

Press release

# Richard Deacon

## *Tread*

7 October—23 December 2023  
Opening Saturday 7 October 2023, 6—9pm

Thaddaeus Ropac  
Salzburg Villa Kast  
Mirabellplatz 2, 5020 Salzburg



Richard Deacon, *Made Of This #4*, 2023. Glazed Ceramic.  
11.5 x 36 x 37.5 cm (4.53 x 14.17 x 14.76 in).

In his upcoming exhibition in Salzburg, Richard Deacon will present sculptures from six groups of works, each characterised by the distinct use of a different material, ranging from steamed wood to glazed ceramic to stainless steel. The sculptures are invariably marked by the artist's experiments with diverse materials and his deep-rooted interest in their specific consistencies and qualities. Deacon remains faithful to the principles of craftsmanship that have driven his practice since the beginning of his career and constitute an integral part of his aesthetic.

Among his most recent works are a group of small-scale ceramic sculptures, a medium Deacon has been associated with for over 20 years. Marked by their shiny, glass-smooth finish, these works manifest the artist's preoccupation with surface, form and colour. The polygonal shapes are accentuated by prominently coloured rims, some of which have been rendered in contrasting hues. The final effect of the glazed surfaces is only revealed after the firing process, introducing an element of chance to his practice, otherwise usually governed by control. The artist explains: 'Colour is part of the process,

but you can't tell what the glaze will look like once it is fired. What you see is never what you get and that is liberating.' Presented on low pedestals, the works initiate a sense of uncertainty, highlighting the viewer's position in relation to the object through their reflective surface.

Glazing ceramics heightened Deacon's interest in the treatment of other surfaces, including the possibilities for colour in metal sculptures. A group of painted and lacquered, stainless steel works show the influence of a single colour, creating a unified but simultaneously disguising effect on the monumental sculptural form, vaguely reminiscent of freestanding folding screens. Formerly viewed as an integral component of the material, colour has become an addition in these works, accentuating the relationship between components and the whole. 'I'd like to think that the surfaces not only fit the works, but are the works,' says the artist.



Richard Deacon, *Under The Weather #3*, 2017.  
Steamed Wood.  
348 x 120 x 115 cm (137.01 x 47.24 x 45.28 in).

Deacon's large-scale but delicate wooden sculpture *Under The Weather #3* constitutes a precisely engineered, intricate construction, characterised by its twisting and sensuous composition. Seeming at once fixed and fluid, the complex shape created by steamed wood components explores the physical



Richard Deacon, *Made Of This #3*, 2023. Glazed Ceramic.  
11 x 43 x 33.5 cm (4.33 x 16.93 x 13.19 in).

qualities of the material, testing out the potential forms that can be achieved through the act of fabrication. One of the sculpture's tail ends stops short of the ground, creating a sense of levitation or a fluid motion suddenly frozen mid-flow. Here, too, the effect of the surface is of vital importance to the work and the holes created by screws have been fitted with wooden pins, achieving the effect of patterns of tiny circles that interrupt the effect of the wood's natural grain. 'Gradually the surface has become important and I have come to think that it should be unbroken, not that I want the trace of work done removed, but rather that it all happens on the surface,' says the artist. Oscillating between organic and structural, the associations of rainfall or towering clouds evoked by the work's title are likewise echoed in the cursive forms of the sculpture. The first sculpture of the *Under The Weather* series, from which this work was developed, is currently part of the collection of the San Diego Museum of Art.

A group of small-scale stainless steel works from Deacon's *Tread* series are distributed rhythmically around the gallery space. Consisting of round, organic shapes, featuring a distinctive wave-shaped surface, the works are characterised by both their soft curves and their sharp cut edges, which, together with the highly polished surface, gives the works a workable, almost malleable quality. Deacon chooses titles to complement the associative potential of his works. This series lends the exhibition its title, and, typical of Deacon's enigmatic titles, *Tread* can be interpreted in a number of different ways.



Richard Deacon, *Tread #6*, 2020. Stainless Steel.  
11.9 x 21.9 x 12 cm (4.69 x 8.62 x 4.72 in).

It brings to mind the idiom of treading lightly, meaning to proceed with caution, the action of treading in general – walking or proceeding along – but also describes the upper horizontal surface of a step. Often playful, deliberately ambiguous or strikingly associative, they are nevertheless never intended as descriptions or explanations.

The sculptures are accompanied by a new and unprecedented series of drawings, which the artist creates on a tablet computer. Restless when it comes to drawing, the artist is particularly interested in finding new ways in which the surface and the means of making the marks interplay. In the case of this new series, the unforgiving surface of a tablet screen and the artist's bare finger were 'an interesting combination and sparked a development.' The designs are then applied to polyester fabric, which lends the drawings materiality and results in haptic and unconventional wall objects. 'They are pulled away from the digital into the world,' he explains. Deacon's drawings – a constant in his practice – are autonomous from his sculptures in the sense that they are experiments to the artist, and do not necessarily have a direct preparatory function. He explains that not knowing exactly where one is going is one of the main drivers in the act of drawing. The artist relates these works to the idea of compression and expansion, offering perspectival clues and 'the sense of pushing and pulling against the idea of space.'

The diverse selection of sculptures in this exhibition highlights Deacon's use of a variety of recurring elements in different groupings and orientations.

In the juxtaposition of multiple sizes, forms and materials, this exhibition highlights the range of Deacon's creative work and sculptural language, which is nonetheless permeated by a common bond that constitutes the core of the artist's oeuvre.



#### About the artist

Born in 1949 in Bangor, Wales, Deacon lives and works in London. He studied at the Somerset College of Art in Taunton, followed by the Saint Martin's School of Art and the Royal College of Art in London, graduating in 1977. His first solo exhibition was held the following year at The Gallery in Brixton, London. This was followed by shows at the Riverside Studios (1984), Tate Gallery (1985) and Whitechapel Art Gallery in London (1998) and at Tate Gallery in Liverpool (1999). His work has been exhibited at the Centre Pompidou, Paris (2003); Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (2007); Musee d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Strasbourg; and Sprengel Museum, Hanover (2010); CAC Málaga (2012); and Tate Britain, London (2014). Between 2015–16, a major retrospective was shown at the Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Switzerland; Heydar Aliyev Center, Baku, Azerbaijan; and Langen Foundation, Neuss, Germany. The first comprehensive survey of his drawings was shown at the Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany in 2016, followed by his first major museum survey in the USA at the San Diego Museum of Art in 2017. His teaching activities include professorships at the Chelsea School of Art, the London Institute and the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, Paris. Among other honours, he was awarded the Turner Prize in 1987, made a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by France in 1997, and became a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1999.

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