

In time: The work of Nick Hornby

It has been long held that the making of any work of art represents the collapsed, condensed and often fragmentary retelling of the entire history of art. The premise of this idea is that the making of any work is only possible because of the experiments, failures and successes of past makers. Every work of art constitutes the marshaling of accumulated knowledge – from across time and place – into the mechanisms (intellectual and material) that give rise to a new art object that is likewise situated in contemporary time.

The work of sculptor Nick Hornby (b. 1980 UK) offers much for those interested in the entwined realm of ideas; their tangible realization; and, the role that the art historical past can assume in the making of art in the present. And while it would be right to say that all art objects are about the expression of ideas, it is the character and quality of the relationship of concept to execution – thinking to form – that differentiates one work or body of work from another. With Hornby, there are always two concerns that frame what he does in his practice. The first is his longstanding questioning of the legacies of western art and their contributions to current day practice. The second is the productive tension that can result from using or referencing historical works of art as the basis for new endeavors. For Hornby, the unavoidable presence of the art historical past – knowledge of the makers and works of significance – in contemporary consciousness and practice necessarily raises questions about precedent and indebtedness, the implication of homage, the parameters of sampling and the conditions of postmodern creativity. Hornby is an artist whose practice might well be characterized as one where historical awareness is the provoking mechanism for the explorations of forms – complex, unexpected, indebted – Hornby's work seeks to respond to the ideological and aesthetic conditions of the society in which he exists, one that benefits from the mixing of genres and artistic precedents.

Hornby's installation of work at Glynebourne in May 2017 constitutes an opportunity for the artist to work as curator in effect and install a body of work that is a distillation of his focused practice. Titled *Sculpture (1504-2017)*, the nine pieces on display in the house and on the grounds and produced between 2013 and 2017 effectively summarize what functions as his investigation of the pertinence of the past in the critical ideation and realization of current work. Importantly, however, Hornby's deferential and informed historicism is at once radical and compelling. Hornby's practice turns on his understanding about the role of the trace in history and how the acknowledgement of the work of eminent practitioners – the shoulders of giants, the canon and the lessons ever able to be learned – that can give rise to new works that are defined by their conceptual originality and gravity.

For the viewer, Hornby's referencing of works such as Michelangelo's *David*, Rodin's *Age of Bronze*, Matisse's paper cut outs and Picasso's *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* invites rewarding consideration of the temporality – both informed and speculative. This is work that through its openly acknowledged reconfiguration of the past bridges temporal divides – the changed ideas about art, the changed cultures of making and the changed conditions in the contexts of production that mark the passage of time – and which exist as testaments to how the contemporary is ever beneficially beholden in its presentism to the past.

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