

Artforum  
June 25, 2013

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

# ARTFORUM

Thomas Houseago

Pier Paolo Pancotto



Thomas Houseago, *Striding Figure (Rome I)*, 2013, Tuf-Cal, hemp, iron rebar, 11' 9" x 5' 7" x 7' 9".

## BORGHESE MUSEUM AND GALLERY

Piazzale del Museo Borghese 5

May 24–July 7

History reverberates as an echo in Thomas Houseago's work. References to Auguste Rodin and Alberto Giacometti (both artists' *Walking Man* sculptures come to mind), Aristide Maillol, Jacob Epstein (particularly his *Rock Drill*, 1913), Pablo Picasso, Cubism, Futurism, and primitive art—as well as histories of music and cinema—nourish his visual repertory, just as ancient art acts as a leitmotif in his oeuvre. Supported by these types of sources, he develops three-dimensional groups of works that call into question the traditional parameters of sculpture (volume, relief, monumentality, the relationship between two- and three-dimensionality) and elude all classification, attesting to the originality of his research, which skillfully establishes a dialogue with the past without ever tipping his work into the trap of being mannered. Ample proof of his finesse is seen in the works selected for his exhibition debut in Rome, staged jointly by Borghese Gallery and Gagosian Gallery. The Borghese features three works: a bust, *Untitled* (all works 2013), positioned at the entrance to the museum, and two monumental works, *Striding Figure (Rome I)* and *Standing Figure (Roman Figure I)*, installed in the seventeenth-century aviary space.

On display at Gagosian are *Untitled (Walking Boy on Plinth)*, *Reclining Figure (For Rome)*, and seven different versions of his “masks.” Seen as a whole, these works—made from iron rebar, wood, and clay cast with plaster and hemp—constitute an homage to Rome, both iconographically and stylistically. Thus, for example, the pose of *Reclining Figure (For Rome)* brings to mind the Christ figure on the vault of the Sistine Chapel, while the arc of its curves recalls the Dying Gaul at the Capitoline Museum. Likewise, the bending limbs of *Standing Figure (Roman Figure 1)* evoke the Dying Niobid in the Museo Nazionale Romano. In addition, the works’ dynamic modeling, developed through contrasting planes, recalls late-Mannerist and Baroque culture and, like those eras’ works, they inspire a sense of wonder and amazement, tempered only barely by their coarse, almost primitive appearance and the roughness of their materials. The culture Houseago references originated in Rome, and he is an ideal modern interpreter.

*Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.*

*This exhibition is also on view at Gagosian Gallery, Via Francesco Crispi 16, until July 26.*