

CAN A SCULPTURE BE AN IMAGE? CAN AN IMAGE BE A SCULPTURE?

DANIEL FIRMAN



Dry Wash, 2009
Neon, washing machine, dryer, wood, plexiglas bonnet
Courtesy Galerie Perrotin, Hong Kong & Paris
© Photo Guillaume Ziccarelli



Solo (genoux pliés), 2013
Work in progress
in the studio of the artist
Plaster
Courtesy Galerie Perrotin,
Hong Kong & Paris

Exhibitions
25 Mai—21 July 2013
Wednesday—Sunday
11:00am—6:00pm

Guided visits

Reservation advisable

“Une heure au musée”

› Thursdays at 12:30 pm

“Visite Thé”

› Saturdays at 3:30 pm

Sunday visits

› Sundays at 3:00 pm

Family visits

› Sundays at 3:30 pm

Groups

Customised group visits
to one or more exhibitions

Reservations: Service des Publics

Meeting with Daniel Firman

A tour with the artist in his exhibition
Grey matter.

› Thursday 13 June at 18:30

On booking / With an exhibition ticket

Catalogue *Grey matter*

Bilingual catalogue (French/English) with complete
iconography, essays by Thierry Raspail (director,
macLYON), Emmanuel Latreille (director, FRAC
Languedoc-Roussillon) and an interview from Daniel
Firman by Hou Hanru (curator and art critic).

Co-edition macLYON / Galerie Perrotin

In press

Information and reservations

Service des publics

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Next exhibition

12th Biennale de Lyon

from 12 September 2013
to 05 January 2014
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SUDDENLY,
AND THEN**

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mac LYON

DANIEL FIRMAN

GREY MATTER

25.05 21.07.13



Nasutamanus, 2012
Fiberglass, polymer
Courtesy Galerie Perrotin,
Hong Kong & Paris
© Photo Guillaume Ziccarelli



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DANIEL FIRMAN

GREY MATTER

Born in 1966 in Bron, Daniel Firman lives and works in Brussels.



Le feu, 2011
Bronze
Courtesy Galerie Perrotin,
Hong Kong & Paris
© Photo Guillaume Ziccarelli

DANIEL FIRMAN DESIGNED HIS EXHIBITION AT mac LYON AS A WORK IN ITSELF: A MUSICAL SCORE, WITH RHYTHMS, ACCELERATIONS, SILENCES AND COUNTERPOINTS, IN WHICH NEWER AND OLDER CREATIONS WOULD ALTERNATE. THE TITLE, LA MATIÈRE GRISE (“GREY MATTER”), REFERS TO THE RAW MATERIAL OF SCULPTURE—CLAY THAT IS MODELLED—AS WELL AS TO THE NEURONAL SUBSTANCE.

Fascinated by relationships between bodies and space, Firman places gravity, time and perception at the heart of his research. His oeuvre raises questions of weight, equilibrium and composition, drawing on the forms and techniques of classical sculpture in order to renew it. This forward-looking approach has led him to work with people in fields as disparate as neurology and dance.

For some years now, Firman has been laying out his creative process in precise protocols: “It’s a way to break free of any sensibility or formal strategy.”¹ His works, from this viewpoint, are traces, results of actions carried out according to predetermined rules. Matter, duration and position are chosen with specific intent.

Firman’s sculptures show, on the outside, that which exists on the inside, overthrowing weightlessness and gravity, movement and immobility in multiple variations on the theme of reversibility.

“STARTING OUT FROM HYPERSIMPLICITY, I’M TRYING TO GET TO, OR GET BACK TO, COMPLEXITY.” DANIEL FIRMAN

Le feu (“Fire”), 2011, imparts eternity to a process that is by nature restricted in time. This involves a “circularisation of duration and material.” It is also an image of the hearth, from prehistory to the kitsch of fake fireplaces. Firman’s work plays on oppositions and complementarities in subtle interactions between ideas, forms and references. Household appliances become sculptures in the spirit of the ready made,² while also borrowing from the vocabulary of minimal art³ with the neon and the elementary form of the cube.

This journey into the history of Western sculpture and its exhibitional codes (the white cube, the plinth, the showcase) takes us to the art of movement in *Rotomatic*, 2011: the washing machine goes round at the speed of the washing, rinsing and spinning programmes.



Chute libre, 2007
Freezer, safe-box
Courtesy Galerie Perrotin, Hong Kong & Paris
© Photo Marc Domage

Firman turns references to the history of art into elements of sculpture by making use of tradition as a way of transforming it. In particular, the singularity of his work renews forms, exhibition configurations and modes of artistic experience.

For the series *Je tourne autour de la terre, entre terre et bakélite* (“I orbit the earth, between earth and bakelite”), 2013, Firman set up a protocol that placed him in an extreme situation. Sitting on a motorised seat, revolving round a monumental mass of clay, he attempted to model “the earth,” despite the centrifugal force to which he was subjected. This “physical challenge” made any attempt at technical control impossible; but the confrontation with materials allowed him to assess his strength and energy in the face of gravity, space and time.

Early on, in the logic of his research on gravity and movement, Firman became interested in



Je tourne autour de la terre, entre terre et bakélite, 2013
Work in progress in the studio of the artist
Polyurethane in different colours
Courtesy Galerie Perrotin, Hong Kong & Paris

dance. In particular, he studied Rudolf Laban’s theories,⁴ and his concept of the “kinesphere”, i.e. the maximum space a body can occupy through the deployment of its arms.

In order to materialise the kinesphere, Firman worked on a volume of clay, with himself at its centre. The form expressed the empty space around him, defined by the span of his arms and the position of his legs: straight, bent, etc. He then moulded the interior of the kinesphere to produce imprints of inner space as defined by his actions, making visible that which was not so. The result was *Solo*, 2013.

The themes of inversion and reversibility are central to Firman’s work. *Géographie Lyon*, 2013, in collaboration with *les gens d’Uterpan*,⁵ extended and expanded his research on the kinesphere.

And so a “solo” became a “quartet.” Following a phase of experimentation in the museum,

four dancers take over an area bounded by walls, to which they alone have access. Only the sounds of moving, breathing bodies are perceptible. For Firman, “we’re not in something hidden and internal, but something internal that’s revealed.” This work brings to mind performances by artists such as Bruce Nauman and Marina Abramovic, with the exhaustion of the body and its material condition.

Over a number of years, Firman has been using moulding techniques. For *Duo*, 2013, he made a mould of a dancer’s body, then that of another, juxtaposed with the first. After this first duo, he placed a third dancer beside the mould of the second, continuing in a similar way, on the principle of the “exquisite corpse,” till he had six duos. It resembles a set of photographs. In a further inversion, it becomes a flat, purely retinal image. Firman asks, “Can a sculpture be an image? Can an image be a sculpture?”

And the research in question continues with *Nasutamanus*, 2012,⁶ an elephant suspended in mid-air. It gives “a particular reading of space, not as a physical reality but as a representation of a vision. The elephant is the largest terrestrial mammal, but in this instance it is a counterpoint that calls into question the ‘sticky’ surface of the floor. It anticipates a world that exists in another space, and one without gravity.”

Here again, Firman uses a visual shock to shake up the usual referents. But *Up/Down #3*, 2007, reinstates gravity. The chandelier, which was distorted by his own weight as he hung onto it, is a result of a performance, a summary of a duration, a trace of a confrontation with matter..

In the darkness of the floor above, it is only with difficulty that one can make out a suspended geometrical sculpture, *Black Icosahedron*, 2013—this being the form at the origin of the kinesphere— with its 30 black edges. It stands opposite *Cube*, 2013, a work composed of white neon tubes, creating an interference between the retinal image and the physical space.

Luxman, 2013, is a revolving turntable that does not play any music, but produces inherent noise. *Drone Project*, 2013, on the contrary, with electric guitars whirling around discs, produces a long, repetitive note

reminiscent of “drone music”,⁷ which gives a palpable presence to duration, manifesting both the time and the space it traverses. For Firman, “sound is an augmented form, in that it reaches spaces the body doesn’t reach.”

As he invited *les gens d’Uterpan* to create *Géographie Lyon* (“Lyon Geography”), Daniel Firman invited the artist David Evrard to produce *Cartels* (“Labels”), 2013, with drawings of fragments of a photograph of dancers from Laban’s school, a Labanotation, a kinesphere, a Rolls-Royce aero engine— constitutive elements of *Grey matter*.

¹ This and subsequent quotations are from an interview he did with Thierry Raspail for the catalogue of *La matière grise* (in press).

² The manufactured object presented as an autonomous aesthetic form.

³ Works comprised of geometric forms (cubes, triangles, circles, etc.) displayed in a neutral space so as to bring out their aesthetic and physical impact.

⁴ Rudolf von Laban, 1879-1958, was a Hungarian theorist of dance and movement, who invented, notably, Labanotation, a way of “writing” dance.

⁵ It was during the 2007 Lyon biennial that Firman met *les gens d’Uterpan*, with Annie Vigier and Franck Apertet, who redefine dance and its interpretive function.

⁶ The word is used for “trunk” in Latin.

⁷ This expression came into use in 1958 to describe a certain type of ethnic or spiritual music using continuous sounds and little or no rhythmical variation. It has been used by post-rock and experimental musicians such as La Monte Young, Charlemagne Palestine and Eliane Radigue.