

All the noise is coming from a cavernous rectangular room, two stories high, with a large square entrance on one side through which sunlight is flooding in from the bright courtyard outside. It smells like the metalwork room at school – it is, after all, a workshop. There are metal people dangling from the high ceiling.

More precisely, overhead are suspended swirling clouds of steel fibres, ingeniously constructed so that from the correct viewpoint the lines mesh to reveal a body-shaped void at the centre.

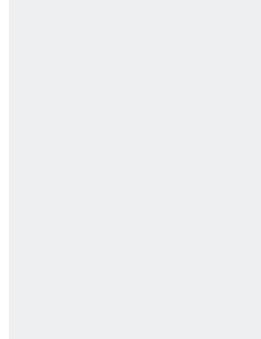
This is where some of Britain's most successful art is made, the workshop at the heart of Antony Gormley's new purpose-built studio in London.

Three young artists – Gormley's assistants – are cutting, welding and beating his artworks into being.

In the courtyard a matching pair of Gormley's striking metal figures punctuates the space and a stainless steel clad staircase rises up to a tastefully minimalist office, where Gormley has agreed to an interview in a room overlooking the workshop.

If you don't already know Antony Gormley the artist, you'll almost certainly know his art. Think of the *Angel of the North* in Gateshead – or, more recently, the 100 cast iron statues gazing out implacably across the Irish Sea from Crosby beach in Merseyside, which make up the installation called *Another Place*.

When *Another Place* was unveiled last summer it attracted the kind of national media attention that is rarely seen in one of Merseyside's regeneration areas.



The Guardian featured a front page picture of the iron men. Like much of Gormley's art it has proved popular with the public as well as the media and the critics. Local coastal rangers estimate that the number of visitors to the beach has doubled since its arrival. The original projection of 600,000 visitors during the installation's stay, until November 2006, looks sure to be comfortably beaten.

"The moment Antony topped the sand dunes and saw the beach he sort of went 'Yes'," says Rod Yeoman, the director of South Sefton Partnership, who played a important part in bringing *Another Place* to Crosby.

Gormley explains: "What I like about Crosby beach is that it's a working beach, not a romantic, escapist idea of nature as wilderness. It's got the wind farm, it's got the community centre, it's got the great container ships coming and leaving the Mersey docks. It's got the piles of scrap iron."

He continues: "*Another Place*, in a way, says 'Here we are' at the beginning of the twenty-first century in a post-industrial world, facing the sea. The beach is a very important interface between the known, the given, the made and the earth and its systems, like the rhythm of the tide."

Another Place was first shown in 1997 at the German port of Cuxhaven, from where thousands of people emigrated to America, many fleeing the rise of Nazism (Crosby is its fourth beach, the first in the UK). So the location of Crosby beach close to Liverpool, another



great port of emigration, also resonates with the work's themes.

But things have moved on since 1997 and to Gormley *Another Place* has taken on new significance. "I think people quite rightly see other associations. With more awareness of asylum seekers and greater global mobility it seems that it's less about the Pilgrim Fathers or refugees going to America than about people coming here and us having an opportunity to think about what kind of society we offer."

Like the life-size statues on Crosby beach and the body-shaped spaces in the steel fibres, the human body is the constant that runs through Gormley's work. His own trim 6' 4" frame in particular has provided the model for many of his works, including *Another Place*.

"I suppose I go to the body because it is the universal human condition," he says. "The body is where we all live."

His work is also partly a reaction to the move towards the abstract in twentieth century art. "I go to the body," he says, "in reply to the failure of modernism to provide an art that reflects the way we feel as well as the way we might think or see." It is a reaction to "the obsession with composition and relationships of pure elements that is responsible for draining the feeling from art."

There is a depth of thought behind Gormley's work, something approaching a philosophy. Indeed, in the early 1970s the young Gormley set out to follow the



hippie trail to India, eventually spending almost three years away, during which time he studied meditation with a Burmese guru and considered becoming a Buddhist monk. It was in India that he decided to make a serious stab at being an artist. When he arrived home in 1974 he enrolled at the Central School of Art in London, before going on to Goldsmiths and the Slade.

"I start from an aspiration that art can be anywhere and for everyone," he says. And the reaction to *Another Place* suggests he is doing something right. People have taken the statues to heart, regularly dressing them up – during the Ashes a cricket team suddenly appeared. There is even a story about a bride in her wedding dress donning wellies to have her picture taken with one of the statues.

So successful has *Another Place* been that local MP Claire Curtis-Thomas has already initiated a campaign to make it permanent. Whether the campaign will succeed is hard to say, not least because Crosby is a complex site. Careful negotiations were required to stage the work in the first place and the permissions granted are for 18 months only.

Even so, with the Capital of Culture arriving in Liverpool in 2008, it's hard to refute the idea that Gormley's stunning installation should stay in place at least until then. [S](#)



The human body is the constant that runs through Gormley's work – in particular, his own.

PHOTOGRAPH ABOVE:
ANTONY GORMLEY

ALL OTHER
PHOTOGRAPHS:
ANOTHER PLACE

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Artist Antony Gormley describes the thinking behind *Another Place*, his installation on a Merseyside beach.

Words Matthew Sutcliffe Photographs Matthew Sutcliffe, Pete Moss & courtesy Mersey Waterfront