**Caro, Anthony, OM, CBE (1924-2013)**

Anthony Caro played a pivotal role in the development of sculpture in the twentieth century. Having begun his career as an assistant to Henry Moore, he made his name with a groundbreaking exhibition of work at the Whitechapel Gallery, London in 1963, in which large, abstract, brightly-coloured steel sculptures were displayed standing directly on the ground. His role in art education was of equal import; teaching at Saint Martin’s School of Art from 1953-81 he introduced a new approach, questioning the boundaries of the medium and encouraging a new generation of British sculptors. Over his long career he continued to experiment with technique and materials – though steel remained his favourite – and from the mid-sixties often worked in series, inspired by time spent in metal factories in Europe and the US. Unusually for a sculptor, he was inspired by painting and his later work drew on the Old and Modern Masters, reinterpreting them in three dimensions. A visit to Greece also led to a series based on classical pediments in 1986, and in 1992 a piece entitled *The Trojan War*. In the 1990s, Caro began using architectural elements in his sculpture, a concept he dubbed ‘sculptitecture’, allowing visitors to interact with the work. His achievements have been widely recognised, resulting in many public commissions, honours and awards.

Born on the 8th March 1924 in New Malden, Surrey, Caro came from a distinguished Jewish family. His father, Alfred, was a stockbroker and Caro attended Charterhouse before applying to Christ’s College Cambridge to study engineering. However, having been introduced to the sculptor Charles Wheeler while still at school, Caro began helping him in his studio and, at Cambridge, he began studying sculpture at Farnham School of Art during the holidays. After serving in the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy during the war, Caro was determined to pursue a career as a sculptor and enrolled at the Regent Street Polytechnic, after which he won a place at the Royal Academy Schools in 1947. While still a student, he approached Henry Moore - the leading British sculptor at the time - and six months later started work as his assistant.

Moore introduced Caro to African and Oceanic art, Cubism and Surrealism and, despite being naturally influenced by Moore’s style, Caro experimented by, for instance, incorporating found objects in his sculpture. He initially produced figurative works in clay and plaster with rough, expressive surfaces such as ‘Woman in Pregnancy’ (1955); these started to gain publicity from the mid-1950s in solo exhibitions at the Galleria del Naviglio, Milan (1956) and Gimpel Fils, London (1957) as well as being included in group shows at the ICA (1955) and at the Venice Biennale in 1958. In 1953, Caro moved to Hampstead with his wife - the artist Sheila Girling (m.1949) - and he began teaching part-time at Saint Martin’s School of Art. He continued in this role until 1981, and is credited with transforming the department and curriculum by integrating sculpture and drawing classes and promoting innovation and debate among his students.

The year 1959 was a turning point in Caro’s career; he met the influential American critic Clement Greenberg, and subsequently travelled to the US for the first time where he met David Smith, Kenneth Noland and many other artists associated with Abstract Expressionism. On his return he began creating abstract sculptures in steel, which culminated in a large solo exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1963. The impact of this show made Caro’s reputation: this was a whole new approach to sculpture, using industrial materials and techniques, along with brightly-coloured paint – a direct rebuttal of Moore’s principle of ‘truth to materials’ - and establishing Caro’s distinct artistic persona. Moreover, the works stood on the floor of the gallery without a mediating plinth to separate them from the spectator’s space. ‘Early One Morning’ (1962) is a typical example – a light, open arrangement of planes and lines along a horizontal axis, akin to a musical composition.

Caro would henceforth work and exhibit frequently in America; he spent 1963-5 teaching at Bennington College, Vermont, where Kenneth Noland suggested working in series and, in 1966, developed his first ‘table sculptures’. In the 1970s Caro worked at the Ripamonte factory in Italy where he produced the ‘Straight’ series based on the H-beam and, later, at the York Steel Company factory in Toronto where the ‘Flats’ series was made from heavy steel-handling equipment, and at the Can Company factory (part of Syracuse University) using bronze in the ‘Can Co’ and ‘Water Street’ series. He also made sculptural series in lead, wood and handmade paper. In 1985 Caro visited Greece and his subsequent work shows the impact of classical architectural elements; a meeting with Frank Gehry in 1987 further spurred him to explore the interrelationship between sculpture and architecture, resulting in large-scale works incorporating interior spaces, such as the ‘Tower of Discovery’, displayed at the Tate Gallery in 1991. The ziggurat design of the ‘Millbank Steps’ (2004) tests this disciplinary boundary – its internal spaces inviting one inside – while also proclaiming an architectural formality in contrast to the surrounding countryside. Caro was knighted in 1987 and received the Order of Merit in 2000.

**References and further reading**

Barker, I. (2004) *Anthony Caro: Quest for the New Sculpture*, Kunzelsau: Swiridoff Verlag.

Bryant, J. (2004) *Anthony Caro: A Life in Sculpture*, London: Merrell.

Moorhouse, P. (Ed.) (2005) *Anthony Caro*, London: Tate.

**Images**:

‘Early One Morning’ (1962), painted steel and aluminium, 289.6 x 619.8 x 335.3 cm, London: Tate (<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/caro-early-one-morning-t00805>) – for image reproduction go to [www.tate-images.com](http://www.tate-images.com).

‘Millbank Steps’ (2004), rusted steel, 534 x 780 x 2307.3 cm, exhibited at New Art Centre, Roche Court, Wiltshire in 2008 (<http://sculpture.uk.com/artists/anthony_caro/>) - contact [nac@sculpture.uk.com](mailto:nac@sculpture.uk.com) or tel: 01980 862244.