

EDINBURGH

SCULPTURE

WORKSHOP

Reproductive!

Kenny Hunter

30 Aug – 24 Sep



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Front cover:

***Repeated Stacked and
Aligned Forms***

*Acrylic resin, polyester
resin and wood*

105 x 145 x 135cm

2013

In his first major solo exhibition in Edinburgh since 2003 Kenny Hunter presents a series of new and reconfigured works at Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop.

Hunter's work for both the public realm and the gallery embodies his main preoccupation, the place of monumental sculpture within the contemporary world and its relationship to cultural memory.

He sees history as a series of recurrent themes that each time come back slightly altered. For Hunter, the human condition is relatively stable and universal despite the belief systems that occur across eras and geography. His sculptures reflect this in their graphic character and unusual mix of very traditional and modern subject matter.

In his own words "Within my work as a sculptor, scepticism and uncertainties play a seminal role. Although I derive inspiration from the past, the subject matter I use draws upon contemporary popular culture – its morals, politics and belief systems."

For this exhibition his starting point has been an interrogation of reproductive processes within sculpture and the broader implications these have for thinking about the world.

The Limits of the Original

Daniel Brown

“Authenticity” doesn’t mean much to me.
I just want “good”¹

1. Gibson, William, The Limits of Authenticity, Interview, Heddels, Mar. 2015

Studio image:

Winchester
(Reappropriated)

Wood, plastic and paint

13 x 110 x 5 cm

2016



Kenny Hunter's work for the exhibition *Reproductive!* is a deconstruction of culture's obsession with the original and the authentic. These terms inextricably link artworks to their value both economic and cultural, their rarity or even better their uniqueness, often conferring a status of worth and importance beyond their material or labour costs. What forces are at work here when a copy or reproduction no matter how perfect will never be regarded as good as the original? Bruno La Tour's scepticism about this idea is thinly veiled when he asserts "Only the original possesses an aura, this mysterious and mystical quality that no second hand version will ever get".² In western cultural consciousness a copy, an otherwise perfect reproduction is viewed as an inferior version, a derogatory term for a paler iteration of something significant.

2. La Tour, Bruno & Lowe, Adam, *The migration of the aura, or how to explore the original through its facsimiles, Switching Codes*, University of Chicago Press, 2010, P.4

Walter Benjamin argues in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be".³

3. Benjamin, Walter, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 1936 P.2

Benjamin here is speaking primarily about painting, a medium where the hand of the artist, the individual skill of the master imbues the work with the mysterious and mythical quality an idea that La Tour is rightly dubious of. Casting, the ancient sculptural mode of reproduction, is summarily dismissed in the first paragraph of Benjamin's essay, a problematic thorn in the side of his thesis that undermines his subsequent arguments. The process of painting produces or at least seems to produce unique works, one off originals whereas sculpture historically has a much more ambivalent relationship to reproduction. The casting process produces a succession of facsimiles that are transformed materially calling into question the location or even the existence of an original. The artist will sign off on a clay reproduction or an initial object and then more often than not hand it over to a skilled technician who will make a mould in order to produce a wax copy before casting the "final" work. What part of this process can be regarded as the original? Is it the clay or the object, the wax copy, the mould or the final outcome? The original object/clay reproduction is a blueprint for the outcome, differing materially and aesthetically, the wax is destroyed by the process. The "final" work embodies the artist's intention but is only one part of a series of iterations of similar things. Indeed the "final" work is paradoxically not the end point, the mould can be used to reproduce a series of other final works and the casts can be used to create another procession of reproductions.

Studio image:

Two Identical Forms

Plaster, bronze and

plywood

170 x 70 x 70cm

2016



New digital technologies are now giving artists different means to (re)produce work. With the emergence of processes such as Photogrammetry and 3d printing sculptors are now able to digitally map, manipulate and reproduce their work. Photogrammetry is a process that provides detailed scans of objects converting them into data. This can be viewed as an image on screen allowing the viewer to move freely around the image, experiencing a representation of the object from all angles even from within. The data file can be manipulated, changed, sculpted and can be reproduced countless times, cheaply and accurately using 3d printers. Use of these technologies is still embryonic but they have clear implications not just for art but for how we store, experience, transmit and fabricate objects and images. It offers artists, as Boris Groys explains a “diversification of the conditions under which a copy is produced and distributed and, accordingly, the diversification of the resulting visual images (objects)”.⁴

It is these processes and the ambiguities they create that Kenny Hunter exploits to propose a reconsideration of the meaning, role and value of the copy in contemporary art. Repurposing La Tour’s arguments that in other fields, literature and theatre for example the countless representations of King Lear or a new translation of the Illiad are “judged on (its) merit and not by its mimetic comparison with the first (entirely inaccessible anyway) presentation”⁵ Hunter explores the etymological origins of the copy whose root is copious and designates a source of abundance.

4. Groys, Boris, Religion in the Age of Digital Reproduction, e-flux Journal, 2009

5. La Tour, Bruno & Lowe, Adam, I.B.I.D, P.6

Studio image:

Potato x 3

Acrylic resin and paint

62 x 140 x 91, 47 x 108 x 61,

43 x 94 x 63 cm

2016



6. La Tour, Bruno & Lowe, Adam, I.B.I.D, P.6

There is nothing inferior in the notion of a copy, simply a proof of fecundity”.⁶ The origin for both La Tour and Hunter is the distant source of a long and complex process of reproductions that is entirely tied to the historic and cultural contexts of the work’s making.

7. Taussig, Michael, Memesis and Alterity, A Particular History of the Senses, Routledge, 1993, P.22

Where in this web of inter connected reproductions is the mystical aura of the original? Is it as the anthropologist Michael Taussig proposes produced by “the fetish of commodities”⁷ an illusory belief driven by the market where value is so closely linked to availability and status? For Benjamin mechanical reproduction entails the loss of aura, the loss of religious experience, which he understands as the experience of uniqueness”.⁸ Boris Groys counters this by arguing that repetition confers “immortality to the subject” concluding “it is precisely the loss of aura that represents the most radical religious experience under the conditions of modernity, since it is in this way that a human being discovers the mechanical, machine-like, repetitive, reproductive and, one might even say, dead aspect of his own existence”.⁹

8. Benjamin, Walter, I.B.I.D.

9. Groys, Boris, I.B.I.D.

Although Benjamin and Groys occupy opposing and apparently incompatible positions they do agree that any discussion of reproduction is foreshadowed by the spectre of death, a contemplation of (im)mortality and creation. Perhaps this is why they both invoke religion to support their reasoning, equating religious experience or ritual to one's experience of either the unique or the reproduction.

Both Benjamin and Groys are discussing images not objects so perhaps this is why Kenny Hunter is more optimistic and less mystical about the proliferation and diversification of the means of reproduction. For him the copy is a fertile, necessary progressive force, echoing La Tour's sentiment that "Something which has no progeny, no reproduction, no inheritors, is not called original but rather sterile or barren".¹⁰ Perhaps the works in the exhibition that best embody the artist's ideas on the subject are the three monumental potatoes, representations of tubers that self-propagate to produce clones of the parent. In this work the biological metaphor that is hidden behind Groys' and Benjamin's discussion of religion and ritual is made explicit, reproduction as creation rather than a dead, thoughtless series of repetitions.

10. La Tour, Bruno & Lowe, Adam, I.B.I.D, P.6

Studio image:

**After your death you will
be what you were before
your birth**

*Polyester resin, wood and
paint*

121 x 300 x 89 cm

2016



Whilst death is inherently present in the reproductive process, as Charles Peguy attests “if we stop interpreting, if we stop rehearsing, if we stop reproducing, the very existence of the original is at stake. It might stop having abundant copies and slowly disappear.”¹¹ As to where the original lies perhaps as Groys suggests “that opinion about what is identical and what is different, or about what is original and what is copy, is an act of belief, an effect of a sovereign decision that cannot be fully justified empirically or logically.”¹² It is all just a matter of faith.

11. Peguy, Charles, (quoted),
La Tour, Bruno & Lowe,
Adam, I.B.I.D, P.5

12. Groys, Boris, I.B.I.D.

Interview

The following text is a transcript of an email conversation between the curator and the artist.

Studio image:

***After your death you will
be what you were before
your birth***

*Polyester resin, wood and
paint*

121 x 300 x 89 cm

2016



Daniel Brown (curator): Perhaps we should begin with the title Reproductive! Can you start by saying something about how this relates to the exhibition, connecting, what at first glance, might be considered a disparate collection of objects/representations?

Kenny Hunter: The title Reproductive! was chosen because it not only suggests an active process but something that can be read as creative or abundant – it also doesn't suffer from the derogative connotations of the word 'reproduction'.

In previous exhibitions I have worked with an overarching narrative approach addressing subjects such as either history or childhood or animal consciousness that type of thing – using materiality, colour, scale and art historical referencing to develop the works communicative range. This exhibition however has kept away from that type of proposition and has instead put an exploration of the reproductive process in sculpture, both traditional and contemporary at its core. Weirdly – some sort of collective and autonomous subject-based narrative seems to have emerged by itself – and it is quite dark.

DB: Yes, particularly in the art world words like reproduction or copy are pejorative in tone even when being used to describe something as an “excellent reproduction” or a “perfect copy”. The implication being that what is being described will never possess the aura of the original no matter how well it is reproduced. Why is it do you think that art is so obsessed with authenticity and the value of an “original”?

KH: Generally I think its roots are in Romanticism a movement essential to the advent of Modernism and one that leaves a long and complex legacy in relation to the unique and the reproduced in Visual Art, further reinforced by Walter Benjamin’s key text “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”.

Current Art practice and contemporary digital reproduction techniques have now introduced new and challenging questions into this area. However it is also worth pointing out that historically within the field of Sculpture reproduction has always been present and key to its development. The status of the original has probably been more at home within the discourse around Painting. Frustratingly though the Art Historical debate around the original and copy seems focused on authenticity, aura and presence, all interesting and important areas, but never really addressing how it perhaps better serves the Art market and not the Artist. By that I mean value is overly attached to the object and not what the artist thinks, sees or articulates through their practice, therefore limiting how Artists might function economically.

DB: In Benjamin's text sculptural modes of reproduction are summarily dismissed in the first paragraph, in part because they don't dovetail neatly with his later arguments but also because, as you say, sculpture, historically through casting has a more ambivalent relationship to the concept of "the original". What are the implications of new technological processes of reproduction for art? What do they mean to the work of Art in the age of digital reproduction?

KH: The immateriality of the digital object is perhaps the key issue to address here – it is without form or cost, it exists nowhere and is endlessly reproduceable. It will never degrade and most likely cannot be truly owned, remaining unaffected by the processes of aging, patina and decay – it is the antithesis of an authentic object.

Studio image:

***Repeated Stacked and
Aligned Forms***

*Acrylic resin, polyester
resin and wood*

105 x 145 x 135cm

2013

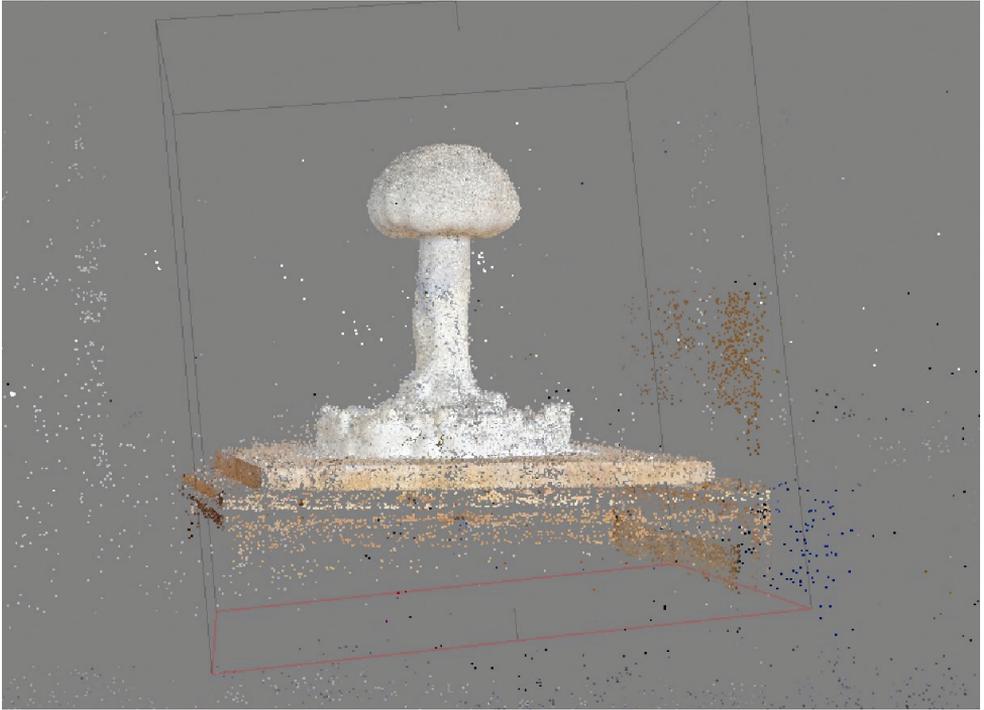


KH (continued from previous page): The prevailing view is that these digital objects cannot acquire aura from their originals. However through my collaboration with the Digital Design studios at Glasgow School of Art I found that with certain representations this was not the case.

The subject we were working with was a sculpture I had made of a nuclear mushroom cloud, which in itself has no true form being a rapidly changing mass of accelerated particles. As a scanned digital object its immateriality seemed to rearticulate and add to the aura of the original, becoming a new part of the trajectory of the original in the process. Throughout this creative and technical exercise I was struck by how immersive and revelatory the experience of looking at sculpture became, revealing impossible viewpoints, shifting scales and otherwise unseen structural realities.

Another outcome of our collaboration was to create 3D prints from the photogrammetry scanning process, allowing the digital object substance and context. This type of technology has become increasingly low cost and widespread creating new challenges and opportunities for Art, most significantly around ownership.

By making one of my sculptures in this exhibition available as a free download, I believe that this type of reuse clearly redefines the original by relocating the aura away from it and more toward with the intentionality of the Artist and a new network of relationships around the process of production.



Data visualisation of

***Migration of the Aura
(Endless Edition)***

3D Printed

*Materials and dimensions
variable*

2016

DB: As well as reproduction the works in the exhibition present some of your other key preoccupations. I'm thinking mainly about your interest in the monument and cultural memory. Can you say something about the presence of these themes in the show?

KH: Traditionally the monument communicates meaning to its audience through a singular direct statement, using scale, structure and the notion of permanence to address collective memory. Monuments are both social and physical constructions, based more often than not on myth rather than history – this produces forms of remembrance that are neither factual or stable, as Nietzsche said “Whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power, not of truth”.

My practice has been more or less centered on this idea of history as a subjective experience, aiming to question notions of historical meaning and progress, often by inverting traditional monumental values through unexpected uses of scale, material, processes and subject matter to open up questions for the viewer rather than provide meaning. Reinterpretation of existing works further resists a unified reading.

Kenny Hunter's research is supported by:



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Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop

is a centre for production, research and learning. We support artists in their careers and practice through the provision of space, funding and professional opportunities. As well as specialist production facilities supporting specific processes, there are studios accommodating a peer network and spaces designed to accommodate research, presentation and learning. Our staff team provides advice, training and mentoring.

In tandem with this is a commitment to public engagement and we are constantly exploring innovative ways to bring audiences closer to the process of making art through education, partnership working and open access to our facilities. Our learning programmes offer a route to understanding artistic processes and approaches for artists, life-long learners, teachers, children and young people. Talks, exhibitions and other events provide opportunities for audiences to see the outcomes of our programme.

Facilities

Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop's new facility has been designed by Sutherland Hussey Harris Architects. Developed in two stages (the Bill Scott Sculpture Centre and the Creative Laboratories) the finished complex is an architecturally inspiring space, purpose-built to provide the best working environment for artists.

The buildings house a studio community, specialist workshops, artist residency and production spaces and areas for exhibition. Indoor and outdoor spaces support a range of different sculptural activities and provide viewing areas to enable visitors to see work in progress.

Public Programme

Visitors can drop in to see exhibitions, attend talks or seminars or participate in our education programme throughout the year.

Tours

Because of the uniqueness of the buildings we are always happy to invite visitors to see the spaces and hear about the history of the development. Tours of the buildings can be arranged for groups and individuals.

Access

Lift to all levels in the Bill Scott Sculpture Centre, please call or email if you have any special access requirements.

Milk Café open

8am – 5pm Monday – Friday

9am – 5pm Saturday – Sunday

@milk_edinburgh

www.cafemilk.co.uk

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