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Greg Forrest: Heavy Metal
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I can't explain the hold that 60s culture has on us – those of us too young to have lived it at first hand – but explained or not, there it is. I think it's love. Or some other strong emotion, one that mixes attraction with repulsion, love with hate, desire with envy and generosity with need. Yeah, that's love.

Greg Forrest is from my generation – we were still playing with Hot Wheels cars when the Who recorded their album *Live at Leeds*. Demographers call my generation a lost one, a baby bust after the baby boom. “There ain't nothin' in the world for a young man these days,” sang Roger Daltrey in Leeds, the irony probably lost on his original, boomer, listeners, but oh so clear to us *these* days. There ain't nothin' in this world that hasn't already been had by that generation. Call us substitutes, forever in the shadow of our older siblings. They moved out, went to college, got jobs and got married, and we moved into their teen years, right into their rooms, still furnished with their old clothes, their posters, their stereos and, most importantly, their records. Sometimes it feels like we're still there.

After all, popular culture was perfected for that other generation, and we got their hand-me-downs. Popular culture is like a sea, and early on we took to swimming. Television, radio, movies, comic books and arcade games – that was our context and it didn't matter when the songs provided as our soundtrack were recorded. Bob Dylan, the Stones, the Sex Pistols, Elvis Costello, the Talking Heads, Janis Joplin, the Velvet Underground, Bruce Springsteen, Patti Smith, and yes, the Who, all happened at once for us.

And the Who? Well, the Who were “The Seeker,” “My Generation” and “Pinball Wizard.” The Who broke their instruments, were arguably the best live band ever, not that many of us growing up in small town Canada ever saw them play live. Their sound was *loud*, hard rock before hard rock became institutionalized as *heavy metal*. They had the greatest rock drummer ever, too, and he lived hard and died tragically. So what if they became just another arena band, the epitome of “dinosaur” rock – we could cherry-pick their albums, listen to their *Live at Leeds*, then move on to *Never Mind the Bollocks Here's the Sex Pistols* or the Clash's *London Calling* without feeling any disconnect. That's the way it is when you live by a sea – flotsam and jetsam keep appearing and you make of them what you can. I'm talking about *my* generation.

So is Greg Forrest. His take on sculpture is populist and sardonic; he's not ironic, but bemused, like our generation. He doesn't step back from his subjects and he doesn't keep a wink and a smirk in his back pocket in case he's taken seriously. No, Forrest is honest with his objects and their viewers, this work is autobiographical and earnest, it's funny and it's serious.

Drum Kit is a monument, a statue of a frozen moment in time, a gesture presented as it may have been when it was still pure, before it descended into mere shtick. The gesture was Keith Moon's – a climax to a performance, an explosive burst of energy that scattered his drums at the end of a concert. It was a gesture, Forrest chooses to believe, that began honestly, only becoming part of a pat routine later on. I suppose that points to a certain romanticism in Forrest's sculpture, but that fits – Forrest may be an artist with an exhibition in a public gallery, but he's also a fan. Forrest talks of Moon as an Icarus figure, someone that flew too close to the sun and burned out in a blaze of publicity. The Greek legend of Icarus is a cautionary tale, as is that of Moon. It's a romantic myth that the route to knowledge is paved with excess, says Forrest. One look at his *Drum Kit* shows his stance: the route to knowledge is paved with work.

Keith Moon earned his reputation as a musician through a mastery of his craft, by the exercise of his art. He became "Moon the loon" when he forgot that art and started performing down to expectations. *Drum Kit* is a monument, but it isn't a celebration. Moon believed a myth, a myth that claimed many other young men of his (and our) generation. That myth is part of our culture, but it holds no claim on Forrest. There's sadness behind this humour, and a bit of nostalgia – after all, says Forrest, "only the dead can be monumentalized." *Drum Kit* doesn't celebrate a burnout, rather, in part, it eulogizes lost potential.

Sculpture as monument is an old-fashioned idea that Forrest has adapted for his own purposes. *Drum Kit* is a monument, but not to Keith Moon, or at least not to Moon specifically. Rather it is a monument to all the young men who flew too close to the sun. It is a monument to their, to our, innocence, an innocence that was lost almost at the instant it was first expressed. Perhaps it never existed except in the minds of we younger sibs, misinterpreting the culture we inherited, that culture that never quite felt like our birthright.

Sculpture, this sculpture or any sculpture, is an idea manifested in material. Between the idea and the material lies a gulf filled only by labour and technique – by, in short, work. It's another old-fashioned idea that the artist need fill the gap between idea and material with their own labour. Yet work is key to Forrest's approach. He could have bought a drum kit, for instance, or he could have made a mould of one in order to make his waxes. He could have hired a foundry to make those moulds, keeping his contribution down to the idea and a cheque. Instead he painstakingly hand-built every component of the sculpture. Artists of Forrest's generation have had to make a virtue of necessity, adopting a do-it-themselves aesthetic because they had to, (Who else would do it for them?), but mastering such old fashioned techniques as lost-wax casting because they want to. It's like having a drummer in a band rather than relying on a drum machine.

Bronze, the heavy metal of this exhibition's title, fell out of favour as a material for sculpture, and as a result the expertise needed to produce large-scale bronze work fell into disuse in art schools across Europe and North America. Steel replaced bronze in Modernist sculpture; artists could work directly in steel without having to go through the intermediary processes of working in clay, plaster or wax. Plastics, fiberglass, found objects,

plywood and other materials are much more current, still, than bronze. Like the Who, and like rock and roll, bronze is a classic, and a bit of a dinosaur. But that's all right.

Monuments fulfill a very basic human need. A monument acknowledges that, while we, and all our works will eventually f-f-f-fade away, we were here, once. *Drum Kit* represents a moment frozen in time, but at heart it also represents desire – the desire to cheat time; a desire born of the all too human need to overreach and in overreaching, to transcend our limitations.