

RA

Royal Academy of Arts

21 September –
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information, questions
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Teacher Resource

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Antony Gormley

Introduction



Antony Gormley (b. 1950) is a British sculptor. His work explores the relationship between the human body and its surroundings. Best known for his 'bodyform' sculptures – based on casts of his own body – Gormley uses sculpture to present the body as a vessel of feeling and experience. Ranging from small-scale works to larger installations, his projects are realised inside gallery spaces or in outdoor locations. In 1994, Gormley was awarded the Turner Prize for his sculptural artwork called *Field for the British Isles*; and in 1998 he completed his best-known work, *Angel of the*

North, which stands 20 metres high just outside the town of Gateshead in the north of England.

Born in London, Gormley was educated at a Catholic boarding school in North Yorkshire. After completing his degree in archaeology, anthropology and history of art at Trinity College, Cambridge, he spent three years in India. During this time, he studied an ancient Buddhist meditation technique that focuses on the connection between body and mind. Moving back to London in 1974, Gormley studied at Goldsmiths' College before completing a two-year post-graduate degree at the Slade School of Fine Art. In 1981 he was offered his first solo show at the Whitechapel Gallery. Around this time the human body became the primary focus of his work.

Many of Gormley's interests in the 1970s and 1980s are still present in his work today. Throughout his 45-year career, he has been intrigued by the dark and infinite space inside the body; the human experience of life, death, growth and reproduction; and the relationship between the natural and built worlds. His choice of materials together with his techniques of wrapping and casting all contribute to the essential meaning of his works. Gormley has always relied on the active

participation and experience of the people who view his works. In 1987, he stated that his work 'is to make a place, free from knowledge, free from history, free from nationality, to be experienced freely'.

Left: *Portrait of Antony Gormley*, 1993.
Photo by Benjamin McMahon

Below: *Field for the British Isles*, 1993.
Terracotta. Variable size: approx. 40,000 elements, each 8–26 cm tall. Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © the Artist. Installation view, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland. Arts Council Collection, England

This Turner Prize winning work consisting of approximately 40,000 clay figures of various heights from 8–26 cm was created by a community of 100 people from St Helens, Merseyside. The makers were given the following instruction: 'Take a hand-sized ball of clay, form it between the hands, into a body-surrogate as quickly as possible. Place it at arm's length in front of you and give it eyes.'





Antony Gormley, *Angel of the North*, 1998.
Steel, 20 x 54 x 2.2 m. Permanent installation,
Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, UK. © the Artist.
Photo: Edifice / Bridgeman Images



**Antony
Gormley**

Courtyard

Iron Baby





Iron Baby, 1999.

Cast iron, 12 × 28 × 17 cm. Private collection.
Installation view, 'Antony Gormley', Royal Academy of Arts, London, 21 September to 3 December 2019. © the Artist. Photo: Oak Taylor-Smith

This cast-iron baby is modelled on Gormley's daughter when she was just six days old. *Iron Baby*, measuring 28 cm in length, lies directly on the paving stone. It turns its head to the left, resting its right cheek on the ground. Its knees and elbows touch as they tuck under its body, and the soles of its feet are exposed.

Iron Baby is the first object that visitors encounter in the Antony Gormley exhibition. Positioned outside in the vast courtyard in front of the Royal Academy, its pure and uncorrupted state contrasts with the built surroundings. In this work, the artist plays with scale. The tiny form makes us aware of our own size and of the expanse of space in which it is located.

Isolated, naked and exposed to the elements, *Iron Baby* reminds us of our own physical and emotional needs as vulnerable human beings.

Gormley used solid iron to make *Iron Baby*, which weighs 19 kg, whereas a newborn baby usually weighs between 2.5 and 4.5 kg. Like all his bodyforms, the seams left by the casting process remain visible on its surface. Defining features, such as whether the baby is male or female, are ambiguous. The artist deliberately chose to use iron, so as to suggest a parallel between the *Iron Baby* and the Earth's core, which is in part formed of the same substance. Gormley calls iron a 'concentrated earth material'. Just as the planet Earth expands from its core, *Iron Baby* embodies the foundation from which we all grow as human beings.

Key words

ambiguous

Earth's core

environment

exposed

nucleus

iron

isolated

vulnerable

Learning questions

How would you describe the surroundings of *Iron Baby*?

How does the baby look in this environment?

Think of three adjectives to describe the texture of *Iron Baby*?

If the baby could talk, what might it say? What questions might it ask?

Why do you think the baby is curled up in this way?

What effect does the artist create when he chooses to put such a tiny sculpture in a very large space?

How heavy do you think the sculpture is? Would it be heavier or lighter than an actual newborn baby? Why do you think this?

How do you think this piece was made?

Learning activities and outcomes

Activity 1

Use the Maya Angelou poem 'Life Doesn't Frighten Me', or just its first four stanzas. Discuss how this poem relates to the sculpture *Iron Baby*. Refer to the idea of fearlessness in youth or of the baby's total innocence of the scarier aspects of the world. Inspired by the sculpture, children could write a poem about bravery, either using their own life experiences or more abstract concepts such as those used in the Angelou poem.

Link

Literacy

Resources

Poem, writing materials.

Learning outcomes

To write a poem in the style of a particular poet.
To use artwork as a stimulus for writing.

Activity 2

Ask the children to bring in a photograph of themselves as a baby, then create two self-portraits: one as a baby, the other as they are now. Use a mirror when drawing the 'now' self-portrait, or pairs of classmates could draw each other.

-- Use soft-leaded drawing pencils or some other drawing medium, or

-- photocopy the photograph, then cut the copy in half so children can complete the missing half of the image with their own drawing, or

-- photocopy a photograph, then cut it into random triangular shapes. Stick half the shapes down so the children can draw in the missing sections.

Resources

Pencils (soft black and coloured), mirrors, photographs, photocopier, scissors, glue, paper.

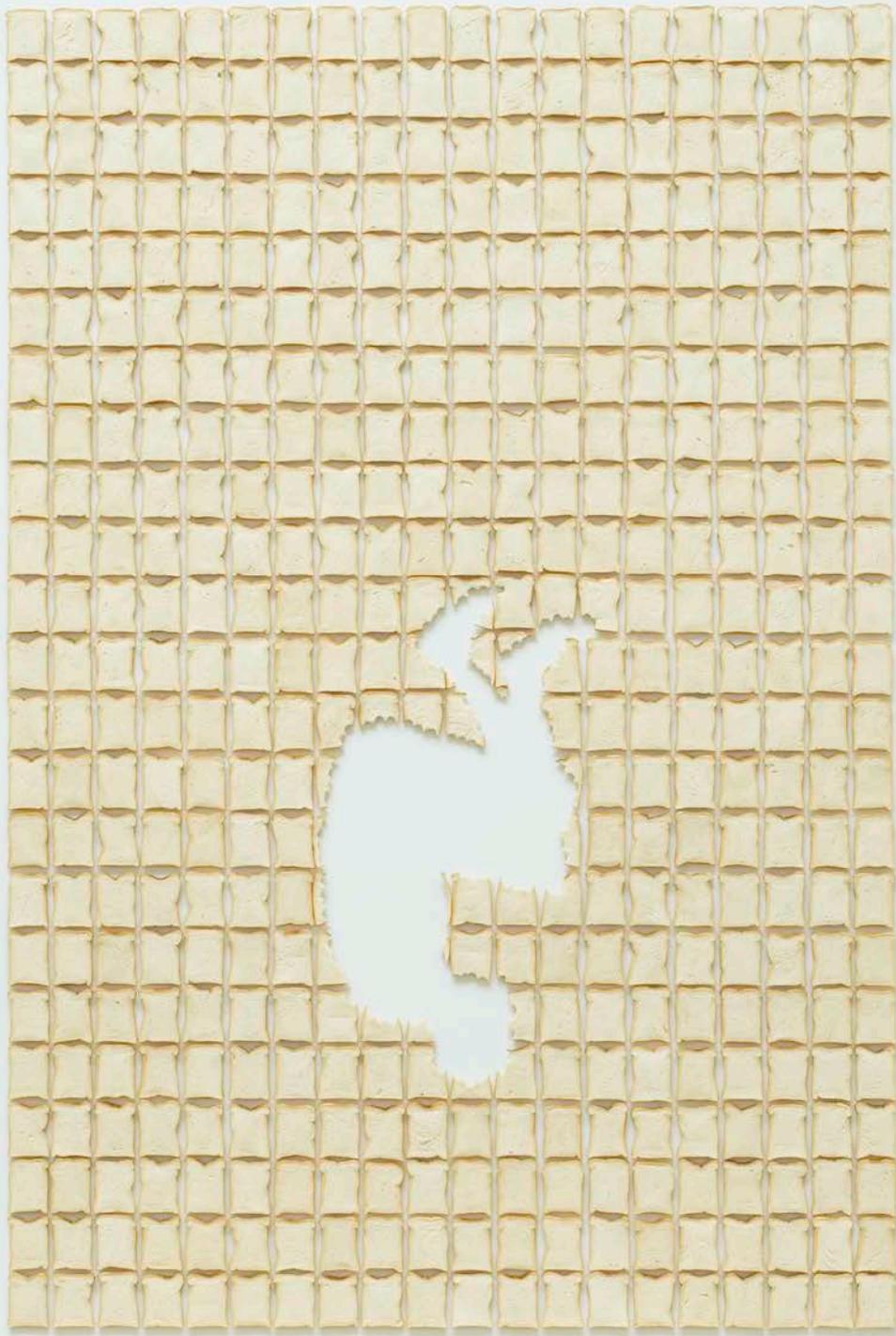
Learning outcomes

Create an artwork inspired by the work of a particular artist.

Explore the proportions and composition of the face.

Gallery 2

Mother's Pride V



1-2

1



Mother's Pride V, 2019.

Bread and wax, 306 x 209.5 x 2 cm © the Artist. Installation view, 'Antony Gormley', Royal Academy of Arts, London, 21 September to 3 December 2019. © the Artist. Photo: Oak Taylor-Smith

Mother's Pride V is made from 429 pieces of sliced white bread arranged in 20 columns and 23 rows. Gormley ate away part of the bread to create a void in the shape of a crouching human. To preserve it, each slice was then dried and dipped in wax. The bread used is Mother's Pride, the brand name that gives the work its title.

Gormley started using bread to create sculptures in 1978. At the time, he was experimenting with a variety of media including clothes, rubber, wood, stone and lead, occasionally combining organic and man-made materials. In the 1980s, Mother's Pride was the most commonly bought processed white bread in Britain. It fascinated

Gormley as a substance that blurred the distinction between what is a natural material and what is industrial. The bread slices were all perfectly square, cut to an equal thickness, and produced from bleached wheat flour. Gormley describes the bread as having 'come as far as it can from the organic'.

In this work, first made in 1982, the artist deliberately arranged the identical bread slices into a constructed, geometrical grid. The only evidence to suggest that he is using a natural material are the teeth marks left around the central void. Gormley sees *Mother's Pride V* as a sculpture that expresses man's relationship with the natural world.



Antony Gormley's bread works were some of the earliest pieces for which he used his own body as the subject. *Bed*, 1980–81 (above), perhaps the best-known in the series, was the first time he had depicted the body as a space. Shortly after it was made, *Bed* was purchased by the Tate gallery and remains in their collection today.

Key words

bread

column

gallery

geometric

media

negative space

row

surrogate

void

Learning questions

What materials are the sculptures *Mother's Pride V* and *Bed* made from?

What do they smell like to you?

What do you think they feel like? How would you describe their texture?

What does the overall grid pattern remind you of?

Why might an artist choose to use bread rather than some other material, such as stone?

What other ways can you think of to change the shape of a piece of bread? For example: fold, cut, bite, rip, freeze it, let it go mouldy.

How is *Mother's Pride V* similar to a Roman mosaic? How is it different?

How is *Bed* similar to an Egyptian mummy? How is it different?

Would you eat this bread? Why? Or why not? Why has it not gone mouldy?

Learning activities and outcomes

Activity 1

Consider the way Antony Gormley created the space in the middle of the bread grid. Instead of cutting – which might have been simpler – he has eaten away the bread to create the outline of a person. As a class, consider other ways to mark or change the shape of a piece of A3 or A4 paper without cutting it.

Ask a child in the class to strike a pose. Encourage the children to generate ideas by thinking about how it feels or looks when we stand or pose in certain ways. For example, after we win a race, or when we're upset.

Ask the children to draw an outline of the pose on paper, then rip around the edge. Children will find this creates quite a rough outline, just as it did with bread. With younger children you may want to use larger paper. Stick the figure on a piece different coloured paper to give a similar effect to the Gormley piece.

Extension

To do the same thing but with negative space, children could draw the outline of the figure on paper, pierce the centre of the figure then rip it out of the piece of paper to create a figure-shaped hole. This could then be hung up as it is, or stuck to a piece of contrasting coloured paper.

Resources

A4 or A3 paper of different colours. You could also experiment with patterned paper, newspapers or magazines.

Learning outcomes

Create your own artwork inspired by the works of an artist. Experiment with ways to change the shape of and make marks on paper.

Activity 2

* First, check for allergies.

Give each child a piece of bread and ask them to chew out a shape from the centre of it, either by biting or tearing, or both. Use simple shapes, such as smiley faces and stars.

Resources

Bread

Learning outcomes

Create your own artwork inspired by an artist. Experiment with a different medium. Understand that some artworks are impermanent or organic.

Activity 3

Give children squared paper to shade in squares to create a simple image such as a face, sun or house. Or provide children with a coordinate grid and named coordinates that will create a specific image. Children could also write their own coordinates to create a simple image and ask a partner to complete it.

Link

Maths

Activity 4

Discuss the fact that when Gormley was growing up, Mother's Pride bread was the most commonly-bought bread. Ask the children what are the most common foods in their household, and why do they eat them so often? What are their favourite meals made with the particular foods?

Explore the origins of that food by finding out where it is grown or how the ingredients are put together. Write a thank-you letter to that piece of food, or write a descriptive poem describing how wonderful, or awful, it is.

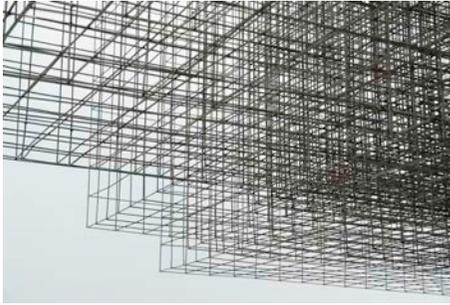
Link

DT/ Literacy / PSHCE

Gallery 3

Matrix III





Matrix III, 2019.

Approximately 6 tonnes of 6 mm mild steel reinforcing mesh, 7.1 x 9.3 x 15.15 m. Installation view, 'Antony Gormley', Royal Academy of Arts, London, 21 September to 3 December 2019 © the Artist. Photo: Oak Taylor-Smith

Matrix III is constructed from multiple sheets of recycled steel mesh. These metal grids are welded together to form 21 intersecting rectangular boxes of various sizes with an invisible void at the centre. The entire work measures just over 7.1 x 9.3 x 15 metres and weighs approximately six tonnes. Created specifically for the Royal Academy exhibition, *Matrix III* is ambitious in scale, as Gormley's earlier versions included up to just 16 rectangular mesh boxes. The steel mass is suspended just above head-height at 1.95 metres, giving it the appearance of an enormous thundercloud.

Gormley describes *Matrix III* as 'the cage we all live in, the ghost of the environment that we've all chosen to accept as our primary habitat'. The relationship of the human body to the built world is a recurring theme in Gormley's work. He references construction in his choice of material: by using building steel to create the structure (steel mesh provides unseen support inside large concrete building blocks); and by building the work around an empty space about the size of an average new-build European bedroom.

However, rather than following a traditional approach to constructed space, his complex, overlapping structure disorients and distorts distance and perspective for its viewers as they navigate around and beneath it. Contradicting the assumption that architecture is a stable construction that provides comfort and shelter, in *Matrix III* Gormley creates an ephemeral and skeletal giant with no boundaries.

Key words

boxes

grid

intersecting

rectangular

steel

structure

suspended

Learning questions

Use three adjectives to describe the *Matrix III* artwork.

Where does *Matrix III* start? Where does it end?

What does *Matrix III* remind you of?

How is it similar to a skeleton? How is it similar to a maze?

In what ways is it similar to a building?

What emotion do you think the sculpture represents, and why?

Does it look strong or delicate? Why do you think that?

Why is it not touching the ground?

What is it made of?

Do you think it is heavier or lighter than an elephant?

Learning activities and outcomes

Activity 1

Using paper or plastic straws construct a square or rectangle. A simple way to join two straws together is by pinching the end of one straw and inserting it into another one. You could present the children with the straws and ask them to work out for themselves how to join them without using glue. Interlink the squares and rectangles in different ways to create a class sculpture.

Link

Maths

Resources

Paper straws

Learning outcomes

Create your own artwork inspired by the work of an artist. Explore ways of joining materials together.

Activity 2

Create a sculpture using cotton buds. Join two cotton buds together using a hot glue gun or glue dots. Children can experiment with joining buds at the ends, in the middle or in random places. Join up to 10 buds together. Either suspend the sculpture from the ceiling or a wall using cotton, or make it a base with Plasticine.

Extension

To create a similar colour scheme to the steel used in Gormley's *Matrix III* work, dip the ends of the cotton buds in ink or diluted water-based paint.

Resources

Cotton buds, glue dots or glue guns, Plasticine, ink or watercolour paint.

Learning outcomes

Create your own artwork inspired by the work of an artist. Explore methods of joining materials together.

Create a structure that is strong enough to be hung or to stand independently.

Gallery 6

Lost Horizon I





Lost Horizon I, 2008.

24 cast iron bodyforms, each 189 x 53 x 29 cm.
Installation view, 'Antony Gormley', Royal Academy of Arts, London, 21 September to 3 December 2019.
PinchukArtCentre, Kiev, Ukraine © the Artist. Photo: Oak Taylor-Smith

The *Lost Horizon I* installation is comprised of cast-iron, upright bodyforms positioned at different angles inside the gallery. Five of the 24 bodies are suspended upside-down from the ceiling, while 19 other bodyforms are dispersed across the floor and walls. Each cast weighs 630 kg. That is around ten times heavier than the weight of an average male of the same height. Although the figures give the illusion of effortlessly 'standing' on the ceiling and walls, large sections of the gallery had to be reinforced to support them.

These iron bodyforms are made from six plaster casts that were taken of Gormley's own body. He started casting himself in plaster in the early 1980s, a process that involves covering his entire body in cling film, followed by

plaster and scrim (a strong, coarse fabric) mixed with water. Creating the casts was a very physical process. He was helped by two assistants (one of whom was his wife, the painter Vicken Parsons) and had to hold himself in challenging poses for up to an hour and a half.

In the early years, Gormley used the plaster casts as the basis of the bodyforms he made from beaten lead. Then in the late 1980s, he began to use the heavier and more robust medium of iron. To cast the iron bodyforms, he used the plaster moulds to create further moulds in sand, into which molten iron was poured. Once the iron has cooled, the final bodyform is extracted. Traces of cling film, sand and the seams of the mould are left visible on the finished work.

With the cast bodyforms placed at different angles within the gallery, viewers experience a strong sense of their own physical position within the space. In an earlier work, *Event Horizon*, 2007, Gormley explored a similar concept by placing standing figures on top of buildings across London.



Key words

angles

cast

figure

form

horizon

mould

perspective

plaster

pose

process

space

Learning questions

Where does the *Lost Horizon I* artwork begin?

Are all the bodyform sculptures the same or different? How are they similar or different?

How is viewing this installation artwork different to viewing a painting?

Which sculpture in the room is the most important?

Which one is the tallest?

Which is the oldest?

How do you feel standing among the bodyform sculptures? Do you feel big or small?

What effect has the artist created by mounting the sculptures on the walls, floor and ceiling?

What is a horizon? Why do you think the piece is called *Lost Horizon I*?



Antony Gormley, *Event Horizon*, 2007. 27 fibreglass and 4 cast iron bodyforms, each 189 x 53 x 29 cm. Installation views, 'Antony Gormley: Blind Light', Hayward Gallery, London, 2007. © the Artist. Photo: Richard Bryant, courtesy of the Hayward Gallery, London

Jorge Lewinski, *Work in progress*, 1995, casting at Bellenden Road studio, Peckham, London © The Lewinski Archive at Chatsworth / Bridgeman Images;

Learning activities and outcomes

Activity 1

Create a figure using pipe cleaners. It could be inspired by classmates standing in particular positions, or replicating the Gormley pose. Attach the figure to a wooden or cardboard base using Plasticine. Wrap the figure in Mod-Roc until the pipe cleaners are entirely covered.

Resources

Small wooden blocks or very thick card, pipe cleaners, Mod-Roc, Plasticine.

Learning outcomes

Create an artwork inspired by an artist's work.
Create a three-dimensional sculpture.

What is Mod-Roc?

A plaster bandage that is used for modelling, casting and crafting. Please be aware that using this material can cause fine dust in the air. Before starting, check whether or not any children with severe asthma are able to use it.

How to use Mod-Roc

Pre-cut the Mod-Roc into strips of approximately 4 cm in length, keeping the width of the roll. Fill recycled plastic trays (such as old take-away containers) with water. Children then dip each of the Mod-Roc strips into the water, let the excess drain off, and apply the dampened strip to their model.

Extension

To familiarise themselves with the proportions of a body, the children could spend some time drawing a basic human figure before beginning to make a model with the pipe cleaners.

Activity 2

Give children a tangram template and show them examples of the kind of images that can be made from the tangram pieces. Younger children could be given time to simply copy some of the examples. Then challenge the children to use all the pieces to make a human figure.

Resources

Tangram template (available online), additional paper to stick the tangram on to.

Learning outcomes

Create an abstract figure using a tangram template.

Develop problem solving, logical thinking skills, visual and special awareness and creativity.

Activity 3

Discuss the fact that Antony Gormley uses his own body as a model for many of his sculptures. Ask the children how they would describe the feeling of walking into a room full of replicas of themselves. What would the room be like if it were full of other versions of oneself? Would it be loud and chatty? What would you play together? Ask children to think about their own qualities, then describe in prose, a poem or a short story how it would be to walk into a room full of their 'cloned' selves.

Link

Literacy/ PSHCE

Resources

Writing materials.

Learning outcome

Write a poem, prose description or short story based on what the room would be like if it were full of identical versions of oneself.

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this resource?

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royalacademy.org.uk](mailto:studentgroups@royalacademy.org.uk)

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