

David Altmejd

14 February – 20 March 2013

Xavier Hufkens is pleased to announce David Altmejd's third solo show at the gallery. The exhibition focuses exclusively on a new group of figurative sculptures, which range from the life-sized to the giant.

Although Altmejd's figurative works are based on human forms, they are not intended to be representational. The figures evolve, instead, out of the matter and technical processes used to create them. Each sculpture begins life as a simple frame, upon which the artist painstakingly applies different components which include, amongst others, polystyrene, fur, crystals and casts of his hands or of exotic fruits. Working over the surface and concentrating on creating resonant connections and juxtapositions between these diverse materials, Altmejd slowly coaxes his semi-human, semi-anthropomorphic forms into being. With their elaborate surfaces and visually complex arrangements, the sculptures demand detailed scrutiny but simultaneously deny the viewer the opportunity to grasp the work in a single take. One of Altmejd's primary aims is to create energy, which he achieves by paying an obsessive, almost microscopic, attention to the details, materials, textures and contrasts in his work. Originally trained as a biologist, the artist says of these figures: 'The idea of creating a sculpture that is too structurally and spatially complex to be grasped all at once comes from an interest in nature. The experience of nature is an experience of details that results in the impression of something great.'

The body as a 'container' and as a site for, and of, transformation — both literal and figurative — is a recurrent theme in Altmejd's oeuvre. Motivated by the invisible worlds that often exist just beneath the surface of things, the artist reveals the hidden structures in his own works through negative spaces: gaps, holes, fissures and crystal filled orifices are a recurring motif. The coconuts, which are a relatively new development, also relate to the artist's on-going exploration of both the inner and the outer constructions of physicality: 'I think that formally they relate to a lot of things in my work... it is like a seed, or an egg, or even a head. And there's a space inside... it's reminiscent of a lot of forms in my work. It's a way of creating humour... but there is also something serious about them, almost creepy or alien.'

While the obviously figurative sculptures are persuasive, fully formed, forceful physical presences, Altmejd's mirrored works are quite different. The reflective surfaces define and destabilise, as well as multiply, the spaces around them. As a result, the sculptures almost disappear into, or are camouflaged by, their surroundings. Says Altmejd: 'If you cover an object with mirrors, it becomes invisible, totally transparent seeming. But if you walk around it, all of a sudden it takes shape, it becomes real. So a mirror-covered object is at once immaterial and super-material, especially if it's broken – then it becomes hyper-material. I like that tension between totally transparent, non-existent and suddenly super-material, dangerous and sharp.'

David Altmejd (b. 1974, Montreal) obtained his master's degree in fine art from Columbia University in New York, where he currently lives and works. In 2007, aged thirty-two, he was the youngest artist to represent Canada at the Venice Biennale (52nd Venice Biennale). That same year, he had solo exhibitions at the Fundació La Caixa Museum (Barcelona) and the Oakville Galleries, Gairloch Gardens, Ontario (the latter touring to Galerie de l'UQAM in Montreal and the Illingworth Kerr Gallery at the Alberta College of Art & Design in Calgary). Subsequent solo exhibitions include Gallery Met at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York (2008), Magasin – Centre National d'Art Contemporain de Grenoble (2008), Les Abattoirs, Toulouse (2008), the Vanhaerents Art Collection, Brussels (2010), Galerie de l'UQAM, Montreal (2011) and the Brant Foundation Art Study Center, Greenwich, Connecticut (2011). Last year, David Altmejd unveiled his first public sculpture in bronze, *The Eye*, which was commissioned by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Xavier Hufkens

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