

ANTONY GORMLEY
ON SCULPTURE

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Edited by MARK HOLBORN

One of the most exciting sculptors of our time, Antony Gormley is the creator of breathtaking public installations. Even casual fans will recognize *Event Horizon*, a collection of thirty-one life-size casts of the artist's body that have been installed atop buildings in places like London's South Bank and New York's Madison Square, and *Field*, formed by tens of thousands of standing clay figurines overflowing across a room's floor. Projects like these demonstrate Gormley's ongoing interest in exploring the human form and its relationships with the rest of the material world, and in *Antony Gormley on Sculpture*, he shares valuable insight into his work and the history of sculpture itself.

Combining commentary on his own works with discussions of other artists and the Eastern religious traditions that have inspired him,

Gormley offers wisdom on topics such as the body in space, how to approach an environment when conceiving an installation, bringing mindfulness and internal balance to sculpture, and much more. Lavishly illustrated, this book will be of interest to not only art lovers, curators, and critics, but also artists and art students. Dynamic and thought-provoking, *Antony Gormley on Sculpture* is essential reading for anyone fascinated by sculpture and its long and complex history as a medium.

Antony Gormley is a sculptor and installation artist based in London. Knighted in 2014 for his service to the arts, he is an honorary doctor of the University of Cambridge and a fellow of Trinity and Jesus Colleges, Cambridge. **Mark Holborn** is an editor at Random House in London.

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In 1979 I went back to the place where Walter De Maria made his parallel chalk line drawings in Arizona. The work of De Maria, Robert Smithson and Richard Serra, and their place in American art was critical for me, as was the engagement of body with material and place, irrespective of image-making. Here, I simply threw a hand-sized stone as far as I could, cleared all the stones within that radius, made a pile that I stood on and then I threw them out again.

You can see from the photographs that I made a huge difference to the topography! You can just see, in the middle of this picture, where the pile was. There's a kind of absent body there. All of these stones are radiating outwards only as far as I was able to throw. This is the action of a living, willing, feeling body on other bodies, which has made a displacement in space. I offer it to you as an image but for me it was an experience. The question of how the action of a human body, potentially, gives affordance to other bodies interests me. What kind of space mentally, physically, imaginatively does it transmit to others?



We have to test our environment, both built and elemental. We are the only animals that choose to live in an environment that is entirely articulated through Euclidean geometry, but at what cost?

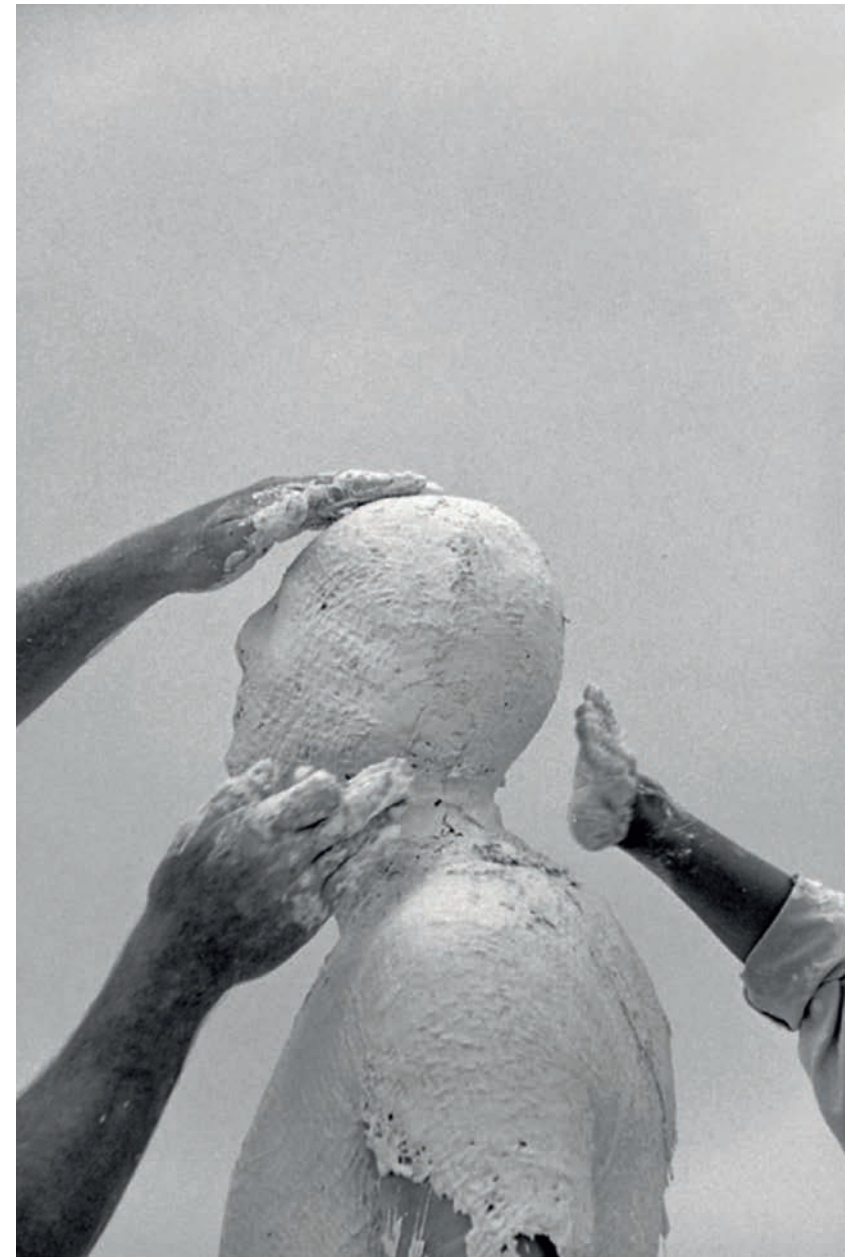
This is *Learning to Think* (1991), sited in an old prison in South Carolina. The idea of breaking or rupturing the assumption about the permanence, or indeed the use value, of the architectural conditions in which we live, is a function of sculpture. Sculpture can no longer simply reinforce the known, it has to be a bridge to the unknown. It can no longer give us a sense of identity; by celebrating the past it has to be open to possible futures. You could say this is bilateral work. On one hand it recalls the lynchings that were so much a part of the life of this prison and the history of early America, but it is also about the potential of shared imagination: the realm of the mind that is free of the condition of a body in space. We exist in space but space also exists in us.



This three-piece work is *Land, Sea and Air II* (1982). It is an early attempt to try to make this memory of a real body connect, not to the white cube of a gallery or the context of an exhibition, but to the elemental world: to land, to sea, to air and to link each of those elements with a physical posture and to link that physical posture to a perception. The work *Land* is a carapace pierced with holes at the ears, listening to the ground. *Sea* is the first work I made that opens the possibility of a sculpture as a body relating to the horizon. It has its eyes open, looking out to sea. *Air* is an empty plaster mould covered with lead, a body case with nostrils open. Lead is a wonderful insulator – against liquid or sound leakage, against radioactivity. Each of these works shares a prominent repeated horizontal every 7½ inches; there is a horizontal line (think of *Replaced Rock*), a repeated contour line that unites each of these pieces in a common spatial matrix. These two ideas: not taking the skin of things as a limit, and the power of immersing a culturally made object in the elements, I have put to work again and again.



This is me during a typical day in the studio. I'm not doing very much. I am a still point in a moving world where my assistants are fixing this moment of a real body in real time. This is important. This is the truth claim of my work. My work is not expressionist; it does not come from arbitrary abstraction, but is rooted in a particular example of a human experience of embodiment. It is offered back to the world as a displacement, hopefully with some affordance.





What has sculpture done from time immemorial? It is a marker in time and space. But I am very keen that it should not be taken for granted that those orientation functions should themselves be questioned. We know that we are travelling (at the equator of this planet) around our own axis at 1,470 kilometres per hour (km/h); that we're travelling around the sun at about 104,000 km/h; that the sun that has in the last five billion years made twenty circuits of our galaxy is travelling at 828,000 km/h. This then has to be put into the context of the Hubble Constant and the realization that our universe is expanding at a speed difficult to quantify – although we do know that at an interval of 3.25 light years it is expanding at 265,000 km/h. Here is a work that indicates the place of a body hanging on to this spinning spaceship, mediating between the forces of gravity and the forces of centrifuge. It touches and activates the surface emphasizing the provisionality of any position in space/time.



Here is another horizontal plane at the Kunsthalle zu Kiel, made from approximately 40,000 touched and fired pieces of mud; an earth that looks at us. It is installed within the collection of German Romantic and genre painting. It occupies that space absolutely, denying us access and insisting that the future of nature lies within the human imagination.



This is the great Buddha of Bamiyan, Gandhara school, probably made in about 554 AD. It is at 2,500 metres above sea level. I visited it in 1971 when it looked like this. This is an image of Viarocana, the celestial Buddha body. The core idea of the dharma is that we can achieve *sunyata* and become unified with the void if we follow the noble eight-fold path and release ourselves from the cycle of rebirth. It is ironic that through their destruction (page 149) the Taliban completed this work so beautifully. The work as it was when it was made probably had a wooden and gilt masked face from the lips upwards. It was very highly coloured, the underlying form created in stucco.

When I visited it I sat on the top of the head and looked out over the valley, with its poplar trees and fields in an early spring. I presume you can still do this and can still look out from that open window behind where the head once was and from that human-shaped frame look out at space at large. What interests me in Buddhist thought, and what I experience in meditation, is its interest in a continuity between the space of consciousness and space at large. This site, in its evolution and destruction, becomes an instrument of realization. The Taliban have completed a working meditational device. I want to show you a few experiments in which I and others have tried to make devices like this, treating the body as a place and making a bridge between consciousness and space at large.

A statue of Buddha stands next to caves cut into the mountainside, c. 554 AD
Bamiyan Province, Afghanistan, 32 m (105 ft) high



Sanmartino's *Veiled Christ* (1753), a work in the extraordinary Sansevero Chapel in Naples, deals with the same idea of activating the relationship between the body and the veil. You can also think of the work of the nineteenth-century Italian sculptor Medardo Rosso, which asks whether a skin reveals or hides.



I find the same thought in the *parinirvana* of Buddha in Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka. This is a sublime object where that relationship between object and place is seamless because here place has been made into object in an even greater degree of clarity than at the Longmen Grottoes. What the Taliban did to the Buddha of Bamiyan has been achieved by time: removing the gesso and painted skin, we now have these striations of geological time that become like a dream pattern. This image of a Buddha becomes like a mirage evoking the threshold between consciousness and the material world where he takes leave of embodied human experience.



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