

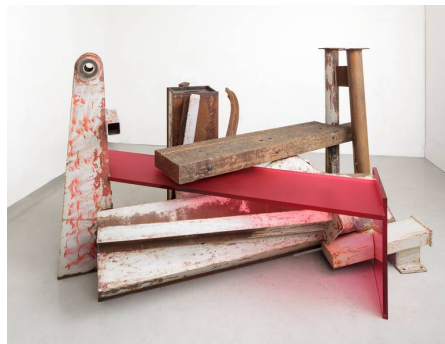
GAGOSIAN GALLERY

The Telegraph

Anthony Caro's sculpture club

As not one but two exhibitions devoted to Sir Anthony Caro are unveiled in Yorkshire, Louisa Buck looks at how the late British sculptor changed the nature of the art form.

Louisa Buck



Terminus, 2013

Picture: Image courtesy of Barford Sculptures Ltd. Photo by John Hammond

With the death of Sir Anthony Caro in 2013, the UK lost not only its grand old man of sculpture but also - as two revelatory shows just opened in Yorkshire now confirm - one of its most relentlessly and restlessly experimental figures. Both strands of the current Caro double whammy, at Hepworth Wakefield and Yorkshire Sculpture Park, clearly demonstrate that throughout a career spanning more than six decades the tireless and multifaceted Sir A was constantly trying out new methods and materials right up to the last year of his life.

Anthony Caro is undoubtedly best known for revolutionizing sculpture in the early 1960s when he committed the then-outrageous act of taking it off the hallowed plinth and putting it onto the real-world floor. At the same time, he rejected the cast and carved figuration that was the standard fare of British Modernism in favour of rigorously abstract assemblages of welded and bolted steel and then pushed this radical departure even further by painting his i-beams, pipes, plates and meshes with coloured household gloss.

This watershed moment is made abundantly – and theatrically - clear at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, which is probably the best of the two shows to visit first as it takes a roughly chronological format. Here, around the corner from the first section devoted to Caro's early weighty, fleshy cast bronzes of the mid 50's - many of which were made when he was a part-time assistant to Henry Moore and are accompanied by some fascinating figure drawings bearing Moore's annotated corrections - you are greeted by the riot of leaping, shimmying magenta, orange and green pipes and slivers of his 1963 "Month of May," which hits you like a blast of fresh air. Hovering behind are the vivid emerald steel and aluminium forms of his 1966 "Paris Green" which are given even greater lightness and grace by being filtered through a sheet of green-painted mesh.

By then Caro had visited America and had his crucial encounters with second generation Abstract Expressionist painters such as Kenneth Noland, Helen Frankenthaler and Jules Olitski, who were just as important in triggering his new artistic departure as the constructed steel sculptures of David Smith.

The YSP show specifically emphasizes Caro's crucial relationship to painting which was further reinforced by his sixty-plus year marriage to the abstract painter Shelia Girling, who often had a direct influence on the colours he chose for his sculpture. But across both YSP and Hepworth Wakefield we see Caro's early painted sculptures harnessing the expressive force of colour, whether in giant assemblages or his much smaller but equally effective 'Table Pieces' which leap, hang and flop into space in hues ranging from a sickly panty-hose tan to rich lacquers of iridescent beetle wing green and shimmering blue.

In Caro's very last works colour staged a particularly dramatic comeback when he started to experiment with sheets of vivid - and sometimes fluorescent - sheets of Perspex which slice through and throw coloured light onto their surroundings. Some are more successful than others, but in the presciently titled 2013 Terminus at Hepworth Wakefield in which two sheets of frosted raspberry red Perspex blush delicate pink onto a skewed, stacked pile of roughly painted steel beams and a slab of coarsely textured Eucalyptus wood, Caro - even in the year of his death - achieved true magic.

In between, as we see in both exhibitions, painting was never far away. On many occasions it was a direct source, whether in the fleshy, floppy reclining forms of his 1989 steel homage to Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* at Hepworth Wakefield or the stolid forms of *Sackbut* of 2011-12 at YSP which was directly influenced by Cezanne's paintings of card players. At the same time Caro's constant interrogation of the language of sculpture also led to him over the decades to work with paper, ceramic, all kinds of wood, aluminium and an infinite variety of rusted/ painted/ stainless/ patinated / waxed /varnished steel.

In 2007 Caro declared that "sculpture is drawn to either painting or architecture" but in his case it was to both, and his equally rich and multifarious relationship with architecture forms the particular focus of the Hepworth Wakefield's beautifully-installed show. Here Caro's sculptures are made to sing within the stunning spaces of this David Chipperfield designed building. In addition to his architectural commissions (most famously the Millennium Bridge with Norman Foster), we also see how every aspect of architecture permeated his work actively engaging with the floor, the ceiling ('Ceiling Piece' of 1979 dangles like a drawing in space) - or in the case of the *Table Works* the edges - of where ever it is installed.

In the 1980's Caro's architectural preoccupations led him to commit what could be seen as another sacrilegious blow to sculptural tradition when he embarked upon what he jokily described as "sculptecture". These were works specifically designed be climbed over and into: some by children as in the case of his 1983 "Child's Tower Room" or - as is the case with *Palanquin* of 1987/91, made in collaboration with Shelia Girling and the architect Frank Gehry and at Wakefield installed outside and just next to a children's playground - anyone at all. For although Caro was utterly serious about his sculpture he was never grand: and both these exhibitions we see how fully he lived up to his declaration, made in his late seventies that "every day is a journey of discovery."

Caro in Yorkshire runs until 1st Nov 2015 at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park and Hepworth Wakefield.