Carta(s)

Thinking Is Three-Dimensional

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Thinking Is Three-Dimensional[1]

Giving talks is kind of difficult, especially artist talks, because so much of the artist is in the work, so many things that go in and out. Finding a trajectory that is interesting for everybody, including the speaker, is sometimes difficult. One wonders how to approach it in different situations. Also, when talking, one wants to get somewhere and do something different. Some people here have heard me talk before, so it's hard not to do the same old thing and not lend irony to the location. But I'll give it a try. I thought I would concentrate on figuration and really try to think about how I arrived at it, as I don't really think of myself as a figurative artist. But I am.

Fall '91 (1992) is not a bad sculpture of a lady, and it's a pretty good sculpture of a mannequin. I became interested in mannequin figuration in the late 1980s. I was doing some still life sculptures at the time, and they brought me to department stores. I was also in academia, at UCLA, where I taught for thirty, thirty-five years. There I was in the middle of a huge, life-threatening academic fight that can only happen in an academic situation. We were de-chairing a department chair, and I was in a kind of death struggle. I was fairly young and had bouts of paranoia, and one day I smoked some marijuana and got extremely paranoid. I was in a shopping center and was looking at the mannequins and thought, "If my enemy comes here and the mannequins look like me, it would really throw him over the edge. He would probably have a nervous breakdown, and I could dispense with him." It was just a simple, stupid thought in my head, but, strangely enough, it stuck with me for a year or so. I kept thinking more and more about figuration and what it meant. At that point I was very naive about it, but I knew some basic things about Greek figuration, about idealization, things I had learned as a

young art student—how it worked and was reflected in the culture and whatnot. I started to look at mannequins as a kind of contemporary figuration.

After that first idea, I went to a mannequin company—a cheap mannequin company—and had them lop the head off their brand of mannequin, take a mold of my head, genericize it and put it on their mannequin, and then dress it like I dressed, but in new clothes. I called it *Self-Portrait* (1990). I wasn't interested in the surreal or uncanny aspect of mannequins, in the mannequins you might see in *The Twilight Zone* or in surreal movies, going out and dancing at four in the morning and coming back before the store opens. I was interested in postwar consumerism—not consumer fetish but the actual cultural function of these figures in our everyday life. So I studied them and talked to mannequin companies and mannequin sculptors and sculptresses, and I learned some really interesting things about the mannequin as an appliance. For instance, a mannequin's eyes are never painted normally. They're always painted out so you can never have eye contact, because if you have eye contact with a mannequin, the mannequin has a soul that's looking at you. The mannequin has to be empty so you can project yourself into it and get a sense of wearing the clothes it wears.

Why does the kouros figure from ancient Greece smile? Why is he stepping forward? It's to animate the stone and give the figure a soul, to give him a *ka*, to give him *pneuma* and breath. If a mannequin smiles, then it's animate and you can't project into it—a smile gives it intentionality.

After World War II, as American consumers started to flock back to department stores, the need for mannequins greatly increased, so production was standardized and mannequins began to be made not of papier-mâché but of fiberglass. An industry of mannequin companies developed. The "Sears standard," named after the Sears department store, dictated proportions, such as the length from

foot to knee. In my early mannequin work I didn't want to screw around with these conventions. So I came up with formal rules for myself: I could do only certain things, like put my head on the mannequin.

Fall '91 I scaled up 30 percent. Originally it was a male mannequin, but that shifted at some point. I wanted her dressed like Ann Taylor, like she worked for the gas company or at a university office. I bought an actual Ann Taylor outfit for three hundred dollars, but when that was scaled up she looked like Bozo the Clown, so I had to buy a three-thousand-dollar outfit. Then when that was scaled up, it looked like a three-hundred-dollar outfit. The shoes, the wig, all the conventions were orchestrated at scale. The only part that wasn't to scale was the base plate—the glass. Initially I used a bigger piece of glass, but it was almost like a plinth; it put her up out of our world, into an idealized place. So in the end I scaled up the circumference but not the height. That's a clue to my interest in space and spatial embedment.

She's nicknamed "The Big Lady." But I often ask, "Is she a big lady, or are you a small viewer?" When she is installed properly in a space (which seldom happens), her proportions are 100 percent correct. She feels like a mannequin from across the room, and as you walk across the space to see her one of two things happens: either you shrink or she increases in height. So there's a kind of hallucinatory aspect to her spatial embedment. Each part is essential to the success of the whole, which makes it difficult to keep it functioning. If, for instance, the hair is out of place or the dress is stained—maybe a collector spills champagne on it—or an accident in transport leaves a mark across her leg, she leaves her mannequin-ness and becomes a Barbie doll or a figuration. Then she becomes a big lady, an ironic figure.

Fall '91 owes a lot to Anthony Caro's *Early One Morning*, from 1962. As a structure, the latter is so extended it can barely hold itself together. As you walk around it, it totally flattens out. When

Caro made it in 1962, the Beatles were singing "I Want to Hold Your Hand." The psychedelic revolution was still a few years away, yet Caro, not purposefully but prophetically, like a prophet of the coming hallucinogenic revolution, took the sculptural space and just turned it into an accordion. As the viewer interacts and walks around the piece, the whole room stretches and compresses and stretches and compresses. It's an incredible piece. Trajectories like these, in and out of sculpture, are fascinating in light of the imminent arrival of Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood" (1967), Robert Morris and minimalism, the destruction of high modernism. Caro's piece is thought of as the epitome of high-modernist sculpture, but looked at another way it is just so pop. Imagine it's 1962 in London, and there's a knock at your door. You open it, and there's this girl in a green vinyl miniskirt saying, "I got pot!" *Early One Morning* is so temporally embedded, so born alive—it comes out of a temporal moment that it carries with it.

A few years ago, before he died, Caro had a Roof Garden show at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. He brought up this beautiful sculpture called *Midday* (1960) that always had a specific color. For the show, they updated the color. It had been a midday orange—not a construction-cone orange but almost a bulldozer orange—that gave it more of a glow and really seemed to be of a piece with the time when it was made. For his 2011 show, the Met updated the sculpture with this kind of designer *lemon*-orange, totally not a color of the early 1960s. If it sounds like I'm being too designy about this, I'm not. I disagree with those who criticize the colors of Caro's work for being secondary skins. When he later strips color away and starts falling in love with his medium, making sculptures with volumetric spaces, with weight, with all these sculptural concepts, he loses a cultural connection to his location and becomes a very mediocre sculptor. I think it's really interesting how a work like this is so embedded in space that it can't be removed from a room, because, whatever space it's in, it's dynamic with the space of the room, and the animation of the

space is in relationship to the viewer, who's walking around the piece—but it's also temporally dynamic.

Works that are born in their moment, that are born alive and kicking, come up not like a time machine. We have to go back *to* them and somehow meet.

Caro's early work is figurative and kinesthetic, sort of like a man taking off his sweater and everything about the sweater—his head would be small but the shoulders are huge, and there were kinesthetic, body-felt feelings. When he met David Smith, he went totally abstract; it was almost like he started going off horizontally rather than vertically. He started talking about, for instance, ideas of the floor as not something that a sculpture sits on but the last element of a sculpture itself. This idea of parts in relationship building up to a whole gestalt was something I was really interested in. My piece *Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley . . .* (1992) is very Caro-esque. It's a sexual orgy where every participant is me. In Constantin Brâncuși's sculpture *The Kiss* (1907–1908), two primitive-like figures are embracing and separated by a linear line, but their arms are full, suggesting this cosmic idea that through love two become joined as one. I thought of *Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley . . .* as being the same piece, in a way. But the other side of that coin is that, when you have a lover, no one else is out there; the lover becomes a projection of yourself.

Ideas like that were very current in the world at the time. They were almost the easiest to come by for me, almost givens. Virtual reality was really big in this moment. Everybody was seeking it. Could you have sex in virtual reality? And if so, who would you have sex with in a virtual world? The process for *Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley . . .* involved making one mold of myself and then interacting with it. I started it in Belgium, failed, and then went back to the United States and spent another year with it. I had these wooden drawing dolls that I spent time with, trying to find a

sculptural relationship between the figures. My energy wasn't spent on content but on the formal aspects of it.

I was trying to make a group figurative sculpture. In my naivete I brought the mannequin industry with me. I brought the mannequin techniques, the mannequin paint, hair, that kind of mold technology. I didn't know another way to do it. I used to say things like, "Well, I couldn't do Rodin's *Burghers of Calais* as the Los Angeles City Council. That wouldn't make any kind of sense in *my* time."

My group figurative sculpture has eight figures, but not one of them touches. They all come close to touching but don't. Eight is just enough that you can't count them. With the eight it becomes infinite: you get the sense that it could go on forever. *Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley* . . . is unified by a kinky sexuality, the repetition of my identity. The Freudian surfboard that the "The Big Lady" rides in on, virtual reality, and the repetition of identity: those cultural givens are unsculptural. They are things I bought into. They were given to me by my dad, so to speak. They were institutional. The meaning of those works comes from an element outside of the work, not from the sculptural condition of the work itself. The artifice of the other is so much closer to the surface in those two works that I started thinking about how I would make a group figurative sculpture that was pushing out more through a sculptural language than a simple cultural language. It's impossible, maybe.

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Family Romance (1993) was made during George H. W. Bush's administration. His campaign kept speaking about family values: "Family values, got to have family values." Except, they weren't really talking about family values. They were talking about top-down values, the values that come from Bush himself down to the peasant—the kids being the peasants. But anyone who's been in a family knows that the children have a hell of a lot of power. *Family*

Romance tries to show that kind of leveling reality about the family. I made it twice. The first time it was a little too high, so I lowered it two inches. But again, I was still working with the mannequin industry. I did a lot of studies of the bodies, and the only body that is unrealistic is the daughter. She's two years old, but children's heads are so big that if you made her look realistic she'd look like an alien with three people. So I distorted her to bring across the gestalt of the family. I think you can see my training in this figuration—the fact that I was brought up by students of Caro but also by minimalist thinking; Donald Judd's thinking, for example.

You can also see that in *Charley, Charley, Charley* . . ., where it's one element after another in a configuration: like a row of Judd boxes. The Caro-esque, sculptural aspect in *Family Romance* can be seen in the shifting scales or the meaning of the pieces in the juncture of the hands, where they can resolve the scales. But I find that what is unsuccessful about it—which I am very interested in—is where you find yourself as a viewer in relationship to the work: where your body is, where you enter the work, the surreal aspect of the sculpture. In a sense, it's like a walking Magritte: there's an invisible line in front of it where the artifice, the reality, shifts. That's a given, acceptable aspect; it's institutional in a way. It's also the kind of thing that drove me further.

I started to think more about how Rodin's sculpture *The Burghers of Calais* (1884–1889) was put together when I did an art show at the Kunstmuseum Basel and the Art Institute of Chicago a few years ago. The show opened first in Basel, and the Kunstmuseum had a cast of *The Burghers of Calais* in its courtyard. At some point Mendes Bürgi, the director of the museum, had it turned. He said the whole city almost attacked him for it. I found that really impressive. Why would people be so upset about the orientation of a sculpture? In Paris you can actually see one of the figures *from* the sculpture *outside* of the sculpture. Rodin's initial idea was to spread the figures across the Calais city square. He saw them as separate pieces, not connected together as they are now. And when you walk

around the sculpture now, there's this incredible gravitational disjunction. Every time you move a quarter arc, the thing tips in a different direction, and all of the figures do that. Somewhere along the line—how could he even think of this?—he took another base of clay and embedded these disparate pieces, bases and all, in this other sea.

I think that their civic-ness, their public-ness, and their success through time, despite being detached from the initial narrative, the initial reason for commemorating these city fathers, has to do with this sculptural making. It's as if Rodin took the sun and the moon and all the stars and put them in a paper bag and then looked inside. The force fields between the pieces are the very nature of civic-ness.

I find it difficult to articulate the relationship I have to Rodin. I articulate it more sculpturally than verbally. I tend not to think *about* sculpture but to *think sculpturally*. When I first conceived of making *The New Beetle* (2006), I was just thinking of a child as a ghost. I was thinking about color, and the toy was going to separate itself from the child by being polychrome—by being colored. But I didn't quite know how to do it. I didn't quite know the pose. I kinesthetically felt my way into the sculpture by thinking it over for a long period of time. In the evening I'd get down on the floor and ask myself, "Should it be sitting? Should it be . . .?" The pose finally came to me in construction, though kinesthetics with my own body. And then, slowly, the toy made itself apparent as I looked at different toys. Early on, the color of the toy fell away, and I sculpted it, or had an assistant sculpt the toy in a second sculptural language, so that it was hyperreal and the child was more generalized. The toy had an interior. You could see a steering wheel and seats and everything inside—all sculpted. But when your mind went into the interior of the toy car, the sculpture was over. You were just trapped in there. My interest was different: it was the space of the child, not the space of the car or the toy.

If I have tried to do anything in my career, it has been to somehow embed my sculptures in our space, so you don't come into the room and go, "Oh! Who put that here?" I've made a lot of sculptures out of, for instance, tables. That's cheating: a table already has a kind of authority in a room. It's there with a purpose, it's very spatially Heidegger-esque. Claes Oldenburg does the same thing with soft objects—he gives them a philosophical embedment.

But how to get the boy in the room? Again I go back to high modernism, to Caro saying the floor isn't what a sculpture sits on. In his sculpture it's the last element of the sculpture itself. I tend to think that the floor of *The New Beetle* is an element of the sculpture. The floor becomes an infinite plane, and somewhere on it is Troy, Vietnam, his future, his problems, his cooking the books with his accountant, his issues, his death, his trials and tribulations. I feel, too, that if a sculpture can move you physically, it can move you intellectually, and there's a tendency with this work to get down on the floor, as you do with a child, to be with him and try to look up into his features. That's why it was important that the car, at a certain point, was closed off: so your soul, your mind, doesn't get caught.

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Boy with Frog (2009) came about after François Pinault asked if I would make a sculpture for his new museum at the Punta della Dogana in Venice. I was about five weeks away from heart surgery, so I was a little freaked out. The surgeons were going to take my heart out of my body and put me in nitrogen to freeze me while they exchanged my aorta for a plastic one. When Mr. Pinault called, I instantly saw a boy with a frog. I think the frog initially was my biology—it was my heart. Frogs are the first thing that we as children dissect in school, at least in America. When you are in the eighth grade or so, they give you a frog, and your teacher teaches you how to cut it open.

I went to Venice with all these flat patterns of varying scales, from life-size to one that was almost twenty feet high. We put up the twenty-foot one, and it was kind of great, because you couldn't even touch the ass. I thought, well, that will help with the graffiti. Everybody loved it and said, "You can see it from St. Mark's! It's fucking fantastic." As I was flying away on the airplane, I said, "Yeah. You can see it from St. Mark's. If I had made it fifty feet bigger, you could see it from the airport. And if I had made it five hundred feet high, you could see it from Milan." But then I thought, "The only thing that making it bigger does is to make the cock big. What's the point?" So I went back and tried to find a relationship to the scale of the place.

For a moment I want to talk about a sculptural idea concerning scale as content. There's a beautiful show at the Reina Sofía of works by H. C. Westermann. I was looking the other day at his small sculpture called *Monument for a Dead Marine* (1957). It's only about half a meter big, and yet I kept wondering about the scale: Why is it monumental? You move around it. The museum even has it in a Plexiglas box, because it's borrowed. There's energy on every side. There's text. There's a figure. There's kind of a howling dog on top, and there's a mournful inscription from the Marines: "WE ALWAYS PICK UP OUR DEAD." I realized that its scale was monumental because somehow Westermann found a way into the mindscape. It's this huge civic piece, but it exists in our mental space, sculpted somehow. I'm still thinking about it.

Anyway, I was brought back to the idea of scale and trying to embed the boy in a particular space and time and still keep him a boy. Everything has an armature—every idea, every person—and a sculptor really understands that. You can say a person's armature is their bones. You can also say it's their meanness or their generosity—whatever their clay is being built around. The armature of *Boy with Frog*, rather than being a stick to hold the modeling clay, is a line from the boy's eyes to the frog. His recognition in this line is the boy-ness of the sculpture—so much so that I had to take

one nipple off, because it formed a kind of triangulation and broke the armature. It's like a moment of recognition of the *other*—that there is an other out there. A friend told me this sculpture taught him how we discovered electricity: it was this sort of curiosity.

If the sculpture were life-size, you'd want to protect the boy. Much bigger than that and it would just be . . . big. It would have no scale. At the scale I ultimately settled on, I think he holds his ground and his boy-ness. I wanted him to become a citizen of Venice, and I knew that would take time. But he got caught up in politics: a new mayor was elected, and Facebook campaigns were just taking off. So he—I shouldn't say "he"—*I*, or the sculpture, got caught in this Facebook campaign to bring back the fake nineteenth-century lamppost that used to be there, that people somehow, all of a sudden, missed terribly.

So the boy was demoted. He had to go away from the Dogana, the lamppost was brought back, and Mr. Pinault generously offered to put the sculpture in another location that he had in Venice. I thought, well, no, that would animate the sculpture—it would be as if the sculpture took a walk and ended up in a new location. So Mr. Pinault gracefully offered to put it away for a while. I showed it in Basel, and I'm still thinking about it, but I feel that, as a civic work, the boy brought the Dogana inside with him. Somehow that location—like Velcro—stuck to him.

I've spent my career working on the spatial and temporal embedment of a sculpture, and now I started for the first time to think about civic-ness. Not public sculpture but *civic* sculpture and what that could mean.

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As I made *School Play* (2014), it dawned on me—like a hammer to the head—that not only was I working on a new sculpture but I had an accidental trilogy. The boy who, many years earlier, had posed for *The New Beetle* and then later for *Boy with Frog* was now in his

early teens. He'd turned into a surly kid, still a *nice* kid, but a teenager. My wife, Silvia, saw a picture of him dressed in a bed-sheet toga with a plastic sword, like he was part of the chorus in a school play. I instantly saw the sculptural potential. Of course, my enemies would say, "Are you still working on that sculpture of the senator? You know, the Roman senator?" Argh. I don't see that in it at all. But it does have a certain subtlety such that it takes time *not* to see that. I realized also that these three sculptures aren't portraits of the boy per se; they're a portrait of a chart of childhood. I think a lot about temporality and time, as I do of space. In Chicago I showed the three sculptures in one room.

The knot at the back of *School Play* took a lot of thought and time. To me, it's not symbolic; it's equivalent to the mind of the mother or the adult who tied it, because a child can't tie that knot. The dent in his head from sculpting the cowlick is like the child's thought—people's brains are not fully developed until they are twenty-two or twenty-three. His face is out of focus because children are totally out of focus and undeveloped. But he's just at this point where he's in relationship to the adult world; he has an attitude, if you will.

A much earlier work, called *Table* (1990), is embedded in space, so you can't remove it, in the sense that space flows. Space is the sculptor's primary media—or so I believed back then. It flows. The vessels have no bottoms; they're fused to the top of the table. The only place where this kind of flowing of the world through the sculpture is stopped is on the kitschy cotton-ball jar, where I left the top on to stop it.

Ink Box (1986) is from even earlier. It's a three-foot-by-three-foot steel cube painted in a high-gloss black and then filled with two hundred gallons of black newspaper ink. Again, the point is to think about where the body is in relationship to it. When I was a kid, my little brother put his hand in the car door and slammed it. When my parents—totally freaked out—asked him why he did it, he said it was because he wanted to see what it would feel like. I think we've all

had that feeling: you're standing at the edge of a building and, while you don't dare yourself to jump—you know for a fact that you're *not* going to jump—you wonder if you *could* jump, if you *would* jump. That doesn't come from logic. It doesn't come from a philosophical aspect of the mind; it comes from a kinesthetic location in the center of your being. Could you do that? *Ink Box* had that location to the viewer. I think of it as figurative, but you are the figure: when you're in a room with it, you want to do nothing but put your hand in it, which would be kind of a disaster, because newspaper ink is one of the dirtiest substances on earth—it's just oil and carbon. That's also its flaw—you go to the lowest, most primitive level of the foundation of the piece, and it had to be black. If it could have been green or red or blue ink, that would have been so much more difficult and beautiful to deal with. But its foundation wouldn't allow for that. It's like *noir*, what we inherited from dad. We all know black ink, like a Raymond Pettibon drawing; it's a cultural given. And that was the foundational problem of it.

For a survey show in Malmö, Sweden, years ago, I included, in one room, one of my three big ladies, *Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley . . .*, and *Ink Box*. My thinking was simplistic. I had found this configuration, I thought, because the black ink matched the mannequin's skirt, and the flesh in *Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley . . .* matched her legs, and they would hum and sing together. I wasn't thinking too much about Mom, the dirtiness of the ink, and the orgy, even though, obviously, that was the pop undercurrent flowing through it.

Also around this time, I had another large show at the Whitney, and Anne Wagner, the art historian, wrote a review for *Artforum*. I thought she had a criticism, which really turned out to be a compliment—although I thought it was more interesting as criticism than as compliment—that "Charles Ray works for a dream audience." When I read that, I thought, she's right; all this struggle to embed my work in space, make it so that it's truly embedded, was so that I would feel embedded in the world, unmovable. I ignored

the very people who were problematic to me—the people who would come around and look at the art. They just tended to touch it or make it dirty or bump into it or scratch it. As I thought about that, I didn't really understand what to do about it.

Different things became apparent to me. When people are around *Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley . . .*, it's totally unsexualized. It's more like a lonely one-man band, a person disconnected from the other. I started thinking a lot about the civic nature of it, but, selfishly, I'm not a political person. Still, as I got older and older and closer and closer to the end, I started thinking more desperately, "How do you keep the piece here?" I also started thinking about embedding temporally, which maybe came from the great love I have for archaic art and how it feels so contemporary to me. As I started thinking again about the civic nature of sculpture, it wasn't for the betterment of the people but, selfishly, for the betterment of my sculptures. If I could somehow make them civic, then it would be so much harder to get rid of them. If I could embed them in time and space, in place—the city, the country—in society, it would be even harder to remove them.

Horse and Rider (2014) weighs ten tons. It's solid steel, and it's machined. I'm not a horseback rider, and I'm not a general. I'm over the hill. I've only ridden with friends on Sundays, and I always find it unpleasant. I'm always nervous. I say "always," but I've only done it like three times in my life. I've just not really enjoyed it. But I wanted to take the equestrian model, this civic model of sculpture, and bring it into our space, down from the pedestal. If you put a monument on a pedestal, you not only embed it in the civic world; you embed it in the sky. That seemed really problematic somehow. I wanted it to exist civically, here in this place. I think that the *weight* became the landscape, sculpturally. The scale of the Westermann works only in the mindscape. So scale isn't measured with a yardstick but is a magnitude of sorts.

I'm interested in authorship and how authorship is one of the first things to dissolve and fade away. Meaning, too, falls away. And many, many people—maybe thirty—work on my sculptures, so you could say I'm a little bit like a film director. I'm responsible for the works as they enter into the world, but I like to chart a course of their making across their surfaces too. One of the final "hands" that you can see in the work is the hand of the robot that did the machining. *Horse and Rider* wasn't cast; it was done on big milling machines by robots. All those marks are not for nothing; they become a kind of cultural Velcro that the space of the world clings to. It throws light around and in this particular work really brings out a great deal of anxiety that is embedded in both me and the horse.

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Huck and Jim (2014) was a failed commission. The Whitney Museum, after seeing *Boy with Frog*, contacted me to make a sculpture for their new building. Huck and Jim are characters in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, about a white boy who has a bad father and escapes downriver with a runaway slave. In America it's a Great American Novel, and it's incredibly spatial. Twain charts the river in space and time and talks, for instance, of sound: a burst of flame at night comes out of a riverboat chimney, and you can't tell in the reflections what are stars, what are sparks on the water, what are lights in the cabins alongside the river. Then, in the delayed *boom*, you hear the explosion from the sparks. Space and time move around, much like the river. In the novel, Huck and Jim go all the way downriver, and not once is the institution of slavery questioned. Bounty hunters are fast on their heels. Huck thinks, "I helped steal this Jim from Miss Watson. She was really good to me, she dressed me, she tried to give me an education, and here I am, stealing her property." He never questions the institution. But in his mind, he says, "Okay, fuck it, I'll go to Hell, but I ain't gonna turn him in." He really believes he'll go to Hell, that what he's doing is wrong, but he won't turn Jim in,

because he's his friend. I think that is still today a poignant American moment in our culture.

The sculpture itself comes from a moment I chose from the novel, from chapter nineteen, where Huck and Jim are debating whether the stars were made or always were. It's a cosmological debate. Huck thinks they always were. Jim, the slave, says they were made, and Huck says, "Well, if they were made, who made them?" And Jim says, "Well, the moon, she laid them." Huck thinks, "Well, if you've ever seen a frog lay her eggs, I reckon that could be so." In case you haven't seen a frog laying eggs: the eggs just come out the back, and there's a seemingly infinite amount of them. The sculpture shows Huck bending over, pulling a mass of frog eggs out of the river at night. Jim is older; he's almost like Moses cutting through, seeing the greater implication of his journey. His hand is awkward, almost touching Huck's back. There's an awkward energy on the back. The museum said it was too difficult a subject for them, the white boy bending over and the black cock.

I showed the pattern of *Huck and Jim* in Chicago. The finished piece is stainless steel. Scholars like patterns because they can show you a lot about the sculpture; for instance, the timing and the metering of the work. Basically, a pattern is the final working piece. A machinist makes patterns out of plywood that they then use and measure off of to make the metal parts in the future. The fashion industry uses clothes patterns, which are similar. I've learned a lot about Rodins from looking at Rodin patterns.

When the sculpture moves from being a pattern into a finished material, all my intention slides away out of my control. Criticality does that, too, right? Things start sliding away as you try to control everything. So the metering and timing of the sculpture start to slip and slide, and it becomes kind of—I won't say a mess—but an abstract configuration.

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Years ago I did a thought experiment: If there were such a thing as ghosts—which I don't believe in—would they need to haunt the place of death? Or would the geometry, the topology do? I spent a year looking for a death wreck—not just any death wreck but a Platonic one. I set out on this course of taking a car apart piece by piece and remaking it in plastic, and at a certain point it shifted away from me, from my intent; it became another sculpture. People often talk about my work as neoclassical or as having a relationship with classical sculpture, but I find it very much high modernist in a certain way. A work like *Unpainted Sculpture* (1997) I find very Greek and very classical. It's like death, but perfection. I see it as a kind of portrait of me.

Baled Truck (2014) was the first of the solid stainless steel pieces I did—the first conceived and last executed. When I was young, we all wanted a crushed car for our penthouse apartment when we grew up—think John Chamberlain (or Judd's take on Chamberlain) or César; their crushed cars were cultural icons. We were going to have a Jaguar crushed-cube coffee table car in our living room and a telescope looking out the skyscraper window and maybe a bear-skin rug.

I was thinking of making my last analog object simultaneously my first digital object. After I crushed my truck in a big crusher, I then scanned it, and many years later I machined it from a block of stainless steel. So, what appears to be a crushed car, an object like a Chamberlain, made of parts, is a *carved* object with a particular cultural embedment.

When I was little, we all knew that the Mafia would put their enemies in the trunk of a car and have it crushed; off it would then go to a scrapyard somewhere, the enemy never to be seen again. I see *Baled Truck* as a kind of sarcophagus, like the cube from *Goldfinger* that's all that remains of Mr. Solo and his Lincoln

Continental after Oddjob shoots him and has the car crushed with Solo still in the back seat.

I'm not obsessed with death by any means, but I'm obsessed with time, and I've read a lot of the philosophy of time, and I think about it, about my approaching end. Philosophical studies of time often talk about the direction of causality, and I often wonder if there could be a way to reverse causality. I thought, "Could I take my cube and slowly open it up and bring it back to life?" Again, a very classical, very Greek idea. It took more than a year and a half and a lot of effort and a lot of people, but the cubed truck was eventually brought back to life (*Unbaled Truck*, in progress). I bought some auto-body equipment, and it was like a reverse causality. I went back in time to bring it back; all of the markings and crumpling reflects what was crushed before. The people who helped me said the parts seemed to *want* to go back to where they had been. It's like us not wanting to die, in a way. But I made it as a thought experiment, and I'm still thinking about it. I'm not sure if it's a sculpture or where it will lead me. I wonder sometimes if it's too internal to be an external sculpture.

I walk a lot—a shocking amount compared to most people, so I have to start very early. Walking leads me to different places, and sometimes I stop and think about what's going on in them. And I think, again, about this notion of the civic. I think this might be too internal to have any relationship to the civic and to pop. And I'm thinking a lot about what that means. Pop art changed things, and as I got older I saw so much pop in Caro, who was thought of by Fried and other people as the epitome of high modernism. When I go to restaurants on my walks, I think, What do they promise? What are they promising us? And where are those promises coming from, culturally? Pizza Hut not only promises you a warm meal; they promise you a job and, by way of this job, a car, which I think is interesting. I go to Burger King every day, not to eat but to think. I went to the one here in Madrid at four in the morning; it's just like the one in LA, identical. Who is there, and what are they being

promised? Jean Gesner Henry (aka Coupé Cloué), the Haitian leader of the Trio Select, said in an interview that money *never* falls into a poor man's pocket. I find it infinite, the destitution—there's such a depth to it. You really understand that at Burger King. At the same time, what is being promised? Something is . . ., but is it a positive promise? I think it is.

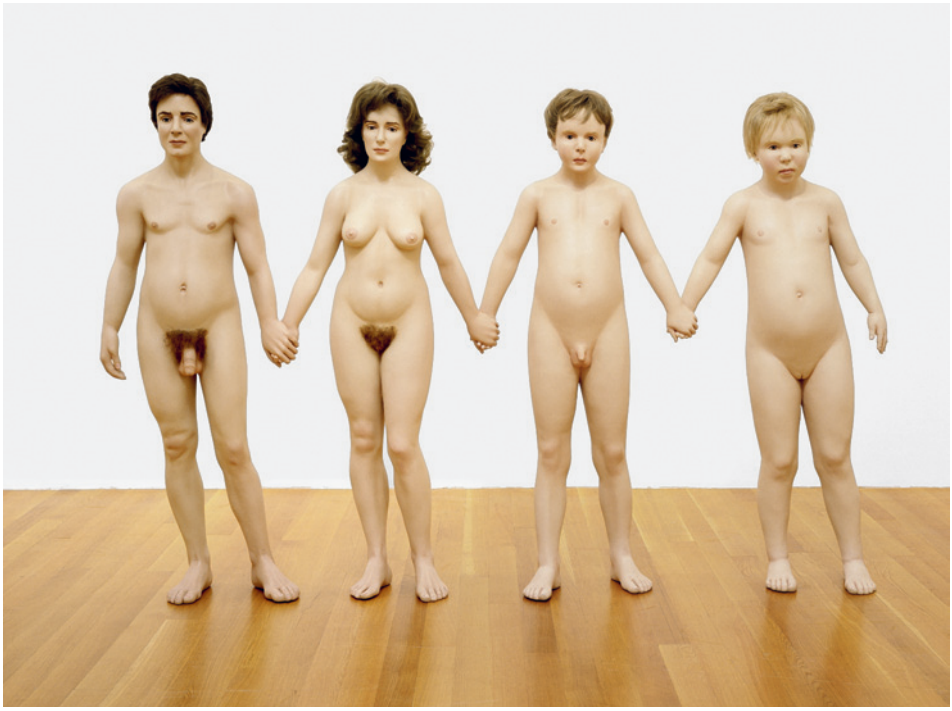
I overheard some guys: "You know, you can't ask for much more: cigarette, coffee, and good conversation about local politics." If you buy a drink, you can plug in your computer and stay as long as you are drinking coffee or something. You are reincarnated into yourself, I think. I find that this pop king himself is gender nonbinary. The promise is real and it's important, and the people eat the food, and the food is inexpensive. Winter in LA can be cold, and inside the Burger King it's warm.

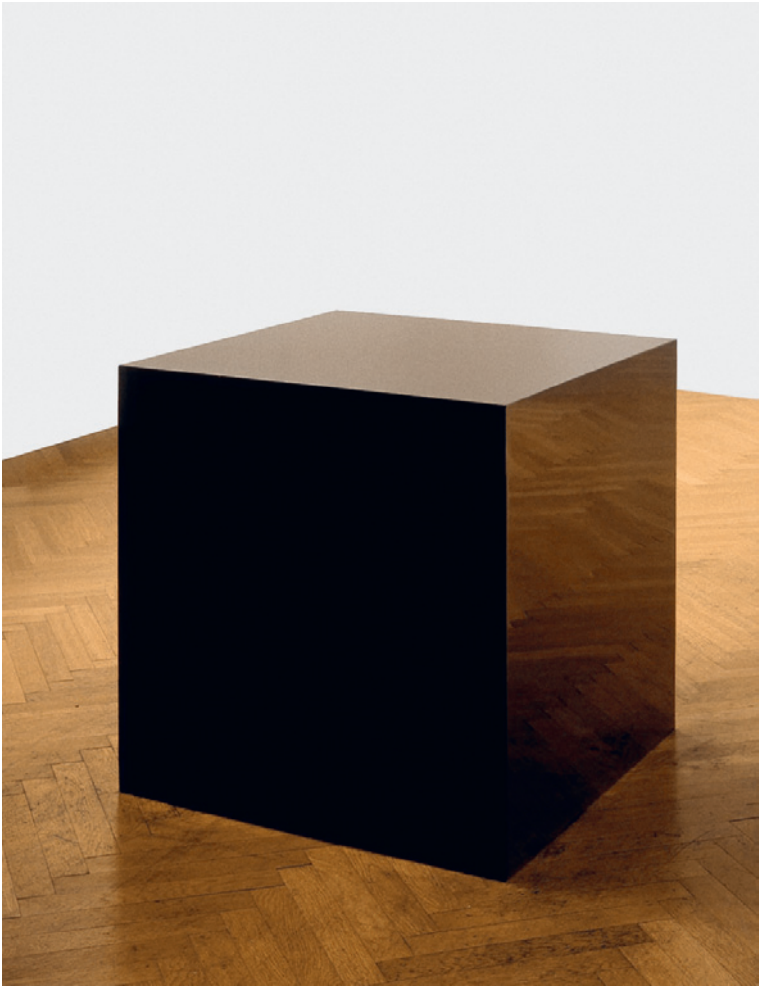
The Three Christs of Ypsilanti is the social psychologist Milton Rokeach's study of three men who had a Christ complex—each thought he was Jesus Christ. Rokeach brought them all to the same ward to see whether interaction could cure them. But they didn't cure each other; they were just miserable. Today his book is held up as an example of bad therapy. But I started to think, "That's what I could do," and then I abandoned it, and various things happened. One in-progress piece, working title *Burger*, is of a man eating and kind of meditating on his burger. He came from Burger King. I'm an atheist, but what I see at Burger King is basically the body and blood of Christ, transmutation of the flesh.

My model for another in-progress work (working title, *Jeff*) was a drug addict from a needle exchange program. For years the sculpture was life-size. Everybody hated that I even worked on it, because it was just such a pathetic figure, and your empathy totally overran the sculpture. Eventually I got the idea to scale it up, and it sort of fought back. I see the figures in *Burger*, *Jeff*, and another recent piece (*Drunk Man*, in progress) as like Christ.

Statistically there's more of a chance that we all popped into the universe three seconds ago with memories intact, than the Big Bang and all of the configurations that had to happen to bring conscious entities here. That means one of two things: either we don't understand the numbers, or we don't understand what numbers are. French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux says the universe is hyperchaotic and there is no God *yet*. One day, given enough time, a God will pop into the universe, and there will be a resurrection, and we will be held accountable for our sins. The Greeks divided the body and the soul, and then Christian theology tried to put it back together, to claim there is no soul without the body, plus the resurrection. I'll leave you with this thought, which is something I'm thinking about: pop art and Burger King.

1. Lecture transcript from the conference "Thinking Is Three-Dimensional," Museo Reina Sofía, March 28, 2019.





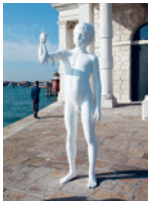
Charles Ray
Fall '91
1992
Mixed media
244 x 66 x 91 cm
(Courtesy Mathew Marks Gallery)

Anthony Caro
Early One Morning
1962
Painted steel and aluminium
289.6 x 619.8 x 335.3 cm
Tate. Presented by the
Contemporary Art Society, 1965
(Courtesy of Barford Sculptures Ltd)

Charles Ray
Family Romance
1993
Mixed media
135 x 244 x 61 cm
(Courtesy Mathew Marks Gallery)

August Rodin
The Burghers of Calais
1884-1889, cast 1942/43
Bronze
216.8 x 255.6 x 196.6 cm
Kunstmuseum Basel

Charles Ray
The New Beetle
2006
Stainless steel and paint
53 x 88 x 72 cm
(Photo by The Art Institute of Chicago.
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery)



Charles Ray
Boy with Frog
2009
Painted steel
244 x 75 x 105 cm
(Photo by Charles Ray.
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery)

Charles Ray
School Play
2014
Solid stainless steel
193 x 59 x 39 cm
(Photo by Mark Rossi.
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery)

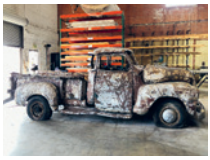
Charles Ray
Ink Box
1986
Painted steel box and ink
91 x 91 x 91 cm
(Photo by Reto Pedrini.
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery)

Charles Ray
Horse and Rider
2014
Solid stainless steel
278 x 101 x 269 cm
(Photo by Charles Ray.
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery)

Charles Ray
Huck and Jim
2014
Stainless steel
274 x 135 x 124 cm
(Photo by Joshua White.
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery)

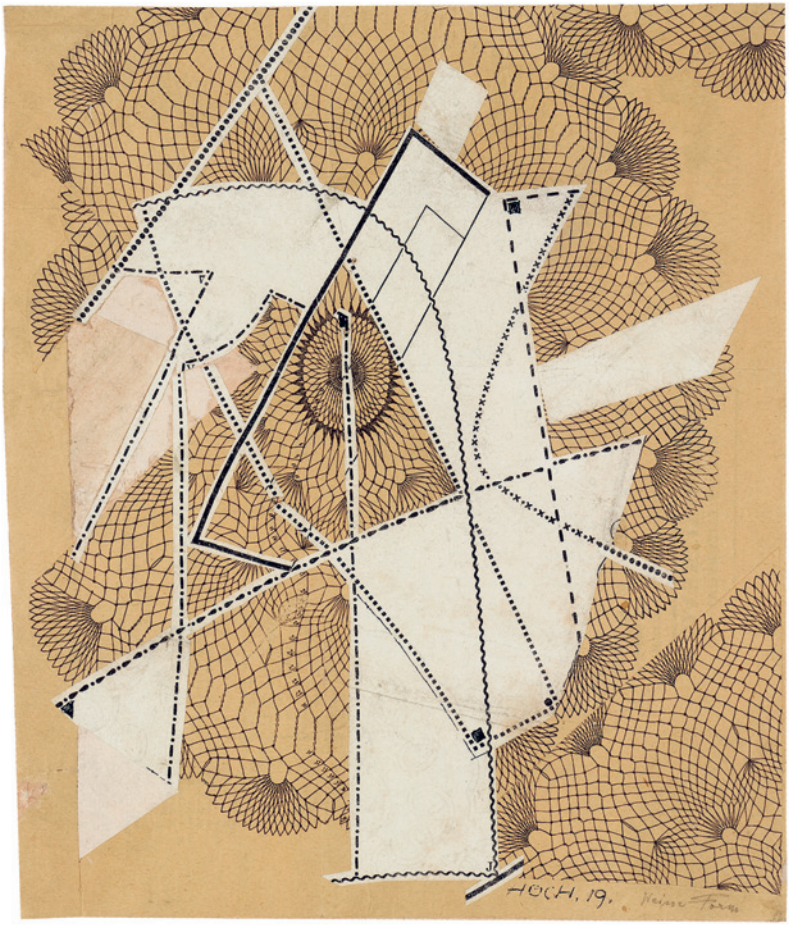
Charles Ray
Unpainted Sculpture
1997
Fiberglass and paint
152 x 198 x 434 cm
(Photo by Joshua White.
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery)

Charles Ray
Baled truck
2014
Solid stainless steel
84 x 129 x 298 cm
(Photo by Joshua White.
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery)



Charles Ray
Unbaled Truck (working title)
In process
(Photo by Charles Ray)

Charles Ray
Jeff (working title)
In process
(Photo by Joshua White)



1.
Hannah Höch
Weisse Form (White form)
1919
Collage
31 x 26 cm
Collection Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,
Kupferstichkabinet

Anne M. Wagner

Pattern Languages

In French, the most common word for *pattern* is *patron*. Speakers of Spanish say *patrón*. Both words also mean "boss," a connotation that suggests the person at the top calls the shots. Perhaps it is this authoritative aura that helps explain why patterns sometimes seem as suspect as they are formative. Consider how pervasively they regulate the shape and scope of social life.

The links between society and self emerge as the topic of a series of Dada collages made by Hannah Höch in the years around 1920 whose delicate destructions of "feminine" convention deploy—and destroy—printed patterns for dresses and lace (fig. 1). Often Höch imposed a quite different scheme—a plan for a new sort of personhood—on their frothy filaments. The result gives visual form to the now familiar idea that femininity—like masculinity—is both a style and a social construction, one whose directives Höch aimed to undermine, then replace.

Patterns for sculpture, by contrast, materialize and thus exemplify qualities of surface, substance, and shape. In this context, we might also invoke terms such as *model*, *template*, and *prototype*, along with *original*, *archetype*, and *pilot model*: the idea of the pattern seems to conceal a fold or crease at its center, along which original and replica seem to meet. Traditionally, the medium of the pattern was clay, built up by hand and kept moist till the form was complete. The customary next step at that point—certainly the most practical one—was to produce a plaster cast of the clay original and, crucially, to hold the mold in reserve. Further casts might well be needed, and in any event a mold served as a safeguard against the multiple mishaps that could damage or destroy the artist's idea. Typically, casts of this type preserve and circulate the features of the original work.[1]

Casts can also be produced well after the fact, capturing a sculpture's form at a point—months, years, even centuries—after its initial production. Think, for example, of the various nineteenth-century plaster reproductions of Trajan's Column that are distributed across Europe, from Rome (the site of both the original and a plaster cast); to Paris, which has a fragmentary version; to London, in the Victoria and Albert Museum; to Bucharest, at the National Museum of Romanian History. As the circulation of such objects suggests, a cast can seem particularly interesting not merely for aesthetic reasons but in light of what it says about the history of empires, nations, and taste. The column of Trajan, which bears a scrolling relief that dramatizes Rome's victory in the campaign to conquer the Balkan region then known as Dacia, inevitably carries particularly pointed implications in a region repeatedly reshaped by defeat.

Casts like those of Trajan's Column, which put into circulation not merely unique objects but even massive monuments, are immaterial to the initial process of production. Even so, they are integral to the distinctive character of sculpture as practice, process, and medium. There is no better way to represent a sculpture. However paradoxical the proposition, sculpture's unique quality is its replicability. Every sculpture is in essence the pattern of itself. And each replication of that pattern helps to parse a sculpture's extended life in space and time.

In the nineteenth century, cast collections were assembled by schools and museums in much the same way as they amassed paintings, drawings, and books in an effort to bolster their mission to instruct.[2] Nor was the practice particularly new. Collections of plaster patterns have been discovered in the workshops of ancient Egypt, where they served as models for full-dress carved stone portraits of the worthies in the pharaonic courts.[3] During the Renaissance, casts of works of antique sculpture were made and shipped off to collectors dotted across Europe, among them, inevitably, such ambitious rulers as Francis I and Henry VIII.[4]

2.
Flora Farnese, cast by Cesare Sebastiani in Rome, from the Roman second century CE marble statue, now in the National Archaeological Museum, Naples
1650
Plaster
h. 3.42
Cast now in Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid

Architects and artists, too, were avid collectors, sometimes acting on their own behalf and sometimes at the behest of a wealthy patron. In the mid-seventeenth century the painter Diego Velázquez spent two years in Rome at the behest of Philip IV of Spain, charged with the task of acquiring plaster casts of the most exemplary antique marbles the city could boast.

Not only the plasters themselves but the documents surrounding their making still survive. Together they demonstrate that Velázquez gave every detail of his assignment rigorous thought. He insisted, for example, that the plaster used not only in the casts themselves, "for the first skin close to the flesh," but equally in the piece molds that shaped them, be produced from the "whitest and most blemish free stone" (*più bianca, e senza machie*).[5] He even went so far as to stipulate not only that each component be reinforced with a metal armature so as to survive shipment home but that each full-size figure be easy to reassemble once its components had arrived in Madrid (fig. 2).[6]

These last provisions were both practical and prudent. But why the emphasis on the value of whiteness? More than three centuries after Velázquez, the American painter Robert Ryman, master of the white monochrome, gave a useful answer: "White has a tendency to make things visible. You can see more of the nuance."[7] His remark, though ostensibly about his own paintings, also persuasively explains why sculptural models are so singularly suggestive. Their bright white surfaces are a haven for light and shadow, allowing both to travel across curves and to pool in hollows, in the process revealing every nuance, every accident of form. This is one reason why drawing from casts was long considered the basis of an artist's education: what better way to absorb the ins and outs of a sculpted shape?

The first artist to transform such accidents into a full-fledged sculptural aesthetic was Auguste Rodin. Few artists before or after have made more dramatic or more public use of plaster. Before Rodin, sculpture was thought to be timeless. Given how eagerly he embraced plaster's immediacy, it is hard to imagine he agreed.

Rodin was also the first to recognize that photography had a place in his process; that is, he was the first to understand how perfectly photography's impartiality is matched by plaster's adaptability. If photography captures whatever the camera "sees," plaster captures whatever it touches. In both, an aesthetics of the accident rules the day. Tellingly, in the wake of impressionism Rodin's plasters, from about 1880 onward, began increasingly to record not only the subjects they show but the process that made them. Mold lines, small chips, and fractures—all are left unretouched. The effect of immediacy, of "made-ness" is like nothing else (fig. 3). Rodin routinely relied on such plasters to stand in publicly for more "finished" works of art.

On no occasion was this tactic more marked than in 1900, when the sculptor responded to the millennial moment with a great display of his work. Both drawings and sculptures were arranged in their hundreds within the "Pavillon de l'Alma," a temporary

3.
Auguste Rodin
Head of Rose
1880-1882
Plaster
25.8 x 19.9 cm
Photographer unknown,albumen print
Musée Rodin, Paris

structure Rodin designed and paid for himself.[8] Yet oddly enough, precisely which works were presented is not certain, as the selection was refreshed (how often is not known) over the course of its six-month run. *Balzac* was included for the whole of the exhibition, along with *Les Bourgeois de Calais* (The Burghers of Calais), *L'Âge d'airain* (Age of Bronze) and the latest version of the never-to-be-finished *La Porte de l'Enfer* (Gates of Hell).

Strictly speaking, the majority of the works on exhibition could not be described as finished, at least not according to the conventions of the day. Most were plasters, which in the context of the Pavillon suggests they were to serve as surrogates for works an enthusiastic visitor could commission—works made to order of materials with greater aura and allure. Still, that Rodin turned to plaster to represent the nature—the essence—of his work, was not accidental.

To look closely at the Pavillon de l'Alma is to encounter a structure shaped by the artist's careful attention to the role of light. His plans aimed squarely at inflecting how his casts would be seen.

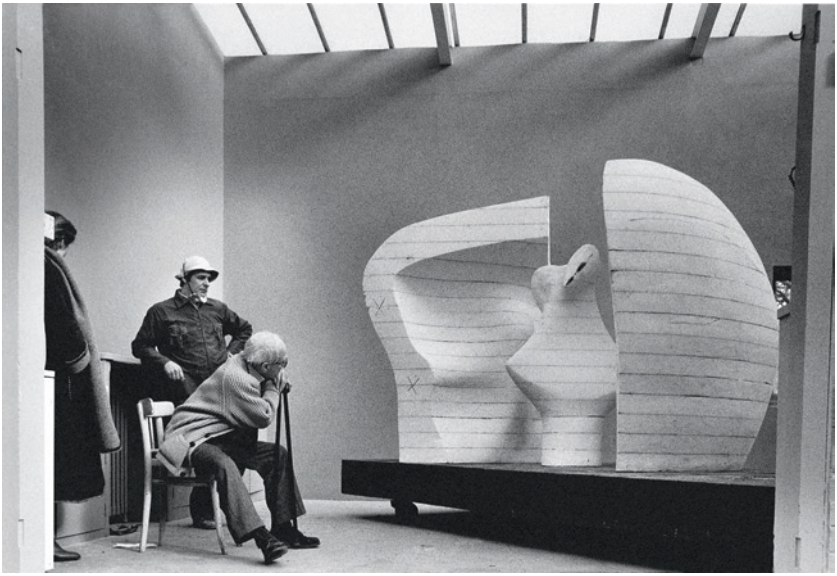
4.
Interior of Rodin’s exhibition, the Pavillon
de l’Alma, after the closing of the show
Paris, Musée Rodin, inv. Ph. 1933

Neither gas nor electricity was used. Instead the scheme relied on lateral and overhead light. Eighteen tall windows opened up the walls of the structure, while a clerestory cut through its roof. And most if not all of these apertures were fitted with adjustable blinds to cope with the inevitable daily and seasonal changes in the course of six months (fig. 4). The works' status as patterns or samples means they were bearers of information first of all.[9] Apparently, they served their purpose. Sales were brisk.

After Rodin the role of plaster and the place of the pattern became increasingly complex. At the same time, the old carving/modeling distinction began to break down, as various hybrid techniques and operations took their place. While Alberto Giacometti stayed true to at least a few time-honored media—clay, wood, and plaster among them—he sometimes used Plasticine too. Its malleability clearly had its uses for an artist who evidently spent nearly as much time hacking away at his materials as he did laying them on.[10] Little wonder that Simone de Beauvoir said his studio was "submerged" in plaster, as were his hands and his hair.[11]

Henry Moore, by contrast, gradually gave up using plaster maquettes as his work grew larger, opting for polystyrene instead (fig. 5). The change came about thanks to a former assistant who found freelance work making sets for London theaters—where polystyrene was the medium of choice—and passed on the necessary skills. Easy to shape (a hot wire is needed), polystyrene is also easy to handle and rework. And it is blindingly white. For Moore this was crucial, given that shadows do so much to shape his large-scale work. Soon enough, he saw how to further enhance the shadows by adding textures in which they collect.[12]

Plasticine, which was invented around 1897 by the British artist William Harbutt, and polystyrene, a hydrocarbon discovered sixty years earlier by Eduard Simon, a German apothecary, can no longer be said to be new. Yet they certainly seem at least newish when compared to sculpture's age-old origins in wood, earth, and stone. Fiberglass and polyester are newer still. What clearly guided



5.
Henry Moore and his assistant Malcolm Woodward
working on the polystyrene *Figure in a Shelter*,
showing sections after enlargement
1983
The Henry Moore Foundation

each artist's choice, however, was convenience rather than novelty. The ethos of plaster is never far away.

The patterns produced by Charles Ray's studio also reprise the merits of plaster, though using cast fiberglass instead.[13] Then detail is added in polyester putty, which is applied in rough layers, cured hard, then shaped with various grinders, files, and rasps. Because it is light blue-green in color, white primer also plays a role.

A full-dress description of this process, along the lines of the exhaustive account Brooks Turner published in 2017, would delve further into processes and materials.[14] Technical phrases such as *silicone mold* and *gelcoat filler* would be duly wheeled on. What matters most here, however, are the aspects of Ray's method that revisit the long tradition of cast plasters: The look of his patterns holds fast to that tradition, not least because his art embraces parallel aims.

Casts were traditionally made to be closely studied by those who used them. Ray's patterns are much the same. The idea is to look closely, then look again and again. Exercising the license they extend is a strange sensation. The patterns show off a varied group of bodies: clothed and naked, male and female, young and old, animal and human. And this is just a start. The closer we look, the more we see: a puckered knot, a horse's eye, a bridle's stitches, a hanging scrotum, a much-worn hoof, a deep-set navel, a waist collapsed into lushly swelling folds of flesh.

Perhaps this brief list comes across as vivid description. Alas, the task is only begun. Ray's patterns are staggeringly inclusive, and matching them to words, and vice versa, is no easy task. Look back at the puckers of the knot (fig. 6). Where do they start? How was it tied? Or untied, for that matter. And how was it made into sculpture? Both pattern and antipattern, the knot is a multiform mystery of the sort this artist thrives on. By these lights it might well be taken as a signature or surrogate. It stands for Charles Ray.

6.
Charles Ray
School Play
Detail of knot

1. For a general survey of the uses of plaster (termed here "stucco" and "gesso"), see Nicholas Penny, *The Materials of Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), ch. 13.

2. For an extended treatment of this subject, see my *Jean Baptiste Carpeaux: Sculptor of the Second Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), chs. 3–4.

3. See Rune Frederiksen, "Plaster Casts in Antiquity," in Rune Frederiksen and Eckart Marchand, eds., *Plaster Casts: Making, Collecting and Displaying from Classical Antiquity to the Present* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010).

4. See Martin Biddle, "'Makinge of Moldes for the Walles': The Stuccoes of Nonsuch: Materials, Methods and Origins," in Frederiksen and Marchand, *Plaster Casts*, 99–117. See also Walter Cupperi, "'Giving Away the Moulds Will Cause No Damages to His Majesty's Casts—New Documents on the Vienna *Jüngling* and the Sixteenth-Century Dissemination of Casts after the Antique in the Holy Roman Empire," in Frederiksen and Marchand, *Plaster Casts*, 81–85.

5. See Ángeles Solís Parra, Judit Gasca Miramón, Silvia Viana Sánchez, and José María Luzón Nogué, "The Restoration of Two Plaster Casts Acquired by Velazquez in the Seventeenth Century: The *Hercules and Flora Farnese*," in Frederiksen and Marchand, *Plaster Casts*, 385–402.

6. Ibid.

7. Robert Ryman, "Paradox," *Art 21*, Season 4, November 18, 2007, https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s4/robert-ryman-in-paradox-segment/ (accessed March 11, 2019).

8. The best account of this exhibition, as well as the structure designed to contain it, is given in Alain Beausire, *Quand Rodin exposait* (Paris: Éditions Musée Rodin, 1988), 158–207.

9. In a letter to an acquaintance, Edmond Bigand-Caire, Rodin recorded 200,000 francs worth of sales. See Frederick V. Grunfeld, *Rodin: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt, 1987), 420.

10. Only after World War II did the sculptor have the means to make use of bronze.

11. De Beauvoir's comments on Giacometti are from Simone de Beauvoir, *Lettres à Nelson Algren: Un amour transatlantique, 1947–1964* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 145–46, quoted by Cecilia Braschi, introduction to *Giacometti*, exh. cat., ed. Lena Fritsch, Catherine Grenier, and Frances Morris (London: Tate Publishing, 2017), 103.

12. See Anne M. Wagner, "Moore's Later Sculpture: The Space between the Knuckles," in *Henry Moore: Late Large Forms*, exh. ca.t (London: Gagosian Gallery with the Henry Moore Foundation, 2012), 170–79.

13. Much like Plasticine and polystyrene, fiberglass is not all that new; according to Wikipedia, a patent for a process to produce a fabric of glass fibers was awarded in 1888 to Hermann Hammesfahr, a Prussian-American inventor. "Fiberglass," *Wikipedia*, last modified April 26, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiberglass.

14. See Brooks Turner, *A Guide to Charles Ray: Sleeping Mime* (Los Angeles: Paperleaf Press, 2017).

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Anne M. Wagner
Pattern Languages _25

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