



ON FORM.

OPERA GALLERY

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19 May - 4 June, 2023

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Bernar Venet, 86.5° Arc x 8, 2015. Art Paris 2023 © Opera Gallery

“On Form”: A World of Forms

A silent symphony. Listening to a Nana by Niki de Saint Phalle, a languished woman by Fernando Botero is waiting. Further on, Bernar Venet's Arcs play with their harmonious elevations. Far from being the umpteenth panorama of 20th and 21st century sculpture, the “On Form” exhibition questions the very essence of gesture and material. An encounter around form and its conceptualisation, bringing together nine major artists: Pablo Atchugarry, Fernando Botero, Robert Indiana, Anish Kapoor, Stephan Mariefeld, Pieter Obels, Niki de Saint-Phalle, Manolo Valdés and Bernar Venet. In this open, sometimes introspective dialogue – the works selected reflect the evolution of the practice of these artists over several decades – a whole lexicon of the language of sculpture is constructed, in its concepts, materials and forms.

This curatorial proposal evokes the question posed by Margit Rowell during the exhibition “Qu'est-ce que la sculpture moderne ?” in 1986 at Beaubourg, a manifesto event that itself echoed the masterful “What is Modern Sculpture?” at MoMA in 1969. For modern and contemporary sculpture is built on paradoxes. Discussed and dissected by art historians, abandoned for a time, and now omnipresent, including in the public space, 20th and 21st century sculpture easily eludes attempts at definition. The exhibition at Beaubourg aimed to “fill a gap” and “to identify as closely as possible, in its broad conceptual and stylistic lines, what might be called the modern sensibility”. Complex and multiple spatial objects, its borders are moving, bordering on the conceptual, the immaterial and the moving. A “shift in meaning (...) from an art of perception to an art of conceptualisation” pointed out the Centre Pompidou exhibition.

The rejection of academicism is not the only marker of sculpture's entry into modernity. The study “La place de la sculpture” published in 2011 in Rue Descartes journal summarised the plurality of its contemporary forms: “Sculpture is not only an object, enclosed in its contours, it is a device that arranges the space. It always brings together an artefact, the common space, the space of representation and ambulant, perceiving bodies. Once a statuary, monument, architecture, it has become an installation, performance, action.”

This is the premise of the exhibition “On Form”, which follows two main lines. One considers sculptures that take on abstract forms as expressions of materiality and experiments with matter; the other considers sculptures as the direct concretisation of the artist's vision, the materialisation of their thoughts. Without exhausting the impossible subject, the selected works and artists each possess a fragment of an answer.



Donna sdraiata su fianco, 2019



The quest for materiality is evident in the work of Uruguayan artist Pablo Atchugarry, whose marbles evoke the monoliths of early civilisations. Before freeing himself from it and sublimating it, his work was anchored in classical antiquity when he discovered Carrara marble in Italy in 1979. In the face of the demands of this noble material, he developed a singular and abstract visual language in which tapered and angular lines echo the curves of his volumes. A spiritual questioning underlies the realisation of his works. The constancy of his research is obvious: nearly twenty years separate *Embrace* (1999) and his *Untitled* (2017), yet they share the same outpouring.

Untitled, 2017

Two major figures of contemporary art play here with a register of forms that appear more playful, but where psychoanalytical discourse prevails: Fernando Botero and Niki de Saint-Phalle. Like Pablo Atchugarry, the Colombian artist devoured the art of the Old Europe. In the 1950s, Botero studied art in Madrid, then stayed in Paris where he immersed himself in the works of the old masters at the Louvre before going to Florence to analyse the frescoes of the Renaissance. His sculptures, populated by figures with exaggeratedly voluminous and voluptuous forms, readily cite the great references of art history. His *Bailarina* (2015), a callipyge version of a Degas ballerina, also defies the weight of bronze. But is she free of the sculptural material? Compared to Botero's works, Niki de Saint-Phalle's prominent sculptures are equally iconic and iconoclastic. The seemingly jovial and colourful *I Am Upside Down (Green)* (1997) and *Ange Vase* (1993) exaggerate bodies and glorify female sexuality with an airy heaviness.



A New World, 6 January - 5 February 2023, Opera Gallery Singapore. © Opera Gallery



For the Nanas, symbolising the work of Niki de Saint-Phalle—a key figure of the New Realists, along with Jean Tinguely, Yves Klein and Pierre Restany—carry a political and militant discourse defending the modern woman against the crushing of the male sex. As with Botero, their apparent candour masks an unfathomable wound. These exaggerated volumes also characterise the Bondage series by the German Stephan Mariefeld, who binds stone and metal with rope. The material, as if constrained, overflows the erotic curves. An illusionist's game that fascinates the artist: "My bondage sculptures live from the contrast between hard materiality and soft form. The rope becomes a symbol of the apparent mastery of the uncontrollable." Within the exhibition, the work of Manolo Valdés alone constitutes a whole universe of forms with a set of six sculptures.

Mariposa en Espejos, 2022

As one of the founding members of Equipo Crónica, a group of artists who drew inspiration from Pop Art to question Franco's Spanish dictatorship and art history itself, the Spaniard also appropriates masterpieces. By decontextualising these images, he frees them from all temporality and formal identification, allowing the material to express itself: "I have to create something in which the materials are dominant, the subject is an excuse."

The sublimation of form and material to the point of extreme purity finds a climax with Bernar Venet's Two arcs of 211.5° (1983) and 86.5° Arc x 8 (2015). Since the 1960s, the line has haunted him. Mathematics too. Both minimal and monumental, his steel sculptures have evolved subtly from series to series. The one in Les Arcs is an infinite variation of the original line. Anish Kapoor is also one of those artists who push the conceptual form of their sculptures to the limits of apparent simplicity. The fibreglass sculpture Untitled (2012) disrupts the interplay of perception and space with its curvilinear form and monochrome. An almost metaphysical experimentation with the relationship to the work recalled here by the iconic sculpture *Love/Blue faces Red sides* (1966 - 1998) by Robert Indiana, a recurring artistic motif in his work.

Physicality, theatricality, materiality... since 1986 and the Beaubourg exhibition, many sites have been opened up, as Thierry Dufrêne and Paul-Louis Rinuy remind us in "La sculpture du XX^e siècle, une histoire en cours." (1999): "Vast and complex, the field of sculpture in our century seems all the richer in future studies as the very definition of this art and its practice have lost all simple evidence." The exhibition "On Form" tends to demonstrate this.

Carine Claude

WORKS



Pablo Atchugarry

b. 1954

Untitled

2017

Signed on the lower edge

Carrara marble

Unique piece

66,5 x 20,5 x 13 cm | 26.2 x 8.1 x 5.1 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio

Private collection



Pablo Atchugarry

b. 1954

Untitled

2017

Signed on the lower edge

Pink Portugal marble

Unique piece

46,5 x 25 x 13,5 cm | 18.3 x 9.8 x 5.3 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio

Embrace, 1999 (detail)





Pablo Atchugarry

b. 1954

Coral Figure

2018

Signed on the lower edge

Pink Portugal marble

Unique piece

108,5 x 31 x 24 cm | 42.7 x 12.2 x 9.4 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio

Private collection



Fernando Botero

b. 1932

Couple

2002

Signed and numbered on the base

Bronze

Edition of 6

65 x 50 x 18 cm | 25.6 x 19.7 x 7.1 in

PROVENANCE

Private collection

CERTIFICATE

The artist has confirmed the authenticity of this work

Couple, 2002 (detail)





Fernando Botero

b. 1932

Donna sdraiata con testa dritta

Bronze

Signed and numbered on the side of the base

2 AP

24,5 x 52 x 30,5 cm | 9.6 x 20.5 x 12 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio

Private collection

CERTIFICATE

The artist has confirmed the authenticity of this work

Donna sdraiata con testa dritta (detail)





Fernando Botero

b. 1932

Reclining Woman

2007

Bronze

Signed and numbered on the base and stamped with foundry mark

Edition of 6

114,3 x 47 x 47 cm | 45 x 18.5 x 18.5 in

PROVENANCE

Private collection

CERTIFICATE

The artist has confirmed the authenticity of this work



Fernando Botero

b. 1932

Donna sdraiata su fianco

2019

Bronze

Signed and numbered on the base

Edition HC

82 x 127 x 70 cm | 32.3 x 50 x 27.6 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio

Private collection

Donna sdraiata su fianco, 2019 (detail)





Niki de Saint Phalle

1930 - 2002

I am Upside Down, Green (Remembering)

1997

Acrylic on polyester resin

Edition of 5, each work unique

117 x 80 x 14 cm |

46.1 x 31.5 x 5.5 in

PROVENANCE

Tasende Gallery, La Jolla, United States

Private collection

EXHIBITED

San Diego, Mingei Museum, *Niki de*

Saint Phalle - Insider / Outsider - World Inspired Art, 1998, another edition of this work ill. in colour p. 117

LITERATURE

Niki de Saint Phalle, Catalogue raisonné, vol. I, 1949 - 2000, Acatos (Publisher), Lausanne, 2001, p. 294, no. 645, ill. in colour

CERTIFICATE

The Niki Charitable Art Foundation has confirmed the authenticity of this work



Niki de Saint Phalle

1930 - 2002

Ange Vase

1993

Signed, numbered and stamped inside the vase

Painted polyester and ceramic

Edition of 50 + 10 AP

99 x 57 x 32 cm | 39 x 22.4 x 12.6 in

CERTIFICATE

The Niki Charitable Art Foundation has confirmed the authenticity of this work

PROVENANCE

Galerie Vogel Heidelberg, Germany

Private collection, Baden-Wuerttemberg, Germany

Private collection, Paris, France

Galerie Mitterrand, Paris, France

Private collection





Niki de Saint Phalle

1930 - 2002

Nana Vase

1984

Painted resin

Edition of 150

47 x 30 x 28 | 18.5 x 11.8 x 11 in



Niki de Saint Phalle

1930 - 2002

Dragon

1974-75

Stamped with signature and foundry mark

Painted polyester

Unique piece

65 x 50 x 23 cm | 25.6 x 19.7 x 9.1 in

PROVENANCE

Private collection, Europe

EXHIBITED

Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, *Beelden, modellen en maquettes van Niki de Saint Phalle*, 21 July - 5 September 1976



Robert Indiana

1928 - 2018

Love 1966 – 1998 / Blue faces Red sides

Stamped by fabricator on the lower interior edge of the letter «E»

Polychrome aluminium

4 AP

61 x 61 x 30,5 cm | 24 x 24 x 12 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio

Morgan Art Foundation Ltd.



Anish Kapoor

b. 1954

Untitled

2012

Signed and dated on the reverse

Fiberglass and paint

142,2 x 142,2 x 121 cm | 56 x 56 x 47.6 in

PROVENANCE

Lisson Gallery, London, United Kingdom

Christie's New York, 18 May 2018, lot 895

Private collection



Stephan Marienfeld

b. 1966

Vertical Bondage Black

2022

Bronze black patina and black rope

Edition of 7

72 x 30 x 34 cm | 28.3 x 11.8 x 13.4 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio

Vertical Bondage Black, 2022





Stephan Marienfeld

b. 1966

Vertical Bondage Gold

2022

Bronze polished and black rope

Edition of 7

72 x 30 x 34 cm | 28.3 x 11.8 x 13.4 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio



Pieter Obels

b. 1968

Densed Emotions

2021

Bronze black patina and black rope

Corten steel

Unique piece

112 x 80 x 70 cm | 44.1 x 31.5 x 27.6 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio



Pieter Obels

b. 1968

Beyond Boundaries

2021

Bronze black patina and black rope

Corten steel

Unique piece

160 x 95 x 80 cm | 63 x 37.4 x 31.5 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio



Manolo Valdés

b. 1942

Clio Dorada

2020

Bronze with Gold Patina and steel wires

Edition of 9

114 x 255 x 90cm | 44.9 x 100.4 x 35.4 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio

Clio Dorada, 2020 (detail)





Manolo Valdés

b. 1942

Untitled

2022

Glass and steel

Unique piece

76,2 x 73,7 x 43,2 cm | 30 x 29 x 17 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio



Manolo Valdés

b. 1942

Reina Mariana

Resin with pigment

Edition of 8

173 x 123 x 87 cm | 68.1 x 48.4 x 34.3 in



Manolo Valdés

b. 1942

Cabeza blanca con tocado azul

2022

Wood and steel

Unique piece

160 x 109,2 x 68,6 cm | 63 x 43 x 27 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio





Bernar Venet

b. 1941

Two arcs of 211.5°

1983

Stamped with the title twice

Rolled steel with black patina

Unique piece

117,2 x 104,1 x 25 cm | 46.1 x 41 x 9.8 in

PROVENANCE

Acquired directly from the artist by the present owner in *circa* 1980s

CERTIFICATE

This work is registered in the artist's archives under inventory number
bv83ss7



Bernar Venet

b. 1941

83.5° ARC X 10

2018

Cor-ten steel

Unique piece

197 x 108 x 70 cm | 77.6 x 42.5 x 27.6 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio

CERTIFICATE

This work is registered in the artist's archives under inventory number bv18s13 and is eligible for a certificate of authenticity signed by the artist



Bernar Venet, 86.5° Arc x 8, 2015. © Opera Gallery

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On Form presented by Opera Gallery Singapore from
19 May to 4 June, 2023

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Opening hours

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