



# PLATEFORM 7

tory fair : testing a world view (again)

*"Our imagination [is] part of our resources and part of our nature. My sculptures intend to endorse the perception that nature is the imagination; that nature is ourselves; and that nature is our surroundings however urban, deserted, bucolic, or wild they may be." – Tory Fair*



## tory fair: testing a world view (again)

Tory Fair creates objects and installations that address the gap between the real and imagined, what is physical and what is emotional. In her most recent work, she explores the relationship between the body and nature through cast, figurative sculpture. As part of the ongoing PLATFORM exhibition series, in which the Museum invites emerging and mid-career artists to create work specifically for deCordova's site, Fair presents *Testing a World View (Again)* on the Pollack Family Terrace (fig. 1).

As the artist notes, "our imagination [is] part of our resources and part of our nature. My sculptures intend to endorse the perception that nature is the imagination; that nature is ourselves; and that nature is our surroundings, however urban, deserted, bucolic, or wild they may be."<sup>1</sup>

Fair cast her own body in a seated, contemplative pose that forms a simple, 90-degree angle. Tiny flowers swarm her head as materialized thoughts, seemingly alive as they engage with and connect to the world. Four of these identical resin figures



Fig. 1: *Testing a World View (Again)*, 2011, installation view, deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum Photo: Tony Luong

are sited on and around the terrace in unexpected positions to suggest both humor and humility in the experience of the body in contact with its variable surroundings. The figures of Fair 'test a world view' through thought and their physical positioning, and ask us to do the same.

*Testing a World View (Again)* also directly references the work of British sculptor Antony Gormley, whose work *Reflection II*, 2008 greets deCordova's visitors at the Museum's entrance. In 1993 he presented *Testing a World View*, an installation of five identical cast iron figures of his own body at right angles posed throughout a museum gallery, articulating the different relationships between the human figure and architectural space, and between interior and exterior experiences (fig. 2). Fair reinterprets Gormley's seminal work in an outdoor gallery space with her own figure, in pink resin, and covered with flowers. Her feminist re-articulation of an earlier and perhaps more masculine work expands the question of our bodies' strained relationship to the world to now encompass the gendered body in both the built and natural worlds.

Nature, the environment, and its manifold metaphors have long occupied Fair's interest as a sculptor. As a young college graduate she drove cross-country to Arizona to work with James Turrell on his *Roden Crater Project*—the conversion of



Fig. 2: Antony Gormley, *Testing a World View*, 1993, cast iron, 1120 x 485 x 1070 mm each  
Presented by the artist (Building the Tate Collection) 2005 © Tate, London 2011



a dormant volcano into a massive naked-eye observatory that is an expression of the sublime American landscape and Turrell's overarching interest in direct forms of light and space. Her own work took the form of objects and installations as she began to use rubber, wood, and cast materials. In these early projects, Fair brought the outdoors into the gallery, following Turrell's early influence, yet through witty, sports-inspired floor installations of large-scale rubber 'field lines' in bright pinks, reds, and yellows. These works reflect Fair's own athletic interests and highlight a common and accessible experience of an outdoor landscape—the backyard/playing field. Fair's experience as a soccer player—of the mental and physical intensity of team sports—runs parallel to her experience as an artist. Much in the way an athlete enters a certain 'zone' on the field during game time to push herself above and beyond her capabilities, an artist does the same in the studio. For Fair, the creative process requires a similar focus and the challenge of exceeding one's own expectations. As such, the floor installations are also clever criticisms of the oft-competitive art world. These floor pieces are funny and playful while articulating thoughtful ruminations about the minimal, abstract sculpture of Carl Andre's floor works or Donald Judd's geometric boxes.<sup>2</sup>

In her 2007 installation *Ready Set Bloom I*, flowers began to appear in Fair's playing fields—overlaying the competitive implications of sports with those of the domesticated garden (fig. 3). Here

a twisted basketball court springs daisies, establishing an ambiguous relationship between blooming and competitive play that evokes a sense of potential or waiting. For Fair, the sports field and flowers are rooted in her own childhood backyard where she and her brothers were avid soccer players and her mother, a landscape architect by training, was an equally passionate gardener. The competing land use at play in both life and sculptural objects speaks to a larger, more elegant fusion of gender stereotypes at peace with one another.

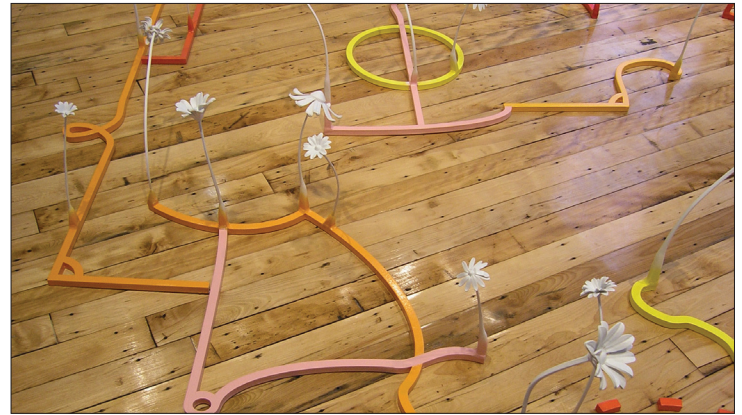


Fig. 3: *Ready Set Bloom I*, 2007, paint, wood, and epoxy  
Courtesy of the artist and LaMontagne Gallery, Boston

The flower, in Fair's visual lexicon, behaves as an icon of potential—of an idea, the imagination—that grows and flourishes, and even dies. To that end, her flowers are simple daisies and almost caricatures in some instances. Nature, in the form of plant life, signifies the imagination as a real, palpable thing that connects us to our environment. In this material externalization, Fair looks to the visionary, Romantic-era poet William Blake (1757–1827) who championed the human imagination as a real, dynamic force, arguing for the imagination over rational thinking as a way to best relate to reality. Fusing flowers to her own figure in direct everyday poses, whether sitting, sleeping, driving, or crouching (figs. 4–6), Fair makes these oddly mundane self-portraits somehow universal, much in the way Gormley uses his own figure to address broader concerns about humanity. The flowers push these figures into the fantastical—visualizing Blake's conceit that the imagined is more connected to the real than we believe.<sup>3</sup>



Figs. 4–6: *Driver*, 2009, rubber; *In the Wall*, 2010, resin and foam, installation view at LaMontagne Gallery, Boston, MA; *Walking*, 2009, resin and foam  
All images Courtesy of the artist and LaMontagne Gallery, Boston, MA

Fair's feminist re-articulation of Gormley's every-man also follows in the footsteps of another artist, Kiki Smith. A sculptor, printmaker, and draughtsperson, Smith is known for her feminist, figurative work that breaks and undermines the historical, male-centric depictions of women by defining "the female in terms of a woman's lived experience,"<sup>4</sup> never shying away from the abject aspects of a woman's body. In the 1990s, she created a series of full-size figures that included such works as *Lilith*, 1995, whose crouching, defecating body crawls on the wall in a position that both threatens and cowers. While somewhat classical in its realistic form and cast in bronze, this "crouching, defecating" *Lilith* is a radical departure from the female nude that has notoriously languished throughout art history as an object of desire and as a symbol of harmonious beauty.<sup>5</sup>

In *Testing the World View (Again)*, Fair presents equally ahistorical female figures—those of herself in multiple, each identical head swarming with flowers, deep in thought. She gives us an image of the artist as a repeated, every-woman with a near monochromatic palette and obscured, nondescript face. Her figure is thinking and addressing the given landscape of a constructed 'natural' world of stone, brick, manicured lawns and cultivated plants. In pink resin, flecked with aluminum leafing, hanging on the wall and precariously angled on ledges, Fair's figures in no way blend in to their surroundings. In all, they stand

out as overtly human-made objects that ultimately argue for the power of the human mind to create and connect to this world.

As Fair notes, "my goal as an artist is to have my work push me in a relationship to the world that is present, alive. Heightened. ... *Testing a World View (Again)* is about this same idea of questioning. Of 'being in the zone' in order to heighten a relationship to one's surroundings. It's about a state of mind that is active and alert. The piece tries to get there through a literal, often clumsy, positioning of ourselves in the world."<sup>6</sup>

Dina Deitsch, Curator of Contemporary Art

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<sup>1</sup> Artist Statement, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> See Francine Koslow Miller, "The Metamorphosis of Tory Fair", *Sculpture Magazine*, (October 2010) vol 29, no. 8, pp.42-47.

<sup>3</sup> Hopkins, Randi and Emily Isenberg, *And the fair Moon rejoices*, exhibition brochure, Boston Center for the Arts, Mills Gallery (June 26–August 16, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Grove Art Online, Oxford University Press. Kiki Smith, *Lilith*, 1995, silicon bronze and glass, Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.

<sup>5</sup> *Lilith*, on the other hand, is based on a biblical figure of Adam's first wife, preceding Eve, who, according to Jewish lore, was banned from Eden and turned into a demon after not bending to Adam's will. Long adapted by feminists, Lilith represents the strong woman that was quite literally demonized by her unwillingness to be subservient. See Alison Gass at <http://blog.sfmoma.org/2009/06/one-on-one-alison-gass-on-kiki-smith/>.

<sup>6</sup> Tory Fair in an email to the author, 7/21/11.



## BIOGRAPHY

Tory Fair (b. 1968, Washington, DC) lives and works in Boston, MA. She received her B.A. from Harvard University, Cambridge, MA and M.F.A. from Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, MA. Her work has been shown at the Mills Gallery, Boston Center for the Arts, Boston, MA; LaMontagne Gallery, Boston, MA; Artspace, New Haven, CT; Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA; and Socrates Sculpture Park, Long Island City, NY, among others. She is Assistant Professor of Sculpture at Brandeis University, Waltham, MA.

## PROGRAMMING

PLATFORM Discussion Series  
Tory Fair and Robb Moss  
Saturday, August 6, 2 pm

## PLATFORM

PLATFORM is a series of solo exhibitions by artists from both the New England and national arts communities. These shows focus on work that engages with deCordova's unique architectural spaces and social, geographical, and physical location. The PLATFORM series is intended as a support for creativity and expression of new ideas, and as a catalyst for dialogue about contemporary art.

The 2010–2011 PLATFORM series is generously funded by James and Audrey Foster. *Testing a World View (Again)* is also supported by the Theodore and Jane Norman Fund for Faculty Research and Creative Projects at Brandeis University.

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