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The Bone Collector

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Nick Evans: Anti-Autonomie

As his new solo exhibition opens in Glasgow Nick Evans talks to David Pollock about the influence of mid-20th century sculpture on his work.

Although he's been a practising artist since leaving Glasgow School of Art in 2000 with a degree in Sculpture and Environmental Art, Nick Evans traces the beginning of his current mode of practice back to 2006, when he completed an eight-month residency at the Tate Gallery in St Ives. 'While I was there I saw a series of plaster works by Barbara Hepworth,' says the Zambia-born, Somerset-raised sculptor. 'They weren't on display to the public, they were stored in her old studio space at the Palais de Danse, lined up on the dancefloor. I think when I started work on these pieces, which are all made of plaster too, I wasn't even conscious of the connection, but the closer I get to it the more I think about it.'

Evans work over the last couple of years has been informed by that memory of iconic, mid-20th century British sculpture. 'It's to do with a memory and vocabulary of form which I carry around with me, and my hope is that the viewer will tap into either a conscious awareness of previous types of modernist, organic abstraction or a more troubling, unconscious awareness of certain shapes, of body parts in a violent reconfiguration.'

Entitled Anti-Autonomie, Evans' exhibition at Mary Mary this autumn will feature around seven works, and is a reaction of sorts to the artist's last solo show in Glasgow, 2009's Use History Autonomie at Washington Garcia. Preview photographs reveal the work to be a series of abstract plaster figures, their shapes indeed suggesting something of altered human figures, while their texture implies bone or ivory. They resemble medical samples of stripped-clean bone, deformed and rubbed smooth like driftwood.

Mary Mary

'They're very classical, formal structures,' says Evans, 'but the tables which are holding them up are almost pop-primitivist, the legs of which are figures in an African or Orientalist style. There's something a bit Arts and Crafts about these tables, almost, and the aim is to create a collision of previous cultural and geographical histories between the plaster works and the stands they're on.'

In Evans' mind, the relationship between his sculptures and those Hepworth pieces is direct. 'Many elements of my pieces have their starting points in the language of her sculptures,' he says. The initial clay models Evans makes aren't direct translations of someone like Hepworth or Henry Moore, but a semi-conscious repetition of a half-remembered fragment of a Hepworth or a Moore or a work by Lynn Chadwick.

'What I'm taking about here is all part of our cultural memory, I believe,' says Evans. 'The forms and ideas around this kind of abstraction have filtered down into popular culture, into cartoons or design or architecture, pop videos ... I mean the shapes themselves, but also the idea of the body morphing and changing. These ideas should appeal to people from all walks of life, so it's almost like tapping into the collective unconscious. Like Hepworth – her sculptures are informed by the landscape of the west of Cornwall, but she translated this into statuesque figures which then had their own meanings. Similarly, you don't have to be versed in modernist abstraction to tap into the resonances of the forms which I'm making.'

Mary Mary, Glasgow, Sat 18 Sep–Sat 30 Oct.