minutes, 45 seconds), wooden masks, cast bronze masks, bowler hat, metals stands, suspended mirror, suspended screen, HD projector, media player, and speakers. Dimensions variable Digital image courtesy of the artist

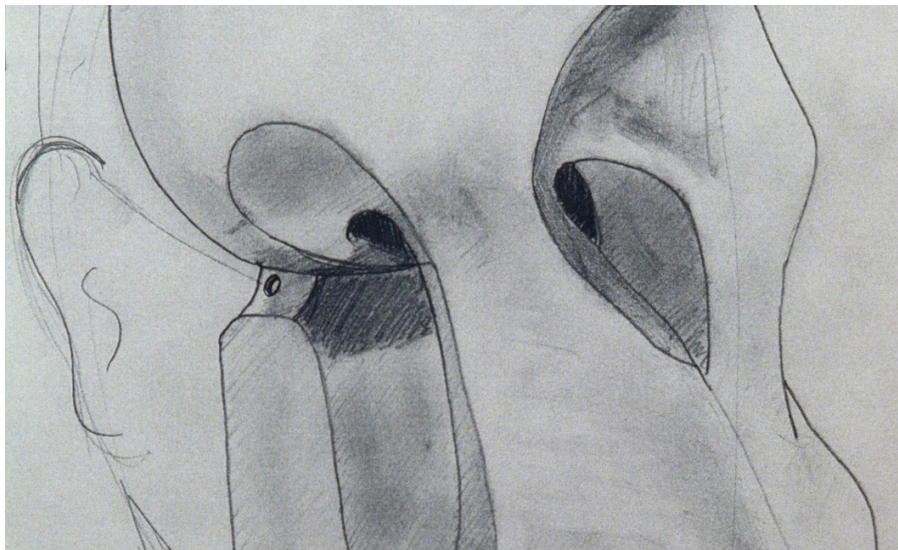


Figure 15.

Installation View, Simon Starling, Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima), 2010-11. 16 mm film transferred to digital (25 minutes, 45 seconds), wooden masks, cast bronze masks, bowler hat, metals stands, suspended mirror, suspended screen, HD projector, media player, and speakers. Dimensions variable Digital image courtesy of the artist

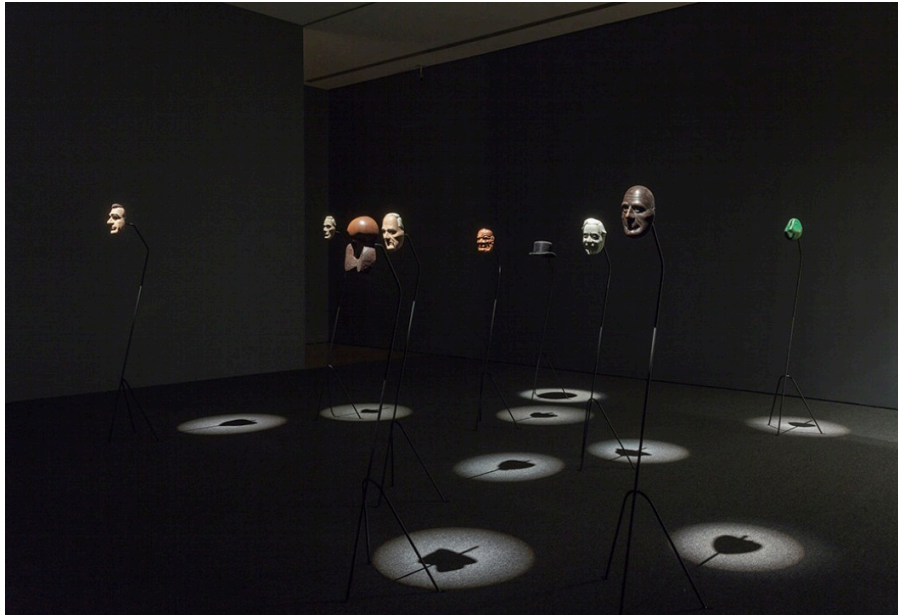


Figure 16.

Installation View, Simon Starling, *Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima)*, 2010-11. 16 mm film transferred to digital (25 minutes, 45 seconds), wooden masks, cast bronze masks, bowler hat, metals stands, suspended mirror, suspended screen, HD projector, media player, and speakers. Dimensions variable Digital image courtesy of the artist

El Eco

Henry Moore again appeared on my radar when I was invited to lead a workshop for young artists in Cornwall in 2013. One evening I gave a public lecture in a small community centre on an idyllic Cornish beach and, after questions from the largely local audience, was approached by a young Mexican curator, Paola Santoscoy (also a participant on the workshop). Prompted by *Project for a Masquerade*, she told me the story of Henry Moore's involvement at the Museo Experimental El Eco, the institution that she runs in Mexico City. This opportune conversation on a Cornish beach soon led to a further redeployment of Moore's work.

El Eco (2014) is concerned with the traces of a largely forgotten work by Henry Moore, realized in the early days of Museo Experimental El Eco, and an accompanying dance performance by the young dancer Pilar Pellicer, which was conceived in 1953 in relation to Moore's work by the Museo Experimental's founder and architect, the German artist Mathias Goeritz (figs. [17-21](#)). Filmed at the Museo Experimental in 2014 during the celebrations of Mexico's Day of the Dead festival, *El Eco* haunts Goeritz's now carefully restored architecture with its own interdisciplinary past.

During a visit to Mexico in 1953, Moore had been invited to the studio of the painter Diego Rivera, where he was struck by some over-life-size papier mâché skeletons hanging on the walls. Moore made some quick sketches of these skeletal figures, traditionally created for the Day of the Dead, on the back of his travel itinerary. Following a meeting with Mathias Goeritz, these sketches were later reproduced in grisaille on Masonite panels, six metres high, and fixed to the walls of the Museo Experimental's main space. To inaugurate the mural, Goeritz invited fifteen-year-old Pilar Pellicer to dance in the space with these huge skeletal figures as highly charged scenography. The dance was never choreographed or performed for an audience, but the few existing black-and-white photographs of this "non-event" became important promotional tools in Goeritz's project to create an interdisciplinary cultural space in which architecture, music, dance, and visual arts would coexist.

Having invited Pellicer—now a celebrated actor with a long history in theatre, film, and television—back to the Museo Experimental in 2014, and using a number of the 1953 still photographs as the key frames around which to structure the film's storyboard, *El Eco* charts Pellicer's retrospective search for those few frozen moments immortalized in black and white—a search which entails summoning her fifteen-year-old self, while simultaneously confronting the limitations of her seventy-six-year-old body. Only occasionally does her body betray her as she re-enacts the poise and vitality of her younger self. With the momentary introduction of the 1953 "ghost frames", populated as they are by Moore's vast skeletal creatures, into the contemporary moving image, *El Eco*, a form of institutional séance, constantly flic-flaks between the past and the present. Pellicer herself seems to oscillate between then and now, as at certain moments she summons once more her youthful energy, and at others retreats into her own introspective reminiscences. The absence of any real choreography for Pellicer's 1953 "performance" builds an intriguing free space between those few surviving photographic moments—a space of speculation and slippage.

The "then and now" visual narrative of *El Eco* is augmented by a finely wrought musical soundtrack for solo double bass, composed and performed by Chicago-based musician Joshua Abrams. This sparse soundtrack, with its subtle allusions to traditional Mexican folk songs associated with the Day of the Dead, intermittent moments of ambient sound, and the occasional mechanical click of a camera shutter, combines with the visual narrative to foster the sense of a fractured and fragmented reality.

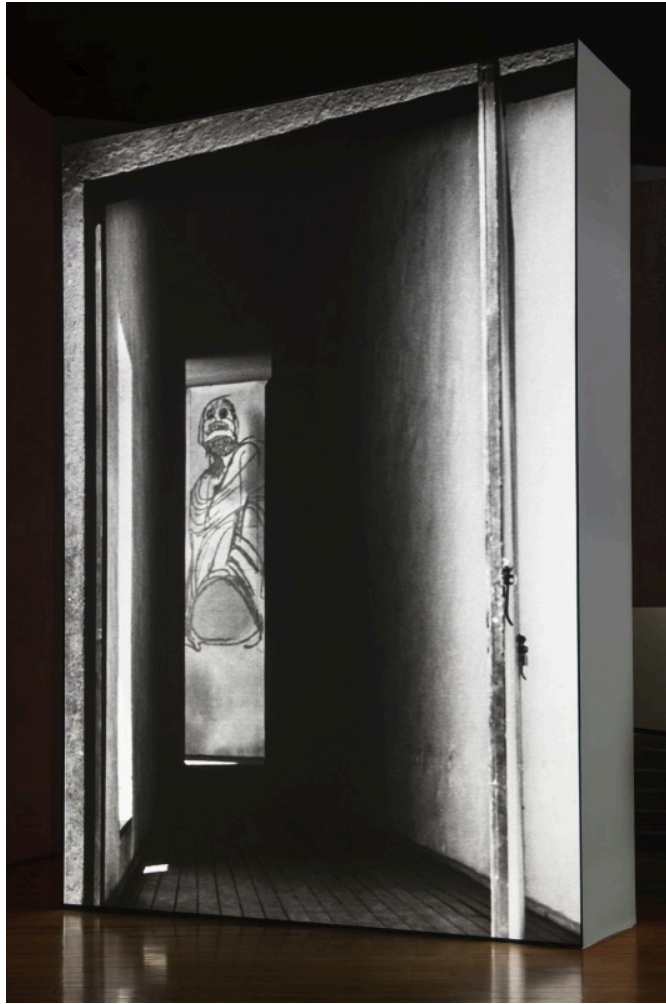


Figure 17.

Installation View, Simon Starling, *El Eco*, 2014, 35mm film transferred to HD (11 min, 18 seconds, loop). Dimensions variable. Installed at Museo Experimental El Eco, San Rafael Digital image courtesy of the artist



Figure 18.

Installation View, Simon Starling, *El Eco*, 2014, 35mm film transferred to HD (11 min, 18 seconds, loop). Dimensions variable. Installed at Museo Experimental El Eco, San Rafael Digital image courtesy of the artist



Figure 19.

Installation View, Simon Starling, *El Eco*, 2014, 35mm film transferred to HD (11 min, 18 seconds, loop). Dimensions variable. Installed at Museo Experimental El Eco, San Rafael Digital image courtesy of the artist



Figure 20.

Installation View, Simon Starling, *El Eco*, 2014, 35mm film transferred to HD (11 min, 18 seconds, loop). Dimensions variable. Installed at Museo Experimental El Eco, San Rafael Digital image courtesy of the artist

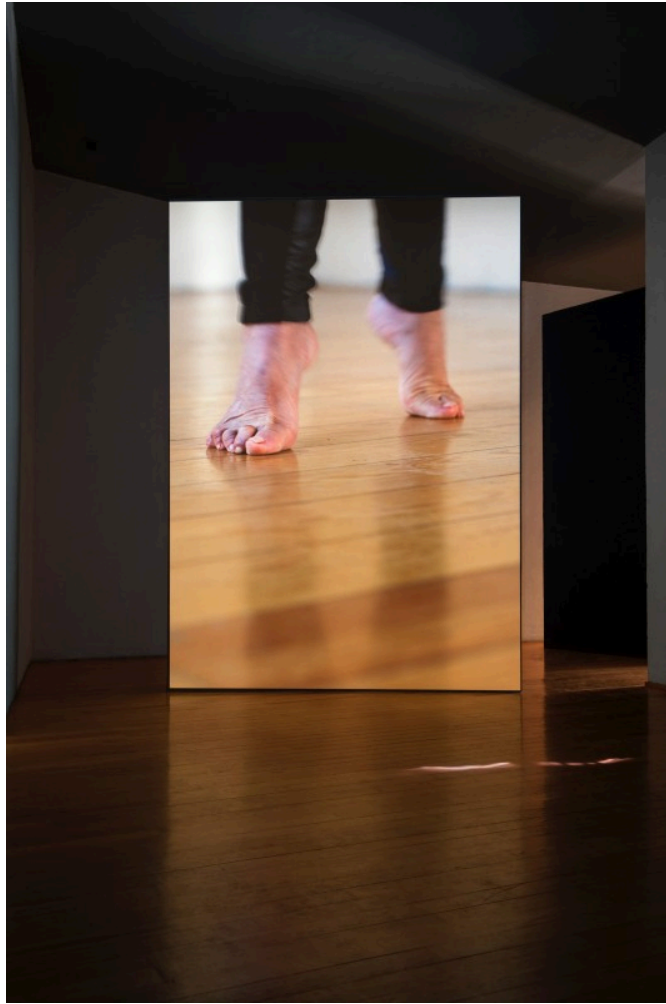


Figure 21.

Installation View, Simon Starling, *El Eco*, 2014, 35mm film transferred to HD (11 min, 18 seconds, loop). Dimensions variable. Installed at Museo Experimental El Eco, San Rafael Digital image courtesy of the artist

Footnotes

- 1 See, for example, <https://mcachicago.org/Collection/Items/Bruce-Nauman-Henry-Moore-Bound-To-Fail-1967> and <https://www.henry-moore.org/hmf/press/press-releases/henry-moore/past-press-releases/body-void-press-images--other-artists/9-bruce-mclean-fallen-warrior-1969>



1970s: Out of Sculpture

Elena Crippa

Abstract

In the 1970s, the mobility of ideas, artists, and their work intensified. British sculpture was included in the most ambitious exhibitions held abroad, aiming to present the latest international developments in contemporary art. Transnational exchanges are discussed as pivotal in the reshaping of artists' attitudes to their work and the process of making. Nonetheless, questions are also raised about inclusion and exclusion from the narrative of British art as displayed abroad, at a time when the rubric of sculpture as much as the sense of what was specifically British in the visual arts were verging towards dissolution. As part of this narrative, Lucy R. Lippard's Art from the British Left (Artists Space, New York, 1979) is discussed as a seminal, if little known, exhibition.

Authors

Acknowledgements

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Cite as

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Introduction

When thinking of the presentation and perception of British sculpture abroad in the 1970s, one cannot fail to note that sculpture was at the time a debated category, increasingly perceived as having “expanded” into innumerable new modes, from Arte Povera and land art to conceptual art and performance.¹ As a result, this essay too will have to address the question of the debated status of works that fell under the rubric of “sculpture” at this period. Yet our more particular focus here will relate to transnational exchanges, and the ways in which they reshaped art practice, at a time when art was defined by the acceleration of its dissemination through a growing number of magazines and exhibitions. The mobility of ideas and circulation of works through the mail, in publications, and via instruction-pieces meant that physical travel on the part of the artists was no longer necessarily required. And yet real encounters, then as ever, continued to be important, as they enabled the establishment of close and long-lasting relationships between curators and artists, and were often at the origin of invitations to contribute to publications and mail projects, as well as to realize more ambitious, site-specific works.² Who were the artists who became part of this continuous and fruitful international exchange? When considering the circulation, distribution, visibility, and critical reception of art at this period, we also need to think about the cultural, socio-political, and economic constraints framing the circulation and reception of people, goods, and ideas. We need to examine who the gatekeepers of those exchanges were; which artists were selected and why; and the ways in which their work was influenced as a result of being introduced into the international arena.

Up to the 1970s, British sculptors had been developing their work as part of a strong, if recent, national tradition. However, by the early years of the decade, Henry Moore’s large public sculpture were starting to feel regressive in its memorializing monumentality, while Anthony Caro’s alignment to American high modernism had turned into a weakness at a time when Greenbergian formalism was being challenged and overturned.³ British sculptors, however, continued by necessity to operate both within and against the path set by these British titans of modern sculpture. Numerous artists who attained international status working in conceptual and performance-based activities had not only trained at the powerhouse of British sculpture, Saint Martin’s School of Art, but continued to define their work in terms of sculpture, as in the case of Gilbert & George, Bruce McLean, and Roelof Louw.⁴ Nevertheless, the growing rate at which artists were invited to take part in international exchanges, publications, and exhibitions was to play a major role in reshaping their work. It did so on at least two levels. Firstly, the artists were inserted into international discussions and groupings that transcended national specificity, both in terms of the

historical development of sculptural practice and the attachment to British values cherished during the Second World War. Secondly, and this will be the focus of this text, the international context fostered an approach to the making of sculpture which both required the planning, pitching, and execution to be deliverable through instruction (when artists could not travel with the work), and also demanded a responsiveness to the specific conditions of a site. As a result, British sculpture acquired some of the characteristics of much international work: process-based and concept-shaped on one side; site specific on the other.

International Exhibitions: Concept and Context

The history of modern art is largely a history of artists' self-organization against institutional constraints; and of the eventual absorption of the avant-gardes into the institutional sphere. Art & Language, as discussed by Jo Melvin in this section, played a major role in turning self-organization into an international affair, both working and publishing as part of a transatlantic network. While artists continued to organize themselves and plan their own journals and exhibitions, from around 1969 exhibition organizers from around the world also acquired a visibly dominant role, not just in the selection of artworks but as authors of the exhibitions themselves.⁵ The discursive framework for the organization of exhibitions became more poetic, thematic, and narrative, and there was less reliance on the traditional categories of period, nationality, or medium specificity.

At the turn of the decade there was also a dramatic increase in exhibitions of contemporary art featuring artists from younger generations, who were now frequently invited to travel and create work in situ while becoming part of international conversations with other artists, critics, and curators.⁶ Two exhibitions in particular signalled this new approach and rapidly became exemplary for subsequent shows: *Op Losse Schroeven* at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (15 March–27 April 1969) and *When Attitudes Become Form* at Kunsthalle Bern (22 March–23 April 1969).⁷ Both exhibitions were approached as a process of engaging with both concepts and context.⁸ In the case of these and many other exhibitions that this essay is concerned with, curators took their cue from the work of conceptual artists, particularly in relation to their procedural and speculative statements. Artists were invited by the curators to send proposals for the execution of new work, or instructions for the making of their work by others. Albeit that many of the "proposals" were more akin to poetic statements or inconsequential gestures than to diligently prepared plans, a clear emphasis was on the pre-conception of the work.

At the same time, a great emphasis was put on the material embodiment and physical presence of the work, with artists invited to respond to the particularities of the location and often using local materials, and working not only within the gallery but also outdoors. *Op Losse Schroeven* not only took up the hall and main staircase of the museum, but also spilled onto the streets and pavements surrounding it.⁹ A similar approach was taken by the art critic and curator Lucy R. Lippard in her “number shows”—beginning with *557,087* at the Seattle Art Museum Pavilion (5 September–5 October 1969). As well as including “a few paintings and sculptures in unconventional media” and “a large section of documents, photographs, books and conceptual projects”, Lippard invited artists to contribute “outdoor (or indoor) pieces which can go out into the city and the surrounding landscape or wherever you choose”—ultimately extending the exhibition to an approximately eighty-kilometre radius around the city.¹⁰ By adopting the artists’ critical responses to the art institution, curators were agreeing with, if not instigating, the siting of work in locations other than the museum. For instance, at *557,087* in Seattle and at *955,000* in Vancouver in 1970, Keith Arnatt presented *Mirror Plug* (1969). In Vancouver, it was recreated in the lawn outside Vancouver Art Gallery. By digging and mirror-lining two identical pits in the turf, the work disrupted the outdoor green by a concrete act of removal, and yet it also mimetically attempted to conceal itself while generating confusion if explored closely. Roelof Louw’s *Wood Piece* (1969), which involved scattering approximately three hundred wooden slats at irregular intervals over an extensive outdoor area, was also shown at both *557,087* and *955,000*. The nature of the artists’ involvement resulted in works that were at once conceptually framed but also specific to the site. Sometimes this was further reflected in the doubling up of exhibition catalogues—one would be available at the opening of the exhibition and include the artists’ proposals, the other, documenting the work in situ, would be published on a later date.¹¹ Through the publication of correspondence and artists’ notes and proposals, exhibition catalogues also became testaments to the exchanges between artists and curators, and to the way in which artists were thinking about the best way to develop or adapt their work to different contexts of presentation.¹²

A similar emphasis on site specificity and local materials characterized the 10th Tokyo Biennale in 1970, titled *Between Man and Matter*, which toured to Kyoto and Nagoya. The curator Yusuke Nakahara emphasized the notions of process, experience, and place. He selected artists making work about the relationship, and the experience of the relationship, between man and matter, as if “they were a part included in the whole.”¹³ Although Nakahara stipulated that the work had to be sited in the museum, it was nonetheless site-specific as it responded to the specific constraints of the building and often used locally sourced materials.¹⁴

Barry Flanagan had created site-specific work for the first time the year before, spending weeks installing his first institutional solo exhibition at the Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld in 1969. The installation he realized at the Tokyo Biennale included a work made of cardboard, wood shavings, and sand (fig. 1 and fig. 2). Its title—*may 1'70*—reflected the contingent nature of a sculpture which was only precariously balanced and destined to change its configuration over the course of the exhibition.¹⁵ Overall, Flanagan's emphasis was on an aesthetic rooted in its embodiment—its mass, ponderability, and occupation of space—somehow a victory of Herbert Read's discussion of sculpture in terms of tactility over Clement Greenberg's emphasis on opticality.¹⁶ This was not only true of artists like Flanagan but also of "Postminimalist" artists such as Eva Hesse, whose work was included in Lippard's number shows, and Richard Serra, who also exhibited at the Tokyo Biennale—both artists whose works' formal qualities and structure depended on the type of materials and the effect of gravity, while fully implicating the viewer as co-habitant. Artists were pushed to create artworks that responded to particular contexts, while the procedural quality of the assemblage of the work guaranteed its movement and visibility independently from the presence of the artist.



Figure 1.

Installation View, *Between Man and Matter* (10th Tokyo Biennale), Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, 1970, showing Barry Flanagan, *may 1 '70*, 1970, sand, wood, cardboard, wood shavings, sand Digital image courtesy of The Estate of Barry Flanagan, courtesy Plubronze Ltd. / Photo: Kiyoji Otsuji



Figure 2.

Installation View, *Between Man and Matter* (10th Tokyo Biennale), Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, 1970, showing Barry Flanagan, *may 1 '70*, 1970, sand, wood, cardboard, wood shavings, sand Digital image courtesy of The Estate of Barry Flanagan, courtesy Plubronze Ltd. / Photo: Shiego Anzai

Similarly to the exhibitions discussed above, Wim Beeren's selection criteria for *Sonsbeek 71* at Arnhem (19 June–15 August 1971), two years after his *Op Losse Schroeven*, was "the degree of involvement of a work with the given properties of the park architecture", with artists asked to conceive a work responding to a particular location of their own choosing.¹⁷ Following the principle of "*making*" rather than selecting and arranging, the exhibition acquired the theme of "spatial relations".¹⁸ Because for some artists the park was an "unnatural environment" rather than a natural context, Beeren and his team worked with them to identify locations across the country, forging relationships and collaborations with institutions, government departments, and individuals.¹⁹ This allowed Richard Long, for example, to realize his *Celtic Sign* (1971; [fig. 3](#)), made by arranging rods in order to create a large spiralling form in the dunes of the remote island of Schiermonnikoog. Other works were created in non-urban environments (as in the case of Michael Heizer in Limburg and Robert Morris in Noord-Holland), as well as at venues in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht.²⁰



Figure 3.
Richard Long, Celtic Sign, Schiermonnikoog, 1971 Digital image courtesy
of the artist

Beyond National Frameworks and Interpretative Models

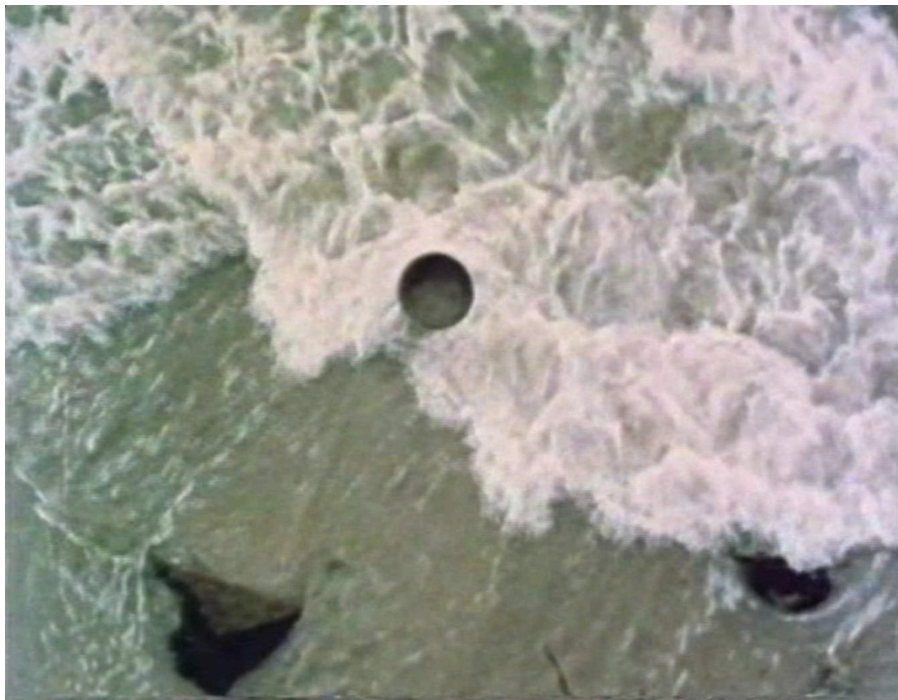


Figure 4.
Barry Flanagan, a hole in the sea (film still), 1969, 16 mm colour film
Digital image courtesy of The Estate of Barry Flanagan, courtesy
Plubronze Ltd.

Barry Flanagan's exhibit at *Sonsbeek 71* was *a hole in the sea* (1969; fig. 4), a 16mm colour film showing a hole being created through the insertion of a transparent, plastic cylinder into the seashore. The work had been filmed and produced by Gerry Schum in Scheveningen, the Netherlands, in February 1969 for the *Land Art TV* exhibition which went on to tour as part of a number of other international exhibitions. Schum had played a key role in inviting artists who mostly worked in sculpture to produce film work as a way of exploring their sculptural concerns: that is, the physical properties of the work, its relation to its surroundings and to light, and the way it is perceived.²¹ While in Arnhem Flanagan showed an existing work, the curators of *Sonsbeek 71* spent a considerable proportion of their funds to give other artists the opportunity, over several weeks, to experiment with audio-visual equipment.²² This was not incidental, as it was felt that communication media had fostered a broader conception and understanding of space, so that sculpture was inevitably linked to audio-visual works in a contemporary engagement with site and experience.²³ The role of foreign institutions and of Gerry Schum in particular, in instigating the adoption of moving images among British artists, cannot be underestimated. A key example is Gilbert & George, who between 1970 and 1972 made four videos with him, and went on to write and direct their own feature-length film, *The World of Gilbert & George*, in 1981.

Flanagan and Long were among those British artists who most often took part in the new type of transnational, temporary exhibition, which primarily featured artists from Europe and the US but at times extended to include artists from Japan and Latin America. The art exhibited was often still seen as having a particular relation to sculpture in view of its engagement with the site, light, and the artist's body. As suggested by Jo Melvin, invitations to artists to work in new and unusual places from 1969 onwards, and increasingly after 1970, whereby materials were mostly sourced locally, enhanced what was already manifest in Flanagan's approach: work that was itinerant, contingent, and responsive to the specificities of the site.²⁴ If Long's way of working since at least 1967 already involved a reliance on the specificity of the site visited, invitations from institutions outside Britain now also enabled the making of projects in unusual and remote locations. *Sonsbeek 71* is a case in point, acting as an example for the future behaviour of art institutions acting as commissioning bodies who were prepared to see work realized away from the museum itself.

Participation in many international exhibitions meant that there was a fluid exchange of ideas between artists in Europe, the US, South America, Japan, and beyond. By the early 1970s, artists—either of their own accord or in response to curators' and editors' invitations—were taking ownership of the discussion and presentation of their work through their writings and through their contributions to catalogues and art magazines, as well as putting

forward their propositions for the work to be exhibited.²⁵ As remarked by art historian Sabeth Buchmann, “Turning away from traditional notions of art towards practice oriented towards exchange and distribution affected the self-understanding of everyone participating in art activities.”²⁶ Additionally, the work could be assessed and discussed beyond national references—such as the traditional subject of the British landscape in the case of Richard Long, for example, who in the early 1970s worked in the most disparate locations and with highly diverse materials, from realizing *A Straight Hundred Mile Walk in Japan* by walking across a mountainside on Honshu (1976), to creating *Stone Line* (1977), for which he took over a large gallery at the Art Gallery of South Wales, Sydney. The work of British artists could also be related to other international developments such as process art and Arte Povera, as in the case of Flanagan. The Italian art critic Lorenza Trucchi highlighted this relationship, describing Flanagan’s supple sculpture in terms of his use of “povere” ropes and other materials such as felt.²⁷ Artists were thinking of themselves as part of an international rather than solely British sphere—and one that went beyond the transatlantic connection that had dominated the 1960s.

International Discourse and Vernacular Assertion

Nevertheless, this was not always an exchange marked by cooperation and mutual recognition. The stakes were high, as history was being drafted through artists represented in shows organized by the most powerful curators, their catalogue essays, and the critical response to them. Already, in 1969, Flanagan had compiled a “documentary exhibition” of practices that foregrounded new developments in the form of a portfolio of large sheets of photographs of works and artists’ statements by Bruce McLean, Richard Long, Roelof Louw, John Latham, Event Structure Research Group, as well as himself.²⁸ The sheets were shown at the Fischbach Gallery and at Lucy R. Lippard’s loft in Prince Street, New York, in 1969. Flanagan intended them as a response to American critics who identified the new conceptual, earthwork, and process-based practices with developments in America, and to a lesser extent with Brazil and Continental Europe, while failing to recognize the role played by British artists as part of an international exchange.²⁹ Similarly, Art & Language were later to openly condemn “the authoritative account of the art of our generation” produced by writers associated with the American journal *October*, which belittled the British contribution to conceptual art.³⁰

It may seem paradoxical that while British artists such as Flanagan, Long, Art & Language, McLean, and Gilbert & George had an extraordinary presence in international galleries and exhibitions, their work was not necessarily recognized as playing a leading role in the development of new practices in the late 1960s and 1970s. Some critics and curators claimed their work

remained quintessentially British rather than representative of major transnational developments. This was true even of curators who were involved in international curatorial trends. For example, in the catalogue introduction for *The New Art* (Hayward Gallery, London, August–September 1972), Anne Seymour argued that a presentation of the contemporary work of British artists in an international context would have been preferable, as “it would have thrown into relief precisely how these manifestations of a world-wide upheaval are very specifically British.”³¹ Guy Brett discussed this attitude as part of a general malaise that affected the antiquated British art establishment, whereby it systematically failed to recognize the value of experimental and transnational contributions.³² It may therefore not seem so peculiar that the reputation of Long’s work in his native country came to be indissolubly connected to a British tradition of landscape painting and to a sense of nostalgia for the uniqueness of the British countryside—one indissolubly connected to the First and Second World Wars, war propaganda, and the paintings of the “Neo-romantics”. This is despite the fact that Long’s work has been made in all sorts of landscapes and with all sorts of materials, extracted from the most disparate sites across the globe, and equally relates to land art—as an international development—in terms of his inscription of gesture, movement, and time into the surface of planet Earth.

This is not, however, a conundrum peculiar to British artists. From the Italian artists associated with Arte Povera to most of the Japanese artists represented in *Between Man and Matter*, few have been recognized for their part in reshaping the international avant-garde. This is, of course, related to the dominance and prescriptive power of the American art market and American art criticism, in a way that remains unmatched anywhere else. One could also argue that the work produced by most British artists remained too scarce, too provisional, and not monumental enough to be able to compete with the work of Moore or with that of their American counterparts, who capitalized on the combined economic and cultural capital of the monumental—from Claus Oldenburg to Richard Serra and Lawrence Weiner.

Institutional Narratives versus Socially Engaged Practices

Writing in 1980, the artist Margaret Harrison was critical of an exhibition of British art shown that year at the Guggenheim Museum in New York: *British Art Now: An American Perspective, 1980*.³³ Harrison complained that the exhibition gave little indication of the exciting work made in Britain in the previous decade, as British artists “forgot to apologise for not being American”.³⁴ She went on to summarize:

A myth has been perpetuated that the 60's was a period of flowering for British Art and the 70's never matched up to it, producing little of consequence. This is difficult to comprehend when one considers that there have been three flourishing fields of activity, feminist art practice, performance art, and work with a socio-political content and all three fed each other and interpenetrated.³⁵

Nonetheless, as Harrison did not fail to note, much of this type of work was officially ignored in Britain as much as it was abroad. Women, black artists, and artists in general who wanted to address and make visible forms of social and political struggle remained at the fringes of institutional acceptability. If artists who were fully part of the international scene and regularly exhibited abroad felt at least partially neglected, under-represented, or written out from historical readings of contemporary artistic developments, this was even more painfully the case for those artists who remained at the fringes of institutional acceptability—notably women and non-white artists—whose work was not included in important international exhibitions and who were mostly ignored by major art institutions; from Alexis Hunter, Jo Spence, and Marie Yates to Rasheed Araeen, Donald Locke, and David Medalla, as well as many others.³⁶ Their exclusion, as argued by Jean Fisher, was indeed what gave coherence to an institutional view of art with a precise genealogy, whereby only the work of white male artists could claim legitimacy.³⁷

As well as a loss of interest in the specific properties of sculpture as a historically shaped category and the rapid institutionalization of conceptual practices, the 1970s witnessed the rise on an international level of a radical consciousness that ended up defining the work of many artists even further away from formal and medium-specific concerns. In Britain, numerous female artists attempted to embody an alternative voice, challenging rather than adapting to the traditional and discursive framework of the dominant art institutions; working collectively, and seeking alternative spaces in which to exhibit their work. Crucially, they often also resisted the language or “condition” of sculpture, which had become synonymous with a conservative and chauvinist tradition associated with the work of white male artists.³⁸ Primavera Boman, Shelagh Cluett, and Margaret Organ are just a few of the artists who between the late 1960s and the 1970s embraced performance or adopted materials and approaches to the making and installation of their sculpture that were purposely fragile or precarious.

Additionally, following a period of economic stagnation and growing social frustration in Britain, racist politicians and police forces were failing to curb intolerant views or the abuse of stop and search procedures on immigrants from the former colonies.³⁹ Towards the second half of the 1970s, these issues were addressed and made visible in the work of a number of black artists who had moved to London in the 1950s and 1960s. They mostly did so by seeking new forms of expression that could channel their concerns while eschewing a history of art and medium specificity they felt disconnected from and been badly served by. In the case of Araeen, as Courtney Martin has observed, the geometric, Minimalist sculpture he had been pursuing had become subsumed in the very modernist ethos that had turned him—as an artist who had moved to Britain from Pakistan—into an undesirable non-citizen.⁴⁰

Oblivious to, or perhaps disapproving of these developments, the British Council played a key role in promoting abroad a more traditionally acceptable, white, male, and often medium-bound type of art through a number of solo presentations (including the biennial presentations in Venice and São Paulo) and large-scale group exhibitions. These contexts prioritized traditional forms of object-based sculpture, particularly those with a strong history and still healthy life. A case in point was the seminal exhibition, *Arte Inglese Oggi*, which opened in Milan in 1976. In a short essay in this same issue I discuss who was included in the exhibition in the “Sculpture” category: it is also revealing to note who was excluded. Only two female artists appeared in the “Painting” category: Rita Donagh and Bridget Riley. No women were represented in the “Sculpture” category, nor in the more progressively titled “Alternative Developments” section. In addition, no artists from the former empire or others who had come to England from overseas seemed to have made a significant enough impact to be selected for these sections (the only exception was the American, R. B. Kitaj).⁴¹

A similar scenario can be identified in the selection for the exhibition *Un Certain Art Anglais: Sélection d'artistes britanniques 1970-1979*, Paris (19 January–12 March 1979), which is discussed in this issue in an essay by Lucy Reynolds.⁴² Despite the overall younger age of the selectors—whom one might have thought would be more in touch with contemporary developments and keener to broaden representation—the remit of the artists selected was not much more diverse than those shown in *Arte Inglese Oggi*.⁴³ The only women included were Phillippa Ecobichon, Alexis Hunter, and Mary Kelly.⁴⁴ While one of the selectors, Richard Cork, had dedicated an issue of *Studio International* (which at the time he edited) to “Women’s Art” in 1977, he seems to have been unable to push for more equal representation in major state-sponsored exhibitions.⁴⁵ In terms of gender and multiculturalism, not much progress was made when it came to the

large-scale exhibitions curated internationally by the now ubiquitous exhibition organizers, as in the cases discussed above.⁴⁶ This is understandable given the limited channels through which art could be made visible and validated, through a tight network of a few dealers, exhibition organizers, and keepers, in Britain as well as abroad; and also given that the work of female artists was not taken seriously; much as the work of artists from the former colonies was not even seen as British, and its value was mostly perceived in relation to preconceived ideas about what indigenous art should look like.⁴⁷

Art from the British Left

One exhibition that, taking place abroad, defied what was unquestioningly seen as the pinnacle of contemporary British art—and one that was nearly exclusively white and male—was Lucy Lippard’s *Art from the British Left*, which took place at Artists Space, New York (16 June–14 July 1979). The exhibiting artists were Rasheed Araeen, Conrad Atkinson, Margaret Harrison, Alexis Hunter, Mary Kelly, Tony Rickaby, and Marie Yates. From 1977 to 1978, Lippard and her son lived on a farm in Devon, making occasional trips to London. Over this period she met all the artists whom she subsequently invited to take part in the show, developing a close relationship with a number of them. Lippard’s desire to present their work in New York was prompted by their active engagement in current social issues. As she noted later in 1981, British artists were, in her view, ahead of Americans in their recognition of “artists’ loss of the confidence to use their communicative tools for social impact” and their “recognition of the necessity to act on it, not just comment on it”.⁴⁸

Unsurprisingly, given that Lippard was a socialist feminist, the exhibition included four women out of seven artists—an exceptional ratio for the time.⁴⁹ All the artists included had been directly addressing socio-political issues and understood the subjects they tackled—be it the representation of gender, sexuality, division of labour, race, power, or civil conflict—as constructed within specific discourses. Since 1977 Atkinson had been addressing the problems in Northern Ireland, because of the lack of a public debate in Britain, both in terms of national political institutions and the media. Rickaby had been making watercolours representing the London headquarters of some of the right-wing organizations that proliferated in Britain in the late 1970s, depicting the material quality of ideology.⁵⁰ In the series *For Bakunin* (referring to the Russian socialist anarchist), from which he showed one work in Lippard’s show, he pursued this theme using performance and photography, inserting staged, angry gestures as well as traces of politicized artistic endeavours—symbolized by a red monochrome painting—which ultimately failed to have any impact on society (fig. 5).

Hunter showed two of her photographic series, which visualize stereotypes and assumptions about the way women are represented and the role they should play in society (fig. 6).⁵¹ Harrison exhibited *Homeworkers: Woman's Work* (1977-78; fig. 7). It includes a series of photographic documentations of homeworkers accompanied by texts which reveal the lives of a community of underpaid and invisible workers, most of whom are women bound to their homes, largely due to the demands of childcare. Kelly presented *Post Partum Document: Document I* (1974), the first in a series of works realized between 1973 and 1979 in which the artist displays feeding charts and her child's faecal stains to explore the complex and subjective relationship between mother and son, while also addressing its larger social and psychological dynamics.



Figure 5.

Installation View, *Art from the British Left*, Artists Space, New York, 1979, showing Tony Rickaby, *For Bakunin*, 1979, black-and-white photographs on board, 101.6 x 50.8 cm Digital image courtesy of Tony Rickaby and Artists Space, New York



Figure 6.

Installation View, Art from the British Left, Artists Space, New York, 1979, showing on the back wall, Alexis Hunter, *For Every Witch*, 1969, black-and-white photographs mounted on five boards, 64.8 x 28.6 cm each; and Alexis Hunter, *War*, circa 1978, colour Xeroxes mounted on three board, 64.8 x 28.6 cm each. On the wall on the right, Tony Rickaby, *For Bakunin*, 1979 Digital image courtesy of Artists Space, New York



Figure 7.

Installation View, Art from the British Left, Artists Space, New York, 1979, showing Margaret Harrison, *Homeworkers: Woman's Work*, 1977-78 Digital image courtesy of Margaret Harrison and Artists Space, New York.

A table with chairs, in the middle of the exhibition space, presented an “archival section” including, for example, documentation of the current dispute between Atkinson and Rickaby relating to “the censorship controversy with the Arts Council of Great Britain”.⁵² Works by the two artists had been selected by Derek Boshier, who had been invited by the Arts Council to purchase works for its permanent collection, which were to be exhibited in *Lives: An Exhibition of Artists whose Work is Based on Other Peoples Lives* at the Serpentine Gallery (1979–80). The works by Atkinson and Rickaby were withdrawn by the Arts Council because of fear of “legal consequences”.⁵³ The same reading area made available other documents and books, including publications by Araeen and Yates. In fact many of the artists included in *Art from the British Left* also addressed their social concerns through writing and editing. Araeen, with the writer Mahmood Jamal, started the journal *Black Phoenix*, which was published in three issues between January 1978 and the spring of 1979, copies of which were available in the exhibition for reading and purchase. In the case of Araeen, the need to publish was particularly urgent given the lack of journals addressing the struggle of black artists, and also as a way to document his performance work in an attempt to save it from oblivion.⁵⁴

As part of the exhibition, Yates presented *Text Piece 1977* (fig. 8), a text-based work on seven panels that she had developed into her book *A Critical Re-evaluation of a Proposed Publication* (1978; fig. 9), also on view with the other publications and supporting material.⁵⁵ Each page of the publication reproduces a page of an earlier book, conceived in 1977. As stated on the cover, this reworking addresses the inscription into the landscape and the perpetration, through cultural and social norms, of the perceived dichotomous relationship between nature and culture. In the 1978 critical re-evaluation of the book, as per its title, a new paragraph was added underneath the representation of each page of the original book, in the gained awareness that the initial work denied “the possibility of struggle, as well as positing a unified ideology”. Yates was at least partially rejecting typical conceptual approaches in favour of the polyphonic layering of pluralistic and changing voices that was defining some feminist art at the time; a refusal to adopt binary oppositions or to reduce “a multi-dimensional phase-space to a single linear dimension”.⁵⁶ The work by Kelly, Harrison, Hunter, and Yates included in *British Art from the Left* was then sent on by Lippard to Chicago, to be shown in the last exhibition held at the Artemisia Gallery, which she also selected, entitled *Both Sides Now: An International Exhibition Integrating Feminism and Leftist Politics* (1979).⁵⁷



Figure 8.
Installation View, Art from the British Left, Artists Space, New York 1979,
showing Marie Yates, *Text Piece*, 1977 Digital image courtesy of Marie
Yates and Artists Space, New York

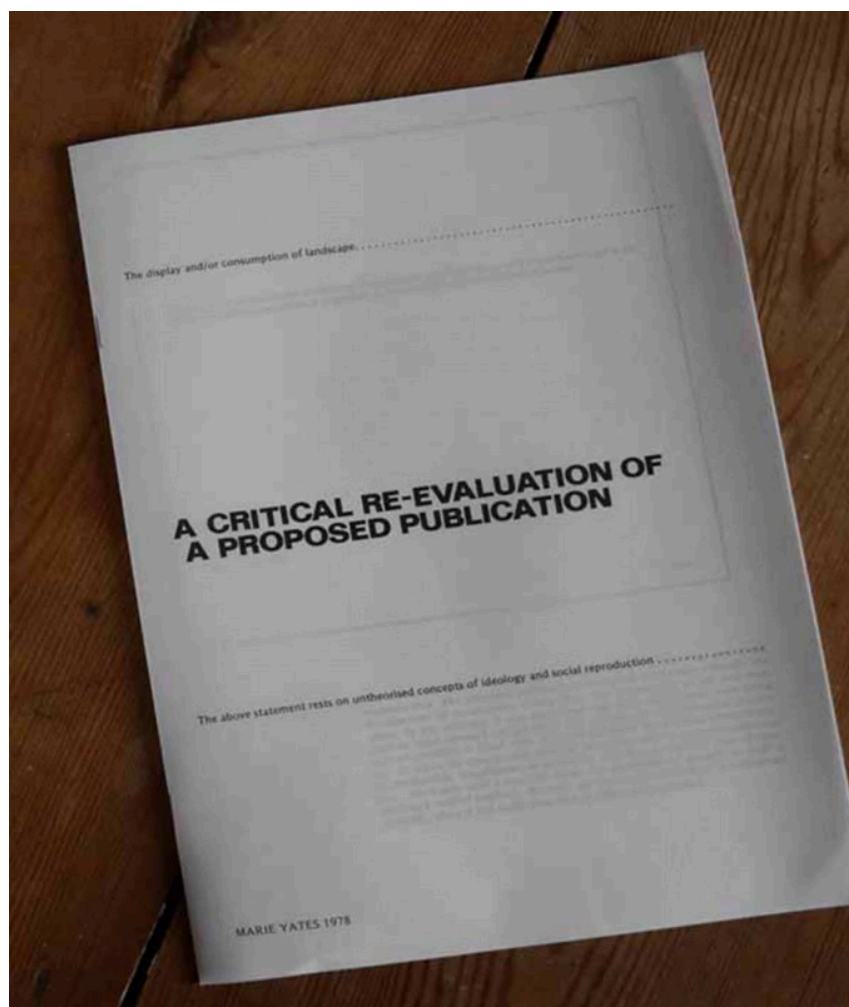


Figure 9.

Marie Yates, *A Critical Re-evaluation of a Proposed Publication*, 1978
(book cover) Digital image courtesy of Marie Yates

As well as making available issues of *Black Phoenix* among the other reading material, the exhibition also included documentation of Araeen's performance *Paki Bastard (Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person)* (1977), while one panel in the changing configuration of *For Oluwale* (1971-73; [fig. 10](#)) was recreated by Lippard using Xeroxes of the original material.⁵⁸ The work was made of news clippings documenting the treatment of black people by the police, and it was dedicated to David Oluwale, a British Nigerian who had been subjected to systematic and brutal violence by police officers and who was murdered in Leeds in 1969. Araeen's work was also adapted for the invitation card to *Art from the British Left*, using one of two postcards that the artist had made and widely distributed earlier that year in order to denounce the fact that black artists in Britain had been ignored in the selection for both *Arte Inglese Oggi* and *Un Certain Art Anglais*.⁵⁹ The card Lippard chose to use for the invitation to *British Art from the Left* ([fig. 11](#))

combined text and photography. The photographic image, showing two policemen assaulting a black man, their arms around his neck, choking him from behind, was a cropped and degraded reproduction of a picture taken by photographer Peter Marlow. It was one of many images documenting anti-racism protesters who halted a National Front march in Lewisham, south London, on 13 April 1977, only for over two hundred of them to be clubbed, dragged away, and arrested by the police.⁶⁰ At the top, across the image and in capital letters, is written "UN CERTAIN ART ANGLAIS!"⁶¹ The eponymous exhibition had opened in Paris only five months earlier. This work by Araeen, reproduced on the invitation card and circulated through the mail, simultaneously hit back at the rise of racism within police forces in the mid-1970s, as well as the ostracizing of "third-world" artists from British culture.⁶²

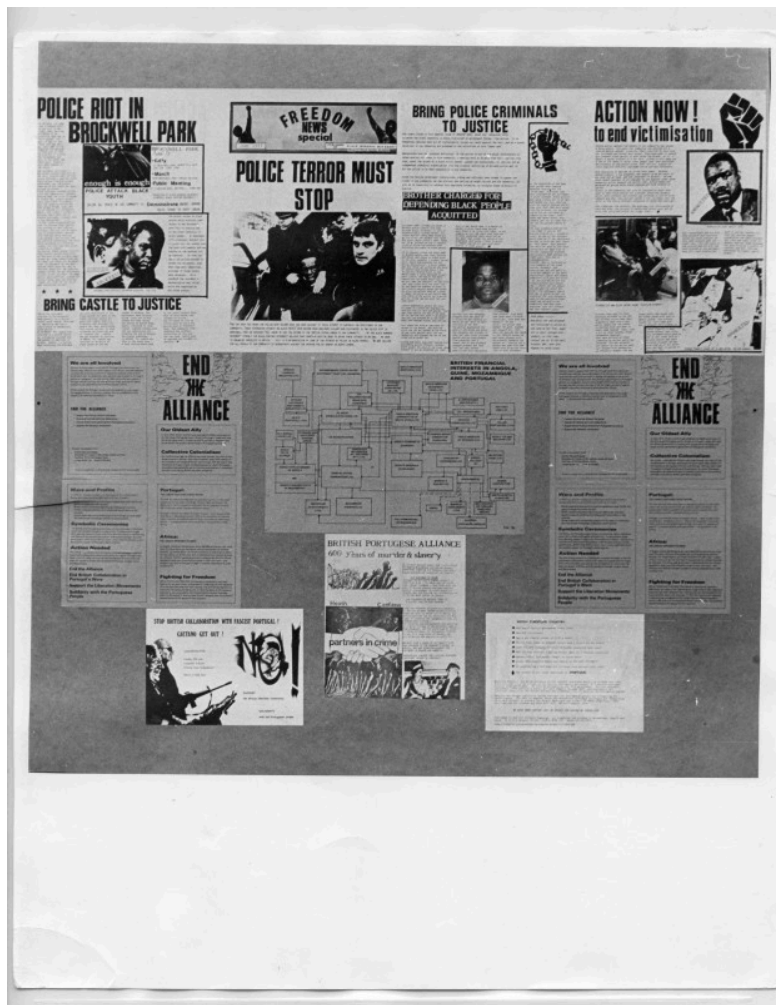


Figure 10. Installation View, Art from the British Left, Artists Space, New York, 1979, showing recreation of Rasheed Araeen, *For Oluwale*, third out of four collage panels, 1971-73, dimensions unknown. Digital image courtesy of Rasheed Araeen and Artists Space, New York.

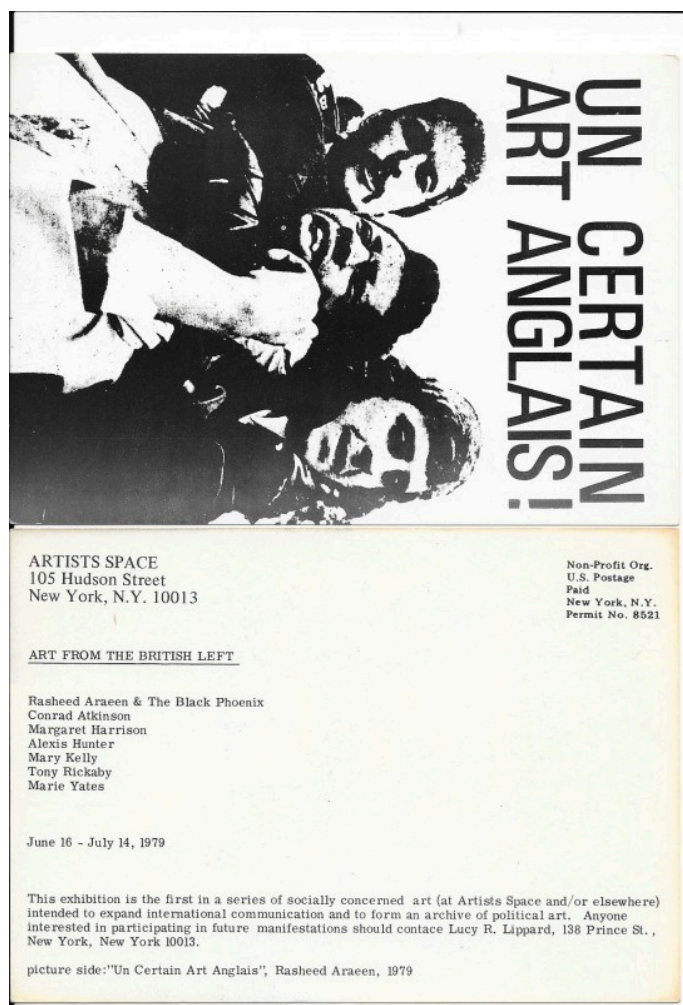


Figure 11.
Invitation card, recto and verso, British Art from the Left., Artists Space, New York, 1979 Digital image courtesy of Artists Space, New York

Sculpture, Body, Struggle

If the category of sculpture had been contested at least since the 1960s—both preserved along the lines that it could be “extended”, and discarded as unhelpful when looked at in terms of contemporary art production—a relationship to sculpture continued to be perceived in the photographic documentation of earthworks and performance, because of a sense of a bodily and spatial encounter—which had its origin in sculpture—being mediated. ⁶³ There is no doubt that this insistence on a bodily encounter with the site and with other people resonated with the cultural climate at the time, in which, on an international level, young people were pressing for social change that would break these traditional moulds whereby individuals were being cast into normative behaviours. And this is

also the way in which we can understand Araeen's work, reproduced on the invitation card of the New York show, as an expression of the sheer physical frustration of the body trapped and restricted by others, in discursive at least as much as in physical terms.⁶⁴ This is also the case with Hunter's powerful work, which Lippard convincingly discussed in terms more akin to performance and body art than conceptual photography, in recognition of its capacity to convey "an almost sexual sense of anticipation, of a potential attack or caress", performed by the hands ubiquitously present in the work from 1973 to 1979.⁶⁵

In the past, curators have been condemned for aestheticizing and reducing, if not trivializing, the impetus of art whose anti-aesthetic is a means whereby it can dissociate itself from the mainstream of production and distribution in order to foreground its ethical and political intent.⁶⁶ In *Art from the British Left* Lippard was doing the opposite—which is unsurprising given that the exhibition was announced as the first in a series of presentations of "socially concerned art" at Artists Space and elsewhere, "intended to expand international communication and to form an archive of political art".⁶⁷ In 1980 this led to the first meetings towards the formation of PAD (Political Art Documentation), and then of PAD/D (Political Art Documentation/ Distribution).⁶⁸ PAD/D emerged from the desire to establish an archive for the "documentation of politically aware and socially concerned artworks" from around the world, "at a time when politically-charged art was still very much hidden and never appeared in art magazines".⁶⁹ Its conception at least partly derived from Lippard's feeling of being energized by the impressive "activist art" she experienced when she spent a year in England, shortly before the organization of *Art from the British Left*, and her realization of how little known the work was in the US.⁷⁰ Araeen's work used on the invitation card, as much as that by the other artists in the exhibition, was also in tune with the expressed aims of PAD/D: "to encourage the fearless use of objects and encourage and support disenfranchised people in making their own uncolonized art".⁷¹

What did it mean for the exhibiting artists to have their work displayed in New York and in some cases in Chicago? Atkinson and Rickaby had already exhibited in New York and Kelly's *Post Partum Document* had already acquired wide visibility and recognition.⁷² Yet for some of the other artists, as in the case of Yates and Araeen, the fact that Artists Space could not afford to pay for their travel to New York, and that the artists themselves were unable to afford the fare, meant that exchanges with and their presence in the American context did not readily materialize. Additionally, as John A. Walker has pointed out, the acceptability and visibility gained by socially and politically inflected work in the late 1970s suffered a blow with

the long Tory administrations in the UK from 1979 to 1997, as well as the Republican administrations in the USA between 1981 and 1993.⁷³ Nevertheless, in 1979 *Art from the British Left* did succeed in giving visibility to the variety of socially engaged work being produced in the UK. The magazine *Village Voice* reviewed the exhibition on two occasions. First, Jane Bell stressed the activist nature of much of the work, describing it as a political manifestation of social struggle.⁷⁴ Then, Peter Frank, without failing to remark on “the wearying task of standing and reading the visual library” that made up the exhibition, noted the frequent brilliance of the material on display, particularly praising Yates’s book, in its bridging of political and philosophical concerns.⁷⁵ With *Art from the British Left*, Lippard brought together and legitimized different ways of engaging with socialism and feminism, both in a form more akin to agitprop, with the aim of raising awareness, as much as through a more conceptual endeavour relating to theory. She was giving visibility to the fact that social and political struggle, despite local specificities, had a more global dimension, as women, black citizens, freedom fighters, and the economically disadvantaged shared the same political and economic struggle across the world—something that will ultimately be documented in PAD/D.

Conclusion

Looking at British sculpture abroad in the 1970s highlights the fact that conceptually framed site-specific practices and those open to new media were relatively quickly endorsed by the major art institutions and had a great visibility. In contrast with this, however, work by women artists, artists from the former British colonies and the Commonwealth, and art with a socio-political commitment only had a marginal, if seminal, presence. It also highlights the fact that British art was part of an international discourse, and artists felt less attached to national schools. Nevertheless, the struggle to raise the funding to pay for artists’ travel on the part of curators and institutions foregrounding socio-political concerns, meant that more often than not the relationships rarely materialized in terms of real encounters or exchanges. In the meantime, the category of sculpture had, at least momentarily, been dissolved. By the 1970s, sculpture was felt by many artists to be a rigid structure whose discourse and context of production needed to be deflated, taken out of the museum, punched through; and this often involved a performative embodiment on the part of the artist, at times documented through photography and film. Furthermore, sculpture proper was to be avoided because it was deemed to be mostly incompatible with what Lippard defined as the feminist “collage aesthetic”—an “art of separations” which, like collage, “is born out of interruption and the healing

instinct to use political consciousness as a glue with which to get the pieces into some sort of new order”, and which yet does not form a new unity, but a combination of fragmented, not fully compatible parts. ⁷⁶

Footnotes

- 1 Despite this, many critics continued to nominate new developments as sculpture. The art historian Rosalind E. Krauss, in a number of key texts on sculpture she produced in the 1970s—particularly *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), and the essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field”, *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 30–44, argued for the creation of new taxonomies rather than the incorporation of new modes of practice within the realm of sculpture. Nonetheless, she did defend new typologies of works—such as earthwork, installation, and anti-form—as logical extensions of the medium of sculpture.
- 2 On this point, between the 1950s and 1970s, artists consistently refer to their first trip to the United States as a major event in terms of the artists and curators they met and the working relationships they established. This was the case for Art & Language and the numerous collaborations that followed Michael Baldwin and Terry Atkinson’s visits to New York between 1966 and 1969. See Charles Harrison and Fred Orton, *A Provisional History of Art & Language* (Paris: Eric Fabre, 1982), 19–20, and Art & Language, “Voices off: Reflections on Conceptual Art”, *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 1 (Autumn 2006): 113–35 (113).
- 3 On the role of Moore’s sculpture in memorializing the British landscape in the wake of the Second World War, see Penelope Curtis and Fiona Russell, “Henry Moore and the Post-War British Landscape: Monuments Ancient and Modern”, in *Henry Moore: Critical Essays*, ed. Jane Beckett and Fiona Russell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 125–41. On Caro’s changing reception in New York in the early 1970s, see Alex Potts, “Caro in the 1960s and the Persistent Object of Sculpture”, *Sculpture Journal* 21, no. 2 (2012): 54–55.
- 4 Gilbert & George first performed *Singing Sculpture* (with the title *Our New Sculpture*) in 1969. They also made postcard sculpture and magazine sculpture. See Gilbert & George, “A Magazine Sculpture”, *Studio International* 179, no. 922 (May 1970): 218–19.
- 5 Writing in the catalogue of *Documenta 5* (1972), curated by Harald Szeemann, Daniel Buren lamented that the exhibition itself had become a work of art, authored by the exhibition organizer. Daniel Buren, “Exposition d’une exposition”, in *Documenta 5*, exh. cat. (Kassel: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1972), 29.
- 6 On the early history of this development, see Jo Melvin, “The New Climate, 1969–72”, in *Conceptual Art in Britain, 1964–1979*, ed. Andrew Wilson, exh. cat. (London: Tate Publishing, 2016), 116–23.
- 7 The latter went on tour to the Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, and the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.
- 8 On a comparative history of the two exhibition, see Christian Rattemeyer and others, *Exhibiting the New Art: “Op Losse Schroeven” and “When Attitudes Become Form”, 1969* (London: Afterall Books, 2010).
- 9 A number of these works are documented in Rattemeyer and others, *Exhibiting the New Art*, 68–105.
- 10 Lucy R. Lippard, letter of invitation to artists, 13 Dec. 1968, quoted in Cornelia Butler, “Women—Concept—Art: Lucy R. Lippard’s Number Shows”, in Butler and others, *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard’s Numbers Shows, 1969–74* (London: Afterall Books, 2012), 31. 557,087 is the first of Lippard’s number shows, followed by 955,000, Vancouver Art Gallery, 13 Jan.–8 Feb. 1970; and 2,972,453, Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAYC), Buenos Aires, 4–23 Dec. 1970.
- 11 For example, this was the case for the two-volume catalogue of the exhibition *Sonsbeek 71*, Park Sonsbeek, 1971, discussed later.
- 12 For example, in the case of some of the artists in *When Attitudes Become Form*, the exhibition catalogue reproduced hand-written or typed notes sent to the curator outlining their projects, or publishing examples of previous ones. This was the case for Walter De Maria’s *Art by Telephone* for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, in 1968, which was then re-presented in Bern; or Roelof Louw’s description of a project he realized in the Park Lane area of London, where he positioned twenty wedge-shaped cast-iron blocks around three blocks of buildings.
- 13 Yosuke Nakahara, “Between Man and Matter”, in *Between Man and Matter*, exh. cat. (10th Tokyo Biennale, 1970), n.p.
- 14 Nakahara, “Between Man and Matter”.
- 15 In *Barry Flanagan: Object Sculptures* at Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, 7 Sept.—12 Oct. 1969, the works were considered to be in dialogue with the architecture. See Jo Melvin, “No Thing to Say”, in *Barry Flanagan: Early Works, 1965–1982*, ed. Clarrie Wallis and Andrew Wilson, exh. cat. (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 62–63.
- 16 On the heated debate between Read and Greenberg in relation to the aesthetic roots of sculpture, see David J. Getsy, “Tactility or Opticality, Henry Moore or David Smith: Herbert Read and Clement Greenberg on *The Art of Sculpture, 1956*”, *Sculpture Journal* 17, no. 2 (Dec. 2008): 75–88.
- 17 Wim Beeren, “From Exhibition to Activity”, in *Sonsbeek 71*, ed. Geert van Beijeren and Coosje Kapteyn, exh. cat., 2 vols. (Arnhem: Sonsbeek Foundation, 1971), 1: 11.
- 18 Beeren, “From Exhibition to Activity”.
- 19 Beeren, “From Exhibition to Activity”.

- 20 See volume 2 of *Sonsbeek 71* (exh. cat.), published after the exhibition had opened, with documentation of the works on site.
- 21 See Ulrike Groos, Barbara Hess, and Ursula Wevers, eds., *Ready to Shoot: Fernsehgalerie Gerry Schum, Videogalerie Schum*, exh. cat. (Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; Cologne: Snoeck, 2004).
- 22 Prof. P. Sanders, "This Time Sonsbeek is Different", in *Sonsbeek 71* (exh. cat.), 1: 6. The moving image was to become the elected medium of another large-scale exhibition that took place in 1971, bringing together a larger cohort of artists, in *Prospect 71: Projection*, Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, 8–17 Oct. 1971, organized by Konrad Fischer, Jürgen Harten, and Hans Strelow.
- 23 Beeren, "From Exhibition to Activity", 11.
- 24 Melvin, "No Thing to Say", 63.
- 25 While artists had traditionally been involved in teaching, writing, the discussion of their work, and the production of students' publications, and increasingly so from the 1950s, this became more of a routine practice from the late 1960s. Artists started editing their own journals, as in the case of *Art-Language* (first published in May 1969). At a similar time, Seth Siegelaub experimented with exhibitions-as-books, famously with *Xerox Book* of 1968 (for which seven artists were invited to create a twenty-five-page work), and *March 1969*, also known as *One Month* (with artists contributing one work each for the day of the month that had been assigned to them). Lucy Lippard's catalogues for the number shows (1969–70) were each a set of index cards that followed a similar principle: artists were sent and asked to return an index card after having included their details and those of the exhibited work, a drawing or photograph of their work, and any other information they wished to provide. This became a regular practice in exhibition catalogues, as in the case of *Between Man and Matter* and *Sonsbeek 71*, among many others.
- 26 Sabeth Buchmann, "Introduction: From Conceptualism to Feminism", in Cornelia Butler and others, *From Conceptualism to Feminism*, 10.
- 27 See Lorenza Trucchi, "Arte Inglese Oggi 1960–76", *Momento Sera*, 12 March 1976.
- 28 The portfolio of large photographic sheets had been compiled by Flanagan the previous year and produced and published by Alan Power. See Melvin, "No Thing to Say", 61–62. The sheets are archived at Tate, Conceptual Art Collection, TGA 747. During repeated visits to New York in 1969, Flanagan also gave a number of lectures at American university galleries and again at Lippard's loft.
- 29 See Melvin, "No Thing to Say", 61–62.
- 30 Art & Language, "Voices Off", 113–14. Art & Language more specifically refer to Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art, 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions", *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 105–43; and the writing of Hal Foster, Rosalind E. Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and Buchloh in *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004).
- 31 Anne Seymour, "Introduction", in *The New Art*, exh. cat. (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1972), 5.
- 32 Guy Brett, "Internationalism Among Artists in the 60s and 70s", in *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, ed. Rasheed Araeen, exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 1989), 111.
- 33 *British Art Now: An American Perspective, 1980: Exxon International Exhibition*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 18 Jan.–9 March 1980. Exhibiting artists were John Edwards, Alan Green, Tim Head, Keith Milow, David Nash, Hugh O'Donnell, Nicholas Pope, and Simon Read. For an overview of the critical reception of the exhibition, see Julian Andrews, *The Sculpture of David Nash* (Leeds: Henry Moore Foundation in association with Lund Humphries and University of California Press, 1996), 131.
- 34 Margaret Harrison, "Statement", in *Issue: Social Strategies by Women Artists*, exh. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1980), n.p.
- 35 Harrison, "Statement".
- 36 In the case of Medalla, apart from being included in Harald Szeemann's *When Attitudes Become Form*, Kunsthalle Bern, and *Documenta 5*, Kassel, 30 June–8 Oct. 1972, most of his frequent travelling and projects remained self-initiated. He was later included in *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* at the Hayward Gallery, London, 29 Nov. 1989–4 Feb. 1990. Conceived and selected by Rasheed Araeen, the exhibition brought together the work of twenty-four artists of Asian, African, and Caribbean cultural heritage who had lived and worked for a significant part of their professional lives in postwar Britain but had lacked institutional support and visibility and whose contribution was not discussed as part of British art.
- 37 See Jean Fisher, "The Other Story and the Past Imperfect", *Tate Papers* 12 (Autumn 2009), <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/no-12/the-other-story-and-the-past-imperfect> (accessed 6 June 2016).
- 38 In William Tucker's terms, the condition of sculpture was dictated by its own physicality as its natural and necessary trait, as "subject to gravity and revealed by light", in its persistence "in face of avant-garde theory". See William Tucker, "Introduction", in *The Condition of Sculpture: A Selection of Recent Sculpture by Younger British and Foreign Artists*, exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 1975), 6–7.
- 39 These were the subject of a special issue of *Camerawork* 8 (Nov. 1977), "Lewisham: What are you Taking Pictures for?"
- 40 Courtney J. Martin, "Rasheed Araeen, Live Art, and Radical Politics in Britain", *Getty Research Journal* 2 (2010): 111.
- 41 The only other women appeared in the more progressive and inclusive sections, "The Artists Film/ Avant Garde Film" (Annabel Nicolson and Liz Rhodes) and "Performance Art" (Shirley Cameron with Roland Miller—as Miller & Cameron) or as part of Coum. Peter Gidal was also included in the moving image section.

- 42 Selectors of *Un Certain Art Anglais* were Suzanne Pagé (ARC; Animation/Research/Confrontation) at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris) with Michael Compton, Richard Cork, Sandy Nairne, and Muriel Wilson.
- 43 Selectors of *Arte Inglese Oggi* were Guido Ballo, Richard Cork, Norbert Lynton, Norbert Reid, Franco Russoli, and David Thompson.
- 44 As well as Barbara Steveni as part of APG (Artist Placement Group).
- 45 *Studio International* 193, no. 987 (1977). Lippard and Linda Nochlin both contributed an article to this issue, while Margaret Harrison compiled the chronology, "Notes on Feminist Art in Britain, 1970-77".
- 46 For example, in the first presentation of *When Attitudes Become Form* in Bern, out of around seventy exhibiting artists, only two were women.
- 47 In relation to the tight networks of curators and museum directors who shaped their collections and exhibitions, see Sophie Richard, *Unconcealed, The International Network of Conceptual Artists, 1967-77: Dealers, Exhibitions and Public Collections*, ed. Lynda Morris (London: Ridinghouse, 2009). Mary Kelly stated that "women were not taken seriously" in relation to the context of Britain, where she moved in 1968 to study at Saint Martin's School of Art. See *Mary Kelly/Tate Shot*, 18 June 2015, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/mary-kelly-tateshots> (accessed 2 April 2016).
- 48 Lucy R. Lippard, "The Continuing Education of a Public Artist", in *Conrad Atkinson: Picturing the System*, ed. Sandy Nairne and Caroline Tisdall (London: Pluto Press and Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1981), 77.
- 49 "Lucy R. Lippard in Conversation with Antony Hudek", in Butler and others, *From Conceptualism to Feminism*, 71.
- 50 The names of the buildings represented in these works, from the series "Fascade" (1978), provided the titles to the works, and included: the *Economic League*, *Monday Club*, *Institute for the Study of Conflict*, and the *Institute of Economic Affairs*. Derek Boshier selected works from this series for his exhibition *Lives: An Exhibition of Artists whose Work is Based on Other People's Lives*, Serpentine Gallery, London, 29 Dec. 1979-1 Feb. 1980, discussed below. See John A. Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London and New York: I. B. Taurus, 2002), 239.
- 51 *For Every Witch*: black-and-white photograph mounted on board, five pieces, 25.5 x 11.25 inches (64.8 x 28.5 cm) each (1979); *War*: colour Xerox mounted on board, three pieces, 25.5 x 11.25 inches (64.8 x 28.5 cm) each (c. 1978).
- 52 See the draft of the press release, *Art from the British Left*, 1979, Artists Space Archive, 1973-2009; MSS 291; series I: Exhibition Files, Box 8, Folder 6. MSS 291. The Downtown Collection, Fales Library and Special Collections, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University Libraries.[fn]See the draft of the press release, *Art from the British Left*, 1979, Artists Space Archive, 1973-2009; MSS 291; series I: Exhibition Files, Box 8, Folder 6. MSS 291. The Downtown Collection, Fales Library and Special Collections, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University Libraries.
- 53 See Walker, *Left Shift*, 239.
- 54 Martin, "Rasheed Araeen", 116.
- 55 The book was published by Robert Self in 1978.
- 56 From a quote attributed to the social theorist Anthony Wilden in the last page of the book.
- 57 The exhibition presented work by Betsy Damon, Margaret Harrison, Donna Henes, Alexis Hunter, Mary Kelly, Leslie Labowitz, Suzanne Lacy, Adrian Piper, Martha Rosler, and Marie Yates. For an account of the exhibition, see Joanna Gardner-Huggett, "The Women Artists' Cooperative Space as a Site for Social Change: Artemisia Gallery, Chicago (1973-1979)", in *Entering the Picture: Judy Chicago, The Fresno Feminist Art Program, and the Collective Visions of Women Artists*, ed. Jill Fields (New York: Routledge, 2012), 177-80.
- 58 It is not certain whether documentation of *Paki Bastard (Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person)* (1977) was displayed as part of the exhibition or presented as an event, but its inclusion is mentioned in the draft of the press release (details of works were cut in the final, reduced press release), and in hand-written notes on the return of works to the artists, which, under "Rasheed Araeen", states that "slides" were sent back by "Lucy". Photographic documentation of the exhibition includes a photograph of the performance. See Artists Space Archive 1973-2009 MSS 291; series I: Exhibition Files, Box 8, Folder 6. *For Oluwale* (1971-73) used different news clippings, rearranged over time on the same board. The work, in its different configurations, is reproduced in Rasheed Araeen, *Making Myself Visible* (London: Kala Press, 1984), 58-59.
- 59 See Rasheed Araeen and David Medalla, "An Open Letter to the British Council", 1 Feb. 1979, reprinted in Araeen, *Making Myself Visible*, 164. The other postcard produced by Rasheed is reproduced at p.165 of the same publication.
- 60 These events were covered, with images captured by different photographers, in *Camerawork* no. 8 (Nov. 1977), "Lewisham, What are you Taking Pictures for?"
- 61 Invitation card, *Art from the British Left* (1979), private archive.
- 62 The expression "third world", common at the time, was used in the press release of the exhibition. See Artists Space Archive 1973-2009 MSS 291; series I: Exhibition Files, Box 8, Folder 6. The journal *Third Text*, founded in 1987 by Rasheed Araeen, was subtitled "Third World Perspectives on Contemporary Art". See Walker, *Left Shift*, 195. In terms of public collections, until the mid-1990s Araeen's work was only included in the collection of the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, following his award of a John Moores prize in 1969; and the Arts Council Collection, which purchased two works under a special scheme towards the acquisition of work by black artists. See Paul Overy, "The New Works of Rasheed Araeen", in *Rasheed Araeen*, exh. cat. (London: South London Gallery, 1994), 5.
- 63 For example, arguing for an element of continuity of the work of Rodin and Brancusi with contemporary sculpture, Krauss wrote that "our bodies and our experience of our bodies continue to be the subject of this sculpture—even when a work is made of several hundred tons of earth." See Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, 279.

- 64 This was also the case with Araeen's *Paki Bastard (Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person)* (1977), documented in the second issue of *Black Phoenix: a performance incorporating sound and slide projection and embodying the racism and street and police violence he experienced as a Pakistani immigrant in London*. See Martin, "Rasheed Araeen", 111-15.
- 65 See Lucy R. Lippard, "Hands On", in *Alexis Hunter/ Photographic Narrative Sequences*, exh. cat. (London: Edward Totah Gallery, 1981), reprinted in *Alexis Hunter: Radical Feminism in the 1970s*, ed. Lynda Morris, exh. cat. (Norwich: Norwich School of Art and Design, 2007), n.p.
- 66 See, for example, Dorian Ker, "Britain Does Not Exist: 'Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain 1965-75'", *Third Text* 14, no. 50 (2000): 120-21.
- 67 *Art from the British Left*, invitation card.
- 68 PAD/D (Political Art Documentation and Distribution) organized exhibitions, window installations, performances, panels, and demonstrations. It also had a magazine called *Upfront*, which evolved from a newsletter called *First Issue*, first published in February 1981. Several years after the last meeting of the political artists' group, Clive Phillpot, who had attended the early meetings of PAD/D, facilitated its gift into the Library of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. On the history of PAD/D, see Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London and New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 25-26.
- 69 Barbara Moore and Mimi Smith, "The Other Side of the Coin: On Being Documentalists in an Activist Organization", in *The Museum of Modern Art Library Bulletin* 86 (Winter 1993-94): 7 and 8.
- 70 See Lucy R. Lippard, "Archival Activism", in *The Museum of Modern Art Library Bulletin* 86 (Winter 1993-94): 4. See also "Lucy R. Lippard in Conversation with Antony Hudek", 72.
- 71 Statement by Lippard and Jerry Kearns in the first issue of *Upfront* (Feb. 1981), as quoted in Lippard, "Archival Activism", 6.
- 72 Earlier that year, for example, Kelly's work had also been included in *Un Certain Art Anglais*, Paris, 1979.
- 73 Walker, *Left Shift*, 253.
- 74 Jane Bell, "Hybrid Art", *Village Voice*, 2 July 1979, 62.
- 75 Peter Frank, "Storytelling", *Village Voice*, 9 July 1979, 65.
- 76 Lucy R. Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: New Press, 1995), 168.

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Mark Boyle and Joan Hills at the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Chris Townsend

Abstract

Boyle Family's poured resin reliefs, cast from randomly chosen sections of the earth's surface, problematize the boundaries between sculpture, painting, and performance in British art of the 1960s and 1970s. This essay, discussing the collective's first international exhibition, at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, in turn problematizes the critical nominations that have so far been used to categorize its practice. The essay sees the Boyle Family as operating not in the genres of "earth" or "environmental" art, but rather within the broad category of European conceptualism and the legacies of high modernism, sharing much with the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher in particular.

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In May 1970 Mark Boyle (1934–2005) and Joan Hills (b. 1931) were asked by the German curator Hans Locher to stage an exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, in the Netherlands. The Hague project was a radical step both for British sculpture and the artists themselves. It was an almost complete inversion of the social organization, values, and practices that had marked British sculpture until the late 1960s. The exhibition was neither the work of a single artist nor was its content readily definable as “sculpture”. Instead, it was marked by diverse practices of denotation and creation that shared a common thematic in the documentation of environment and society.

Although the Gemeentemuseum show was presented solely under the rubric of Mark Boyle, the accompanying publication made clear it was the work of “Boyle and his colleagues in the Sensual Laboratory, Joan Hills, Des Bonner and Cameron Hills”.¹ Indeed, if the project was collective, by 1970 it went further than the corporate operations of the Sensual Laboratory which Boyle had founded with Hills, his partner, and John Claxton in November 1966. For the project was also familial: indeed, in 1970 it was about to become primarily so. Cameron Hills, Joan Hills’s teenage son by her earlier marriage, was joined by the couple’s two younger children, Sebastian (b. 1962) and Georgia (b. 1963). Even in the wake of Fluxus and its challenge to Abstract Expressionism’s romantic myth of the obsessional male artist, collective practice in art was still rare: collective practice whilst at the same time going about the difficult and time-consuming business of raising children, was exceptional; collective practice that involved those children—of pre-school age— in the making of artwork, was so remote from art’s traditions in the modern era that, even when the Boyle Family appellation was established with a modicum of success by the late 1970s, it demanded a continual insistence on its collective identity. Although in the early years of the project, exhibitions and objects were ascribed only to Mark Boyle, they were never less than shared efforts. As Mark Boyle later remarked: “Our primary objective was to make our work. Secondly we wanted to survive. . . . Under these circumstances, if the art world wants to believe in the single, preferably male, obsessed, artist, you don’t quarrel with them.”²

No one in this group was “a sculptor”: none had received extended training in an art school, none had worked as a studio assistant for an established artist—as had, for example, Anthony Caro, Phillip King, and Denis Mitchell with Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth. Boyle had studied to be a lawyer before joining the army, whilst Hills had briefly enrolled on a painting course, been to an architectural school, and studied structural mechanics. Boyle began writing poetry in the late 1950s: before he shifted his attention to the visual arts he would be published in *The Paris Review*, one of the leading international literary journals. Hills recalls that by the early 1960s she and Boyle were experimenting widely with collage and assemblage. On the one

hand they were making pieces where the material used stood only for itself as object, and on the other using compositional methods where the assemblage carried a greater cultural reference. However, found material from the urban environment gradually supplanted the use of studio-derived materials for attachment to boards.³

Boyle's dual status as poet and artist was important in the development of the collective practice, with its activities spread across a variety of media: he was invited to read his poetry at the 1963 Edinburgh Festival and at the same time to show "his" assemblages at the Traverse Gallery. Whilst installing the exhibition, Boyle and Hills became drawn into Ken Dewey's staging of a "happening" for the International Drama Conference, organized by John Calder at the McEwan Hall of Edinburgh University. This event eventually bore the title Boyle devised for it, *In Memory of Big Ed*, and became notorious as the highest profile work of event-art yet staged in Britain. Boyle and Hills also took part in the second "happening" at the conference, Allan Kaprow's *Exit Piece*.⁴ Returning to London, Boyle and Hills added the creation of events to their portfolio of practices. By the time of their first major London exhibition at Indica Gallery in July 1966, the couple in most ways fulfilled Kaprow's prescription for artists working in the wake of painting's failure: their output ranged between the production of objects and performance; it was exhibited or staged more often in informal, or domestic spaces rather than institutions; and they sought to "discover out of ordinary things the meaning of ordinariness".⁵

The Hague exhibition was the first full international exhibition of this totalizing engagement with the everyday. By 1969, two significant, governing vectors had been added to it: the work was now both indexical and aleatoric. The most visible objects in the Gemeentemuseum were the resin "earth pieces". These had developed from the assemblage works in 1965-66, shortly before the Indica show. That exhibition marked the transition between one form of practice and another. All of the original sites for the earth pieces had, to varying degrees, been selected at random. Whilst several of the works in the Indica Gallery show were transfers of material onto boards, including organic materials fixed to a resin surface, others were either resin casts where only a thin layer of fine detritus had been incorporated into the resin pellicle, or where organic materials had been similarly preserved and fixed to a resin surface. As Patrick Elliott has observed, contemporary British sculptors including Phillip King and William Tucker also used new polymer resins, but none had attempted anything like this.⁶ After July 1966 the resin works would become Boyle and Hills's most visible and recognizable mode of practice. However, whilst the earth pieces have subsequently often been accommodated within the rubric of "land art", this is not how Boyle and Hills understood them.⁷ As Boyle put it in the *ICA Bulletin* of June 1965, "My

ultimate object is to include everything.”⁸ The earth pieces were part of a wider aesthetic endeavour that examined the relation between sign and referent, and a parallel social project that promised—even if it could only rarely be executed—a total analysis of human physical, social, and environmental relationships.



Figure 1.

Journey to the Surface of the Earth, Mark Boyle with his two children Sebastian and Georgia, and a visitor, to the Journey to the Surface of the Earth exhibition, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, 1970 Digital image courtesy of the artists

The first step in this presentation of the object as referent had been the introduction of square boards of a pre-determined size. Rather than the assemblage being made only with the materials that the site offered—often including the surface on which it was made—it was now subjected to an element of modernist presentation through a paradigm which was being reprised at much the same time by Minimalist art—the grid. Whilst the resin incorporated a trace of the surface it recorded, to attain the effect of

reality—to appear to be a *readymade*—it now required the intervention of the artists to give the effect of natural colour to the surface. But they were also required, for the work to appear wholly free from intervention, to mark their presence as artists only by erasing all traces of artistry. The work was “sculptural”, since it was three-dimensional, and produced by a sculptural process—negative casting. But it was defined by the edges of the grid, and thus followed the contested tradition of framed representation. Indeed, the earth pieces are still often appraised within the discourses of painting: Bill Hare, for example, positions them within abstraction.⁹ Furthermore, the earth pieces could be, and were, exhibited either on the gallery floor, horizontally, or on the wall, vertically.

All of the sites of these earth pieces had, to varying degrees, been selected at random. The selection of sites within London had expanded to a global scale with the announcement of the “Journey to the Surface of the Earth” project during Boyle and Hills’s major exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London in June 1969. The project was to make “multi sensual presentations of 1000 sites selected at random from the surface of the earth”.¹⁰ Starting in Boyle and Hills’s flat in August 1968, and then continuing at the ICA, friends and finally members of the public first threw, and later fired darts into a large map of the world. The only dart to land in Holland was near The Hague, and seeing this during the ICA exhibition, Locher invited the group to undertake its first multi-sensual survey and present the results.



Figure 2.

Journey to the Surface of the Earth, installation view, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, 1970 Digital image courtesy of the artists



Figure 3.

Journey to the Surface of the Earth, installation view, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, 1970 (showing The Hague Study, 1970, World Series 1968–)
Digital image courtesy of the artists

Although they did not complete a full survey in Holland, according to the parameters they established for themselves, Boyle and Hills's first overseas exhibition was clearly ambitious. It was marked by a striking amount of supporting activity, notably the publication of *Journey to the Surface of the Earth: Mark Boyle's Atlas and Manual*. This volume came from the German publisher Edition Hansjörg Mayer, and is significant in a number of ways. Firstly, it emphasized the conceptual grounding of the Boyle project, previously only apparent in the ICA exhibition, and otherwise elided in the presentation of the single object. Indeed, the *Atlas* as a totalizing index and practical guide, with the artists heavily involved in its content and design, is best understood not as an analysis of the project but an integral part of it. Secondly, it took a European publisher—one already familiar with the ways in which the artist's book in various guises might be bound into conceptual art projects—to recognize the emphasis and potential of Boyle and Hills's activity. Thirdly, it marked Boyle and Hills as artists whose perspective was not parochial, but international. The overarching title for the project, *Journey to the Surface of the Earth*, more or less solicited invitations from institutions beyond the British Isles; the Gemeentemuseum exhibition in turn led to invitations from Norway (the Henie-Onstad Kunstsenter) and Germany.

Boyle Family would evolve not only from the collaboration between father and mother with a pair of rapidly maturing and artistically engaged children, but from the continual international activity that the concept of the *Journey to the Surface of the Earth* forced upon the collective. The Hague might only have been on the other side of the North Sea, but the exhibition marked a significant turn in the group's patterns of making and exhibition work. Whereas before 1969, they had been part of the London art scene—where, in 1993, David Mellor placed them in his defining exhibition of that milieu, *The Sixties Art Scene in London*—they were now to become global artists.¹¹ One of the penalties of this would subsequently be that it became increasingly difficult to locate Boyle Family's work within the localizing framework of national art history. As Philipp Kaiser and Miwon Kwon's exhibition *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974* (2012–13) or the writings of Stephanie Ross and Charles Green (amongst others) exemplify, it became possible to represent the project within various and at times conflicting international contexts through selective emphasis.¹² However, the category where it might have been expected to fit comfortably, alongside contemporary, totalizing European conceptual projects, is one context where the Boyle project has not been adequately examined. The exhibition that followed Boyle and Hills's installation at the ICA was a revised version of Harald Szeemann's groundbreaking *When Attitudes Become Form*.¹³ If this was coincidence, it is in retrospect something more than fortuitous, for Szeemann's show was one into which any of Boyle and Hills' activities could have been readily accommodated.

Certainly Boyle and Hills would later be compared to, and classified along with, a number of the artists included in *When Attitudes Become Form*—notably “earth artists” such as Richard Long, Robert Smithson, and Michael Heizer. Boyle and Hills were not “conceptual” artists in any specific sense—any more than were most of the artists included by Szeemann: the materialization of the fundamental concepts that underpinned their work was mostly expressed in media and material objects. Boyle and Hills's practice ran completely counter to the attempted elimination of objects in favour of “knowledge”, that might be understood to characterize conceptualism as a practice.

However, in their emphasis upon the apodicticity of objects, in their refusal to read into, or have read into them, degrees of significance and meaning, at this moment in the 1960s Boyle and Hills seem to share many of the directions of thought that typify conceptual art in its broader senses. In their insistence on the literal properties of things in the world, their status first of all as pure, objective presence, Boyle and Hills share a far greater affinity than might be at first apparent with another collaborative project that began at much the same time—that of Bernd and Hilla Becher. The Bechers and the Boyles would both criss-cross continents in vans crammed with equipment,

and became characterized by their insistence on one presentational format (albeit that the Boyles were unfairly labelled in this way). The Bechers undoubtedly made motivated choices both of general sites and specific locations that they photographed to produce their typologies of industrial forms. However, their re-evaluation of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* tradition of objectivity led them to a deliberate anonymity of style which mirrored the anonymity claimed for the industrial architecture and landscape that was their subject. Both couples thus operated on a basis of uninflected presentation of objects through their indices—the cast for the Boyles and the photograph for the Bechers. What varies between the two oeuvres is the character of that index and the mode of its selection: the Bechers concentrating on one aspect of industrial modernity and its obsolescence; Boyle and Hills taking a universalizing approach where everything matters equally.

Actual sites in The Hague were selected by the artists using darts on maps of increasingly large scale, and then throwing a right-angle in the field, which determined the orientation of the predetermined square. Because of their presentation as factual objects and their striking realism—which led some to think they were indeed “the real thing”, the earth pieces were to secure Boyle Family’s reputation, even though their project was conceived as far more diverse in its scope. The Hague earth piece was shown horizontally, as it had been cast, and came from a muddy track scarred by tyre marks and containing a piece of piping. A vertical “strata study”, made by pouring resin down a rock face, was shown vertically. Much of the exhibition was concerned with providing a context for the Hague earth-probe through a broad survey of the Boyles’ existing works. On the walls were casts from “The Tidal Series” (1969), made at Camber Sands in southern England, along with several earth pieces from “The London Series” and two “Snow Studies” (1969), also made at Camber. Locher would later record a certain bewilderment on the part of the audience in the Gemeentemuseum. One part of the audience found the principal earth piece “downright ugly”, and was unable to understand why such an ordinary subject needed to be recorded. They were, however, impressed by the technique used to record it. Others, more accustomed to looking at contemporary art, wanted to interpret the earth pieces on the basis of their encounters with artists such as Alberto Burri (using natural materials in abstract painting) or Antoni Tàpies (bringing real objects into the artwork and transposing them), and could not accommodate the governing concept that these were exact facsimiles of real objects chosen at random. ¹⁴

Incorporating the actual surface of the site into a permanent indexical trace was intended as only the first of some sixteen different activities. Some of these were specific and readily achievable ideas, such as taking a six-foot (1.8-metre) earth core with an auger and making a film involving a

360-degree pan from the centre of the site, or collecting seeds from the site. Other goals were more nebulous, such as making “a study of elemental forces working on the site”. The most demanding element was filming and taping in the local community, treating it “as a biological entity”, with these recordings then becoming the basis for performances under the title “Requiem for an Unknown Citizen”. ¹⁵

The use of chance for the earth pieces’ production seemingly eliminated the artists’ involvement, first in the visual appearance of the works, then in the choice of objects for the work, and finally in the process of choosing the site itself. At times, the only surviving act of motivation for “the artists” appeared to be the choosing of those who would choose on their behalf. However, the process of site selection, as it evolved, also included the recuperation of artistic identity from its intended universality. Within the world map used to determine sites for the “World Series”, the mark made by a dart covered an extensive area. To determine the location of earth pieces, the Boyles would take progressively larger scale maps, using their dart throwing process, and where possible involving the public in it. Eventually this defined an area where the artists used chance procedures in the field to select the final site. The definition of sites therefore, even if it remains chanced, passes back from the unseeing projection of others to the hands of the artists at the end of the selection process. This return of identity, however, is not accompanied by either a return to aesthetic choice or the non-aesthetic provocations of Marcel Duchamp. There is no special category of objects that, in their representation, might challenge the status of the art object. All objects will serve equally well.



Figure 4.

Mark and Georgia Boyle working at the site of the Hague World Series, 1970 Digital image courtesy of the artists

The Hague show presaged a decade of extraordinary success for Boyle Family, culminating in representing Britain at the 1978 Venice Biennale. If that institutional endorsement was a significant acknowledgment, one that afforded a complete “earth-probe” into a site in Sardinia, it was also a containment. It was an exhibition nominated in the identity of a single man—Mark Boyle—rather than the collective: and it emphasized as far as possible the pictorial thematic within the group project, rather than its unique combination of the pictorial with the performative, of the survey of the social and natural worlds presented, not as “culture” but as document. ¹⁶

A project that was part of late modernism’s radical break with representation was recuperated in the terms provided by the traditions of landscape—rather than “land”-art and the painting of nature. Michael Compton’s essay for the British Council considered the project in terms of Romanticism and finding beauty in the everyday. ¹⁷ But the Boyles’

corporate activity did not mirror that of the Renaissance or Baroque studio. Nor were the artists much interested in aesthetic categories—as the critic and curator Jasia Reichardt had made clear after the event *Any Play or No Play* (Theatre Royal, Stratford East, London, 1965).¹⁸ There Boyle and Hills synthesised a Duchampian “whatever” as describing the outcome of events, with a Schwittersesque “everything” as their potential contents. Far from challenging judgments of taste towards the object by the substitution of a single object, beyond the register of aesthetic prescription and indexical of all other objects, in privileging the plural and the democratic they suggested that not simply *any* thing can be that object, but *every* thing, and it does not matter what those objects are. All objects in a culture are capable of challenging judgments that would privilege one object, one experience, over another. That disinterested “interest” in presentation is the operating *eidos* of the Boyle project, with its principal goal not the replication of reality but the attentiveness of the spectator. Paradoxically, their collective practice and the “realism” of its objects means they have become deconstructive agents between the binary categories of description and nomination in which culture is formulated. Are they artist or artists? Is the work reality or representation? That corrosion of classification together with their international perspective has, perhaps, worked against the collective’s own status within British art.

Footnotes

- ¹ *Journey to the Surface of the Earth: Mark Boyle’s Atlas and Manual* (Cologne: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1970), np.
- ² Mark Boyle, “Beyond Image: Boyle Family”, in *Beyond Image: Boyle Family*, exh. cat. (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1986), 11.
- ³ Chris Townsend, Interview with Mark Boyle and Joan Hills, 5 Jan. 2001.
- ⁴ For fuller accounts of the conference and these events see, inter alia, Charles Marowitz, “Happenings at Edinburgh” and Ken Dewey, “Act of San Francisco at Edinburgh”, *Encore* 46 (Nov.–Dec. 1963), reprinted in *New Writers IV: Plays and Happenings* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1967), 67–76; “High Jinks End Drama Conference”, *The Scotsman*, 9 Sept. 1964, 4; Andrew Wilson, “Towards an Index for Everything: The Events of Mark Boyle and Joan Hills 1963–71”, in Patrick Elliott, Bill Hare, and Andrew Wilson, *Boyle Family*, exh. cat. (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2003); and chap. 5 in my forthcoming *A World at Random: The Art of Boyle Family*.
- ⁵ Allan Kaprow (1958), “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock”, in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 9.
- ⁶ Patrick Elliott, “Presenting Reality: An Introduction to Boyle Family”, in Elliott, Hare, and Wilson, *Boyle Family*, 13.
- ⁷ See, for example, Philipp Kaiser and Miwon Kwon’s exhibition, *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*, MoCA Los Angeles/Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2012–13.
- ⁸ Mark Boyle, artist’s statement, *ICA Bulletin*, June 1965, n.p.
- ⁹ Bill Hare, “Old Habits of Looking, New Ways of Seeing: The Paintings of Boyle Family”, in Elliott, Hare, and Wilson, *Boyle Family*, 81–87.
- ¹⁰ *Journey to the Surface of the Earth*, np.
- ¹¹ David Mellor, *The Sixties Art Scene in London* (London: Phaidon, 1993).
- ¹² Stephanie Ross, “Gardens, Earthworks, and Environmental Art”, in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell, eds., *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 183–98; Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
- ¹³ *When Attitudes Become Form (Works—Concepts—Processes—Situations—Information)*, was held at Kunsthalle Bern (March–April 1969), Museum Haus Lange Krefeld (May–June 1969), and at the ICA, London (Aug.–Sept. 1969).
- ¹⁴ J. L. Locher, *Mark Boyle’s Journey to the Surface of the Earth* (Stuttgart: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1978), 49.

- 15 *Journey to the Surface of the Earth*. "Requiem" has, in fact, only been staged once (in Rotterdam in 1971), without being associated to any earth-probe, and using material recorded in London. See Locher, *Mark Boyle's Journey*, 146-53.
- 16 The first exhibition to properly acknowledge the collaborative nature of the project was *Mark Boyle and Joan Hills Reise um die Welt* at the Kunstmuseum Lucerne in November 1978. The group would not be described as "Boyle Family" until a show at the Henie-Onstad Kunstsenter in 1985.
- 17 Michael Compton, *Mark Boyle, British Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 1978* (London: British Council, 1978).
- 18 Jasia Reichardt, "On Chance and Mark Boyle", *Studio International* (Oct. 1966): 165.

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Dewey, Ken. "Act of San Francisco at Edinburgh." *Encore* 46 (Nov.-Dec. 1963). Reprinted in *New Writers IV: Plays and Happenings*. London: Calder and Boyars, 1967.

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Hare, Bill. "Old Habits of Looking, New Ways of Seeing: The Paintings of Boyle Family." In Elliott, Hare, and Wilson, *Boyle Family*, 81-116.

Kaprow Allan (1958). "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock." In *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*. Ed. Jeff Kelley. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993.

Marowitz, Charles. "Happenings at Edinburgh." *Encore* 46 (Nov.-Dec. 1963), reprinted in *New Writers IV: Plays and Happenings*. London: Calder and Boyars, 1967.

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The British Avant Garde: A Joint Venture Between the New York Cultural Center and Studio International Magazine

Jo Melvin

Abstract

This essay considers the relevance of The British Avant Garde exhibition at the New York Cultural Center in 1971 to the reputation and discussion of British artists in the US, and its subsequent impact in Britain. It situates the exhibition with reference to Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects at the NYCC and Information at the Museum of Modern Art, both held in 1970, and within the background milieu of a lively transatlantic and multi-directional network of artists such as Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin, Ian Burn, Barry Flanagan, Dan Graham, Joseph Kosuth, Christine Kozlov, Richard Long, Mel Ramsden, Sol LeWitt and Lawrence Weiner, who were developing alternative ways to make and to distribute work by using text, photocopies, and self-publication as forms of production as well as becoming the site of exhibition. Devised by Charles Harrison, assistant editor of Studio International magazine, the exhibition was a collaboration between the magazine and the NYCC, directed by Donald Karshan. Despite the mixed press reviews in New York, the exhibition paved the way for establishing institutional support for the artists in the UK.

Authors

Cite as

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In May 1970, Charles Harrison, assistant editor of *Studio International* magazine, was in New York on a research trip when Joseph Kosuth introduced him to Donald Karshan, founding director of the New York Cultural Center (NYCC). Karshan's launching exhibition, *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects*, had just opened with great aplomb—during the private view searchlights were beamed from the building into the night sky.¹ It created a stir; “Xeroxophilia rages out of control”, was Hilton Kramer's response in the *New York Times*. Kramer was bemused by the thought of text presented as art and failed to make connections between synchronicity, duplication, and multiples. He grudgingly reported that Kosuth's *Information Room*, where the viewer was invited to read a variety of books and magazines on philosophy and art criticism, was the “best thing” in the show.² The director's statement was not included in the exhibition catalogue, which was devoid of explanatory text, but it was on hand at the venue to justify what Karshan termed “Post-Object Art”. This term built on some considerations of new art raised by David L. Shirey in a two-part feature with Thomas M. Messer (director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum) called “Impossible Art”. Messer outlined its characteristics as follows: “extreme fragility . . . [it] moves towards invisibility, disembodiment and sheer non-existence . . . It is useless to all but those who would accept it for its own sake.”³ Shirey located the artists' work in categories of practice as “earthworks, waterworks, skyworks, nihilworks and thinkworks”.⁴ The last two terms focused Karshan's assertion that

[at] the end of the 20th century we now know that art does indeed exist as an idea . . . and we know that quality exists in the thinking of the artist, not in the object he employs—if he employs an object at all. We begin to understand that painting and sculpture are simply unreal in the coming age of computers and instant travel.⁵

The article reached a broader and more international audience when it was published later that year in *Studio International*. Harrison considered it to be something of a “coup”, and “the first time a serious discussion of conceptual art” was aired in the British art press.⁶ Karshan's essay, “The Seventies: Post-Object Art”, written for *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* but, as noted, not included in the catalogue, explained the shift from painting and sculpture to “idea art”, “analytic art”, or work foregrounding a “conceptual aspect”.⁷

Writing in the *New York Times*, Peter Schjeldahl found the exhibition almost free of visual stimulation but vigorous in its “scholarly austerity”; for him it presented a distinct contrast with the “flea market” organization of the *Information* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. He remarked that “enough gifted young artists had taken to working in or around [conceptual art] to guarantee its influence for a long time.”⁸ In contrast, *Information* was broadly scoped like Messer and Shirey’s “Impossible Art” to the surveyed variety of practices preoccupying artists. And unlike the NYCC exhibition, it was not restricted to Anglo-British artists but included artists seen in the US for the first time from South America and Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, Karshan was anxious to get attention for what he hoped would become NYCC’s radical programme, and to get the exhibition opening before the Museum of Modern Art’s much longer planned exhibition was important to him.

The evolution of *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* bears a relation to the *The British Avant Garde* show devised by Harrison which was also held at the NYCC a year later. A series of exchanges consolidated relationships between British and US, particularly New York City-based, conceptual art practices. Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin had stayed in the city and established contact with Sol LeWitt, Dan Graham, and Joseph Kosuth, amongst others. Baldwin and Atkinson devised a collaborative practice from 1966. Two years later, in association with David Bainbridge and Harold Hurrell, they adopted the term Art & Language. Ian Burn worked collaboratively with Roger Cutforth and Mel Ramsden, and in 1969 they formed The Society for Theoretical Art and Analyses, through which they published text-based art.⁹ The first issue of *Art-Language*, published in May 1969, had the subtitle, “the journal of conceptual art” (fig. 1). Edited by Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin, David Bainbridge, and Harold Hurrell, the issue’s introduction situates the dialogic investigation of their practice with the rhetorical question: “Can this editorial come up for the count as a work of art within a developed framework as a visual art convention?”¹⁰ Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt, and Lawrence Weiner contributed works to the issue. It was shown in *Number 7*, the exhibition curated by Lucy R. Lippard at Paula Cooper Gallery in New York, which presented text-based and ephemeral work by British and American artists including The Society for Theoretical Art and Analyses, Richard Long, Hanne Darboven, Lee Lozano, Joseph Kosuth, Christine Kozlov, and others.¹¹ The latter two, along with Atkinson and Baldwin, Barry Flanagan and Richard Long were participants in Seth Siegelaub’s *One Month* calendar exhibition of March 1969, when thirty-one artists were each offered a page on which to make work for print distribution.

Art-Language

The Journal of conceptual art

Edited by Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge,
Michael Baldwin, Harold Hurrell

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Figure 1.
Art-Language, 1, no. 1 (May 1969)

Phonon School of Art

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 2 FEBRUARY 1970

Art-Language

Edited by Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge,
Michael Baldwin, Harold Hurrell
American Editor Joseph Kosuth

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Figure 2.
Art-Language, 1, no. 2 (Feb. 1970)

Karshan and Burn became friendly when the former needed frames for his print collection and called into Dain's workshop where Burn made frames. Karshan was looking for ideas for the opening exhibition at the NYCC. Burn suggested involving Kosuth, the recently appointed American editor of *Art-Language*, knowing his extensive contacts would attract a range of artists. (The second issue of *Art-Language* dispensed with the subtitle "the journal of conceptual art" because it suggested inclusivity of the diverse practices loosely configured by the rubric of the term.) (fig. 2) Although Karshan would be described as the organizer of *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects*, it was conceived and "ghost" curated by Burn and Kosuth, who proposed the artists and installed the exhibition. ¹²

The British Avant Garde emerged from conversations between Karshan, Harrison, and Kosuth during a weekend spent at Karshan's country house in upstate New York, when Karshan asked Harrison to organize an exhibition of

British artists. ¹³ They discussed extending the project with a special issue of *Studio International* and the simultaneous publication of the exhibition catalogue, using the same material. ¹⁴ Harrison was working on his section of Siegelau's *Studio International* magazine exhibition for July/August 1970, which included many artists showing in *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects*. ¹⁵ Harrison's connection with *Studio International* and its grass-roots editorial policy of commissioning artist-generated projects appealed to Karshan, and both were alert to the possibilities of international networking. Harrison proposed focusing on ten to fifteen artists working in areas beyond conventional interpretations of painting and sculpture. ¹⁶ Karshan thought this "a little thin"; he wanted "a broader sweep more like thirty artists including painters and sculptors". ¹⁷ In fact, Harrison restricted the selection to artists who, broadly speaking, were engaged in conceptual art, film, sound, light, text pieces, and sculpture using non-traditional materials.

The Magazine-catalogue and Catalogue

In September 1970, Harrison informed the artists that as the project was a joint venture with *Studio International's* May 1971 issue he intended to commission them to make work "direct for the printed page". ¹⁸ These contributions would be treated by the artists as an extension of the exhibition, as well as a record of it. ¹⁹ The results formed a dedicated issue of *Studio International*, acknowledging the NYCC's involvement. (fig. 3) ²⁰ An extra run, minus the masthead, was printed as the exhibition catalogue (fig. 4). ²¹

Harrison disliked the title *The British Avant Garde*, and was dismayed when he heard from Konrad Fischer about Karshan's nationally themed series: *The Swiss Avant Garde*, *The French Avant Garde*, and *The Avant Garde from South America*. On hearing this "disturbing rumour", Harrison remarked that the title sounded like "Swinging London in a Bowler Hat". ²² He proposed the title *New Art from England* instead, as "the concept of the avant garde seemed dated." Karshan ignored the suggestion but the title reappeared as *The New Art* in the Hayward Gallery survey in 1972, which was largely based on Harrison's exhibition and the work of *Studio International* magazine in drawing attention to new and experimental art practices.

The artists Harrison selected as they appeared in magazine-catalogue order were Bruce McLean, Keith Arnatt, David Dye, David Tremlett, Roelof Louw, Barry Flanagan, Gilbert & George, Gerald Newman, Richard Long, Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin, Sue Arrowsmith, Colin Crumplin, Andrew Dipper, and Victor Burgin. Ways of thinking about duration, movement, and the processes of documenting practice feature prominently in several

contributions. I will outline a few examples. Dye utilized the action of page-turning as intrinsic to the viewing process and creates a *mise-en-scène*. To realize the project, and in keeping with the prevailing spirit of collaboration, he asked Harrison if he could have another artist's page-pulls. Harrison sent him those of David Tremlett, though no one recalls if his permission was sought.²³ Dye had himself photographed seated with Tremlett's pages resting on his knees as he turned them. Dye held the page showing his name while his right hand turned the page to reveal Tremlett's double-page contribution (fig. 5).²⁴ Dye's work in the exhibition, *Distancing Device*, was a series of vertically mounted mirrors in hoods with which the viewer read the single letters of the words, "k-e-e-p-g-o-i-n-g". The constructions demonstrated how the viewer needed to read in the act of viewing the work while moving away from the vertical arrangement as they faced it whereby the letters under the hoods become visible.



Figure 3.
Cover Image, Studio International, 181, no. 933 (May 1971)



Figure 4.
The British Avant Garde, exh. cat., New York Cultural Center,
1971 (Studio International, W. & J. Mackay & Co. Ltd, Chatham,
Kent, 1971)

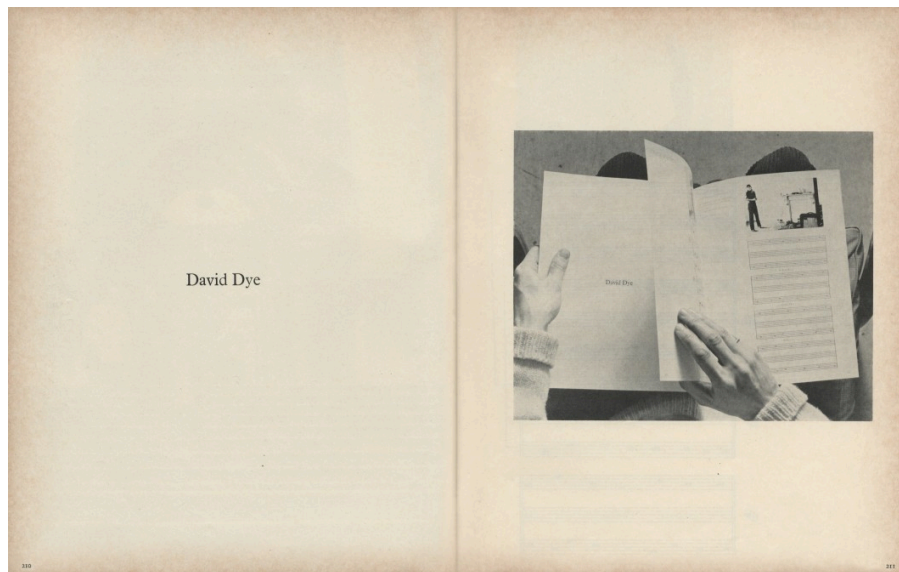


Figure 5.
David Dye, *Studio International*, 181, no. 933 (May 1971), pp. 210–11



Figure 6.
Gilbert & George, *Studio International*, 181, no. 933 (May 1971), pp. 220–21

Gilbert & George were photographed on the Thames Embankment opposite the Houses of Parliament, with the text of *There were two young men who did laugh* printed across it (fig. 6). The image, although not acknowledged as such, restaged a tourist postcard of the scene.²⁵ Newman presented documentation of both *Piece* (1971), a sound work on a looped tape that was included in the NYCC exhibition, and *Piece for Two Lights* (1970),²⁶ which differed from the light piece he included in the exhibition. Art & Language's

De Legibus Naturae accompanied the text-work *Theories of Ethics*, which was shown in the NYCC exhibition.²⁷ Harrison had supplied Karshan with a Xerox copy of Art & Language's text-work, *Theories of Ethics*, for reference. It is a theory of the ethics of the production of artwork as an artwork in itself.²⁸ The book was to be published in an edition of two hundred. Harrison was shocked when he discovered that Karshan had copied it for the art critic Jack Burnham without seeking permission. Harrison discussed this with the artists who proposed making five copies for interested parties, and keeping a record of who received them.²⁹

There were several films on show, including Arrowsmith's *Street Walk* (1971); Flanagan's *The Lesson* (1971), *The Phantom Sculptor* (1971), *Atlantic Flight* (1970), and *a hole in the sea* (1969); Gilbert & George's *The Nature of our Looking*; Long's *Ten Mile Walk* (1969), McLean's *In the Shadow of your Smile Bob* (1971); and Tremlett's *English Locations* tapes (1970-71).³⁰

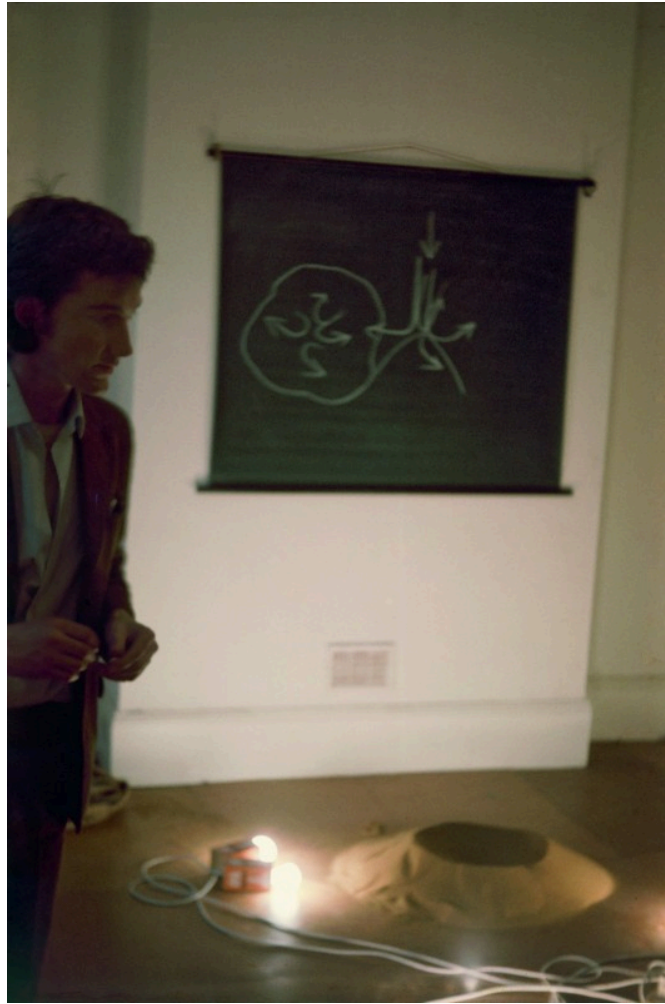


Figure 7.

Barry Flanagan, filming *The Lesson*, 1971. Charles Harrison papers (1970s–2000s), TGA 200868, London

Installation instructions were the motivation behind Flanagan's making of *The Lesson*. His work *ringn 66* (1966) was selected for the exhibition and Harrison would need to construct it. In March 1971, Harrison contacted Karshan with a list of materials required, including sand "as golden yellow as possible; but must be fine and dry" for *ringn 66*, noting that Fischbach Gallery might still have sand following Flanagan's exhibition there in 1969.³¹ Flanagan's film served a dual purpose, both to document making the sand sculpture and for this to become a work in itself. Harrison assisted and photographed the process (fig. 7).³² In September of that year the film was shown again at Situation Gallery, London, in *Film Show*, part of *Prospect 71: Projection*, with films by Hamish Fulton, Bob Law, McLean and Tremlett.³³

In the time between Karshan's invitation and Harrison's arrival in New York to install the exhibition, relations between them were strained. It was at Karshan's insistence late in the process that Gilbert & George were included. Harrison managed to secure the Museum of Modern Art's agreement to lend the recently acquired work by Gilbert & George, *To Be with Art is All We Ask* (1970), with the stipulation that the NYCC cover the panels with Plexiglas.³⁴ The NYCC did not, however, provide the budget for this, and to Harrison's embarrassment he was unable to satisfy this condition and the work was returned immediately after the opening, leaving the wall space blank.³⁵ The exhibition opened on 19 May to mixed reviews. It closed on 29 August 1971.

Responses to the project

Overall, Schjeldahl in the *New York Times* was supportive, although he incorrectly made "British" synonymous with "English", asserting that the exhibition "brought to Conceptualism the kind of discrimination and stylishness typical of English modern art" (fig. 8). This, he felt, was a movement that had not "exactly electrified art-world discourses these past few seasons".³⁶ Bored by bandwagon repetitions of "the end of art as we know it", he welcomed the opportunity to see this new British art, mostly unknown in New York (with the exceptions of Flanagan and Long—whom, he remarked, were not conceptualists). His favourites were

the vivid informal sculptures of Barry Flanagan . . . a tepee of sticks containing a square of green felt and the actually charming work of Richard Long, redolent of an Englishman's fondness for walks in the country, on which he may pause to arrange some rocks . . . [which] rightly fall outside the canon.

Schjeldahl noted the removal of work by Gilbert & George, describing them as "the most unheard of thing Harrison brought with him—the life sculpture of two gentle young artist-poets", and noting that "Unfortunately only one short film represents them." The article was illustrated by a still from *The Nature of Our Looking*.³⁷ The Flanagan work Schjeldahl referred to, *no. 1, '71*, was reproduced in Shirey's review in the *New York Times*. Shirey was scathing, picking up on the exhibition's title exactly as Harrison had feared: "what looks avant garde to Mr Harrison in England looks manifestly derriere garde to some observers in the United States."³⁸ Conversely, John Perreault described the exhibition's conceptualism as "global whether we like it or not".³⁹



Figure 8.

Installation View, *The British Avant Garde*, New York Cultural Center, 1971, showing Barry Flanagan, *no. 1 '71*, 1971, *fpresu*, 1965, and *4 casb 2 '67*, *ringl 1 '67*, *rope (gr 2sp 60) 6 '67*, 1967, and Bruce McLean drawings. Charles Harrison papers (1970s–2000s), TGA 200868, London

In *Artforum* in October 1971, Robert Pincus-Witten paralleled *The British Avant Garde* with *Projects Pier 18*, organized by Willoughby Sharp, founder editor of *Avalanche* magazine. His droll assessment was that *Studio International* was “as dogmatically attached to conceptualism as is Willoughby Sharp’s *Avalanche*”.⁴⁰

The influence of the magazine-catalogue and exhibition

Despite Harrison’s reservations about *The British Avant Garde* exhibition, the May 1971 issue of *Studio International* was immediately regarded as a reference point for new practices in British art. The international attention affected the reputation of these younger British artists: Michael Compton, the Tate Gallery’s assistant keeper, organized *Seven Exhibitions* in February 1972 in space made available by the cancellation of Robyn Denny’s show. Files kept by younger Tate keepers, including Compton and Richard Morphet, formed the basis of this project and enabled Compton to persuade the director, Norman Reid, of its relevance.⁴¹ Joseph Beuys was the only non-British artist of the seven, and each received a solo show.

When the Arts Council of Great Britain began planning what would be the first museum survey of new art practices by British artists in the UK, *The New Art*, Nicholas Serota (assistant to the exhibition officer, Ann Seymour),

contacted Townsend to ask for twenty-five copies of the issue.⁴² The Hayward exhibition included many of the same artists as *The British Avant Garde*, and several films were screened again.⁴³

Footnotes

- ¹ Mel Ramsden in conversation with the author, 1 June 2015.
- ² Hilton Kramer, "Art: Xerophilia Rages Out of Control", *New York Times*, 11 April 1970.
- ³ Thomas M. Messer, "Impossible Art—Why It Is", *Art in America* 57, no. 3 (May/June 1969): 31.
- ⁴ David L. Shirey outlines the practices, without consideration of the international element of exchange, in "Impossible Art—What It Is", *Art in America* 57, no. 3 (May/June 1969): 39–41 (40)
- ⁵ Donald Karshan, "The Seventies: Post-Object Art", *Studio International* 180, no. 925 (Sept. 1970): 69–70.
- ⁶ Charles Harrison, unpublished interview transcript, 31 Oct. 2007, Melvin papers, London.
- ⁷ Harrison, unpublished interview transcript, 31 Oct. 2007, Melvin papers; Karshan, "The Seventies", 69–70.
- ⁸ Peter Schjeldahl, "Don't Just Stand There—Read!", *New York Times*, 19 Aug. 1970.
- ⁹ The Society for Theoretical Art and Analyses merged with Art & Language in 1970. Charles Harrison became editor of *Art-Language* in 1971. By the mid-1970s some twenty people were associated with the name, divided between England and New York. From 1976, however, the genealogical thread of Art & Language's artistic work was taken solely into the hands of Baldwin and Ramsden, with the theoretical and critical collaboration of these two with Charles Harrison who died in 2009.
- ¹⁰ *Art-Language* 1, no. 1 (May 1969): 3. Joseph Kosuth was invited to become the American editor for the second issue of *Art-Language*.
- ¹¹ *Number 7* (exhibition), Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, 18 May–15 June 1969.
- ¹² Ann Stephen, "New York Art Strike", in *On Looking at Looking: The Art and Politics of Ian Burn* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2006), 132–55.
- ¹³ Harrison, unpublished interview transcript, 31 Oct. 2007, Melvin papers.
- ¹⁴ Harrison letter to Karshan, 12 June 1970; NYCC file, Charles Harrison papers (1950s–1979), Tate Gallery Archive (hereafter TGA) 839/1/3/3.
- ¹⁵ Artists exhibiting in both projects (order as it appears in NYCC catalogue): Joseph Kosuth, Frederick Barthelme, On Kawara, Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin, David Bainbridge, Harold Hurrell, Stephen Kaltenbach, Jan Dibbets, Douglas Huebler, Iain Baxter, Robert Barry, Daniel Buren, and Lawrence Weiner.
- ¹⁶ Harrison letter to Karshan, 12 June 1970, Harrison papers (1950s–1979) TGA 839/1/3/3.
- ¹⁷ Karshan letter to Harrison, 23 June 1970, NYCC file, Harrison papers (1950s–1979) TGA 839/1/3/3.
- ¹⁸ Harrison letters to Arnatt and Arrowsmith, 17 Sept. 1970, NYCC planning file, Harrison papers (1950s–1979) TGA 839/1/3/3.
- ¹⁹ Harrison letter to Karshan, 8 Aug. 1971; Harrison papers (1950s–1979) TGA 839/1/5/1/7.
- ²⁰ Editorial announcement, *Studio International* 181, no. 933 (May 1971): 200.
- ²¹ *The British Avant Garde* (exhibition catalogue), New York Cultural Center (London: W. & J. MacKay and Co., 1971). Barry Flanagan archive, London. CG JBF 1971 AVA.
- ²² Harrison letter to Karshan, 8 Jan. 1971; Harrison papers (1950s–1979) TGA 839/1/5/1/7.
- ²³ David Tremlett discussion with author, 3 Feb. 2012; David Dye email to author, 2 April 2012, Melvin papers, London.
- ²⁴ David Dye, *Studio International* 181, no. 933 (May 1971): 210–11.
- ²⁵ Gilbert & George, *Studio International* 181, no. 933 (May 1971): 220–21.
- ²⁶ Gerald Newman, *Studio International* 181, no. 933 (May 1971): 222–23.
- ²⁷ Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin, *Studio International* 181, no. 933 (May 1971): 226–32.
- ²⁸ Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin, *Theories of Ethics*, 1970, Tate library collection, 1971, transferred to Tate artwork catalogue in 2011. <http://library.tate.org.uk/uhtbin/cgiirsi/?ps=fvooiUpv6K/LIBRARY/144790004/9>
- ²⁹ Harrison letter to Karshan, 20 April 1971; Harrison papers (1950s–1979), TGA 839/1/5/1/13.
- ³⁰ *The British Avant Garde* (exhibition catalogue).
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- 38 David Shirey, "British Avant Garde", *New York Times*, date cut off; Harrison papers (1950s-1979), TGA 839/1/5/1/19, London.
- 39 John Perreault, "'British Conceptual Art at the Cultural Center", *Village Voice*, 3 June 1971, 16.
- 40 Robert Pincus-Witten, "Anglo-American Standard Reference Works: Acute Conceptualism of Two Survey Shows: Projects Pier 18 with documentation at the Museum of Modern Art and the British Avant Garde at the New York Cultural Centre", *ArtForum* (Oct. 1971); Richard Long, *Untitled Sculpture* and Sue Arrowsmith, *Streetwalk* (1970) were illustrated, pp. 82-83.
- 41 The artists were Bob Law, Michael Craig-Martin, Hamish Fulton, David Tremlett, Keith Arnatt, Bruce Mclean, and Joseph Beuys, 23 Feb.-23 March 1972, TG, *Seven Exhibitions* LON-TAT (Tate Public Records), London.
- 42 Serota letter to Townsend, 27 June 1972, Arts Council file, A correspondence to 1972, *Studio International*, Peter Townsend editorial papers, TGA 20028.
- 43 In addition to the artists in *The British Avant Garde* were Keith Milow, Michael Craig-Martin, John Stezaker, and John Hilliard.

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Arte Inglese Oggi, Milan, 1976: Between Formalism and Conceptual Art

Elena Crippa

Abstract

In the 1970s, Arte Inglese Oggi (Palazzo Reale, Milan, 1976) was one of the major exhibitions organized by the British Council in partnership with foreign institutions towards the presentation of British art abroad. Covering the period 1960–76, the selectors aimed to represent contemporary developments while attempting to hold on to the categories of painting and sculpture, the latter divided into sculpture proper and the splinter section “alternative developments”.

Authors

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The exhibition *Arte Inglese Oggi*—English art today—took place at Palazzo Reale, Milan, from February to May 1976. It was co-organized by the British Council and the municipality of Milan, which set up a joint selection committee formed of Guido Ballo, Richard Cork, Norbert Lynton, Franco Russoli, David Thompson, and Norbert Reid, who acted as president. Guido Ballo was a poet, prominent critic, and organizer of many exhibitions, including those he selected for the Venice Biennale over seven editions between 1956 and 1968. Franco Russoli, then director of the Pinacoteca of Brera, was a passionate supporter of the social role of art and the need to open museums to a wider public.¹ Russoli's stance may have played a role in the decision to open the exhibition with a room wallpapered with large-scale pictures of contemporary popular British culture, including photographs of the illuminated advertising hoarding in Piccadilly Circus, of the Beatles, and of the artists who were participating in *Arte Inglese Oggi* posing for a group portrait in London's Trafalgar Square.² This choice was also in line with the original and more propagandistic aim of the British Council: to promote knowledge of British culture, and thus to foster sympathetic appreciation of its foreign policy.³

The list of English representatives on the selection committee highlights the connections between the powerful institutions shaping the contemporary art world of that time. Norman Reid was Director of the Tate Gallery, a member of the Arts Council of Great Britain Art Panel from 1964 to 1974, a member of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) Advisory Panel from 1965, and Chairman of the Fine Art Advisory Committee of the British Council between 1968 and 1975. David Thompson was a critic and Director of the ICA. Norbert Lynton was Director of Exhibitions at the Arts Council between 1970 and 1975, before returning to the academic world as Professor of History of Art at Sussex University. Richard Cork, the youngest of them, was an art critic for the *Evening Standard* and a member of the Arts Council's Art Panel between 1971 and 1974. The Arts Council had, since the immediate postwar years, played a major role in the organization of exhibitions at home, and had recently organized shows at the Hayward Gallery and the Serpentine Gallery in London. Nevertheless, it was the British Council, which was responsible for British art abroad and foreign art in Britain, that was seen by some as more sympathetic to new artistic trends than the Arts Council, in part due to its reliance on independent critics rather than permanent staff.⁴

The seat of different government bodies since the medieval communes, the Palazzo Reale had numerous large rooms that, in enfilade, structured the imposing palace around an internal courtyard. The building, which had been partially destroyed following an English bombing raid in 1943, gained prominence as an exhibition venue in 1953, when Pablo Picasso—building on the material and symbolic history of the palace—chose it for his retrospective

exhibition, centred around the display of *Guernica* (1937).⁵ By the time of the opening of *Arte Inglese Oggi*, the venue had received a simple but effective makeover, and its walls had been whitewashed in a fashion that was, by then, *de rigueur*.⁶ The major criteria guiding the configuration of the exhibition was that each artist was to be represented in depth, since the organizers' view was that they would otherwise not be properly appreciated by a public unfamiliar with their works.⁷ As a result, nearly all the artists were given a large room each.

The generous proportions of the building allowed for the participation of well over fifty artists. The works were not displayed chronologically or according to medium, but alternated painting with sculpture and moved from David Hockney to R. B. Kitaj, Anthony Caro, Bridget Riley, "New Generation" sculpture, Richard Hamilton, and so on. Nevertheless, the selection had been planned and the catalogue structured so as to maintain a clear distinction between media, with each selector writing an essay on the medium they worked with, followed by texts and images of the work of each artist, ordered alphabetically. Lynton was in charge of painting, which was by far the largest section, including twenty-nine artists. Thompson worked on sculpture, selecting thirteen artists. Nine artists featured in Cork's "Alternative Developments" category, while separate sections, with dedicated spaces, were given to performance and film, which were arranged by Ted Little and David Curtis respectively.⁸

In terms of the period surveyed, the initial intention to cover the whole postwar stretch was revised, as it appeared too heterogeneous and vast to be addressed in any depth.⁹ Instead, 1960 was chosen as a landmark year from which the survey would begin. In his text for the exhibition catalogue, Lynton justifies the choice not merely as an expedient to narrow down the selection, but on the grounds that 1960 signalled a "move out of painting and sculpture", a testing of their physical parameters and expanding of the materials and processes involved in their making.¹⁰ These included all sorts of works that did not fit within the traditional categories of painting and sculpture, and whose nomenclature, not yet fully established, encompassed "conceptual art, performance art, various forms of linguistic and symbolical art, artists' films and video-tapes", and much more.¹¹ While these types of works mostly fed into the section on "alternative developments", Lynton was flexible in his criteria for selection and included John Latham and Mark Boyle under the rubric of painting—despite seeing them as better aligned with "alternative art"—because Cork had excluded them from his own selection.

By 1976, a number of important exhibitions, from *When Attitudes Become Form* (Kunsthalle Bern; Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld; ICA, London, 1969) to *Information* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1970) and *Documenta 5* (Kassel, 1972), had not only freely presented contemporary art making as an activity that had fully broken loose from traditional categories, but had also expanded the range of its exhibits to a realm that seemed to relate to any aspect of human activity. The work of Italian artists such as Giovanni Anselmo, Mario Merz, and Gilberto Zorio, among others, had featured prominently as part of these developments and exhibitions. Between 1967 and 1970, the critic and curator Germano Celant had played a key role in giving visibility to Italian artists under the collective banner of *Arte Povera*, exhibiting their work with that of international artists in *Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art* (Galleria Civica d'arte Moderna, Turin, 1970). He too, after having initially discussed *Arte Povera* in political terms as a form of “guerrilla warfare”, ultimately articulated his compatriots’ work in terms more aligned to the dominant international discourse, as inhabiting the new possibilities that had opened up in the diverse spectrum ranging from Minimalism to conceptual art.¹³ In Britain, the exhibition *The New Art*, curated by the Tate Gallery’s Anne Seymour for the Hayward Gallery in 1972, while Norbert Lynton was Director of Exhibitions, elected the post-medium condition as the criteria in the selection of British artists’ work.¹⁴ As Seymour stated in her catalogue contribution, the exhibition included a wide range of work that did not presuppose the categories of painting and sculpture, but involved “written material, philosophical ideas, photographs, film, sound, light, the earth itself, the artists themselves, [and] actual objects”.¹⁵

In this context, *Arte Inglese Oggi* was a strange and polymorphic endeavour. On the one hand, it attempted to maintain a traditional approach to medium specificity; on the other, it stated the demise of such an approach to art making. There are a number of reasons for these internal contradictions. The selection panel was heterogeneous: Reid, its chair, certainly privileged a more traditional approach in the discussion and presentation of art, while Lynton and Cork had a more progressive outlook. The Italian members were also interested in the representation of British sculpture proper—with which the Italian public had become familiar through a number of editions of the Venice Biennale, from Henry Moore in 1948 and Barbara Hepworth in 1950, to the group of sculptors labelled in terms of a “geometry of fear” in 1952.¹⁶ The same contradictions were first and foremost dictated by the very nature of the period covered—sixteen years marked by a rapid and radical transformation in British art—years that included Clement Greenberg’s championing of Anthony Caro’s work as the pinnacle of modern sculpture; the ascendance of British Pop; and the international exposure of a significant group of conceptual artists. If, over this period, painting had gradually come to include a wide range of new forms—collage, construction, the marks of

gesture, the imprint of bodies, the insertion of found objects—sculpture seemed to have generated the most diverse tendencies, impossible to harmonize under a single rubric.

The choice to take 1960 as the beginning of the period covered by *Arte Inglese Oggi* legitimized the narrative whereby Anthony Caro's mythologized trip to New York and his first abstract works of 1960 mark the starting point of a "New British Sculpture", international in its transatlantic connection with "high modernism" and hence fully allied with medium specificity. This narrative was most clearly articulated in Thompson's sculpture section, where Eduardo Paolozzi and William Turnbull were the only artists who had been active since the immediate postwar years. The selection was otherwise shaped around sculptors who taught and had been trained at Saint Martin's School of Art between the mid-1950s and early 1960s, with galleries dedicated to Anthony Caro, Phillip King, William Tucker, and Tim Scott; while their work also featured in a separate section on "New Generation" sculpture, alongside that of David Annesley and Michael Bolus.

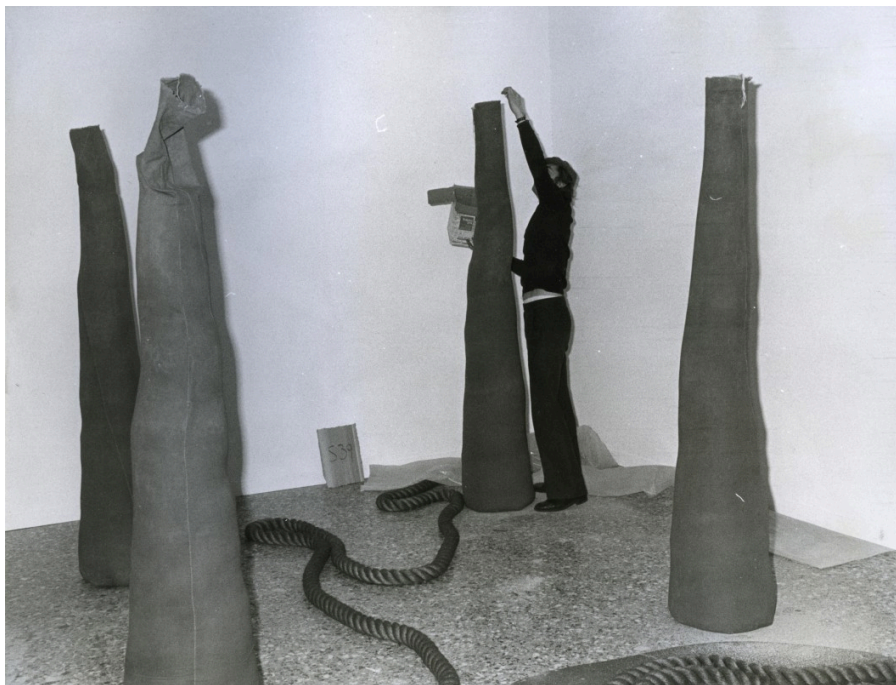


Figure 1.

Installation View, *Arte Inglese Oggi*, Palazzo Reale, Milan, Feb.-May 1976, showing Barry Flanagan, *4 casb 2 '67, ringl 1 '67, rope (gr 2sp 60) 6 '67*, 1967, gelatin silver print, 18.5 × 24 cm Digital image courtesy of British Council Collection archives / © Tate, London 2016

From younger generations, Thompson selected Nigel Hall, Barry Flanagan, Julian Hawkes, Tim Mapston, and Carl Plackman. Thompson conceded that Flanagan's work had a new attitude to the activity of sculpture in terms of process, unstable materials, and temporal configurations rather than finite

objects; while Hall, Mapston, and Plackman's work was environmental in scale or related to the study of posture and human behaviour.¹⁷ He also admitted that the 1970s had been defined by the tendency to move away from the categories of painting and sculpture, and that artists' concerns in sculpture overlapped with those enlisted in Cork's section. Nevertheless, Thompson felt that one could continue to speak of sculpture as a cohesive discipline, as many artists still found that the issues proper to its activity continued to yield new expressive possibilities.¹⁸ Thompson's selection bore strong similarities to that of William Tucker for his exhibition *The Condition of Sculpture* at the Hayward Gallery in 1975, replicating the insistence on sculpture's belonging to a continuous tradition defined by its physical properties and materials.¹⁹ The fact that a demonstration had been staged outside the Hayward, protesting that thirty-six men and only four women had been selected by Tucker for his exhibition, did not seem to affect Thompson's nor Cork's selecting process: no women featured in either one's sections.²⁰

Cork's "Alternative Developments" section was there to make a very different statement on the most recent artistic developments. This was certainly something the organizers of *Arte Inglese Oggi* pursued, as Cork had started making a name for himself as a representative of alternative practices to painting and sculpture. In 1974 he selected work for *Beyond Painting and Sculpture: Works Bought for the Arts Council*, which toured to Leeds City Art Gallery, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, and Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol; and also for a *Critic's Choice* exhibition at Arthur Tooth & Sons, London, in 1973.²¹ A good number of the artists in Cork's section were second-generation Saint Martin's sculpture students: David Dye, John Hilliard, Gilbert & George, Tim Head, and Richard Long, alongside Keith Arnatt, Art & Language, Victor Burgin, and John Stezaker. Their work in *Arte Inglese Oggi* was primarily photographic and text based. In his catalogue essay, Cork stated that "the abandonment of painting and sculpture *per se* is by no means the most significant distinguishing characteristic of the new priorities under discussion here."²² Rather, he went on, an entire generation, in England and abroad, had come to the broader realization that "art does not necessarily have to be channelled either into the media or the critical preconceptions which have for a long time dominated the post-war avant-garde continuum."²³

Reassessed was the centrality of the relationship between an idea and its material embodiment—a defining characteristic of art, that had been lost in postwar American art and criticism. What is more, Cork identified this shift with artists' need to realign art with the society they live in and the strategies they develop within it and in response to it.²⁴

Just over a year prior to the opening of *Arte Inglese Oggi*, Cork was still speculating on the conditions for the survival of sculpture, and argued that the discipline was facing a "cross-road situation" between dissolution and

redefinition.²⁵ He felt that, if sculpture had to survive the extreme reductive process undergone by Minimalism, and the alteration of its meaning and role—almost beyond recognition—on the part of conceptual artists, there was a need to re-examine its underlying premises and potentials.²⁶ By the beginning of 1976, with *Arte Inglese Oggi*, the relationship between “alternative developments” and sculpture was only brushed over and the demise of medium-specificity a *fait accompli*. In 1979, the art historian Rosalind Krauss took on the task that a few years earlier Cork had called for, but not pursued: the redefinition of sculpture. The starting point of her essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” was that all sculpture originates in the monument; and it proceeded to explore the meaning of sculpture in relation to site specificity in terms of architecture and landscape.²⁷ A different type of analysis may be applied to a development that was reshaping British sculpture and that made a quiet appearance in *Arte Inglese Oggi*.



Figure 2.

Installation View, *Arte Inglese Oggi*, Palazzo Reale, Milan, Feb.-May 1976, showing Tim Mapston, *Sculpture III*, 1974, gelatin silver print, 16.3 × 21.6 cm Digital image courtesy of British Council Collection archives / © Tate, London 2016



Figure 3.

Installation View, Arte Inglese Oggi, Palazzo Reale, Milan, Feb.-May 1976, showing Carl Plackman, *Sisyphus Descends Again*, 1974, gelatin silver print, 20.5 x 13.8 cm Digital image courtesy of British Council Collection archives / © Tate, London 2016



Figure 4.

Installation View, *Arte Inglese Oggi*, Palazzo Reale, Milan, Feb.-May 1976, showing Carl Plackman art work, gelatin silver print, 18.5 x 24 cm Digital image courtesy of British Council Collection archives / © Tate, London 2016

Tim Mapston's wooden sculptures, almost like props for the display of the interaction between man and his environment (fig. 2), and Carl Plackman's installations featuring fish tanks, jars, and basic wooden structures (fig. 3 and fig. 4), are far from being concerned with monumentality and site specificity. Instead, they seem to relate more closely to a tradition that encompasses the domestic and transportable sphere, from votive sculptures and furniture all the way up to Picasso's Cubist constructions, Kurt Schwitters's incorporation of objects in his sculpture, Hubert Dalwood's utensils-sculptures, or Caro's "table pieces"—which did not feature in *Arte Inglese Oggi* despite the artist's commitment to the series since 1966. Mapston and Plackman's works relate to touch more than sight and to one's physicality on a basic and intimate level. In so doing, they inevitably signal a return to concerns relating to a more social dimension of art. Barry Flanagan's sand-filled canvases and "rings" of sand poured and carved from within, whilst maintaining a more direct interest in the behaviour of materials and an emphasis on process, also spoke of dislocation and a sort of physical, soft-edge state defined by contact (fig. 4). Concerns about human behaviour and social exchange, grounded in one's physical experience, were beginning to signal a new type of engagement with sculpture that had a presence in *Arte Inglese Oggi*. Yet the sculptors exploring these concerns could in this context only speak softly, their different premises eclipsed by the highly

vocal nature of the two already over-defined titans they were squeezed between—formalist sculpture on the one side, and conceptualism on the other. This was reflected in the reception to the exhibition of Italian critics, who, while being on the whole impressed by the Pop generation of painters (particularly David Hockney), nevertheless discussed the exhibition in terms of the already historicized dichotomous relationship of sculpture proper on the one side, particularly in the well-known abstract work of Caro, King, and Tucker, and “alternative developments” on the other, with Gilbert & George and Art & Language amongst its leading figures. ²⁸

Footnotes

- 1 See Franco Russoli, *Il museo nella società: Analisi, proposte, interventi (1952-1977)* (Milan: Feltrinelli Economica, 1981).
- 2 The exhibition was documented photographically in an unusually extensive way. Photographic documentation was taken at different stages: during the installation, once the installation had been completed, and during the private view. See TGA 200317/2/1/184 – TGA 200317/2/1/193, Tate Archive, British Council collection. The photograph of the artists in Trafalgar Square is also published in the exhibition catalogue, *Arte Inglese Oggi, 1960-76*, 2 vols. (Milan: Electa Editrice, 1976), 1: 6–7.
- 3 This was the aim set out in the 1940–41 Annual Report of the British Council, a few years after its foundation. For a history of the British Council, see Frances Donaldson, *The British Council: The First Fifty Years* (London: Cape, 1984).
- 4 Lynda Morris, “Arte Inglese Oggi”, *Data 20* (1976): 45.
- 5 The exhibition was the occasion of the return of *Guernica* to Europe from the USA after fifteen years. It was the first and only time the painting was shown in the same space as *Massacre in Korea* (1951), and *La Guerre et la Paix* (1952), before their permanent installation in the chapel in Vallauris. See Gijs van Hensbergen, *Guernica: The Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 207.
- 6 On the tradition of white walls in art museums, see Christoph Grunenberg, “The Modern Art Museum”, in *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, ed. Emma Barker (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 29–31.
- 7 See Francesco Ogliari and Gerald Forty’s Foreword to *Arte Inglese Oggi*, 1: 1.
- 8 The films were projected as a programme in a dedicated room in Palazzo Reale, while performances took place in the octagon of Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, a few minutes’ walk from the main venue, across the Piazza del Duomo.
- 9 Guido Ballo and Franco Russoli, “A Propos of the Exhibition”, in *Arte Inglese Oggi*, 1: 8.
- 10 Norbert Lynton, “Painting: Situation and Extensions”, in *Arte Inglese Oggi*, 1: 14.
- 11 Lynton, “Painting: Situation and Extensions”, 14.
- 12 See Norbert Lynton’s review of Richard Cork’s book, *Michael Craig-Martin* (2006), in *The Art Book* 14, no. 4 (2007): 20–21 (21).
- 13 On this transition in Celant’s conceptualization of Arte Povera, see Jacopo Galimberti, “A Third-worldist Art? Germano Celant’s Invention of Arte Povera”, *Art History* 36, no. 2 (April 2013): 418–41.
- 14 For a detailed account of this exhibition, see Joy Sleeman, “*The New Art*, Hayward Gallery, London, 1972: New as compromise, or when what happens around the exhibition is as interesting as what happens in the exhibition”, *Sculpture Journal* 21, no. 2 (2012): 63–74.
- 15 Anne Seymour, Introduction to *The New Art*, exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 1972), 5.
- 16 See Ballo and Russoli, “A Propos of the Exhibition”, 8.
- 17 David Thompson, “Sculpture”, in *Arte Inglese Oggi*, 1: 228–29.
- 18 Thompson, “Sculpture”, 232.
- 19 William Tucker, *The Condition of Sculpture*, exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 1975), 7.
- 20 See John A. Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 226. Very few women featured in the exhibition: Rita Donagh and Bridget Riley in the painting section, Annabel Nicolson and Lis Rhodes in the film section, and members of Coum Transmissions, and Roland Miller and Shirley Cameron in the performance programme.
- 21 The Arts Council touring exhibition included work by Keith Arnatt, Victor Burgin, David Dye, Hamish Fulton, Gilbert & George, John Hilliard, David Lamelas, Gerald Newman, and John Stezaker. The exhibition at Arthur Tooth & Sons included work by Conrad Atkinson, David Dye, Gilbert & George, John Hilliard, John Latham, Bob Law, Richard Long, Gerald Newman, Nice Style, and John Stezaker.
- 22 Richard Cork, “Alternative Developments”, in *Arte Inglese Oggi*, 2: 310.

- 23 Cork, "Alternative Developments", 311.
- 24 Cork, "Alternative Developments", 340.
- 25 Richard Cork, Introduction to *Sculpture Now: Dissolution or Redefinition?*, exh. cat. (London: Royal College of Art, 1974), n.p. The exhibition coincided with the Lethaby Lectures which Richard Cork delivered.
- 26 Cork, Introduction to *Sculpture Now*.
- 27 Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", *October* 8 (1979): 30-44.
- 28 See Giuliano Briganti, "Arrivano dall'Inghilterra il 'pop' e il suo contrario", *La Repubblica*, 11 March 1976; and Lorenza Trucchi, "Arte Inglese Oggi 1960-76", *Momento Sera*, 12 March 1976.

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Un Certain Art Anglais, 1979

Lucy Reynolds

Abstract

This retrospective look at the 1979 British Council travelling exhibition to Paris, Un Certain Regard Anglais, considers whether it was an accurate picture of English art practices at the end of the decade. I examine the aims of its English and French curators, and its reception by art critics and audiences. I find that the exhibition raises timely questions about how national characteristics might be reflected in art practice, and how, despite the cultural and societal shifts of the 1970s, omissions on the grounds of colour and gender prevail. With this in mind, my short essay finds that the radical objectives which are often attributed to this period of English art practice were not so widespread as history would have us believe.

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Lucy Reynolds, "Un Certain Art Anglais, 1979", British Art Studies, Issue 3, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-03/lreynolds>

Writing in the April 1979 issue of *Artscribe*, Terence Maloon considers the use of the adjective “Certain” in the title of the British Council touring exhibition, *Un Certain Art Anglais*, an ambitious show which took the work of thirty British artists to the Musée d’Art Moderne in Paris that January and February. According to Maloon, the use of this qualifying word acts as a disclaimer, and enabled the British Council and the exhibition’s curators—ARC’s Suzanne Pagé, Richard Cork, Sandy Nairne, and Michael Compton—to “profess a resolute impartiality in regard to the art they promote, seeking not to influence, exhort or misrepresent the kinds of art being produced in this country, but rather to passively reflect”.¹ Maloon goes further to point to the reductive inevitability of survey exhibitions seeking to encapsulate the national cultural picture for a given period, suggesting that the term “relativises the selected artists while leaving their context, the interests and merits of excluded artists *uncertain*”.² However, it could be argued that it is precisely through a closer look at the work included in *Un Certain Art Anglais*, and those artists left outside its canon, that a picture of contemporary art practice in Britain on the cusp of a new decade can be identified.

Because whilst there is no doubt, as Maloon infers, that the exhibition *Un Certain Art Anglais* presents a particular face of British art practice, it is perhaps not the one that is reflected in contemporary reviews and essays, nor in the brief mentions that the exhibition has received in histories since, nor in current expectations of what artists were making at the end of the 1970s.³ Maloon’s review, as well as that by Ralph Rumney in *Art Monthly*, and Richard Cork’s introductory essay for the catalogue, “Collaboration without Compromise”, suggest an exhibition which continues the conceptual approaches rooted in non-traditional art media such as photography, performance, and text, which have come to characterize the decade; seen in the 1972 Hayward gallery show, *The New Art*, for example, or, an earlier curatorial project by Cork, the 1974 touring show, *Beyond Painting and Sculpture*. Indeed, in retrospective scholarship, artists in the show such as Conrad Atkinson, Art & Language, or Stephen Willats are often seen as paradigmatic of conceptual practices distinct to the British context during the 1970s, engaging overtly with the country’s political dimensions, particularly around the subject of activism, labour, and class and its representations. John A. Walker, for example, recalls that “what was new and significant about art in Britain during the 1970s was its repoliticization and feminization, its attempt to reconnect to society at large”,⁴ whether through the Artist Placement Group’s attempts to create dialogue with industry, or the inclusion in the exhibition of the Muralist Painters Group, whose paintings were developed within local community groups rather than white cube institutions. Walker is nevertheless at pains to stress the arbitrary and misleading nature of decade-based periodization, when there are “continuities that connect the 1970s with earlier and later decades”.⁵

Located on the cusp of the 1980s, *Un Certain Art Anglais* might thus offer an intimation of the concerns which would exercise artists in the decade to come, such as the theoretical dominance of Postmodernism; as well as accounting for how artists' attempts to engage with a shifting political and social landscape had played out, bracketed on the one side by the student protests of 1968, and the rise of a new political right under Margaret Thatcher on the other.

Yet, a glance at the subheadings in Rosanne Saint-Jacques's review of the exhibition for *Vie Des Arts* would appear to offer a narrative of British art practice in which political rhetoric plays a small role within a show largely defined by a continued engagement—albeit deconstructive—with well-established fine art genres, if not media, and stressing aesthetic rather than overt political enquiry. Referring back to the catalogue's introductory text by the exhibition's French curator Suzanne Pagé, Saint-Jacques traces three emerging areas of practice, or “trois directions”.⁶ The first two do not include an engagement with contemporary socio-political contexts, but are situated, rather, within the familiar fine art genre traditions of the “portrait/paysage”,⁷ which she perceives as “plus particulièrement-anglaise-ou-intimate”, and “Art/Illusion/Réalité”, a deconstructed term for new approaches to the enduring still life genre.⁸ In Hamish Fulton's images of the Bering Sea, Richard Long's *Slate Circle* and *Night Sea Journey*, Glen Onwin's installed boat and waxed wall of reeds, for example, the residue of the land art movement of the preceding decade can be traced alongside the enduring landscape painting tradition, perceived by Saint-Jacques as a national trait (fig. 1 and fig. 2, both 1979). But, as she stresses, in line with land art these works attempt to rethink landscape beyond pictorial convention through their emphasis on the indexed mark of photographic time; documenting changing weather conditions in the photographs of Phillippa Ecobichon, for example, the drawn marks of David Tremlett, or the slate circle which evidences Long's walk through Sligo.



Figure 1.

Installation View, *Un Certain Art Anglais*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, January - March 1979 (showing Richard Long *Slate Circle*, 1979), Gelatin Silver Print, 113 x 225mm Digital image courtesy of British Council Collection archives / © Tate, London 2016

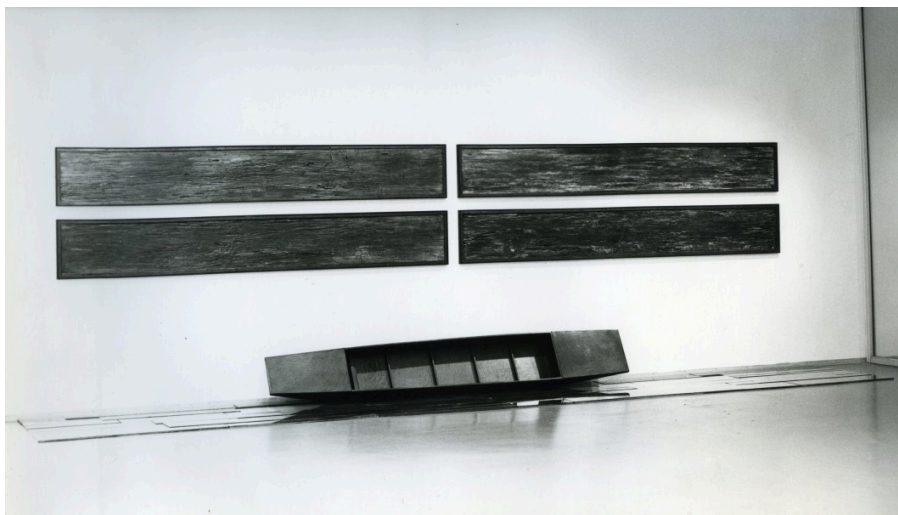


Figure 2.

Installation View, *Un Certain Art Anglais*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, January - March 1979 (showing Glen Onwin's *Night Sea Journey*, 1979), Gelatin Silver Print, 128 x 222mm Digital image courtesy of British Council Collection archives / © Tate, London 2016

Certainly the introduction of performative presence and photographic document to reinvigorate landscape or still life genres reflects the turn away from traditional art media which characterizes the decade. As Cork recalls of the period:

it was exciting to encounter artists of my own generation employing any strategies they wished, including film, video, performance, raw documentation, photography, texts and many other alternatives, in the conviction that their work need no longer conform to the old hierarchy.⁹

However, it could also be argued that this mode of practice and use of media, particularly that practised by Fulton and Long, was a well-established approach to landscape by the close of the 1970s, despite its attempt to efface the aesthetic conventions associated with landscape painting. And, rather than offer new dialogues with the vexed question of British landscape in relation to property rights or environmental concerns, it could be that these artists were concerned with documenting a singular, even poetic, engagement with its temporal and spatial dynamics—just as Michael Craig-Martin's enlarged outline wall paintings of domestic objects do not trespass beyond a Pop art play with scale into the more profound questioning of representation for which his 1973 conceptual work, *An Oak Tree*, had been lauded.

Furthermore, as Saint Jacques's review suggests, a national preoccupation with landscape was to be expected from British artists, raising the question of how the exhibition was charged not only with presenting a snapshot of those figures deemed significant in British art at the close of the 1970s, but also of making a particular address to French expectations of British cultural preoccupations. In her introduction to the exhibition catalogue, Pagé, who was a key figure in the conception and realization of the exhibition through the independent organization ARC,¹⁰ stresses that the exhibition was more concerned with reflecting the diversity of contemporary British art to a Paris public unfamiliar with it, than attributions of individual excellence.¹¹

However, she does identify particular traits of restraint and objectivity across the exhibition which imply a certain reading of national characteristics.¹² Maloon's more blunt assessment of the exhibition as "heavily Methodist" supports the notion of a specific English sensibility of pared-down religious asceticism, against his argument that "British art is a far hardier, more vigorous beast than the French have been given to believe. The best of it is diametrically opposite in spirit to the thin-lipped puritanism of this exhibition."¹³

Maloon does not clarify exactly which missing artists might constitute a more vigorous approach to the English reserve on display in the exhibition, but neither does the exhibition challenge the canonic hegemony of the white male artist, despite its ambitions to address the realities of lived experience outside the gallery and museum. Of the twenty-seven works represented, it

is notable that only three were by women, suggesting that despite the vocal and well-organized efforts of the Women Artists Workshop during the 1970s, exhibition spaces such as the Women's Free Art Alliance, and the attempts at redress by an all-female exhibition panel for the Hayward Annual the year before, the significant presence of women artists as part of the diversity of English art, which Pagé seeks to address, is little acknowledged.

However, of those works which were included, two make a significant and confrontational address to women's lived experience.¹⁴ The exhibition offered the French public their first encounter with Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79), a diary of the developing bond between mother and growing son inscribed in its material and observational phenomena: carved into stone, and stained onto cloth. It also included photographic text-works and drawings by Alexis Hunter. The suggestive yet sinister undertones of her out-of-focus photo series *Gender Confusion: Incubus/Succubus* (1978) makes implicit reference to rape through allusion to the mythical figures of Incubus and Succubus.¹⁵ In the photo work *A Secretary Sees the World* (1978), a woman's hands on the keyboard of a typewriter in the photographic sequence assert the continued struggle for recognition of women's labour, following the compromises of the 1975 Equal Pay Act (fig. 3). Part of the series *Approach to Fear*, in which close-ups of a woman's hands are shown undertaking a number of different incongruous actions, such as an impeccably manicured hand rubbing itself in oil¹⁶ or holding a burning shoe,¹⁷ *A Secretary Sees the World* contributes to a wider refrain across the exhibition addressing the fractious labour relationships which dominated Britain in the 1970s. This is also apparent in Nick Hedges's quiet photographs of factory workers, and Art & Language's polemic paintings and texts, *Our Progress Lies in Hard Work, Dialectical Materialism No 4*. A certain irony can also be read in a related work by Hunter, which might have made an apt addition to the show, entitled *The Marxist's Wife (Still Does the Housework)* (1978). Here, a female hand in close-up, attempting to clean an image of Marx, reminds us that the radical engagements professed by some artists included in the exhibition did not always extend to equal terms for their female comrades.



Figure 3.

Alexis Hunter, *Secretary Sees the World*, 1978, 20 hand coloured Xeroxes in 4 panels, vintage, 120 x 37cm (each panel) Digital image courtesy of the Estate of Alexis Hunter. Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery.

Whilst there is no mention in contemporary reviews of the exhibition of this impoverished representation for women artists at a time when feminism was well established, it was even less so for people of colour, as an open letter to the British Council in *Art Monthly* from David Medalla and Rasheed Araeen demonstrates. Medalla and Araeen write of their concern that the British Council

is adamant in persistently projecting the white image of Britain abroad, as if there are no black people in Britain or they are not part of British reality, and as if black artists have done nothing significant in the field of art reflecting a contemporary reality. ¹⁸

They demand an explanation, one not apparently forthcoming in later issues of the magazine. If the exhibition was indeed attempting to represent the diversity and direction of English art practices across the 1970s, Medalla and Araeen's contributions prove a striking omission. For both were highly visible in their challenges to prejudice within and without the art establishment, confronted in Araeen's slide performance *Paki Bastard (Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person)* (1977; [fig. 4](#)), or Medalla's founding of Artists for Democracy in 1974 to protest, through art, the dictatorship in Chile and other political repressions. ¹⁹ As well as bringing an international perspective to a country where, as John Walker contends, much radical art

appeared “parochial in its concerns”,²⁰ their explicit commitment to addressing political concerns within their work would also appear to make them fitting for “socio-critique”,²¹ the third category of the exhibition articulated by Pagé, and the one which chimes most readily with the conceptual paradigm of English 1970s art with which the exhibition is associated.



Figure 4.

Rasheed Araeen, *Paki Bastard (Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person)*, 1977, live event with slides and sound, Artists for Democracy, London
Digital image courtesy of Rasheed Araeen

But rather than commitment to the politics of the day, the show’s conceptual markings may be better identified in a preoccupation with language, whether Tim Head or Craig-Martin’s play on still life genre representation, or a use of text with photographic image in the work of Victor Burgin; although, as one critic observed, conceptual art’s linguistic turn did create problems of translation for a French audience, “where the French have to cope with (mostly) English language conceptual works, with work unfamiliar to them, and with that private reserve of the British character, there is little to help them”.²² Furthermore, whilst individual artists such as Kelly, Atkinson, and Art & Language might posit the political, the impact of their images of labour or the troubles in Northern Ireland loses potency when situated in dialogue with works of predominantly aesthetic concerns, such as Alan Charlton’s abstract paintings or Long’s slate circle. Thus, there is an implicit paradox in Pagé’s use of the word “neutralization” to explain the cool objectivity brought to bear by these artists on matters of politics, representation, as well as the landscape or still life image.²³ For it would appear that the lively and heterogeneous qualities of art in England (itself an ambiguous term which

elides questions of Scottish and Welsh art) which Cork and Walker remember as responsive to the decade's political and social contexts, become neutralized when they are subsumed into a wider body of competing artwork, to become institutionalized and out of context. For all its organizers' good intentions, *Un Certain Art Anglais* could be seen to reflect the anxiety of the decade's endgame, by endorsing art which perpetuated established fine art traditions and their canons. Yet, it might also be argued that perhaps radical art had a smaller part to play in the landscape of 1970s art practice than art history would like to believe, and that, in the main part, the exhibition presents an accurate view of artists' enduring engagement with the singular problems of individual practice.

Footnotes

- 1 Terence Maloon, "English Uncertainty in Paris", *Artscribe* 17 (April 1979): 48.
- 2 Maloon, "English Uncertainty in Paris".
- 3 Conceptual art practices in Britain during the 1970s were well recuperated by the exhibition *Live In Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain 1965—1975* (Whitechapel Gallery, 2000), and John A. Walker's *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002).
- 4 Walker, *Left Shift*, 2.
- 5 Walker, *Left Shift*, 2.
- 6 Rosanne Saint-Jacques, "De L'Autre Côté de la Manche", *Vie des Arts*, 12 March 1979, British Council Files, Tate Britain Special Collections.
- 7 Saint-Jacques, "De L'Autre Côté de la Manche".
- 8 "Une autre direction, elle meme très rigoureuse, interroge les relations Art/Illusion/Réalité à travers de savantes constructions ou mises en espace d'objets divers, nouvelles approches de la nature morte traditionnelle." Suzanne Pagé, "Introduction", *Un Certain Art Anglais: Selection d'Artistes Britanniques, 1970-1979* (British Council/ARC, 1979), 6.
- 9 Richard Cork, *Everything Seemed Possible: Art in the 1970s* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 1.
- 10 Associated to the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, and based in their building, ARC was an independent curatorial and research body which organized events through the 1970s, its acronym standing for Art/Animation, Research, Creation/Confrontation.
- 11 "Cette exposition ne prétend pas être une présentation du meilleur art anglais d'aujourd'hui mais apporter une information sur sa diversité et sa singularité propres, en tenant compte, toutefois, du niveau d'information du public parisien." Pagé, "Introduction", 6.
- 12 "Un des traits spécifiques de l'art anglais, vu à travers cette sélection, tiendrait alors, peut-être, à ce qui se joue entre une extrême sensibilité, subtile, prégnante, et sa neutralisation par des effets d'objectivité et d'ordonnance strictes, de sobriété et de froideur impeccables." Pagé, "Introduction", 6.
- 13 Maloon, "English Uncertainty in Paris", 49.
- 14 The third women artist represented was the aforementioned Phillippa Ecobichon, who showed a series of landscape photographs.
- 15 In medieval folklore, Incubus is a male demon who has intercourse with a sleeping woman, and Succubus is his female counterpart. In Hunter's photographs, Incubus is represented by a mouse seen adjacent to female genitalia, and Succubus takes the form of a cat, attacking the mouse to defend the woman.
- 16 *Approach to Fear III: Taboo—demystify* (1976).
- 17 *Approach to Fear XIII: Pain—destruction of Cause* (1977).
- 18 David Medalla and Rasheed Araeen, Open Letter to the British Council, *Art Monthly* (April 1979).
- 19 It was founded with John Dugger, Guy Brett, and Cecilia Vicuña.
- 20 Walker, *Left Shift*, 11.
- 21 Pagé, "Introduction", 6.
- 22 *Un Certain Art Anglais*, *Art Review* (1979): 87 (Tate Archive).

- 23 "Un des traits spécifiques de l'art anglais, vu à travers cette sélection, tiendrait alors, peut-être, à ce qui se joue entre une extrême sensibilité, subtile, prégnante, et sa neutralisation par des effets d'objectivité et d'ordonnance strictes, de sobriété et de froideur impeccables." Pagé, "Introduction", 6.

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Henry Moore's Public Sculpture in the US: The Collaborations with I. M. Pei

Alex Potts

Abstract

The many commissions Henry Moore received for public sculpture in the United States provided the occasion for several quite distinctive works. While not site specific, these were unique, and their final form, scale, and disposition was elaborated with a particular setting in mind. This aspect of Moore's work in the US, which began with the monumental piece he designed for the Lincoln Center in New York in 1963-65, is examined here by focusing on the productive relationship he forged with the architect I. M. Pei in the 1970s. The sculptures Moore produced in collaboration with Pei respond in suggestive ways to the spatial environments created in American cities by late modern architectural developments. They also realize an oddly effective combination of the biomorphic and abstract that differs both from the bodily conception of Moore's earlier work and the non-figurative character of much public sculpture of the time.

Authors

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The many commissions Henry Moore received for public sculpture in the United States provided the occasion for several quite distinctive works. While not site specific, these were unique, and their final form, scale, and disposition was elaborated with a particular setting in mind. While the basic idea may have been taken from a smaller, independently conceived prototype, the final sculpture was not, as was habitually the case with Moore, simply a cast of a previously enlarged work. This aspect of Moore's work in the US, which began with the monumental piece he designed for the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York in 1963–65, is examined here by focusing on the particularly productive relationship he subsequently forged with the architect I. M. Pei (b. 1917). The sculptures Moore produced in collaboration with Pei respond in suggestive ways to the distinctive spatial environments created in American cities by late modern architectural developments. They also realize an oddly intriguing and effective combination of the biomorphic and abstract that differs from the more overtly bodily conception of Moore's earlier work, and they depart from the familiar reclining format he adopted for many of his large-scale pieces.

Having established a major international reputation in the immediate postwar period, Moore was in a good position to benefit from the significant expansion of commissions for modern sculpture to embellish the plazas and public spaces created by the wave of corporate and civic urban redevelopment that got underway in the 1960s.¹ While many of his earliest public commissions were realized in the UK, it was the US which provided the real opportunity for work in this later, less civic-minded, vein—work which was not regarded as having an identifiable public significance beyond its aesthetic value as exemplary modern art, adding lustre and variety to a space that might otherwise be seen as a little austere and impersonal. There was far more money for this kind of work in the US than in the UK. At the same time, the general cultural context was much more favourably disposed to schemes for publicly sited works of sculpture, as evidenced, for example, by the National Endowment for the Arts *Art in Public Places* programme that got underway in 1967, alongside a number of other more local art and architecture initiatives. Both corporate and government funding and encouragement played a role, aided by a typically American pattern of patronage whereby private individuals and private grant-giving foundations would provide backing to finance artistic embellishments for high-end architectural developments. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, Moore was securely locked into this system, partly aided by the connections he established with architects such as Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and I. M. Pei. He was also seen by many of the corporate and government sponsors of such projects as an exemplary, safely established European modern master, whose work would bring artistic aura to the sites for which his work was commissioned; and as having a status in this respect rather like earlier modern masters such as Picasso and Miró, who were also

called upon to fulfil such projects. This was true, despite the fact that more avant-garde-minded American critics were becoming critical of what they saw as Moore's monumental, safe sculptural modernism and were promoting newer, more evidently radical, and American-based rather than European, forms of sculptural experimentation. Well into the late 1970s and early 1980s, Moore remained an artist of choice among those responsible in America for sponsoring and commissioning high-end public sculpture, even as art world pundits tended to dismiss his work as retardataire, blue-chip modernism.

Starting in the late 1960s, Moore's approach to making public sculpture underwent a significant change, partly in response to the changing nature of commissions of this kind, particularly marked in the US where he had his major patronage base. While often seen as marking a decline to a less hands-on approach, this shift nevertheless marked a new departure of some note as Moore engaged with the possibilities of public sculpture in a world now very different from the one in which he had first made his international reputation. Producing work whose scale and form would hold its own in the architectural environments of late modernism, he adopted a smoother, less heavily worked look, and began using light-weight polystyrene rather than plaster to fashion the models for his largest creations. The residues of studio touch that his earlier bronzes sought to retain largely disappeared, and the work took on a more evidently fabricated appearance.² He produced radical enlargements of ideas he had worked out on a small hand-held scale, and at times toyed with a lightness of touch and humour that echoes the general departure at the time from the heavy seriousness of much postwar modernism.

Moore fulfilled many of his public commissions by having a patron choose an idea already realized as a large-scale sculpture and then arranging for another bronze cast to be made—usually by the Noack foundry in Berlin, but also by Singer in Basingstoke for a few of the very largest works. Occasionally, however, as in his collaborations with I. M. Pei, the enlargement of an earlier smaller-scale work was undertaken in response to a particular commission. Pei would not just be involved in choosing an appropriate prototype from Moore's stock, but would also consult with Moore over the enlargement and its suitability to its destined architectural setting—in this way making these works, for all their autonomously generated basic shape, responsive to their site. This procedure took a little time to evolve. In his earliest work for a building by Pei, the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York, completed in 1968, the conception is quite conventional. A cast of an existing work, *Two Piece Reclining Figure No. 3* (1961), was commissioned and placed in front of the entrance. A little over life-size, so not that large, there was nothing about the sculpture particularly keyed to its role as a feature enhancing the approach to a public art gallery.



Figure 1.

Henry Moore, *The Arch* (LH 503b), 1963, bronze, 5.9 × 3.8 m, in situ at the Cleo Rogers Memorial Library, Columbus, Indiana Digital image courtesy of Henry Moore Archive. Reproduced by permission of the Henry Moore Foundation

Moore's *Large Arch* in Columbus, Indiana, was rather different (fig. 1). Set in an open plaza bordered by three important buildings—Pei's Cleo Rogers Memorial Library completed in 1971, Eliel Saarinen's First Christian Church dating from 1942, and a traditional local mansion created in the early years of the twentieth century for a wealthy Indiana banker—the work by Moore was very much commissioned with the site in mind. The initiative apparently came from Pei, who wanted "a large sculpture which would anchor the space and bring the buildings together"³ and also complement his modestly scaled, low-slung modernist library. As with most high-profile public sculpture of this kind in the US, the funding came from a private patron, in this case the wealthy local industrialist J. Irwin Miller. He had set up the foundation that covered the cost of commissioning renowned modern architects such as Pei and Saarinen to design new buildings in Columbus. Pei negotiated with Moore to enlarge a two-metre-high *Large Torso: Arch*, completed in 1963, taking it up to a more architectural scale that would create a strong sense of place in what was a quite dispersed and modest plaza. Effectively a new sculpture, rising to six metres, three times the height of its prototype and wide enough for two people to walk through, *Large Arch* (1971) is the most architectonic of Moore's public sculptures.⁴ The areas of roughened finish

and the bone and flesh-like feel of the sculpture's shape, however, are still closer in character to Moore's cast work of the 1950s and early 1960s than to the smoother and more uninflected look of his later bronzes.



Figure 2.

Henry Moore, Three Forms Vertebrae (The Dallas Piece) (LH580a), 1978-79, bronze, 12.19 m length, City Center Park Plaza, Dallas, Texas
Digital image courtesy of the author



Figure 3.

Henry Moore, *Three Forms Vertebrae (The Dallas Piece)* (LH580a), 1978–79, bronze, 12.19 m length, City Center Park Plaza, Dallas, Texas
Digital image courtesy of the author

A much more clear-cut new departure is evident in the work Moore fashioned for the large plaza in front of the City Hall in Dallas, which Pei completed in 1978; a unique bronze cast called *The Dallas Piece* (1978–79) (fig. 2). Here again there was considerable collaboration with the architect. In consultation with Moore, Pei chose the prototype, the *Three Piece Sculpture: Vertebrae* dating from 1968–69. This was subjected to significant modifications. Even though it was already fairly large, at just under three metres high, its size was significantly increased to an elevation of over four-and-a-half metres. Pei worked with Moore deciding on the enlargement and also on a new layout of the three elements. In an interview conducted in 2002, Pei recalled how he set about getting Moore involved:

You have to intrigue him into it: “Why did you choose this piece?” Then, “How big should this piece be?” Then, when he thinks that the architect is as interested in the scale of the piece as he is, then he gets very animated and he collaborates in thinking about it and eventually making the piece.⁵

Pei noted how Moore altered the composition, opening it up so the elements were not, as in the original prototype, packed within the confines of a rectangular pedestal: “He regrouped the three vertebrae—three pieces, in

such a way that would fit with the plaza and building.”⁶ Pei also indicated that the choice of Moore was not entirely his doing, but also reflected the preferences of local patrons of the arts. Indeed, the funding came not from the city but from a Dallas real estate developer who announced his donation “to the citizens of Dallas” in the inscription accompanying the sculpture.

In Pei’s mind, the sculpture was an essential component of the larger project which included the plaza, landscaped with an ornamental pool and oak trees, as well as the City Hall building.⁷ Pei is said to have conceived of the relationship between the new City Hall and the skyline of downtown Dallas onto which it faced as “not unlike the one between the building and the Henry Moore sculpture, *The Dallas Piece* . . . the role of the sculpture was to balance the building at the scale of the plaza, just as the role of the building was to balance the spires of downtown at the greater urban scale.”⁸ This said, it is important to note that part of what makes the sculpture so effective in its monumental modernist setting is its incongruity. It has a decidedly non-architectural, slightly flippant biomorphic vitality. The smoothed bulbous shapes no longer recall the vertebrae from which they derive but look like organisms of some indeterminate kind engaged in endless pushing and probing and recoiling (fig. 3). They are large enough to hold their own against Pei’s looming concrete structure; at the same time they have a certain lightness and vitality that enlivens the rigorously spare ceremonial space that they occupy.

The work makes much more of an impact as an urban feature than the publicly sited version of the earlier prototype, *Three Piece Sculpture: Vertebrae*, installed in 1971 outside the new Seattle First National Bank skyscraper in Seattle. This was a cast of an already realized work, and was sited quite conventionally—squeezed into a narrow left-over space between the entrance to the Mies-like office building and a heavily trafficked thoroughfare. Easily seen as a sculpture simply added onto the building, it was almost removed for sale after the Seattle Bank, nearing financial collapse, was bought out by Bank of America and the building was sold off in 1986. As a result of the public outcry this development occasioned, the sculpture was kept in place, suggesting that it had acquired a certain symbolic value as a public good, even if in practice it never functioned as a particularly notable feature of the downtown urban landscape. The Dallas sculpture too has had its problems, vandalized and then fenced off for a time, though now restored. Even so, it has never quite acquired the status of a popular landmark, being too isolated from the inner-city life there is in Dallas to attract wide public attention.

A further collaboration with Pei developed concurrently with *The Dallas Piece* gave rise to one of Moore’s very largest creations, *Mirror Knife Edge* (or *Knife Edge Mirror Two Piece*), set in the entrance way to Pei’s new East Wing of the

National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, in 1978 (fig. 4). This experimented with a rather different relation between sculpture and architectural context.⁹ The circumstances of its commissioning and the adaptation of a pre-existing creation by Moore generally follow the pattern of the Dallas sculpture, give or take some last minute changes in the choice of prototype and the siting.¹⁰

Pei was closely involved with picking out the model, *Knife Edge Two Piece* (1962–65) a cast of which was installed outside the Houses of Parliament in London in 1967, and with determining the work's scale and final placement. The then director of the National Gallery, J. Carter Brown, also played an important role in the process. Mirroring rather than simply replicating the shape of the earlier prototype, and also hugely enlarged, the sculpture clearly announced itself as a new work created specifically for the National Gallery extension. As usual, the funding came from a private source—the Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation (Cafritz had been a wealthy property developer)—even though the commission was masterminded by a federal institution.



Figure 4.

Henry Moore, *Mirror Knife Edge* (LH 714), 1977, bronze, 5.35 × 3.63 m, outside the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC Digital image courtesy of Henry Moore Archive

The relation between the sculpture and the architecture is particularly interesting in this case. For one thing, the size, at over seven-and-a-half metres high, makes it more architectonic. Also, rather than acting as a counterpoint to the building, *Mirror Knife Edge* tends on first sight to blend in with the architecture framing it. Yet, on sustained viewing, it also emerges as an entity with its own quite powerful dynamic. The two forms are pushed close together but also split apart, with the thin knife edge seemingly having

sliced a protruding section from the larger entity. For someone attending to the sculpture, it can suggest a muted if insistent violence. In a way that is characteristic of some of Moore's best later work, the sculpture is simultaneously inanimate and alive, but not overtly figurative. Pei made it clear that one reason he liked Moore's work for his architectural projects was that "It's not anthropomorphic; it's abstract. Even though he used human figures a lot, the human figure is not really obvious in his sculpture."¹¹ At the same time, the sculpture, with its smoothly finished, slightly undulating surfaces—interrupted, unfortunately, by indented lines resulting from the faulty fabrication—is endowed with a low level biomorphic vitality that sets it apart from the solid constructedness of its architectural context.¹² What could have been a monumental, all too imposing creation acquires a degree of lift-off and animation, with the interacting entities oblivious to the abstract ceremonial grandeur of their setting. While not actively competing with its architectural context, nor offering a vividly animate contrast to it, it possesses a pervasive if low-level presence which is felt as much as seen, endowing the entrance with an undertow of unconscious psychic resonance that is usually lacking with work of this kind. For a variety of reasons, some structural to the world of art and corporate finance in the 1970s and some happenstance, Moore deposited one of his most impressive and finely conceptualized public works on the doorstep of a major American institution which had a policy of free public access in tune with his sense of public value.

In its almost architectonic scale, this work also set a precedent for Moore's last major sculpture, realized in 1985–86. Rising to a height of 7.6 metres, *Large Figure in a Shelter* is unusual in that it incorporates its own semi-architectural setting of a figure-like motif—as if the idea of a sculpture in an entrance had now become the sculpture. Completed in the year of Moore's death before a final siting had been determined, it now seems singularly at home in the public garden settings where the two casts made of it have been placed; the sculptor's studio at Perry Green in Hertfordshire and the Park of the Peoples of Europe at Gernika in the Basque region of Spain. At Gernika, it has proved equal to the complex task visited on it of commemorating the fate of the city when the Fascists bombed its civilian population, as well as Basque resilience in the face of this atrocity. Without the opportunities for elaborating his conceptions on a monumental scale provided by Moore's earlier public commissions in America, it is hard to see how he could have embarked at the very end of his career on a work of such evident scope and ambition.

Footnotes

- 1 Pauline Rose, *Henry Moore in America: Art, Business and the Special Relationship* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2013). An article-length version is published on the Tate website under research publications <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/henry-moore/pauline-rose-henry-moores-american-patrons-and-public-commissions-r1145958>. See also Henry J. Seldis, *Henry Moore in America* (New York: Praeger in association with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1973).
- 2 Anne Wagner, "Moore's Late Sculpture: The Space Between the Knuckles", in Anita Feldman and Anne Wagner, *Henry Moore: Late large Forms* (London: Gagosian Gallery, 2012), 174–79.
- 3 Philip Jodidio and Janet Adams Strong, *I. M. Pei: Complete Works* (New York: Rizzoli, 2008), 99.
- 4 A fibreglass version, silhouetted against the Florence skyline, was a striking presence at the Moore exhibition installed in the Forte di Belvedere in 1972; and one in travertine, a donation from the sculptor, formed an effective landscape feature when placed in Kensington Gardens alongside the Serpentine in 1980.
- 5 Bonnie Lovell, "Interview with I. M. Pei", 1 Aug. 2002 (pdf posted on the Dallas Library website under Texas/Dallas History and Archives division, pp. 9-10. https://dallaslibrary2.org/texas/oralHistory/transcripts_pdf/PeileohMing_transcript.pdf).
- 6 Lovell, "Interview", 5.
- 7 Lovell, "Interview", 19.
- 8 Carter Wiseman, *I. M. Pei: A Profile in American Architecture* (New York: Abrams, 1998), 128.
- 9 This is the public art project by Moore in America whose genesis has been most exhaustively documented. John-Paul Stonard, "Henry Moore's 'Knife edge mirror two piece', at the National Gallery of Art, Washington", *The Burlington Magazine* 153 (April 2011): 249–55.
- 10 Originally a cast of *Large Spindle Piece* was chosen, but when delivered was rejected as not being suitable, partly because the siting changed from the side of the building along Pennsylvania Avenue to the entrance way.
- 11 Lovell, "Interview", 12.
- 12 On the thinner element one can see the forms of the gridded armature to which the bronze plates were attached showing through. The Singer foundry, which had to fabricate this casting in rather a hurry, did a better job on *The Dallas Piece*.

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Renewing the New: British Sculpture in the 1980s

Greg Hilty

Abstract

Greg Hilty introduces the case studies in his 1980s section of "British Sculpture Abroad". He also points to two exemplary instances of British sculpture's expansion onto an ever wider global stage: Tony Cragg in Warsaw in 1988 and Richard Long in Paris in 1989.

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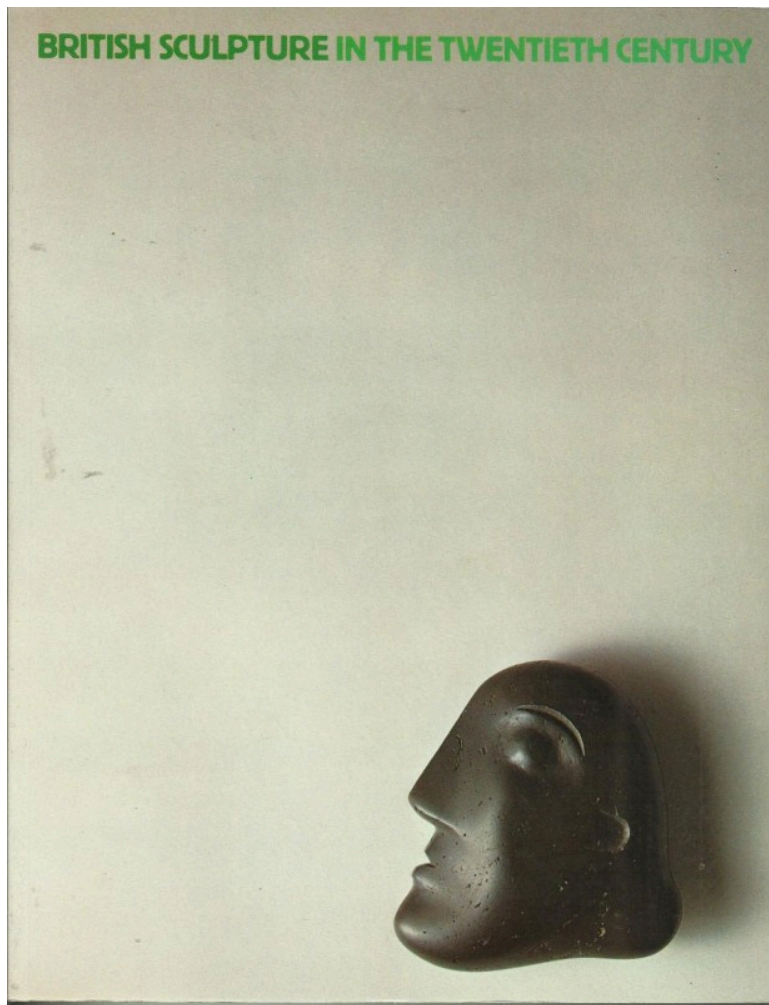


Figure 1.

Exhibition catalogue, *British Sculpture in the Twentieth Century*, Sandy Nairne and Nicholas Serota (eds), (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1981)

One of the early defining exhibitions held in 1980s Britain excluded sculpture from its frame of reference yet presaged a shift in taste and practice that would become dominant through the decade. *A New Spirit in Painting* was selected by Christos Joachimides, Norman Rosenthal, and Nicholas Serota and presented at the Royal Academy in the spring of 1981.¹ The exhibition, as well as asserting a revival of interest in traditional painting as a medium, focused on key practitioners, on narrative and figurative content, and on national classifications. Later that year the Whitechapel Art Gallery presented its two-part survey *British Sculpture in the Twentieth Century*.² As its title suggests this was an overview of the century but signalled also a reconsideration of Modernism's traditions, inevitably in contradistinction to the experiments into the "expanded field" of sculpture that had marked the

previous decade. The art critic John McEwen used the language of the day when he spoke of the “new spirit”, “zest”, and “eclecticism” of the exhibition (alongside its “inadequacies”).³

A new generation of sculptors, trained in the rigours and inspired by the ambitions of conceptual and minimal practice, but unafraid to direct their disciplines to wider material and content considerations, quickly established itself through a rapid series of group exhibitions in the UK and Europe.⁴ These exhibitions provided a consolidated platform for the object- and image-based work of a group of artists who had come to maturity in the 1970s and early 1980s. The essays in this section consider different ways in which the influence of these artists extended beyond the UK to become the dominant “school” of British art during the decade. There were, to be sure, other highly significant practices, groupings, and individuals, but in the context of this journal a focused analysis of the emergence of the “New British Sculptors” and the dissemination of their work is essential.

Nick Baker’s quantitative analysis gives fascinating objective evidence of the surge of interest in British art and, especially, the new generation of sculptors internationally in the 1980s.

Anthony Bond—a key figure in the Australian contemporary art world in the 1980s— writes about *The British Art Show* organized by the British Council which travelled to museums in Australia and New Zealand in 1985–86. Describing the fresh nature of the work shown compared to the abstract sculpture of a previous generation, he picks up on characteristics of narrative, affect, and humour in the work shown, tending towards a “democratization of art” and its reception. Bond followed this exhibition with deeper personal and institutional engagements with a number of its key artists through repeat visits and residencies.

Bond attests to the highly active role of the Visual Arts Department of the British Council which was crucial during this period, both instigating initiatives and supporting projects in partnership with international partners. The Council’s key platform, the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, gave three of its five slots during the decade to sculptors and supported numerous group shows globally.⁵

Mary Jane Jacob (whose early research into British sculpture was supported by the British Council) writes about her exhibition *A Quiet Revolution: British Sculpture since 1965*, which she co-curated with Graham Beal. Their 1987 project, a few years into the phenomenon of “New British Sculpture”, took a slightly longer view and focused on six artists of successive generations, pointing to the overlapping continuity and innovation in British art over two decades, including their common academic backgrounds, and identified

certain shared characteristics of reticence and introversion underlying the work, which contrasts with the brasher, more Pop culture associations of the earlier group shows. Jacob and Beal's project was exemplary in demonstrating a considered and specific curatorial perspective on an artistic moment that was still taking shape.

Julian Heynen writes of his close working relationship with Richard Deacon, focusing on the artist's dual exhibitions within the highly specific programme of the Haus Lange and Haus Esters which Heynen directed from 1981 as key venues in the Krefelder Landesmuseen. The programme concentrated on a tightly associated group of artists of similar generation and often friendship, including Juan Muñoz, Harald Klingelhöller, Thomas Schütte, and Richard Deacon. Heynen shows how Deacon, while remaining based in the UK, established strong individual artistic and curatorial relationships in continental Europe. Deacon was notable for his participation in the Skulptur Projekte Münster in 1987, alongside only two other British Artists, Ian Hamilton Finlay and Shirazeh Houshiary.

The galleries and institutions of the Rhineland were important for most of the New British Sculptors: their leading figure, Tony Cragg, moved his studio from Britain to Wuppertal in 1977 and became one of the region's most prominent artists. This did not stop him simultaneously representing "British" art and sculpture in particular. In 1988, he represented Great Britain at the Venice Biennale and later that year won the Turner Prize. Less lauded, but nevertheless significant, was his modest show at the small but influential Foksal Gallery in Warsaw in the same year. The Foksal, as well as championing the most innovative Polish artists, was key in inviting leading international figures to show there during the years of Poland's cultural and political opening up. For Cragg, as well as the intrinsic interest of showing in such a dynamic context, this project awakened him to the possibilities and value of pioneering relationships with institutions in territories that many would have seen as on the margins of the art world.



Figure 2.

Richard Long, *Red Earth Circle*, 1989, and Paddy Japaljarri Sims, Paddy Japaljarri Stewart, Neville Japangardi Poulson, Francis Jupurrurla Kelly, Paddy Jupurrurla Nelson, Franck Bronson Jakamarra Nelson, Towser Jakamarra Walker and Yuendumu community, *Yam Dreaming*, 1989, installed in the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition, Grande Halle de la Villette, Paris, 1989 Digital image courtesy of Centre Pompidou / MNAM-CCI / Bib. Kandinsky / Photo: Béatrice Hatala

The artistic decade closed in 1989 with the paradigm-shifting exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* in Paris, for which Jean-Hubert Martin and his curatorial team selected fifty artists from “centres” and fifty artists from “margins” of the art world, notionally on equal terms whether established within the hierarchies of Western art or local traditions of visual culture. The problematics of the project were many and are well documented.⁶ At the same time the initiative heralded a significant, if inevitably contested, expansion of the art world from its perceived charmed inner circle. One of the exhibition’s most resonant juxtapositions was the presentation at the Grande Halle de la Villette of two site specific works: Richard Long’s *Red Earth Circle* (1989) and *Yam Dreaming* by seven members of the Yuendumu community in Central Australia—Francis Jupurrurla Kelly, Frank Bronson Jakamarra Nelson, Paddy Jupurrurla Nelson, Neville Japangardi Poulson, Paddy Japaljarri Sims, Paddy Japaljarri Stewart, and Towser Jakamarra Walker. The two works on a comparable spectacular scale were viewable (and often photographed) within the same visual field. They were both symbolic representations of the earth, both shared the formal similarity of vibrating circular motifs, and were handmade from materials taken from the earth. Long had had close connections with Australia since he was first invited to a residency there by John Kaldor in 1977. The Yuendumu community artists would present a related major work in Europe just a few years later in the exhibition *Aratjara: The Art of the First Australians* shown at museums in

Germany, Denmark, and the United Kingdom. The iconic pairing of these two works at La Villette remains a ground-breaking artistic dialogue, pointing the way to the increasing range and depth of globalization of individual artistic practice and curation in the decades that have followed, in which British artists would play an important role.

Footnotes

- 1 The exhibition ran from 15 Jan. to 18 March 1981.
- 2 The exhibition ran from 11 Sept. 1981–24 Jan. 1982.
- 3 John McEwen, "London, Whitechapel Art Gallery, British Sculpture in the Twentieth Century", *The Burlington Magazine* 124, no. 948 (March 1982): 183.
- 4 Notable among these were: *British Sculpture Now*, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne, Switzerland, 1982; *Objects and Figures: New Sculpture in Britain*, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, 1981; *Objects and Sculpture: Richard Deacon, Antony Gormley, Anish Kapoor, Peter Randall-Page*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, and Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, 1981; *The Sculpture Show*, Serpentine Gallery and Hayward Gallery, London, 1983.
- 5 These were Nicholas Pope (with Tim Head) in 1980; Barry Flanagan in 1982; and Tony Cragg in 1988.
- 6 See, particularly, Lucy Steeds, ed., *Making Art Global (Part 2): "Magiciens de la Terre" 1989* (London: Afterall Books, 2013).

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The British Show in Australia, 1985

Anthony Bond

Abstract

In 1984-85, The British Show, an exhibition largely made up of New British Sculpture, was curated for Australia and New Zealand. This essay discusses the context and effects of the exhibition on art in Australia. It also seeks to define the sources of originality and innovation of the artists included.

Authors

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In 1983/84 William Wright, Assistant Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) in Sydney, and myself, at that time Assistant Director of the Art Gallery of Western Australia in Perth, agreed that a major exhibition of British art was well overdue.

The timing for an exhibition seemed perfect, as there was a wave of new conceptual and Postminimal sculpture emerging after several years of expressive figural painting that had dominated the market following the exhibitions *A New Spirit in Painting* at the Royal Academy, London, in 1981, and *Zeitgeist* at Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, in 1982. Many of the most interesting new sculptors had a background in conceptual practice; some of them were associated with Saint Martin's College of Art. The Lisson Gallery showed a number of these alongside an older generation such as Stephen Willats, Bob Law, and Richard Long, who we also wanted to include. While the exhibition *The British Show* is largely remembered for the new sculpture, we also decided to include sound and performance works that had fallen within the scope of sculpture departments in art schools. The immediate critical and public success of the new sculpture may have been due in part to the return to figuration and/or narrative, but unlike *A New Spirit in Painting*, it was not based on self-expression or quotation but took a conceptual approach, informed by the structures and constraints of Minimalism mediated by the powerful language of things that surround us in everyday life, in the wake of Marcel Duchamp. It was art that appealed not just to the eye but also to an intellectual fascination with the problems of representation through the lens of conceptual art.

Patsy Zeppel and Peter Prescott at the British Council in Sydney encouraged us to pursue this idea and agreed to fund the project. Later, the Australia Council and the philanthropist and collector John Kaldor also agreed to contribute, giving us the chance to make the most of the opportunity. *The British Show* was launched in Perth and travelled to Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and New Zealand during 1985–86. The role of the British Council was key not only to this particular exhibition taking place but also to the rapid dissemination of the key ideas embodied in the art of this generation and of its successors. Exhibitions Officers Brett Rogers and Lewis Biggs made our research process efficient and pleasurable. They never sought to determine our choices but they encouraged us to look far and wide. In the end we followed a fairly specific route, which focused on the experience of the exhibition, and making this new material accessible for an Australian audience. For us it was important to capture key features of the new sculpture rather than to make an inclusive survey. A few months after our opening in Perth, an exhibition assembled by the Arts Council in the United Kingdom, *The British Art Show II*, did just such an inclusive survey. Many of the artists in the Arts Council exhibition would have been worthy of inclusion in the Australian selection. However, we were determined to make sense out

of the diversity of ideas that were in play, so did our best to find specific works that taken together conveyed some of the essential factors that made this body of work so engaging and novel.

The term “New British Sculpture” was a gross oversimplification. While there was a notable surge of new sculpture in the early 1980s, its diversity and the apparent contradictions between, say, Shirazeh Houshiary, Anish Kapoor, Tony Cragg, Antony Gormley, Richard Deacon, Richard Wentworth, and Ian Hamilton Finlay, suggest that British art has often been best characterized by its differences, individuality, and even the eccentricity that makes British art an infertile ground for homogeneous movements—even if the media and, unfortunately, some curators push hard to create and promote these reductionist categories. Our task nonetheless was to find clear strands or sets of associations that allowed a degree of coherence to emerge through the exhibition.

The New British Sculpture cannot meaningfully be described as being of a kind or a coherent movement, yet the sculptors had certain ideas in common, such as a commitment to meaning relating to the experience of being human, often investigating the relationship between consciousness and matter and how art works in the gap between them. The sculpture was intensely material but in very different ways, ranging from the Postminimal use of found material to finely crafted stone, bronze, and lead. It also nearly always alluded to the human form or to everyday attributes of human life. The level of direct political engagement varied and was often mediated by a sense of humour. Richard Wentworth, for example, made some very serious but amusing points about the way we navigate the world, by recognizing curious happenstance, such as assemblages accidentally occurring on the street, or tracing the pathways of desire in the environment that so often bypass the determinist planners’ prescribed pathways. One of the works we selected was Wentworth’s *Toy* (1983), made by soldering an oval sardine tin into a sheet of galvanized steel that in turn is soldered into a galvanized oval bathtub, suggesting the surface of water in the tub. Wentworth’s interest was initially sparked by the formal resonance between the two ovals. He had also floated an empty sardine tin while playing with his child in the bath, so there was a personal story being recalled too. At the same time, Margaret Thatcher’s war against Argentina had come to a head with the notorious sinking in 1982 of the Argentinian vessel the *Belgrano*. The formal response and the material process were related to Minimalism, and the conjunction of the bathtime game with Thatcher’s war was purely circumstantial. The space provided by the ambiguity and the playful set of associations created the possibility for a viewer to play in turn with the possible associations he might find there. Such ambiguity would be anathema to a Minimalist, but it is precisely this allowed space that I think marks out the particularity of the New British Sculpture.

Wentworth's *Toy* also reflected upon Jacques Lacan's idea of the gaze that is returned by an object. In Lacan's version, the return suggests a narcissistic projection onto the thing, but I see Wentworth's approach rather as one that invokes empathy with the external world. Wentworth speculates that when he sees a floating sardine tin, the tin sees him back, creating a kind of identification and unleashing multiple associations. Empathy is one of the most useful parts of the art repertoire, and a closely associated element is affect in art. As John Latham noted in relation to the Destruction In Art Symposium (DIAS) in 1966, affect is the sleeper that often, unacknowledged, crosses the boundaries of popular culture and the avant-garde. For example, the cultural rumour of an artist destroying a musical instrument as part of DIAS later came to the attention of Pete Townsend of rock group the Who, who began making the destruction of his guitar a regular feature of his performances. In both cases the instrument stood for a cultural convention that was being violently repudiated. This destructive behaviour strategy also played an important part in Fluxus performances. Affect need not be cathartic, however, and in the case of the New British Sculpture the vehicle was often humour. The British sense of the absurd informed the narrative they revived in art. Their use of everyday objects brought a very particular perspective into postconceptual art that resonated with Arte Povera, but was in many ways far more accessible to the public, even though it relied less on purely aesthetic delectation. I think this is part of what made the later generation of artists from Goldsmiths work so well in the 1990s.

The generation of British artists growing up after the Second World War were exposed to the absurdist humour of the radio comedy programme *The Goon Show*, that captured an anti-authoritarian strand in postwar thinking, and in an unexpected way meshed with the rebirth of the avant-garde in the 1960s. The new mood reacted against the existing order and, like the early avant-garde, sought to engage in a more comprehensive way with the public. The Goons were widely appreciated by a public exhausted by the restrictions and pomposity of the establishment. But they were also more than a comedy act, occasionally dropping hardly registered, usually parodic references to postmodern theorists such as Michel Foucault or Havelock Ellis. This goonery continued in the work of the Cambridge Footlights and later the Monty Python team. Unlike the more radical countercultural activities of the 1960s, such as the exhibitions at Better Books and the poetry events organized by John Hopkins and John Sharkey, along with Jeff Nuttall and many others at the time, the humour of the Goons was a gentler form of counterculture that permeated the whole of society in a more accessible way. It may not have had the visceral power of the hardcore cultural avant-garde, but together they emerged into the broader culture and paved the way for a long-term democratization of contemporary art.

We hoped that the core group we chose for the 1985 exhibition could help define some shared characteristics of the new generation of sculptors. Amongst these were Tony Cragg, Richard Wentworth, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Antony Gormley, Alison Wilding, and Shirazeh Houshiary—all of whom came to be represented in the collection at the AGNSW over the next few years, as did Stephen Willats, Richard Long, and Bob Law. Cragg, Kapoor, Wilding, Gormley, and Wentworth also came to Sydney as part of a residency programme in the late 1980s, again funded by the British Council, to follow up on the significant impact these sculptors had had on a younger generation of artists in Australia. What characterized the core selection for me was what I came to think of as a Postminimal aesthetic in which the material and process were privileged, and yet the raw presence of matter was turned to expressive or narrative purpose more akin to Arte Povera than to Minimalism. There was a sense of humour in many of the works, but also a philosophical turn that was to influence my career as a curator and help to shape the collection at the gallery over the next twenty-nine years. Prior to *The British Show*, abstract steel sculpture and formal installations were dominant. There had been a narrative, quirky strand in the 1970s, partly influenced by West Coast American sculptors, but the very specific use of everyday objects and materials as signifiers that embody meaning, rather than simply illustrating it, was a powerful new stimulus from the British sculptors. Since the mid-1980s, this has been a given for most art students with an interest in sculpture. Generations of Australian sculptors emerging in the 2000s continue to take this way of thinking about making art for granted. I could cite the work of Sean Cordeiro and Claire Healy, whose first major installation out of art school followed the strategy of an earlier Tony Cragg, in which he stacked the demolition materials from a house into a perfect rectangular solid. It was neither a homage to, nor a repetition of, Cragg's piece, although the process closely followed his. I am reasonably assured that the young Australians had never seen the work by Cragg in question, but this way of thinking was in the air and in large part this was possible in Australia because of *The British Show* in 1985.

In the course of developing the exhibition I moved to Sydney to start a new collection of international contemporary art that was made possible by the Mervyn Horton bequest specifically for this purpose. The gallery was also building a new wing to house the collection. Prior to this there had been no history of collecting modern or contemporary art from overseas. I conceived this collection around a set of ideas about what art could be, rather than trying to be encyclopedic or even broadly representative: there was neither the room nor the budget to do that well. I decided instead to collect works that had an aesthetic in common, that included teasing meaning out of objects and materials. In this way I would be able to make coherent installations out of the collection without relying on purely formal affinities or art-historical narratives.

Some of my conversations with the British artists helped put flesh on these ideas. Cragg talked about the artist having a pencil and paper and how, regardless of whether they use it to draw or to write down ideas, a similar mysterious process occurs. He described making some marks, erasing, altering, or adding to them, and then stepping back to look at what he had done only to discover something unexpected: “I did not know that”, was how he put it. The pencil was part of the material process that guided the artist’s mind towards a state between knowing and being in the world—something that the mind alone cannot imagine. This is the most concrete expression I have heard about the engagement between ideas and things.

As part of the residency programme at the AGNSW I took Antony Gormley and later Anish Kapoor into the bush. Gormley wanted to place a concrete sculpture based on his crouched body onto a claypan in the desert. He specified a place with 360 degrees of flat horizon: no trees or hills. This is not all that easy to find, even in the Australian desert, but we located the spot and spent several days installing and documenting the piece, making good the surface of the claypan for our documentation so that it looked untouched. The piece was named *Room for the Great Australian Desert* (1989, [fig. 1](#)). We also collected enough red bull dust to make 1,100 small earthen figures on our return to Sydney. This was to be his first field installation: *A Field for the Art Gallery of New South Wales* ([fig. 2](#)), now in the collection of AGNSW. The red figures rise from the earth perfectly embodying the idea of consciousness arising from the material plane.

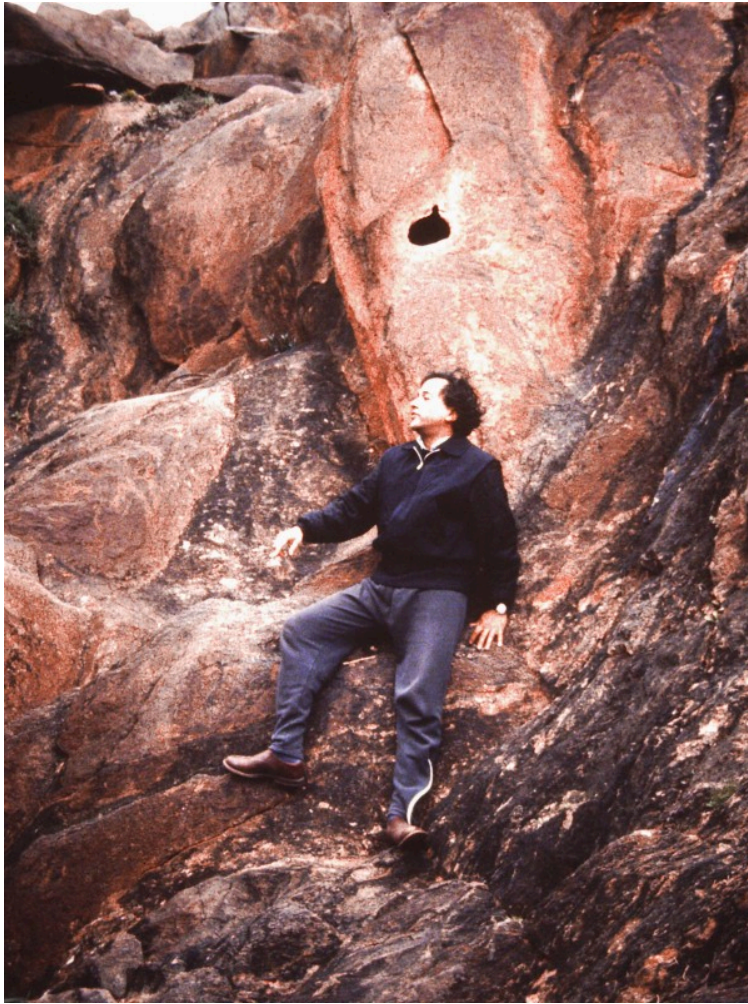


Figure 1.

Anish Kapoor discovers a naturally occurring void stone at Uriowe outback New South Wales, 1990 Digital image courtesy of Anthony Bond



Figure 2.

Antony Gormley, Room for the Great Australian Desert, 1989, concrete, 92 × 58 × 51 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales Digital image courtesy of Anthony Bond

While camping out in the bush we talked about many things including the relationship between consciousness and the material world out of which it arises. Located in a place where when you stood up you were the highest thing this side of the horizon was vertiginous, and underlined the place of the human figure as a conductor between matter and the void. As a result of this experience I have come to think of art as crucially placed between idea and matter, and this is borne out in the work of many of the artists in *The British Show*. One day Gormley and I traced the Mootwingie creek to its source, that turned out to be a vagina-shaped opening in the rock, “l’Origine du monde” (fig. 3)?



Figure 3.

Antony Gormley, *A Field* for the Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1989
Digital image courtesy of Art Gallery of New South Wales / Photo: Ray Woodbury / © Antony Gormley

That was 1989. The following year I was in the same area with Anish Kapoor. This time we camped out one night in a gorge, arriving after dark. In the morning we discovered that the walls of the gorge were covered in ancient erotic engravings. We also discovered a black hole carved out of the sandstone by the wind (fig. 4). It was exactly like one of Kapoor's void stones that we had just acquired for the gallery. We climbed up to discover that the circular black hole had radiating lines engraved around it suggesting energy pouring out of the void. This was strikingly in keeping with the idea of the void in Kapoor's stones, and with his later drawings and prints of the sexualized void, such as *Blackness from her Womb* (2001). An anthropologist subsequently told me that the desert varnish deposited over the carving indicated that this site was over twenty-thousand years old. Since our chance visit, the property where we found the gorge has been returned to the indigenous elders and can no longer be accessed without permission.



Figure 4.

Antony Gormley discovering the source of Mootwingie creek in the shape of 'l'Origine du monde', 1989
Digital image courtesy of Anthony Bond

These experiences brought intensity to the ideas I had been developing in response to conversations with artists about the horizon and the void, metaphors about being and not being, of consciousness and matter. Other works now in the collection embody these ideas in different ways: in Bob Law's *Blue Black Indigo Black* (1977), the black surface unexpectedly opens up a window onto infinity, with veils of indigo and blue appearing behind or within the black; a later work by Shirazeh Houshiary, *Unknowing* (2002), reveals on close inspection thousands of the Arabic letter Alif drawn with fine graphite strokes on the apparently blank white surface, summoning energy out of the void in a kind of Sufic mantra, repeating the name of god over and over.

Perhaps the most surprising example in the gallery collection is Stephen Willats's *Pat Purdy and the Glue Sniffers Camp* (1981). Willats has evolved a way of working collaboratively with communities, in this case people displaced from the East End of London to an estate near Hayes in West London. The kids growing up in these soulless tower blocks had nowhere to go; even the open land nearby was fenced off. This land they named the "Lurky Place", and they nonetheless got in through a hole in the Cyclone wire fence. Willats found one of these young people, Pat Purdy, who was interested in collaborating with him. She introduced him to the life they lived between worlds. When they left the determinist space of the tower blocks through a hole in the fence they entered another, utterly different, world. It was a space where they made their own rules, built their own camps, and inhaled heated glue. They had created the opposite of what they left. Maybe it was dysfunctional and dangerous, but it was theirs.

The structure of Willats's work is a set of four triptychs, each triptych consisting of a photo of the estate and another of the Lurky Place. Between them a smaller panel shows the hole in the fence. Next to the hole Stephen found objects that had been dropped. He collected these and attached them to the photo. He showed how a pragmatic object like a glue can completely changed its function as it moved through the hole. From a binding agent of construction it became the centrepiece of a wild dysfunctional journey to the edge of oblivion and dissolution. The hole in the fence, then, was another kind of event horizon relating to consciousness and its loss.

Since the time of *The British Show* in Australia, British sculpture has appeared globally, initially through exhibitions supported by the British Council but also in commercial galleries as well as in biennales and museum exhibitions. Individual curators, such as Martin Kunz at Kunstmuseum Luzern, also made early exhibitions of the new sculpture in the 1980s. I attribute the success of this new work to the fine balance the sculpture has maintained between a solid underpinning of Minimalism's structural privileging of material and the process with a playfulness that could pack multiple readings into the objects, contrary to the anti-referential premise of Minimalism; yet it is a scaffold that protects the art from undisciplined self-expression. The ordinariness of the found objects makes the humour and affect imbued in the objects accessible to a wider audience than had previously been possible with Minimalism and conceptual art. This generation of artists undoubtedly paved the way for the energy of the Young British Artists (YBAs) who came after them and continue to be amongst the most visible sculptors around the world today. At the Venice Biennale in 2015, the British Council presented Sarah Lucas: this was a hilarious installation capturing the best of British comedy laced with tragedy. It perfectly represented the lineage I have been suggesting. I might also add that Ed Atkins's film installation, *Hisser* (2015)

in Istanbul in 2015 was original, Pythonesque tragicomedy, right up to the denouement when he disappears into a sinkhole under his bed. Although I confess no one else seemed to see it that way.



A Quiet Revolution: British Sculpture Since 1965

Mary Jane Jacob

Abstract

This essay traces the thought processes behind the composition of artists for the exhibition A Quiet Revolution: British Sculpture since 1965 (1987-88). The exhibition introduced American museum audiences to the burgeoning activity in London in the 1980s and which foreshadowed even greater intensity in the following decade.

Authors

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This essay reflects on the exhibition *A Quiet Revolution: British Sculpture since 1965* (1987-88), which was organized by the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and traveled to several venues in North America. Revisiting this project offers the opportunity to revisit it offers the chance to test them against what we know today.¹ In retrospect, twenty years might seem a fine gauge on history, while the six artists featured represented a narrow view of the art scene. As curators, we posited that the period 1965–85 in British sculpture had an unprecedented impact on and dialogue with the international scene, even though Henry Moore and his circle of other prominent sculptors working before and after the Second World War had become known beyond England's shores. Instead this show positioned the artists it included in regard to the radically experimental anti-form and Minimalist art that severed ties with the modernist tendencies of the earlier twentieth century. Proclaiming their departure, artists starting in the mid- to late 1960s came to be understood as creating “contemporary” art (with “postmodern” later coming more fully into parlance), and found a new connectedness to artists working at that time in other European centres and in New York.

Initially, in a preliminary proposal, I posited three possible approaches for the exhibition:

1. an historical overview of British sculpture from the 1960s or 1970s to the present;
2. a selective showing of current work by artists who had emerged since the late 1970s, including artists who had studied in but were no longer living in England; and
3. an international exhibition around a narrative tendency carried out through the use of found, everyday objects.²

By mid-1985 I had joined forces with Graham Beal, a forerunner of the wave of prominent British contemporary art curators who would come to work in the United States. His concurrent interests in this subject, I felt, could offer an insider's perspective. Institutionally, this also seemed a promising partnership, averting redundancy and competition for loans, and putting us on a firmer footing in organizing a national tour, securing fundraising (in the end only the US National Endowment for the Arts was a significant sponsor), and accomplishing other shared tasks (for instance, Chicago oversaw the publication, while San Francisco managed the circulation of works). Our first joint plan was to show between ten and twelve British sculptors from the late 1960s to the present.

We can see now that Britain was defined as the art scene in England, and this happened naturally for several reasons. England predominated in the selection as the seat of power and the location of galleries—commercial and

not-for-profit—and of art schools that, respectively, gave exposure and fed the art system, with London as the primary place for research. As to the birthplace of the artists included, Tony Cragg, Richard Long, David Nash, and Bill Woodrow were from England, with Richard Deacon and Barry Flanagan born in Wales (though Nash had set up studio there), while Cragg lived in Wuppertal, then West Germany. A research visit had been made to one artist in Scotland; Northern Ireland was not part of the scope of research. Today a view to include representation of all UK countries would have been part of my consciousness, and would probably have been given priority. In fact, just what constituted Britain had been eroding in the years following 1945, so representation of other places that constituted the British Empire, at that time or previously, was beyond our consideration. It would be a few years before postcolonial discourse and cultural criticism had their full effect on the visual arts in England, with the work of theorists led by bi-national writer and Harvard professor Homi K. Bhabha, whose books in the early 1990s extended the 1978 landmark work *Orientalism* by American Edward Said.

Another factor under consideration was England's historicizing impulse: the penchant to tell its own story, to make its history a history of world importance seen through its own eyes, to detail a lineage which, while not royal, had its protagonists nonetheless. As we proceeded with our research, sculptors were consistently discussed as generations, one leading to the other throughout the century. With this in mind, we put forward six artists who, while all born in the 1940s, came of age at somewhat different times in the 1960s or 1970s. This was represented by showing work that spanned from the mid-1960s to mid-1980s: Cragg (1975–86) ([fig. 1](#)), Deacon (1981–86) ([fig. 2](#) and [fig. 3](#)), Flanagan (1965–84) ([fig. 4](#)), Long (1967–86), Nash (1975–86), and Woodrow (1979–86) ([fig. 5](#)).



Figure 1.

Installation View, *A Quiet Revolution: British Sculpture Since 1965*, 1987-88, showing, left to right: Tony Cragg, *Postcard Flag (Union Jack)*, 1981, and *Città*, 1986. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago Library and Archives Digital image courtesy of MCA Chicago



Figure 2.

Installation View, *A Quiet Revolution: British Sculpture Since 1965*, 1987-88, showing Richard Deacon, *Listening to Reason*, 1986, laminated wood, 226 × 609 × 579 cm Digital image courtesy of MCA Chicago



Figure 3.

Installation View, *A Quiet Revolution: British Sculpture Since 1965*, 1987-88, showing, left to right: Richard Deacon, *Turning a Blind Eye No. 2*, 1984-85; *Art for Other People No. 5*, 1982; *Tall Tree in the Ear*, 1983-84; *Out of the House*, 1983. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago Library and Archives Digital image courtesy of MCA Chicago



Figure 4.

Installation View, *A Quiet Revolution: British Sculpture Since 1965*, 1987-88, showing, clockwise from left: Barry Flanagan, *Ubu of Arabia*, 1976; *Vessel (in Memoriam)*, 1981; *Soprano*, 1981; *Leaping Hare on Crescent and Bell*, 1983; *Baby Elephant*, 1984; *Pile 3 '68*, 1968; *pdreeoo*, 1965. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago Library and Archives Digital image courtesy of MCA Chicago



Figure 5.

Installation View, *A Quiet Revolution: British Sculpture Since 1965, 1987-88*, showing, clockwise from left: Bill Woodrow, *Armchair and Washing Machine with Bobo Mask*, 1982; *The Empty Spoon*, 1983; *A Passing Car*, *A Caring Word*, 1982; *Ship of Fools*, *Captain's Table*, 1985. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago Library and Archives
Digital image courtesy of MCA Chicago

The role of academic institutions in making art history and forming generational networks of artists as a result (which is not so direct or succinct in American discourse) seemed particular to London. Moreover, the revision in art teaching initiated by Anthony Caro at Saint Martin's School of Art was cited as a route by which sculpture students were encouraged to question the use of conventional materials in order to enrich their understanding of three-dimensional object-making. This was a major jumping off point that unified all six sculptors. From Flanagan's burlap and polythene works, to Long's documentation of his walks across countries, to Nash's processes, to the choice of materials as well as process of Cragg, Deacon, and Woodrow—each sculptor was finding their own intersection with daily life, as well as questioning the conditions of spectatorship.

Canvassing London via the galleries led to studio visits—a phenomena that was not the case for young artists in New York, and certainly not in Chicago or Los Angeles at that time. The galleries in London maintained a high profile, absorbing artists fresh out of art school—with the density and competition among the schools bolstering the energy and quality of their output. Galleries, too, kept up the strong representation of sculpture, and grew in international power in succeeding decades. I was wary of the big group show that could read like a scattershot approach—or a menu with too many possibilities to digest—leaving audiences without a true

understanding of the artists' intentions and ideas. I did not want this effort to be taken as giving credibility to a scene that could ultimately be promotional for the commercial market or a national initiative. My inclination was to present a few artists in depth, with the hope that by doing so viewers would gain a greater insight into their concerns, forms, and techniques. Then there was also an issue of the scale of sculpture and the modest space of the inaugural venue, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, where I was chief curator, that had yet to find a more generous home (a new building was opened in 1996). So each artist was represented by between seven to ten works.

Just how much of an historical approach we would ultimately take would become a point of contention with some in London, for whom history was the story. Choosing not to trace a sequence of artistic development based on lineages of figures among a canon of practitioners, we instead sought to explore connections between a small, yet diverse, group of artists. We were cautious not to give in to a wave of enthusiasm for younger British sculptors in the 1980s, or the perpetual urgency to label the current things "new", believing that proclaiming the innovations of the slightly younger sculptors could be over-emphasized at the expense of the revolutions of those that preceded them by a few years. So by deviating from the accepted dialectical style of art history's telling of British sculpture, and linking these two otherwise labelled "generations", we focused on the one hand on their distinct directions, and on the other on their shared continuities. "Quiet" was added to the title to convey that Britain had been "reticent to enter fully into an open international dialogue", perhaps in part due to its determined sense of national uniqueness and separation from the United States and Europe—an island if not an empire.³

Our position too was that these artists were both part of a British story and part of a wider American and European moment in contemporary art in which conceptual and performance art—that is, the use of process-based actions and the presence of the body—had affected the way that sculptural objects were made by the artist and engaged with by the viewer. Seeking to assert a period in history rather than an evolutionary stance, we wrote this exhibition description to dealers, scholars, and the British Council that had been consulted:

Seen together they indicate shifts of attitude over these decades while also pointing to certain continuities. Certainly other artists could be included in an historical survey and in the course of our research many others were visited and considered. However, all attempts to mold these artists into a single lineage of an "English School" seemed far too simplistic, so in the final analysis we

chose to make our main focus the best sculpture to have emerged out of England in the last twenty years. This point of view, which is distinguished from that presented in other recent British sculpture surveys, will be reflected in the structure of the exhibition and catalogue. Designed as a series of six simultaneous one-person exhibitions, a selection of about ten works throughout each artist's career is being assembled. The accompanying catalogue will take a two-fold approach. First, paralleling the exhibition, it will include monographic essays on each artist, half to be written by Graham Beal and half by me. Secondly, it will place these six artists within their milieu through a major essay written by Charles Harrison on the period of the late 1960s into the 1970s, and one by Lynne Cooke on more recent developments of the 1970s to the present. In the exhibition and catalogue, therefore, we intend to present both the artistic individuality of the artists represented and give a sense of this twenty-year period by showing them together and defining the scene more broadly through the comprehensive essays of the English scholars noted above.⁴

It is relevant that this was the Thatcher era. With staggering unemployment, the economy was on everyone's minds. We had seen this played out at home in the US with Ronald Reagan's cuts in federal sponsorship and privatization of what had heretofore been seen as the public services; on both sides of the Atlantic Neoliberalism would continue to take a bite. I followed *A Quiet Revolution* two years later with *A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles—a show filled with US artists' concerted efforts to comment on the times, dominated by the postmodern style of appropriation. One approach to helping the visual arts climb out of economic decline—before the National Lottery's Good Causes funding created bright spots all over the isle, before the reinvention of the Tate under Sir Nicholas Serota, and before anyone heard of the Young British Artists (YBAs)—was provided by the efforts of the British Council to fund the foreign exposition of their artists.

I had seen this before with German museum professionals and Italian critics along with commercial galleries, aiming to show their own and naming and claiming new movements: Neo-Expressionists or Neue Wilden and Italian Trans-avantgarde, respectively. But, not coincidentally, these were painting movements, with objects ready for the market and more easily collectable than sculpture. France tried to catch up in the early 1980s, and I was among the first American curators invited by the Ministry of Culture to survey hundreds of studios across Paris and the provinces. But I took my own approach with the 1988 retrospective of the then-forgotten artist Christian

Boltanski. At the same time I brought to the US the German sculptor Rebecca Horn (1984) and Arte Povera artists Giuseppe Penone (1984), Jannis Kounellis (1986), and Mario Merz (1989), even straying as far as Poland to introduce Magdalena Abakanowicz (1982) and present Icelander Dieter Roth (1984). In all of these exhibitions sculpture as well as installation art predominated. So it was of interest to look at Britain, an underdog at that moment of European gallery and art-world competition, with research assistance from the British Council.

All of this was going on with an eye for the major European cities of Paris, Cologne, and Milan, as well as London, to regain their collective status as a centre that had been so dominated by New York since the 1950s. To engage an American curator in this process was to make complicit the enemy, but I had come up through the curatorial ranks during the feminist period of change that challenged the status quo. When I began curating, to show women artists was radical—and I did so, over and over. To respect the regional and show so-called local artists was also a mission of mine in Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles, and also to participate in and further the multicultural movement in the arts in the US. So to take part in a widening of the view of the art world was welcome, even though it seems nearly inconceivable now that Britain or London would lag behind when questions around representation are so much wider today and the art world so much more globalized.

While we kept some names Beal brought to the table, notably David Nash, we eliminated others by virtue of a curatorial truce. Perhaps by that time, or by inclination, it was not possible to go back to an earlier list to expand beyond the six artists we had first agreed upon. The enormous effort and cost involved in touring sculpture may have kept us from increasing the number of artists, especially considering we wanted to show a body of work for each artist included.

Finally, some artists we visited but left out of the exhibition were afterwards remembered. As a result of this exhibition research, I would later work with Boyd Webb in 1988 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in addition to a show that year by Richard Deacon of recent works that included a commissioned temporary public work, *Distance No Object*, on the museum's plaza. In 1991 I would have Ian Hamilton Finlay and Antony Gormley create new site-specific projects for the 1991 exhibition *Places with a Past* in Charleston, South Carolina, and in 1997 I would work with Anish Kapoor at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia, later writing on his work *Cloud Gate* in Chicago's Millennium Park, for his 2008 retrospective at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

Footnotes

- 1 The exhibition was organized by the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. From 1987-88 it toured to Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, CA; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; and Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY, and was accompanied by a book of the same name, *A Quiet Revolution: British Sculpture Since 1965* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987).
- 2 Mary Jane Jacob with Graham Beal, exhibition proposal, dated 1 Feb. 1985, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Archives.
- 3 Graham Beal and others, *A Quiet Revolution: British Sculpture Since 1965* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987), 8.
- 4 Preparatory materials for mailing, dated 26 Feb. 1986, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Archives.



full'n'empty - subjectobject - uhmm, Richard Deacon, Haus Lange and Haus Esters, Krefeld 1991

Julian Heynen

Authors

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The exhibition of new sculptures by Richard Deacon that was presented at Haus Lange and Haus Esters in Krefeld in 1991 was not the first occasion on which the artist's work had been shown there, but it nevertheless took its place as one of a significant sequence of exhibitions presented at this unique site. The architect of the two villas, constructed in adjacent grounds between 1927 and 1930, was Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and they have been used as exhibition spaces for contemporary art since the 1950s and the 1980s respectively. The open vistas provided by these villas, the intense interplay between the inner and outer spaces together with the intrinsically sculptural nature of their design, perhaps contributed to the particular focus on sculpture and installations in the programme of exhibitions held there. At Haus Lange, outstanding examples in the period after 1955 were the exhibitions of work by Henri Laurens, Julio González, Alexander Calder, Jean Tinguely, Yves Klein, Arman, and Marcel Duchamp; and, in the period after 1969, the presentations by Sol LeWitt, Christo, Joseph Beuys, Carl Andre, and Isa Genzken. Following the opening of Haus Esters in 1981, there were exhibitions of work by Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Bruce Nauman, Jannis Kounellis, Maria Nordman, Richard Serra, and Claes Oldenburg.¹ At the same time a younger generation of artists was coming into play, leading to exhibitions of work by Reinhard Mucha, Thomas Schütte, Zvi Goldstein, Katharina Fritsch, Harald Klingelhöller, Franz West, Juan Muñoz, and others, some of whom had their first institutional exhibitions in these villas.² After this came the era of Richard Deacon and the "new" form of sculpture that was making an impact in Europe and North America, having initially evolved in the shadow of the "new" expressive painting that seemed to dominate artistic activity at that time. The precursor to Deacon's solo show in Krefeld in 1991 was the group exhibition *Anderer Leute Kunst* in 1987, in which the artist not only participated, but for which his work was also the inspiration for the exhibition's title, a paraphrase of the title of his series, *Art for Other People*.³ All the artists represented in this exhibition were specifically interested in creating sculptural interconnections between autonomous forms, objecthood, and language.

Deacon's solo exhibition in 1991 was one of his most extensive to date and consisted almost entirely of new sculptures (and "drawings") made for the occasion. Responding to the architecture of Van der Rohe's similar, yet strikingly distinct, villas, Deacon aimed for a sense of emptiness in one (Haus Lange) and abundance in the other (Haus Esters)—to the extent that *Mammoth* (1989) appeared to put a visible strain on the capacity of the living room. The vitalist dynamics of the sculpture almost seemed to burst open the crystalline structure of the space. In other rooms, open and closed forms interacted in a variety of ways with the vast windows of Haus Esters and with the dialectics of inside/outside that are so characteristic of this architecture. The notion of emptiness in Haus Lange was addressed in two different ways, albeit again in relation to the internal/external theme of the architecture. On

the upper floor the main focus was shifted to the terraces outside. Spectators viewed the sculptures from the empty bedrooms or from the garden below (fig. 1). On the ground floor only the living room was occupied, and contained two airy, semi-translucent sculptures, one of which was linked to its “twin” in Haus Esters (fig. 2) . Beyond that, everything played out on the literal membrane dividing the inside from the outside, that is, the large windows that define these spaces. Deacon created “drawings” on multi-layered, synthetic light-weight panels that fitted exactly into the window frames (fig. 3). But in Deacon’s thinking, emptiness and fullness also corresponded here to autonomy and dependence within the given space. The relatively conventional placement of the sculptures in Haus Esters gave them an air of independence. Their relationship to the architecture was pragmatic and formal. Deacon himself explained that, by contrast, pushing works to the very skin of Haus Lange and to places beyond the interior of the building, had “to do with the notion of evacuating the interior of the house to its outside, and putting the spectator in the position of being always in the wrong place”.⁴ In his consideration of the exhibition’s focus on the zone between inside and outside, between sculpture and the spectator, language also came into play. As he put it, he “tried from time to time to make the connection between the work and the world resemble the way in which speech exists between individuals”. His use of the conditions in Haus Lange was

an expansion of that “border” between the subject and an autonomous universe. The in-between is something that’s shared. It’s not private or personal and it’s also not public. So therefore it’s common but able to become part of the spectator’s subjectivity.



Figure 1.

Installation View, Richard Deacon, Pipe, 1991, on the terrace of Haus Lange, Krefeld, Germany Digital image courtesy of Richard Deacon / Kunstmuseen Krefeld



Figure 2.
Installation View, Richard Deacon, *Pack*, 1990 (left), *Border*, 1991 (right) in
the hall of Haus Lange, Krefeld, Germany Digital image courtesy of
Richard Deacon / Kunstmuseen Krefeld



Figure 3.

Installation View, Richard Deacon, *The Interior Is Always More Difficult* (C), (E), and (F), 1991, Haus Lange, Krefeld, Germany Digital image courtesy of Richard Deacon / Kunstmuseen Krefeld

The special qualities and characteristics of the architecture of these exhibition spaces in Krefeld prompted Deacon to develop new ideas, forms, and procedures. At the end of a decade in which he had achieved his major breakthrough and received international recognition, he managed to create a subtle through-choreographed exhibition concept, which included a notable, but subtle, dialogue between the Van der Rohe's two villas. But Deacon's work had also reached a plateau of sorts, and the exhibition seems to have allowed him not only to reflect on what he had achieved so far, but to engage with new themes and methods. On a phenomenological level, these included sculptures with closed surfaces. While Deacon had previously made a number of works of this kind, it was only in the sculptures he made for the Krefeld exhibition that he explored this theme in more detail. Sculptures of this type subsequently took root in Deacon's work, particularly in 1999, when he started to fabricate ceramic pieces. In the aforementioned conversation with the author, which took place during the exhibition and was also filmed, Deacon explained that

in much of the other works the spectator was in the position of feeling occasionally outside and occasionally inside of the sculpture. The feeling of being engulfed by the object you are looking at does change the subject/object relationship. One has the sense of becoming, on occasion, the object for the sculpture as much as the sculpture is object for you. . . . In the more recent works . . . the subject and object relationship is more consistent. The object maintains its distance and therefore always remains an object for the perceiving subject. At the same time the result of that autonomy is that the nature of the object or the nature of the subject remains for the spectator a matter of guess work. It's like when I talk to you, then the contents of your subjectivity remain unknown to me.⁵

Another innovation in Deacon's repertoire of materials that came to light as a result of the Krefeld exhibition was his use of PVC and synthetic materials. He had found that joining together several pieces, sometimes a great many sections of the same or different materials, had begun to "frustrate" him. So he went in search of a new material that he "could use like a skin", and found that transparent synthetics opened up new possibilities for his art.⁶

The fact that Deacon was born and trained in the United Kingdom and was amongst those promoted as exponents of "New British Sculpture" did not influence the decision to show his work at Krefeld.⁷ His work self-evidently connected with international developments of the 1960s and 1970s—above all it connected with the diverse attempts in the 1980s to rehabilitate sculpture as an independent medium, without succumbing to traditionalism. This is exemplified in the changed relationship between language and sculpture that is seen if one draws a line from Lawrence Weiner to Franz West, Harald Klingelhöller, or to Richard Deacon himself. One could also point to the use of metaphor, for instance in Thomas Schütte's architectural models, or Hubert Kiecol's house sculptures, and Andrew Lord's ceramics, or possibly even Katharina Fritsch's early, non-figurative works, and Richard Deacon's sculptures. And the precise, extreme manual skills evident in Deacon's work also connect with the very different-looking work of Reinhard Mucha.⁸

Aside from any generational issues, it is worth considering how Deacon's work was seen at this period by artists in Continental Europe, and what influences may have resulted from their encounters with him, and vice versa. It is hard to come up with definitive answers to these questions, or even to cite concrete examples. The main focus for these and other artists was the revision and expansion of what sculpture could be in the postmodern world,

in the wake of the neo-avant-gardes shaped by Minimalism and conceptualism. These artists saw themselves as mutually empathetic experimenters, albeit with no interest in creating a new movement, let alone a new doctrine. Above all, they had a strong sense of being part of a community of post-ideological, isolated individuals.



[Watch Video](#)

Figure 4.

Martin Kreyszig, *The Interior Is Always More Difficult—Schwieriger ist sowieso der Raum im Innern*, DVD, from 00:00 till 00:26, directed by Martin Kreyszig, produced by Richard Deacon, 1991. Digital image courtesy of Martin Kreyszig / Richard Deacon.

In terms of actual points of contact, however, mention should be made of Richard Deacon and Thomas Schütte's collaborative work, *Them and Us* (1995). It was not by chance that this installation took the form of a sprawling ensemble with 120 individual parts (later divided into twelve groups). The input of each artist was clearly identifiable: Schütte contributed some of his *Kleine Geister* figures (Small Ghosts/Spirits), while Deacon devised the geometric constructions and organic-looking felt objects. What they shared, however, was a multi-part open narration, which had something of an improvisatory air. Spatial contexts are hinted at, and dialogues combining familiarity with alienness unfold between the figures and the felt shapes. The title highlights the fact that the two worlds in this narrative are both connected and separate. The contributions of the two artists do not coincide either materially or stylistically; each artist basically remained true to his own repertoire. There was also no mutual adjustment in the narrower

iconographic sense. If anything, the combination activated the specific narrative and metaphorical potential that is essential to the work of both artists. In a figurative sense, this might even be described as a metonymic relationship between the two. The third entity that followed from this encounter cannot be defined clearly, but is rather a proposition of sorts—as fragile as it is stimulating. In a sense, *Them and Us* can be seen as an illustration of the nature of the exchanges that took place between these and other sculptors in the 1980s and early 1990s. It seems that Deacon's fabrication-based, pragmatic experimentation made probing contact with Schütte's forays into a non-conservative revival of figuration—despite the barely definable differences in the mentalities of these two artists.



[Watch Video](#)

Figure 5.

Martin Kreyssig, *The Interior Is Always More Difficult—Schwieriger ist sowieso der Raum im Innern*, DVD, from 08:44 till 11:00, directed by Martin Kreyssig, produced by Richard Deacon, 1991. Digital image courtesy of Martin Kreyssig / Richard Deacon.



[Watch Video](#)

Figure 6.

Martin Kreyszig, *The Interior Is Always More Difficult—Schwieriger ist sowieso der Raum im Innern*, DVD, from 22:00 till 25:04, directed by Martin Kreyszig, produced by Richard Deacon, 1991. Digital image courtesy of Martin Kreyszig / Richard Deacon.



Figure 7.

Richard Deacon, Martin Kreyszig, UHMM, CD, Dia Art Foundation, New York, 2006 (back of CD case) Digital image courtesy of Richard Deacon / Martin Kreyszig

A long time after the Krefeld exhibition, a CD was released with the title *UHMM*, which goes back to that event.⁹ It contains a “speech” by Richard Deacon, slowly unfolding in a carefully constructed rhythm over the course of nine tracks. It consists almost entirely of the fillers that are used by speakers as they gradually formulate their thoughts. Every now and then a word or concept briefly shoots out from this sea of stops and starts. The whole thing is of course a fine joke. However, one could also take this multitude of near-nothingnesses, this collection of linguistic raw material as a metaphor. From this wealth of repetitive, disordered acoustic material—which seems to have a life of its own in the artist’s mouth and which serves the course of his thoughts like a kind of humus—all of a sudden a word, a form, a meaning flashes into view. As Deacon speaks, the murmuring material yields meaning. On the basis of this way of producing language, one might wonder whether it is exactly the opposite case in the conception and production of one of Deacon’s sculptures. Is there not in the beginning a concept—or an idea of a form, which at this point is more or less the same thing—that then has to be taken through a similar sea of materials, tested and put into concrete form?

Are the realization of thoughts and sculptures in fact reciprocal processes? Even if reducing the processes to a single formula seems a little too mechanical, don't the notions of contrary-motion or intersecting activities tie thinking, talking, and doing to each other in a way that seems fitting and that the artist may well be aware of? On the back cover of the CD of the audio sculpture *UHMM* there is a direct reference to the concept of working with one's hands, to the actions of the sculptor (fig. 7). As a humorous yet also deeply meaningful echo of the Krefeld exhibition, this image raises unanswered and unanswerable core questions concerning Deacon's art. Namely, the matter of the relationship between the work of the mind to the work done by the hands, and hence the relationship of language to the visual form, and, ultimately, that of the subject to the object and of the individual to society. And vice versa, of course.

Translated from the German by Fiona Elliott

Footnotes

- 1 *Dreiig Jahre durch die Kunst*, exh. cat., 2 vols. (Krefeld: Museum Haus Lange and Museum Haus Esters, 1985).
- 2 *c/o Haus Lange Haus Esters 1984/1999* (Krefelder Kunstmuseen, 1999).
- 3 *Anderer Leute Kunst—Ernst Caramelle, Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Katharina Fritsch, Andrew Lord, Franz West*, exh. cat. (Krefeld: Museum Haus Lange, 1987).
- 4 This and the following quotes are taken from "Zwischenzonen", in *Richard Deacon*, exh. cat., 2 vols. (Krefeld: Museum Haus Lange and Museum Haus Esters, 1991), 1: np.
- 5 Martin Kreyszig, *The Interior Is Always More Difficult—Schwieriger ist sowieso der Raum im Innern*, DVD, directed by Martin Kreyszig, produced by Richard Deacon, 1991. See "Zwischenzonen".
- 6 "Zwischenzonen".
- 7 In addition to the group and solo exhibitions mentioned here, in 1993 Deacon also realized the sculpture *Building From The Inside* in a public space in the town of Krefeld.
- 8 The artists mentioned here also had solo exhibitions in the villas in Krefeld between 1984 and 1991, or participated in group exhibitions.
- 9 Richard Deacon and Martin Kreyszig, *UHMM*, CD, Dia Art Foundation (Dia 006), New York, 2006. The words spoken by Richard Deacon were extracted from an interview that was recorded during his exhibition at Haus Lange and Haus Esters in 1991 and forms part of the film by Martin Kreyszig, *The Interior Is Always More Difficult* (figs. 4, 5 and 6).

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- c/o Haus Lange Haus Esters 1984/1999* (Krefelder Kunstmuseen, 1999).
- Dreiig Jahre durch die Kunst*, exh. cat., 2 vols. (Krefeld: Museum Haus Lange and Museum Haus Esters, 1985).
- Richard Deacon*, exh. cat., 2 vols. (Krefeld: Museum Haus Lange and Museum Haus Esters, 1991)

Expanding the Field: How the “New Sculpture” put British Art on the Map in the 1980s

Nick Baker

Abstract

This paper shows that sculptors attracted much of the attention that was paid to emerging British artists during the 1980s. The group of young artists represented by the Lisson Gallery and collectively referred to at the time as the “New British Sculptors” were particularly successful in gaining coverage.

Authors

Cite as

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Introduction

In 1978, John Kasmin, a leading London dealer in contemporary art, told an interviewer that “most of the serious European collectors, like Mr [Peter] Ludwig for instance, go to New York to buy pictures. I do not think he has ever been to London.”¹ In the same year, the British art critic Richard Cork complained of “Britain, where an innate parochialism in matters of art is scarcely helped by a complete dearth of large international surveys.”² The London-based magazine *Studio International* that Cork edited had recently ceased publication temporarily: its co-publisher explained that “This recognises that magazines such as *Studio* can only survive if there is a viable market for contemporary art, which regrettably, there is not really today in the UK.”³ Ten years later, London-based art student Damien Hirst and his friends mounted the exhibition *Freeze* that is widely seen as the beginning of the international success of the so-called “Young British Artists” or YBAs. Charles Saatchi, who was by this time already recognized internationally as a leading collector of contemporary art, bought work from this show.⁴

Hence it would appear that within a decade Britain, and in particular London, had moved on from being a backwater that leading collectors did not even bother to visit, and was poised to become a vibrant hub of art making and art collecting. Data concerning the coverage given to emerging British artists by art journals during the late 1970s and 1980s reveals the considerable attention paid during this period to sculptors, and in particular to a group referred to at the time as “New British Sculptors”. They also indicate the importance of exposure overseas, both in exhibitions and journals, to the establishment of these artists’ reputations.

The Sample

The principal state-funded collections of contemporary art in Britain are (and have been for over thirty years) those of the Tate Gallery (now Tate), the Arts Council, and the British Council. Between 1975 and 1990, some three-dozen artists had work acquired for the first time by all three of these collections. I have taken these to represent a good approximation of those artists whose reputation became established in Britain during this period. The thirty-six artists, including one pair of individuals who worked as a team, are listed below. Twenty of them worked primarily as sculptors, indicated by the suffix “(s)”. Another thirteen made work that involved painting or drawing, indicated by “(p)”, while two used photography as their primary medium—“(ph)” —and one produced texts and documentary material—“(t)”. It should also be noted that only nine of these thirty-seven individuals were female.

Roger Ackling (s); Edward Allington (s); Conrad Atkinson (t); Glen Baxter (p); Boyd & Evans: Fionnuala Boyd and Leslie Evans (p); Steven Campbell (p); Helen Chadwick (s); Marc Camille Chaimowicz (s); Stephen Cox (s); Tony Cragg (s); Richard Deacon (s); Norman Dilworth (s); Maggi Hambling (p); Tim Head (s); Susan Hiller (s); Shirazeh Houshiary (s); Peter Howson (p); Anish Kapoor (s); Christopher Le Brun (p); Leonard McComb (p); Stephen McKenna (p); Lisa Milroy (p); Dhruva Mistry (s); David Nash (s); Paul Neagu (s); Julian Opie (s); Roger Palmer (ph); Nicholas Pope (s); Paula Rego (p); Trevor Sutton (p); Boyd Webb (ph); Richard Wentworth (s); Kate Whiteford (p); Alison Wilding (s); Adrian Wiszniewski (p); Bill Woodrow (s).

Journal Coverage

Although coverage in art journals represents only one element in the reputational success which an artist can achieve, it is likely to be an indication of other forms of exposure, as exhibitions in both public and commercial venues are often the trigger for press coverage. There are several independent sources of information about references to individual artists in art journals and other relevant publications during this period. For this exercise I cross-referenced *ARTBibliographies Modern*, *Bibliography of the History of Art*, and *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*.

The journals covered by these sources were primarily published in Britain, Western Europe and the USA, reflecting both the international nature of the contemporary art world in the late twentieth century and its predominant bias towards the so-called “developed economies”. In order to see how far the British artists’ reputations were built in different parts of the world, I have categorized the references to sample artists according to whether they occurred in journals published in Britain; the USA; Europe (including the Republic of Ireland); or “Other”, consisting mainly of Canadian and Australasian journals, with occasional references from Latin America. This last category represented less than 5 percent of the total references over the period, and has not been shown on the graph below. The proportion of references to have come from each region may be, at least in part, a function of the regional biases of the sources used. The figures should not therefore be taken as an authoritative indication of how much attention the sample gained in one part of the world compared to another in any one year. They can, however, be used as an indication of trends over time, and this is summarized in graph form below, using three-year rolling periods to smooth out anomalies.

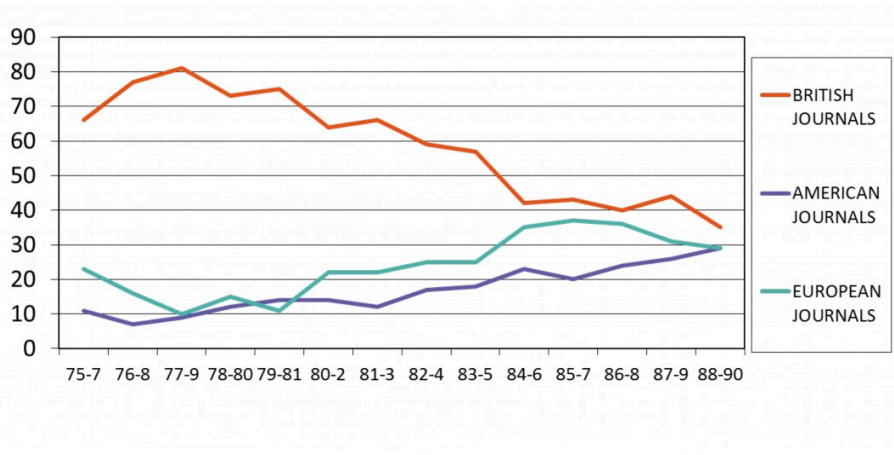


Figure 1.
Proportion of Mentions of Sample Artists by Region of Journal Publication,

This suggests that the balance between British, American, and European journals shifted significantly during this period. The proportion of all the mentions of our sample provided by British-based journals almost halved from 66 percent in the late 1970s (when there were relatively few references in total) to 35 percent at the end of the 1980s (by which time the total number of mentions each year had more than doubled). The proportion of coverage in American journals increased steadily throughout the entire period from around one-sixth to almost one-third. European journals also accounted for about one-sixth of references at the start of the period; this rose to one-third or more by the mid-1980s, then levelled. This indicates that, for this particular sample at least, British art began to attract more attention overseas during this period.

The number of mentions received by individual artists in the sample varied considerably, as indicated by the diagram below.

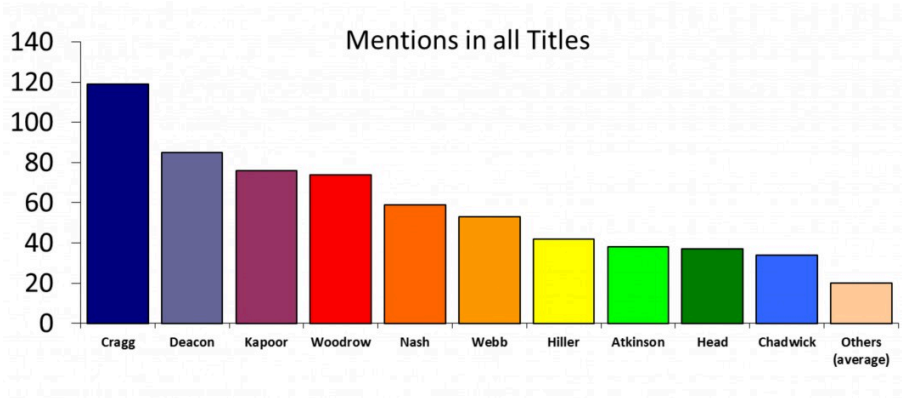


Figure 2.
Coverage Received by Most Reported Artists,

It is striking that Susan Hiller and Helen Chadwick are the only two female artists to appear in this “Top Ten” and neither of them were amongst the top five. The preponderance of sculptors among the most reported “new” British artists is also remarkable. None of the ten most covered artists were painters, with Boyd Webb and Conrad Atkinson the only ones whose practice was not primarily sculptural. In total, the twenty sculptors accounted for 77 percent of the total press coverage given to all of the thirty-six artists in the sample.

The diagram below shows the same artists in the same sequence, but in this case the height of the bars indicates the proportion of the coverage that each received from British as opposed to overseas journals.

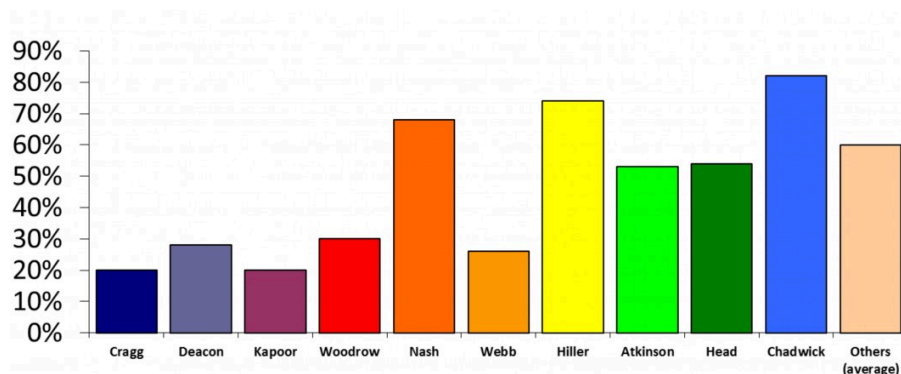


Figure 3.
Proportion of Coverage Received from British Journals,

Less than half of the coverage devoted to Cragg, Deacon, Kapoor, Woodrow, and Webb was in journals published in Great Britain. This was not the case with any of the other top ten artists.

The Role of the Lisson Gallery

Some of the artists in the sample were not represented by any commercial gallery, whilst others changed gallery during the period. However, most of those who received the greatest media coverage stayed with the same commercial gallery throughout. The Lisson Gallery in particular was associated with the highest-profile artists in the sample, all of whom were sculptors. It represented Cragg, Woodrow, Deacon, and Kapoor—the four artists who received most press attention for the period overall. Apart from these the Lisson also represented three other artists who ranked in the top half of the sample for press coverage; these were Opie, Allington, and Wentworth. Houshiary was also represented by the Lisson, and if Ackling, who left the gallery in 1984, and Stephen Cox who did not exhibit there after 1981, are included, there were in total ten “Lisson artists” (all of whom worked primarily as sculptors) in the sample. Even if references to Cox after

1981 and to Ackling after 1984 are excluded, Lisson Gallery artists accounted for 473 press references, or 41 percent of the total for the sample. No other gallery came anywhere near this total of coverage, or represented so many of the artists in the sample.

The name that was most commonly used to denote these artists and some of their contemporaries was “New British Sculptors”. On occasions their identity was linked to that of their London gallery, as when the critic Waldemar Januszczak commented with regard to Richard Deacon, that “Exhibition organisers confronted with his work usually place him among the so-called Object Sculptors or Lisson Boys, Woodrow, Cragg, Vilmouth etc.”⁵

The historic importance of sculpture within British art, and of Britain within the “world” of sculpture, was widely discussed at the time. In an interview published in 1985, Nicholas Logsdail, the proprietor of the Lisson Gallery, argued that his artists should be viewed within a specifically British tradition: “There has been a continuity, a development in sculpture, a progression from one thing to another.”⁶

In 1991 the critic Paul Overy wrote about the political and economic background to the promotion of sculpture by British cultural institutions since the Second World War.⁷ Overy’s article was prompted by the recent success of “New British Sculptors” including Cragg, Deacon, Woodrow, and, in particular, Kapoor, who had represented Britain at the Venice Biennale in 1990. Overy contextualized this within a narrative of how the British state had used sculpture as a symbol of national cultural vitality since 1945.

Exposure for the Lisson’s group of “New British Sculptors” in public exhibitions overseas followed soon after the exhibition *Objects and Sculpture* at the ICA and the Arnolfini Gallery in 1981 (London and Bristol respectively) had included work by Allington, Deacon, Kapoor, and Woodrow.⁸ *Englische Plastik Heute* (English Sculpture Now) took place in 1982 at the Kunstmuseum in Lucerne, with support from the British Council. It featured just five artists: Cragg, Deacon, Kapoor, Woodrow, and Stephen Cox. Ten young British artists were included in the “Aperto” section of that year’s Venice Biennale. These included four of the Lisson’s “New British Sculptors”—Kate Blacker, Houshiary, Kapoor, and Woodrow—alongside two other artists represented by the Gallery (Stephen Cox and Stephen Willats). Kapoor and Woodrow represented Britain at the 1982 Paris *Biennale des Jeunes Artistes*, while Cragg and Jean Luc Vilmouth featured in *Documenta 7* at Kassel in the same year.

The British Council also supported the exhibition *La Trottola di Sirio* at the Centro d’Arte Contemporanea in Syracuse in Sicily in 1983. This featured work by Allington, Cragg, Kapoor, and Woodrow. Cragg, Deacon, Kapoor, and

Woodrow were among the artists whose work was on show in *Transformations: New Sculpture from Britain*, Britain's contribution to the Sao Paulo Biennale in the same year, which subsequently travelled to Mexico and Portugal. These four were also included in *An International Survey of Recent Paintings and Sculpture* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1984. In 1985 the British Council collaborated with the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney to mount *The British Show*. Twenty-four "non-temporal" artists were shown, including Cragg, Deacon, Kapoor, Opie, and Woodrow, and two other sculptors represented by the Lisson Gallery: Houshiary and Wentworth.

Across the period 1975 to 1990, the ten Lisson Gallery sculptors accounted for 64 percent of the total coverage of all the sample artists in European and American journals, compared to just 23 percent of that in British journals. This seems to bear out the comment made in 1985 by the critic Sarah Kent: "The Lisson Sculptors have thrived . . . because Nicholas Logsdail has persistently promoted them abroad." ⁹

Conclusions

The success of the "New British Sculptors" during the 1980s in attracting attention from art journals is an episode in art history that can be contextualized within a number of wider narratives. One represents the theme of this issue of *British Art Studies* itself; the succession of British-based sculptors who achieved international recognition during the twentieth century. This was much discussed at the time, and with hindsight the "apostolic succession" from Moore and Hepworth to Caro and beyond can now be extended to include Hirst and his YBA contemporaries.

Another context more specific to the period 1975-90 was the reaction against the Greenbergian, New York-centred, painting-focused hegemony that had dominated curatorial and critical discourse during the 1950s. Linked to this are the ways in which the legacy of conceptual art began to reshape the attitudes, behaviours, and relationships that constitute the art world as a whole. Concern with the institutional framing of artworks, and not just with the object itself and its materials, involved a parallel shift in the role of the artist from small-scale craft manufacturer to value-added service provider. ¹⁰ Within this context, young British artists including the "New British Sculptors" began to question the idea that professionalism had nothing to do with selling or even exhibiting their work, and became more proactive and cooperative in their attitude toward commercial galleries.

The "New British Sculptors" were eager to work with the Lisson Gallery partly because of its involvement with the conceptual art network established in Europe by Konrad Fischer. ¹¹ During the 1970s this had provided an audience (if not a market) for pioneering British conceptual artists like Art & Language,

Gilbert & George, Richard Long, and Bruce McLean. They in turn inspired and were to some extent role models for the young artists whose reputations became established by the Lisson Gallery in the 1980s. Cultural and political pressures had combined in the late 1970s and early 1980s to restrict the supplies of state-funded revenue for artists in Britain, whether this came from teaching in art schools, grants and subsidies from the Arts Council, or the “dole”. The “New British Sculptors” led the way in exploring new career opportunities for artists that involved working constructively with art dealers, and actively pursuing opportunities to show their work overseas.

Footnotes

- ¹ Lynda Morris, “Kasmin on ‘K’”, *Art Monthly* 15 (March 1978): 9. The themes and issues discussed in this article are explored in greater detail in Nick Baker, “A Market of Reputations” (unpublished doctoral thesis, Milton Keynes, The Open University, 2015).
- ² Richard Cork, “What does *Documenta* Document?”, *Studio International* 194, no. 991 (1978): 37.
- ³ D. Thomas Bergen, quoted in *Art Aktuell* (Jan. 1978): 696.
- ⁴ *Freeze* exhibition was held in Surrey Docks, London, 6 Aug. to 29 Sept. 1988.
- ⁵ Waldemar Januszczak, “The Church of the New Art”, *Flash Art* 120 (Jan. 1985): 29. Januszczak’s use of the term “boys” was somewhat inaccurate given that Kate Blacker and Shirazeh Houshiary were also “Object Sculptors” represented by the Lisson Gallery.
- ⁶ Simon Vaughan Winter, “Interview with Nicholas Logsdail”, *Artscribe* 41 (1985): 35.
- ⁷ Paul Overy, “Lions and Unicorns: The Britishness of Postwar British Sculpture”, *Art in America* 79, no. 9 (1991): 105-10, 153-55.
- ⁸ The exhibition also included works by Peter Randall-Page, Margaret Organ and Antony Gormley (who were not represented by the Lisson Gallery) as well as the work of Jean Luc Villemouth, a French artist based in London who was on the Lisson’s roster.
- ⁹ “Likely Prospects: A British Art Questionnaire”, *Artscribe* 41 (1985): 31. This feature simply reported the responses of a cross-section of British artists, dealers, critics, and curators to a short questionnaire about the place of British art within the international art world.
- ¹⁰ This theme has been discussed in relation to American artists of the 1960s and 1970s by Caroline A. Jones in her book *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- ¹¹ Fischer’s role in building up a network of European galleries sympathetic to conceptual art during the 1970s is documented in Sophie Richards, *Unconcealed, The International Network of Conceptual Artists, 1967-77: Dealers, Exhibitions and Public Collections* (London: Ridinghouse, 2009). However, during the 1980s Fischer was involved with the Anthony D’Offay Gallery in London, which represented prominent sculptors such as Carl Andre and Richard Long, but was also the principal British showcase for Neo-Expressionist painters including Georg Baselitz, Anselm Kiefer, Francesco Clemente, David Salle, Sigmar Polke, and Sandro Chia.

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Britishness, Identity, and the Three-Dimensional: British Sculpture Abroad in the 1990s

Courtney J. Martin

Abstract

This essay examines how sculptural discourse was absent from British art shown outside of Britain in the 1990s, despite the international prominence of two distinct groups of British artists: the so-called Young British Artists (YBAs) and other British artists folded into a postcolonial or identity-based construction.

Authors

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Introduction

In May 1992, on the twenty-fourth anniversary of the political and cultural upheavals of May 1968, the artist and writer on art Michael Corris used the occasion to satirize what he saw as the growing *Americanization* of contemporary British art. Footnoted in Corris's tongue-in-cheek manifesto was a prescient description of the state of British art that would follow it for an entire decade:

The conceptualization of a new generation of artists who are fixed in the ambered abundance of London is subject to a number of constraints that abrade and unsettle the normal logic of promotion and curatorial space. Theoretically, the relationships between class, race, and gender must be made visible, as these ultimately determine how the most important questions of "membership" within a newly imagined avant-garde are settled. The "new generation" of "young British artists" is a cultural phenomenon formed out of specific needs expressed primarily in terms of a presumed national culture. But even that celebratory discourse is subject to pressures brought to bear by historical responses to the collapse of British colonialism, its neocolonialist aftermath, and the prevailing consciousness of the subordination of the early-20th-century English avant-garde in painting and sculpture to the Continental avant-gardes and, domestically, to the practice of literature. That tension continues to be felt by contemporary English curators as a "preference" for the semi-abstract, the blandly narrative, and the environmentally anecdotal in art.¹

It is likely that Corris's reference to "young British artists" was an allusion to the exhibition *Young British Artists I* that preceded his essay that spring at the Saatchi Gallery in London. The first in what was to be a series of generationally themed group shows supported by Charles Saatchi, this exhibition gathered together a group of artists that had come to the forefront of contemporary art in London. Their prominence, or "celebrity", put them into an ongoing conversation about the changes in London's art landscape involving collectors, young artists, and the media.² The Saatchi exhibition and Corris's article cemented the name "Young British Artists", or the equally popular acronym YBAs, into the lexicon of the art world.

Biennialization

British art in the 1990s seemed to be dominated by the YBAs. Artists associated with this moniker, such as Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin, became household names as their work became indistinct from their personal lives as reported on in the media. The visibility of these artists was parallel with their rise in the art market, which had another corollary—the redefinition of the art market’s London axis. In this decade, art dealers, commercial art galleries, periodicals, and auction houses began to spring from and/or focus on art and artists in London. For example, *Frieze* magazine launched from London in 1991. A false cognate, in title, of the *Freeze* exhibition curated by Hirst in London in 1988, from its inception *Frieze* documented the YBAs and, by the middle of the decade, the robust art scene in Glasgow, dubbed the “Glasgow Miracle”.³ Though it did not bill itself as a national vehicle, its earliest issues prominently featured art made in Britain, artists living in Britain, and concepts emanating from a specifically British perspective, making it a resource for what was happening inside the country for those in and outside of it.

Beyond London, the conceptually driven and explicit objects being produced made these artists and this city a locus of curiosity. By the late 1990s, many of the artists identified (interchangeably) with either the YBAs or with the coolness of London’s art scene, were also heralded abroad. A number of exhibitions sought to export so-called “Cool Britannia” out to the world, and invitations were made to individual artists to show some aspect of this aesthetic. This trend met another one in which artists sought and gained representation from commercial galleries internationally, who then showed their work at art fairs, further dispersing the artists globally. The 1990s also saw the rise of international annual, biennial, and triennial exhibitions. Before the 1990s, the Venice Biennale (founded in 1895), the São Paulo Art Biennial (founded in 1951), and the quinquennial *Documenta* (founded in 1955) were, with a few exceptions, the only major showcases for artists as representatives of their nations or for demonstrations of thematic trends. After 1989, there was an increase in the non-commercial, non-national, non-institutional and temporary, international display of art.⁴

The so-called *biennialization* of contemporary art has its roots in the 1990s and describes the global distribution mechanism of art as a temporally fatiguing system with no seeming end or beginning. According to this idea, art was marketed, shown, and sold, with no distinction made between the function of an exhibition at museums, commercial galleries, art fairs, or temporary non-institutional spaces. Biennialization uprooted nationality for the possibility of global exposure. If all of contemporary art was focused on, or oriented towards, New York at the start of the decade, by the end of it, New York was only one place in which art could be recognized as global. And

yet the wide availability of information about art (through fairs, dealers, and shows) ran hand-in-hand with a kind of democratization of art whereby more artists were being seen by more people in more places. Corris's call for the recognition of "class, race, and gender" as well as an aesthetic reckoning with colonialism, may have benefited some of those artists swept into the YBA circuit (the discourses of feminism and class analysis are certainly two methods of entry into the work of Emin and Sarah Lucas). Other British artists came to the fore at exactly the same time as the YBAs, concurrent with their media notoriety, but separate from it.

Freeze and The Other Story

From this vantage, if biennialization over-exposed one set of British artists in this decade, another was given some degree of recognition by the same channels of distribution. We might trace this point of contact and diversion to two London exhibitions in the late 1980s: *Freeze*, held in the summer of 1988, and *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, which opened in the fall of 1989 and closed in the winter of 1990. Historically, student exhibitions have played a great role in British art, and *Freeze* can be seen as part of this legacy. Curated by Hirst in the disused Port of London Authority Building in Surrey Docks, the summer before he graduated from Goldsmiths College, *Freeze* is often noted as the touchstone for the YBAs because it included sixteen artists with which it would later be identified.⁵ The show also established an exhibition style that moved away from the "white cube" towards a more unpolished aesthetic of high ceilings, rough floors, and open, undivided galleries that would be replicated, even when not situated in an actual warehouse. It also established a dictum for the reception of British artists outside of Britain to be young (for a time), white (with few exceptions), and to make conceptual art. It was an alternative to the degree shows held that year because Hirst made the selection and then promoted the exhibition as a professional endeavour, not unlike *New Contemporaries*, the annual juried exhibition of art school graduates selected by established artists and arts professionals and held in a major British arts institution.

While *Freeze* may have shown one side of the art world, *The Other Story*, by contrast, introduced another. Curated by the artist and writer Rasheed Araeen, the show was an exploratory survey of the several decades long accomplishments of African, Asian, and Caribbean artists in Britain (fig. 1).⁶ It brought together artists working in various media and from different periods to be the first major museum exhibition of non-white British artists in Britain. Unlike *Freeze*, which was seen by few people outside of the immediate art world context, *The Other Story* was viewed widely and thought to be a popular success, if not a critical one.⁷ Conversely, *Freeze's*

smaller audience included collectors like Saatchi, curators, and others with a wide international reach. Since both shows predate *Frieze* magazine, there is no way to evaluate how the insider/outsider publication would have measured the shows locally for international consumption.



Figure 1.

Installation view, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, Hayward Gallery, London, 29 Nov. 1989— 4 Feb. 1990 Digital image courtesy of Rasheed Araeen Archive / [Asia Art Archive](#)

Though *The Other Story's* local success and the international curiosity it aroused did not attract commercial galleries or significant collectors, Araeen's endeavour seemed to mark a shift in the ways that British museums were responding to the country's changing demographics in line with the ways that museums in America and in Europe were addressing the questions proposed by postcolonial theory.⁸

Despite their marked differences, *Freeze* and *The Other Story* were constitutive of a period and modelled the way that British art would be shown abroad during that period. If *Freeze* was the originary event for the YBAs, then *The Other Story* performed this operation in reverse, perhaps postcolonially, explaining the presence of non-white British artists in the decades that preceded it. From their openings, each would become the referent for the ways in which these two, seemingly divergent, groups of artists could be understood or shown. That said, neither exhibition, in its installation or in its accompanying material, made note of the presence of sculpture in their shows, despite the fact that both included significant works that would characterize the periodized style that was transported out of the

country. It is worth mentioning that both Araeen and Hirst acted as curators and participants, placing their own sculpture prominently in their respective exhibitions.⁹

For all of these artists, YBA or not, the question of sculpture is complicated. In Britain, some of the best-known works (to the art world and to the general public) in the 1990s were three-dimensional: Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), Rachel Whiteread's *Untitled (House)* (1993), Emin's *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995* (1995); or the shark, the house, and the tent. These works gained international attention once they were displayed or promoted outside of the country. Rarely, however, do we think of their status as objects with depth that exist in space. Each is subsequently reduced to its surface qualities (the shark in the tank or the cast house) which, in some measure, treats them as if they are conceptually and physically flat. This is not to say that these objects were misunderstood as two-dimensional media (painting, prints, or photographs). Their flattening was literal, owing in part to the conflation of their concept with their construction (Whiteread's *Untitled (House)* was a cast of an actual terrace house, and Emin claimed to record every being in whose presence she had fallen asleep or with whom she had shared a bed) and to the way in which sculpture can still be overlooked if it is not presented as traditional sculpture (that is, without a plinth, not carved or modelled). A reconsideration of this decade needs to take into account the misrecognition of the variety of multi-dimensional objects or installations that could be called sculptural.

How then might we look at these three overlapping concerns: the over-exposure of the YBAs nationally transmitted out to the rest of the world; the exposure of other British artists folded into a postcolonial or identity-based construction; and the absence of sculptural discourse in the appraisal of both? For both groups, spectacle subsumed media. True to the aesthetic concerns, market conditions, and institutional responses of the decade, the question of identity, be it an ethnic designation or a consumption strategy, framed the reception of and set the terms for British art and artists abroad in the 1990s.¹⁰ This essay stands as a survey of this decade, while the other essays in this section zero in on key intersections of artists and the international in the 1990s that take shape around, with, and through the ideas surveyed here.

Magiciens de la Terre

One of the first pronouncements for the international reception of British art in the 1990s was the late 1980s show *Magiciens de la Terre*, in which British artists Araeen, Tony Cragg, Shirazeh Houshiary, and Richard Long all showed sculptural installations deemed global rather than national or the binary of contemporary/traditional then used to evaluate the work of living artists along an eastern/western split. Curated by Jean-Hubert Martin, *Magiciens de la Terre* was on view in the summer of 1989 at two locations in Paris, the Pompidou Centre and La Grande Halle at the Parc de la Villette. Its presentation of one hundred artists, half from the “west” and half from “outside the west”, was explicitly in response to the problematic rendering of the west relative to the rest of the world in the Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition, “*Primitivism*” in *20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984–85). MoMa’s show in New York seemed to reify existing denigrations about art produced outside of Europe and America as, in some sense, completed only by the engagement of Western masters such as Pablo Picasso.¹¹ Martin’s initiative sought another tack—to see all makers of objects as not simply artists but as shamans able to harness their otherworldly power in order to conjure art. While Martin’s curatorial plans have been heavily criticized for the “ethnographic” presentation of art and artists, he has also been lauded for attempting to democratize the field of contemporary art in a more inclusive manner.¹² I would argue that Martin’s failure is also his success. By equalizing all of the artists as magicians (and by extension, suggesting all art is a magical act), he imbued non-western artists and non-white artists in the west with one of the oldest tropes of art history: the artist as a naive genius. The problem therein, of course, is that he returns to the well-worn dictum of artists as naifs, not as skilled agents operating within a global system of aesthetics and commerce.

The other achievement of Martin’s show was to highlight the shared global interest in the three-dimensional. Of the one hundred artists in the show, a great majority presented objects in space. For a show that did not announce itself as sculptural, its display (not only that of the works, but also the two large locations used to house them) implied that the international (museum) standard for new art embraced all manner of installation art and multiple dimensions. True to the utopian concept of the exhibition, the four artists living in London were not understood within the frame of the show as British (in the sense of the YBAs), but neither were they shown together elsewhere as examples of global artists in the 1990s. Certainly Long is considered under the rubric of British land art, and Araeen and Houshiary are often labelled as Pakistani and Iranian, living in London, though not necessarily British. Though he agreed to be in the show, Araeen used his participation as a stage to protest it as an avenue of “chasing either exotica or the famous European

artists". ¹³ A few years later, Chris Ofili (whose work was not shown in *Magiciens*) delivered a riposte that addressed the problem that exhibitions like this presented to artists:

It's what people really want from black artists. We're the voodoo king, the voodoo queen, the witch doctor, the drug dealer, the *magician de la terre*. The exotic, the decorative. I'm giving them all of that, but it's packaged slightly differently. ¹⁴

Into the following decade, *Magiciens* would be a foil against which which artists of colour measured both the reception and presentation of their works within exhibitions, books, and collections that sought out race and ethnicity as an aesthetic medium.

Kapoor, Venice and *The Other Story*

In 1989 it was made known that Anish Kapoor had declined Araeen's invitation to participate in *The Other Story*. This revelation was almost simultaneous with the announcement that the Indian-born Kapoor would represent Britain in the XLIV Venice Biennale in the following year. In the run up to the Biennale, Kapoor was asked why he had declined to participate in *The Other Story*. He answered:

Because I believe that being an artist is more than being an Indian artist. I feel supportive to that kind of endeavor. I feel it needs to happen once; I hope that show is never necessary again. Western artists have been able to look at non-Western influence and make it part of Western culture in some very energizing ways. But it's never happened the other way round. I think we are in a time where it is possible. ¹⁵

The public attention to Kapoor's role in Venice coincided with *The Other Story's* proposal (in one of Britain's most prominent public venues) that there was an undisclosed history of neglected British artists, based solely on race or ethnicity, which was challenged by Kapoor's pending apotheosis in Venice. Instead, answers to Kapoor's abstention from the exhibition were generated as speculation in the media. Richard Dorment described the invitation to be a part of the exhibition as being placed in a "humiliating situation". ¹⁶ In the *Independent*, Andrew Graham-Dixon referred to Kapoor as "extremely successful" with a preference for "open competition", which was, presumably, disallowed by the exhibition. ¹⁷ Perhaps in anticipation of this

contention, Araeen wrote in the postscript to the exhibition catalogue that Kapoor, along with Houshiary, Kim Lim, Dhruva Mistry, and Veronica Ryan, declined to be in the exhibition as a result of fear, though the nature of that fear was never explored.¹⁸ In the few months between the closing of *The Other Story* in February 1990 and the opening of the Venice Biennale in the spring, there was a sense among Britons, at least, that Kapoor's show would be met by as much critical and popular interest by international audiences as *The Other Story* had been in London.

In Venice, Kapoor showed seven objects, all of which were within the sculptural idiom: single stand-alone structures, multi-part installations, and a wall relief.¹⁹ The most substantial of these was *Void Field* (1989; [fig. 2](#)): sixteen rough-hewn stones, each punctured by a hole and installed into a single room, through which viewers could narrowly traverse. The abyss of the hole, outlined in Kapoor's signature blue-black pigment, suggested the void of the title.²⁰ Though Kapoor's entry was not billed as sculptural, it was a decisive response to the question of what British art wanted the world to acknowledge as its national artistic output, by way of the world's oldest temporary biennial exhibition of art. The solid success of Kapoor's pavilion reinforced the long-held prominence of British sculptors internationally, starting with Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth and leading up to Anthony Caro. Though Kapoor may have seemed like an adventurous choice for Britain's entry (he was young and not born in Britain) he already had an international reputation. He had shown with Barbara Gladstone Gallery in New York since the mid-1980s and received critical reviews for these shows and other group outings across Europe for nearly as long. In contrast with the ways in which the press pitched him against Araeen, Venice audiences received the work without controversy, so much so that he was awarded the Premio Duemila (the prize awarded to young artists) for his effort. Almost immediately after Venice Kapoor began to be considered for the large-scale public commissions that have defined his practice from 2000 to the present.



Figure 2.

Anish Kapoor, *Void Field*, 1989, 16 elements, sandstone and pigment, each element 125 x 125 x 125 cm Digital image courtesy of Anish Kapoor / Photo: Gareth Winters, London

Brit Art in New York

The 1990s inaugurated a string of exhibitions in America loosely themed around the emergence of a new school of British art. These include *Twelve British Artists*, curated by Clarissa Dalrymple for the Barbara Gladstone Gallery in 1992; the New York version of the London exhibition, *Lucky Kunst* (1993), which was held on 42nd Street; the museum-scaled "*Brilliant!*" *New Art from London* (1995-96), curated by the then Chief Curator at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Richard Flood; and, of course, *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*, which was on view at the Brooklyn Museum from the fall of 1999 into the new year. The point is not so much that these shows were in America, but that most of them came to New York, which at the time, was conceived of as the centre of the art world. So Corris's concern over *Americanization* should then be specified as the potential for *New Yorkification*, since the activities of the art world mostly happened in New York, not in the rest of the United States. If part of the YBA construct was the necessity to be on a par with New York art and artists, then showing in New York was crucial.²¹ What then can be made of the fact that there were a few other shows that delivered non-white and immigrant British artists to American audiences during this period? The exhibitions *Interrogating Identity* (1991) and *Transforming the Crown: African, Asian, and*

Caribbean Artists in Britain, 1966–1996 (1997–98) looked at the particular role of black British artists, often in the context of the former British empire or the Commonwealth. Both sets of exhibitions, while having little crossover in terms of participating artists, had two features in common: the inclusion of sculpture and, what Julian Stallabrass has called, the “Britishness of British art” in the 1990s.²²

The first of these exhibitions was *Interrogating Identity*.²³ Originating at New York University’s Grey Art Gallery in the spring of 1991, the show was, according to one of its curators, Kellie Jones, the outgrowth of a fascination with “black British culture” because of its “transnational practice”.²⁴ With its focus on objects that explored personal identity, often through the vehicle of nation or culture, the show was an early participant in the period of so-called identity politics in art. Later, exhibitions such as the 1993 Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial would cement this decade of art in America as one that was deeply political, ambivalent about the art market, and invested in pursuing the body as a medium.²⁵ In all cases, identity is the American adjective for what, outside of the US, might be described as postcolonial. Of the eighteen artists in the exhibition, nearly half were British or living in the UK during the run of the show, including the sculptors Mona Hatoum, Keith Piper, Donald Rodney, and Yinka Shonibare.²⁶ Though Piper and Shonibare did not exhibit three-dimensional works, Hatoum and Rodney did.

While *Interrogating Identity* was not the first exhibition outside Britain in which Hatoum participated, it was one of the first in which she showed an installation, *The Light at the End* (1989; [fig. 3](#)), instead of a film/video or a performance, the work for which she was more well known in the late 1980s.²⁷ First shown in London in 1989, *The Light at the End* is a multi-part installation in which a vertical, rectangular gate structure blocks an area to create a human-scale cell-like enclosure in the installation’s negative space.²⁸ The installation requires a darkened space so that the single light shone onto it spotlights the central structure. In New York in the early 1990s, this work would have fit easily in an exhibition alongside Sol LeWitt’s free-standing grids or Dan Graham’s architectonic pavilions, the latter demonstrating how the body can be physically contained within an aesthetic object.

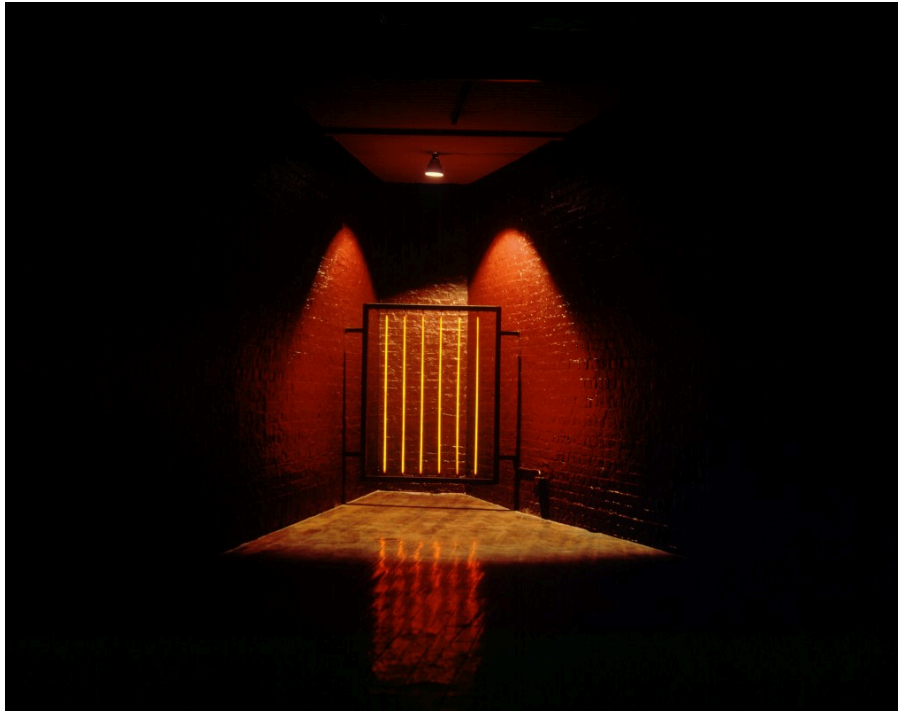


Figure 3.

Mona Hatoum, *The Light at the End*, 1989, iron, steel, brass, glass, aluminium and electrical elements, Edition: 3/3 Digital image courtesy of Mona Hatoum / Photo: Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

In the context of her earlier work and within the exhibition, however, the gate-like structure was a kind of body backed into a corner, just as the enclosed space created by the gate and the walls suggested a cell or trap, large enough to imprison a human body. The enclosure is further enhanced by Hatoum's use of electric heating elements on the bars of the gate. Engaged to capacity, they provide light and warmth in equal measure with danger. In either reading, the subject was under surveillance due to the spotlight. For Hatoum, readings of this kind followed the discourse of her work in the previous decade, in which her biography as a Palestinian woman in exile (doubly so, first with her family from Palestine to Beirut, then alone from Beirut to London following the outbreak of the Lebanese war in 1975) was transposed literally over it, with little attention given to the specifics of her practice.

Though Hatoum has discussed the necessity of aligning her work in this way ("At the beginning it was important to think about the black political struggle as a total political struggle"), in the 1990s she moved away from the politics of Britain in the 1980s after participating in three of the most important "black" group shows of the decade: Araeen's *Third World Within: AfroAsian Artists in Britain* (Brixton Art Gallery, London, 1986); *The Essential Black Art* (Chisenhale Gallery, 1988); and the previously discussed *The Other Story* (1989).²⁹ I would argue that the shift from time-based media and body art to

installations allowed Hatoum the platform from which her whole practice could develop materially. *Interrogating Identity*, then, was an important show for Hatoum because it allowed an international audience not specifically versed in British cultural politics to see larger-scale work outside the frame of that context. To show in New York was important for any artist in the 1990s, but for Hatoum this was doubly true, as it moved her beyond the smaller group shows in London that did not attract dealers or collectors.

Arguably, for those new to her work, the exhibition's triple-country platform (Britain, Canada, and the United States) further promoted Hatoum, who might not have been read as "British" in that context. It is no surprise then that *The Light at the End* was one of the first works to ignite the reading of Hatoum's objects within the Minimalist idiom.³⁰ Hatoum's intent, or the political content that was read into her work in the 1980s, are not the point. Rather, I want to suggest that when she began making three-dimensional objects and showing them outside of Britain, viewers (critics, curators, collectors, and general audiences) began to situate them as Postminimalist: this entailed a shift in focus away from biography, to take into account the style, construction, and period affinities of her practice. This is not to suggest that the New York centred, male-dominated art history of Minimalism is apolitical or devoid of cultural intention. A key aspect of Hatoum's Postminimalist reception grew alongside the reconsideration of the relative absence of women in early Minimalist discourse, such as Jo Baer, Eva Hesse, Nancy Holt, Agnes Martin, Howardena Pindell, Dorothea Rockburne, and Anne Truitt.

Between 1991 and 1995 Hatoum was included in several other exhibitions outside Britain, which could be divided equally between those that called on her to perform a blend of ethnicity and politics, and those that did not. Among the former were the Havana Biennales of 1991 and 1994, which were geared to recognize artists from the so-called "third world"; and *Heart of Darkness*, on view at the Museum Kröller Müller in the Netherlands in 1995, which sought to draw a link between postcolonialism (by way of Joseph Conrad's novel) and artists working in the realm of identity. In contrast, in the Museum of Modern Art's 1994 group show, *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties*, Hatoum, placed alongside Whiteread, was not construed as British, but was employed to make the case for Minimalism's afterlife as inclusive of women artists outside the immediate New York context. Hatoum's participation in the Istanbul Biennial in 1995 coincided with the year in which she was nominated for the Turner Prize (which was awarded to Hirst). From 1995 to the end of the decade, Hatoum's sculpture would be known internationally by way of large-scale solo exhibitions of sculpture and installation, like her show at the British School at

Rome in 1995, or her first international retrospective in 1997 held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago and The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.

Ofili's Three-dimensional Painting

Held jointly at three locations in New York, *Transforming the Crown: African, Asian, and Caribbean Artists in Britain, 1966-1996* (1997-98), opened two years before *Sensation* at the Brooklyn Museum.³¹ In the same way that *Freeze* and *The Other Story* were twinned, so too were *Transforming the Crown* and *Sensation*. Noticeably, *Transforming the Crown* gained much from Jones's *Interrogating Identity* and Araeen's curatorial premise, just as *Sensation* drew from Hirst's *Freeze* and the subsequent group shows of British artists that he curated in London. Further complicating this interaction between *Transforming the Crown* and *Sensation* was the surprising overlap between the two shows, despite the fact that they both claimed to represent British national identity. Various iterations of *Britishness* (or identity) were explored here in much the same way that class, race, gender, and sexuality were explored as aspects of "identity" elsewhere in the decade. If *Sensation* brought about "Cool Britannia", *Transforming the Crown* doubled the novelty of Britishness by adding race to the equation and drawing heavily on the literary concept of the transatlantic recently put forward by theorist Paul Gilroy.³² Yinka Shonibare was the only artist that the two shows had in common. Shonibare's installations, however, were not the focus of the attention. Much of that went to Chris Ofili's painting, *The Holy Virgin Mary* (1996; [fig. 4](#)).



Figure 4.

Chris Ofili, *The Holy Virgin Mary*, 1996, acrylic, oil, polyester resin, paper collage, glitter, map pins, and elephant dung on linen, 243.8 x 182.8 cm Digital image courtesy of Chris Ofili and Victoria Miro, London / Photo: Stephen White

Ofili's painting of the Virgin was deemed vulgar and profane by New York's mayor, Rudolph Giuliani and by the state's standing Archbishop and Cardinal, John O'Connor, due to the elephant dung that Ofili incorporated into the work. While much has been made of Giuliani's public denunciation of the painting, and his attempt to withdraw public funding from the museum while nevertheless profiting from the publicity surrounding the ensuing controversy, little attention has been paid to the work itself. While technically two-dimensional, *The Holy Virgin Mary's* most offending element, the dung, was three-dimensional. The painting—depicting a black Madonna, swathed in the Renaissance iconography of a blue gown and emerging from a yellow-gold background—was a multi-media object composed of collaged paper, oil paint, glitter, polyester resin, map pins, and dung. A rounded mound of dung protruded from the surface of the work as a stand-in for the Marian figure's

breast. Ofili also used dung for the two posts that supported the bottom edge of the work, elevating it from the floor in the manner of a pedestal and turning it into a standing object. From this placement, the dung allowed the work to rest at an angle against the wall, so that the space between the wall and the work was visible from either a side or frontal view. The painting's installation method—propped up and leaned against the wall—returns to the implicit proposition made by Magiciens de la Terre in 1989 that multi-dimensionality was a key component of contemporary art. Here, a two-dimensional painting is enhanced by (and later denigrated for) its acknowledgment of the space around it, in the manner of sculpture.

Though I would not argue that Ofili intended his object to be anything more than a painting, it is sculptural. Within its three-dimensionality, I think it is worth considering the way in which the sculptural element of his work, the dung, received the kind of media attention in New York that had previously been granted to Whiteread's *Untitled (House)* (1993), Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), or Emin's *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995* (1995); all of which (the latter two were on view alongside Ofili in *Sensation*) were evaluated on the basis of their literalness, rather than their merit as art objects—let alone as sculpture.

Conclusion

By the latter part of the 1990s, the questions that were posed to British sculptors had changed. Installation art, for one, became a widely accepted form, and the artists once grouped as YBAs were frequently considered singularly and within sculptural norms. Even more transformed were the ways in which these artists responded. Corris's pronouncement on the *Americanization* of British art in the 1990s fell flat against the tide of globalization, which called for artists to be represented everywhere in a manner that negated a specifically national affiliation. Perhaps the best example of this is Rachel Whiteread. In 1993 Whiteread made national and international headlines for her *Untitled (House)*, a cast interior of a London terraced house on the site of the original home. In that year she was awarded the Turner Prize, which led to other accolades, nationally and internationally. Frequently, Whiteread, like and along with Hatoum, was placed within the discussion on New York Minimalism. For critics, the demolition of *Untitled (House)* was comparable to the erection and removal of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981; removed 1989) from federal property in lower Manhattan.³³ Perhaps it was this type of comparison that shifted her career away from the grouping of YBAs (despite her inclusion in *Brilliant* and *Sensation*) and towards the realm of public art commissions and the larger recognition and international success that they offered.



Figure 5.

Rachel Whiteread, Holocaust Memorial, 1995-2000 Judenplatz, Vienna, mixed media, 3.8 × 7 × 10 m Digital image courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York, Lorcan O'Neill, Rome, and Gagosian Gallery

In 1996 Whiteread was commissioned to produce a memorial in Vienna to commemorate the more than 65,000 Austrian Jews who died under the National Socialist regime. Her proposal was selected from a competition to which ten artists, a mix of Austrian and other nationalities, were invited to submit proposals. It was chosen on its merit, but likely also due to her earlier success at completing large-scale public art works. True to Whiteread's practice and to the needs of the site—a public square in Vienna's former Jewish Ghetto—the sculpture was to be representational to the extent that it invoked the books on library shelving from which it was cast and titled, but abstract enough to veer away from the didactic or the illustrative. Though the sculpture, *Nameless Library* (1996-2000), was to be erected in the fall of 1996, it was delayed for a host of reasons for four years until the fall of 2000 (fig. 5).³⁴ It is important to see this work as a product of the 1990s rather than of the millennium, by which time the idea of Whiteread's *Britishness* and connection to the earlier conceptual bent of the YBAs had been relinquished. As a commission belonging to this decade, *Nameless Library* feels risky (a non-Jewish, British sculptor called to commemorate the Holocaust in Austria) and slightly ahead of its time. Yet it also achieves to some degree the ambition that the conjoined identity/postcolonial ethos of the decade sought: an art that would ultimately reflect and refer without the weight of representation, in all senses of the term. By the turn of the

millennium, British art outside Britain answered the call to the global economy and the postcolonial in ways that reflect how those issues were being addressed in Britain. The difference between inside and outside was one of reception.

Footnotes

- ¹ Michael Corris, "British? Young? Invisible? w/Attitude?", *Artforum* 30, no. 9 (May 1992): 106.
- ² *Young British Artists I* was on view at the Saatchi Gallery from March to Oct. 1992. It included the work of John Greenwood, Damien Hirst, Alex Landrum, Langlands & Bell (Ben Langlands and Nikki Bell), and Rachel Whiteread. See Sarah Kent, ed., *Young British Artists [I]*, exh. cat. (London: Saatchi Collection, 1992).
- ³ The designation of the success of artists, galleries, and the Glasgow School of Art in the 1990s as the "Glasgow Miracle" is attributed to London-based curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist and has been circulated widely since the mid-1990s. Ross Sinclair recalled an anecdote in which Obrist coined the term in reference to Douglas Gordon on the occasion of the Scottish artist being awarded the Turner Prize in 1996. See Sinclair, "What's in a Decade: The Glasgow Miracle vs. Utopian Modernism Done by Third World Peasants", in *Circles: Individuelle Sozialisation und Netzwerkarbeit in der zeitgenössischen Kunst*, ed. Christoph Keller (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2002), 193-99.
- ⁴ Here are a few examples to illustrate the proliferation of temporary international exhibitions in the 1990s. Though the Istanbul Biennial and the Dakar Biennale (rebranded as Dak'Art in 1996) date to 1987 and 1989 respectively, they are constituted in the following decade by the shows that join them a few years later, such as France's La Biennale de Lyon (1991), and the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT) in Brisbane, Australia, and the Sharjah Biennial in the United Arab Emirates, both 1993. The first editions of the now-defunct Johannesburg Biennale and the extant Gwangju Biennale in South Korea were launched in 1995, along with the SITE Santa Fe Biennial, which opened alongside its eponymous institution. In the following year, the itinerant biennial Manifesta staged its first event in Rotterdam, and was thereafter held in other European cities or sites (the Trentino-South Tyrol, for one) of regional conflict. By 1998, some countries hosted more than one biennial in different cities. This is the case for the Berlin and Liverpool Biennials, founded in 1996 and 1998 respectively, in countries with existing successive annual art exhibitions.
- ⁵ *Freeze* was on view from 6 Aug. to 29 Sept. 1988, and included the work of Steven Adamson, Angela Bulloch, Mat Collishaw, Ian Davenport, Angus Fairhurst, Anya Gallaccio, Damien Hirst, Gary Hume, Michael Landy, Abigail Lane, Sarah Lucas, Lala Meredith-Vula, Stephen Park, Richard Patterson, Simon Patterson, and Fiona Rae.
- ⁶ Curated by Araeen, the show was on view at the Hayward Gallery in London from 29 Nov. 1989 to 4 Feb. 1990, and included the work of Araeen, Saleem Arif, Frank Bowling, Sonia Boyce, Eddie Chambers, Avinash Chandra, Avtarjeet Dhanjal, Uzo Egonu, Iqbal Geoffrey, Mona Hatoum, Lubaina Himid, Gavin Jantjes, Balraj Khanna, Donald Locke, David Medalla, Ronald Moody, Ahmed Parvez, Ivan Peries, Keith Piper, Anwar Jalal Shemza, Kumiko Shimizu, Francis Newton Souza, Aubrey Williams, and Li Yuan-chia.
- ⁷ The audience surveys and attendance book for *The Other Story* are overwhelmingly positive (Hayward Gallery Library). The exhibition was also favorably received by the public in its travelling venues: Cornerhouse, Manchester, the Manchester City Art Gallery, and the Wolverhampton Art Gallery.
- ⁸ For one contemporary view of museums at the beginning of the decade, see Ivan Karp, "How Museums Define Other Cultures", *American Art* 5, nos. 1/2 (Winter/Spring 1991): 10-15.
- ⁹ Hirst showed *Boxes* (1988), along with spot paintings that were painted directly onto the wall, and Araeen showed several three-dimensional objects: *Sculpture No. 1* (1965), *Sculpture No. 2* (1965), *Second Structure* (1966-67), *Structure Blue* (1967), *Lal Kona* (1968-69), *8b5* (1970), and *Chakras* (1969-70).
- ¹⁰ Looking back to the 1990s, Kleeblatt offers an evaluation of the importance of "identity" to exhibitions then and more recently. See Norman L. Kleeblatt, "Identity Roller Coaster", *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 61-63.
- ¹¹ For one reading of this issue, see Pablo Lafuente, "From the Outside In: 'Magiciens de la Terre' and Two Histories of Exhibitions", in Lucy Steeds and others, *Making Art Global (Part 2): Magiciens de la Terre, 1989* (London: Afterall, 2013), 8-22.
- ¹² Jeremy Lewison wrote in full, "Broadly, the western artists were chosen for their affinity with ethnographic or 'primitive' art ([Shirazeh] Houshiary, [Richard] Long, [Jean-Michel] Alberola, Tony Cragg, [Louise] Bourgeois), or for issues relating to the third world." See Lewison, "'Bilderstreit' and 'Magiciens de la Terre'. Paris and Cologne", *The Burlington Magazine* 131, no. 1037 (Aug. 1989): 585.
- ¹³ This statement is taken from Araeen's transcribed statements at the exhibition's public colloquium. Reprinted in Rasheed Araeen, "Magicians of the Earth: On 'Magiciens de la Terre' 1989", in *Exhibition: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Lucy Steeds (London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2014), 129.
- ¹⁴ Marcelo Spinelli, Interview with Chris Ofili, in *"Brilliant!" New Art from London*, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1995), 67.
- ¹⁵ Douglas Maxwell, Interview with Anish Kapoor, *Art Monthly* (May 1990): 11.
- ¹⁶ Richard Dorment, "Vexed Questions of Colour", *Daily Telegraph* (London), 9 Dec. 1989.

- 17 Andrew Graham-Dixon, "Pride and Prejudice: *The Other Story* at the Hayward and Anish Kapoor at the Lisson Gallery", *The Independent* (London), 5 Dec. 1989.
- 18 Rasheed Araeen, ed., *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 1989), 106. Ryan, for one, confirms that she declined to be a part of the exhibition, but denied that fear was the reason. Author's interview with Veronica Ryan, 6 June 2008.
- 19 In addition to *Void Field* (1989), Kapoor showed *It is Man* (1989–90), *Madonna* (1989–90), *Tomb* (1989), *Black Fire* (1990), *A Wing at the Heart of Things* (1990), and *The Healing of St Thomas* (1989) in Venice.
- 20 *Void Field* had been the focus of Kapoor's 1989 solo show at his London gallery, Lisson. This show was a teaser for what he would offer in Venice and for what was being left out of *The Other Story*.
- 21 Upon seeing *Sensation* at the Royal Academy, Alexandra Anderson-Spivy described it as a "chauvinistic exercise" for British art to "vanquish New York". See Anderson-Spivy, "The Freeze Generation and Beyond", *Art Journal* 57, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 89.
- 22 This phrase frames a chapter in Julian Stallabrass's *High Art Lite: The Rise and Fall of Young British Art* (London: Verso, 1999), 237. Though highly critical of this period and the artists associated with it, Stallabrass's text was one of the earliest scholarly assessments of the YBAs, thereby helping to periodize the 1990s in Britain.
- 23 On view from 12 March to 18 May 1991, *Interrogating Identity* was co-curated by Jones and Thomas Sokolowski, then director of the Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University. After closing in New York, the show travelled through 1993 to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the Madison Art Center, Wisconsin; the Center for the Fine Arts, Miami; the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College, Ohio; and Duke University Museum of Art, Durham, NC.
- 24 Kellie Jones, "Art in the Family", in *EyeMinded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art* (Chapel Hill, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 14.
- 25 Roberta Smith, "At the Whitney, A Biennial with a Social Conscience", *New York Times*, 5 March 1993.
- 26 Rasheed Araeen, Allan deSouza, Roshini Kempadoo, and Ingrid Pollard were the other British artists in the show.
- 27 *The Light at the End* was first shown at The Showroom in London in 1989. Later that year, it was on view at the Oboro Gallery, a public venue known for showing video and hosting artist-curated projects in Montreal.
- 28 I am grateful to Mona Hatoum for providing a thorough description of *The Light at the End*.
- 29 "Michael Archer in Conversation with Mona Hatoum", in Archer and others, *Mona Hatoum* (London and New York: Phaidon, 1997), 14.
- 30 For one example of this, see Connie Butler's recollection of viewing *The Light at the End* in *Interrogating Identity* in 1991, in "'A Shock to the System': Connie Butler on Mona Hatoum's Red-Hot Minimalism", www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/book_report/phaidon-mona-hatoum-53046. See also Lynn Zelevansky, *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 17–18.
- 31 From 14 Oct. 1997 to 15 March 1998, *Transforming the Crown: African, Asian, and Caribbean Artists in Britain, 1966–1996* was split between the Studio Museum in Harlem and The Bronx Museum of the Arts. Simultaneously, the Caribbean Cultural Center hosted a solo show of Birmingham-based photographer Vanley Burke (*The Photographic Narratives of Vanley Burke*), which was billed as a component of *Transforming the Crown*.
- 32 Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* was published in Britain by Verso in 1993 and reissued in the US by Harvard University Press two years later.
- 33 For a longer discussion of *Tilted Arc*, see Harriet Senie, *The Tilted Arc Controversy: Dangerous Precedent?* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
- 34 For two viewpoints on the commission and its delays, see Brian Hatton, "Judenplatz Vienna 1996: Architectural Association Exhibition Gallery, 6 November–12 December 1996", Architectural Association Files, No. 33 (Summer 1997), 88–93; and Robert Storr, "The *Struggle Between* Forgetting and Remembering", *Artnews* 96, no. 3 (March 1997): 127–28.

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Sensational Cities

John J. Curley

Abstract

The controversial and hugely popular exhibition Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection opened at the Royal Academy in London in 1997, before travelling to Berlin and Brooklyn over the next three years. While best remembered for its highly controversial works and brash assertions of "Britishness", the exhibition, especially its sculptural objects by Damien Hirst and Rachel Whiteread, registers a common, post-industrial attitude to urban space at the end of the millennium. While Sensation might have seemed subversive, it aligns with the rapid gentrification that transformed the former functionality of its host cities into qualities to be fetishized.

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Figure 1.

Alex Hartley, *Ronan Point*, 1995, black-and-white photograph, MDF and steel, 200 x 90 x 35 cm Digital image courtesy of the artist

Alex Hartley's *Untitled (Ronan Point)* from 1995 garnered little attention when it was exhibited in *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* in London (1997), Berlin (1998–99), and Brooklyn (1999–2000).¹ Its steel and fibreboard Minimalist box is fronted with a monumental blurred photograph of Ronan Point, the London tower block that was partially destroyed in a gas explosion in 1968 (fig. 1). The disaster, which resulted in the deaths of four residents, had come to stand for the erosion of confidence in British public housing, not unlike the later demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe complex in St Louis, Missouri, in 1972. Hartley's sculpture seems to equate the Minimalism of an artist like Donald Judd to a failed utopian impulse advocating affordable modern apartments for the masses. If Ronan Point collapsed, the sculpture suggests, so did faith in mere formal exercises in

sculptural and geometric form. Both art audiences and urban dwellers in the late 1990s wanted something besides lifeless Minimalism. *Sensation* offered something to both groups.

While painting, especially in the London and Brooklyn venues, was the focus of attention due to the controversial subject matter of a couple of works (which Courtney J. Martin discusses further in her essay in this special issue),

² I want to argue that *Sensation* was, at heart, a show about the body's relation to time and place; a show, then, whose concerns were largely sculptural. It is no accident that the exhibited artists who remain the most relevant are predominantly sculptors: Damien Hirst, Rachel Whiteread, and Sarah Lucas. As Hartley's work implies, the sculptural concerns of *Sensation* turned upon questions of the city, especially referencing discarded objects and urban spaces. By this logic, even the flat photographs of Richard Billingham, depicting his father living in spectacular urban poverty, can refer to the viewer's own social, economic, and geographical position whether in London, Berlin, or Brooklyn. Instructors at Goldsmiths College, where many of the *Sensation* artists (known collectively as the "Young British Artists", or YBAs) received their training, were well-versed in postmodern theories of site-specificity and the contingency of the viewing experience. ³ Especially considering the shock tactics and visceral nature of much of the art on display (Hirst's pickled animals or Marcus Harvey's painterly pornography, for instance), viewers' experiences in the exhibition approximate to a sculptural encounter.

Julian Stallabrass has discussed how many of the artists in *Sensation* are interested in what he calls "the urban pastoral", engaging the imagery and attitudes of the working-class city, but in a way that transforms these forms—and the urban fabric itself—into spectacle. ⁴ Considering the box office success of *Sensation* in its three host cities—London, Berlin, and Brooklyn—and the fact that each locale was declared a global capital of "cool" in the years immediately before or after the exhibition, can we view the works in the exhibition as marking a specific transatlantic attitude to urban space at the end of the millennium? Do these works, at some fundamental level, posit a common artistic language of post-industrial world cities? As we saw with *Untitled (Ronan Point)*, it is my contention that the art in *Sensation* thematizes urban transformations: from places of functional particularity to those merely fetishizing an image of particularity. Certain post-industrial details—factory fittings, dirty bricks, discarded objects, and the like—served as the nostalgic exception to the rule of slick global capital around 2000. While critics have focused much on the particular "Britishness" of the art in *Sensation*, in what follows I will consider the relation of the works to broader economic and social forces operative on both sides of the Atlantic.

⁵ Fetishizing national stereotypes—whether British obsessions with class

hierarchy or a characteristic British working-class “brashness”—distracts from the larger issue at hand: the ways *Sensation* registers the homogenizing forces of global capital in environments in circa 2000.

Even though *Sensation* opened at the Royal Academy of Arts in the heart of London’s Mayfair, one can argue that the exhibition brought London’s East End into these wealthy environs.⁶ As Richard Shone discussed in the catalogue: “The fragmented, despoiled, high-rise, war-scarred urban landscape of the East End and Docklands has made an immeasurable impact on the look of much recent art.”⁷ Hartley’s subject, Ronan Point, once stood in Newham, East London; Michael Landy’s *Flower Cart* seems plucked from Columbia Road Flower Market; Sarah Lucas’s gritty objects, such as worn chairs, buckets, and mattresses, engage with popular images of waste-strewn streets in Hackney, to cite three examples. When London was named by *Vanity Fair* and *Newsweek* as amongst the coolest cities in the world in 1996–97, the East End, especially the area around Hoxton Square, was the epicentre of so-called “Cool Britannia”.⁸ And, as a number of commentators have noted, this moment of cultural relevance was tied to London’s emergence as a key global financial centre, located between banking hubs in Asia and the United States.⁹

Given this, it is no surprise that the London art scene charted by *Sensation* developed around exhibitions in alternative spaces, whether the former office building in Docklands where Damien Hirst staged *Freeze* in 1988, or Building One, the former biscuit factory in Bermondsey, that was the site for the important YBA exhibitions *Modern Medicine* and *Gambler* (both 1990).¹⁰ The layered history of such buildings—as well as the urban pilgrimages required to get there—could generate nostalgia for London’s industrial and colonial trading past, allowing the visual signs of ruin and former functionality to contrast with the architectural and economic abstractions of late capitalism. Put simply, these alternative exhibitions marked this transitional moment in London’s economy, poignantly highlighting what had been lost.¹¹ And these warehouse exhibitions certainly helped ease the conversion of many East End neighbourhoods away from light industry to so-called “creative industries” like design, advertising, publishing, public relations, and technology. Charles Saatchi’s conversion of a former paint factory in North London (marginal to any period geographies of the city’s contemporary art scene) into a steel and concrete white cube in 1985 predicts the YBAs’ later attitudes towards London’s material and symbolic fabric. The opening of Tate Modern in 2000 in the borough of Southwark in southeast London made such shifts explicit, as this incredibly popular museum was housed in a former power plant located about two miles away from Building One in Bermondsey.

The cities hosting *Sensation's* two international stops were in the midst of similar transitions of once-marginal areas into important sites of commerce and creativity: a recently reunified Berlin and New York City's borough of Brooklyn. *Sensation* was on view at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin from September 1998 to January 1999.¹² While it did not elicit the controversy associated with the London and Brooklyn venues, it was still a popular draw for visitors, enough so that its run was extended. Of all the major cities in Europe since the end of the Cold War, Berlin has, without a doubt, undergone the most dramatic transformation. When divided by the Berlin Wall for twenty-seven years (1962–89), the city's urban identity found itself in a condition of permanent stasis—literally two halves waiting to become whole. Furthermore, the Wall's physical footprint meant that acres of prime central real estate, like the levelled areas around Potsdamer Platz and the Brandenburg Gate, suddenly became available for development when the Wall fell. Neighbourhoods in the former East, especially Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg, began to attract artists and intellectuals from across Europe for their distinctive and unrenovated architecture, in addition to affordable rents. The 1998 edition of *Time Out Berlin* described Prenzlauer Berg, for instance, as a place full of new cafes and galleries, “inhabited by everyone from artists to yuppies”.¹³

The exhibition's location at the Hamburger Bahnhof would have directly confronted visitors with the changing nature of the city's landscape. Literally abutting the path of the former Wall, this new museum for contemporary art (opened in 1996) was surrounded by active construction sites that clearly implied the path of the Cold War barrier, especially the ambitious building projects in Potsdamer Platz and in the new government quarter, as seen in a photograph from 1998 with the Hamburger Bahnhof just out of view at the top (fig. 2). Much of the new architecture employed the abstract steel and glass vernacular of late capitalism, therefore erasing sites of contested Cold War history with a global style. The urban pastorals on view in *Sensation* could thus mark a new understanding of a unified Berlin. The Hamburger Bahnhof itself, a former train station not utilized since 1945, emphasized this message, like Tate Modern: urban functionality transformed into spectacle.



Figure 2.

Aerial View of building projects in Potsdamer Platz, Berlin with the Hamburger Bahnhof just out of view at the top, 1998 Digital image courtesy of Getty Images / Photo: Oltmann Reuter/ullstein bild

While *GQ* magazine did not name Brooklyn the “coolest city on the planet” until 2011, it had been attracting artists with its affordable real estate since the mid-1990s.¹⁴ One of the reasons the Brooklyn Museum’s director Arnold Lehman hosted *Sensation* in 1999 was to increase the institution’s engagement with contemporary art.¹⁵ As Carol Becker has noted, Lehman was, in part, “appealing to his own new constituency—the hundreds of numerous not-so-young artists and professional who are increasingly making Brooklyn their home”.¹⁶ The neighbourhood of Williamsburg, about two or three miles from the museum, has since become synonymous with a certain type of “cool” gentrification that celebrates urban “grit”, similar to the situation in the East End of London.¹⁷ Sharon Zukin has recently bemoaned the loss of the area’s particularity, the disappearance of light industry, ethnic diversity, and local shops.¹⁸ Dick Pountain and David Robbins noted the ways that the ironic and “cool” attitude that has come to define Williamsburg has “become the dominant ethic of late consumer capitalism”.¹⁹

In different ways, Damien Hirst's and Rachel Whiteread's sculptures in *Sensation* thematize these urban sites in transition. Hirst produced *A Thousand Years*, with its famous rotting cow's head, flies, and bug zapper, in 1990, when it also appeared in the exhibition *Gambler*. In the context of the industrial venue of Building One, the work can conjure up the ghosts of the site, perhaps the flies once attracted to the sticky sweet walls of the biscuit factory. Hirst's sleek steel and glass vitrine, referring back to Donald Judd's Minimalism, can also suggest the architecture and styling of the post-industrial building boom that began appearing on the London, not to mention Berlin and Brooklyn, skylines in the 1990s.²⁰ Hirst thus employs abstract forms that speak the language of international modern art and architecture. *A Thousand Years* can suggest the new life of old buildings within changing neighbourhoods: neutral steel and glass vitrines with organic, messy souls that will eventually disintegrate and disappear. In the meantime, Hirst offers up this transformation as violent spectacle. The work can suggest the shift from the distinctive and functional particularity of world cities to one conceptualized via the predatory logic of late capitalism.

While decidedly more melancholic, Rachel Whiteread's work in *Sensation*, such as *Ghost* from 1990, also addresses urban transformations (fig. 3). Whiteread cast the interior of a North London Victorian parlour, effectively turning the room inside-out and making it into something resembling a mausoleum. Traces of soot visible on the protruding void of the fireplace punctuate such a loss of use. Furthermore, the sculpture communicated this isolation through its aesthetics; Simon Watney comments on this effect in the context of her work *House* from 1993 (her cast of the interior of an entire East End terraced house), but his words are equally apt for *Ghost*: "*House* places us in two places at once, in two dimensions—inside and outside. We gaze at its exterior, composed of interior walls, trapped forever outside and inside."²¹ The viewer and the ideas of comfortable familiarity and community represented by domesticity are thus doubly and radically isolated from one another. Whether referring to London's rapidly changing fabric, the fetishized *altbau* in neighbourhoods in former (and ghost-like) East Berlin, or the prohibitively expensive brownstones in Brooklyn, Whiteread's work speaks poignantly to the disappearance and spectacularization of particularity in these locales. *Ghost's* showing at the Saatchi Gallery in 1992 – itself a space that had undergone conversion from factory to gallery—perhaps conveyed just these notions.



Figure 3.

Installation View, Rachel Whiteread, *Ghost*, 1990, plaster on steel frame, 269 × 355.5 × 317.5 cm, Saatchi Gallery, London, 1990 Digital image courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery / Photo: Mike Bruce

Hirst's and Whiteread's works do have a particular British specificity but they also, when considered through *Sensation's* international venues, resonate with international artists of this period who deal with similar issues of urban transformation. In 1992, for instance, Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco pushed a heavy plasticine ball around the streets of New York (*Yielding Stone*), which literally incorporated the urban detritus it encountered. This object, when displayed as art, transforms into a kind of nostalgic urban fetish, especially given the context of Mayor Rudy Giuliani's sterilizing gentrification of New York after his election in 1993. Even Ai Weiwei's destruction and repurposing aspects of antique Chinese objects (including architecture), begun around 1995, registers the violence of China's own version of capitalist speculation. Perhaps *Sensation* had such international resonance around 2000 because the exhibition treated these site-specific themes of urban transformations in what had become an international language of contemporary art: accessible and recognizable forms that still engaged with art's history of Minimalism and conceptualism. In the context of Hirst and others, Stallabrass called this practice "high art lite".

Critics have labelled the artists in *Sensation* "Thatcher's Children"—referring to former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher—namely for their entrepreneurial acumen in organizing exhibitions and generating press coverage during periods of minimal public funding for the arts.²² We might also see artists

like Hirst and Whiteread as more specifically allegorizing the transformation of urban space in the aftermath of Thatcher's embrace of global capitalism. Returning to Alex Hartley's *Untitled (Ronan Point)*, the sculpture clearly and poignantly fetishizes the failures and reconfigurations of the postwar welfare state, especially since one of Thatcher's most controversial schemes was the privatization of public housing. By the late 1990s, fashionable Londoners were "queuing up" to live in tower blocks similar to Ronan Point that had been renovated and turned over to private firms.²³ Such literal urban transformations are recalled in *Sensation's* symbolic conversions of older models of productive urbanism into the international language of contemporary art, including its monetary worth. The exhibition itself has been cited as a cynical ruse by Charles Saatchi to increase the value of his collection; he auctioned works by *Sensation* artists (at exhibition sponsor Christie's) after the London run of the show.²⁴ This arrangement emphasizes a similar attitude present in the art itself in *Sensation*—objects complicit with new forms of enterprise and capital.

Footnotes

- 1 The exhibition was also scheduled to open at the National Gallery of Australia in June 2000, but was cancelled due to ethical questions concerning the show's funding. Saatchi and the auction house Christie's provided support for the Brooklyn venue, even though both parties had a clear financial stake in the works. See Carol Vogel, "Australian Museum Cancels Controversial Art Show", *New York Times*, 1 Dec. 1999. I briefly address the funding controversy at the end of the essay.
- 2 In London, the offending work was Marcus Harvey's *Myra* (1995) and in New York, Chris Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary* (1996). For a comprehensive look at both controversies, see Lela Capri Rosenberg, "The Meaning of *Sensation*: Young British Art in the Nineties" (PhD diss., Duke University, 2008).
- 3 Jon Thompson, Michael Craig-Martin, Richard Wentworth, and Yehuda Safran taught there. See Richard Shone, "From 'Freeze' to *House*: 1988-1994", in Norman Rosenthal and others, *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 18-19.
- 4 Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art of the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999), esp. 237-45. My thinking about YBAs owes much to Stallabrass's scholarship. Some of the ideas in this essay are also drawn from my own work on the subject. See my "Inside the New White Cube: The Ideology of Warehouse Exhibitions and the Aestheticization of Urban Space in London, 1988-98" (MA thesis, University of Manchester/Sotheby's Institute, 1998).
- 5 For instance, see Stallabrass's discussion of the artists' use of British stereotypes in *High Art Lite*, 225-57.
- 6 *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*, 18 Sept.—28 Dec. 1997, curated by Charles Saatchi and Norman Rosenthal (Royal Academy of Arts, London).
- 7 Shone, "From 'Freeze' to *House*", 16.
- 8 David Kamp, "London Swings! Again!", *Vanity Fair*, March 1997, 199-28; Stryker McGuire and Michael Elliot, "London Reigns," *Newsweek*, 4 Nov. 1996, 34-36.
- 9 Simon Ford and Anthony Davies, "Art Capital", *Art Monthly* 213 (Feb. 1998): 2.
- 10 *Freeze*, 6 Aug.—29 Sept. 1988 (three parts), curated by Damien Hirst (PLA Building, London); *Modern Medicine* opened 1 March 1990, curated by Damien Hirst, Carl Freedman, and Billee Sellman (Building One, London); *Gambler* opened 1 July 1990, curated by Carl Freedman, and Billee Sellman (Building One, London).
- 11 Aidan White, "Locating Art Worlds: London and the Making of Young British Art", *Area* 35, no. 3 (Sept. 2003): 252, 261. For a contemporary understanding about the transformations of urban space in post-industrial locales, see Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989).
- 12 *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*, 30 Sept. 1998—30 Jan. 1999, curated by Charles Saatchi and Norman Rosenthal (Hamburger Bahnhof für Gegenwartskunst, Berlin).
- 13 Dave Rimmer, ed., *Time Out Berlin*, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 1998), 57.
- 14 "Brooklyn is the Coolest City on the Planet: An Eater's Guide", *GQ*, Nov. 2011. Online version: <http://www.gq.com/food-travel/travel-features/201111/brooklyn-new-york-guide-food-dining>.

- 15 Carol Becker, "The Brooklyn Controversy: A View from the Bridge", in *Unsettling "Sensation": Arts-Policy Lessons from the Brooklyn Museum of Art Controversy*, ed. Lawrence Rothfield (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 17; *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*, 2 Oct. 1999–9 Jan. 2000, curated by Charles Saatchi, Norman Rosenthal, and Charlotta Kotik (Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn).
- 16 Becker, "Brooklyn Controversy", 17.
- 17 Sharon Zukin notes how the adjective "gritty" did not appear in the context of Brooklyn until the gentrification of the 1990s. See her *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 51.
- 18 Zukin, *Naked City*, 35–61.
- 19 Dick Pountain and David Robins, *Cool Rules: Anatomy of an Attitude* (London: Reaktion, 2000), 28.
- 20 Joshua Shannon discusses the appearance of International Style skyscrapers in 1960s New York in similar terms. See his *The Disappearance of Objects: New York Art and the Rise of the Postmodern City* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).
- 21 Simon Watney, "About the House", *Parkett* 42 (Dec. 1994): 107.
- 22 Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, 127.
- 23 See Terence Conran, *Terence Conran on London* (London: Conran Octopus, 2000), 39.
- 24 See, for instance, Michael Kimmelman, "Critic's Notebook: In the End, the 'Sensation' is Less the Art than the Money", *New York Times*, 3 Nov. 1999.

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***Brilliant! New Art from London, Walker Art Center,
1995–96***

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There can be little doubt that the accepted origins of the Young British Artists (YBAs) began with *Freeze*, the exhibition organized by Damian Hirst in 1988. It was packed with graduates of Goldsmiths College where the artist and educator Michael Craig-Martin had recently revamped the curriculum to allow students to choose from a buffet of courses, rather than using the *prix fixe* menu. Hirst turned out to be a natural entrepreneur and guided his fellow Goldsmiths' graduates into the public eye well before the traditional art world machinations would have allowed. After *Freeze* came *Modern Medicine*, spearheaded by Hirst, Carl Freedman, and Billee Sellman, and *East Country Yard Show*, devised by Sarah Lucas and Henry Bond, both in 1990. A year later, the Serpentine Gallery endorsed what was beginning to feel something like a movement in its *Broken English* exhibition, overseen by Hirst.

In 1992, the artists came to New York for a politely titled exhibition—*Twelve British Artists*—curated for the Barbara Gladstone Gallery by the freelance British/American curator, Clarissa Dalrymple. At the time I was the director of the gallery and saw the show come together. The quiet title was, I think, a decision to de-sensationalize a selection of artists who were hopefully to be presented on a level playing field. In preparation for the show, Barbara and I joined Clarissa in London for a round of studio visits made remarkable by the incredible loyalty of many of the artists to each other. Accompanying us was the private dealer Helen van der Meij-Tcheng, who was a mentor to a number of the artists. I remember all of us having intense conversations about what the artists were up to, what was bratty and what was genius, whose work defined the moment, and what work looked disposable. The artists were all at the beginnings of their careers, so the curatorial intention was not to set up a horse race between them. In the end Clarissa made her choices, and the young Londoners (as indeed they all were) came to New York.

Twelve British Artists was composed of work by Lea Andrews, Keith Coventry, Anya Gallaccio, Liam Gillick, Damien Hirst, Gary Hume, Abigail Lane, Sarah Lucas, Steven Pippin, Marc Quinn, Marcus Taylor, and Rachel Whiteread. Some I thought were extraordinary; others not so much. Nonetheless, it was bracing to see who stood out for Clarissa and to hear her selection reasoning, which was an invigorating mix of impulse and sociology. Helen, who had worked for many years with Sigmar Polke, Anselm Kiefer, and Georg Baselitz, introduced a number of the artists to the Valhallan aspirations of contemporary German painting. To be sure, it was antithetical to the British, anti-Thatcher social critique, but for some the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* stuck. Years later (just prior to *Brilliant!*) I remember Helen hiring a bus to take a raucous group of artists (the usual suspects) to see the Polke retrospective at Tate Liverpool (January–March 1995), and the enormous impact it had on us all. At one point, Gary Hume declaimed that every young British artist should be thrown on their knees in front of Polke's paintings. At the same time, Polke's hand-made, easy-peasy sculpture must have felt very familiar and heartening.

Back in New York, I thought that Sarah Lucas and Anya Gallaccio offered the freshest statements on the virtue of directness. While Lucas had an astringent tabloid vocabulary, Gallaccio was collecting flowers from a Gothic graveyard. Steven Pippin was the poster boy for a British eccentricity that was part Monty Python and part Pickwickian. In the one interesting review by an American writer, Peter Schjeldahl commented that Pippin was the author of “the single most beautiful object in the show” (*Wow & Flutter*, now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York).¹ The only other attempt at beauty was Damien Hirst’s *Still Pursuing Impossible Desires*—a very maudlin title for such a young artist. The work was an enormous vitrine filled with hatched larvae and dead butterflies, as if millions of these exquisite things had no other destiny than to perish for art’s sake. Marc Quinn also trended morbid with what looked like a flayed skin, auto-portrait, punningly titled *You Take My Breath Away*. It was, in its way, a disturbingly pathetic version of the satyr Marsyas after the skinning. I remember the reaction of one visitor who pointed to it and commented to her friend, “This is what my last husband looked like after I finished with him.”

The other artists—Keith Coventry, Liam Gillick, Gary Hume, Abigail Lane, Marcus Taylor, and Rachel Whiteread—showed work that was already signature and, in most cases, acted as a critique of classic modernism. The one exception to all the rules was Lea Andrews, who created an installation in the gallery basement. The space was left in near darkness and featured three enlarged back-and-white photographs of a young boy with a mop of blond hair. In two of the images, the child (short pants, knee socks) is alone. In the central image, he is held by a man in a pose that looks uncomfortable but is otherwise open to interpretation. There was also a soundtrack of a child crying that echoed very softly in the space. In a way it was too much, but at the same time it was spookily effective. Even viewers who were annoyed with it succumbed to its awful ambiguity. The show received a lot of attention, caught the eyes of both curators and collectors, sold well, and seeded the New York art yard with a small wave of young artists. Seven of the group went on to join New York galleries and most continued to be regulars in the always-developing international market.

When I arrived at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, in 1994, I spent weeks in the painting racks taking copious notes and trying to understand the trajectory of the collection. Two of the things that immediately piqued my interest were a residue of work by Italian and British artists working in the early to mid-1960s. As it turned out, the Italian material had come into the collection in anticipation of an exhibition to be curated by Martin Friedman, the Walker’s then director. The paper trail is fascinating, including an almost comic series of letters between Friedman and Germano Celant, the critic and entrepreneur, which is a narrative of missed appointments and misunderstood agendas. The show never happened and it is not totally clear

why, other than a probable Italian/American collision of expectations and language. The 1965 exhibition of British art, *London: The New Scene*, seems to have come off without a hitch with most of the artists in attendance. It was also perfectly timed, coming as it did on the heels of *Time Magazine's* legendary cover story on "Swinging London".² The young artists selected by Friedman were not known in the US and, in some cases, were still defining their artistic identity. The works which entered the permanent collection at the time were paintings by David Hockney, Howard Hodgkin, Bridget Riley, and Joseph Tilson (for Hockney, the exhibition was the beginning of a long and productive relationship with the Walker).

What occurred to me after learning of Friedman's show was that it was only a year away from its thirtieth anniversary in 1995. The temptation to update *London: The New Scene* was an exciting possibility, and I was happy when Kathy Halbreich, the Walker's director, allowed me to take it on. Part of the pleasure was to revisit the London artists and see those whose work I wasn't aware of previously. I continued to listen to Van der Meij-Tchen and added Michael Craig-Martin. Douglas Fogle (then a National Endowment of the Arts Curatorial Fellow) became a complete partner and sounding board at every stage of the project. From Clarissa's checklist, I continued on with eight of her twelve artists and eventually added another twelve (I'm counting the Chapman brothers—Jake and Dinos—as one). Aside from the Chapmans, the new group included Henry Bond (collaborating with Liam Gillick), Glenn Brown, Adam Chodzko, Matt Collishaw, Tracey Emin, Angus Fairhurst, Michael Landy, Chris Ofili, Alessandro Raho, Georgina Starr, Sam Taylor-Wood, and Gillian Wearing. The same feeling of solidarity that I had noticed in 1992 was still the norm. One studio inevitably led to another, and the artists' unity, superficial or sincere, made it seem as if something quite new and collectivized was taking place.



Figure 1.

Brilliant! New Art from London, view during the installation of at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Oct. 1995, showing (from left) works by Dinos Chapman, Richard Flood, Sam Taylor-Wood, and Jack Chapman
Digital image courtesy of Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

It was also a time in London when the response to anything was “Brilliant!”: an expression of bereavement, an insult, whatever; all were met with “brilliant”. In the end, the word meant nothing; it just filled up dead space in a culture that needed to keep the conversation going at all costs. I loved the word because by the time I encountered it, it was almost as vacant as a sneeze, and I thought it was the perfect title for the exhibition. I asked Stuart Morgan to write an essay on the word for the exhibition’s publication and he made a brilliant job of it. From our studio visits, we ended up with a core group of exhibitors who were mostly all friends. There were also those artists who were resistant to the clubby inner circle, and functioned best without those distractions that provided energy for the others. During this time we began working on the exhibition’s publication, which assumed the form of a newsstand tabloid which was then, as now, unavoidable on the streets of London.³ We poured over British tabloids and let their tawdriness be our guide. The unfortunate controversy that came out of the publication was set off by its cover, which portrayed the aftermath of the Bishopsgate bombing in London in 1993. The British Council, who had been a supporter from the get-go, was deeply unhappy, as were a number of the artists and supporters. For me, the cover was an expression of the horror of the times (just as the tabloid was) and the brand-new reality of terrorism in our cities. In the US it began with the bombing of the World Trade Center (also in 1993) which left six dead and one thousand injured. It was impossible not to acknowledge that everything had suddenly changed; the art of the young as well. Even as

we worked on the exhibition, domestic terrorism hit Oklahoma City in a bombing that killed sixty-eight (many of them children) and injured well over a hundred people. Was *Brilliant!*'s cover justified? I thought that the image said everything about the new world we were entering, much more than any essay could Here it is: this is our reality. It wasn't intended to be an insult but to make a statement.



Figure 2.

Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Urbemensch*, 1995, fibre-glass, mixed media, and paint, 144 × 72 × 72 cm Digital image courtesy of Jake and Dinos Chapman

All of the artists came to Minnesota with the exception of Hirst, Lucas, and Whiteread. The happy-puppy syndrome didn't survive the journey and there were underlying tensions throughout the installation. I think part of the problem was the shifting hierarchy among the artists. Things had begun to change as some of their work grew increasingly sought after. The early publicity about the exhibition came from publications like *Interview* and *Vogue*, which indicated the beginning of a branding problem. It was fine PR,

but the American art journals were nowhere to be seen; the exhibition simply wasn't on their radar. There was a small wave of enquiries asking if Hirst would be represented by "any animal things". He wasn't, because I didn't want the exhibition to be overwhelmed by angry animal rights groups which were already poised to react. The local media was most taken by Tracey Emin's welcoming tent, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With*, and viewed it with affection rather than opprobrium.

The exhibition's *Gesamtkunstwerk* was Michael Landy's installation, *Scrapheap Services*, which, from our first conversation, was clearly not going to be effective in a formal space. Michael came to Minneapolis well in advance of the show and we took him to a succession of spaces that might be adapted for the work. He eventually settled on an abandoned soap factory that had decades of built-up fat on the floor. A not-for-profit arts group had just taken possession of the building and agreed to help scrape up the debris together with a force from the Walker. It was a model partnership, and during the opening buses ran between the Walker and the Soap Factory. The work itself was a vast meditation on the homeless, the indigent, the ill, and the infirm—anyone who was a drag on the anchor of progress. There were enormous piles of tiny, uniformly cut, tin men. There were uniformed workers brooming them up and feeding them into huge compacting machines. It was an enormously powerful piece of agitprop in an exhibition where social critique was an insistent throb (figs. 3 and 4).



Figure 3.

Installation views, *Brilliant! New Art from London*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 22 Oct. 1995–7 Jan. 1996, showing Michael Landy, *Scrapheap Services*, 1995, mixed media installation with customized chipper/shredder; two silk-screened baked enamel street signs; five mannequins with standardized uniforms; seven trash bins; trash bin carrier, dimensions variable Digital image courtesy of Michael Landy



Figure 4.

Installation views, Brilliant! New Art from London, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 22 Oct. 1995–7 Jan. 1996, showing Michael Landy, *Scrapheap Services*, 1995, mixed media installation with customized chipper/shredder; two silk-screened baked enamel street signs; five mannequins with standardized uniforms; seven trash bins; trash bin carrier, dimensions variable Digital image courtesy of Michael Landy

Sarah Lucas and Gillian Wearing both pledged allegiance to the other, the disenfranchised, with, in the case of Lucas, a comradely irony, and, in the case of Wearing, an aggressive sympathy. Wearing's *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992–93), is arguably one of the great conceptual works of the early 1990s. With its recognizable chorus from the streets, its people are impossible not to identify with. The pink, pudgy-cheeked chap with jacket and striped tie looks like management, but the sign he holds reads "I'm desperate", and completely undercuts the apparent reality. Other signs are

silly or clever; still others are heart-breaking, like “I signed on and they would not give me nothing.” The *Signs* series was also one of the most imitated of the decade, turning up on television and in magazine advertisements.



Figure 5.

Installation view, *Brilliant! New Art from London*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 22 Oct. 1995–7 Jan. 1996, showing, left to right: Sarah Lucas, “Hello Stranger” (part of *Shine On*), 1991, Damien Hirst, *Alphaprodine*, 1993 Digital image courtesy of Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

By the end of the exhibition, much of the work had found its way into private collections and prices for some of the artists had escalated. Relationships had changed and friendships were both strengthened and weakened. If I could do it over again, I wouldn’t change a thing. Even mistakes become an important part of the narrative. Today, almost everyone in the exhibition is still making art—and, yes, “Brilliant!” is still tossed around like coin of the realm.

Footnotes

- 1 Peter Schjeldahl, “Twelve British Artists: Barbara Gladstone Gallery, NY”, *Frieze* 7 (Nov./Dec. 1992): 45.
- 2 *Time*, 15 April 1966.
- 3 Stuart Morgan, Richard Flood, and others, *Brilliant: New Art from London* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1995).

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Schjeldahl, Peter. “Twelve British Artists: Barbara Gladstone Gallery, NY.” *Frieze* 7 (Nov./Dec. 1992): 45.

Real/Life: New British Art and the Reception of Contemporary British Art in Japan

Kajiya Kenji

Abstract

This essay explores the ways in which the exhibition Real/Life: New British Art was conceived and received in Japan, where contemporary British art has been shown since the 1960s. Taking place at five museums in the country between 1998 and 1999, the exhibition aimed to show how British artists in the 1990s struggled with realities, internal and external, but its response was not as satisfactory as was expected. The essay examines the exhibition as a turning point for the transformation of exhibition culture in Japan from nationally themed exhibitions to showcases of contemporary art in the global context.

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Contemporary British art began to be shown in Japan in the 1960s. *Recent British Sculpture* was held at the Bridgestone Gallery (now Bridgestone Museum of Art), in Tokyo and the National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto in 1964; and *Recent Prints by Some British Painters and Sculptors* took place at the above museum in Kyoto in 1969 and Niigata Prefectural Museum of Art in 1970. Both were worldwide travelling exhibitions organized by the British Council.¹

In 1970 the first full-scale group exhibition planned in Japan, *Contemporary British Art*, was held at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo, following a Henry Moore show the previous year. Organized by the museum and the British Council, it featured forty-eight artworks made in the 1960s by twenty-five artists in their thirties and forties.² Many participating artists could be categorized as “New Generation” sculptors, such as Phillip King, Tim Scott, and William Tucker, but also included were artists of the previous generation such as Eduardo Paolozzi, William Turnbull, and Anthony Caro, as well as younger Pop artists such as Peter Blake, David Hockney, and Allen Jones.

After the 1970 survey exhibition, three major group shows of contemporary British art took place at Japanese museums, in 1982, 1990, and 1998. Because the curators and institutions that organized the three exhibitions loosely overlapped with each other, they conceived the three shows as part of a continuing project of showing contemporary British art in Japan.

Aspects of British Art Today in 1982 was the first and biggest show of the three, and travelled to five cities: Tokyo, Utsunomiya, Osaka, Fukuoka, and Sapporo.³ It featured 177 artworks by thirty-three artists.⁴ The introductory section contained nineteen works by eight known artists, including Anthony Caro, Phillip King, and Bridget Riley, and the main section had 158 artworks made during the past five years by twenty-five artists, who were, at the time, less well known in Japan, such as Tony Cragg, Gilbert & George, David Hockney, Howard Hodgkin, Richard Long, and David Nash.

Cragg’s sculptures made of plastic rubbish he found in Tokyo and Nash’s wooden sculptures made in the mountain snow near Nikkō aroused particular interest.⁵ The fact that they made their works during their stay in Japan, without bringing works made in their own country, left a vivid impression on the Japanese audience. Because all four museums to which the exhibition travelled apart from the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum were opened in the 1970s, many of the curators learned how to introduce contemporary foreign art and artists to Japan through organizing this exhibition, with the ungrudging support of the British Council.⁶ After the show, David Nash had a one-man exhibition that travelled to five venues including three museums in 1984–85, and Anthony Green also had a solo

circulating exhibition at four museums in 1987–88. Roger Ackling, Mark Boyle, Tony Cragg, Barry Flanagan, Hamish Fulton, Gilbert & George, Alan Green, Nigel Hall, David Hockney, Richard Long, Bruce McLean, and Paul Neagu were offered solo shows at galleries in Japan in the 1980s.⁷ The number of their exhibitions in Japan is an indication of the ways in which contemporary British art had an impact on the art world in Japan, functioning as an alternative to the austere aesthetics of Mono-ha artists and their monotonous shapes and styles that were prevalent in 1970s Japan.

British Art Now: A Subjective View was the second of the three post-1970 shows. Held in 1990, it travelled to six cities: Tokyo, Fukuoka, Nagoya, Utsunomiya, Kobe, and Hiroshima.⁸ Organized by the museums, the British Council, and the Asahi Shimbun, the show focused on British art made after 1983, resulting in the selection of fifty-two artworks by sixteen artists including Cragg, Richard Deacon, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Andy Goldsworthy, Antony Gormley, and Anish Kapoor.⁹ The artists who were selected had not been included in the 1982 show, with the exception of Cragg, whose inclusion was decided due to his importance for the “New British Sculpture” and the transformation of his style after the 1982 show, according to Shioda Junichi, a curator who was involved with all the three shows.¹⁰ The subtitle, *A Subjective View*, reflected the organizers’ intention to avoid the characterization and categorization of contemporary British art. Shioda writes that, as a result of their research in London in 1988, they were impressed by “the diversity of contemporary British art and the independence of the artists”. That is why they concluded that “the best way to convey the essence of British art was to stress the artists’ individuality.”¹¹ In spite of their emphasis on the individuality of the artists, their presupposition of “the essence of British art” was handed down to the next show, held eight years later.

The third and final exhibition, *Real/Life: New British Art*, was held in five cities between 1998 and 1999: Utsunomiya, Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Tokyo, and Ashiya (fig. 1).¹² It featured British art made after the mid-1990s and comprised twenty-seven works by twelve artists: Mat Collishaw, Willie Doherty, Ceal Floyer, Anya Gallaccio, Mona Hatoum, Gary Hume, Sarah Lucas, Georgina Starr, Sam Taylor-Wood, Gillian Wearing, and Rachel Whiteread (fig. 2). In contrast to the previous two shows which had focused on painting, sculpture, and photography, video projection was conspicuous at this exhibit, featuring in more than half of the exhibited works. For this show, three curators (Shioda Junichi from Tokyo, Sugimura Hiroya from Tochigi, and Suhama Motoko from Hiroshima) and two representatives of the organizers (Obikane Akio from the Asahi Shimbun and Sakurai Takeshi from the British Council’s Tokyo Office) went to London, Liverpool, Manchester, and Glasgow in the autumn of 1995. They saw the Turner Prize show at the Tate Gallery (now

Tate Britain), where Damien Hirst won the prize, and *The British Art Show 4* in Manchester, which included many “Young British Artists” (YBAs). They also saw *Brilliant!* at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, a showcase of YBAs in the United States, although they were not able to see the *Life/Live* exhibition at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, from October 1996 to January 1997.



Figure 1.

Installation view, *Real/Life: New British Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, 10 Oct.-13 Dec circa 1998, showing Sam Taylor-Wood, *Atlantic*, 1997, three screen projection with sound, dimensions variable Digital image courtesy of Zeit-FotoDACS ref no CL-1772 / © Shigeo Anzai



Figure 2.

Installation view, *Real/Life: New British Art*, Ashiya City Museum of Art & History, video installation with two screens, 300 × 400 cm each; and (left) Sarah Lucas, *Me Suspended (second version)*, 1993, PVC photocopies, poles, and wire. Digital image courtesy of Ashiya City Museum of Art & History / Photo: Yamamoto Atsuo

During their research trip they gathered data on more than one hundred artists. After narrowing down the selection of artists, the organizers, with slightly different members, visited Europe for further research in June 1997 before making another trip to Britain in the autumn of the same year to make their final selection, and to visit the *Sensation* show at the Royal Academy of Arts.¹³ The organizers hoped for the inclusion of work by Hirst, but the artist declined to participate in this show. According to the Foreword to the catalogue, the artist insisted that he would not participate in a show he could not be fully involved with, and that he declined to join all the group shows at that time—although this was not actually the case, given his inclusion in many group shows held in Europe and America.¹⁴

Probably adapting the *Life/Live* show in Paris for the title of the exhibition, *Real/Life* indicated the organizers' intention to show how British artists dealt with the realities of contemporary life, rather than just to introduce the latest styles and trends in British art:

Nowadays we often come across works of art which are concerned with real life, representing private lives or reflecting harsh political situations. . . . Emphases have been put on the

“pop and fashionable” aspect of the British art in the nineties that is connected with subculture. But underneath its bright surface it severely stares at reality.¹⁵

Shioda, one of the main curators of this show, regarded the reality that British artists of the 1990s were struggling with to be not so much the social and political reality on its own, but “the situation, the state of being, in which humanity finds itself today”, which, “in contemporary society, is fragmented, divided, traumatized”. That is why the participating artists often referred to wounds to the body, inner traumas, and multiple identities as both literal and figurative subjects for their works.¹⁶ But these wounds, traumas, and multiple identities were clearly not unrelated to the social and political situation at the time. The exhibition dealt with the internal reality that was shaped in relation to the social and political issues of the day.

This is exactly what the organizers wanted the exhibition to show in Japan. As Shioda writes:

The state of affairs in Britain is not irrelevant to Japan. During the latter half of the 1990s, the collapse of existing systems and other difficult circumstances affecting human existence have stepped up rapidly, reaching by now almost tragic proportions. For such reasons, New British Art, with its examination of fragmented and traumatized being, will surely be seen by many people as being of universal significance.¹⁷

The 1990s saw the bursting of the economic bubble in Japan and the prolonged recession it caused, in addition to the increasing sense of unease brought about by tragedies such as the Great Hanshin earthquake and the Tokyo subway sarin attack in 1995 and the Kobe child murders in 1997. Wounds, traumas, and identities should have been topics of interest to many people in Japan.

But it seems that the high-minded ambitions of this exhibition were not completely understood by its audience. In his review of the show, Sawaragi Noi, a leading Japanese art critic known for his fondness for subculture, emphasized the close connections between contemporary British art and subculture.¹⁸ In her review for *Bijutsu Techō*, the most popular contemporary art magazine in Japan, Katō Emiko, an independent curator, insisted on the difficulty of presenting the “real time” of contemporary art in big institutions, owing to the complicated ways in which such institutions operated.¹⁹ These

reviews indicate that the critics prioritized their own agendas, without paying attention to the proposed idea of reality and its significance in Japan. Few of the other reviews in Japan seem to have been any different.

Ultimately it is important to consider at least how far the show succeeded in introducing contemporary British art to Japan. Sugimura Hiroya, a curator at the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, who participated in the last two exhibitions, writes that although they recognized the rising popularity of the YBAs in Europe, the intention of the *Real/Life* exhibition was not only to introduce YBAs to Japan:

British art in the '90s, rich in the entrepreneurial spirit while maintaining its links with subcultures, has been a major stimulus to modern art in other parts of the world. . . . one almost has the impression that the 90s in Britain has been the age of the YBAs. However, they were something more than that. There are others too, such as the energetic artists who clustered in alternative spaces in Glasgow; the artists who carry on their activities in Northern Ireland, such as the Willie Doherty represented in the present exhibition; and others who, like Mona Hatoum, remain in London yet tread a solitary path. Anya Gallaccio, who formerly showed work in *Freeze*,²⁰ has extended her sphere of activity all over the world. . . . British artists skillfully evade school and return to their own individual places.²¹

By including non-YBAs such as Doherty, Hatoum and Floyer, *Real/Life* aimed to introduce not only YBAs but more broadly the current situation of contemporary British art. But its ambition was not understood in a satisfactory way in spite of the rising interest in British culture in Japan in the late 1990s. In the sphere of contemporary art, Japan began to foster an interest in young artists at home and in Asia rather than just following in the footsteps of European and American art, as it had been for a long time.

In terms of introducing European and American art to Japan, nationally themed exhibitions had been popular for a long time in the country together with one-person shows. But this framework was losing its validity in the late 1990s, when local governments began to cut down the budgets of the public museums by outsourcing their operations to *shitei kanrisha*, or designated administrators, whose system was legislated in 2003, for greater efficiency and transparency. That is why public museums began to have difficulty organizing large-scale exhibitions of overseas art based on long-term research at home and abroad. Another reason for the decrease of nationally themed exhibitions, especially for European and American art, was that the idea of national schools, or groupings, became increasingly questionable, in

view of the increasingly transnational character of much contemporary art. It was not until the early years of the twenty-first century that the YBAs achieved the fame they deserved in Japan, not so much as a major movement in the 1990s within the United Kingdom, but rather as what triggered recent tendencies in contemporary art in the global context. In this sense, the *Real/Life* exhibition was a turning point for the transformation of exhibition culture in Japan and beyond around the turn of the millennium. It should be better considered as an historically important exhibition that encapsulated the practices developed by Japanese museums over the years, for dealing with contemporary art from overseas up to the point where they, like everyone else, were overtaken by the surge in globalization of the art world.

Footnotes

- 1 *Recent British Sculpture* travelled to Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, and Hong Kong between 1961 and 1964; *Recent Prints by Some British Painters and Sculptors*, with several different titles, travelled to Mexico, Cuba, Peru, India, Japan, Portugal, Spain, Denmark, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, and Colombia between 1968 and 1975. See <http://visualarts.britishcouncil.org/exhibitions/exhibition/artistas-grficos-britnicos-de-la-dcade-del-60-gravuras-de-artistas-britnicos-na-dcade-dos-60-1968> (accessed 1 Oct. 2015) and *British Artists' Prints of the Sixties: A British Council Exhibition* (London: British Council, 1973).
- 2 The participating artists were David Annesley, Peter Blake, Anthony Caro, Patrick Caulfield, Bernard Cohen, Robyn Denny, Barry Flanagan, David Hall, Richard Hamilton, David Hockney, Howard Hodgkin, John Hoyland, Allen Jones, Phillip King, R. B. Kitaj, Mark Lancaster, Eduardo Paolozzi, Bridget Riley, Tim Scott, Peter Sedgley, Richard Smith, Joe Tilson, William Tucker, William Turnbull, and John Walker.
- 3 The venues were Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts in Utsunomiya, National Museum of Art in Osaka, Fukuoka Art Museum, and Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art in Sapporo. The exhibition was organized by the museums, the British Council, and the Asahi Shimbun with the support of the Japan Foundation.
- 4 The exhibiting artists were Frank Auerbach, Anthony Caro, Patrick Caulfield, Lucian Freud, Phillip King, Kenneth Martin, Bridget Riley, John Walker, Roger Ackling, Art & Language, Adrian Berg, Mark Boyle, Tony Cragg, Michael Craig-Martin, John Davies, Braco Dimitrijević, John Edwards, Barry Flanagan, Hamish Fulton, Gilbert & George, Alan Green, Anthony Green, Nigel Hall, John Hilliard, David Hockney, Howard Hodgkin, John Hoyland, Bob Law, Richard Long, Bruce McLean, Keith Milow, David Nash, and Paul Neagu.
- 5 Shioda Junichi, "Introduction: The Selection", trans. Janet Goff, in *British Art Now: A Subjective View* (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun, 1990), 16.
- 6 The role of the British Council cannot be overemphasized. According to Henry Meyric Hughes, who was Director of Fine Arts at the Council between 1982 and 1992, the Council provided necessary contacts for Japanese curators on their various visits to London for exhibitions and arranged for them to meet artists, critics, and others as well as guiding them in their choices of artists and works and helping with the detailed loan negotiations. The Japan Foundation also played an important part in the development of artistic and curatorial exchanges between Britain and Japan. I sincerely thank Hughes for giving me useful comments on my manuscript.
- 7 *David Nash* was shown at the International Contemporary Sculpture Symposium 1984 in Moriama, Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, Miyagi Museum of Art in Sendai, Fukuoka Art Museum, and Sogetsu Hall in Tokyo. *Anthony Green 1960-86* travelled to Niigata City Art Museum, Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo, Daimaru Museum Umeda in Osaka, and Iwaki City Art Museum. For the above artists' shows at galleries, see Shioda, "Introduction", 16.
- 8 The venues were Setagaya Art Museum, Fukuoka Art Museum, Nagoya City Art Museum, Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art in Kobe, and Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art. The exhibition was organized by the museums, the British Council, and the Asahi Shimbun with the support of the Japan Foundation.
- 9 The participating artists were Steven Campbell, Helen Chadwick, Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Andy Goldsworthy, Anthony Gormley, Anish Kapoor, David Mach, Christopher Le Brun, Lisa Milroy, Paula Rego, David Tremlett, Boyd Webb, Kate Whiteford, and Adrian Wiszniewski. Richard Harris, an artist working closely with nature, was subsequently included in the showing in Fukuoka. Goldsworthy's new work was made in Utsunomiya and shown in Utsunomiya, Kobe, and Hiroshima, although his old works were shown at all the venues. Mach's large installation was shown only in Setagaya but his movable works were shown at the other venues.
- 10 Shioda, "Introduction", 17. Shioda participated in organizing each show at three different museums: Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts in 1982, Setagaya Art Museum in 1990, and Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo in 1998.
- 11 Shioda, "Introduction", 17.

- 12 The venues were Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, Fukuoka Art Museum, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo, and Ashiya City Museum of Art & History.
- 13 Chinzei Yoshimi, curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo, Obikane, Sakurai, and Yamaguchi Yōzō, curator at Fukuoka Art Museum, joined their research trip to England in June 1997 and Obikane, Sakurai, Shioda, Sugimura, Suhama, and Yamamoto Atsuo, curator at the Ashiya City Museum of Art & History, participated in their research in the fall of the same year.
- 14 The Japanese Organizers, "Foreword", in *Real/Life: New British Art* (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun, 1998), 7.
- 15 The Japanese Organizers, "Foreword", 6. I modify the English translation in the catalogue according to its original Japanese text.
- 16 Shioda Junichi, "Fragments and Traumas: A View of British Art in the 90s", trans. John Bester, separate leaflet set with the catalogue, 8-12.
- 17 Shioda, "Fragments and Traumas", 12.
- 18 Sawaragi Noi, "Sabu karuchā kara umareta Igrisu no āto: 'Riaru Raifu: Igrisu no atarashii bijutsu ten [British Art Born from Subculture: Real/Life: New British Art]", *Mr. High Fashion* 87 (Dec. 1998): 142.
- 19 Katō Emiko, "12 nin no kūru na geijutsuka tachi [12 Cool Artists]", *Bijutsu Techō* [Art Notes] 757 (June 1998): 109-23.
- 20 *Freeze* was an art exhibition held in London in July 1988. Organized by Damien Hirst, a then second-year student at Goldsmith's College, it featured works by sixteen students at his school and pioneered the subsequent development of the Young British Artists (YBAs).
- 21 Sugimura Hiroya, "Notes on 'Real/Life'", trans. John Bester, separate leaflet set with the catalogue, 5.

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With the Void, Full Powers: Anish Kapoor and the Venice Biennale of 1990

Rakhee Balaram

Abstract

In 1990, Anish Kapoor, supported by the British Council, was Britain's representative at the Venice Biennale. Still an Indian citizen at the time of his selection, Kapoor's exhibition questioned what it meant to be claimed as a "British" artist at a time when multiculturalism was at its height and, in Europe, events in Berlin would signal geopolitical change. Aligned for years with artists associated with the "New British Sculpture", Kapoor's bold exhibition at the British Pavilion would bring him international acclaim. Routinely positioned between East and West, Kapoor's sculpture and conceptual concerns were often read as universalist, but the messy postcolonial and diasporic legacies of British art force a reconsideration of this timely exhibition.

Authors

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Before his 1989 solo exhibition at the Lisson Gallery, London, it was feared that the Indian-born artist, Anish Kapoor, had reached an impasse. This exhibition marked a turning point in the artist's sculpture, which he had been practising in Britain for the previous two decades. Reviews were positive and the belief that Kapoor was "stuck" with his pigment-piled towers—a critique levelled at him since the early 1980s—seemed to dissipate with the lavish praise of the press.¹ His pointed departure from the world of "New British Sculpture"—exemplified by the mixed group of artists with whom he exhibited at the "Aperto" in Venice in 1982—towards a more independent and surreptitious terrain, was felt with his surprising selection to represent Britain in the 1990 Venice Biennale.² What the exhibition seemed to ask of its public was to see "beyond" Kapoor's previous group associations, as well as his much-touted Indian "roots", in order to further embed the artist into a British/national, or even European, mainstream. This while he was headlining for a nation for whom name and origin carried a particular weight since decolonization, and whose own art practice appeared to require a constant negotiation between identities. In spite of the formal and transcendent qualities attributed to his sculpture, they did little to dispel the charismatic figure of the artist, and the messy, albeit rich, legacy of diasporic and postcolonial concerns in British art.

One year after the fall of Berlin Wall, the year 1990 saw a shift in exhibition politics. In Europe, this was exemplified by the controversial exhibitions *Magiciens de la Terre* at the Centre Pompidou and Parc de la Villette in Paris, and Rasheed Araeen's postcolonial account of Modernism in *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* at the Hayward Gallery in London.³ Both sought a new global and/or multicultural approach to European exhibition making, however unevenly inflected across exhibition spaces. Giovanni Carandente, director of the XLIV Venice Biennale, focused on a younger international generation of artists and the possibilities to come in "Future Dimension". The latter paid special tribute to the tumultuous political events in Berlin one year earlier in "Ambiente Berlin" housed in the Italian Pavilion. African and aboriginal artists were also included in the Biennale and received special mention.⁴ Gran Fury shocked with its AIDS tribute and controversial *Pope Piece* using the penis and condoms to draw social crises, homosexuality, and activism further into the "sanctity" of Biennale culture. The Spanish sculptor Eduardo Chillida, meanwhile, returned modernist sculpture to the exhibition, with a series of iron works in the Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna which feted his win at the 1958 Biennale. Chillida's sculpture resonated with contemporary philosophy, and the "emptiness" of his sculpture was equated by Martin Heidegger to part of its space and place in the world.⁵ Space was a theme of the Biennale in Venice, or, more precisely "the relationship that the artist establishes with the surrounding space", which Carandente saw as the "definition" of that year's

exhibition.⁶ In this climate, Anish Kapoor's sandstone blocks and deconstructed sculptural forms, with their twinning of spiritualism and eroticism, created a foil, as well as a parallel, to other works seen in the exhibition; the blue-black void in the stones projected a "metaphysical" stillness in an otherwise disparate, if energetic, Biennale. Poised perfectly in its theatrics, Kapoor's works at the British Pavilion were the highlight of the Giardini, suited as they were for "the light and airy spaces which the pavilion affords".⁷ The juxtaposition between the "volume and the voids", "the [human] body and spirit of the sculpture" in a city where "East meets West", or where a land "mediated" between sea and sky, staged the exhibition as both contradiction and confrontation. It was set to see Kapoor, already age thirty-six, create a sensation and walk away with the Premio Duemila prize, habitually awarded to an artist under the age of thirty-five.⁸



Figure 1.

Installation View, XLIV Venice Biennale, 1990, showing Anish Kapoor, *Void Field*, 1989, 16 elements, sandstone and pigment, each element 125 × 125 × 125 cm Digital image courtesy of Anish Kapoor 2016 / Photo: Graziano Arici

Void Field (1989) was the most challenging and successful of Kapoor's works both in his Lisson Gallery show in 1989 and at the Venice Biennale (fig. 1).⁹ Presented in the main gallery of the British Pavilion, *Void Field* was positioned to capture attention even after successive (and expensive) attempts to move it.¹⁰ The work had already been lauded in the British press before appearing in Venice.¹¹ Made of Northumbrian sandstone and pigment, the phenomenological qualities of the sixteen stone sculptures were much remarked upon when the work was first presented at the Lisson Gallery; this included the "smell" of the pigment which, unlike chemical and industrial odours, smelled of the "sour-sweet damp of the earth".¹² Emphasis was on the primitive, while critics' references ranged from the holy "Jerusalem" to "mystic".¹³ Interestingly, it was this metaphysical quality that led one prominent New York gallerist, on the day of the opening, to put his finger in one of the stone holes and mark his forehead with a blue-black cross; paying tribute to the spiritual aspect of the work by performing the Catholic ritual of purification.¹⁴ That evening, other visitors put their fingers into the stone holes, amongst them, Artistic Director of the Biennale, Giovanni Carandente (figs. 2, 3, 4). This engagement with the sacred was also not lost on Giulio Andreotti, the then Italian prime minister and controversial leader of the Christian Democratic Party, who, in a test of faith, could be seen leaning over with his eye peering into the void.¹⁵ The work, as such, was open to a wide range of interpretations and experiences.



Figure 2.

Giulio Andreotti with Anish Kapoor's sculpture, Void Field, at the 1990 Venice Biennale. From left to right: Henry Meyric Hughes, Anish Kapoor, Giulio Andreotti, and Giovanni Carandente, Artistic Director of the Biennale Digital image courtesy of La Biennale di Venezia—Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee / Photo: Giorgio Zucchiatti



Figure 3.

Giulio Andreotti peering into the void of Anish Kapoor's sculpture, Void Field, at the 1990 Venice Biennale. From left to right: Henry Meyric Hughes, Anish Kapoor, unknown man, Giulio Andreotti and Giovanni Carandente, Artistic Director of the Biennale. Digital image courtesy of La Biennale di Venezia—Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee / Photo: Giorgio Zucchiatti



Figure 4.

Giulio Andreotti putting his finger into the void of Anish Kapoor's sculpture , *Void Field*, From left to right: Henry Meyric Hughes, Anish Kapoor, unknown man, Giulio Andreotti and Giovanni Carandente, Artistic Director of the Biennale Digital image courtesy of La Biennale di Venezia—Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee / Photo: Giorgio Zucchiatti

In Venice, *Void Field* could be seen as a potential political counterpoint to Richard Long's *Red Earth Circle* at the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition in Paris in 1989. There, the curator Jean-Hubert Martin had controversially juxtaposed Long's *Red Earth Circle*, with its "void" at the centre, with the dirt floor painting *Yam Dreaming*, by the Yuendumu Aboriginal artists, in the Grande Halle of the Parc de la Villette.¹⁶ While each of these works emphasized the hand or hands of the artist, the pairing raised questions about the relationship which reflected those underlining the exhibition as a whole: "pre-modern authenticity" and the primitive and, by default, the "non-European" whose exposure to Western art created a derivativeness, or "contamination".¹⁷ In this way, Kapoor, Indian-born and British-trained, could be seen in some way to mediate and reroute the formal differences between sculpture, the floor, raw material, and the primitive, which he both reinstated and escaped through his Western training, "palatable" Modernism, and his positioning of the stones in *Void Field*. Sandstone, too, signified a colonial past, prominent as it was in monuments to British imperialism as seen in the architecture of Lutyens's Delhi. Further back, the material, widely available in India, also featured in the country's premodern sculpture.

The rough stone blocks of *Void Field* placed the work somewhere between the floor and the verticality of the wall, much like the two works in the Paris exhibition, though in Venice Kapoor played with the formal implications of *Void Field* alongside *The Healing of St Thomas* (1989); a red fibre-glass gash

in the wall of the pavilion. Verticality is met with horizontality, slashes/wounds, and cave-like voids, even death, as the “body” becomes implicated in the sculpture. In this way, Kapoor uses British sculpture to challenge the American critic Michael Fried’s rejection of Minimalism, along with the sleek industrial materials of Donald Judd, through his use of natural stone, with all of the psychological and corporeal suggestions of the work of Eva Hesse.¹⁸

It was Romanian-British sculptor Paul Neagu, Kapoor’s teacher at the Royal College of Art, who had focused the artist on performance and led him to see how the body is implicated in an artwork, in the creation of a new iteration between England and the United States via Eastern Europe, or even the “East”.¹⁹

Kapoor’s work in the British Pavilion, a building erected in 1887, where the British Council’s first group show had been held at the twilight of imperialism in 1938, was anti-institutional in as much as it was about the awkward process of decolonization. Bringing heavy stones into the gallery (at great cost), both ponderous and difficult to move, could be seen as a subversive gesture; so too could the powder of the pigment pieces which detached from the sculptures and travelled and stained the walls.²⁰ The logistics of maintaining the show were complex in other ways too, with the blue powder pigment of one of the pieces frequently having to be replaced without leaving any marks behind.²¹ The clinical finish of the gallery was important for showing works such as the technically accomplished and mysterious red slash of *The Healing of St Thomas*. Kapoor’s *A Wing at the Heart of Things* of 1990, with its conceptual and seemingly Christian title, was placed at the back of the gallery which faced Torcello, the oldest continuously populated island of Venice (fig. 5). In this way, and with his work *Madonna* (1989–90), Kapoor made the country’s history of Catholicism integral to the exhibition. *It is Man* (1989–90) continued to play on the polar opposites of the sexes, which was also seen in the vaginal imagery of *Black Fire* (1990), or the oval-shaped crevice made from coal.²² Such work saw the possible impact of Indian neotantrism, whose themes Kapoor would continue to explore throughout his career.²³ Along with the Iranian-born artist Shirazeh Houshiary, Kapoor was described in the 1980s as one of the few sculptors who were working against industrial and object-based materials fashionable in Britain, and instead utilizing “archetypes”.²⁴ Each work of the Biennale showed Kapoor moving away from the earlier pure pigment sculptures to a more complex (if sometimes heavy-handed) set of works which concentrated on paradoxes of weight, lightness, voids, gashes, hollows, and long slabs of natural material in bright pigments or dark, earthy colours.



Figure 5.

Installation View, XLIV Venice Biennale, 1990, showing Anish Kapoor, *A Wing at the Heart of Things*, 1990, slate and pigment, two parts: 28 × 353 × 270 cm; 25 × 295 × 320 cm Digital image courtesy of Anish Kapoor 2016 / Photo: Graziano Arici

The difficulty of positioning Kapoor's work is reflected in the discourse created to help understand it; critics constantly negotiated the artist's position between East and West. Writing in the Biennale exhibition catalogue, the critic Thomas McEvilley focused on the relationship between Yves Klein, the void, Indian tantrism, and the sexual duality which underlies it; all of which would be dismissed only a decade later by Indian-bred postcolonial theorists.²⁵ McEvilley drew together a broad range of sources which included Hegelian origins (implying Clement Greenberg and Modernism's teleology), Eastern philosophy, Hinduism, Judaism, Modernism, Minimalism, Postminimalism, poetics, metaphysics, and psychoanalysis to evoke Kapoor's work.²⁶ However, McEvilley's positioning of Kapoor between the binaries of East and West created an internationalism which would come to define him: a kind of "universalism" which emptied out the complex politics which would locate the work in any specific context, time, space, or place.²⁷ Kapoor's interview with Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton in his catalogue for the Biennale

called into question national frameworks invoked by the pavilion by interrogating the artist's own Britishness (Kapoor still held an Indian passport at the time).²⁸ He responded:

I am Indian but to see everything in terms of nationality is limiting. I don't see myself as an Indian artist; neither do I see myself as a British artist. I am an artist who works in Britain. The work has to be looked at from as wide a base as possible.²⁹

At the same time, Kapoor was negotiating his "break" from the collective identity surrounding the Lisson Gallery's stable of artists and was looking to assert his own brand identity amongst them. After nearly a decade of coming under the tag of "New British Sculpture", the artist wanted to move away from the generic label which covered artists of different generations and practices, such as Tony Cragg, Bill Woodrow, Richard Deacon, Jean-Luc Vilmouth, Edward Allington, and Julian Opie—however much market success and establishment recognition they were receiving. The movement of British sculpture from the postwar context of abstraction to the "expanded field" in the 1960s and 1970s would see a shift towards punk and the rebelliousness of street culture along with the utilizing of everyday household goods.³⁰ The pavilion in Venice had given a warm reception to these sculptors, and had showcased the work of British sculptor Tony Cragg, just two years earlier in 1988. With works like *Red Indian* (1982–83; not shown at the Biennale), a wall silhouette made of "useless" objects, Cragg sparked questions about the primitive and the appropriation of the racialized and marginalized "other" in institutional spaces, seen earlier in the 1970s with the work of Joseph Beuys. Generated and supported by a system of London galleries and bolstered by a series of exhibitions in Britain and internationally, the new generation of sculptors was supported by the burgeoning market of the 1980s. Kapoor's work for the selection committee, although it had appeared to lag behind that of other sculptors for some years, had finally reached the stage of a major international solo exhibition, and with the success of the Lisson Gallery show in 1989, was seen to be mature and to have "come of age".³¹

The choice of Kapoor to represent Britain in Venice was bolstered by the growth of "New British Sculpture" as much as it was questioned, and then later seemingly supported, by Rasheed Araeen.³² His *The Other Story* (1989), and touring show, *The Essential Black Art*, which opened at the Chisenhale Art Gallery in 1988, were both efforts to make minority artists more visible. The Black Arts movement in Britain was in full bloom through the 1980s, but was slow to receive the establishment recognition that would come later in various forms of exhibitions and via the success of individual careers.³³ Kapoor's own rejection of the exhibition has entered art-historical

lore, but the timing between the pavilion of Venice and Araeen's own curated venture on the South Bank makes the politics of one postcolonial artist and the other, Araeen, interesting in terms of the dispersed sense of British nationalism it suggested.³⁴ Kapoor, in this respect, was already part of a wider mainstream owing to the mobility afforded to him by the world of British sculpture, and, on the whole, he chose not to participate in "Asian" shows (the one early exception was an exhibition organized by David Elliot, Victor Musgrave, and Ebrahim Alkazi during the Festival of India events in the UK in 1982).³⁵ Kapoor was obviously sensitive to the issue of a racialized identity, recounting in an interview in 1990 that he was once asked in his early exhibitions if his sculpture smelled of "spices".³⁶ The call of the Minimalist environment was strong for Kapoor, and his attack on the white cube was still contained by the convention of form.

In February 1990, when the Iranian fatwa on fellow Mumbai-born Salman Rushdie (a friend and later collaborator of Kapoor's in *Blood Relations* of 2006) was reinstated by Ayatollah Khomeini, it was only a few months before the opening of Kapoor's exhibition in Venice. Kapoor appears to have been removed from the upheavals of this world as much as he was from the industrial and everyday contexts highlighted by British sculpture that reacted to the legacy of Thatcherism. It would be the Young British Artists (YBAs) who would use this context more directly to conflate sculpture/conceptual art/Minimalism and the readymade into new configurations of middle-class taste, well removed from the sublimity of the sea and sky of Venice. By the end of the decade and throughout the next, a generation of YBA artists would also show there.³⁷

Kapoor's invitation to be the British representative of the country's national pavilion in Venice in 1990 not only marked a turning point in British sculpture, but also in Kapoor's own career, which would see him win the prestigious Turner Prize in 1991—similarly to Tony Cragg who had both accolades in 1988 (the 1990 Turner Prize, the year Kapoor exhibited in Venice, was not awarded due to the lack of funds). After nearly two decades of living and working in Britain, the artist had finally arrived. Dramatic entries and timed arrivals would continue to be part of Kapoor's career trajectory, such as his timely arrival in India in 2010 (he had, however, been showing at New Delhi's commercial India Art Fair—then called the India Art Summit since 2009). After decades away from the land of his birth, Kapoor celebrated this return with his first ever exhibitions shared between the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi and the Mehboob Studios in Mumbai. Kapoor had two solo exhibitions in the country at a moment when much of Europe was recovering from financial crisis and globalization continued to see developing markets as alluring.

Only a few years after penning the catalogue essay for Kapoor's works in the British Pavilion, McEvelley would question the legacy of the Venice Biennale with the rise of "third world biennials".³⁸ Over the next two decades the global order would begin to shift. It would take, perhaps, until 2015, with the postcolonialist agenda of artistic director Okwui Enwezor at the LVI Venice Biennale, with its theme of "All the World's Futures", for political reckonings to take place and the unevenness of Modernism around the globe to be taken into account. Britain's own representative, the YBA Sarah Lucas, with her ongoing rebellion against the white British middle class, appeared perhaps a decade too late. Enwezor sought to question the logic and purity of the Giardini, seeing the pavilions as the "ultimate site of a disordered world, of national conflicts, as well as territorial and geopolitical disfigurements".³⁹ His "Gardens of Disorder" brought globalism and multiculturalism as destabilizing forces into the space of the Giardini, in which we see the latent promise of Kapoor's 1990 representation, and the more expansive logic of his selection, come to fruition. Kapoor, however, had already moved in another direction.

Footnotes

- 1 Michael Newman, "New Sculpture in Britain", *Art in America* 70 (Sept. 1982): 104-14, 177-78; and Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton, "Anish Kapoor: Lisson Gallery", *Artforum* 28, no. 7 (March 1990): 175-76. The exhibition at the Lisson Gallery took place from 1 Sept. 1989 to 4 Jan. 1990.
- 2 "An Indian, representing Britain—that's an odd notion. Yes. It is an odd notion. I think they are amazingly courageous. I think there is a whole attitude that the British Council has towards artists working in this country as British artists irrespective of where they come from. Now I think that must be applauded." "Anish Kapoor Interviewed by Douglas Maxwell", *Art Monthly* 136 (May 1990): 11. According to Henry Meyric Hughes, Commissioner and Director at the British Council, much of the timeliness of the selection must be attributed to the committee that he sat on with Brett Rogers, Deputy Commissioner and Exhibitions Officer, Visual Arts Department of the British Council, and Nicholas Serota, in his first year as the Director of the Tate. Hughes believes that Serota had seen and been highly impressed by Kapoor's work earlier at the Carnegie International in 1988. Also on the committee were Marina Vaizey, art critic for *The Sunday Times*, who had written previously on Kapoor's work, and two or three other members. Henry Meyric Hughes, email communication, June 2015.
- 3 *Les Magiciens de la Terre* was curated by Jean-Hubert Martin and took place from 18 May to 14 August 1989, at the Centre Georges Pompidou and Grande Halle de la Villette in Paris. *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* ran from 11 November 1989 to 2 April 1990 at the Hayward Gallery in London.
- 4 Artists from Nigeria (El Anatsui, Bruce Onobrakpeya) and Zimbabwe (Tapfuma Gutsa, Nicholas Mukomberanwa, Henry Munyaradzi) were included along with Aboriginal artists from Australia (Trevor Nickolls, Rover Thomas). Carandente regarded this selection as being distinctly different from *Magiciens de la Terre*, in so far as it did not "exalt" the primitive and ancestral, but rather foregrounded a "new form of dialogue with the Western world". Giovanni Carandente, "XLIV Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Dimensione Futuro, The Artist and Space", in *Dimensione Futuro, L'artista e lo spazio, XLIV Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte La Biennale di Venezia*, exh. cat. (Venice: Fabbri, 1990), 16.
- 5 "Emptiness is not nothing. It is also no deficiency. In sculptural embodiment, emptiness plays in the manner of a seeking-projecting instituting of places." Martin Heidegger, *Art and Space*, trans. Charles H. Seibert, *Man and World* 6, no. 1 (1973): 7.
- 6 Carandente, "XLIV Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Dimensione Futuro", 16.
- 7 Henry Meyric Hughes, Brett Rogers, and Malcolm Hardy, "Foreword", in *Anish Kapoor: British Pavilion, XLIV Venice Biennale, May-September 1990* (London: The British Council, 1990), 8.
- 8 Meyric Hughes, Rogers, and Hardy, "Foreword".
- 9 Anish Kapoor's *Void Field* was included in his solo exhibition at the Lisson Gallery between 1 Sept. 1989-4 Jan. 1990.

- 10 Brett Rogers recounted that the budget of roughly £250,000 for the show was also added to by private donations. The floor where *Void Field* was placed in the main gallery had to be structurally reinforced from below to accommodate the weight of the stones. Days before the opening, Kapoor decided to move the piece to a side gallery. The floor in that room also had to be reinforced at the same expense in order to accommodate the weight. In the end, Kapoor decided upon its original placement in the main gallery before the opening. Discussion with Brett Rogers, June 2015.
- 11 See, for example, Andrew Renton, "Anish Kapoor: Lisson Gallery", *Flash Art* 151 (March 1990): 151-52; and Allthorpe-Guyton, "Anish Kapoor: Lisson Gallery", 175-76.
- 12 Allthorpe-Guyton, "Anish Kapoor: Lisson Gallery", 176.
- 13 Allthorpe-Guyton, "Anish Kapoor: Lisson Gallery", 176.
- 14 Meyric Hughes, email communication, June 2015.
- 15 Meyric Hughes, email communication, June 2015.
- 16 Long would go on to win the Turner Prize that year in Britain.
- 17 Jean Fisher, "The Other Story and the Past Imperfect", *Tate Papers* 12 (2009): 1.
- 18 See Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood", *Artforum* 5 (June 1967): 12-23.
- 19 "Anish Kapoor Interviewed by Douglas Maxwell", 6-12. It is worth citing that Yves Klein's own engagement with performance was influenced by Japan. Robert Godet, whose apartment on the Ile Saint-Louis was the early site of Klein's first anthropometry performance, was one of his key supporters. Godet, a follower of George Gurdjieff, was heavily engaged with Eastern philosophy and thought. He would die in a plane accident in Benares in 1960.
- 20 Kapoor mentions in an interview that this was deliberate on the artist's part. "Some of the things you make are pretty damned large and pretty damned heavy. Does the thought: where is this going to end up, bother you? Pigment pieces makes them difficult to own and to domesticate. I feel that is quite important." See "Anish Kapoor Interviewed by Douglas Maxwell", 10.
- 21 Meyric Hughes, email communication, June 2015. The work was probably *A Wing at the Heart of Things* (1990).
- 22 Anish Kapoor interview with Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton, "Mostly Hidden", in *Anish Kapoor: The British Council 1990*.
- 23 Denis Vidal, "The Return of the Aura: Anish Kapoor, the Studio and the World", in *Arts and Aesthetics in a Globalizing World*, ed. Raminder Kaur and Parul Dave-Mukherji (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 43.
- 24 Michael Newman, "Discourse and Desire: Recent British Sculpture", *Flash Art* 115 (1984): 48-55. In 1989, Shirazeh Houshiary took part in Jean-Hubert Martin's exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre*.
- 25 Homi Bhabha commented in 1999: "Looking back on ten years of writing about his [Anish Kapoor's] work, you find this all the time. If he uses blue pigment, first there is a reference to Yves Klein; a paragraph later there is somehow a Lord Krishna reference; another paragraph later and you're having an experience with the Elephant Kings of Bombay. The references continually move in that direction, as if the work does not signify as a sign itself. The work of diasporic artists must be authenticated through some sort of biographical/cultural reference." See Homi Bhabha, "Chillava Klatch: Shahzia Sikander Interviewed by Homi Bhabha", in *Shahzia Sikander*, exh. cat. (Chicago, IL: Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, 1999), 18.
- 26 Thomas McEvilley, "The Darkness Inside a Stone", in *Anish Kapoor: The British Council 1990*, 43-51.
- 27 "I've never met anybody who's Indian and also Jewish. Is your Jewishness a strong thing with you? I think it is. All of these things are avenues into a whole cultural world which is very rich. I wish I could have been Christian and Buddhist as well. That would have been perfect." "Anish Kapoor Interviewed by Douglas Maxwell", 6.
- 28 Kapoor still held an Indian passport at the time of the Venice Biennale. He had applied unsuccessfully for British citizenship around 1986. Meyric Hughes, email correspondence, June 2015.
- 29 Allthorpe-Guyton, "Mostly Hidden", 48.
- 30 Newman, "New Sculpture in Britain", 104-14.
- 31 Discussion with Brett Rogers, June 2015.
- 32 Rasheed Araeen, "Inverted Racism?", *Art Monthly* 306 (2007): 39-40.
- 33 David A. Bailey, Sonia Boyce, Ian Baucom, eds., *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); and Eddie Chambers, *Black Artists in British Art: A History from 1950 to the Present* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014).
- 34 Not all critics were generous with their praise for the two concurrent exhibitions. Some were reactionary. Giles Auty, art critic of the conservative *Spectator* magazine, was cynical about the status of "minorities living in alien cultures", equating the more "political" works included in *The Other Story* to "sixth-form projects". Auty mentions that Kapoor was not commenting on his "non-inclusion" in Araeen's show, and acknowledges the mysticism of his stone works at the Lisson Gallery (which nonetheless fell short of Michelangelo) as well as his upcoming participation at the Venice Biennale. See Giles Auty, "The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain, Hayward Gallery till 4 February & Anish Kapoor, Lisson Gallery till 4 January", *Spectator*, 16 Dec. 1989.

- 35 See *India: Myth and Reality Aspects of Modern Indian Art*, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, as part of the 1982 Festival of India in the UK. Artists shown were split between the Progressives or Moderns (M. F. Husain, F. N. Souza, Satish Gujral, S. H. Raza, Akbar Padamsee, Ram Kumar, Mohan Samant, Tyeb Mehta, K. G. Subramanyan), and the Contemporary artists, which included Krishen Khanna, A. Ramachandran, Bikash Bhattacharjee, Jogen Chowdhury, Rameshwar Broota, Ranbir Singh Kaleka, Gieve Patel, Sudhir Pathwardhan, Nalini Malani, Mrinalini Mukherjee, and Anish Kapoor.
- 36 Ameena Meer, "Anish Kapoor", *BOMB* 30 (Winter 1990). <http://bombmagazine.org/article/1273/anish-kapoor>
- 37 This would include Rachel Whiteread (1997), Gary Hume (1999), Mark Wallinger (2001), Chris Ofili (2003), Tracey Emin (2007), and Sarah Lucas (2015).
- 38 Thomas McEvelley, "Arrivederci Venice: The Third World Biennials", *Artforum International* 32, no. 3 (1993): 114-16.
- 39 Okwui Enwezor, "Statement of Okwui Enwezor". See http://www.hausderkunst.de/fileadmin/ueber_uns/3_Statement_by_Okwui_Enwezor_56th_IAE.pdf.

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Disorienting the Art World: Mona Hatoum in Istanbul

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In 1995 the German curator René Block was invited to curate the 4th International Istanbul Biennial. Titled “Orient/ation: The Vision of Art in a Paradoxical World”, Block eschewed the national groupings employed by most biennials, instead tackling head-on the idea of what nationality might mean in a climate of increasing global mobility in which the art world comprised an “international diaspora of artists”.¹ Block’s poster for the Biennial was a hastily hand-drawn compass, its coordinates marked deliberately incorrectly. West was labelled North, South-East read as South-West, and the North-East was renamed “Istanbul”. According to this compass there is no one central point or locale relative to which its cardinal points of north, south, east, and west can make sense.²

Block wanted to draw attention to the ways in which events such as the Istanbul Biennial tend always to be framed in relation to the central power blocs of Western Europe or North America. By placing the “Orient”—with all its nostalgic, romantic, racist, and ideologically charged associations—at the centre of the Biennial’s world-map, Block’s aim was to re-orient, or rather, to *disorient* the art world, and to remap its familiar coordinates. Block paid particular attention to Turkey’s geographical neighbours, inviting artists from Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Macedonia, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, and the newly formed Balkan states.

Block also invited a mix of ten younger and more senior figures from the then-thriving British art scene, seven of whom were women, and five of whom were born outside the United Kingdom—Anish Kapoor in Mumbai, Shirazeh Houshiary in Iran, Zaha Hadid in Iraq, Ceal Floyer in Pakistan, and Mona Hatoum in Beirut—in one more complicated twist on how viewers might begin to think about—or rethink—the idea of nationality, “Britishness”, and the geopolitics of home and belonging. Less than a handful of those selected were affiliated with the then-dominant “Young British Artists” (or YBAs); a phenomenon that since the late 1980s had stood for a very particular, increasingly jingoistic formulation of “British” art that ran counter to Block’s attempt to disrupt, rather than affirm, ideas of national identity. Hatoum was a generation older than the YBAs, and her practice was a world apart from Sarah Lucas and Tracey Emin’s dystopic vision of a beer-soaked, bawdy Albion. On the contrary, Hatoum’s work addressed the condition of rootlessness, rather than a rooted sense of belonging, and while she drew freely on her own experience as an exilic subject born in Lebanon to Palestinian parents, she has always, rightly, insisted that her work should not be reduced to only that interpretative framework.

In 1975, when she was in her twenties, Hatoum paid a short visit to London. While she was there civil war broke out in Lebanon, making it impossible for Hatoum to return. Forced to remain, the artist enrolled for undergraduate studies at the Byam Shaw School of Art, after which she went on to study at

the Slade. English was to become her third language, after Arabic, which she had always spoken at home, and French, which she'd spoken at school. Hatoum's homesickness became a key motif for her ensuing work, most powerfully articulated in her important video-piece *Measures of Distance* (1988), in which Hatoum reads aloud in English some letters from her mother, the Arabic text of the originals being superimposed over images of her mother taken in the shower. While Hatoum's exilic status is foregrounded in many of her works, her growing reputation from the late 1980s onwards assured for her a standing in the London art world that was, significantly, far from that of an "outsider".

In Istanbul, Hatoum showed two rectangular floor-bound works that were very much in keeping with her practice in London at that time. *Pin Carpet* and *Prayer Mat* (fig. 1 and 2) were both covered with neat, tightly aligned rows of sharp pins; stainless steel in the case of *Pin Carpet*, and nickel-plated in the case of *Prayer Mat*. Both glisten when the light catches them. *Prayer Mat* was the smaller of the two, measuring about one metre in length, while *Pin Carpet* measured over one metre wide by approximately two-and-a-half metres long. The rug or carpet was a format Hatoum returned to several times over the coming years, recalling a longer interest in post-sixties sculptural practice, such as the Minimalist floor-pieces of Carl Andre, or Eva Hesse's latex "rugs" such as *Schema* and *Sequel* on which she balanced loose rubbery balls that might—like Hatoum's glass-marble "map" carpets—roll free and disintegrate if touched. Hatoum enjoyed the sense of dislocation and the complex muddle of the familiar and the unfamiliar that the rugs offered, which, as with the best of Hatoum's work, both conceptually and literally served to wrong-foot viewers.



Figure 1.

Mona Hatoum, in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, Pin Carpet, 1995, stainless steel pins, canvas and glue, 3 x 125 x 246 cm Digital image courtesy of White Cube / Mona Hatoum Studio / Photo: Will Brown



Figure 2.

Mona Hatoum, Prayer Mat, 1995, nickel-plated brass pins, compass, canvas, and adhesive, 67 × 112 × 1.5 cm. British Council Collection, London Digital image courtesy of the British Council

In 1996 Hatoum made *Doormat*, a domestic doormat complete with the word “WELCOME” spelled out across the middle in hundreds of bristling stainless steel pins, glued to stand upright in uniform rows running along the horizontal length of the mat. *Doormat* is at once welcoming and frightening, a binary which Hatoum frequently exploits in her work. That the domestic is typically cast as the traditional realm of the female subject was a point not lost on Hatoum, who would have been all too aware of the complexities of this situation when installing her work in a largely Islamic culture, in which the daily prayer ritual performed at the local mosque tends to be attended largely by men, with many women instead performing their prayers at home. Although for Block Hatoum’s works offered “a sharp commentary on the situation of women in the Orient”, Hatoum, as ever, was resistant to the idea that her work could be reduced to any one specific meaning.³ For Hatoum her work spoke to universals as much as particulars, and while for some critics the constant reference to her place of birth and exiled status has proven the driving force in how to think about her work, the artist is always quick to offer other, often more expansive themes that concern her; of home, not “her” home; of violence, not civil war; of *women*, not this one particular woman. Of her works for the Istanbul Biennial, Hatoum has said:

A carpet is supposed to give you comfort and protect you from the cold of the floor. From a distance this carpet looks like it is made of plush velvet, a very inviting shimmering surface. When you approach it, you realise it is made of millions of sharp stainless steel pins pushed upwards through a canvas backing. I showed it at the Istanbul Biennale in the Aya Ireni church along with another smaller mat.⁴

Hatoum refers here to *Pin Carpet*, which she placed in the by-then decommissioned Aya Ireni church. It was the first church built in Constantinople, and remained the city's central place of worship until Hagia Sofia was first dedicated in 360 AD. The second "smaller mat" Hatoum refers to is *Prayer Mat*, which also had a shiny, pin-studded surface. The thought of standing, kneeling, or sitting on either carpet is an uneasy one. As Hatoum put it, her rugs and carpet works operate through "a kind of attraction/repulsion"; at turns suggestive of a magic carpet or prayer mat or, from a Western perspective, of a doormat designed to wipe one's feet clean.⁵

Inset among the pins of *Prayer Mat* was a small compass. As well as recalling the overarching theme of the Biennial, the compass here serves a specific, and not just metaphorical, function. It is there to assist the worshipper who must face in the direction of Mecca when praying, and the mat is always situated as such. Travelling prayer mats with in-built compasses are readily available to purchase, as Hatoum would have been aware—any number of shops on London's Brick Lane stock similar items; slightly kitsch, yet helpful, aids for Muslims located far from Mecca's geographic location in Saudi Arabia who may be on the move, or away from home travelling and in need of assistance in locating their coordinates from their current position.⁶ Hatoum's two mats, one in an historically Christian place of worship, the other explicitly referencing Islam, could be considered bookends framing Hatoum's Christian upbringing within a Muslim culture. However, they point also to a wider geopolitical situation addressed in other works made by Hatoum from around this time, in which cultural motifs are taken not as given but as mobile and open to interpretation. To whom is the invitation to pray extended? And what are we to make of that invitation, suffused as it is with a threat of violent damage to one's body? Hatoum prefers to leave the question open and unanswered: poetics, not polemics, guide the political implications of her work. While Hatoum has often spoken of the powerful impact made on her by the Palestinian writer Edward Said's 1984 essay, "Reflections on Exile", the coordinates of her work have never been confined solely to those of "east" versus "west".⁷ Like Block she wanted to disorient

and so re-orient attention elsewhere, away from “nationality” as either straightforward or important in the final analysis of the work. Said, in turn, wrote an essay about Hatoum’s work in which he suggested that

An abiding locale is no longer possible in the world of Mona Hatoum’s art which . . . articulates so fundamental a dislocation as to assault not only one’s memory of what once was, but how logical and possible, how close and yet so distinct from the original abode, this new elaboration of familiar space and objects really is. ⁸

Hatoum’s practice both exploits and confounds binary oppositions by redeploying them in ways that are at once specific and allusive, personal and playful. Her work is never explicit. Rather, Hatoum prefers to work in the gaps between making and meaning, saying that any work of art that “obviously reveals itself” and its “intentions” is “boring”. ⁹

Another early work by Hatoum titled *Light Sentence* (1992), in which a single light bulb swings in a grid of mesh lockers to throw menacing, mobile shadows, is frequently described as a political work that speaks of the refugee camp, of confinement, and indeed disorientation. And yet, as Farah Nayeri has pointed out, the artist frequently finds viewers coming to her work “with this preconceived idea of where I come from, and therefore what I’m putting in my work, and they tend to over-interpret the work in relation to my background”. ¹⁰

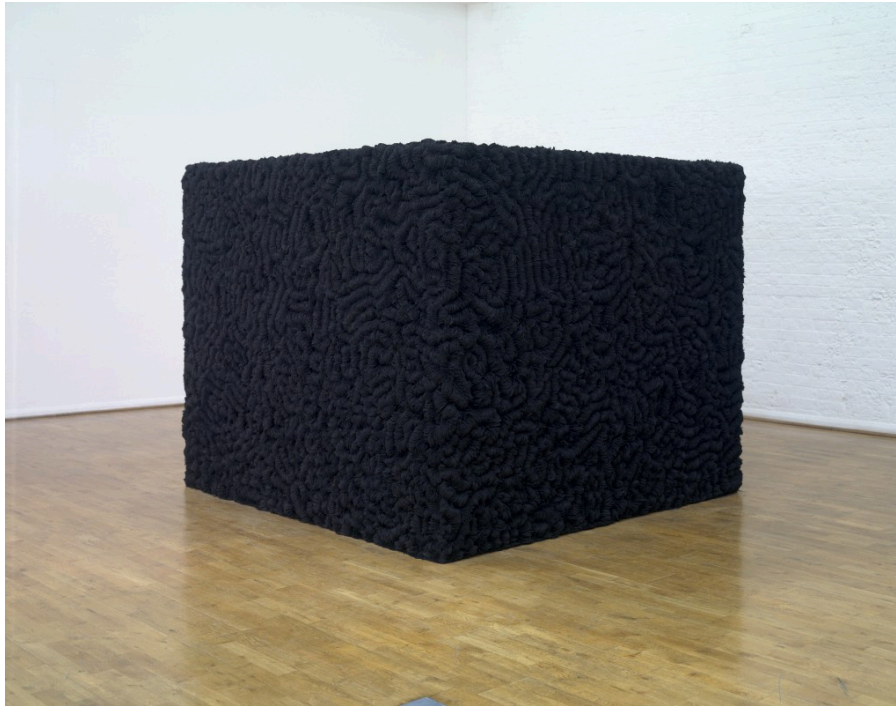


Figure 3.

Mona Hatoum, *Socle du Monde*, 1992–93, wooden structure, steel plates, magnets, and iron filings, 164 × 200 × 200 cm (64⁵/₈ × 78³/₄ × 78³/₄ in)
Digital image courtesy of White Cube / Photo: Edward Woodman / © Mona Hatoum

At the centre of a compass is found a magnet, an object that operates according to the same logic of attraction and repulsion as many of Hatoum's works. It is magnetism that allows the compass needle to establish its coordinates, and to position us in the world. Magnets seek similarity, not difference (the south pole of a magnet is always attracted to another south pole). Place a north- and south-seeking pole near by and they will repel one another, refusing contact or connection. Three years before the Istanbul Biennial, Hatoum had made another work that used magnetic forces to counter global ones. Formally the work was an ambivalent "homage" to Piero Manzoni's 1961 sculpture *Socle du Monde*, in which the Italian artist placed a sculptural plinth upside down on the ground as if supporting the weight of the world. In Hatoum's reworking, or rather *re-worlding* of Manzoni's sculptural base, every surface of the magnetic pedestal was covered in a writhing sea of iron filings, dotted with clustered islands (fig. 3). If you held an opposing magnet close to the surface, the filings started to ripple and move. In contrast to Manzoni's proposal, the base of the world in Hatoum's work was not fixed and solid, but mobile and responsive, liable to change and subject to human as well as material forces.



Figure 4.

Mona Hatoum, in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, *Pin Carpet* (detail), 1995, stainless steel pins, canvas and glue, 3 × 125 × 246 cm Digital image courtesy of White Cube / Mona Hatoum Studio / Photo: Will Brown

Crucially, the pins that make up the surface of both *Prayer Mat* and *Pin Carpet* are also magnetic. The magnet functions in these works both as a material conduit and also as an apt metaphor for both Hatoum's and Block's global politics, which set out to disorient an art world that remained attracted to sameness rather than difference, and which complacently treated nationality and cultural difference as irreconcilable, polar certainties rather than unsettled and staying that way. Hatoum insists that her own biography neither explains nor wholly accounts for the kinds of worlds her work seeks to invoke and produce; so too the position of her Islamic prayer mat in a church in Istanbul refuses to resolve or settle as either political or personal, polemic or poetic. Like the needle on a compass, Hatoum's aim with works such as *Prayer Mat* is to orient and disorient viewers in equal measure. By the same measure, Hatoum's status as a leading British artist who looks outwards rather than inwards, has defined her critical engagement with a globalizing contemporary art world, even as she insists upon, and continues to assert, the grounded nature of her art, as signalled by her various site-specific works and frequent international residencies. ¹¹ Place matters, as does our embodied relationship to that place and to the materials and objects comprising our lived environment, wherever in the world that may be.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Mona Hatoum for her help in the preparation of the essay.

Footnotes

- 1 See the website of the Istanbul Biennial, accessed 12 Aug. 2015: <http://bienal.iksv.org/en/archive/biennialarchive/213>
- 2 See Arthur C. Danto's catalogue essay for the 1995 Istanbul Biennial, "Art and the Discourse of Nations: Reflections on Biennial of Nations", in *4th International Istanbul Biennial: Orient/ation: The Vision of Art in a Paradoxical World* (Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, 1995), in which he addresses Block's motif of the compass.
- 3 René Block, "Is it Possible to Create Works that Aren't Art?", in *4th International Istanbul Biennial: Orient/ation*, 20-35 (25, 29).
- 4 Mona Hatoum, personal correspondence to Chiara Bertola, 2015.
- 5 Janine Antoni, "Mona Hatoum [interview]", *BOMB* 63 (Spring 1998): <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2130/mona-hatoum>
- 6 Guy Brett has also described these works in his "Survey", in Michael Archer, Guy Brett, and Catherine de Zegher, *Mona Hatoum* (London: Phaidon, 1997), 77.
- 7 See Edward Said, "The Art of Displacement: Mona Hatoum's Logic of Irreconcilables", in Said and Sheena Wagstaff, *Mona Hatoum: The Entire World as a Foreign Land*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Publishing, 2000), 7-19.
- 8 Said, "Art of Displacement", 7-19 (15).
- 9 Antoni, "Mona Hatoum [interview]".
- 10 Farah Nayeri, "The Many Contradictions of Mona Hatoum", *New York Times*, 7 July 2015.
- 11 Although the geopolitics of the artist residency is not quite so straightforward as such an "exiled" or outsider position might seem. On the politics of the artist as global "nomad", see James Meyer, "Nomads: Figures of Travel in Contemporary Art", in *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn*, ed. Alex Coles (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2001).

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