

Hanneke Beaumont's *Melancholia*

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Hanneke Beaumont's sculptures represent solitude. Given their astute formal acuity and lyrical tension, they are ultimately concerned with individual feelings of isolation, reflection, and the search for a holistic sense of self. They are not concerned with the monumental. Nor are they particularly given to the conformist pressures of everyday life. They infuse the figure with the structure of the space around them. Their formal contiguity is purposeful and real. They suggest a phenomenological excursion into the existential reality of everyday time and space. It is this mature vision of the figure that aligns Beaumont with other visionaries of figurative sculpture in the Modernist era -- from Lehmbruck to Reg Butler, from Giacometti to Kathe Kollwitz. Like these artists, Beaumont delves deeply into the soul of the sensory persona, the subjective being, that has become the object of Beaumont's recent work.

What Beaumont strives to achieve in her three-dimensional figures is a kind of poetic license that relinquishes itself without projecting despair. This articulation gives her work a heroic stature, a stature that is not only rare in contemporary postmodern sculpture, but also original. The *Melancholia* series is clearly set in the direction of longing. One might argue that the kind of longing portrayed in works such as *Bronze 48* and *Cast Iron 48* -two figures placed in a complementary relationship to one another - is not only unabashed but totally outside the pervasive irony that encompasses so much figurative representation in recent years. Yet the kind of aesthetic distance seen in Beaumont's work can only be achieved in artists who truly understand their personal vision of the world and who see themselves in relation to others.

Each designation of movement, every exaggeration of shape, is about the creative act -- a metaphor of the kind of work in which she is engaged. Her grasp of the moment and the transmission of feeling between the arrangement of figures in a work such as *Le Courage* (1994) -- composed of a single terracotta figure in relation to three figures poised on large steel plates -- implies the fundamental axis between the formal and expression language of sculpture. In a similar way, her *Melancholia* series offers a similar glimpse of the self that necessarily includes realities of love, of loss, of anguish, and forlorn desire.

While we may confront these feelings or even deny them on some occasions, there are few artists capable of bringing the language of form into focus and who give us the sense of relinquishment required in coming to terms with the endurance of the self. This is precisely the message I glean from these sculptures and the message that I believe they offer in a world given over to the fragmentation of the self. Although they reveal a tragic view of life, Beaumont's sculpture also gives us the courage to go elsewhere and to be someone - without shame or regret.

What I find so astounding and unrepentant in the sculpture of Hanneke Beaumont is how these sentiments assume their own reality in the face of solitude. It is as if she is unraveling the mysteries of life through the apotheosis of the creative process. This is what makes her work heroic in the most refined sense. Her sculptures are possessed by feelings that artists associated with the recent avant-garde have not dared to tell. Beaumont resolutely stands apart and daringly touches the-pulse of a moment caught within time.