

Press Release

Richard Deacon: 'Deep State'

20 November 2019 – 29 February 2020

67 Lisson Street, London

Opening: 19 November, 6 – 8pm

“As a sculptor, I have always wondered what exactly is depth? It is shifting and ineffable. Perhaps all I can know is surface, the rest a fiction, a deep state that slips away from view.”

Richard Deacon presents his eleventh exhibition with Lisson Gallery, showing works incorporating steel, ceramics, clay, bent wood and ink on paper that evoke different senses – from memory and touch, to sight and movement. This new collection of sculptures, reliefs and drawings also inhabit different planes – from verticality to horizontality – all while shifting between two and three dimensions and passing from porosity to solidity, suggesting their fluid possibilities as either sites for bodily experience or spaces for contemplation and, as the title suggests, for deep dives into each object.

Among his major recent sculptures are the undulating, twisted forms of *I Remember #5* (2018), *Swell* and *Under the Weather #5* (both 2019). The complex arrangements of stainless steel housings and spiraling wooden beams in *I Remember #5* are presented horizontally, suggesting the viewer walk along its length while following the trajectory of its delicately sinuous wooden lines. With every steamed wooden dowel ending at a different point in a tessellating grid of metal plates, there is an invitation to recall where each begins its journey and follow them to their conclusion. The upright form in pale bentwood, *Under the Weather #5* (2019), represents the apotheosis of Deacon's two-decade-long mastery of the various techniques involved in wood steaming, manipulation and construction, with only the most unobtrusive nodes of joinery completing the object's soaring, shelter-like structure and revealing the techniques of its manufacture.

A series of ceramic pieces, another medium Deacon has long been associated with, likewise alternate between the vertical – for a number of glazed wall-based works, collectively titled *Flat* (2018-19,) that resemble lustrous abstract paintings embedded directly into the wall – and the horizontal, for dark clay plinths which sit somewhere between monumental earthenware, non-functional furniture and sculptural support. Indeed, Deacon has previously experimented with ceramics on an architectural scale for his frieze of 39 polychromatic sculptures on the façade of One Eagle Place in Piccadilly with Eric Parry Architects (2013) and has recently completed another major architectural collaboration with Serbian artist Mrdjan Bajic, to construct *From There to Here* (2006-19), a 200m pedestrian bridgeway over Belgrade's Sava River connecting the Kalemegdan fortress with a towering sculptural form.

While the artist describes his own process as protean and not fixed: “sometimes it's a consequence of accident and sometimes it's a consequence of intention or past history and sometimes it's a combination of all those things,” Deacon's ability to translate between one type of material and one set of propositions to multiple others, has resulted in his own unique sculptural language – one that speaks simultaneously in different registers and communicates between industry and craft or between geometry and nature. “Changing materials from one work to the next is a way of beginning again each time – and thus of finishing what had gone before.”

Deacon's linguistic twists and turns extend to his titles, as seen in the large floor-based work called *Swell* (2019), which consists of ideographic waves of steel, traversing the space like an ocean-bound liner. The exhibition title is indeed also a play on words, between the political inference of a 'Deep State' – the hidden and intersecting internal agencies that operate within governments – and his hard-won approach to revealing the internecine workings of each sculptural or imagistic form. His verbal approach to aesthetics is further explored in a new book being published to coincide with the exhibition, entitled

‘I wanted to talk about the future but I ended up thinking about the past’. First delivered as a lecture, this volume provides a historical sweep of the art of sculpture from Paleolithic handaxes to 3D printers, all while revealing some of Deacon’s own ideas on authorship, authenticity and appropriation.

About the artist

Richard Deacon’s voluptuous abstract forms have placed him at the forefront of British sculpture since the 1980s and, hugely influential, his works are visible in major public commissions around the world. His voracious appetite for material has seen him move between laminated wood, stainless steel, corrugated iron, polycarbonate, marble, clay, vinyl, foam and leather. As he explains: “Changing materials from one work to the next is a way of beginning again each time (and thus of finishing what had gone before)”. Deacon describes himself as a ‘fabricator’, emphasising the construction behind the finished object – although many of the works are indeed cast, modelled or carved by hand – and accordingly the logic of the fabrication is often exposed: sinuous curved forms might be bound by glue oozing between layers of wood or have screws and rivets protruding from sheets of steel, wearing their hearts on their sleeves. Such transparency highlights the reactive nature of the process: it is part of a two-way conversation between artist and material that transforms the workaday into something metaphorical. The idea of ‘fabrication’ also denotes making something up, of fiction rather than truth, and this knack for wordplay surfaces in Deacon’s titles, which might establish juxtapositions or wreak new meaning from familiar sayings or clichés – see *Let’s not be Stupid* (1991), *No Stone Unturned* (1999), *Water Under the Bridge* (2008) or *Shiver My Timbers* (2016).

Richard Deacon was born in Bangor, Wales, UK in 1949 and lives and works in London, UK. He has a BA from St Martin’s School of Art, London, UK (1972) and an MA in Environmental Media from the Royal College of Art, London, UK (1977). Solo exhibitions include Beijing Commune, Beijing, China (2018); Middelheim Museum, Antwerp, Belgium (2017); San Diego Museum of Art, USA (2017); Prague City Gallery, Prague, Czech Republic (2017); SkulpturenHalle, Thomas Schütte Stiftung, Neuss, Germany (2017); Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany (2016), Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Switzerland (2015); Tate Britain, London, UK (2014); Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany (2011); Musée de la Ville de Strasbourg, France (2010); Portland Art Museum, Oregon, USA (2008); PS1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, USA (2001); MACCSI, Caracas, Venezuela (1996); Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, UK (1989) and Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, USA (1988). He represented Wales at the Venice Biennale, Italy (2007) and has participated in the Venice Architecture Biennale, Italy (2012), Glasgow International, UK (2006) and documenta 9, Kassel, Germany (1992). He won the Turner Prize in 1987 and the Robert Jakobsen Prize, Museum Wurth, Kunzelsau, Germany in 1995. He was awarded the Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et Lettres by the Ministry of Culture, France in 1996 and made a CBE in 1999.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and develops 60 international artists across two exhibition spaces in London and two in New York as well as its new space in Shanghai. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt and Richard Long among many others. It still works with many of these artists in addition to other artists of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estates of Leon Polk Smith, Susan Hiller and Roy Colmer. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, John Akomfrah, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky.

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