

Thomas Houseago

My Genghis Khan Suit/Like A Circle Around the Sun

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Press Release

Xavier Hufkens is pleased to present a new exhibition of sculptures, wall reliefs and drawings by Thomas Houseago.

Since his breakthrough exhibition in 1996, Thomas Houseago has created a body of work that is as paradoxical as it is coherent. Often monumental in scale, his sculptures are surprisingly complex and reveal countless traces of the processes involved in their creation. They evoke solidity and physical strength, yet exude a sense of emotional vulnerability. His sculpture is resolutely contemporary, yet speaks to the past. Mysterious and unworldly, and executed in a highly evolved visual language that is entirely Houseago's own, his oeuvre is also notable for its startling, almost brutal honesty. In *My Genghis Khan Suit/Like A Circle Around the Sun* all of these seemingly contradictory facets coalesce in an exhibition that illuminates Houseago's intense engagement with the process of making art. Says Houseago: *"I am fascinated by the act – whatever form it takes – of making art. And in a broad sense, by how an artist responds to the world and the action that occurs from that interaction. . . . I wanted to get rid of the readymade and figure out what I looked like and how I reacted to the world."*

Houseago regularly works in traditional materials such as plaster, hemp, graphite and iron rebar, and his sculptures often reveal their structural components: iron rebar armatures can be glimpsed through plaster skins, while the artist's movements, as he shaped and carved the work, are all present on the surface in the form handprints, strokes, ridges and incisions. Typically, the artist often combines different representational strategies in a single form. By juxtaposing two-dimensional, hand drawn elements with three-dimensional sculptural volumes, Houseago creates works that reveal unexpected shifts in depth when viewed from different angles. As he has said, *"In my approach to making sculpture, I try to be honest to the experience of looking and recording. You could argue that sculpture is a dramatization of the space between your eye and the world, between what you see and feel, and memory."*

If Houseago's works resonate, it is because they encompass a wide range of influences: the formal language of sculpture throughout the ages (from ancient to early modern), mythology, the natural world of plants and animals, African tribal art, cartoon imagery and contemporary music and culture (the title of the exhibition contains a fragment from the lyrics of 'Wild Child' by Lou Reed and a reference to James Taylor's 'Like A Circle Round the Sun'). Sculptures such as *Yêt to be titled (small walking figure)*, and his series of heads and masks, all testify to the energy and animism that runs throughout his oeuvre. The expressive, skull-like forms of the masks and heads builds on the Western modernist fascination with tribal objects from Africa and the South Pacific, but go beyond this to provide a fresh interpretation of transhistorical and transcultural sculptural genres. In *Yêt to be titled (rebar head on plinth)* Houseago pushes his practice to the opposite extreme and, instead of building up his work in plaster and

hemp, creates a three-dimensional linear work in iron rebar – normally employed as a structural component, it is used here as a medium in its own right. Like a three-dimensional drawing in space, the work echoes past sculptural traditions but is possessed of a materiality and robustness that is anything but historic. In a similar way, the wall reliefs are both an acknowledgement of the formal traditions and conventions passed down through art history, but also a riposte: a riff, so to speak, on sculpture as it was, as it is and, crucially, upon what it might become.

Drawing is central to Houseago's practice and his large format charcoal drawings can function as preparatory sketches, integral parts of his sculptural works or, as here, autonomous works of art.

Thomas Houseago was born in 1972 in Leeds, England and lives and works in Los Angeles. He studied at the Central Saint Martins College of Art, London and De Ateliers, Amsterdam. *As I Went Out One Morning*, a major solo exhibition of Houseago's work, is on view at the Storm King Art Center in Mountainville, New York until 11 November 2013. Other recent exhibitions include *Thomas Houseago: Striding Figure/Standing Figure*, Galleria Borghese, Rome (2013); *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Thomas Houseago: Hermaphrodite*, Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, Norwich (2012); *The Beat of the Show*, Inverleith House, Edinburgh (2011); *The World Belongs to You*, Palazzo Grassi, Venice (2011); *The Artist's Museum*, MOCA, Los Angeles (2010); *What Went Down*, Modern Art Oxford (2010, travelling to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, the Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach and the Centre International d'Art et du Paysage de l'Île de Vassivière throughout 2011). His work was included in the 2010 Whitney Biennial. In January 2013, the Dijon Art Centre Le Consortium installed a selection of Houseago's sculptures in the streets of Aix-en-Provence, France.