

ANTONY GORMLEY

HUMAN, FORTE DI BELVEDERE, FLORENCE

26 April - 27 September 2015

'The Forte di Belvedere, its function as defensive fortress and its expression of temporal power are the basis of this exhibition. Overlooking Florence, a city that typifies an urban ideal, this site offers a place in which to consider how architecture serves to shelter, protect and dominate people and space.

The Forte is an extraordinary example of a terraforming: a natural hill transformed by Ferdinando de' Medici into an artefact. It has a long association with contemporary art and has often been used as a monumental context for monumental sculptures. Rather than attempt to insert works that try to match the scale of the site, I have chosen to exhibit works that are life-size and that will allow the mass and form of this remarkable construction to speak.

At the core of the exhibition there are two arrangements of the work CRITICAL MASS II (1995). This work comprises twelve bodyforms, each cast five times to produce a total number of sixty works that can exist in any orientation. CRITICAL MASS II identifies a number of basic body postures from the contemplative to the supplicant, from the mourning to the deferential, from the position of a man who awaits an order to the dreamer. On the east side of lower terrace of the Forte the twelve body forms of CRITICAL MASS II are installed in a linear progression, from foetal to stargazing, recalling the 'ascent of man'. On the opposite side is a jumbled pile of the same bodies. Here, as abandoned manufactured iron objects, each ten times the specific gravity of a living human body, they reflect the shadow side of any idea of human progress, confronting the viewer with an image redolent of the conflict of the past century.

This dialectic between aspirational and object is the tension that runs throughout the exhibition.

As the installation infiltrates the spaces and places of the Forte, a dialogue between anatomy and architecture evolves. Bodyforms become increasingly rectilinear, departing from the symmetry of the CRITICAL MASS II works to the more cubic and chaotic forms of the 'Blockworks'. A single work installed against the wall in an entrance tunnel to the east connects building and body but also underlines the contrast between the idealism of a Renaissance city and the figure that we all know well, that of the homeless person sheltering in a city doorway. On the top terrace, outside the loggia, a mourning figure from CRITICAL MASS II faces a horizontal plane that it shares with a 'Blockwork' that looks out to the campagna. At the heart of the exhibition, in the old gunpowder store, is a single sculpture constructed from pure cubes, where the idealisation of the statue placed on a plinth is replaced by the pathos of the exposed prisoner on a box.

The concept behind the exhibition is to open up the Forte through sculptural acupuncture: the works are widely dispersed to catalyse the inherent masses, constrictions and panoramas that the site affords. In finding the right places to make these confrontations and allusions, I want to create stumbling blocks that stop the viewer in their tracks. I want to encourage the viewer to think again about who they are and how they negotiate the spaces around them.'

Antony Gormley, February 2015
