

The best sculptors in the world

Art critic Richard Cork tracks the evolution of sculpture as a medium - and Kurt Beers, author of 100 Sculptors of Tomorrow, highlights some of the most important sculptors today



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Nathan Mabry combines references to ethnographic art, particularly from the pre-Columbian era, with pop culture and modern artistic movements such as minimalism. The result is work which seeks out recurring themes in art history across direct temporal or cultural continuums. Mabry's sculptures are often presented as though they might be historical artefacts, the sculptural remnants of an alternative history wherein differing cultures' distinct aesthetic languages are curiously, provocatively amalgamated. His work explores the dualities, dichotomies and juxtapositions that arise through these combinations.

Shape-shift (Eagle) (2013) is a terracotta sculpture of a large head, based on the stone Tenon heads created by the Chavín culture of Peru; the aluminium plinth on which it sits is based on

Donald Judd's minimalist sculptures. The head depicts a man mid-transformation into an eagle. Viewed in conjunction with one another, the concept of transformation takes on new meaning: the art of the Chavín culture, through the evolution of its stylistic and aesthetic features, transforms into the kind of minimalist work made by Judd. Both elements begin to take on a new visual language – the stark, bold lines of the head work in relation to those of the minimalist plinth.

In keeping with the myriad art-historical references that Mabry uses as his basis, his materials are similarly wide-ranging: aluminium, bronze, steel and terracotta all make appearances. The chosen materials often correspond to the original sculpture that Mabry is referencing, but at other times they work in direct opposition to it, creating an uncanny sense of recognition that is always just outside the viewer's grasp. He comments, "I've always been fascinated by anthropology and archaeology – ritualistic associations within objects both old and new – everything they represent about human culture and human endeavour; and how this affects past, present and future."