

the creators project

Quayola's New Work Matter Rethinks Rodin's *The Thinker*

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The work of UK-based visual artist Quayola bridges time periods, genres, and aesthetics, creating a dialogue between the old and the new, the classical and the modern, the physical and the digital. Often using historic paintings, stained glass windows, or frescos as his source material, Quayola typically starts with a hi-res digital image of these familiar masterpieces, then transforms it through custom software and atmospheric audio to breathe new life into these iconic works.

His finished products, usually presented as large scale, multi-channel video-based installations, are mesmerizing abstractions of rosy cheeked cupids and gilded altarpieces, reducing the original subjects into geometric forms and cloaking the image in a crawling, undulating tessellated digital skin. Though the images he works with are usually flat and two dimensional, Quayola's manipulations give them a physical quality, at times feeling like he's exploring some sort of implied topography.

With his latest installation, *Matter*, Quayola makes his first foray into working with three dimensional forms, taking Rodin's famous sculpture *The Thinker* as his subject. In this instance, rather than starting with a photographic image of the piece, the sculpture was digitally reproduced using the 3D animation software Houdini and rendered in Cinema 4D, producing a 10 minute video rendered at an enormous 4K resolution.



The project was commissioned by luxury Swiss watch manufacturer Audemars Piguet on the occasion of their 40th anniversary and will have its first public exhibition, “From Avant Garde to Icon,” at the Park Avenue Armory this Thursday, March 21st, before going on to travel the world in a series of smaller exhibitions.

We showed Quayola’s Strata #4 at our Creators Project: San Francisco event this past weekend where the artist also spoke on our “Artist as Researcher” panel on Saturday. We caught up with him after his talk to learn more about Matter and what this new three dimensional direction means for his work.



A still from Matter.

The Creators Project: This is your first time working with sculpture as your source material. Can you tell us a little bit about what inspired this new work?

Quayola: This project was really about exploring forms and space and volumes, and generally applying similar themes explored in my previous work but on a volumetric form. The original inspiration comes from these artworks from Michelangelo, called The Slaves. It’s a series of four sculptures developed for the grave of Pope Giulio II. Michelangelo had the idea of sculpting them all at the same time, working a bit on one, then the other. It got to this stage where all four were completely unfinished but somehow they had that perfect balance between the original block and all these kind of organic imperfections, and portions of the body.

What was incredibly fascinating about that piece to me was that it’s this perfect combination of different stages of this block of matter—from its primitive form, which is a cube, to the highest geometric complexities. And it’s so fascinating that Michelangelo decided to stop working on them and actually left them unfinished. I think there’s something so special, so contemporary about these sculptures, and that relates to my work—this idea of creating something that might also look like an error, like a glitch, some kind of unfinished quality to the work, but finding the right balance. This is ultimately what fascinates me about classical art in general, and is the process behind the Strata series—trying to find the connection between things that seem so old but somehow actually are quite contemporary.



Two of Michelangelo's Slaves sculptures.

How does the idea of matter fit into all of this?

The idea was to really explore and celebrate matter itself, which is the substance that all things are made of. It's an exploration, a sort of continuous articulation, of a block of matter, starting from its primitive, simplest form, and going through some organic transformation processes and then discovering some kind of manmade craft and perfection inside this block.

Was it different working with a 3D form as opposed to a flat painting or image?

I think in the end I never see my work as 2D. A painting is a flat surface but it exists in 3D space, and the way I explore them through my previous works, it's still a sort of 3D form. I quite like this idea of adding a sculptural element into my work. I think the main difference is that usually I capture a photographic image and then I explore this, but this image is also present in the work. While this time, it's completely computer generated. It's based on the sculpture and the idea is to recreate something that has a photorealistic quality to it. It's the beginning of a study that's quite complex.

