

Richard Deacon

Richard Deacon (Bangor, Wales, 1949), regarded as one of the most important contemporary British sculptors, continually challenges the conventions of sculpture, exploring the relationships between materials, volume, and form. He redefines sculpture as a dynamic, associative, and multilayered object that invites an active response from the viewers, encouraging interaction and reinterpretation. While combining experiments with technical innovation, Deacon also reflects on the social and philosophical aspects of the creative process.

Deacon's debut in Croatia, at the Kula Gallery and the Museum of Fine Arts in Split in 2021, featured works in ceramic, paper, resin, and steel, introducing Croatian audiences to his layered and diverse approach to material, space, and visual language. This new show in Split explores an additional aspect of his practice, featuring a select collection of drawings and sculptures that offers a unique opportunity to appreciate his work more deeply.

Deacon's series of drawings is marked by intricate geometric layering and balanced colors which, though abstract, evoke a sense of tactile, almost familiar spatiality. Each drawing is essentially a visual puzzle, urging the viewer to explore its internal structure and logic. Particularly intriguing is the polyester surface, which adds not only a distinctive visual quality but also a new layer of meaning. An industrial, synthetic material, polyester may well be a metaphor for both the modern world with its technological advancement and man's disconnection from nature. Its smooth surface allows for a precise and intense presentation of colors and shapes, particularly important for Deacon's abstract, sometimes geometric and sometimes organic scenes.

In Deacon's sculptures, such as *Shiver My Timbers*, a similar dynamic unfolds, though with forms extending into three-dimensional space. His wooden sculptures, with their sinuous abstract vertical forms, evoke a growth, a tension or a trembling, as if organic elements are suspended in motion - as suggested by the title itself, which is in fact an old pirate oath (language and wordplay that creates new semantic juxtapositions are crucial for Deacon's work). Their undulating twists and turns convey a sense of motion, translating the ideas presented in his drawings into physical form. The contrast between the wood's natural texture and the glossy polyester drawings creates an intriguing visual dialogue between different materials. The tactile quality of wood provides for a warmer, intimate experience of the sculptures, while the sheen of polyester seems to forewarn unpredictable changes.

By combining drawings and sculptures, Deacon suggests that abstract forms can serve as templates for three-dimensional structures, while sculptures can act as spatial versions of the ideas present in his drawings. Polyester with its durability stands for resilience, while wood, with its organic quality, recalls transience and natural cycles. Ultimately, Deacon's work transcends superficial aesthetics to dissect the relationship between material, space, and consciousness. His artwork is a reflection on the energy of creation and a bold exploration of transience, form, and the profound impact of artistic expression. In this way, his work establishes a compelling connection between drawing and physical objects, between two-dimensionality and volume, inviting the viewer to bridge the divide between perception and reality.

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Deacon guides viewers into a realm where the boundaries between drawing and sculpture blur to enable a dialogue between material and space. In his works, light and shadow, the smooth and the rough, are not merely aesthetic elements; they serve as the medium through which the artist conveys his thoughts on “nature” and the “nature of creation.” In Deacon's work, material and form merge to create a bounty of meaning beyond mere visual impressions to encourage a journey into deeper speculative spaces. (text Dalibor Prančević)

Richard Deacon was born in Bangor, Wales, UK, in 1949, and currently lives and works in London, UK. He graduated from St Martin's School of Art in London, UK (1972), and earned a Master's degree in Environmental Media from the Royal College of Art in London, UK (1977).

His solo exhibitions include the Middelheim Museum, Antwerp, Belgium (2017); San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego, California, USA (2017); Prague City Gallery, Prague, Czech Republic (2017); Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany (2016); Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Switzerland (2015); Tate Britain, London, UK (2014); Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany (2011); Musée de la Ville de Strasbourg, France (2010); Portland Art Museum, Oregon, USA (2008); PS1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, USA (2001); MACCSI, Caracas, Venezuela (1996); Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, UK (1989); and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, USA (1988).

He represented Wales at the Venice Biennale, Italy (2007), and participated in the Venice Architecture Biennale, Italy (2012), Glasgow International, UK (2006), and Documenta 9, Kassel, Germany (1992).

Deacon won the Turner Prize in 1987 and the Robert Jakobsen Prize from the Museum Würth, Künzelsau, Germany, in 1995. In 1996, he was awarded the title of *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* by the French Ministry of Culture, and in 1999, he was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE).

Exhibited Works:

Shiver My Timbers (#16, #18, and #20), 2016, wood, 103 × 23 × 23 cm

Second Motif (17–26), 2023, sublimation print on polyester, 81 × 56 cm

(framed 83.7 × 59.1 × 4 cm)