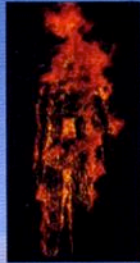


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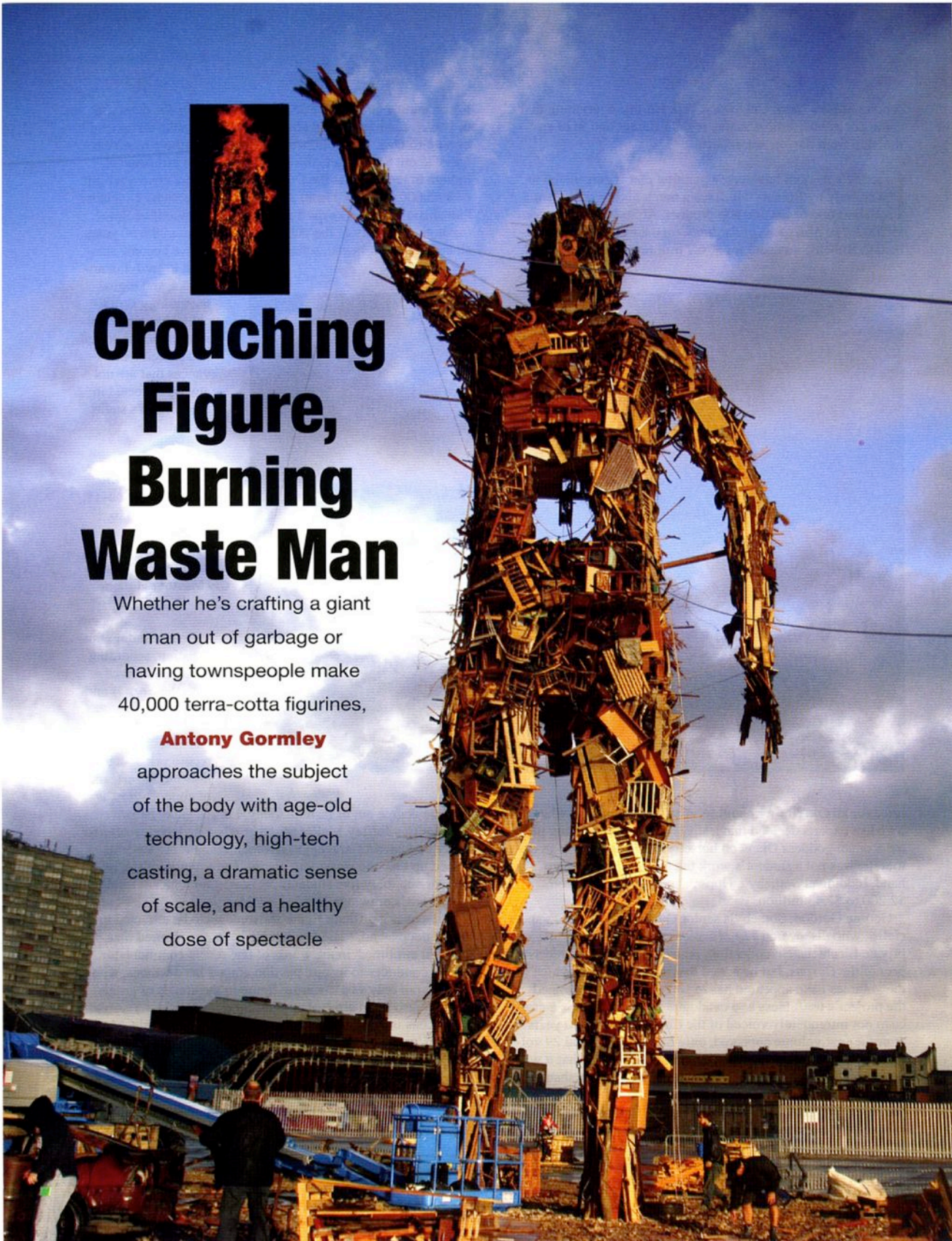


Crouching Figure, Burning Waste Man

Whether he's crafting a giant man out of garbage or having townspeople make 40,000 terra-cotta figurines,

Antony Gormley

approaches the subject of the body with age-old technology, high-tech casting, a dramatic sense of scale, and a healthy dose of spectacle



LAST AUTUMN AN 80-FOOT-HIGH COLOSSUS named *Waste Man* was burned to ashes in the run-down British seaside resort of Margate. As the sun set, flames etched the figure against the sky, and its components—toilet seats, old furniture, and domestic refuse—were silhouetted in fire. The spectacle was at once primitive and cutting-edge, avant-garde and genuinely popular—a large crowd of locals gave every sign of thoroughly enjoying this experience of contemporary art. Many of the objects that made up the figure were their own discarded possessions, things with or without emotional significance, which they had been encouraged to bring.

Waste Man was a sculpture by Antony Gormley. “It took six weeks to build and about 32 minutes to burn completely to the ground,” Gormley told me later when I visited him in his London studio. “It was an extraordinary experience, working on

BY MARTIN GAYFORD

that scale, with that material, in that community.” Mar-

gate, on the southeastern tip of England, was a fashionable destination in Turner’s day but is now a grim, neglected place on the road to nowhere, with a disproportionate number of poor people and many asylum seekers from Africa, Asia, and elsewhere, sent there by the government.

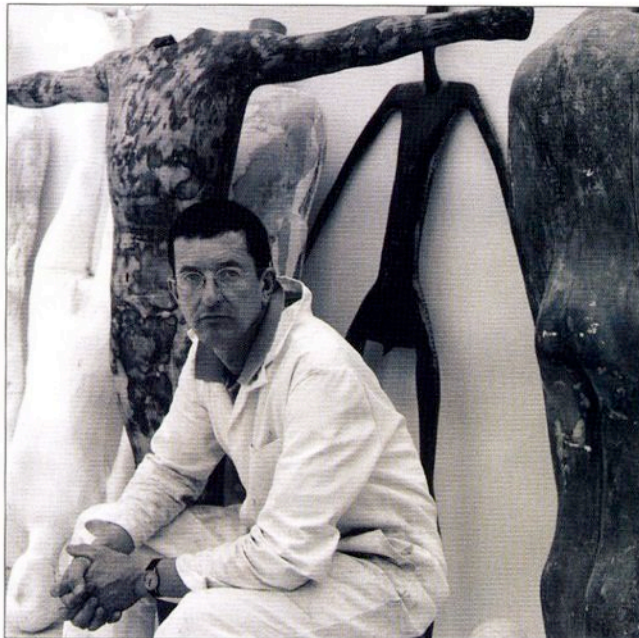
All that was part of the intended meaning of *Waste Man*: a giant fashioned from garbage or, as Gormley puts it, “the detritus of the Western overproduction of things,” which is itself a symbol of dispossessed and marginalized humanity. *Waste Man*’s raised right arm was intended as a gesture of greeting. “I wanted it to be about recognition: I am here. I am making myself known to the wider world.”

The evident success of the figure points to one of the most unusual aspects of Gormley’s work: it is genuinely popular. His colossus *Angel of the North* (1995–98), a 65-foot-high figure sprouting aircraft wings that towers above the main London–Edinburgh road outside the industrial town of Gateshead, is the only work of contemporary art in Britain that is marked on standard driving maps. It has become symbolic of the region in which it stands.

Last autumn, while *Waste Man* was rising in Margate, a controversy was brewing concerning *Another Place*, a work consisting of 100 iron figures spread over almost two miles of beach on the estuary of the Mersey River, near Liverpool. *Another Place* had already been installed for a year, to great acclaim, when the local authorities withdrew planning permission for it to remain, on grounds of health and safety and the welfare of seabirds. There were vociferous protests. “It seemed to matter a lot to people,” Gormley comments. “And that to me is a huge encouragement.” A national controversy ensued, and the decision was postponed. In March *Another Place* was given indefinite permission to stay.

This was not the first time Gormley had been in the news. *Angel* made headlines, and so did *Domain Field* (at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in 2003), for which he asked 240 citizens of Gateshead to strip naked to be smeared with Vaseline and cast in plaster.

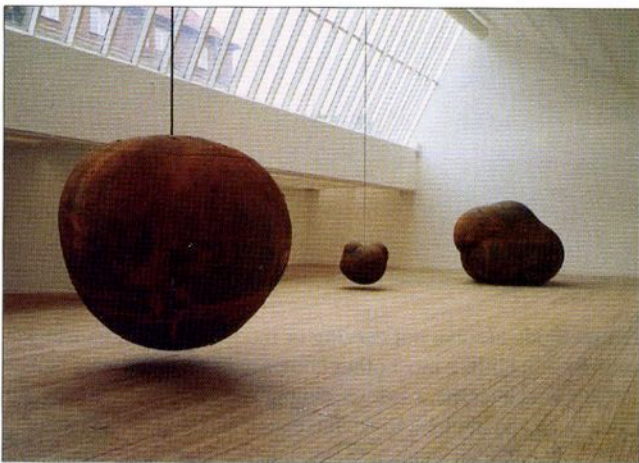
Gormley’s London studio—a beautiful minimalist structure the size of a small factory, designed by the architect David Chipperfield—has been bustling with activity in preparation for his first retrospective in England, “Antony Gormley: Blind Light” (on view at the Hayward Gallery in London through August 19). He is planning another colossus, as tall as a 14-story building, which will stand in the waters of the River Liffey at Dublin. He is also at work on a massive crouching



OPPOSITE PAGE *Waste Man* before (and during) immolation.

TOP RIGHT Gormley in his London studio, 1999.

BOTTOM RIGHT *Body, Fruit, Earth*, 1991–93.



figure, 80 feet high, to be constructed in Flevoland, the Netherlands, where it will join projects by Robert Morris and Daniel Libeskind. In Austria, for a solo show at the Kunsthauus Bregenz, he will be scattering 100 human forms, of nongiant scale, over 125 square miles, 6,500 feet above sea level.

At 57, Gormley is too old to be classed with the BritArt generation (although he shares a London gallery, White Cube, with Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, and the Chapman Brothers). Chronologically, he belongs with the group of idiosyncratic sculptors—including Anish Kapoor, Tony Cragg, and Richard

Martin Gayford is chief European art critic for Bloomberg.com.

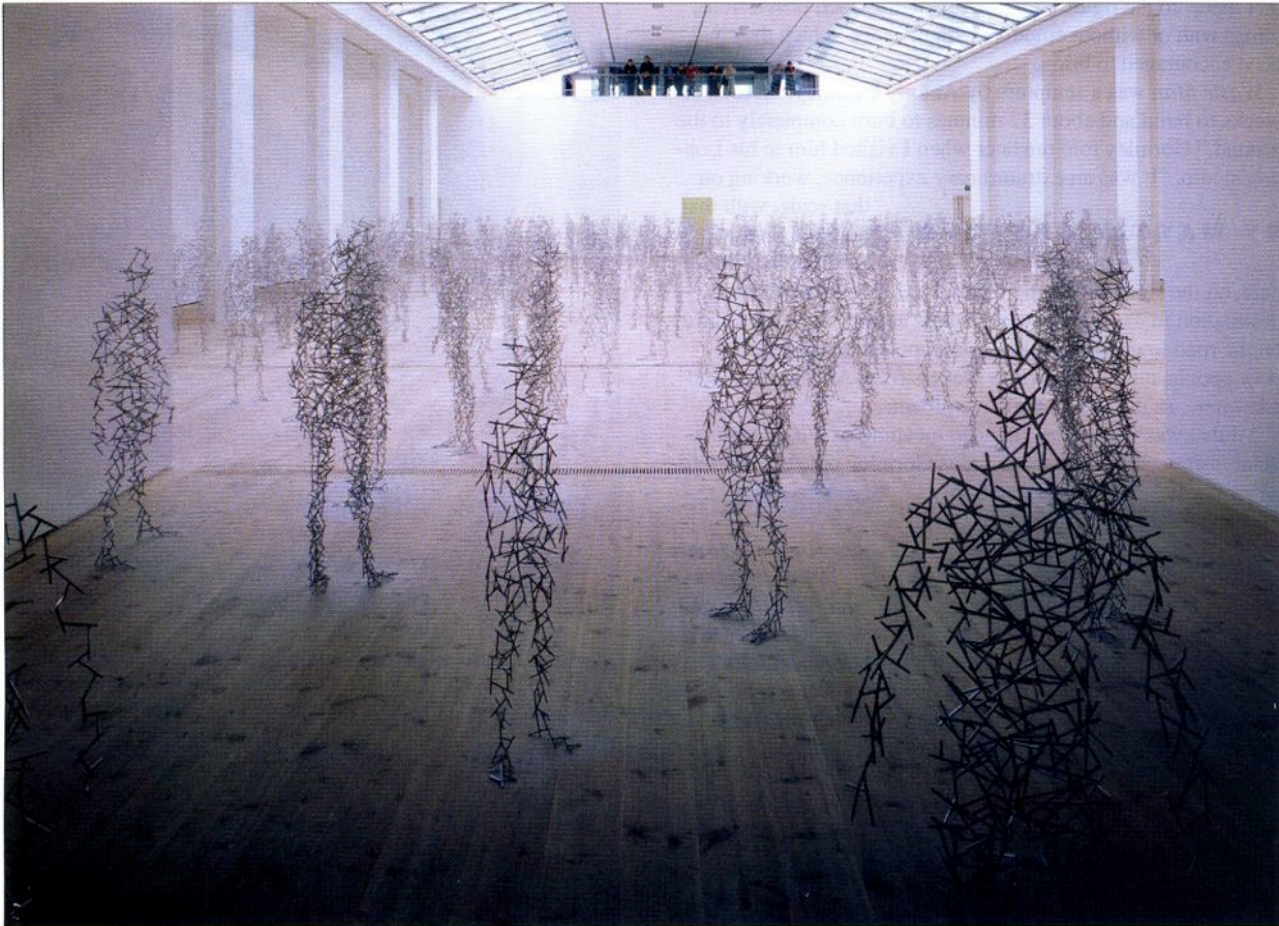
Gormley's work emphasizes the routine but extraordinary fact that huma

Deacon—that emerged in the late '70s and early '80s. But his work, unlike theirs, is almost always derived from the human body. Much of it is actually figurative, which may begin to explain why it makes sense to people outside the art world. The 1994 award to him of the Turner Prize, which is annually decided in the tabloid press as an outrage to conventional taste, drew fewer protests and furious headlines than usual.

But Gormley is in no way a traditional figurative sculptor.

For a long time, all of Gormley's figures were cast from his own naked body sheathed in plastic, then in plaster. "I think my methodology is radical," he says. "My work is evidence of something real, not only because it is made of real metal, but because it is evidence of a lived moment in real time and real space."

This is an ancient way to make art—one of the earliest "art-works" in existence is an imprint of a hand on a cave wall. But



His methods involve not carving or modeling but measuring and casting. Unlike most other contemporary artists who use casting, however, he is not seeking greater surface accuracy. In a way, he is trying to achieve the opposite. Each of his figures is intended as Everyman, a blank, human-shaped volume into which spectators can project their own sense of bodily being. Though very physical in one sense—they are often formed from solid blocks of lead or iron—in another sense the figures are almost conceptual.

Gormley's detractors tend to miss this point. They assume that he is attempting to depict people in the manner of Bernini or Rodin and is either cheating or doing it badly. "Once you make a three-dimensional thing that looks like a body," Gormley says, "people immediately think of statues. But I'm interested in the body as a *place*, not an object. I want this bit of the material world to carry enough evidence for people, in a way, to put themselves in the place this piece identifies. The subject is always the viewer."

Gormley has melded it with the most high-tech of media. The Flevoland sculpture is being designed on a computer screen, using a 3-D scan of the original cast.

Gormley is tall, six feet four, with very black hair just beginning to silver, owl-like spectacles, and a manner that is at once patrician and alternative. In 1980 he married the painter Vicken Parsons, who can be seen in photographs of the casting process, helping Gormley into and out of the molds. They live in North London and have three children.

His pious Catholic parents christened him Antony Mark David Gormley, so that his initials would be AMDG, as in the Latin invocation "Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam" ("To the greater glory of God"). He was educated at Ampleforth, a grand Catholic boarding school; studied archeology, anthropology, and art history at Trinity College, Cambridge; and spent several years in India and Sri Lanka practicing Buddhist meditation under the tutelage of the well-known teacher S. N. Goenka.

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Between 1974 and 1979 he attended three London art schools (Central, Goldsmiths, and the Slade), where he discovered contemporary art. "I immediately got very interested in Conceptualism and Minimalism," he says. His early artistic heroes included Richard Serra and Carl Andre.

All these experiences have left traces in Gormley's work. He says that holding a pose while being cast is like Buddhist meditation (it certainly requires stamina and patience, because one must remain motionless for more than an hour). And his work is based on a sophisticated rejection of the Western sculptural tradition. "I love Bernini, but I don't want to do him again," Gormley says. "I think my work starts absolutely from first principles. I want to start from scratch."

Although Gormley long ago lost his faith—"I'm of the mud-upward rather than heaven-downward persuasion," he says—it is evident that Catholicism has influenced his imagination. All of his work, in a nonreligious way, could be said to be about incarnation. It emphasizes the routine but extraordinary fact that human beings consist of consciousness contained in a three-dimensional object, a body. "We all live behind the skin," he says. "Appearances belong to others. When we

close our eyes, we're in a space. It's a space of intimacy, of the most internal feelings and thoughts, some of which we share and some of which we don't. It's also the collective condition—the collective space of the darkness of the body."

Gormley has approached that inner zone in various ways. Many of his works are straightforward casts, although these often have a muffled appearance, as if the subject were wrapped like a mummy. But he has also produced works by measuring out from a model's curled body to a standard distance, then drawing a contour around the enlarged form and casting it in metal. The result of this procedure, in works such as *Body, Fruit, Earth* (1991–93), is a ponderous, globular form.

"The Insiders," conversely, make the body smaller. In 2005 Gormley created *Inside Australia* by scanning the naked bodies of 51 Australians and reducing their lateral dimensions by two-thirds. The resulting sculptures, cast in stainless steel, are sited in Lake Ballard, a million-year-old dry salt lake in western Australia. They look like extraterrestrials, or mantises and—because the tip of the penis, like the shoulders, feet, and top of the head, was a fixed point while the body is reduced in size—the male figures are equipped with virile members resembling short spears or bulbous radio antennae.

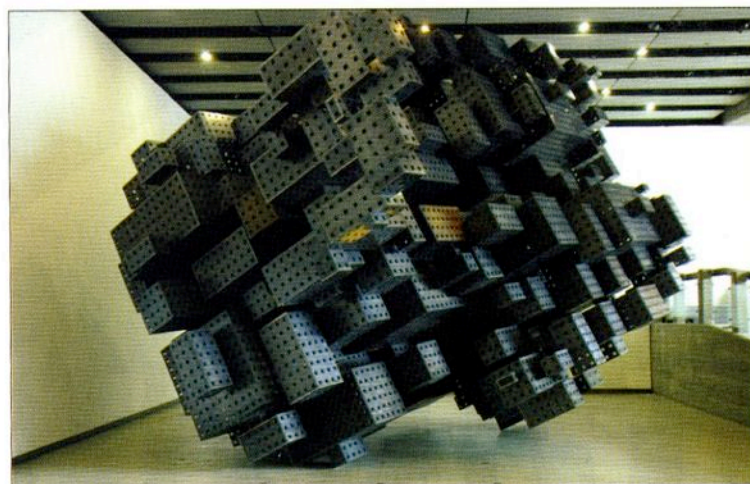
Another group deals more with the space around people than with actual bodies. One of Gormley's earliest works was made of his own clothes cut into strips and arranged to form a square space (*Room*, 1980). A recent piece, *Breathing Room* (2006), is made up of a series of space frames coated with luminous paint; as the daylight fades, the zone surrounding the spectator

becomes more vividly marked out. *Allotment II* (1996), which is on view at the Hayward, consists of 300 rectangular concrete boxes—big box for body, small box for head, square hole for mouth—tailored to the measurements of different people.

Gormley has played with small scale as well as large. *Field* (1994)—in five different versions made in Sweden, China, Mexico, Brazil, and Britain—is composed of up to 40,000 figurines that are fashioned by local inhabitants, who squeeze a



OPPOSITE PAGE Domain
Field, 2003. TOP RIGHT
Angel of the North,
1995–98, towering
over the countryside
outside Gateshead.
BOTTOM RIGHT Space
Station, 2007.



piece of clay in their hands and poke two holes for eyes. Each little figure is close to the irreducible minimum required for a human representation. Flooding across the floor toward you, they collectively represent the masses of humanity. *Field* is another example of Gormley's knack for making sculptures that both involve ordinary people and appeal to them.

They also appeal to collectors. According to Sean Kelly, Gormley's New York gallery, his prices range from \$8,000 to \$20,000 for works on paper, \$200,000 to \$400,000 for sculptures, and up to \$1 million for installations.

One way in which Gormley wants to start again from first principles is to ask, does all art need the specialized conditions of the museum? He doesn't think so. "The museum is a sort of prison for art," he says. "Not everybody goes there. Can we make a work that can be shared on the same basis as the sky, a mountain, a tree?" That's asking a lot. On the other hand, few contemporary artists have succeeded in making work that survives outside the sheltered white cube of the art gallery. ■