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Today's POP is Lily, the morning after a sculptural supper with artists Peter Hide and Walter Early at the Piper Gallery, Newman Street...



Last night I ate supper surrounded by steel. Which was great. I highly recommend it. And no, I was not in some incredibly trendy blink and you'll miss it pop-up restaurant located somewhere south of the river. I was at The Piper Gallery, sitting alongside the dynamic work of sculptors Peter Hide and Walter Early, celebrating their exhibition *Protesting Time* with a bespoke menu from Matthew Phelps (of FunThyme) inspired by the exhibition title. There was a lot of preserving and curing. And it was all incredible.

United by the Museum of Steel Sculpture (MOSS) (such a good acronym), Hide and Early are two artists separated by a generation who have found interest and synergy in one another's practice, and ultimately, I suppose, in their need or desire to protest time. Despite the innate heaviness and visual density of the steel they use, there exists a lightness and vitality to their work. The absolute strength and (for want of a better word) manliness in the abstract cube work of Hide is offset and complemented by the organic nature and bright hues of Early's chewing-gum-like structures. If you're feeling the post-Frieze-art-deprived-blues, then I can highly recommend *Protesting Time*.

A small talk with Peter Hide and Walter Early.

Why sculpture?

PH: Why dance? Because we have bodies. Nobody seems to ask 'why dance?' though. This is the short answer. What is different about sculpture from dance is a need to make something tangible, something that exists beyond ourselves. Dance is transient, we as beings are transient; sculpture is permanent. The New Guinea people carved ancestral figures as guardians for their homes to ward off evil spirits.

WE: It's the best! But seriously, it's the physicality that I'm drawn to. I've typically chosen labour oriented methods of manipulating material. Sculpture extends this full-body exertion by requiring circumnavigation to fully comprehend the piece. Conceptually, I'm concerned with objects and how they operate in our lives. It only seems fitting to explore theories by creating objects. Often these objects employ or reference found objects. I like this link to history; that the found pieces bring almost a sense of validity to my questions of value as they've already been judged (for better or worse) likely multiple times.

Where is the starting point for any given piece?

PH: By sticking one piece of steel to another or by seeing a chance relationship between pieces of steel that have significance as a group.

WE: My work is responsive to environments. I'm sensitive to forms and material that exist in a place and am intrigued by the systems we use to assign value to objects. I begin by collecting material related to an idea and then working with it until an appropriate path develops. This is not to say that my work is directly related to a specific site. I often think of it being related to photography: the ability to take something from a place, related to that place, but because of its removal it becomes something totally different.

Is there any significance in the use of steel/metal in your work?

PH: What is the significance of clay or marble or wood or bronze? They are all materials that are useful and available for making sculpture. Each material has different properties, so a clay sculpture (usually fired in a kiln or cast in bronze) will look quite different from an Egyptian carved granite sculpture and so it goes with steel, which looks very different indeed. This is an overly simple answer - there are other more complex reasons as to why steel sculpture, particularly in the High Modernist phase of the 60's which looks so unfamiliar, so disembodied. Abstraction of some sort or another occurs, I understand. Steel is unique amongst sculptural materials in that it's very strong and can be cut with great ease. This has led in part to a freely improvised genre of sculpture - abstract sculpture.

WE: I've dabbled with steel and cast metal in the past but this work marked the beginning of a couple years of working with steel almost exclusively. It was sparked by a residency at the Ironbridge Open Air Museum of Steel Sculpture (where Peter occasionally used the studio space) funded by a grant from the Henry Moore Foundation. This was an opportunity for me to develop technical skills while exploring how this media would fit into my studio practice. It's a delightful material to work with, very immediate and responsive. Though the choice is considered, the act of altering a piece can happen in a literal flash. I often think of steel as a very rigid thing, but working alongside Peter, I'm learning just how plastic it can be. It also has a protracted but very real lifecycle I've been exploring.



You both use a lot of negative space in your work, is this a conscious choice or a by-product of something else?

PH: Negative space has always existed in sculpture. In the Parthenon pediment the space between the sculptures is almost as important as the figures themselves. In New Guinea in Africa, the forms of sculpture are not naturalistic, negative space flows freely through the open-working of the piece.

WE: I wanted these pieces to feel like things that had been through the (metaphorical) wringer. That they had been twisted, beaten, torn apart and then casually discarded. Then picked back up, deemed worth saving for some reason, and given a shiny new protective coating. The negative space is a byproduct of construction. When assembling my sculpture, I tried not to alter the original pieces too much. I wanted them to retain some sense of their identity in the jumble in which they had been thrown. Like attempting a jigsaw puzzle short a few pieces, I tried to match up lines and planes as close as possible, but with irregular pieces that leads to holes.

Walter, I feel your pieces have an organic, almost natural appearance to them. They look alive. Agree/disagree?

WE: I will agree with the liveliness of them, maybe not the "natural" part. I think the active surfaces and lines lead the eye around pretty rapidly. This is aided by the bright colour. Their stance on the plinth also lends a perched air: adding tension and potential energy to the more massive bits which I might be able to be convinced in this instance resemble musculature. I started very hesitant to agree but think I may have just talked myself into it... Certainly there is a record of some sort of life in and on them.

You say this is "aided by the bright colour". Clearly colour plays a huge role in your work, which is not always the case with sculpture. Why colour? Has this always been of importance?

WE: My current use of colour is a recent (past 2 years) development in my work. For a time I was completely committed to self-coloured materials; sometimes choosing a material simply for its colour. Applied colour slowly began creeping its way in and eventually I decided to just jump in with something previously uncomfortable. These sculptures in particular mark that first move. Though, more than the individual colours I was interested in the process of powder coating as a preservative measure. The particular colour range (deciding to use vibrant colours) was largely informed by the forms. The lines and surfaces were so active that I felt they needed an equally lively coating.

Peter, who has inspired or influenced your work?

PH: Anthony Caro - who I studied under at Central St Martins in the 60s. Then I always thought I was greatly influenced by Rodin, but more recently I have realised there is something more of Degas. The 'unfinished' nature of the work appeals to me; the rough texture and his unique ability to make man and object appear as one. For many sculptors, a chair is just a chair, but Degas made it part of the work. In his work it becomes important unto itself.

Finally, any opinion/thoughts on virtual sculpture?

PH: I sculpt in order to make something tangible and real, so it makes no sense to me. But if people have a reaction to it as a piece of art - if it inspires something in them - then it is art, regardless of the form it takes.

WE: I'm all for the use of the computer as a tool. Three-dimensional printing, for example, is an expedient method to get incredibly intricate forms. However I'm wary of objects that are created solely in the digital realm. I put a lot of value on the physical handling of material and think that the person sitting at the screen should have a thorough understanding of the tools and materials being used and how the images onscreen are understood as real life objects.

Interview Lily Silverton

Protesting Time is on until Friday 22nd November 2013 at The Piper Gallery, 18 Newman Street, London, W1T 1PE.