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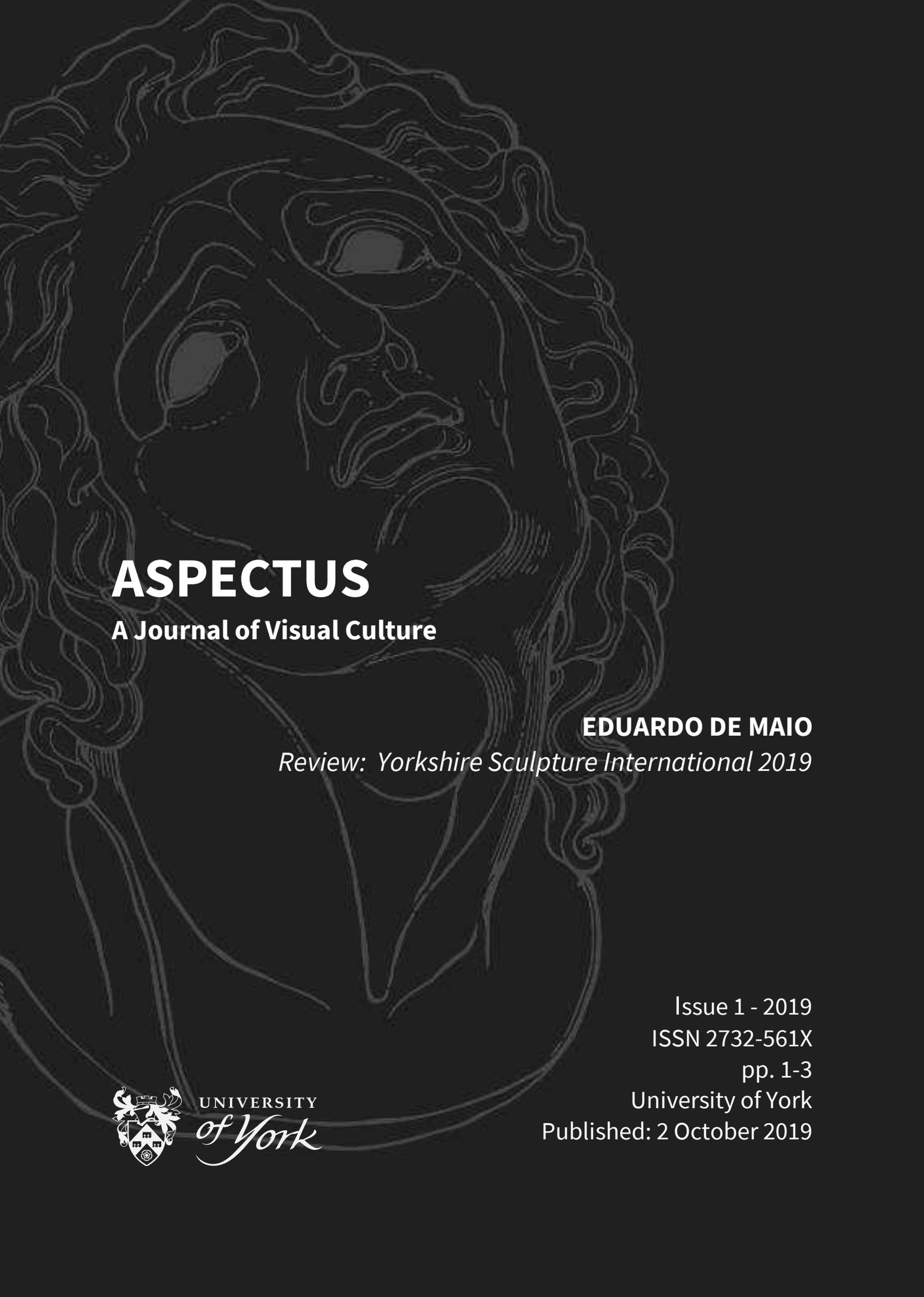
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Exhibition Review

Yorkshire Sculpture International 2019

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From 22 June to 29 September 2019, the Henry Moore Institute (HMI) in Leeds hosts the first leg of the inaugural Yorkshire Sculpture International 2019 (YSI 2019). The festival, spread across the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds city centre, The Hepworth Wakefield, and the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, is dedicated to contemporary approach to sculpture. YSI 2019 has centred West Yorkshire in the debate concerning sculpture in the United Kingdom. The Henry Moore Institute presents an eclectic exhibition in which five different artists, belonging to four nationalities and of differing cultural backgrounds, offer five different approaches to art. Each artist has a dedicated section of the HMI: Tamar Harpaz, from Israel, has been given Gallery 1; Rashid Johnson and Cauleen Smith, from the USA, respectively Gallery 2 and Gallery 4; Maria Loboda, from Lithuania, is exhibited in Gallery 3; Sean Lynch, from Ireland, has the Research Library.

The first room holds the curious installation *Current* by Tamar Harpaz, an artist fascinated by sound and noise who is known for working with intangible materials such as lights, mirrors, lenses, and other intangible materials. Her installation consists of a perimeter of disparate objects (a pot, a clock, a telegraph, for example) all linked by a jungle of electric cables. Periodically, an electric pulse flows through the entwined objects—or rather accidents?—all exhibited in a shared multisensorial experience. Harpaz’s works are often related to the history and the current contrasts and uncertainties caused by the endless conflict between Israel and Palestine. Harpaz’s installations, while aesthetically and aurally hostile, are nonetheless a vehicle of symbolic meanings and debate, dealing with, and emerging from, as the catalogue notes, “a consideration of borders, conflict and the histories of feminism”.



Harpaz, Tamar, *Current*, 2019, mixed media,
Henry Moore Institute, Leeds. Courtesy of the artist and Sommer
Contemporary.

Walking into the second room, the visitor can experience Rashid Johnson’s interesting installation *Shea Butter Three Ways* (2019) made by shea butter blocks atop a rough wooden board table supported on wooden sawhorses. Each table proposes a different way of approaching this yellow and sticky material: on the first table, the shea butter is shaped in order to remind of rough portraits; on the second, a pyramidal structure of rough-hewn blocks, and the third is a sort of workbench for the visitors who are invited to make art by using such unconventional material and thus be engaged as part of the installation. Even

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though I would have preferred an example of Johnson's famous modular–natural structures, I found it interesting that he chose to directly involve the visitor in such artistic experience, through which the former can be part of a “process of identity creation” allowed by the malleability of the shea butter.

Maria Loboda's installation *The Chosen* (2019) in Gallery 3 shows an interesting interpretation of the practice of collecting: one of the most interesting aspects of anthropological research on human behaviour. Loboda proposes a sort of deconstructed cabinet of curiosities in which six alabaster lamps—inspired by the 1920s French designer Pierre Chareau—encase several species of insects, which have been previously meticulously chosen according to the taste (or knowledge?) of a metaphorical collector, whose choice remains secret to us. Regarding the room, Loboda refers to a “dysfunctional environment,” which aesthetically fascinates the visitor even though its actual meaning remains obscure, after all, is not collecting sometimes obscure as well?



Johnson, Rashid, *Shea Butter Three Ways*, 2019, shea butter, wooden sawhorses and wooden boards, variable dimensions (site-specific installation), Henry Moore Institute, Leeds. Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

Cauleen Smith's film *Sojourner* (2018) is presented in Gallery 4, the small dimensions of which are counterbalanced by a rich installation made by multi-coloured wallpaper on which disco balls create psychedelic light effects. Smith's *Sojourner* aims to tell the story of a utopian community in which black people are chosen to redeem mankind, according to the Afrofuturist beliefs and theories Smith is inspired by. The title of the film recalls Sojourner Truth, a legendary black woman who fought fiercely in the name of abolitionism in the nineteenth century. Though not ‘sculpture’ in the typical sense, *Sojourner* was filmed at Noah Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum of Assemblage Sculpture in Joshua Tree and reimagined by Smith as a radical feminist utopia.



Lynch, Sean. *The Rise and Fall of Flint Jack*, 2019, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds. Courtesy of the artist; Ronchini, London; and Kevin Kavanagh, Dublin

Sean Lynch's main aim is “discovering untold stories”. For YSI 2019, Lynch has realised the project *The Rise and Fall of Flint Jack* dedicated to the legendary figure of Flint Jack, a nineteenth-century Yorkshire vagabond and highly skilled forger of Stone-Age flint carvings which he sold to wealthy collectors and famous English museums. The figure of Flint Jack is surrounded by a mystical aura since his uncanny ability of perfectly carving stones imitating original Stone-Age pieces identifies him as a sort of Faustian

figure. Nevertheless, his ability led him to prison and thus to his consequent oblivion. Lynch has directly involved the Research Library spaces by placing Flint Jack's forgeries in display cases inserted in the library shelves and in the corridor. The installation transforms the library in a sort of nineteenth-century domestic museum or archaeological cabinet of curiosities different to Loboda's conceptual and entomologic approach to her installation. At the end of the exhibition, two monitors show Lynch making flint carvings imitating Stone-Age technique, though perhaps the video, like the work of Flint Jack, is an inauthentic imitation?

At the end of the exhibition, it appears the main theme which runs through the work of all five artists' installations is the personal interpretation of anthropological issues within society. "Sculpture is the most anthropological of the art forms", asserts Phyllida Barlow, exhibiting in the adjacent Leeds Art Gallery. The main objective of the HMI exhibition is to highlight the ideological, cultural developments, and racial conflicts which historically expressed themselves as material culture through the objects, which throughout history "often made to function as a form of black box recorder that can play back history, identity, belonging and difference". The works exhibited at the HMI are therefore the result of five different approaches both theoretical and steeped in lived experience, on the study of human being as a culture and history maker, from the origins to the present day.

The Yorkshire Sculpture International 2019 was on display at the Henry Moore Institute from 22 June 2019 to 29 September 2019. Curated by Laurence Sillars.