

Caro in Yorkshire
Caro and painting
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Sculpture is drawn to either painting or architecture. In the last century, particularly in the 60's, sculpture tended, as in the Renaissance, towards painting. The opening up of sculpture, its new planer and linear approach, which grew out of cubism (which is anyway a sculptural idea) revealed interior space. The possibility of using that interior space led naturally towards the architectural. 1

In focusing the YSP exhibition on Caro and painting we not only wanted to celebrate the artist's long and rich use of colour in sculpture but also to reconsider the importance of painting to his practice. When asked to list his key influences in an interview with Tim Marlow, Caro's response includes a significant number of historical painters including Rembrandt, El Greco and Rubens.² Throughout his long career Caro returned to paintings often as sources of inspiration. In 1998 he was the first living sculptor to have an exhibition at the National Gallery, London. It comprised sculptures directly inspired by paintings from Renaissance to Modern: Giotto and Mantegna to Manet, Goya and Matisse and he made a body of work based on Van Gogh's Chair (1888), the Gallery's most popular painting. This project informed a new series of sculpture inspired by Duccio's painting The Annunciation (1307/8-1311), in different materials such as cast iron, copper and Plexiglas. Each is a unique response to the painting, itself resonant with Caro's dual concerns for painting and architecture. The YSP exhibition features a number of works inspired by paintings including Xanadu (1986/1988) from Bathers by the River (1909-10) by Henri Matisse and Sackbut (2011/2012) from The Card Players (c1892-5) series by Paul Cézanne.

Caro did not paint, in conversation with Tim Marlow he said that he 'tried painting once and hated it'³, but stated that the process of the painters he met in the USA in 1959 – specifically Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski – offered the solutions he had been searching for in his own practice. This is important as the change in Caro's work after this trip is often linked specifically to his exposure to the work of sculptor David Smith, but as the influential curator and critic Bryan Robertson wrote in 1999 'Caro had visited the USA and was greatly affected by the way in which colour and form were indivisible in the new post-abstract expressionist paintings of Kenneth Noland, Helen Frankenthaler, Jules Olitski and other New York based painters. Painting in their hands had taken on a new, post-Pollock, freedom in a new, subtle formality concerned with format, sides, corners, edges, diagonals, verticals, and a search for the simplest shapes that could 'hold', contain, the maximum saturation of colour'.⁴

In the late 1950s Caro felt his work had reached something of an impasse and sought an original language and style. As can be seen in the first room of the YSP Longside exhibition, he was successfully executing figurative sculptures in bronze, and building an understanding of the figure through life drawing. He was assistant to Henry Moore from 1951-1953 and acknowledged this as a crucially important time because he gained practical experience, but was also exposed to sculpture from many cultures as well as formative debates about art and artists. In the summer of 1959 he met the important US critic Clement Greenberg at a party organised by the artist William Turnbull in London. Greenberg suggested he visit the USA and Caro obtained a travel grant to go to the

¹ Anthony Caro 'Architecture and Sculpture' unpublished text for interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, Serpentine Gallery August 2007, p.1

² Anthony Caro in interview with Tim Marlow, www.webofstories.com [accessed 8 June 2015]

³ Anthony Caro in interview with Tim Marlow, www.webofstories.com [accessed 8 June 2015]

⁴ Bryan Robertson 'The arrival of colour: British sculpture in the sixties' in *Colour Sculptures: Britain in the sixties* Waddington Galleries, London 1999, p.2

USA and Mexico in autumn of that year. The important critic Michael Fried says of the visit 'he spent just over two months there (and in Mexico) travelling, meeting artists and critics, looking at pictures and sculptures. In particular he was impressed by the work of two painters just starting to be recognized, Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis, as well as by the few Pollocks then in New York museums; he saw at least one sculpture by David Smith, whose work he knew from reproductions, and met Smith briefly'.⁵

The sculpture Caro made on his return, as announced by Month of May (1963) in Longside main gallery space, is unrecognisable as being by the same artist as the figurative bronzes of the 1950s. The body of work made 1960-1963 was presented in a groundbreaking exhibition and in 1994 the curator of that project, Bryan Robertson, wrote 'it must be hard for anyone under 50 to fully understand the raw shock of Anthony Caro's new coloured sculptures in metal when they were first seen by the general public in London at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1963'.⁶

More recently the artist Matthew Monahan has eloquently expressed the significance of the change in Caro's work as being not just relevant to his own practice but the course of British sculpture: "how can we account for the huge revolution in style that occurred ... his works will not be named for great men and deeds, or allegories, or archetypes of the psyche ... The age of bronze is over. Manufactured steel and aluminium in a variety of standard profiles, sheets and plates bent on standard dies: this will be the new language in which to speak. And how they stand in the world will change too. They needn't sit up upon their royal horse in the town square, or lord over from atop their mighty plinths, they will move laterally through the landscape like abstract notations, seismic rhythms overlaid upon the horizon. ... There is something 'natural' in the work, like firewood prepared in the hearth. Caro's work usually 'feels' right. There is still a feeling of picture-making. They fit in the landscape frame of the painting, and the camera'.⁷

One of the most iconic works from this time, and in fact of sculpture history, is *Early One Morning* (1962), which is based on *The Window* (1916) by Henri Matisse and was originally painted green. Caro's wife, the painter Sheila Girling, suggested it should be red, and it would now be difficult to imagine it any other way. She often advised on colour and Caro also collaborated with Kenneth Noland, saying 'colour in sculpture is one of many topics we discussed. It is seldom handled very well by sculptors. Enhancing, not overwhelming, the forms, calls for a delicacy of colour choice and understanding of how colour works with form which sculptors seldom possess. My first stainless steel sculptures were made with pieces from David Smith's estate. The raw steel and stainless steel that were at Smith's studio at Bolton Landing had been purchased by Kenneth Noland and brought to Shaftsbury. I worked on the stainless pieces in Noland's garage. When they were made, some of them called for colour. Noland brushed some colour on one while I watched. His choice was impeccable'.⁸ Caro's painted steel sculptures of the early 1960s became synonymous with their time and his career, so much so that in the 1970s he chose another fresh departure and to work primarily with the natural processes and oxidation of his materials, not returning seriously to working with colour until the *Last Sculptures* from 2011-2013.

Caro's association with painting is not limited to colour or source inspiration. His consideration of sculpture within the landscape frame of the painting, or in fact from a pictorial position, is a key factor in the *Flats* series on display in the YSP landscape. Shown near to Caro's *Promenade* (1996), which has been on display since 1998 and has its primary point of departure in a series of tree paintings by Gustave Courbet, the *Flats* were made in Toronto in 1974 outside the York Steel Company. Caro was cautious about displaying his work in an outdoor setting, particularly a natural one, and believed that the only sculpture that worked well outside was that made outside. The *Flats* series not only considers the relationship between two and three-dimensional, being constructed in layers almost like a stage set, but are intended to frame the landscape around it and in so doing refer to the tradition of English landscape painting and the conception of designed estates such as Bretton.

It has been said that Caro learned from Noland that his art need not be rooted in nature but could be purely non-representational – derived from geometry.⁹ The most significant link between Caro and painting, however, is what

⁵ Michael Fried 'Introduction' in *Anthony Caro* [catalogue of an exhibition held at the Hayward Gallery 24 January to 9 March 1969], Arts Council of Great Britain, London 1969, np

⁶ Bryan Robertson 'Caro in the 20th Century' in *Five Decades* [exhibition catalogue], Annely Juda Fine Art, London 1994, p.v

⁷ Artist Matthew Monahan on Anthony Caro, Caro Phaidon 2014, p41

⁸ Unpublished note by Anthony Caro, 28 February, Caro Phaidon 2014, p112

⁹ Terry Fenton on Anthony Caro, Anthony Caro Thames & Hudson 1986, p9

the process of painters taught him about the possibilities for sculpture, saying in 2005 'I think at least in the early days I got more food from the painters because they were doing wacky things. [I thought] 'How would that be if we did that in sculpture? Is there an equivalent of that?'"¹⁰ And in 2008 declaring that he opened the door for the next generation of sculptors, particularly those he taught during his long tenure at Central St Martins from 1953-81, because of what he learned from painters: 'I showed them the possibility of freedom. They could be as expressive as the painters. And this has continued to this day. In order for the work to be expressive, it needed to be direct. Direct in the way that Manet's painting can be, less underpainting, less craft. Remove the barriers between the feeling and the making'.¹¹

For Caro, painting was free because it allowed him to break with the long lineage of sculpture history: 'When I went to America the excitement in New York was in painting not in sculpture. When I went to Bennington, my friends and neighbours were painters Olitski and Noland. At weekends, Noland would have people to stay, critics, and painters. I cannot think of a single sculptor. For me it was very interesting. I could almost divorce myself from the history of sculpture. When I was with Henry Moore there was a lot of talk about Rodin, Michelangelo, Donatello, their sculpture was inside me. But I did not want to make sculpture that was echoing this. I wanted to innovate. Painting could tell me things which were unexpected for a sculptor to be involved with'.¹²

This statement reveals the crux of the significance of painting to Caro's career, precisely that it wasn't sculpture and liberated him not only from the history of the discipline but also the 'anxiety of influence' towards his 'fathers in sculpture', particularly Henry Moore and David Smith.¹³ Able to establish his own practice Caro went on to create an extraordinary and innovative body of work. His final, but no less enthusiastic, departure was the incorporation of coloured Perspex into the Last Sculptures. Often wearing the Perspex colour sample around his neck, in collaboration with his studio of younger sculptors and in the same building as Sheila continued to paint, Caro's final days were spent on preparing this extraordinary series, which conclude our exhibition and fulfil the artist's wish to share these sculptures with YSP visitors as expressed during his last visit in 2012.

¹⁰ Anthony Caro in interview with Tim Marlow, www.webofstories.com November 2005 [accessed 8 June 2015]

¹¹ Anthony Caro in interview with Patrick Le Nouène Interview, December 2007, Anthony Caro_Association of Museum Curators in the Nord Pas-de Calais Region 2008, p30

¹² Anthony Caro in interview with Patrick Le Nouène Interview, December 2007, Anthony Caro_Association of Museum Curators in the Nord Pas-de Calais Region 2008, p28

¹³ David Cohen 'Sculpture: Anthony Caro invites you to lunch', *The Independent* 21 February 1998