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Material world: Peter Marino reflects on bronze, mythology and timeless design

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'Fire and Water' exhibition by Peter Marino at Gagolian, London. Photography: Lucy Dawkins

Peter Marino is continually driven to make new and long-lasting marks on the creative world. Starchitect, artist, fashion house favourite, leather-clad luminary and landscape gardener; a few of the many titles Marino has collected over an ongoing 45 year career. His art collection is just as multifaceted, including Andy Warhol paintings, historic bronze sculptures, and one of the world's largest collections of Robert Mapplethorpe photographs.

Another title to add to the list: trend-avoider. 'Trends are for people who want to get noticed. Three months later everyone is yawning,' says Marino, clad hat-to-shoe in the iconoclastic biker-gear he's known for, complete with fingerless gloves bound in the same French calf leather used for his recent pen collaboration with Caran d'Ache. Silver bird-skull rings clink on each finger. 'Maybe it's old fashioned, but I think the end goal in design should be timelessness. IM Pei achieved it with the East Wing of the National Gallery of Washington. It has no time, no place, no nothing. That's why it was great when it opened, it's great now, and will always be great.'

His quest for design longevity explains his predilection for bronze – a material that can last 5,000 years. He has worked with it since 2012 on three collections of functional boxes, the latest of

which is currently on display at Gagosian gallery's Davies Street location. 'There was a show about the age of bronze here in London about three years ago,' Marino recalls. 'The centrepiece was a Greek statue of a dancer that they found under the ocean from 400 BC. It was essentially 2,414 years old. I was so impressed. What art really lasts the ages? Does anything we do last that long?'

Bronze doesn't just appeal to Marino for its ability to outlive us. 'It's one of those materials that becomes more beautiful the more you touch it. It reacts to the oil in your hands, as opposed to plastic which gets scratched, or wood, that dries up and rots.'

Despite looking deep into the future, Marino's steel-toe capped shoes are firmly planted in the present. Physicality and touch are vital to his practice. He is preoccupied by texture, and the different patinas on his boxes attest to this. Charred, gilded wood gives way to undulating waves of silvered dragon scales, topped by impeccably varnished, blackened surfaces. The doors to one box bares imprint after imprint of Marino's thumb.

To the touch, such intricacies unfold themselves. From afar, the boxes are unshakable, ominous objects; some five foot tall, and just as wide. Marino calls them 'serious'. As with the previous two series (2012 and 2014 respectively), this collection was produced in France's Atelier St. Jacques, part of the Fondation de Coubertin – the French national institution for crafts and manual work. Marino describes his visit there as an 'emotional' experience. 'When I met the guys at the foundry, they were wearing hilariously long leather smocks and gloves so they don't burn. They pour out molten bronze liquid, the smoke pours everywhere – like the fourth of July. The casting is like giving birth to a work of art.'

Marino revels in the theatrical, almost mythological process, which he attributes to a childhood love of legend and storybook fantasy. 'All little boys love mythology,' he says. 'My favourite was always the "Golden Fleece". It is an enduring story. Myths are continually, universally relevant, which is why they last.'

As will these boxes. They are dateless, folkloric, and entirely untrendy. 'So often, people want to be an architect, or an artist, of their time,' says Marino. 'The higher goal, if I may, is to transcend it.'