

Artsy : ‘Ugo Rondinone (OO-go ron-di-NO-né) on Human Nature’, April 22nd, 2013

Ugo Rondinone (OO-go ron-di-NO-né) on Human Nature

At the unveiling of Ugo Rondinone’s “Human Nature” installation at Rockefeller Center, an assembly of speakers (Mayor Bloomberg included) affectionately struggled to pronounce the Swiss-born artist’s name; however, within moments, these six syllables were not to be forgotten. With Rondinone’s 20-foot bluestone sculptures towering over Rockefeller Center Plaza and a complementary exhibition soon to open at Barbara Gladstone Gallery, Rondinone’s impact is as weighted as it is provocative, no matter the discipline or scale in which he works.

Artsy: Can you talk about the thinking and process that went into realizing this installation?

Ugo Rondinone: Two years ago, I was asked by the Public Art Fund to develop a specific work [in New York City]. Ten days later, I came up with the idea to work with stone. I have a little house in Pennsylvania, maybe 80 miles from here; Pennsylvania has a long history of quarries but only a few that are still active. All of the stone in New York, like in the pavement, is all bluestone. So I wanted to bring something very basic to a site like midtown or Rockefeller Center—among the most developed places in America, where everything is about speed. I developed this work within those two years, and for a year I would just train myself with small stones. I made maybe 100 figures.

Artsy: Was this exhibition the influence for the works in your upcoming show at Barbara Gladstone, which also uses bluestone?

UR: Exactly. First came this exhibition. Because the material bluestone is new for me, I wanted to make them in small scale before I would go to the quarry and cut them—there, it needs much more manpower. I could do the small figures myself; for a year I made those figures, and they will be part of the [Gladstone] exhibition [titled “Soul”].

Artsy: Can you discuss the title “Human Nature” and the reason you chose to present the stone as human figures?

UR: This is maybe my fourth public work. I started with the rainbows, and then I made the masks, and then the trees, and then the scholar rocks ... All [the works] have in common a very universal, symbolic resonance. They’re not abstract; people can react and interact with them and that’s the basis of a public artwork—that people can react to it. [The title] “Human Nature” embraces this universality, bringing forces together—humanity and nature—and how they balance each other, and how each has to work together to keep this balance. And of course, you have the stone, which is a basic material to work with, and the way the human figure is made in a very basic way. The individual pieces are named for feelings, so again something very basic.

Artsy: Why is public art important?

UR: Because I believe art makes us better people! So as more people see art, it will influence their conscience.

Artsy: How do you generally conceive your ideas, and what are you working on next?

UR: Dynamics are important to me, so working on something very big and impressive and at the same time something very small—that’s the way I like to work.

Artsy: Although you’ve worked in very diverse materials, there seems to be a common undertone. Is this something you can

actually describe?

UR: I believe the undertone of [my work] is that all the symbols have been generated by the Romantic movement, which is probably the basis of the work. It's important to me because it was the first time people could express emotion. Inspiration from dreams and emotion is the groundwork for all my work.

“Human Nature” is on view in Rockefeller Center Plaza, New York through June 7th, 2013; “Soul” is on view at Gladstone Gallery, New York from May 11th through July 3rd, 2013



Ugo Rondinone

Ugo Rondinone: Human Nature, On view at Rockefeller Center, New York City, April 23 , June 7, 2013

Public Art Fund



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