

## DRAW ME A SCULPTURE

This summer the Saatchi Gallery opens *The Shape of Things To Come: New Sculpture*, its first ever exhibition devoted entirely to sculpture. The exhibition follows hot on the heels of the Royal Academy's *Modern British Sculpture* exhibition, and Anita Zabludowicz's sculpture show *The Shape We're In* which bridges disused spaces in London, New York and her own 176 Gallery. This proliferation of exhibitions devoted to sculpture has ensured that the traditions, and contemporary iterations, of the medium have become the subject of much scrutiny.

These exhibitions are united in their battle to define 'sculpture', a category that has become increasingly slippery, even obsolete, in contemporary artistic practice. The Saatchi Gallery show incorporates a broad spectrum of artworks that can be described as 'sculptural'. From stuffed horse hide to compacted dust and detritus; neon tubes to theatrical sets, the term is pushed and pulled away from its traditional moorings to encompass works which seek to enter directly into the space the viewer inhabits, and so profoundly disturb it.

Thomas Houseago, whose work is amongst the best represented in the Saatchi show, is an LA-based artist whose monolithic figurative sculptures dwarf the viewer and freshly reinterpret sculptural practices which stretch right back to Classical times. Many of these clay forms feature flat planes marked with transferred drawings, situating them in an interstitial territory between sculpture and sketch. This reinforces their 'unfinished' aesthetic and adds an additional energy and immediacy to what are startlingly primitivistic works of art. Thomas and I exchanged emails on the eve of the exhibition to talk Yorkshire, LA and a return to the hand-made.

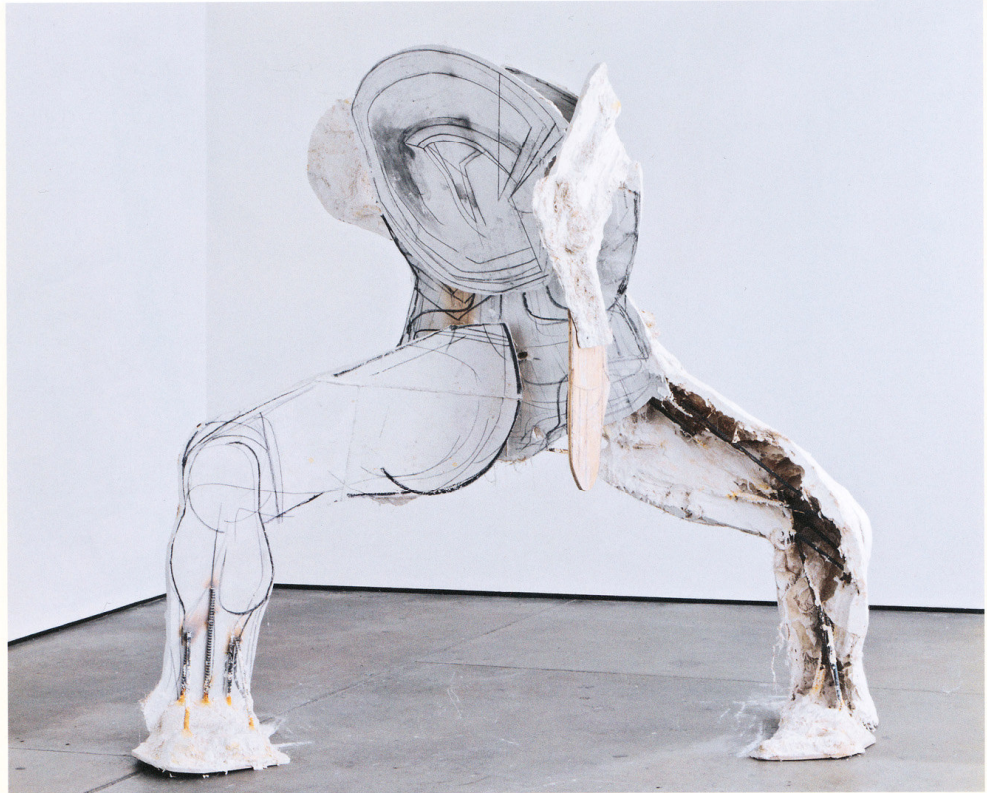


Figure 1, 2008, wood, graphite, tuff-cal, hemp, iron, oil stick, 221 x 221 x 132 | cm  
Courtesy Saatchi Gallery, London

## Viewing

Folded Man, 1997, plaster, jute, inox, 220 x 110 x 80 cm  
Courtesy Saatchi Gallery, London

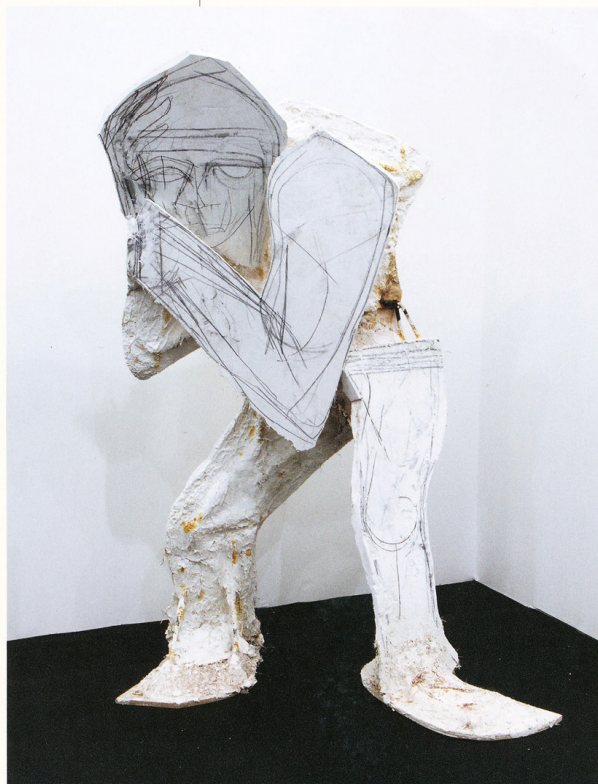


— As the realities of space and time have unfortunately not allowed for a face to face meeting, I can't help wondering whether you feel that you still correspond to Rudi Fuchs's description of you as: 'young, red-haired, intense and impatient – a Yorkshire boy'? Pretty much. Yes. I'm still red-haired, impatient, a little less intense, I think, and for sure less young. 'You can take the boy out of Yorkshire, but not Yorkshire out of the boy.'

— When were you first compelled to create three-dimensional work? Did the proud Yorkshire tradition of sculpture have an impact at all? No, not when I first started with three dimensions, which was at Jacob Kramer Foundation College in Leeds. I had been amazed and terrified by Joseph Beuys. He made me believe in objects and materials. I'm only recently starting to accept that tradition here in LA, and partly through artist friends like Aaron Curry and Amy Bessone.

— What is your studio like? What atmosphere do you cultivate there? I recently – and for the first time – could buy my own studio, and for me it is paradise. It is comprised of two buildings, one like a kitchen and the other more like a restaurant. There is also a garden space, so I have the opportunity to see my works under the beautiful California sky. I have amazing people who work for me; there has to be a good atmosphere to make good things.

Figure 2, 2008, wood, graphite, oil stick, luf-cal, hemp, iron rebar, 228.6 x 83.8 x 134.6 cm  
Courtesy Saatchi Gallery, London



— You say in an interview with Michael Stanley that you believe the world really needs sculpture and art, perhaps more than ever. What do you mean by that? I mean it in the simplest terms. But isn't it pretty obvious?

— One of the themes for this issue is maps, and looking at your biography I am struck by the variety of locations you have based yourself in. Why have you had such a nomadic lifestyle, and do the various places that you've lived in – LA, London, Amsterdam – feed into your work? I moved always because I had to. I never really had much choice in it. I think that if you dedicate yourself totally to your work, it kind of leads you until you find the right place to be a home. In my case, Los Angeles. But, yes, the journey was really important for me; sometimes hard and painful, but it taught me never to believe in any kind of local scene or dogma.

— You are showing next in the Saatchi Gallery's *The Shape of Things to Come: New Sculpture* alongside artists like Matthew Brannon, Berlinde de Bruyckere, Peter Buggehout and David Altmejd. Do you see any synergy between the ways in which contemporary artists are working in sculpture? Loosely yeah, I see a return to the hand-made, the body as a form to act things out in. But the artists of my generation that I really look at are Aaron Curry, Amy Bessone, Mark Grotjahn, and Enrico David.

— The titles of your works are largely mythical, for example 'Striding Man', 'Serpent', 'Cyclops'. One of your sculptures 'Joanne' has really stolen my heart. Why such a personal name for this crouching figure? 'Joanne' is named after a friend of mine in L.A. It was one of the first works that I made out here.

— Your work has increasingly incorporated the drawn line. What do you feel this adds to the sculptures? I think drawing is at the root of my work. I have always wanted to be able to bring the spontaneity, energy, speed, intimacy, and vulnerability of drawing into sculpture.

— Could we ever tempt you back to the UK? I love the U.K. but my home is California with my beautiful wife, kids, and the mountains. You know, America took me in when I was homeless and desperate and I'm eternally grateful for that. Amazingly, Michael Stanley gave me the chance to do Oxford – my first U.K. show – which was a fantastic experience. I'm currently working on a large-scale show for Paul Nesbitt at Inverleith House that I'm wildly excited about – so I feel I'm gently, kind of returning.

*The Shape of Things to Come: New Sculpture* runs from May 27th – October 16th 2011, [www.saatchigallery.com](http://www.saatchigallery.com)