

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Phillip King
Colour on Fire

3 Duke Street St. James's

Phillip King
Ceramics 1995-2017

11 Duke Street St. James's

For his second show at Thomas Dane Gallery, Phillip King PPRA CBE (b. 1934 Tunis) presents an exhibition in two contrasting halves that explore some of the wide diversity of approach to materials the artist has adopted over the last 60 years. Steeped in both ancient tradition and modernist simplicity, these new works reveal the investigations of a peerless sculptor who continues to challenge materials and form.

At 11 Duke Street St James's a crowd of solemn, statuesque, unglazed ceramic vessels populate the gallery spaces. From domestic to monumental scale these works suggest a utilitarian purpose, though each is cut open in some way revealing the volume behind their surfaces. The form of these ceramics chimes with King's persistent desire to cut into the surface of his sculptures in order to open them up to understand their density and volume (for example *Rosebud*, 1962 and *Through*, 1965). Part Brancusian totems and part abstract figures, King sets off echoes within the group of works with forms repeating and mutating throughout the show.

King has had a long and enduring relationship with clay, from the beaches of Tunis as a boy where he was born and grew up, to the architecture of the ruins in Carthage he visited, and the sun-baked adobe block buildings of North Africa, through to his visits in the late 1980s to Japan where he became fascinated by the ancient tradition of Jomon ceramics. King thrives off the immediacy of its malleability, traditionally not making preparatory sketches or plans for any of his work, preferring to resolve the form of his work intuitively directly with his hands. King chooses to leave his ceramic works unglazed, giving them a sense of historical or archaeological relics (and in also keeping with the Jomon tradition). Though not one to stand on tradition, King is constantly experimenting with clay, adding glass fibre and paper pulp in order to explore and extend the possibilities of the material.

At 3 Duke Street St James's King presents new work that extends his investigation into colour and volume. Again, using the method of cutting through his work to explore the balance between the surface of an object and its volume. *Colour on Fire*, 2017, a large geometric form in bright hues (blue, pink and green), has been perforated, almost obliterated, with dozens of large cylindrical holes that bisect the volume of the sculpture. The vibrant and competing colours of the work also combine with the brightly coloured walls of the gallery – visible around the work but also through its perforations.

The geometry of the work is also broken by a sense of collapse as the two halves of the sculpture seem to slump across two plinth-like, ominous, black boxes. In this work, we are reminded of Hepworth's abstract forms frequently cut through with cylindrical holes but moreover the reclining figures of Henry Moore (King's employer and mentor in the very early days of his career). Anti-monumental and perhaps reminiscent again of the architectural ruins of Carthage, the shapes balance lightly, precariously, on one another as if to remove one would mean the collapse of them all.

Between the two halves of the show King continues to move between a diverse range of materials, constantly experimenting and exploring their possibilities and limitations. This lack of reliance on any medium is characteristic throughout King's career, often creating works purely in order to challenge himself and his understanding of sculpture and materials.

Phillip King's work is in the collections of major international museums, including Tate, London; MoMA, New York; Pompidou, Paris; MOCA, Los Angeles; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humblebaek; Osaka Museum, Osaka; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Major outdoor sculptures are on permanent display at Houghton Hall, Norfolk; University of Liverpool; Zuiderpark, Rotterdam; Kistefos Museet, Norway; Venet Foundation, France; European Patent Office, Munich; as well as various other civic and rural locations around the world.