

Anthony Gormley
“**Apart X**”

Anthony Mark David Gormley was born in London in 1950 of a devout Catholic family, the youngest of seven children. His name with the initials AMDG stand for Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam meaning “FOR THE GLORY OF GOD”. His early childhood helped shape his way of visualizing and exploring his art. He was required to rest each day in a claustrophobic room and he turned this feeling inward to cope with his space and his relation to it.

His approach to art was also shaped by his travel to India as a young man just graduating for college in 1969. There he experienced the people sleeping on the streets covered and ambiguous venerable, figures. They were still shapes and a form of architecture. His first sculpture, Sleeping Place on his return from India was a plaster cast of these figures.

His entire career has been centered around the human body and its relation to space and surroundings. “Sculpture deals with what it is like to inhabit a human body.” And “when we close our eyes the feeling is immeasurable and is equivalent to deep space, the cosmos”. So his body of work has dealt almost entirely with the human body, mostly his own. He experiments with various materials, steel, lead, plaster, iron, fiberglass, wire and with this work structural steel blocks arranged to form his body. This is a melding of the organic body with the architectural body.

Apart X is a sculpture of his body in a position, which reduces it to the least volume and size that a body can assume. This piece is part of his *Block Work Series*. It was made by making a plaster cast of his body, which his wife did. Then a mold to sculpt the form is done by using steel blocks of 25mm x 25mm x 50mm. This is a ratio of 1:1:2. He maintains this ratio in all of the blocks in his Block Work figures. The first of these works were made in molds. He uses a post-and-lintel structure to construct the body. This is an ancient construction technique with the best example being “Stonehenge” in England. These are the digital representation of the cellular or molecular structures of the body. It also helps join his belief that the body is architecture. The early works allude to chemical states: concentrate, precipitate, sublimate, which evoke references to the body under the skin. Their surfaces are relatively smooth and follow the form of the body.

The later works try to “liberate each of the participant blocks into a space of their own, where the dynamic between space and mass permeates the whole body”. In these works the blocks project outside of the surface or the body making the surface much more abstract.

In 2007 he participated in the “Fourth Plinth” in Trafalgar Square. Usually, the Plinth has artwork placed on it but what he did was for his one week he had various different individuals stand on it and do what they wanted to do. He titled it “One Another”. One of the participants was a girl with acrophobia and she spent her entire hour assuming the same position as the Apart X. He explained that he was profoundly moved by her performance.

Gormley is extremely prolific in his artwork and experiments on various new ways of sculpturing the body. Previously his works used the body like a found object which he sculpted pieces that resembled the body but in a simpler form based on a cast of his body. Now he has expanded and in his Block Work series he now used these pixels of various sizes to sculpt large very abstract representations of the human body. There are several iterations of his Block Works. He now has evolved into making works that are large and now open where you can walk thru the body and experience first hand what it feels like to be inside a body.

He does not consider his sculptures as statues but that it represents the body’s relationship to space. Gormley is well known for his large outdoor public works. He installs them on buildings, on beaches in large numbers and in public buildings. He hopes that people view these installations in the context of the relation of the body to its surrounding space.

Being a surgeon, the body has been an integral part of my life and this work fascinates me from a structural and representational aspect.



Apart X, 2003 Mild Steel Blocks

Gift of Donna and Cargill MacMillan

References:

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