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From the Archives: Lawrence Alloway and William Feaver on Anthony Caro's Gritty Sculptures

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BY THE EDITORS OF ARTNEWS  January 13, 2017 4:44pm



Anthony Caro (<https://www.artnews.com/t/anthony-caro/>), *Terminus*, 2013, steel, jarrah wood, frosted raspberry red Perspex.

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(<https://www.artnews.com/t/mitchell-innes-nash/>)

With an Anthony Caro show currently on view at Mitchell-Innes & Nash gallery in New York, we turn back through the ARTnews archives. Because the show brings together very early and very late work from the British artist's career, we have selected one old excerpt, by Lawrence Alloway, and one new sample, by William Feaver, who in 2014 wrote an essay following Caro's death the year

before. Both excerpts follow below.

“Art news from London”

By Lawrence Alloway

April 1957

The “geometry of fear” phase of British postwar sculpture is over. The linearism of the 1940s and early '50s is rarely seen now. Iron has declined in popularity and traditional materials are back in use. This has returned mass to sculpture. Kenneth Armitage spoke for a number of the younger sculptors when he commented on a visit to Calder Hall, Britain's atomic power station: “A living Léger perhaps, but the excessively immaculate and organized space made me long for some dirt and untidiness.” “There was comfort,” he added, “in thinking that even here there must be a lavatory: or that somewhere, surely, a misguided spider might be laying her eggs.”

A generalization about current British sculpture must include: solidity, traditional materials, room for spider's eggs and a dislike of highly abstracted forms. There are exceptions, of

course: Robert Adams, for example, reveals a renewed interest in Gonzalez and the now-popular Lynn Chadwick is, on the whole, outside this tendency towards non-geometric images. His metal forms, punning on the resemblance of

mechanical and organic life, seem humanoids of the 1940s rather than new faces. Two sculptors who typify the present tendency (both were born in 1924 and both show at Gimpel) are Anthony Caro and Hubert Dalwood.



Anthony Caro, *Baby with a Ball*, 1954, brush and ink on newsprint.

COURTESY MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

With dollops of matter and unbendable projections, Caro builds up burly nudes and massive busts. The new thickness has deceived some critics. As the sculpture is not linear and as the human image is overwhelmingly insisted on, they have tried to read the figures in terms of Renaissance mechanics. Thus a pregnant woman of Caro's was said to carry herself without a due regard to the baby's weight. What Caro dramatizes is the emergence of human beings out of raw material. The presence of the plaster and the bronze is always part of the sculpture; its gritty mass, partly defeated by the sculptor, partly victorious over him, is always there. The untidy process of creation leaves its traces on the sculptures and this as much as the drama of the work is the action of the represented figure. The detail on these craggy figures is often indeterminate: this has the effect of siting the appearance of the sculpture somewhere between rocks and newspaper photographs.



Anthony Caro, *Blue Moon*, 2013, stainless steel, clear Perspex, painted clear Perspex.

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“Why Anthony Caro Broke the Rules”

By William Feaver

January 2014

“A sort of digested cubist thinking is at the root of most of the interesting sculpture that’s going on,” Caro wrote to me in 1973; he was reflecting then on the legacy of Picasso and, obviously, speaking primarily for himself. As a born-again Cubist in the ways he treated his materials—clamping them, abutting them, clustering them—he upheld the philosophy of synthesis: that untiring appetite for the reconciliation of disparate parts into congruent wholes.

His Cubism was businesslike. From *Early One Morning* onward, his career was geared toward the occupation of spaces, from closest indoors to greatest outdoors. He worked on such a scale that, relishing opportunities, he could locate processional quantities of his Greco-Romanesque Cubism on Park Avenue and in the Tuileries—not so much for his own satisfaction as in the belief that such grand temporary implants could do wonders for the cause of modern sculpture. *Millbank Steps*, a 75-foot-long array of bulwark ziggurats in Corten steel, made in 2004 for his Tate Britain retrospective the following year, was one of the last great monuments he created in this spirit of inspired bravado.

Caro punctuated his life's work with telling shows: at the Museum of Modern Art in 1975; in Trajan Markets in Rome in 1992, where each piece sat in its own ancient, roofless cubicle; and, most recently, at the Museo Correr in Venice, a display that,

characteristically, he willed into being, against all logistical odds. The exhibitions proclaimed him the great Caro. From *Hopscotch* (1962) and *Garland* (1970) to *River Song* (2012), with its steel haunches housing a great red Perspex slab, this was a roll call of all that he did best.



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