

CITIZENS *of* HUMANITY

British Sculptor Nick Hornby lets us into his London-based studio and discusses his greatest influences, art in the age of social media, and how the pandemic has impacted his work

Art often reflects society and the times, how is what's going on now impacting or influencing your work?

"This is actually a really pertinent question..... Until this year, my work had actively avoided the present day – assuming an ahistorical position and criss-crossing art histories. But this year has been different: Covid-19 reduced my world to the smallness of my apartment. For the first time, I became profoundly lonely and craved touch. Just before lockdown, I discovered a method of dipping objects into liquifying images – where the image wraps around the object covering every detail. The process is intimate, tactile, fragile and almost magical – and it seemed to almost mirror the touching and swiping our iPhones – the facetimes, zooms and tinder encounters. What unfolded from this has been a huge body of work – 32 sculptural portraits born from iPhone encounters (basically when things slipped into DMs)."

In the age of social media and the way content is taken in does that present challenges for you in sharing your work?

"Sculpture is a physical experience. Size and weight are important. It is the opposite of cinema, in whose dark space you forget about your body. With sculpture the opposite happens – you connect with your materiality – your feet your feet planted on the floor, the pores of your skin, your dry lips. Its challenging to relay that physical experiences – but a mixture of images and video and text captions can get you some of the way there."

Do you think its [social media is] positive for the arts in general?

"Instagram is an extraordinary phenomenon. I have met so many artists, curators and writers, I've made friends and even lovers via Instagram. Whilst it might favour bright and colourful poppy images or frothy selfies over more contemplative ideas... despite this I love it. A prime example is the Artist Support Pledge (#artistsupportpledge), an initiative set up by Matthew Burrows – to encouraged artists to sell their work via Instagram. I read has now generated over £70m in sales... a fascinating democratising of an otherwise too closed system – and a lifeline to so many artists. And I believe its how you [Citizens of Humanity] found me? And we embarked on this wonderful dialogue. You've introduced me to fellow artists, poets - who have in turn triggered other new conversations."



Who are some of your greatest influences? Mentors?

"I really like to mix-it-up.... my influences are broad ranging, from luxury yacht design, 16th Century Choral music, Victorian industry – to wetsuits, spacesuits, ballet, artists, curators, poets, flowers, pebbles, Michelangelo, Hepworth and Moore, Matisse, Rodin, Picasso, Arthur Fleischmann, Video Art, New Media Art, Isidore (unclassifiable) Simon (ex-boyfriend), Felipe (ex-boyfriend), Indie Choudhury (the curator I worked with at Tate), Brooke Lynn McGowan (writer), Alex Massouras (Artist), Oliver beer (Artist), Barthes, Derrida, David Roberts (collector), Mervyn Davies (collector), the public."

Historically art has movements, abstract expressionists, pop, neo pop etc... what do you think your generation of artists mark will be on art history?

"I think my generation's mark on history will actually be to question the movements themselves! I think they tend to reduce complicated ideas into simplified stories – and mainly stories of white men. I hope my generation will be remembered for opening things up – the grand narratives of modernism are over, but so too are the equally dogmatic narratives of post-modernism. Rather than manifestos that dictate art as one thing or another, we are happy to include anything. Paint on canvas or digital coding - figuration or abstraction, live action art or commodifiable art objects – all can be equally relevant. Authorship is fine and re-mixing is fine. I feel all the dogmas no longer matter. I feel very optimistic."

What has been your greatest lesson to date?

That meaning isn't fixed. That its contingent. To give a simple example, in sculpture, placing one thing next to another changes its potential reading. But more widely - this notion has vast impact on a much broader approach – it means that my belief, or my position might be wrong and however informed I might be, I will never know the whole truth (outside of my own limitations). This is both terrifying but also extremely exciting as it opens up extraordinary creative potential.

Any sound advice you've received that has shaped your career?

Yes – in 2016, a friend (Iris) visited my studio and pointed out that whilst I'd done a great job of setting out the intellectual concepts and philosophical enquiry of my practice – she didn't know anything about me. And she wanted to know my story. It took several years and a global pandemic – but this advice was the seed that grew into this recent very personal and autobiographical series and my current solo exhibition at Mostyn "Zygotes and Confessions."

– Zygotes and Confessions Mostyn, Llandudno, 14 November to 18 April