

THE FRUITMARKET GALLERY

DAVID NASH

22 Feb – 5 April 1997

DAVID NASH (b. 1945) is one of the leading British sculptors of his generation, with an international reputation. Since 1967 he has lived and worked in Blaenau Ffestiniog, North Wales, and during the past thirty years he has produced a large body of work which has been shown all over the world.

Nash is best known for his work in wood, a material he turned to initially because, in his own words, it was plentiful and cheap. He carved with hand tools for ten years in order to learn the language of wood before using any machine tools. His simple methods and materials, motivated initially by practical concerns and by living in a remote area, set him clearly apart from his contemporaries, and throughout his career he has continued to work solely in response to his own interests and motivations. In 1977 he initiated the first of his 'planting projects', Ash Dome, on an area of land near his studio. Twenty-two ash trees were planted in a ring formation and pruned and shaped over the years to create a 'domed' space. This project was planned to reach maturity for the millennium and, like most of Nash's work, relates in real time to the cycles of nature and man. His indoor sculptures mature over the years just as we do, changing form and expression as they dry out. Outdoors, his trees grow according to his shaping, but ultimately die just like us. "The objects I make are vessels for the presence of the human being, aware and surrendering to the realities of nature."

Line of Cut and Elements of Drawing highlight two different aspects of Nash's work, and provide a timely opportunity to reassess his position both in relation to his peers and to the wider issues affecting contemporary sculpture.

LINE OF CUT

Curated by Robert Hopper on behalf of the Henry Moore Sculpture Institute, Line of Cut is a small group of sculptures made between 1979 and 1996. In contrast to his well-known involvement with the organic and symbolic qualities of wood, this exhibition focuses upon sculpture which has evolved from an abstract idea, as distinct from the prompting of organic form.

Control is an essential condition for making this type of work, and a rigorous exercise of geometric control underlies the best of Nash's sculpture from the earliest work to the present day. The sculptures in this exhibition show him investigating pure, archetypal forms such as the cube, the sphere and the pyramid both in isolation and in relation to each other. Nash has stated that he is in awe of these archetypal forms, recognising that the inherent clarity and authority they possess represent a powerful geometry which, in other cultures and times, might be seen as a living, procreative force. He maintains his attentiveness to the intrinsic nature of the material from which these sculptures are made, however, and we become intensely aware of the tactile differences between oak, beech, redwood, Australian pine, palm, lime or cedar. Working with wind-felled rather than

processed timber, sometimes scorched to increase the timeless effect, Nash welcomes the natural fissures and undulations that appear in the wood, and regards them as an integral part of the sculpture.

ELEMENTS OF DRAWING

Curated by Nigel Walsh of Leeds Museums and Galleries, these drawings have been selected to give the viewer an insight into the ideas that have preoccupied the artist over the past twenty years. As well as showing his interest in revealing primary form, they also show the artist observing and investigating nature and his own sculpture - both his 'planted objects' and sculpture meant for display indoors. They make it clear that drawing is a sustaining activity for the artist, separate from but linked to his sculpture.

Drawing or 'mark-making' is a very physical process for the artist, and he speaks of transferring energies through the movement of his arm and his entire body, "impacting the paper with material". Using a combination of materials such as graphite, earth, charcoal and pastel, he searches for significant shapes and motifs which have potential to carry meaning. His drawings Cube, Sphere and Pyramid, for example, show him reducing natural forms to their ultimate simplicity, which are repeated in sculptural form in Line of Cut. By bringing the sculpted and drawn versions together, Nash is exploring two different forms of perception, and once again revealing his keen interest in the recovery and investigation of primary form

In order to get closer to the essence of the forms he describes, Nash uses natural elements such as fire and water to treat the paper, and incorporates materials such as coal dust, earth or flower petals into his drawings. In the drawing Pyramid, for example, he begins his investigation of the form by scorching the paper. He describes the process as follows: "Fire: paper transformed by scorching. A pyramid form removed from a block, a slow fire lit in the vacated space and a sheet of paper held over to catch the vented smoke. A clear, archetypal form emerges

Line of Cut and Elements of Drawing are presented in association with the Henry Moore Institute. Leeds. and Leeds Museums and Galleries.



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