

ANTONY GORMLEY: Body & Soul

24 January 1991 – 2 March 1991

Frith Street Gallery, London

This exhibition is based on a series of nine etchings completed between February and September of last year. It is the first show of works on paper for 5 years by one of Britain's best known artists. Drawing, and more recently printmaking is a vital part of Gormley's work – more a liberation from the physical than studies for sculpture.

Gormley's work, most familiarly known through lead body-cases, is an exploration of the place of the body – not as in much recent European sculpture in terms of its external social or architectural context, or as in much painting of the 80's in terms of expressionism, a return to mythology and the explanation polyvalent sexuality, but in terms of it as an enquiry into the nature of being.

By using his own body as the material, he re-invents the human subject that is both an inquiry into the self and an explosion of it. The body in question is that of the artist and the body of all mankind.

The etchings that form the basis of this exhibition are an important new departure in the development of the work – by allowing the soft ground of the etching plate to be the membrane onto which the body is exposed, the work has a sense of mortality without the use of the human image.

It is as if the process of pressing, intrinsic to printing has been the catalyst for a liberation from appearance. Many of the etchings seem to evoke a view from 'within' the body in which the orifices become points of light – suggesting a visual equivalent for Blake's assertion that the senses are the windows of the soul.

These 'internal views' are balanced by impressions of the body bearing its own weight - a body conscious of itself as an instrument of gravity. This series of etchings is an invitation to reconcile the celestial and the corporeal body and evokes the idea that freedom, as light, can be expressed/explained/experienced only through a return to earth.

Through this work we are invited to consider the body not as an object of desire but as a place of reflection: an instrument that locates the illumination of the mind back within the ground of being to find balance, peace, liberation.

Implicit in this work is a notion of the redemptive function of art – for Gormley the inner body, the body freed from appearance is the most vital subject for art with a purpose. It suggests that for there to be order in the external world, there has to be balance within – inherent in its seeming withdrawal is a model for a new marriage between mineral and mental that has political implications in a world in which one is constantly the prey of the other.