

## Conrad Shawcross: *After the Explosion, Before the Collapse*

**Private View 6–8pm, Wednesday 12 September 2018**

Exhibition 13 September–27 October 2018

**Victoria Miro Mayfair**, 14 St George Street, London W1S 1FE



*Fracture (R12B1)*, 2018 (detail)

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Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro, London/Venice

**Victoria Miro is delighted to announce an exhibition of new works by Conrad Shawcross. *After the Explosion, Before the Collapse* features new *Fracture* sculptures and two new mechanical works, in addition to a sequence of unique photographic prints created by firing a laser through a series of faults in fragments of glass. United by an aesthetic akin to that of scientific models, the abstract works on view continue to deal with notions of time, entropy and disappearance.**

The exhibition marks a significant development of Conrad Shawcross's celebrated *Paradigm* sculptures. The *Paradigms* are an ongoing exploration of the tetrahedron – geometrically a four-sided non-tessellating form and conceptually the symbol of an indivisible unit of matter. As a building block, the tetrahedron behaves as an irrational number, creating sequences that in theory, extend into infinity without repetition. Major examples include *Paradigm*, 2016, a permanent installation commissioned by the Francis Crick Institute in King's Cross, which is one of the tallest public sculptures in central London. The title of the works refers to the notion of the paradigm shift – a leap of imagination that jolts scientific enquiry forwards and collapses pre-existing notions of what is true – identified by the American physicist and philosopher Thomas Kuhn (1922–1996).

The previous series of *Paradigms* embody the epistemological metaphor of the ascending stack and display a visceral physicality. By contrast, these latest sculptures, known as *Fractures*, are far more ethereal, and seem almost to disappear as they rise up and expand. While strikingly distinct both conceptually and aesthetically, the *Fractures* still obey the same geometric parameters and constraints, but also contain a central helical stem. This twisting spine supports a series of branches which in turn support hundreds of fragments that, as a whole, echo the once solid surface of the *Paradigm* skin. For Shawcross, an aesthetic of the designed, scientific and the rational serves as a device to cloak more poetic, philosophical and metaphysical themes, which are foregrounded in these new works. A variety of surfaces and materials articulate the field array; dark surfaces

counterpoint the reflective or semi-transparent skin to create interference and disruptive reactions to light, all of which further accentuate feelings of dissolution and perplexity, drawing viewers into an ever-changing experience as they move among the works.

Speaking about the *Fractures*, Shawcross notes that ‘A potential way to think of them is as some sort of complex model by a scientist or a mathematician. While they appear to be functional or of rational intent, their meaning remains elusive. They contain a temporal element that seems to convey growth, entropy or collapse. On one side they could represent a complex chemical such as a protein chain or amino acid, but to complicate this interpretation, a strong sense of the passage of time runs through the form. They perhaps capture an instant after an explosion but before the collapse of the system that they chart, like a Muybridge sequence; the story of a complex system and its expansion from birth to death. One of the key ways that scientists talk about time is in the dispersal of heat, that time is defined by energy dissipating. In this way, these new works also contain a sense of expansion or a loss of heat, which in turn relates to the expansion of the universe and its possible contraction. This preoccupation aligns with the concerns of my previous works, such as the early rope machines.’

Placed above the *Fractures* is *Slow Fold Inside a Corner*, 2018, a new mechanical work that, displayed in a corner of the gallery, slowly folds in on itself, its mirrored, petal-like surfaces creating an incrementally changing and destabilising view of the gallery and the other works contained within it. Displayed in the gallery window, *Murmuration Sequence*, 2018, is the culmination of years of investigation into interference and disrupted surfaces created through a moiré pattern. Two perforated surfaces come in and out of phase to create a shifting pattern that appears almost holographic as it swarms and evolves, reacting to the movements of viewers passing by and the changing play of light upon it. The work makes use of techniques developed in sculptures such as *Optic Labyrinth (Arrangement I)*, on display as part of Frieze Sculpture 2018.

Referring to the term for a defect in a lens, *Aberrations* comprises a new sequence of unique prints created by exposing traditional photographic paper to the beam of a laser after it has passed through a fragment of glass. Usually considered a thing to be avoided, these unwanted faults have been deliberately sought by the artist who has projected their shadow onto the paper, in a manner akin to Dorothy Hodgkin’s early crystal radiography experiments and Man Ray’s rayographs. The *Aberrations* point to the creative potential of failed or imperfect models as art, just as Shawcross’s use of failed or ambiguous models and machines throughout his career has been informed not by failure per se but by our capacity to perceive. In tandem, materials more commonly associated with bulk, mass and inflexibility, transform in the artist’s hands to the delicate and mercurial; acting as vehicles to prompt some of our most enduring questions about our place in the universe.

**A substantial new book**, focusing on key themes in Shawcross’s art and detailing many of his most ambitious public projects to date, will be published by Elephant Publishing this autumn.

### **Frieze Sculpture**

**4 July–7 October 2018**

For Frieze Sculpture, selected by Clare Lilley, Director of Programme, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Shawcross has created a new large-scale work, *Optic Labyrinth (Arrangement I)*, 2018. Taking the form of a simple immersive maze, the work engages with the sun and its shifting position throughout the day and the seasons, focusing specifically on how people navigate and orientate themselves both physically and emotionally in relation to its rise and fall.

### **Matrix 179: Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art**

**Until 21 October 2018**

The artist’s first solo institutional exhibition in the United States features sculptures, models and a recent light machine, *Slow Arc Inside a Cube X*, 2017, and demonstrates the artist’s ongoing interests in science, robotics and the natural world. The major work *Monolith (Optic)*, 2016, first displayed at Frieze Sculpture 2016, is installed on Main Street in front of the Wadsworth Atheneum.

### **Comcast Technology Center**

**Unveiling Autumn 2018**

A major site-specific sculpture by Shawcross has been commissioned for the new Comcast Technology Center building, designed by Foster + Partners, in Philadelphia, USA. *Exploded Paradigm*, 2018, the artist’s largest *Paradigm* work to date at 18 metres tall, occupies the lobby of the building, its complex mirrored surfaces enhancing the visitor’s experience of the surrounding architecture.

## **About the artist**

Conrad Shawcross was born in 1977 in London, where he currently lives and works.

Shawcross has undertaken numerous prestigious commissions. In June 2017, the Royal Academy of Arts and St Pancras International unveiled the major site-specific installation, *The Interpretation of Movement (a 9:8 in blue)*, as part of the *Terrace Wires* series. The work was on view until December 2017. Unveiled in autumn 2016, *The Optic Cloak* is a major architectural intervention for the Greenwich Peninsula low carbon Energy Centre. *Paradigm*, 2016, is a permanent installation which marked the inauguration of The Francis Crick Institute in King's Cross. *Three Perpetual Chords*, 2015, is a series of permanent sculptures commissioned for Dulwich. *The Dappled Light of the Sun*, 2015, first installed in the Annenberg Courtyard of the Royal Academy of Arts, London as part of the *Summer Exhibition 2015*, is an immersive work comprising branching cloud-like forms made of thousands of tetrahedrons.

Earlier commissions and artist projects include *The Ada Project*, an ongoing series of musical commissions between Shawcross and leading contemporary composers, which was conceived for the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2013, and subsequently travelled to venues in Tasmania, London, Hong Kong and Denmark. Shawcross was one of three contemporary artists invited to create works inspired by Titian's masterpieces for the project *Metamorphosis: Titian 2012*, an ambitious collaboration with the National Gallery and Royal Ballet. He was Artist in Residence at the Science Museum, London, from 2009–2011, and his first public realm commission *Space Trumpet*, installed in the atrium of the refurbished Unilever Building in London in 2007, won the Art & Work 2008 Award for a Work of Art Commissioned for a Specific Site in a Working Environment. In 2009 Shawcross was awarded the Illy prize for best solo presentation at Art Brussels, and elected as a Royal Academician in 2013.

Solo exhibitions have been held at institutions including the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut (until 21 October 2018); New Art Centre, Roche Court (2015); ARTMIA Foundation, Beijing (2014); MUDAM, Luxembourg (2012); Science Museum, London (2011–2012); Turner Contemporary, Margate (2011); and Oxford Science Park (2010). His work has recently been exhibited nationally and internationally as part of the *Summer Exhibition 2018*, Royal Academy of Arts, London (2018); *Socle du Monde Biennale 2017*, HEART Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark (2017); *Into the Unknown: A Journey Through Science Fiction*, Barbican, London (2017); *Summer Exhibition 2017*, Royal Academy of Arts, London (2017); *The Universe and Art*, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2016–2017), travelling to ArtScience Museum, Singapore (2017); *GLOBALE: Exo-Evolution*, ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe (2015–2016); *Art Out Loud*, Chatsworth House, Derbyshire (2015); *Proportio*, Palazzo Fortuny, Venice (2015); *Summer Exhibition 2014*, Royal Academy, London (2014); *Light Show*, Hayward Gallery, London (2013), travelling to Auckland Art Gallery (2014–2015), MCA Sydney (2015), Sharjah Art Foundation (2015) and Benaki Museum, Athens (2016); the 55th Venice Biennale (2013); *Journeys: Conrad Shawcross and Tavares Strachan*, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design (2011); and 4<sup>th</sup> edition international sculpture exhibition, LUSTWARANDE '11 – RAW, Park De Oude Warande, Tilburg (2011).

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