Visiting a room containing 150 works spanning 44 years is bound to have a profound effect upon the artist who has made them. This rather different group is Gordon Baldwin’s response having seen the exhibition ‘Objects for a Landscape’ which started its tour in York in February last year and has just opened in Plymouth Art Gallery.

Common elements of Gordon’s work - ‘otherness’ and ‘contrast’ are exhibited here, overlaid with a very strong sense of ancient times. As Modernist as they are, these vessels would not look out of place standing in an ancient cave, their surfaces a mirror to the cave paintings on the walls. The two groups - restful, contemplative White torso forms with open vase like tops are reaching up, contrasting with the Black lively iridescent bud forms with flaring flanges above and around, expelling their contents.

Gordon has many blacks and these buds are particularly rich tonally - the oxide over a vibrant blue slip conveys a strong patination of age. Neither groups are empty vessels but they are laid bare with their interiors exposed.

The subtle difference with this group is that the vessels are no longer in transit but have arrived. The buds the beginning, spreading their seeds; the White figurative forms a moving commentary on a lifetime’s work. There is a hesitancy in the building of these pieces, evidence of a slow gestation, that makes them more subtle and moving, picked up by the chalky white surface with scattered short line markings - fixing points in an otherwise shroud-like countenance. They go back much further in time, echoing Brancusi’s capacity to capture timeless truths about form, setting the human frame against landscape.

Another difference with this group is that they are very photogenic. It has something to do with how open and naked they are, felt from the outside, the core as strong as ever but not concealing anything. There is considerable dialogue between the forms with their wandering lines of silhouette, contrasting the many paths Gordon has taken in his career.

Another title for this group could be ‘All that remains’ the name he gave to the last works in his ‘Objects for a Landscape’ exhibition but, as with them, it suggests less when they have yet more to say.

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