



Sotheby's
INSTITUTE OF ART

Zygotes and Confessions: Nick Hornby's Structuralist Contradictions

Provocative, irreverent and subversive, British sculptor Nick Hornby lays himself bare with his first UK solo exhibition, "Zygotes and Confessions", at MOSTYN. Through a pluralistic approach in which sculpture and photography merge into a hybrid form, he surpasses the conventional academic canons of space and media, creating a fluid world in which there are no preconceptions and determinations.

In conversation with MADE IN BED's Feature Editor, Federico Raffa, the artist reveals himself in a contradictory confession through eros, structuralism, fluidity and utopia.



"I don't love Bernini; I find him too melodramatic."

It is said that the sculptor and architect Gian Lorenzo Bernini could make marble as malleable and pliable as wax. The history of art has praised him as a multifaceted and multidisciplinary master of Baroque figurative art and a cornerstone of Italian art. Every year, tens of thousands of tourists visit Italy to admire and photograph his sculptures, posting pictures of them on social media like trophy hunters. Yet, despite Bernini's undeniable technical mastery, a layer of doubt inevitably persists: are people really fascinated by the drama and lightness of the Neapolitan sculptures' touch, or do they love him because art history imposes this admiration? Are we free to follow our tastes, or does society ultimately condition us?

Provocative, irreverent and contradictory, British sculptor Nick Hornby follows the roots of French structuralism by questioning the necessity and reliability of social canons of beauty, gender, and thought, through fluid, sensual and figurative sculptures, a selection of which is now on display in his autobiographical exhibition *Zygotes and Confessions* at MOSTYN. Here, Hornby presents three groups of sculptures with a patinated photographic skin using a technique appropriated from industry. In this way, he manages to create a hybrid, dichotomous, hermaphrodite form that surpasses the academic canons and breaks into a new space, offering a three-dimensionality to the photographic images and a double personality to the sculptural form. Everything merges into forms that he defines as "meta-cubist". The image acquires a corporality that simultaneously cancels the sculpture's rigid structure, the latter of which disappears on being perceived as an image. The coexistence of the two figurative forms, photography and sculpture, gives the eye a distorted incapacity to clearly define what is being observed. That is the intended effect: it is not essential to define, to channel thought structures of thought, but to observe what is given and take it as it is. Hornby rebels against social structures and creates a fluid world where there are no preconceptions and determinations, ultimately giving life to a zygote born from the fusion of two art forms, shapes, images, colours and sensations.

[more...]



Zygotes and Confessions at MOSTYN.

"I used to hide behind other people's quotes; now, I lay bare."

The artist defined the exhibition as a confession, playing on the ambivalence of meaning. This term notoriously carries a negative connotation, describing an admission of guilt, of hidden sin. In a society defined by standardized criteria with norms for everything - from conceptions of gender to fashion and behavioural customs - laying oneself bare and showing one's true identity is often perceived as a fault. Yet, speaking in religious terms, the word confession derives from the Latin verb *confiteri*, which was formerly used to indicate the profession of one's faith even at the cost of one's life. Therefore if, on the one hand, confession can be understood as an admission of remorse to a society that imposes mass conformism, it also bears a different, more transgressive potential. In Hornby's case, confession transcends conformity and instead becomes a hymn to one's person and a way to express oneself without the burden of shame, regret, or guilt, a sort of declaration of love towards oneself. Like a hybrid between King Midas and Pygmalion, Nick Hornby carves his desires, passions, loves, and pleasures, exorcising and reliving them, and above all, sharing them with the public.

"I don't target a select audience. I'm interested in work that has an immediate accessibility, and then slowly reveals complexities, contradictions, mistakes and questions."

On the Victorian busts it is possible to notice images by the photographer Louie Banks, on the mantelpiece dogs BDSM images and on the abstract forms photos of men in bathing suits. In the destruction of gender stereotypes and the exaltation of free sexuality, eros is a central theme of Hornby's work. The shapes of the male bodies in the photographs stand out through a seductive and captivating gossamery lack of clarity, stimulated by the undulating, enveloping shapes and the sculptures' translucent surfaces. Their lustre attracts the viewers, almost inviting them to touch the works. The intimacy and carnality of touch, in addition to sight, thus becomes a fundamental sense of research, discovery and feeling.

"Superficiality is deemed to be a negative trait, but as a sculptor, I'm interested in surfaces - the relationship between surface, form and interior. The gloss lacquer creates a hermetic seal that hides many stages of fabrication."

If, on the one hand, the translucent patina gives fluidity to the work of art and its characterization of the artist's being, on the other it recalls the screen of a telephone, evoking the impact of new technologies on our sexual and relational spheres. Today, in a consumer society that prefers ready-made products, quick solutions, and immediate satisfaction, the relational experience becomes similar to other consumable goods; as such, it becomes equally replaceable, affordable and transactional. Today's society tends to dissolve the taboo of sex and then commodify it through media eroticization. Cinema, television, and advertising all deal with sexual themes, transforming them into objects of consumption. Technology plays a vital role in this process by creating virtual realities in which sex itself is subject to commodification. Think, for example, of dating applications like Tinder, in which people are window-shopped according to purely aesthetic criteria as if they were objects in a catalogue. From this perspective, those same sensual, bewitching, seductive works become at the same time alienating, distressing and estranging. The sculptures pose as a hedonistic illusion, in which the erotic character becomes ephemeral. The screen, the translucent patina, shows images that seem to take a three-dimensional concretization through the sculpture but simultaneously remain trapped in the two-dimensional world. A mirage.

Similarly, the fluidity of the genre itself becomes a utopia. Despite the intersection between sinuous shapes and images, it is possible to immediately recognize the sculpture's silhouettes: Victorian busts, mantelpiece dogs, abstract art. It's as though we must always somehow pay a debt to the past, or at least acknowledge its importance, honouring it and making it present. In the same way, today's society clings to ideas and stereotypes of the past, not because it necessarily accepts or shares them, but simply as a matter of practicality. Categorization is a pragmatic process that occurs through social simplification, with the dual function of making the strange familiar and the invisible perceptible. We are all accomplices, both victims and executioners.

Nick Hornby's work puts before us what apparently has the hallmark of constant and continuous contradictions. Yet the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction does not apply here, exalting opposites' coexistence or even their coincidence. The artist seduces, provokes, deludes, saddens and then thrills us again, demonstrating the existence of a binary system in which alternative realities are interacting with each other with complicity. By exposing himself through his work, he unmasks the taboos of a structuralist society to which he haphazardly belongs. Thus his confession, whether taken as an admission of guilt or as a profession of faith, becomes a stoical acceptance.

Is he, after all, a melodramatic like Bernini?

- Federico Raffa, Feature Editor, MADE IN BED