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*In Conversation with Neil Gall*

By Amy E. Brown

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Neil Gall (b. 1967, in Aberdeen, Scotland) is an Artist based in London. He received his BA (Hons) in Painting from Gray's School of Art, Aberdeen and later his diploma from Slade School of Fine Art, London. His works include painting, drawing, sculpture, photography and model-making.



Neil Gall at the opening of 'A Sense of Things' with his work Unable to separate their own identities (2004) and Unable to separate their own identities (2008). Courtesy Zabłudowicz Collection.

*Amy E. Brown: Recently, your work was selected to be in our exhibition, A Sense of Things, and you kindly offered us the sculpture of the same object which was made at a later date. We were*

*told that they had never previously been shown together and I was just wondering why the showing of the painted and sculptural work together appealed to you?*

Neil Gall: The idea appealed to me because it was exactly the situation I'd promised myself not to put either the sculptures or the paintings into: a situation where there was a direct compare and contrast scenario. I'd always felt that that would be rather boring. For me, in this situation, I thought, for once, "Why not?"

Often people just talk to me about the painting's mimetic skill, you know the realism factor, which is not hugely interesting to me. I thought that this opportunity might provoke a different response. Also, I thought, the audience, a young student/ curator audience, might find the juxtaposition intriguing. I think the whole 'experimental' idea of the exhibition made me feel that I could experiment.

A lot of people are just switched off to the whole idea of painting and even more so to the kind of 'realistic' or photographic looking painting that I do, so in a way perhaps the obvious compare and contrast situation at least gets people involved. They have to stop and wonder at a very basic level and ask themselves "What is going on here?"

*AEB: Does the idea of creating installations, a further collaborative show of your sculptural and more 2-dimensional works, feel like something that interests you?*

NG: Yes, possibly, although at present there are only I think four pairings of works, paintings and their directly related bronze or cast resin sculpture double, that exist at the moment. I don't think any of the pairings of works would necessarily negate them as individuals, but it would set up a different bunch of speculative readings for the period of the exhibition, which I'm perfectly ok with.

*AEB: After handling a couple of your pieces I was amazed by the weight of some of the bronze pieces, particularly Watching Me Watching You. The sculptures are often from the models you have in the studio, why do you feel the need to produce these copies, in bronze, or resin, and do you feel they contribute more to your work in these materials?*

NG: This is quite a complicated question for me and I have different answers for it at different times! Today, I think that a good reason for me to move the sculptural work in the material sense from the ephemeral, or the bricoleur idea, into something more traditional is that there is so much sculpture out there made in such an off-hand way with such workaday materials, which is exactly what my models are, and that the complex procedure of replication of the original to the bronze or resin sculpture sets them apart. However, more importantly it ties in with the rendering of the original object onto a 2-D surface, be it a painting or drawing and, in a way, completes a kind of working cycle, with the model being made into a copy of itself in the same dimensions.

*AEB: Does this shift to more substantiality have a great bearing on the works you produce? Creating something from nothing, for example ping pong balls and tape, into scaled up paintings and drawings and more solid sculptural versions?*

NG: Yes, of course, although substantiality might not be quite the right word.

I make the flat work, the drawings and paintings, in this laborious way because of some need to do work. They take a long time to make but I like being in the studio, it suits my temperament, artistic or otherwise, to work on something steadily over a long period. Making the sculptures "from nothing" could be seen as play rather than work although it is normally a fraught, difficult and complicated kind of play. The painting of the 3-D sculptures does not actually take so long; in fact

it's all pretty quick. The time factor is somewhere else at the bronze foundry or at a model maker's workshop.

Actually, maybe "substantial" is OK. I mean, in one way I am like a hobbyist, messing around with craft or children's play materials and the professional part, although I hate the word professional in regard to being an artist: there are way too many successful professionals in the art world! So maybe adult part is better, is the making of the "substantial" artworks.

*AEB: Do you feel your models are sculptures? Is the sculpture a further exploration of the model?*

NG: I suppose after what I've just said I would have to say my models are not sculptures because they are not substantial enough! And, actually, I can't even joke about it, it's true, I don't really value them, keep them or anything, so maybe they are just props. And the substantial sculptures, the bronzes or resins, are therefore, as you say, further explorations of the model.

But perhaps one day, I'll have a different view. When a model survives, lies around the studio long enough, gathers dust, they do start to look pretty interesting to me. They start to look like relics. I see them afresh, don't really recognize them. I am amazed at them in some way.

*AEB: When I visited you in your studio you showed me a photograph, on your phone, of your sculpture placed into architectural scale model. This made your piece look building sized and reminded me of some of your other painted works like The Upperworld and Materials for Reasoning. How much does this idea of scale interest you in your practice?*

NG: It's true, you have picked the two most obvious paintings in which scale comes into play and I think scale is interesting for me in other more recent works, a painting from 2012, *Rise and Fall*, is what I'm particularly thinking about. It's a large painting 8 or 9 feet in height with a single standing white ball figure. It's quite combative in the way it confronts the viewer, the scale, although it has nothing obvious to suggest the object's scale like the small horses in *The Upperworld* for example, is important. The way the object fills most of the canvas gives it it's feeling of bigness. It has been scaled up. The object is monstrous somehow, even if you don't identify the balls as being ping-pong balls, and mostly I don't want the viewer to think about that, or the thick dribbles of viscous gloop as being hot glue from a glue gun, you definitely get a sense that this thing has grown and is way too big for it's own good!

*AEB: Does the increasing in size of your sculptures feel like a next natural step?*

NG: Not necessarily the natural next step, that might horribly suggest that I've been wrong once again and the small bronzes are not even sculptures and just themselves some kind of model or maquette for something grander and substantial. I would say that the scaling up of the sculptures is just one more possible option but it would step out of a quite neat conceptual cycle of making that the work follows at the moment. I'm ok with that. It's another case of "why not?" Another rule I'd had that perhaps I should break just for the hell of it. Earlier on, I'd thought that a large sculpture would be just plain cheesy, like a giant Tellytubby but perhaps it might just work, I mean maybe still a bit funny, but also monumental in an interesting way too.

*AEB: In the future, perhaps near future, if you do in fact produce your sculptures on a massive-scale what context would you want to see them placed in?*

NG: Not really the gallery, I've got it in my mind that these outsized things should be outdoor works, I think they would function in a much more odd and surreal way, out there, interacting with

everyday life. And weirdly I think they might actually be quite popular. Or am I being crazy? They would be funny. Fun. And, of course, Tellytubbies are 'in' the landscape!