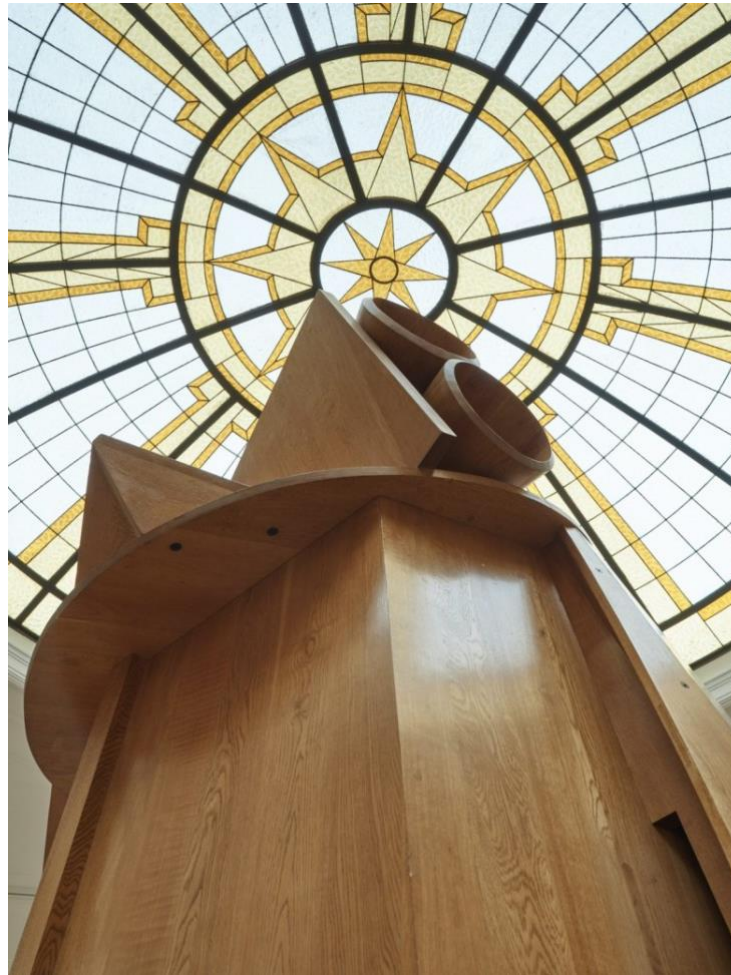


HYPERALLERGIC

Just Don't Tell Me the Artist Was “Influenced by Music”

Two London shows highlight the influences of music and architecture on sculptor Anthony Caro's work. The latter is more successful than the former.

Michael Glover | May 3, 2023



Installation view of Anthony Caro: *The Inspiration of Architecture* at Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery, London (courtesy Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery, photo Andy Stagg)

LONDON — The British sculptor Anthony Caro is 10 years dead. How to keep him in the public eye? How to arrest the possibility of reputational fade?

Two men have been doing some heavy lifting on his behalf. One of them is his dealer, David Juda, custodian of the estate. The other is Paul Moorhouse, the director of the Antony Caro Centre in Camden, where Caro had his studio.

Due in part to their efforts, two Caro shows have opened this year. One of them is in Ealing, northwest London, where a great architect called Sir John Soane built a country retreat for himself called Pitzhanger Manor at the beginning of the 19th century. That [exhibition](#) takes for its theme architecture as an inspiration to Caro. The other, [Caro and Music](#), is at Annely Juda Fine Art, near Oxford Circus in central London, and it is all about Caro and the influence of music.

Though a polite, tweed-jacketed man of relatively light frame, Caro was a bruiser of a maker. He knocked sculptures off their pedestals and bolted, say, a gobbet of steel to whatever else came to hand with improvisatory glee, from first to last.

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He never knew what he was doing until he'd done it. That's what he enjoyed most: the thrill of discovering what his hand and his eye had been up to.

The first challenge he set for himself had been to re-invent sculpture itself, to get away from the faking of the human presence that his disappointing efforts at figuration represented. That was in the 1950s. Architecture as a discipline could help in this. There was something pure and abstract about it, even though it was also undeniably useful — in keeping the rain off, for example.

The largest of the sculptures is in the central gallery, which faces you as you enter. “Child’s Tower Room” (1983–84) — with its high gleam of varnished Japanese oak — is a kind of crazed stir-fry of three quite distinct ingredients: Tatlin’s tower, that unrealized monument to the Third International; a wheeling fairground helter-skelter; and an off-kilter pepper pot. In short, it’s wild — and children are loving it to bits this morning because it contains a spiraling staircase, which you can ascend as high as the viewpoint of your dreams.



Left: Installation view of *Anthony Caro: The Inspiration of Architecture* at Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery, London (courtesy Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery, photo Andy Stagg). Right: Installation view of *Caro and Music* at Annely Juda Fine Art, London (courtesy Annely Juda Fine Art)

In fact, throughout almost the whole of Paul Moorhouse’s serious talk about the architectural significance of “Child’s Tower Room,” various small children are up inside that tower, shouting him down for the sheer joy of it.

The other works in the show demonstrate exactly how Caro pressed ideas about the architectonic into service. His sculptures, though abstract enough, utilize what you can easily read as room-like spaces, doors, recesses, a roof-like lean. Sculpture is a built thing, with an inside and an outside, through which you are often invited to journey, and whose inner spaces are bounded by walls.

But what of music? Didn’t Friedrich Schiller once ask: “What is architecture but frozen music?” The second show takes us on a different journey, and it does not quite convince to the same degree.

Doesn’t almost every artist (and every poet) tell us that they are influenced by music? The difference with Caro, Paul Moorhouse explains to me, is that most artists do not actually *make* to music — they turn it off before snatching up brush or chisel. Caro, on the other hand, would ramp up the volume on Brahms or Mozart when making a large piece, to give his creative juices an extra shot.

So when I walk into the gallery, it is to the light tripping of piano notes, at a relatively low volume. How exactly has music influenced Caro?

Well, here are some pieces from the *Concerto Series*, all created in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Caro has cannibalized various wind instruments, and from those bits he’s fashioned musical sculptures. One, called “Castanets” (2000), looks like a wilting double horn; another shows a trombone sliding away from itself. Unfortunately, these sculptures do little other than show off the expressive shapes of the pieces from which they are assembled, sometimes ingeniously, often amusingly. They also feel imaginatively under-powered — more muzak or Easy Listening than great music.

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Architectural forms enabled him to see and develop his creative potential. Music, on the other hand, finds him treading water. In fact, the best works in this second show have been brought in from quite different periods of his making, and are not pretending to have been raised into being by the power of Beethoven at all.

Take “[Horizon](#)” (*Park Avenue Series*) of 2012, for example. The ways in which these plates and girders of steel have been clustered and bonded have a precarious and dangerous urban excitement about them. We feel the roar and the teem of the city, forever on the making and the unmaking, on our very pulses.

In comparison with the heft of “Horizon,” the musical sculptures feel like dibs and dabs of prettification.



Left: Installation view of *Anthony Caro: The Inspiration of Architecture* at Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery, London (courtesy Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery, photo Andy Stagg). Right: Installation view of *Caro and Music* at Annely Juda Fine Art, London (courtesy Annely Juda Fine Art)

Anthony Caro: The Inspiration of Architecture continues at Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery (Ealing Green, London, England) through September 10. Caro and Music continues at Annely Juda Fine Art (23 Dering Street, London, England) through May 6. both exhibitions were curated by Paul Moorhouse.