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Dr Michael Petry

Artist, curator and author, director of MOCA London

Nick Hornby: Sculpture (1504-2013)

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'Art about art' can be sterile, or not as technically adept as the reference work. Artists (often with poor draftsmanship) can ape historic work in an effort to claim its significance for themselves. Duchamp's defacement of the Mona Lisa is an important exception; in saying she had a hot ass (*L.H.O.O.Q*) Duchamp's altered readymade presented a way forward for artists in the 20th century. Similarly, Warhol was a skilled draftsman and created images which incorporated historic work. Warhol built on Duchamp's legacy in perhaps a greater way than his direct students, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns - sexual lovers who blanked Warhol because he could not 'pass' for straight as they could.

The only drawings I have seen by **Nick Hornby** are cad-cam assisted. They are clean, clinical, precise and show no touch of the human hand. Like Warhol's paintings (as opposed to his drawings) they seem cold. The computer has a way of deflating even the sexiest line. If we compare Zaha Hadid's computer models to the real thing we get the same feeling - the models are somewhat dry, but the real things are a big *wow*.

And so are Hornby's sculptures. They fill the space, crowd the viewer, and stir the loins.

The starting point for *The Present is Just a Point* is that icon of young male prowess, Michelangelo's *David*. Working on computer, Hornby took David's profile and extruded it to a single point. The result is a half-ton, nine-foot spike of condensed marble dust. If one were to lay on the floor and look up at the spike, one would see David's outline looming above, coming to a penetrating point. The spike is attached to/balanced against a boulder, just as David's right leg is anchored to a tree trunk. The natural-look of the rock and the space-age sleekness of the crenulated appendage seem to get along. They are in a conversation about that sharp point.

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Joseph Nollekens (1737-1823), *Diana the Huntress*, detail, 1778.

This is the first freestanding sculpture of a mythological subject executed by a British Artist.

Adding to the artificiality of the work is the process of its manufacture. Hornby hired a traditional stone carver from Carrara to work in his London studio, modelling the rock in terracotta, and then casting it in marble dust. Sometimes Hornby manufactures work himself, and other times he employs third-parties - carving specialists, laser cutters or three-dimensional printers. Irrespective of the process, the outcome is unmistakably his - sexy in the choice of material; fetishistic finish; and underlying imagery.

In 1984, Warhol made a portrait of Jean-Michel Basquiat in David's pose, wearing only a jock strap (*Reel Basquiat*). Warhol's portrait was at odds with the original: instead of hard white marble, the viewer was presented with pliable black flesh; instead of an ideal, they were presented with the real. Hornby updates this for an internet generation familiar with instant images of naked youngsters sending 'selfies' to each other in order to hook up at will. David was always an erotic object as well as an artistic one.



Hornby uses David's somber face in *My Nose Grows Now* and *6^o Takes One Minute*. Hornby mirrored the profile onto itself to create an anamorphosis - a distorted perspective of an image that requires an outside object (a mirror, cylinder, or position) to be seen or decoded. Here the face recalls the Giacometti head with the long Pinocchio nose (*Le Nez*, 1947) hanging from a cage. This is also a seminal work that other artists have used: Jim Dine created a framed human sized Pinocchio at Pace Wildenstein along with other riffs on the wooden bad boy in 2007, and previously Paul McCarthy used that long nose in an openly sexual way in his performance/installation *Pinocchio Pipenose Household dilemma* (1994). Hornby has made a resin (above) and a bronze version (suspended in a cage) of this nose, and David somehow still comes out of it sensually charged.

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Back Towards Flat, detail, 2013, Digital C-Type, Edition of 3

Sexy lads are not the only art objects that take Hornby's interest. *Back Towards Flat* uses Matisse's original bronzes (*The Back I-IV*, 1908-31) as source material. He hired a Photoshop expert to morph images of the famous voluptuous nude backs into a final harsh bronze gash. He is highlighting the erotic in a way that Matisse may have found extreme. But Hornby also recalls Gustave Courbet's infamous *L'Origine du Monde* (*The Origin of the World*, 1866), the detailed realistic oil painting of the junction of a nude woman's open thighs, which was bought by Jacques Lacan in 1955 before ending up in the Musée d'Orsay in lieu of death tax. In the game of appropriation it seems the state is always the winner.