

NewArtCentre.

Edmund de Waal

tacet

21 September 2020 – 09 January 2021



I've found great pleasure in using materials to hand, English stone and alabaster, the porcelain in my studio, some gold. These are slow works.

- Edmund de Waal, 2020

Edmund de Waal: *tacet*

21 September 2020 – 09 January 2021

In its entirety, Edmund de Waal's solo exhibition, *tacet*, now on view at the New Art Centre, is a reflection on the last six months of the artist's time in the studio; spent often in solitude, with time and space to think and throw. The exhibition is an installation of a diversity of sculpture – benches carved from Hornton stone alongside more familiar forms and vessels made from alabaster, gold and porcelain. Both bodies of work essentialise and encourage the yearning to pause. 'Tacet', Latin for *it is silent*, is a term most often used in music to indicate when a voice or instrument does not sound, most notably by John Cage in his score *4'33"*. This whole exhibition offers a very real opportunity to slow down, calling upon the beholder to be attentive to the materials, the arrangements and the sensibility created.

The siting of the exquisite new Hornton stone benches by de Waal in the Gallery and grounds of the New Art Centre marks the first outing for these sculptures, fresh from their time with the stonemason with whom de Waal collaborated, Corin Johnson. By their very nature of being, these benches provide a place to rest, a place to absorb the tranquillity cultivated by the arrangement of forms in the exhibition. Such tranquillity is also garnered by their proximity to nature, facilitated by the open architecture and vast glass windows of the New Art Centre's Gallery space.

The Hornton stone used in his work is an English sedimentary stone, quarried in Oxfordshire. It is rich in colour, with earthen yellows, oranges and browns pooling together. Also known as 'Iron stone', Hornton was a favourite of Henry Moore's, who began using it in the 1920s for his largest forms. He considered it a 'warm, friendly stone', and, for de Waal, it calls to be touched. Far from regular blocks, the benches are carved with textures to be explored with the hand; undulating polished surfaces meet rough planes, soft dents - or 'bruises' – and a gentle ridge. They feel worn, human, and sensitise the sitter to materiality. Each bench has its own character, each has a singular way of the grain appearing to the eye. The idiosyncrasy of each piece accentuates the call for a moment of *tacet*, silence.

And to feel 'known and handled', in the words of David Jones, has been central to de Waal's practice, as has the life and work of the poet, painter, essayist. Jones wrote of "the body and the embodied; hence to history, to locality, to sense-perception, to the contactual, the known, the felt, the seen, the handled, the cared-for, the tended. For a poet this means a response to the texture of words, an exact and evocative use of each word." Jones cared about the particularity of materials. And just as the Hornton stone is profoundly evocative of Oxfordshire, so the alabaster de Waal uses here comes from the last remaining alabaster quarry in Nottinghamshire, and so evokes the long history of alabaster sculpture in this country.

De Waal's light and exacting response to materials is keenly felt in this new body of work. These new sculptures bring together porcelain with gold, glass, alabaster and onyx. In his free-standing installations such as *counter*, *parti*, *piéd*, *several* and *with what's to hand* – titles which reference Jones's poem, *The Tutelar of the Place* – gilded slivers of porcelain lean against blocks of alabaster and porcelain vessels, held in space, pausing.

Alongside the alabaster's glorious luminosity, the material is imbued with a sincerity and humanity that, akin to the Hornton stone benches, derives its origins from the earth. Time spent with these sculptures brings the realisation that these are collections of objects and unadorned materials, carefully shaped and arranged, but nonetheless remaining true to their essential form. The translucency of the alabaster and its ability to play with light comes to the fore, which in turn attributes an independence of energy to the works. They almost sing in their interaction with the light and their proximity to the beautiful gardens of the New Art Centre adds a further harmonic quality to the installation.

Edmund de Waal

the tutelar of the place, I

2020

Porcelain, gold, alabaster and onyx

21 x 29 x 9 cm

8 1/4 x 11 3/8 x 3 1/2 in



When they proscribe the diverse uses and impose the
rootless uniformities, pray for us.

When they sit in Consilium
To liquidate the holy diversities
mother of particular perfections
queen of otherness
mistress of asymmetry
patroness of things counter, parti, pied, several
protectress of things known and handled
help of things familiar and small
wardress of the secret crevices
of things wrapped and hidden
mediatrix of all the deposits
margravine of the troia
empress of the labyrinth
receive our prayers.

Extract from David Jones' poem *The Tutelar of the Place*.
The poem first appeared in *Poetry*, volume XCVII, No. 4,
(Chicago), January 1961.



Edmund de Waal

the tutelar of the place, II

2020

Porcelain, gold, alabaster and onyx

21 x 29 x 9 cm

8 1/4 x 11 3/8 x 3 1/2 in



Edmund de Waal

the tutelar of the place, III

2020

Porcelain, gold, alabaster and onyx

21 x 29 x 9 cm

8 1/4 x 11 3/8 x 3 1/2 in

I've made some new works using alabaster from a quarry near Nottingham, the material used for the greatest carvings of the Middle Ages, for funerary monuments. This alabaster glows, making things float, brings light into play with the porcelain vessels and tiles that sit with them.

- Edmund de Waal, 2020



Edmund de Waal

known and handled

2020

Porcelain, alabaster, gold,
aluminium and plexiglass

40 x 48 x 12 cm

15 3/4 x 18 7/8 x 4 3/4 in



Edmund de Waal
counter, parti, pied, several
2020

Porcelain, alabaster, gold,
aluminium and plexiglass
71 x 22 x 18 cm
28 x 8 5/8 x 7 1/8 in



Edmund de Waal

kin, enclosure, site

2020

Porcelain, gold, alabaster, aluminium
and plexiglass

40 x 50 x 13 cm

15 3/4 x 19 3/4 x 5 1/8 in







Edmund de Waal

with what's to hand

2020

Porcelain, gold, alabaster, aluminium
and plexiglass

40 x 18 x 16 cm

15 3/4 x 7 1/8 x 6 1/4 in



Edmund de Waal

speak to me

2020

Porcelain, gold, alabaster, aluminium
and plexiglass

40 x 18 x 16 cm

15 3/4 x 7 1/8 x 6 1/4 in

In these last months I realised how much I wanted to make things for people to touch. These new works use Hornton stone from a quarry near Tew in Oxfordshire, the same seam as the stone that Henry Moore used for his Madonna and Child in St. Matthew's Church, Northampton. They are benches, carved and polished so that there are different textures to discover. I hope they feel old, weathered, 'known and handled' to borrow David Jones' words. I've called them tacet. Silence, rest.

- Edmund de Waal, 2020



Edmund de Waal

tacet I

2020

Hornton stone

48 x 180 x 35 cm

18 7/8 x 70 7/8 x 13 3/4 in





Edmund de Waal

tacet IV

2020

Hornton stone

49 x 120 x 35 cm

19 1/4 x 47 1/4 x 13 3/4 in



Edmund de Waal

tacet IX

2020

Hornton stone

49 x 57 x 35 cm

19 1/4 x 22 1/2 x 13 3/4 in

Edmund de Waal

tacet II

2020

Hornton stone

49 x 130 x 35 cm

19 1/4 x 51 1/8 x 13 3/4 in



Edmund de Waal

tacet VI

2020

Hornton stone

49 x 73 x 34.5 cm

19 1/4 x 28 3/4 x 13 5/8 in





Edmund de Waal

tacet V

2020

Hornton stone

49 x 110 x 35 cm

19 1/4 x 43 1/4 x 13 3/4 in



Edmund de Waal

tacet III

2020

Hornton stone

49 x 130 x 35 cm

19 1/4 x 51 1/8 x 13 3/4 in





Edmund de Waal

tacet VII

2020

Hornton stone

51 x 60 x 35 cm

20 1/8 x 23 5/8 x 13 3/4 in

Edmund de Waal

tacet VIII

2020

Hornton stone

51 x 60 x 35 cm

20 1/8 x 23 5/8 x 13 3/4 in

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