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ON COSTUMES  
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# HISTORY LESSONS

Young artist Nick Hornby reconsiders master works to create contemporary sculptures on a grand scale.

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**“I have an ambivalent and** ambiguous relationship to David,” says London-based artist Nick Hornby. “I think most people do. It’s completely amazing, but it’s also quite cheesy.”

Given the amount of art history infused in the sculptor’s work, it’s surprising to hear him talk about the venerated Renaissance work in these terms. His solo exhibition on the grounds of the Glyndebourne opera house is rife with interpretations of Rodin and Brancusi, and, of course, nods to Michelangelo’s heroic *David*. In fact, the show, which runs until next spring, is called “Sculpture (1504 – 2017)” — 1504 being the year *David* was completed.

The works, which are placed inside and out of the opera house, are grand in scale and scope. One outdoor piece, for instance, is a totemic bronze that reveals Rodin’s *The Age of Bronze* (1875) figure from one angle and a Brancusian abstraction from another. Another, *God Bird Drone*, reveals the silhouette of *David* from a single point if you were to fly above it.

And then there’s the work that recently appeared in a group show called “The Curators’ Eggs” at Paul Kasmin Gallery this summer, which is part of a series derived from Matisse’s cutouts, which Hornby hopes will materialize into a stand-alone show.

Still, Hornby maintains a healthy skepticism about the historical narrative of the works he’s drawing from. And that suspicion comes from firsthand experience. When he was a younger artist, Hornby spent long hours drawing in the Victoria & Albert Museum’s Cast Courts—a room filled with plaster versions of historical sculptures. He was eventually shortlisted for a commission at the V&A because of his reputation for taking various sculptures and putting them together. Though he didn’t get the commission, it nevertheless solidified his line of inquiry into historical coalescence. But it didn’t salve his frustration with the entire historical through-line.

In fact, seeing famous moments boiled down to one or two people and artworks, such as Picasso with Cubism or Pollock with Abstract Expressionism, has reinforced Hornby’s uneasiness about art history.

“A lot of this is about my struggle with grand narratives,” he says. “Of course, it’s a fairy tale... The grand narratives single out individuals who are hailed as geniuses. I question the author. I think meaning is contingent on context. But, on the other hand, Picasso was a fantastic artist. So was Rodin and Michelangelo and Barbara Hepworth and Louise Bourgeois.”



