Ordovas exhibition explores the poetic power of the void in modern and contemporary art

Installation view.

LONDON.- Ordovas presents Sculpted, an exhibition bringing together sculptures by leading modern and contemporary artists, and exploring the ways in which they approach the materiality and dimensionality of the medium. United by a notion of the 'void', the works presented highlight how negative space has been used in sculpture to evoke emotion and response by some of the most notable artists of the 20th and 21st centuries.

The exhibition presents a selection of works diverse in size and subject, and executed in a range of mediums and techniques; they range from a standing mobile by Alexander Calder and an abstract sculpture in bronze by Barbara Hepworth to three recent ceramic creations by Yassi Mazandi, the Iranian-born artist whose work is driven by a response to nature. The catalogue includes an essay written by Jon Wood, former Research Curator at the Henry Moore Institute. Sculpted is the third in a series of summer exhibitions to be held at Ordovas exploring different techniques and mediums in twentieth-century and contemporary art; it follows Stitched, which took place in 2022, and Drawn: 30 Portraits in 2023.

Since the early 20th century, sculptors have increasingly used holes, voids and various types of internal and external spaces as an integral part of the forms and meanings of their sculptures. Artists moved beyond carving, modelling and casting, and into the world of construction, complex open structures and, today, digitally formulated, spatialised forms. This exhibition presents works by modern and contemporary artists, each of whom treat space and the void in different ways, showing different concerns and tendencies.

The earliest work in the show is a hollow bronze by Henry Moore, Maquette for Openwork Head no.2, which was executed in 1950 as the preparatory work for a sculpture now in the permanent collection of The Hepworth Wakefield. By piercing the material, the artist accentuates the sense of volume and three-dimensionality, while also conveying a powerful corporeal 'shape-meaning'. Moore explored the head and the helmet from the late 1930s to the 1970s and drew from diverse inspirations including his own experience as a soldier in France in World War One. Also executed in that medium is the abstract Bronze Form (Patmos) which was conceived and cast in 1962-3 by Barbara Hepworth to commemorate the seascape of the Greek island which the artist had visited in 1954. This sculpture does not prod and puncture space, but loosely wraps around it, creating a tubular funnel of air that is open at the sides as well as the ends, with four large and curving oval apertures. Representing a more spacialised approach to the void is Red Stalk, a standing mobile by Alexander Calder. This free-floating work is constructed out of steel wire and small hand-painted disc sheets of aluminium and is one of a group of nine sculptures that were created by Calder during a visit to Ahmedabad in India in 1955, where he was invited to stay at the home of Kamalini, Gautam and Gira Sarabhai; they are considered among his finest works.

Captured through the medium of photography is Untitled by Ana Mendieta which was executed in 1981, and which shows the silhouette of a figure representing a goddess or female archetype connecting the earth with what lies above. The artist fled her native Cuba for America when she was 12 years old; throughout her career, she confronted the theme of the void, exploring concepts of identity through race, gender, age, and class. Untitled (Crushed Newspaper) by Andy Warhol was executed in silkscreen on foil paper in 1983. A scrumpled copy of the New York Post newspaper from Monday 24 October 1983 reproduced in silkcreen on foil paper, it includes the headline 'Grim Marine Toll Hits' and a column reading 'At least 50 still buried in shattered barracks', echoing the artist's Death and Disaster series of the 1960s in which the void is inherent in its representation of death. Exhibited in public for the first time, it was previously in the collection of Halston, the artist's great friend and celebrated fashion designer.

Rachel Whiteread is renowned for her innovative use of negative space. Her work Untitled, 2010, consists of two stone carvings; one made from Forest of Dean stone and the other from Exhill stone. In this instance, the stone adds both weight and solidity to proceedings, taking up space rather than releasing it, and giving further material density to forms that are at once full and empty, present and absent. The artist is currently subject of the inaugural exhibition at the Goodwood Art Foundation in Sussex (31 May to 2 November).

More recent works in the exhibition include Open Close by Antony Gormley which was executed in 2022 in 8mm Corten steel, and which is shown in public for the first time having been kindly loaned from the artist's collection. It is from the series Open Blockworks (2014-2023), about which the artist said 'I wanted to open the body up. I had been using absolute masses that are solid and confront you with your own bodily spatial displacement, but another way is to make intersecting cells out of planes that are enclosures but are open enough to invite a speleology of the eye.' In the interplay between absence and presence, void and substance, Gormley invites a reflection on how sculpture might modify our experience of space and time. Untitled by Anish Kapoor, 2023, is a wall-mounted sculpture in resin and paint by one of the most accomplished void shapers making sculpture today. This work highlights the artist's dialectical sculptural imagination which is interested in oppositional relations and the creative tensions that can inhabit forms, surfaces and spaces, activating and heightening the viewer's imaginative engagement in the process. On public view for the first time, its sister work was shown at the major exhibition dedicated to the artist held at the Palazzo Strozzi in 2023-24.

Flower 1, Flower 3 and Flower 4 were made in 2023 by Yassi Mazandi, the Iranian born artist whose work is driven by a response to nature, and whose installation Language of the Birds, was until recently on display at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Each of the flower sculptures is made of porcelain – from imagination, and not from images in a book - and each is poised, elevated on top of bronze stands or stalks which have been originally modelled in wax. The petals have an almost mechanical form, resembling interlocking parts that can readily open and close, shutting the surrounding atmosphere off or locking it tightly in, as space is both compressed and released, contracted and expanded.