

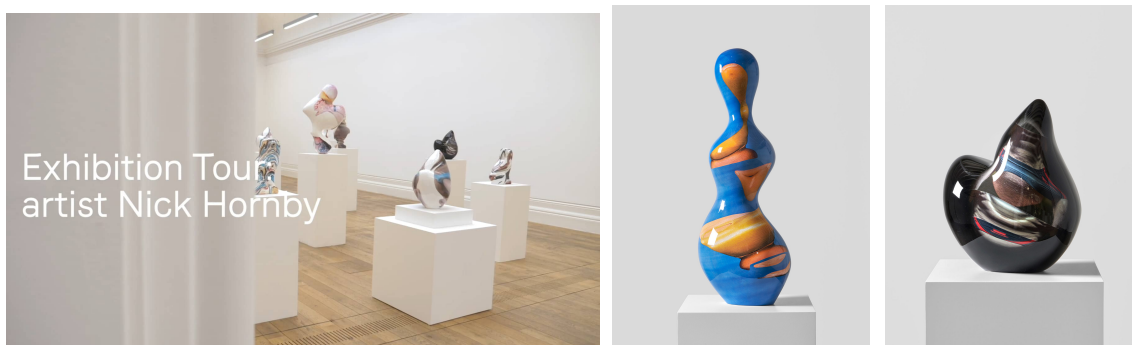


SOHO HOUSE & CO

Artist Nick Hornby on the right time for a confession

The London member and sculptor opens up about the deeply personal works that make up his first major institutional exhibition currently on show at MOSTYN in Wales.

By Osman Can Yerebakan Images courtesy of Nick Hornby Wednesday 28 December, 2020



In a year marked by turbulence, May was particularly formative for the artist Nick Hornby. Ending a seven-year relationship, witnessing his ailing father no longer remember who he is, and the 10th anniversary of his mother's death crammed into 31 days – all while he turned 40. Compounded by lockdown with its mantras of distancing and hand-washing, Hornby decided to let his guard down – and the result is a show that documents a need for human touch and intimacy. In the weeks and months that followed – Hornby developed glossy sculptures covered in images of iPhone encounters. Autobiography had never been his subject until this year and his first major institutional exhibition, *Zygotes and Confessions*, at MOSTYN in Llandudno, Wales. The new work on display — seventeen marble and resin sculptures wrapped in distorted images of bodies — is deeply personal, a testimony of grief, break-up and leaving behind another decade as the artist turned forty. The confluence of life events and their anniversaries during the pandemic, turned the artist's attention to the tactility of sculpture and its conflicting relationship to touch, as he tells me from his Notting Hill studio.

'Titillating' is how Hornby describes injecting other protagonists into art history's canonised silhouettes. Think of the bulbousness of a Henry Moore, dipped into the sensuality of a nude selfie. The sculptures possess a 'hermetically sealed' mystery about their fruition, but Hornby is as open about his process as he is with his journey of conceiving them. Rigorous stages of the 'magical process' include transferring the image onto water in the form of dissolvable ink before pressing the blank sculpture into that floating image. 'I'm taking an industrial technique used in commercial reliefs and adapting it into sculpture's three dimensionality,' he says, citing a memory of curiosity about the faux-mahogany dashboard in his dad's car.

Hornby's toying with the canon and means of production spills into his questioning of his past as well. 'I was raised as a Catholic, which affected how I expressed my identity,' he says. He was the closeted boy having his rugby-player classmates pose for clay sculptures at his all-boys' school. 'I had to use their athletic physiques to create both male and female figures,' he remembers. And each week, he was required to attend confession - to atone for his moral sins. It has taken him until now to develop a subversive response to this education. The result is a new series of voluptuously abstract sculptures that include men who have entered his life over the past few months. Look for the liquid crystal intimacy of an iPhone encounter, with its pixelated physicality, across the surfaces of his lacquered sculptures.

'I don't know what you see in them,' says Hornby mischievously. Among them are sleek marble blobs, frozen with fluid possibilities – crisply round, and both weightless and hefty. Their bulging and protruding surfaces host different men, each fragmented by the sculptures' poetic fluctuations, a la Futurist Boccioni or Modernist Brâncuși. A blue speedo is seen covering a man's buttocks and crotch. Interlocking hands at the end of tattooed arms. Unlike their 2D originals, the images appear wavy and solvent, almost yearning for a touch. 'First their shine, then their shape,' says Hornby, when referring to the order his sculptures expose themselves to the viewer. In the end, it depends on where you're standing - literally and figuratively.

If it wasn't for the pandemic, Hornby's intention was to invite visitors to touch the works. You might be compelled to touch the smooth shiny surface – but in doing so – you would also be touching the man's buttock or arm.

Soho House is a spot where he can be seen working on his computer. 'I may be inspired by someone curiously approaching me to see what I am working on,' he says. Hornby is somewhat against the romantic presumption of the artist working isolated at his studio, which, in his case, is a massive space converted from a former set for the pilot episode of MTV's *The Real World*. 'I cannot think of a better environment than a site where they produced the zygote of something,' he laughs. He finds his visitors intrigued by the faux fire escape or crusty walls that he inherited from the studio's former life. 'That moment before something fluid is complete and sealed... there isn't a better metaphor for my work.'