

Don Brown

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Don Brown started with himself as the model for his sculptures, invariably named “Don”. Don represented himself in his perfectly unheroic banality of a 20th-century man—a far cry from the triumphant models of ancient statuary sometimes evoked in relation to his work. Almost ten years ago he then started exclusively representing his spouse. Like the sculptures where he was the subject, the Yoko sculptures are fifty to seventy-five percent smaller than the subject itself. The effect is instant: you want to protect these figurines that you glare at, apparently petrified in the immaculate whiteness they display.* For as their small size intimates, they cannot have been moulded on the original and are hence the fruit of patient artistry: here too lies their singularity in the manufactured landscape of art in this day and age.

Just as Egyptian statues can be dated by the length of a robe, the form of a hairstyle, or the way in which the eyes are represented, Yoko is placed in a potential temporality through a mere handful of accessories: the form of a bikini, a pair of platform-heel shoes, a hairstyle, a dress. *Yoko IV* (2004) is hieratic and frontal in a long, figure-hugging dress, one arm bent upwards, and looks like a generic image of these Egyptian statues, while *Yoko II*, perched on stiletto heels, arms resting along the side of the body and the break of the waist marked by a hip swung slightly to one side evokes Helmut Newton’s *Big Nudes*. Reduced to one figure, one colour and few accessories, each decision, each shift in pose and each detail takes on a dramatic meaning: Yoko evolves before us in absolute slow-motion. Don Brown seems to want to produce these pieces at a determined rhythm, a few sculptures a year at most, in a laborious process recording the passing of time.

Much as they represent the human figure, Don Brown’s sculptures have no equivalent in the history of contemporary art. Georges Segal’s white sculptures were on a human scale and executed in a basic plaster far short of the quality of the details that Don Brown’s recreate. Duane Hanson’s were minutely detailed but also on a human scale and their accoutrements referred to a multi-coloured vision of the Pop art world in which they were born at the turn of the 1970s. Freed of clothes and presenting totally nude bodies on a human scale, American artist John de Andrea’s hyperrealist sculptures also appeared in the 70s and fascinated people through their power to imitate the visual qualities of skin. Frozen in the fragile, immaculate lightness of their production in white resin,** Don Brown’s sculptures have only the extravagance of their precision and their reduced size with which to confront the gaze. Parsimonious distribution of the codes of classical sculpture—a plinth on which the model stands, in *Yoko X* (2004); little pedestals on which Yoko is sometimes raised by platform heels, heightening the process of distancing her from the ground—reminds us just what an exercise this is. As a counterpoint to these codes, the attitude is surprisingly natural: a contemporary woman, hands on hips, sitting, standing, in a form of simplicity and obviousness no longer touched upon by fashion photography—indeed, the photographic dimension of these sculptures is instantly striking.

Extract of ‘La Venus de Brown’, by Eric Troncy, Numero, November 2006

These notes refer to the works that will be exhibited in the gallery and do not feature in the original article:

* or in the black patina of bronze

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