

RICHARD DEACON - WERNER LEUPIN - FAX INTERVIEW.

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WL: What are your intentions and hopes that with your sculpture in Liestal?

I think that urban sculpture has the possibility of making a place, and some meanings, public - somewhere which belongs, at least in some part to the inhabitants and passers-by - a part of their lives. I am excited and stimulated by this possibility.

WL: Did you try to react (through your sculpture) to the architecture of the UBS building in Liestal and/or to the surroundings of the building?

The ideas that I put forward to the commission were a result of my having visited Liestal and looked at the site and the surroundings. I was also interested in the geology revealed by the excavation on site.

WL: Why did you decide to create the specific form of the sculpture?

What is your message that you want to give with your sculpture in Liestal to its viewers? **Or.** What message do you wish to give to your viewers?

How (and why) did you get its name?

I put forward three proposals, three different responses. The one chosen is in some ways the most assertive and, in consequence of its near verticality, that which most approaches the figurative. Formally the lean to one side and curvilinear forms are in counterpoint to the architectural surroundings. The lean is towards the buildings of the bank so that there is an implicit acknowledgement of process, of dependency or of being supported. The conceptual process is more difficult to describe but I can try. On my first visit to Liestal the building was still very much under construction, the site crane standing in a deep hole now covered by the present plaza. One side of this hole revealed the fragmentary wall of a much older structure - some steps and a window were still visible. For the rest the hole seemed to dug into what looked like beach shingle of a large size, rounded pebbles and small rocks. I was a bit puzzled as to how shingle arrived in the mountains until it was explained that this was a terminal moraine, a pile of material churned up and pushed along by a glacier. The rounded stones were characteristic of their erosion by churning around and knocking against each other. I was intrigued by the imaginative connections between the hole (an absence), a geological process which had passed and the fact that the hole itself was the site of a crane which moved, distributed and organised the material for the new building - a pivot articulating the process of construction. Moving, distributing and organising material are also amongst the effects of glaciation. You can also think that this is

what a bank does to financial affects. The fragments of an earlier building suggested a cyclicity to the process of building and rebuilding, just as ice had undoubtedly advanced and retreated over the site. All of my three proposals involved imaginative excursions into these connections. The finished work is constructed from a repeated element, reflecting cyclicity. Smooth and precariously balanced it is solid and empty at the same time, a hole above the ground, a displacement.

One of the presented proposals involved not filling in a part of the excavation and then completing the plaza with a glass cover. Through the cover, installed over a void, it would be possible to see a polished stainless object, its surface rippled and catching the light as if it were a fluid. There were ideas of ice as liquid turned to solid and of sunken treasure glittering in the depths (the bank vault) involved. The polished stainless steel mound at the bottom of the installed sculpture has some of these ideas still attached. The title 'No Stone Unturned', tries to bring in these thoughts (it's a phrase in English implying a through search - usually for something of value) as well as suggesting the turning and tumbling of the glaciation process, displacement and cyclicity. Of course the delicate colouring is in tension with these ideas since 'a rolling stone gathers no moss' and such delicate, lichen like colouration could only be achieved by something staying in one place. However, as a child I was always fascinated to look under stones to see the life there and do know that the richest are those that have 'gathered moss'. The colour therefore has a role in suggesting fixity of place (although interestingly it also has vaguely glacial connotations).

WL: How do you start a sculpture?

What is your starting point for a sculpture?

What is the hour of birth for one of your sculptures?

I can start in various ways - from a material, from an idea, from a sensation, from a memory, from a slogan, from an action, from an object, by accident, by surprise, on purpose.

WL: How do you decide that a sculpture is finished? Is the determination of the final stage of a sculpture a rational decision or is it guided by your 'gut feelings'?

It's finished when there's nothing left to do. This is not often a rational decision.

WL: Should a sculpture tell a story, represent a strong message of an artist or should it be only a scattered ray of light hitting the observer at the moment he/she looks at it?

I don't like sculptures that tell stories.

WL: In many civilisations, cultures or societies sculptures have been (mis)used by many owners to show the other people how rich they are. How can you as a sculptor fight against such misuse of your work?

You can't.

WL: Which role does the colour play in your sculptures?

I am interested more in light than in colour per se. I use many different varieties of receptivity to light - transparency, translucency, opacity, brilliance, shine, colour, texture, darkness, shadow.

WL: In modern art the human being is mostly absent or not visible. How and where can it be found/observed in your sculptures? Or do you not want to show it?

Since all of my sculpture is handmade this is often very evident. I consider that the human being is all over my work. I also think that making sculpture is an activity so human that you cannot think of these objects outside of the context of humanity. The various scales of my work - big, medium, small are also addressed to the human since the human is in the middle. Finally many of my works have titles which include words directly involving a someone like me as a spectator - 'we', 'us', 'you' etc

WL: How do the three-dimensional structures formed by or found in nature influence your work?

I am interested in structure but I don't particularly think of my work as being an abstraction of nature. My reasons for using curved forms for example has little to do with connotations of organic form although I accept that this connotation exists.

WL: In one of your recent works (exhibited in Liverpool) you use an array of pyramids to construct a sculpture. This sculpture resembles a little bit the structural model of 'Buckminster Fullerene', a molecule formed solely by carbon atoms, thus being related to graphite and diamond. Did you know of the Buckminster fullerenes before the creation of this work of yours?

Yes I did know about Buckminster-Fullerenes but this is a casual relation. Although in the sculpture you refer to - 'Second Skin' - the thing I was trying to construct, a form made from a universally articulated skin, has some overlap with the connectivity of BuckyBalls.

WL: Your earlier sculptures are often bold structures hiding their insides, whereas your newer sculptures are sculptures to see through. How do you comment this change in your sculptures?

I think you're wrong. Most of the sculpture I have made has been hollow and the inside has been exposed.

WL: For your sculptures you use wood, metal and plastics, in your series 'art for other people' even paper coated with epoxy resins. What influences your choice of material?

Basically I use materials that I can bend. At its most simple this is like bending (folding or rolling) a sheet of paper. There is an immediate change in structural strength that I like and the simple act encloses a volume which therefore has some meaningful connection to work. The transformation liquid/solid which happens with resins is also a change I find interesting. I like materials and often use the word stuff as general term of reference. I like the way stuff is a part of the world and I am fascinated by plasticity.

WL: Your work does not only consist of sculptures but also of sketches, drawings and photography. How does this work correspond to your sculptural work?

WL: Is the reduction from three to two dimensions a way you to reduce the complexity of a given object or does it simply represent one of your playgrounds used to develop new ideas?

I have also written, worked with dancers and made performances. Of these activities the one that most closely approximates to sculpture for me is writing. Another way to talk would be to say that sculpture is (almost) exclusively made in the studio. Other activities happen in other places. Sculpture therefore seems to me to be place dependent. At the same time there is also a sense in which making sculpture generates a world for me so it is also possible to talk of a genuine independence. This is less true of other activities. I have noticed that my drawing goes in phases related to ways I am thinking about sculpture.

WL: 'Modern art' often has a hard time to be accepted by today's people.

How should one approach a piece of 'modern art' in order to understand it or to get some ideas of the artist's perception behind the art work?

I think that all one needs is an open mind.

WL: You are observed as one of the outstanding sculptors of this age. How do you see the relation of your work in relation to 'classical' sculptures before 1950 or even before 1900?

I think there is a watershed somewhere around 1960. I have a great interest in the history of sculpture but I'm not sure that the continuities are as great as appearances might indicate.

WL: Artists (and scientists) are often viewed as people acting and living in an ivory tower. How do you see yourself?

I think that both artists and scientists are trying to understand things. I don't know whether that means they do or don't live in ivory towers. It wouldn't be much of a world without them.

WL: Which precautions do you take for not feeling or being isolated in your own world?

I don't live in my studio.