

from the ground up. Their hollowness is practical – the making and firing of such large clay objects requires it – but it is also significant to Silver as a space waiting to be filled, waiting to make something possible. He refers to these sculptures as both ‘totems’ and ‘vessels’, and while they reference the human figure they are also the most abstracted forms in the exhibition. Nevertheless, in titles such as *Looking totem pole: blue on green* (2020) Silver instils them with the ability to see, to look at us as much as we look at them.

Daniel Silver in conversation with Phyllida Barlow

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Daniel Silver

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This exhibition celebrates Daniel Silver's recent turn to clay, a material he uses not as a ceramicist, but as a sculptor. *Daniel Silver: Looking* is about the gaze of the artist, forming the world he sees through touch, but it is also about the eyes of the audience and of the sculptures themselves, creating connections through reciprocal observation.

Daniel Silver (b.1972, London) studied at the Slade School of Fine Art and the Royal College of Art, and lives and works in London. In his sculptural practice – in marble, bronze, concrete, wood and now clay – he explores the human figure and asks what it feels like to live within and understand the world through a human body. His work draws upon archaeology, psychoanalysis and references modernist sculpture and painting.

The exhibition opens in the lower gallery, where *The Audience* (2022) greets its counterpart. Eighteen larger than life clay busts occupy a ranked podium, like a stadium crowd, a congregation, or a group of people waiting in a queue. Each with their own personality or attitude, Silver thinks of these busts as a family, individuals who exist as a group – for whatever length of time – with relationships and exchanges between them. While this is articulated in glances and poses, it is also expressed in colour, as the palette travels between the heads, as if the sculptures have 'painted themselves, as if they took the paint and started going, let's have some fun or let's have a pillow fight' as Silver puts it. Unusually for ceramic, the colour comes from oil paint rather than glaze, used in different thicknesses, so that in some areas the clay is visible and in others the oil paint builds up a thick skin.

This painterly quality in the sculptures gives them a direct relationship with the works on paper shown alongside them, *Untitled (made in Death Valley, California)* (2021). Made in the Californian desert, these works explore the human head through expressive brushwork.

In the small gallery, Silver pushes at the capabilities of clay, to create freestanding sculptures at the scale of the human figure, with *Heart*,

Orange and Lover (pink) (both 2020). Unlike other types of clay, the smooth black clay that Silver uses is 'very much a sculptors' clay', as he puts it, and is particularly suitable for creating imposing objects that will not collapse. The pink of *Lover (pink)* finds its inspiration in the paintings of Philip Guston, a repeated reference point for Silver, not only in his use of colour, but also of form. In his work Guston also referenced the figure of the Golem in Jewish folklore, an animate body created from mud, with the potential for everything from companionship to destruction. As a concept this fascinates Silver because it allows him to think of his sculptures not as figurative representations of pre-existing objects, but as entirely new beings in the world with their own potential and lives.

The small clay works shown in the upper gallery were made in the presence of a dancer. They capture the energy of the figure in motion without being tied to imitating poses in a strictly figurative sense. With dancer Darren Devaney (of Sharon Eyal's L-E-V Dance Company) dancing in his studio, Silver 'made the works in his presence, sometimes looking at him, sometimes just taking a silhouette from him, or not even looking, just in his presence' as the artist says. Each table collects together a group of these figures: relationships form between them and stories emerge, hinted at in titles such as *Dreaming about Sculpture* (2022) and *Mother and Child and Friends* (2022).

The tables on which the figures are shown appear, like the dancers, to be on the move too, but with heavier, more lumpen movements. Their large clay legs – quite Guston-like in form – seem to walk them round the gallery. This sense of movement draws upon Silver's preoccupation with migration in his own family history. Born in London and raised in Jerusalem, Silver also has roots in South Africa, and further back – through his Ashkenazi Jewish heritage – in Poland and Lithuania. The march of tables, for Silver, has something of the camel train about it, carrying the stories we all bear as we move through the world.

In the Warehouse there is a greater sense of rootedness, with groupings of tall clay sculptures that seem to grow organically