Study from the Human Body

Stephen Friedman Gallery is pleased to present 'Study from the Human Body', a group exhibition that pivots around two legendary twentieth century artists: Francis Bacon and Henry Moore. The show captures the complex discourse on the human form by aligning the timeless influence of these two masters with a diverse group of international contemporary artists working today.

'Study from the Human Body' takes its title from a major painting by Francis Bacon which conveys a naked man in motion rendered in characteristic brush strokes of pink, purple and white. This powerful contemplation of the human form is evident in previously unseen paintings by Yoshitomo Nara, Kehinde Wiley and Jiro Takamatsu. Nara's 'Julien' is an intimate full-scale portrait of a young boy, painted in gentle swatches of grey. In contrast, a dramatic new painting by Kehinde Wiley depicts a reclining semi-naked male figure mimicking the pose of a dying Thomas Chatterton in Henry Wallis' famous portrait of 1856. Catherine Opie's, 'Divinity Fudge' hangs next to 'Vaginal Davis' which both form part of the 'Portrait' photographic series, formed from 1993 to 1997 while she was exploring the representation of the figure in gender politics and the sado-masochistic leather subculture in California.

Complementing the paintings is a group of figurative sculptures by Stephan Balkenhol, Huma Bhabha, Tom Friedman, Kendell Geers, Henry Moore and Yinka Shonibare, MBE. Bhabha’s ‘Chain of Missing Links’ is a towering human totem created with multifarious media including weeds, a skull, clay and Styrofoam. Its neo-primitive form draws a link to Geers’ sculptures from the series 'Flesh of the Spirit', a commentary on the fetishisation of African objects. Hand-modelled and cast in bronze they resonate with Henry Moore’s delicate ‘Working Model for Reclining Figure’ which elegantly recalls the British master's key principle of 'truth to materials'. This honest approach to art making is strongly evident in a new column sculpture by Stephan Balkenhol whose human form is hand-carved out of a solid block of wawa wood. Alongside the Henry Moore sculpture, a tightly curated selection of Paul McDevitt’s ‘Notes to Self’ integrate elements of his renowned biomorphic shapes.

Tom Friedman and Yinka Shonibare, MBE both present playful and anthropomorphic sculptures. A humorous self portrait, Friedman's 'Being' is a larger-than-life pre-historic man fashioned out of painted Styrofoam balls. Shonibare's 'Fire' is a Victorian figure of ambiguous race clothed in exuberant wax batik. In place of a head, an ornately carved glass lamp glows symbolically and flickers in reference to the element, fire.

In one gallery, David Shrigley's 2013 Turner Prize installation 'Life Model' is presented in London for the first time: a three metre high sculpture of a naked and comically disproportioned male model is set within a traditional life drawing classroom. Standing still on a plinth, his beady eyes occasionally blink and periodically he urinates into a tin bucket near his feet. Here, the concept of a traditional life drawing class is reimagined as the public is invited to participate in an ongoing 'study' of the human body over the course of the show.

A meeting of tradition and innovation, connoisseurship and humour, 'Study from the Human Body' is a comprehensive exploration of the impact of Francis Bacon and Henry Moore on contemporary figurative art.

With thanks to Slade School of Fine Art, UCL.

----

14 March – 26 April 2014
Private View Thursday 13 March, 6-8pm

(Pictured: 'Life Model' by David Shrigley at Cornerhouse Gallery, Manchester, UK. Photography Jan Dixon and Emily Dixon.)
Francis Bacon (1909-1992) has been the subject of three Tate retrospectives; ‘Francis Bacon’, Tate Britain, London; travelled to Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, Space and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2008); ‘Francis Bacon in St Ives: Experiment and Transition 1957-62’, Tate St Ives, Cornwall, UK (2007) and Tate Gallery, London (1999). Further notable solo exhibitions include; ‘Vis à Vis, Bacon and Picasso’ at Kunstmuseum, Lucerne, Switzerland (2007) and ‘Francis Bacon, The Violence of the Real’, K20 Kunstsammlung, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf, Germany (2006).


Paul McDevitt (b.1972) lives and works in Berlin. Recent solo exhibitions include; ‘A Life Without Shame’, Sommer & Kohl, Berlin, Germany (2013); ‘Running on Woollen Legs’ Stephen Friedman Gallery, London (2011) and ‘Herbei win Licht’ (co-curated by Paul McDevitt and Declan Clarke), Lismore Castle Arts, St Carthage Hall, Ireland. Group exhibitions include; ‘Summer in the City’, Martin Asbaek Gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark (2013) and ‘About Stupidity’, The Petach Tikva Art Museum, Petach Tikva, Israel (2013). Later this year he will be included in a group exhibition ‘Body & Void’, Henry Moore Foundation, Leeds, UK.


