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# The Henry Moore Foundation Review





## Why Sculpture, Why Here?

This event was organised with Iniva (The Institute of International Visual Arts) and brought together the artists Abel Barroso, Maria Magdalena Campos Pons, Dilomprizulike, Subodh Gupta, Huang Yong Ping and Mamiko Otsubo at Tate Modern to talk about their work. Why? Well, the Henry Moore Institute was established with the aim of developing knowledge and appreciation of sculpture from all periods and countries; in practice, we have been unable to show work from outside the parameters of Europe and North America as often as we should have liked. A special event seemed the best way of beginning to redress the balance. We recognised that inviting a range of artists to talk about their respective practices could potentially raise more ideas about sculpture on the global stage, and have more immediate impact than a series of exhibitions that might take years to complete.

Sculpture is our specialism; place is Iniva's; and so Iniva seemed an ideal partner in an exploration of new territories. It was during an initial discussion between staff here and Iniva's Cylena Simonds that the event began to take shape.

The galvanising moment, and the one which gave us our title for the day, came from looking at Dilomprizulike's uncompromisingly 'awkward' works – in particular **Journey out of Africa**, in which a beaten-up car filled with detritus sits in a garden, and **The Face of the City**, in which scarecrow-like figures are assembled with a rusty bike-frame and other junk material, including empty water bottles, on soft sand. Put very bluntly, the works seemed to ask: why make sculptures like *that* and then place them *there*? In addition, to what extent could such work in those materials emanate only from Africa? As we later learned during his presentation on the day, making sculpture is like vomiting for him, in that it is spontaneous, can happen anywhere and immediately makes him feel better.

*Why Sculpture, Why Here?* was formulated as an attempt to understand why one idiom might be more appropriate in a given context than any other, and to what extent international imperatives shape the choices being made by artists in a global age. From the outset, we knew the event could not be exhaustive, but felt it should be as diverse as possible. Hence artists were considered not only for their age, nationality or gender, but because of the expanded notion of sculpture that

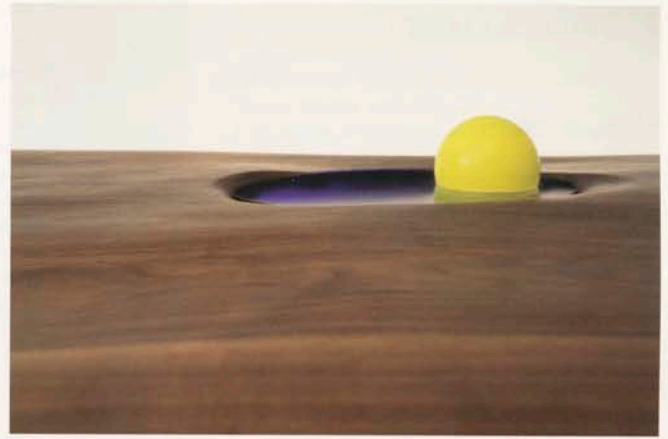


Dilomprizulike, **Journey out of Africa** 2005. Courtesy the artist





Subodh Gupta, **I Go Home Every Single Day** 2004. Courtesy the artist and The Showroom, London. Photo: Daniel Brook



Mamiko Otsubo, **Untitled** 2007 (detail). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Mark Müller

their work suggested. With this all-encompassing remit, the event was in danger of being huge, but after a rigorous selection process involving Institute and Iniva staff, we approached just the six artists listed above. Luckily, each said yes.

Countries 'represented' on the day included China, Cuba, Nigeria, India and Japan; ideas about 'home' therefore resonated, as each artist's sense of place and culture had clearly shaped their work, though to greater or lesser degrees. Some of them have (perhaps inevitably, perhaps regrettably) moved to established international art centres such as Paris or New York, while others have opted to pursue their careers in the country of their birth. With enhanced communications, ease of travel (though, as we discovered, visas can still prove problematic) and the circuit of biennials, residencies, exhibitions and art fairs, there should be less pressing need for artists to relocate from one country to another as it is relatively easy to foster an international reputation. However, either for reasons of freedom of expression or finance, some still feel the compulsion to move.

Importantly, the six artists also represented different ways of working sculpturally today, from installation and performance to making discrete objects, in which they use a variety of materials from trash or cast elephant dung to live insects or taxidermy. One surprising revelation was how many of the artists had worked in other art forms or disciplines, such as printmaking or design (even economics, in Otsubo's case) and especially painting, before they turned their attention to three dimensions. And whilst different kinds of objects might now figure strongly in their work, none actually like the idea of being described as a sculptor – most probably because they do not want to limit or label their practice with any designation.

At the event, we asked each artist to show images and to talk briefly about their work. Subodh Gupta described his use of readymade and found objects associated with his home in India – some of which are already shiny or, if not, then he casts them in metal – to create glittering forms redolent of the drama and excess of Bollywood. Abel Barroso revealed

that he is known in Havana for being a printmaker, but he constructs objects out of wood with surfaces like inked woodblocks; many of them involve the viewer in 'low-tech' reflections on the limitations of new technologies in Cuba. Dilomprizulike explained how he earned the epithet 'thejunkmanfromafrika' from his uncompromising use of rubbish as source material for work in which he established ideas about Africa's present, before his temporary stay in New York to find inspiration in Manhattan's junk.

Maria Magdalena Campos Pons explores her Afro-Caribbean heritage from the perspective of her base in Boston, combining objects, film and performance in nuanced installations that present abstract concepts of time, place and memory. Whilst Huang Yong Ping has lived in Paris since 1989 and has explored issues surrounding national identity and cultural difference, his work is as likely to draw on the Chinese horoscope as make comment on American global domination or the colonialism of old Europe. Mamiko Otsubo, having lived in the States since childhood, is reticent about any trace of Japan in her work – indeed the handmade and machine-made elements combined in her stylised, reductive landscape-furniture hybrids are universal and could come from anywhere in the world. Yet she did admit her work possessed a kind of violence – an almost painful tension from her severely restrained approach – that could only be Japanese.

Ultimately, what to make and where to show it are questions that matter to all artists, but only in the sense that they involve choices they might make among any number of others, perhaps equally decisive. However, for the artists who participated in *Why Sculpture, Why Here?*, considerations of material and place carry a very special resonance.

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