



Baroque Interior no. 3

Martin Smith

Not on display

Title/Description: Baroque Interior no. 3

Artist/Maker: Martin Smith

Born: 1982 c.

Object Type: Sculpture

Materials: Ceramic, Redware

Measurements: h. 130 x w. 260 d. 925mm

Accession Number: 50567

Historic Period: 20th century

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This large, solid, seamless terracotta bulk elaborates Smith's interrogation of the vessel form, taking on a more weighty and imposing presence than other early pieces.

This is an example of Smith's precision press-moulding technique that came to dominate many of his later forms. This object is a solid piece, press-moulded in plaster forms on both the exterior and interior surfaces, where previously Smith's press moulded pieces had just been moulded on the exterior. [1] Once moulded the large work has to be carefully dried in stages to prevent cracking, caused by rapid drying, but also to ensure no moisture remains, as this can cause ruptures in the kiln.

Select surfaces are coloured with a darker clay slip, defining what we could understand as the interior of a vessel. The texture is rough and cracked, contrasting with the polished raw red surfaces that could correspondingly be understood as the rim and the exterior. The contrast invigorates its 'vessel-ness' but the association remains abstracted for the viewer and the sense of containment is merely suggested.

This vessel is, however, unmistakably architectural and continues Smith's preoccupation with space and containment, here signalling architecture as a vessel. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Smith made many extended research trips to the Mediterranean and this series in particular finds inspiration in the stacked Romanesque arches in the entrance to Sienna's Duomo. [2]

On what could be described as the interior surfaces of the vessel are press-moulded details that recall the decorative edging on carved archways, but the curve of each is cut short by an intersecting body that arches in the opposite direction. The construction is confusing to the eye, as if several pieces of masonry have been dropped and reassembled incorrectly, recalling Escher's Penrose Steps. The piece therefore is a dichotomy of illusions. It could appear as a complicated cross-section of the abrupt intersecting of many architectural elements. The opposing axis of each element renders it impossible to determine whether the architectural space defined is interior or exterior. [3] Opposingly, the association with monolithic architecture forces each beam to travel on into an imaginary space beyond its physical presence, conjuring a further illusion of the potential space to the viewer.

Both suggestions are made more visually possible because of the surfaces darkened with slip. Those areas appear aged, the texture vulnerable and cracked, whereas areas we assume as the rim of this vessel, are clean and neat as freshly cut masonry, leaving the viewer with the impression that this piece could have been newly hewn from an ancient structure.

Natalie Baerselman le Gros, November 2020

[1] Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Martin Smith, *Balance and Space*, Ceramics 1976-1996 exhibition catalogue (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 1996), p. 62.

[2] Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, p. 62.

[3] Interview with Martin Smith, phone call 10/09/2020.

Further Reading

Leeds Art Gallery, Forms around a Vessel: Ceramics by Martin Smith exhibition catalogue (Leeds: Leeds Art Gallery and Leeds Art Collections Fund, 1981).

Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Martin Smith, Balance and Space, Ceramics 1976-1996 exhibition catalogue (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 1996).

Paul Rice and Christopher Gowing, British Studio Ceramics in the 20th Century (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1989).

Paul Rice, British Studio Ceramics (Marlborough: The Crowood Press Ltd, 2002).

Oliver Watson, British Studio Pottery: The Victoria & Albert Museum Collection (London: Phaidon, 1990).

<http://martinsmith.uk.net>
