

Caro in Yorkshire
Architecture and Scale in Anthony Caro's Sculpture
Eleanor Clayton, Curator, The Hepworth



*'What I am suggesting are these three things: architects and sculptors learning from one another's approach and methods, sculptors making large-scale works for public places looking to great architecture, and the teaching and practice of architecture and sculpture coming close together. Then there will surely be great understanding, influence both ways and a new possibility of growth together.'*¹

These words were written by Sir Anthony Caro, published in the catalogue for his 2001 exhibition *Sculpture and Sculptecture* at Yorkshire Sculpture Park. By this point Caro had been involved in a number of projects with architectural considerations culminating in London's Millennium Bridge designed with architect Norman Foster. When he began working with Foster, it prompted a consideration of how architecture related to his sculpture, causing him to reflect, *'Architecture has come to play an important role in my thinking during the past ten or fifteen years, but when I look back I think it was always there, even if only at the edge of my interest.'*² The award-winning David Chipperfield-designed galleries at The Hepworth Wakefield provide a perfect setting to trace the role of architecture as it developed in Caro's work, starting with his seminal painted steel sculptures of the 1960s.

At this point, just a few years after RIBA stopped architecture from being taught in art schools and repositioned it as a social science in universities,³ Caro was keen to distance himself from the discipline. This may have been due to the new materials he adopted. Welded steel and I-beams were synonymous with construction, not fine art, so to effectively repurpose his chosen material it now needed to be stripped of other connotations. He remembered, *'We did not want our sculpture to have anything to do with architecture - but it crept in, without our even noticing it. I felt that architecture had connotations of tables and doorways, and chairs, and I didn't want that at all. But somehow, it was coming in.'*⁴ Despite this, a major part of his radical approach to sculpture was the relationship of art to its surroundings through the eradication of the plinth. By placing the sculptures directly on the ground, Caro – in the words of then Whitechapel Gallery Director Bryan Robertson – created an impact that was *'direct and immediate. Caro dislikes the idea of sculpture presented with artificial aids, separate from the ground – and from life.'*⁵ This focused attention on the ground plane upon which both the viewer and the works stood, but inevitably drew in other architectural features. Sculptures such as *The Window* 1966 literally created rooms into which the viewer could enter, albeit only with their eyes, enclosing space with steel mesh and sheets propped up like partition walls.

The space in which Caro created his works also changed. Following now famous instructions from the highly influential American art critic Clement Greenberg that if he wanted to change his art he must change his methods,⁶ works like *Hopscotch* 1963 were constructed in a small garage, making it impossible for Caro to stand back and view the whole piece. This closeness led to the highly physical

¹ Caro, A. 'Through the Window' in *Sculpture and Sculptecture* Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield 2001 p.69

² Quoted in Wilkin, K. *Anthony Caro: Interior and Exterior* Lund Humphries, London 2009 p.10

³ McCormac, R. 'When art meets architecture' *Tate Etc.* Issue 5: Autumn 2005

⁴ Quoted in Wilkin, K. *Anthony Caro: Interior and Exterior* Lund Humphries, London 2009 p.21 From transcript of a lecture given in April 1994 at Hartford Art School, University of Hartford, symposium 'Caro, Olitski, Noland', unpublished transcript, p.9

⁵ Robertson, B. *Anthony Caro: Sculpture, 1960-1963: catalogue of an exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, September-October 1963* Whitechapel Art Gallery, London 1963 p.1

⁶ Sometimes Caro is quoted remembering this instruction as 'change your methods', at others he recalls Greenberg told him he must change his 'habits', as in conversation with Tim Marlow quoted elsewhere in this book.

manner in which one engages with the work as a viewer, as well as the size of the piece being determined by the limited studio space. Caro would later write to Greenberg, *'It's extraordinary that it has taken me so long to grasp that sculpture since 1960 has been using architectural space and architectural details, and of course to amalgamate it with architecture (but without degenerating into decoration) is a natural.'*⁷

As Caro found, upon consideration, there are many points of contact between his work and architecture. The emphasis on the viewer's physical interaction with sculpture necessitates a focus on human scale, Caro's notebook declaring, *'scale is the most important thing in sculpture ... unless the scale is right – and by right I mean in relation to human size – then no sculpture will work.'*⁸ This recalls Le Corbusier's *Modulor*, a measuring system described as a *'range of harmonious measurements to suit the human scale'*,⁹ which became a central tenet of modern architecture. While the small-scale *'Table Pieces'*, started in 1966, incorporated handles and tools to underscore their presence in, and connectivity to, a human-scale world, the 1970s and 1980s saw the relationship between Caro's work and architecture become more overt. He described the *Emma Lake* series as being architectural because the thin steel tubes he had to work with enabled the containment and division of space. Later, in the *Barcelona* series, Caro incorporated architectural features both physically, through repurposing scrap wrought-iron balcony rails, and conceptually with titles such as *Barcelona Window* 1987. However, working with architecture instead of co-opting elements was more difficult, as Caro found through his first architectural commission, *Ledge Piece* 1978, a sculpture for the new wing of the National Gallery, Washington, USA. Unable to use scale models through fear of losing the correct human and architectural relationship, Caro constructed the enormous steel work in situ, a laborious task played out in front of the construction workers finishing the building around him. He remarked, *'It was like working in public without any clothes on. I think it was the right way to work though, because I did get the scale kind of right.'*¹⁰

A positive move towards architectural collaboration and an indicator of Caro's growing interest in the practice came through the 1987 Triangle Workshop held in Pine Plains, New York State. This was the first Triangle Workshop to which architects had been invited, and resulted in Caro and the painter Sheila Girling collaborating with architect Frank Gehry and his assistants on a *'Sculpture Village'*. Caro described the process later that year:

'Frank Gehry, Jon Isherwood and I met in New York in May and discussed the general avenue of approach. We decided to make architecture in much the same way as many of us make sculpture, moving parts into place and changing them, working loosely with a small team, all members contributing ideas and suggestions. Before the workshop, Jon enlarged six or seven of my sculptures and these became the pivots of our village structure. As soon as he saw them, Frank wanted to use them as they stood – expanding them into rooms, connected by walkways, using levels and bridges and creating a coherent environment.'

*He incorporated sheet steel and tree trunks, creating a focus. Sheila Girling used interior spaces and wall spaces, painting wooden off-cuts and collaging walls, ceilings and floors to accentuate the architecture; she also used coloured plexi-glass in dark areas to create coloured light. Jon Isherwood built outdoor furniture, sculptural seating areas and tentlike roofs ... The surprising thing was the closeness of vision with which we all saw the project and the degree of co-operation and the give and take with which we worked. Of course it wasn't architecture – nor sculpture, nor painting either, but it was a step in the dark, a crazy step pointing to what could be possible.'*¹¹

Alongside *Palanquin* 1987/1991, which is shown outside The Hepworth Wakefield, one of the works Caro made relating to the Sculpture Village was *Cathedral* 1988/1991. He jokingly described this sculpture to art historian Karen Wilkin as *'sculptitecture'* and would go on to make a series of works under this moniker, works which viewers could enter and inhabit thereby skirting the boundary between sculpture and architecture.

⁷ Letter to Clement Greenberg written March 1982, Quoted in Ian Barker in *'Anthony Caro: Quest for the New Sculpture'*, 2004

⁸ Caro, A., unpublished notebook held in Barford Sculptures Archive

⁹ Ostwald, Michael J. (2001). "The Modulor and Modulor 2 by Le Corbusier (Charles Edouard Jeanneret), 2 volumes. Basel: Birkhäuser, 2000" (PDF). *Nexus Network Journal* 3 (1): p.146

¹⁰ Caro interview with Inside New York's Art World

¹¹ Slide of text by Anthony Caro, Caro Studio Archive, dated September 1987

In 1996 he approached architect Norman Foster to suggest that they entered the competition to design a pedestrian bridge over the Thames at Bankside, now known as the Millennium Bridge. Their design, made in collaboration with engineer Chris Wise, incorporated features found in Caro's sculpture of the time, archway-like structures that relate in form to *Halifax Steps* 1994. When illuminated at night the bridge created a *'blade of light'* across the river, a work of art that has a practical use and daily visitor interaction.¹² However, as Caro noted in an unpublished treatise on sculpture and architecture in 2007, *'commissioned public sculpture points to the death of high art, too many dreams, too many hands in the cooking and too many limitations.'*¹³ A collaborative project in which more of Caro's 'dreams' persisted through to realisation was the *Chapel of Light*, completed the following year with architect Pierre Bernard and considered by Caro to be one of his most successful architectural projects. The chapel was the choir of the Church of St Jean Baptiste in Bourbourg, France, which had been damaged during World War Two. Caro created two oak towers, a concrete baptismal pool, and significant sculptures for the nine niches in the surrounding walls, as well as concrete benches and tapestry cushions.¹⁴ This established a holistic environment for occupants comparable to Matisse's Vence Chapel (1948-52).

It was with Bernard that Caro subsequently developed the Park Avenue Project, a sculptural intervention in New York. His notes outline his thinking for this project:

*'From the start I saw the Park Avenue project as site specific. The work would get viewed from the sidewalks, from windows high in the canyon of Park Avenue, above all from the passenger seats of vehicles travelling up or downtown or stationary at the stop lights ... So I started working on a 1:20 scale model of the Park Avenue site stretching the length of a single city block. I soon came to the conclusion that this was too short. It needed the full three blocks to be read from a moving vehicle. I had started working like an architect and this was more conceptual than is my usual practice.'*¹⁵

By the time the project proved too expensive and logistically complex to be realised, Caro had seen within his scale models the genesis of a new series of sculptures. Just as he had been inspired by the Sculpture Village of 1987, the architectural intervention into Park Avenue would become the *Park Avenue* series in 2012, a body of work that critic Michael Fried described as *'one of the singular triumphs of Caro's long and distinguished career.'*¹⁶

A final quote from Caro perhaps gives the best summation of his interest in architecture, and how it related to ideals he pursued throughout his remarkable career:

*'Since 1988 when I began addressing myself to architecture, I have found a rich vein; it's about containment and enfolding, skin even. When you think about it, that is what a building is – the encompassing of a personal place hollowed out from the vastness of the world ... It's entirely different from the old monolithic sculpture, and it refers directly to what I was trying to do when first I took sculpture off its pedestal; that is to give it a direct meaning to the spectator.'*¹⁷

¹² For further details on this project see Sudjic, D. *Blade of Light: The Story of the Millennium Bridge* Penguin Books 2002

¹³ Caro, A. *Architecture and Sculpture* unpublished text, written 2007. Barford Sculpture Archives

¹⁴ For further details on this project see *Anthony Caro: Chapel of Light in the Church of Saint-Jean-Baptiste De Bourbourg* Editions Ouest-France, Edilarge SA, Rennes 2010

¹⁵ Caro, A. *Sculpture and Architecture* unpublished text, written c. 2009. Barford Sculpture Archive

¹⁶ Fried, M. 'Anthony Caro's Park Avenue Series' in *Caro: Park Avenue Series* Gagosian Gallery, London 2013 p.11

¹⁷ Caro, A. *Sculpture Towards Architecture* unpublished text c. 1992 Barford Sculpture Archive