

Thomas Houseago

Before the Room

13 November – 19 December 2015

Press Release

Xavier Hufkens is pleased to announce an exhibition of sculptures and paintings by Thomas Houseago.

In this exhibition, Thomas Houseago presents a body of work that not only testifies to his continuing interest in the history of sculpture, but also hints at the emergence of a new aesthetic sensibility within his oeuvre. In this respect, the cuboid plaster sculpture in the first room is a prominent focal point. Whereas Houseago has long been known for his monumental and tactile figurative sculptures – which often reveal the method of their construction and the hand of the artist – this work is more architectural and abstract, and explores the notion of ‘spaces within spaces’. This shift in style and approach, which is characterised by overlapping surfaces and apertures, was first discernable in Houseago’s *Moun Room* (2015) – a vast, architectonic and immersive environment that viewers could enter and, in so doing, become active participants in the work. In terms of scale, and in the break with figuration, the *Moun Room* can be regarded as a departure for Houseago. The works on display here also reflect this new trajectory, which places greater emphasis upon the dynamic interaction between inside and outside, light and dark, shadow and light, and positive and negative space.

Houseago has long been fascinated with classical and modernist sculptural techniques and references, and is well known for his ability to synthesize different time periods and cultures into a highly distinctive sculptural language that is completely his own. This genre of work reflects, in part, the early Cubist style and the era’s preoccupation with the psychological symbolism of African art, masks in particular. But Houseago’s masks are impossible to pin down to any specific time, place or culture and, as a result, possess a mysterious, otherworldly dimension. The masks in the exhibition also betray a more architectural and linear approach. Houseago’s *Face Construction (Man with Cigarette)* is made up of a myriad of abstract and geometric shapes in flat sheet metal. Working layer-upon-layer, like a collagist, he coaxes a multi-dimensional human countenance out of a two-dimensional medium. By way of contrast, he takes the opposite approach in his plaster mask and, through sculpting, allows the negative spaces to delineate features that, while abstract, are nonetheless human.

Before the Room is the culmination of an unprecedented year of creativity for Thomas Houseago, one that has seen him create his largest and most antithetical works to date: the aforementioned *Moun Room* and *Masks (Pentagon)*, an installation of five colossal masks on the Rockefeller Plaza in NY. Both projects have enabled him to not just deepen, but also extend, his unique visual vocabulary. The fruits of this can now be seen in the different inflections that Houseago brings to familiar themes and, most intriguingly of all, in his articulation of brand new ideas for painting and sculpture.

Thomas Houseago was born in Leeds (UK) in 1972 and currently lives and works in Los Angeles, USA. His most recent solo exhibitions include: *Lovers*, Le Consortium, l’Académie Conti, Vosne-Romanée, France (2015–16); *Masks (Pentagon)*, Rockefeller Plaza, New York (2015); *Thomas Houseago: Studies ’98–’14*, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, The Hague (2014); *Striding Figure/ Standing Figure*, Galleria Borghese, Rome, Italy (2014); *As I Went Out One Morning*, Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, NY (2014); *Thomas Houseago: Where the Wild Things Are*, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East

Anglia, Norwich, UK (2012) and *What Went Down*, Centre International d'art et du paysage, île de Vassivière, Vassivière, France (2012, travelled to Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Germany; Modern Art Oxford and The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).