

Don Brown

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When first confronted with the work of Don Brown, viewers are initially overcome by a dual perception that alternates between an historical art form – statuary – and what it represents – a contemporary woman.

Visiting an exhibition by the artist is not unlike walking through an archaeological site from the future. The technical quality of these sculptures inevitably evokes both the skills of the Greco-Roman era and Italian neo-classicism, not least the central importance attached to plinths in its museography.

If we take a closer look, however, a number of anachronistic details unsettle this initial impression. High heels, sunglasses and clothes in the latest fashion all clearly indicate the twenty-first century.

For his first exhibition at the Almine Rech Gallery in Brussels, Don Brown has produced his sculptures at a scale that is significantly larger than usual. Questions of scale are essential in the long process involved in the preparation of these works. The artist initially fashions a detailed clay maquette that will serve as the prototype for a much larger cast. Following enlargement and refining, the sculptures are then produced in either acrylic composite or bronze, but also, although rarely, in silver. The making takes several months, and the pieces are finally covered in a layer of gesso.

For years now Don Brown has been photographing his sculptures against a white background in daylight in order to document his work and bring out elements. By enlarging the prints, he gradually discovered in the flat representation of a volume a certain autonomy that is both powerful and subtle: “It’s as if everything is concentrated in a single view and the surface is uninterrupted” (D.B.). For the first time, the artist will present large prints of these photographs in an exhibition, images which he now sees as artworks in their own right.

The “Yoko” project thus consists of a complex set of sculptures, drawings and photographs, which interact with one another through the recurrence of a single subject: the representation of the artist’s muse. The rhythm of production of Don Brown’s works and their technical perfection are typical of classical sculpture, of a time when a craftsman could spend an entire lifetime polishing a single work by hand. It expresses the artistic fantasy of the ultimate masterpiece.

Don Brown, born in 1962 in Norfolk, England, studied at the Central School of Art, London (1983-5) followed by the Royal College of Art, London (1985-8). He has been the subject of solo exhibitions across Great Britain and Europe, including at Le Consortium, Dijon (2007). Don Brown’s work has been included in significant group shows, including *SNAP: Art at the Aldeburgh Festival at Snape Maltings*, Suffolk, UK (2011), *Crucible* at Gloucester Cathedral, Gloucester, UK (2010), *In the darkest hour there may be a light* at the Serpentine Gallery, London (2006) as well as *The Naked Portrait, 1900-2007* at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh (2007). In 2012 his work will be exhibited alongside Degas’s *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen (1880-81)* in *Presence: the Art of the Sculpted Portrait* at the Holburne Museum, Bath, UK. His works are held in prominent collections, both public and private, including the Tate, London; the Museum of Realist Art Schering, Spanbroek, Netherlands; the Olbricht Collection, Berlin and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. He currently lives and works in Suffolk, England.

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