



Nick Hornby, *Atom v. Super Subject*, 2010, at Alexia Goethe Gallery, London



Nick Hornby, *Transition from Thinking to Dreaming*, 2009, at Alexia Goethe Gallery, London



Nick Hornby, *If I held you any closer I would be on the other side*, 2010, at Andaz 5th Avenue hotel, New York



Nick Hornby, *If I held you any closer I would be on the other side*, 2010, at Andaz 5th Avenue hotel, New York



Nick Hornby, *Untitled 727*



Nick Hornby, *13* [an iteration of his 727 sculpture], 2008, at the Chelsea Parade Ground

SCULPTURE AS NARRATIVE by Simon Todd

The young British artist **Nick Hornby** (b. 1980) was recently touted as "one to watch" by the *Evening Standard*, and so naturally I hastened along to take a look. He's definitely on the go, having enjoyed a sellout solo show at **Alexia Goethe Gallery** in London, and landed a large commission for the deluxe **Andaz 5th Avenue** hotel in New York City that has just opened to the public. He was also recently nominated for the inaugural **£45,000 Spitalfields Sculpture Prize**, and has three large works in a sculpture survey that the British Council opens in Athens on Oct. 1, 2010.

New Yorkers can also visit "Patrons, Muses and Professionals," a series of sculptures on view at **Eyebeam** in Chelsea, Sept. 23-Oct. 16, 2010. At our meeting, Hornby looks serious, is dressed in black and is carrying a large coffee with his laptop.

Simon Todd: You've exhibited in Tate Britain, at the Fitzwilliam Museum, and a Dover Street gallery. Why now a boutique hotel in Manhattan?

Nick Hornby: The Andaz 5th Avenue is quite a magical hotel -- slightly Wizard of Oz. For example, in the lobby they've eliminated the front desk and instead you're greeted by two guys carrying iPads to seamlessly check you in. The space is very open and dissected by vertical shutters and pathways. To some extent my sculpture mirrors the interior -- it's a seemingly complicated shape, a 12-sided dodecahedron. As you walk around it you start to see glimpses of things you recognize. Faces, outlines, shapes snap into view.

ST: What is it that you see?

NH: The sculpture is multifaceted. It contains the outline of six iconic silhouettes taken from the surrounding area -- for example, it includes the bowed head of the Gertrude Stein statue in Bryant Park, Barnett Newman's *Broken Obelisk* from MoMA, the huge urns from the steps of the New York Public Library across the street, and a star from the American flag.

I love the idea of single objects filling in for an array of other objects -- Swiss Army knives, computers, department stores, filing systems, catalogues, poems. I like to read digests and summaries. When I was at school I was taught to read a book and condense it to notes, condense those notes to a handful of sentences, and then to just words, and finally just the book's title.

ST: What's the sculpture's title?

NH: *If I held you any closer I would be on the other side*

ST: Do you want the viewer to be able to recognize your source material?

NH: I'm trying to find that place between the raw and the cooked -- to make each object appear to have its own rationale, but also be unstable enough to unfold and reveal its origins.

ST: For your MA show you built a life-sized lateral section of a 727 airplane, a kind of circular sculptural object, which blew over in the wind two hours before the opening. (Since then, it's been refabricated and installed at Sony HQ in London.) But was the original event part of a plan to implicate the viewer in the role of "gossip-monger"?

NH: I'm interested in sculptures as devices to tell stories. It is important to draw people in and capture their imagination. The 727 was standing in the morning, and gone by the time the exhibition opened to the public. Only a photograph taken at dusk remained, and the rumor. We do have a tendency to fill in gaps and create meaning. The sculpture of the 727 in its absence is more powerful than as an object alone. As a composite of six different things, the Andaz sculpture becomes a puzzle to be solved. At the core of my practice is an interest in interpretation and how artworks are read.



Nick Hornby carrying *Tell Tale Heart* through the canals, 2008, for the London Festival of Architecture



Nick Hornby carrying *Tell Tale Heart* through the canals, 2008, for the London Festival of Architecture



Nick Hornby, *Tell Tale Heart*, 2008, at the London Festival of Architecture



Nick Hornby, *Walking in Our Mind*, 2009, at Southbank Centre, London



Nick Hornby, 2010

ST: Another work of yours that no longer exists is an enormous sculpture of a castle that was part of the 2008 London Festival of Architecture. It was bought by David Roberts Foundation but rotted and is now gone forever. Isn't that problematic?

NH: It was designed to decompose -- that was part of the narrative! For six months it floated in a pond in a mini-nature reserve in the heart of an urban development. That nature reserve was created by water from the canals that were instrumental in industrializing Britain and creating the manmade landscape that now entraps the park. The castle wasn't a monument, but a way to tell stories.

My works are about entrenched narrative. The newer works are cast in a synthetic marble so they don't rot. It is literally marble frozen in time, as in the classical material from Italy ground to a dust and suspended in resin.

ST: You've described the works themselves as "synthetic" and also as "genetic-hybrids." In September's *Frieze* magazine, Jörg Heiser talks of "super-hybridity." Is that an accurate description of your work?

NH: Not necessarily. Maybe this work is the result of new technologies, the internet, "facebooking," digital consumption, but I think in my case it's more autobiographical. My questioning of authorship is more to do with trying to pinpoint what I inherit, what I accumulate, and what I can create. I mix and unmix, trying to isolate raw ideas, atoms, ingredients, and cook up new things.

ST: Your works are handmade, and their surfaces scratched and dusty, but the objects are almost sci-fi. You employ computers and robots to generate the pieces. This seems to be a surreal contradiction.

NH: Absolutely. I'm interested in the legibility of traditional labor versus the opacity of mechanical or electronic labor. We can understand the blows of a chisel on a Michelangelo sculpture, but can't quite imagine what happens behind the Google logo.

ST: What follows this trip to New York?

NH: I'm engaged in designing a sculpture for a space that doesn't yet exist -- only knowing the space via conversations and abstract ideas. I'm working on another future architecture project still under development. First I'm headed to Athens for a group exhibition, "Props, Events & Encounters" at the Hub.

ST: It seems apt for you to visit Greece, the authentic origin of your synthetic marble.

NH: Yes, the classical figure on a stone plinth, rather than my meta-sculpture on a computer cube.

SIMON TODD is Artnet's UK representative.