

# SEANKELLY

Januazczak, Waldemar. "The darker side of Antony Gormley takes hold of Waldemar Januazczak at the Hayward," *The Sunday Times*, May 20, 2007.



## THE SUNDAY TIMES

The darker side of Antony Gormley takes hold of Waldemar Januazczak at the Hayward.

Antony Gormley is good at lots of things. Talking, for instance. Surely the world record for an artist giving clever interviews was broken in the weeks leading up to his Hayward Gallery show? But he is particularly good at putting his provocative sculptures in exactly the right place. It's a feng shui sort of talent, a heightened awareness of a location's rhythms and needs. Various sculptures might have commanded the roadside hill in Gateshead on which he plonked his Angel of the North — if they were big enough. But making it a man with wings, who might take to the skies at any moment, has the wonderful effect of bringing into play the air, the clouds, the fields, the pylons and the motorway that surround the Angel. The entire landscape becomes a potential flight path for this human condor.

He's been successful again with Another Place, that marvellous mood piece on Crosby Beach, in which a band of pensive metal chappies standing at the water's edge gaze longingly out to sea like Meryl Streep in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. However, it's hard to go wrong artistically on a deserted beach, and Crosby is a long way for most of us to voyage to have proved to us that Gormley is a landscape artist masquerading as a figure sculptor. So I am even more impressed by what he has now achieved on the skyline of London with Event Horizon, a capital piece of sculptural feng shui in the capital, for which another mysterious cast of metal chappies appears to have climbed up to a

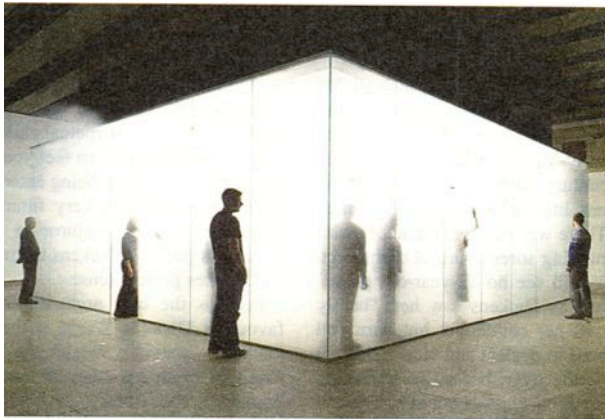
ring of rooftop eyries around the Hayward in order to stare down at us. It's like watching the Apaches appear at the edge of the canyon in a John Wayne movie.

Event Horizon turns out to be the icing on the cake of a Gormley show that is even more haunting inside the Hayward than it is on the outside. It's Gormley's first big unveiling in London for 25 years, and manages seamlessly to combine new pieces with old ones. Everything on view, new or old, seems determined to sneak inside your intimacy zone and mess about with your sense of place. Let me explain. You know how, when you walk into a shop filled with precious china, you suddenly become extra-aware of those bits of you that are protruding, and fret about brushing against something and knocking it over? Well, that jittery awareness of your own extremities is the sensation Gormley seems keenest to trigger. Time after time, in work after work, his sculptures give your nerve endings a right going-over.

I had a particularly fraught experience inside the most extraordinary of his new works, a huge glass room, filled with fog, called *Blind Light* (also the title of the exhibition). Gormley has already explained that he wanted to make you feel you were inside a Turner painting, which sounds nice. So I strode into the all-enveloping whiteness confidently enough, but slowed immediately to a stutter and started panicking. I felt asthmatic. Off balance. And where the hell was the exit? As you blunder about in the fog, you are supposed to be able to see two feet in front

Gormley is best known, of course, for those famous metal casts of his body, which I have always found to be forlorn but friendly. This Hayward show, however, unveils an altogether weirder and edgier artist than the one we are used to. Yes, there are plenty of the familiar metal munchkins — hanging from the stairwell, slumped against the arrival ramp, clambering up the walls — but the display makes clear that seeing Gormley as an amiable sculptor of his own body is very wrong. What he actually is is an intrepid explorer of a body's uneasy relationship with the space around it.

Witness a sculpture called *Sense*, which has been placed outside *Blind Light*. It consists of a concrete block with holes in it. As you examine these mysterious holes, you soon realise they were made by bits of a human body that was imprisoned inside the concrete and poked out in places. This is where the legs went; that is where the head was. What counts here is the sense



of claustrophobia that is being set up: the spatial anxiety, the fetishistic punch.

Thus, the point the show keeps making is that the friendly metal munchkins are just a small part of Gormley's story, and that he actually has a much darker and more

unsettling agenda. The human figure is a starting point for all manner of curious and compelling investigations. The first piece you encounter — you can't miss it — is a whopper called Space Station, which sprawls clumsily across the entrance and seems to be a messy

clump of giant metal Lego bricks. It's only when you have circled the heap a few times and examined it from various angles that you begin to discern the human figure hidden inside the messy mountain of Lego. It's like one of those optical puzzles in which an array



'Everything on view seems determined to sneak inside your intimacy zone and mess about with your sense of place's from left: Blind Light, 2007, with Gormley, second from left; Capacitor, 2001; and Draw, 2000/07



ANTHONY GORMLEY: BLIND LIGHT

of dots suddenly coalesces into a picture of a rearing horse, or whatever. In this case, the metal sprawl becomes the figure of a giant human curled up in a foetal position. Thus, a daunting robotic presence turns cunningly into a vulnerable human one.

There isn't a sculpture in the show that doesn't repay this kind of careful consideration. Although there are lots of highlights, I was particularly taken by a set of suspended body works entitled, rather clunkily, *Matrices and Expansions*. A dozen of them occupy one of the Hayward's upstairs galleries, and all appear to show the contorted human figure surrounded by curious emanations and mandalas

growing out of it, like formations of crystals. Made out of thousands of short metal rods welded together, these strange see-through sculptures defy gravity and appear to record the thrashing about of a body in space. When was the last time you saw a sculpture attempting that?

Another reason this show looks as good as it does is that it is set mainly in the original Hayward, the famously brutalist one made chiefly of concrete, which usually gets covered up, at exhibition time, with cladding and partitions. Event Horizon becomes visible only when you venture out onto the Hayward's proudly concrete sculpture terraces and begin counting the mysterious metal figures dotted about the skyline. It's a fabulous piece of urban theatre that unfolds around you in every direction and makes you unusually aware of the London canopy. I brought along my binoculars and had such fun spotting all the distant metal chappies on their rooftops. There's one on the Freemasons' Hall. Another on top of the ITV building. A couple have clambered down onto London Bridge, where they mingle with the people, and reminded me of TS Eliot's lament, in *The Waste Land*, upon the crowd flowing over London Bridge: "So many, I had not thought death had undone so many."

This is the contemporary art exhibition of the year so far. Fascinatingly varied, brilliantly achieved and unexpectedly dark, it makes clear that, although Gormley is already among the best known of our sculptors, we are certainly guilty of underestimating him. □

*Antony Gormley: Blind Light.*  
Hayward Gallery, SE1, until  
August 19