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Photo: Courtesy Nick Hornby

## Nick Hornby in Harlow, U.K.

November 4, 2019 by Alexander Macgregor

Nick Hornby's largest sculpture to date is unveiled this month in Harlow, U.K. The town's historical collection includes works by Auguste Rodin, Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, and Elizabeth Frink, among many others, so is a fitting environment for an artist whose subject is frequently the canon and its construction. For this commission, Hornby has crossed one of the most canonic of figurative sculptures, Michelangelo's *David*, with a curving line from a 1925 Kandinsky drawing. In one rotation, *David* is visible; in another, it is Kandinsky's flamboyantly abstract squiggle.



Photo: Courtesy Nick Hornby

When installed, the sculpture will stand five meters tall. Being three-dimensional and viewable in the round, the form that results from this meeting of Renaissance sculpture with high Modernist abstraction is more often than not unrecognizable. The experience of looking at it is strangely reminiscent of early analytic Cubist paintings. There, a still life or portrait is built up from fragmentary shards, which hint at the composite nature of perception—memory stitching together smaller segments of focus, often from slightly different angles. Hornby's sculptures reverse this to the extent that their moment of recognition is singular rather than composite. But like Cubism, they emphasize the role of memory in perception, and like Cubism they have an innate hybridity—in a Cubist collage the newspaper is both the object and its representation, and Hornby's sculptures similarly play with status as both image and object. Hornby's work is also a reminder that figuration haunts abstraction, and that all figuration is abstract.

### EDITOR'S CHOICE



Simone Leigh:  
Loophole of Retreat



Berta Fischer



OLAFUR ELIASSON:  
IN REAL LIFE



Sheila Hicks: Seize,  
Weave Space



Antony Gormley:  
SIGHT



Photo: Courtesy Nick Hornby

Games with perception have recently assumed new relevance; in an era of alternative facts and deep fake videos, artists are recapturing this method of calling attention to the paradoxes and contrivances of representation. Lydia Okumura has been doing this since the 1970s, arranging lines and blocks of tone on walls and floors so that from a particular place they appear three-dimensional, activating the fictions of lines which represent space, like contours on maps, or architectural plans. Darren Harvey-Regan approaches the idea differently, intricately linking sculpture with photography in work like "The Erratics," by presenting a point where the camera's singular view explains otherwise abstruse forms. These experiments are fundamentally pictorial to the extent that they use a two-dimensional picture plane to elucidate three dimensions.

Nick Hornby uses technology to push this conversation around perception entirely into a sculptural space; where Harvey-Regan and Okumura have at one end flatness and at the other end three dimensions, Hornby's concerns seem always three-dimensional. His variables are instead the tension between abstraction and figuration, or between the old and the new. That contest plays out both in the work he responds to and in the technologies he uses, which combine canonic materials like marble or bronze with contemporary tools. His approach draws from the Boolean framework that underpins digital systems: commands like "and," "or," and "not" serve as the architecture of programming and data-searching, but are used by Hornby to intersect known forms.

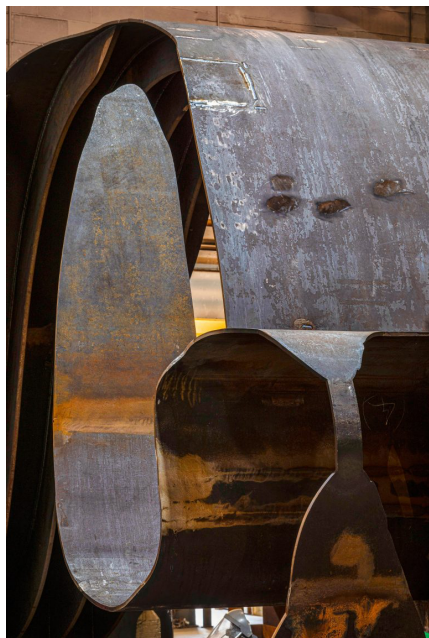


Photo: Courtesy Nick Hornby

The Harlow sculpture started as an imaginary comparison between art at two poles of representation, whose forms Hornby digitally crossed and modeled as a solid, five-meter-tall object. The tension between their two idioms is neatly repeated in the sculpture's process, which combined laser-cutting and rolling. The sharp cutting of a beam of light, and manipulation by vast weight, have a distance between them as significant as the distance between Michelangelo and Kandinsky. Hornby has joined these historical artists via a digital process and the material qualities of Cor-ten steel to create a nuanced monument to the pliability and reproducibility of sculpture.

