

Press Release

Richard Deacon *Harbour*

29 October 2022 – 14 January 2023
2/F, 27 Huqiu Road, Huangpu District, Shanghai

For Richard Deacon's first exhibition at Lisson Gallery Shanghai, the influential British sculptor will present a series of new works, demonstrating his mastery of sculpture and drive to extend the possibilities of his chosen materials. Deacon's complex composite forms, presented here through two new bodies of work, are driven by the material itself and embodying the movement and agency of the hand that created it. With their origins in model making, these works are refined by a production process that becomes integral to their ultimate meaning. The exhibition follows Deacon's previous presentations in China at TAG Art (2021) and Wuzhen International Contemporary Art Exhibition (2016), among others.

The renowned British artist has been in the vanguard of British sculpture since the 1980s, with a career that spans over forty years. While this is Deacon's first exhibition at Lisson Gallery's Shanghai space, it is his twelfth with the gallery globally, following his first in London in 1983. Since then, the artist has gone on to win the Turner Prize; present numerous solo exhibitions at the world's greatest institutions; and represent Wales at the Venice Biennale – all while experimenting with a diverse range of raw materials in order to test their very limits.

The exhibition includes a small series of rare glazed porcelain sculptures, each cast from the same mold but individually fired to create hues that reference distinctive natural elements: from emerald green to a soft blue granite, a metallic burnished copper to a deep leather. These works characterise the inherent process of making itself; each sculpture inhabits the molding of clay, each contour plied by the artist before they are transferred to be glazed – first on a small scale before being reproduced into their larger form. The model for the porcelain sculptures was initially created by the artist sculpting a lump of clay with a round wooden stick until the form emerged. This model was then carefully measured and enlarged, a technique not unlike the classical use of a pointing machine, to produce a plaster model which served as the cast for the porcelain forms.

Alongside these are three stainless steel sculptures entitled *At Sea...* (2022) – two placed in the centre of the main gallery and one in the adjacent space mirroring light from the window. Each of these works ripple with the undulating waves of the ocean, their surfaces meticulously worked to create the swirling patterning that mimics the movement of the sea. The material utilised – stainless steel, the surfaces of which were pre-prepared before construction using a grinder – is an additional reflector of light, allowing rays to bounce off the surfaces, just as the sun reflects off the ocean. The models for the *At Sea* pieces were made from discarded cardboard tubes, cut and re-joined to give a raft of wave form, the amplitude depending on the diameter of the roll and the number of sections it had been divided into.

These two bodies of work differ in both appearance and substance – the porcelain works appearing to connote differing materialities whilst the stainless steel works, whose materiality is exposed in the initial grinding of the surface, disperse light. However, there is a clear affinity between these two bodies of work in their refined, undulating surfaces. The intense colours of the porcelain can be seen dancing on the steel sculptures, and the movement of the *At Sea* works play with the fluxing forms of the glazed forms. Together, these techniques and components create an aesthetic that harks back to historic artistry while referencing modern engineering – a carefully orchestrated combination that is at once ancient yet contemporary.

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 Kula Gallery and the Museum of Fine Arts, Split, Croatia (2021); Middelheim Museum, Antwerp, Belgium (2017); San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego, CA, USA (2017); Prague City Gallery, Prague, Czech Republic (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 promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across two spaces in London, three in New York, one in Shanghai and one in Beijing, as well as forthcoming gallery in Los Angeles. 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, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estate of Leon Polk Smith.

In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, 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, Van Hanos, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Wael Shawky and Cheyney Thompson.

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