

Bosco Sodi: The Art of Wabi-Sabi

Someone once said that ‘a painting is the lasting evidence of a performance’. This is certainly true of the works on show in *Bosco Sodi: Heavens and the Earth* at the Blain|Southern gallery on Hanover Square, London, as for Sodi, the act of making art is more important than the results. Inspired by wabi-sabi, the Japanese aesthetic philosophy that accepts imperfection and reveres natural authenticity, Sodi’s paintings are fashioned from organic raw materials which are transformed into art through an intensely physical process in which chance and experimentation play important roles.

Sodi works by first mixing pigment with base materials like glue, sawdust, and natural fibres, then using his hands, he layers this paint mixture over a canvas laid horizontally. Working alone in a trance-like state, he sculpts the painting’s surface over several days, stopping intuitively when cracks start to appear. The piece is then left to dry outside, the cracks and fissures of the finished work bearing witness to the external conditions of its place of creation. As Sodi explains, the paintings that emerge from this process embody ‘the accident, the non-control, the passing of time’.



Bosco Sodi: Heavens and the Earth, 2019, Installation View, Courtesy the artist and Blain|Southern, Photo: Peter Mallet

Best known for his vividly coloured paintings, here Sodi has worked for the first time with black and white, and the show features 13 monochromatic relief paintings. All of these works are untitled. For Sodi, this is fundamental – the works have emerged by chance so it is fitting that their interpretation should also be left to chance. But the stark contrast between black and white, and the knowledge that these works were created after the death of Sodi's grandmother, invite us to see these paintings as a dialogue between contrasting universal forces – light and dark, good and evil, life and death.

There is also a geographical quality to these works, something that brings to mind the aerial perspective of topographical relief maps. But so stark are the colour contrasts and so dried and cracked are the surfaces of these 'maps' that they have a striking sense of post-apocalyptic art about them.

And here lies the challenge these works pose. The process of their creation may have been animate and vital, but the dried, cracked surfaces and the absence of colour drains these paintings of life. As finished works, they become instead inanimate and dead, standing in contradiction to the transformative process that created them. Perhaps too they serve as a prophetic warning of one possible future faced by the Earth of the show's title.



Bosco Sodi: Heavens and the Earth, *Untitled* (2018) Photo: Peter Mallet

Standing guard over the show are eight towers of hand-made bricks, modelled from the shape and size of traditional Mexican building materials. Each brick is unique, having been handmade by Sodi and his collaborators at Casa Wabi, Sodi's artists' retreat in rural Mexico, from local resources like clay and straw and cured in wood-fired kilns.

These structures echo Sodi's collaboration with Art Night last year in which he used hand-crafted bricks to build *Muro*, a wall two metres high and eight metres long. In contrast to that piece though which people were instructed to symbolically dismantle, these collaboratively-made towers instead anchor Sodi's paintings in the social context of the place and time that inspired them.



Bosco Sodi, Heavens and the Earth, 2019, Installation View, Courtesy the artist and Blain|Southern, Photo: Peter Mallet

The exhibition takes its title from the opening of the Book of Genesis: 'In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth'. As the catalogue explains, this choice reflects Sodi's fascination with 'the nature and necessity of creation' and his desire to seek out 'the moment of genesis itself'. And in the performative process through which he constructs his paintings, Sodi is clearly exploring the potential for the creative act to animate base material and transform it into art. But as the Book of Genesis goes

on to tell us, the Earth was first created without life and light, and perhaps the finished paintings serve as a warning of a return to this inanimate state in a post-apocalyptic future. Food for thought!

Bosco Sodi: Heavens and the Earth is on at Blain | Southern 4 Hanover Square London W1S 1BP until 23rd March 2019 (free entry)

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