



Bucket Man

John Davies

On display

Title/Description: Bucket Man

Artist/Maker: John Davies

Born: 1974

Measurements: h. 2100 x w. 1522 x d. 1370 mm

Accession Number: 597

Historic Period: 20th century

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Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1978

This composition was partly inspired by the artist's own exertions with buckets of water (necessary for plaster-casting), which he had to fetch himself, there being no tap in his studio at the time. However, the mundane inspiration for this and a number of related sculptures - men at work - is all but completely lost in the finished sculpture. Here, in an audacious essay, an ageing man appears as if caught in the midst of some arcane ritual, his carefully-edited garb variously evoking the tramp and the party reveller. Carrying a bucket in each hand, he stares straight ahead, as if totally absorbed in his task. Most provoking of all, on his head is a dense cannon ball-like sphere, behind which, and embedded in his shoulders, is a curved sheet of fibre glass. Davies has said that these devices were essentially his way of anchoring the head in space, in much the same way that a painted portrait is tied into the background, but they also operate like attributes in religious art.

Davies keeps to himself his personal reasons for selecting bits and pieces for his work, but he has no objection to others constructing a rationale of their own in relation to a sculpture such as this. Indeed, he welcomes it as an inevitable result of people's curiosity and as an indication that the figure is accepted as a real being (Beal, 1985). Although the sculpture seems complex on first sight, Davies has been as restrained as ever. Colours are muted, and the composition of the figure is nearly symmetrical, except that one leg is pushed slightly forward to suggest movement. In this combination of restrained realism and hieratic pose, *Bucket Man* is not far removed from the depictions of pharaohs and priests in ancient Egypt.

Entry taken from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997).
