

## The Armory Show: Conrad Shawcross

Booth 600, Pier 94, 5–8 March 2020



**Conrad Shawcross**, *Fracture (R14C16)*, 2019  
Bronze  
Height 140 cm (55 1/8 in)  
© Conrad Shawcross, courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

**Victoria Miro is delighted to participate in The Armory Show (Booth 600) with a solo presentation of new and recent works by Conrad Shawcross. The artist will be present at the fair with the gallery.**

Conrad Shawcross, RA, creates sculptures and installations that, imbued with an appearance of scientific rationality, explore subjects that lie on the borders of geometry and philosophy, physics and metaphysics. He has gained a global reputation for extending the possibilities of art in the public realm, with recent commissions including the Comcast Technology Center building, designed by Foster + Partners in Philadelphia, where *Exploded Paradigm*, 2018, occupies the lobby of the building, its complex mirrored surfaces enhancing the visitor's experience of the surrounding architecture. At 18 metres tall, *Exploded Paradigm* is the artist's largest *Paradigm* work to date. It forms part of the building's permanent installation of artworks alongside a scrolling text work by Jenny Holzer. *Paradigm*, 2016, a permanent installation which marked the inauguration of The Francis Crick Institute in King's Cross, is currently one of the tallest public sculptures in central London.

This presentation, which follows the artist's first solo institutional exhibition in the United States, held at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in 2018, features new and recent examples from major bodies of work. The *Paradigms* are an ongoing exploration of the tetrahedron – geometrically a four-sided non-tessellating form and conceptually the symbol of an indivisible unit of matter. As a building block, the tetrahedron behaves as an irrational number, creating sequences that in theory, extend into infinity without repetition. The title of the works refers to the notion of the paradigm shift – a leap of imagination that jolts scientific enquiry forwards and collapses pre-existing notions of what is true – identified by the American physicist and philosopher Thomas Kuhn (1922–1996). Examples on view include *Paradigm Exploded*, 2015, which, like the permanent commission in Philadelphia, creates a play of light across its mirrored surfaces, and *Paradigm Slender 2 (Solid)*, 2017, a graceful column composed of weathered steel.

While the *Paradigms* embody the epistemological metaphor of the ascending stack and display a visceral physicality, Shawcross's *Fractures*, such as *Fracture (R14C16)*, 2019, are more ethereal, and seem almost to disappear as they rise up and expand. While strikingly distinct both conceptually and aesthetically, the *Fractures* still obey the same geometric parameters and constraints as the *Paradigms*, but also contain a

central helical stem. This twisting spine supports a series of branches which in turn support hundreds of fragments that, as a whole, echo the solid surface of the *Paradigm* skin. Speaking about the *Fractures*, Shawcross notes that ‘A potential way to think of them is as some sort of complex model by a scientist or a mathematician. While they appear to be functional or of rational intent, their meaning remains elusive. They contain a temporal element that seems to convey growth, entropy or collapse. On one side they could represent a complex chemical such as a protein chain or amino acid, but to complicate this interpretation, a strong sense of the passage of time runs through the form. They perhaps capture an instant after an explosion but before the collapse of the system that they chart, like a Muybridge sequence; the story of a complex system and its expansion from birth to death. One of the key ways in which scientists talk about time is in the dispersal of heat, that time is defined by the dissipation of energy.’

Shawcross’s *Manifold* sculptures, such as *Fallen Manifold (Perfect Fourth) 4:3*, 2020, draw on the artist’s interest in harmonics and the mathematics of music to visualise the precise mathematical ratios of musical chords. To create these works Shawcross uses a machine based on the Victorian harmonograph – with its two pendulums that draw the oscillation of a sound wave – to map the complex shape of a specific chord. Using this specific ratio between two notes, and governed by the chord’s strict number ratios, rules and logic, each work describes a journey through space as the chord recedes into silence. Shawcross will create a major new *Manifold* sculpture for the Crossrail Elizabeth line at Liverpool Street, London. The public artwork, to be installed in early 2021, will be positioned outside the Moorgate entrance of the new station.

*Schism* is the latest body of work by the artist to investigate the beguiling geometric and philosophical qualities of the tetrahedron. Each *Schism*, such as *Schism (B)*, 2019, consists of twenty tetrahedrons assembled together to form a near perfect polygonal form. While some sides mate perfectly, the form is covered with a deep chasm and a series of fissures. The rational order of the working geometry is violently contrasted with a sense of a deep problem that is ripping the ideal apart. This rupture, this schism, could be seen as a timely symbol of our turbulent times. Shawcross is currently creating *Schism (Château La Coste)*, a new permanent and monumental commission due to be completed this spring in the grounds of Château La Coste, Provence, France. Consisting of twenty tetrahedra arranged together to form a sphere, this near-perfect polygonal form stands at over six metres in height. Realised at this monumental scale, the form enables the viewer to enter it through the deep cracks in its surface.

*Bicameral Study*, 2019, relates to *Bicameral*, a major new public sculpture by the artist, which was unveiled at the Chelsea Barracks development in London in November 2019. Standing eight metres tall and with 693 component parts which cascade down in scale as they radiate out, *Bicameral* is an unprecedented structure, created entirely without welding whilst using techniques drawn from traditional Japanese wood joinery.

*Formation Study IV (Prevailing Wind)*, 2018, relates to the artist’s large-scale *Formation* works, which comprise branching cloud-like forms made up of thousands of tetrahedrons of various sizes held aloft by sets of steel tripods. These were first installed collectively in the Annenberg Courtyard of the Royal Academy of Arts, London, as part of the *Summer Exhibition* in 2015, and titled *The Dappled Light of the Sun*, the interplay between light and shadow on both the ground and surrounding architecture adding to the sense of movement contained within the welded forms. Subsequent examples include *Beijing Canopy*, a permanent commission for Guo Rui Square, Beijing, China, completed in 2017.

Referring to the term for a defect in a lens, *Aberrations* comprises a sequence of unique prints created by exposing traditional photographic paper to the beam of a laser after it has passed through a fragment of glass. Usually considered a thing to be avoided, these unwanted faults have been deliberately sought by the artist who has projected their shadow onto the paper, in a manner akin to Dorothy Hodgkin’s early crystal radiography experiments and Man Ray’s rayographs. The *Aberrations* point to the creative potential of failed or imperfect models as art, just as Shawcross’s use of failed or ambiguous models and machines throughout his career has been informed not by failure per se but by our capacity to perceive. In tandem, in his sculptural works materials more commonly associated with bulk, mass and inflexibility, transform in the artist’s hands to the delicate and mercurial; acting as vehicles to prompt some of our most enduring questions about our place in the universe.

## About the artist

Conrad Shawcross, RA, was born in 1977 in London, where he currently lives and works. Major exhibitions and commission for 2020 include *Escalations*, a solo exhibition at Château La Coste, Provence, France, where the artist's monumental new commission *Schism (Château La Coste)* will be on view; *Pioneering Places*, a major public art work for Ramsgate Royal Harbour, UK; and an exhibition to mark the 800th anniversary of Salisbury Cathedral, Wiltshire, UK. The artist will show new works at Victoria Miro Venice (22 May–31 July 2020) to coincide with the opening of the 17th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia.

Major commissions and works in the public realm include: *Bicameral*, a permanent commission for Chelsea Barracks, curated by Futurecity, London (2019); *Exploded Paradigm*, permanent commission, Comcast Technology Centre, Philadelphia, USA (2018); *The Interpretation of Movement (a 9:8 in blue)*, HS1 Terrace Wires commission in conjunction with The Royal Academy, St Pancras International station, London (on view during 2017); *The Optic Cloak*, permanent commission for The Energy Centre Greenwich Peninsula, London (2016); *Paradigm*, permanent commission for the Francis Crick Institute, London (2016); *Three Perpetual Chords*, permanent commission for Dulwich Park, London, curated and managed by the Contemporary Art Society for Southwark Council (2016). Shawcross will create a major new public artwork for the Crossrail Elizabeth line at Liverpool Street, London. Titled *Manifold*, the bronze sculpture will be positioned outside the Moorgate entrance of the new station when it opens in 2021.

The artist has had solo exhibitions at international institutions including: Yorkshire Sculpture International, Dean Clough, Halifax, UK (2019); Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut, USA (2018); the New Art Centre, Roche Court, East Winterslow, Salisbury, UK (2015); ARTMIA Foundation, Beijing, China (2014); MUDAM, Luxembourg (2012); Science Museum, London, UK (2011–2012); Turner Contemporary, Margate, UK (2011); and Oxford Science Park, UK (2010).

His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally as part of group exhibitions including *Art of Innovation: From Enlightenment to Dark Matter*, Science Museum, London, UK (2019); *Sculpture at Pilane*, Pilane Sculpture Park, Klövedal, Sweden (2019); the *Summer Exhibition*, Royal Academy of Arts, London UK (2014, 2016–2019); *Frieze Sculpture*, London, UK (2018); *Socle du Monde Biennale 2017*, HEART Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark (2017); *Into the Unknown: A Journey Through Science Fiction*, Barbican, London, UK (2017); *The Universe and Art*, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan (2016–2017), travelling to ArtScience Museum, Singapore (2017); *GBALE: Exo-Evolution*, ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Germany (2015–2016); *Art Out Loud*, Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, UK (2015); *Proportio*, Palazzo Fortuny, Venice, Italy (2015); *Light Show*, Hayward Gallery, London, UK (2013), travelling to Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand (2014–2015), MCA Sydney, Australia (2015), Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE (2015) and Benaki Museum, Athens, Greece (2016); *Glasstress*, the 55th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2013); *Journeys: Conrad Shawcross and Tavares Strachan*, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, USA (2011); and 4th edition international sculpture exhibition, *LUSTWARANDE '11 - RAW*, Park De Oude Warande, Tilburg, the Netherlands (2011).

Shawcross has also received numerous awards and undertaken prestigious residencies and cross-arts commissions including: *The Ada Project*, an ongoing series of musical commissions between Shawcross and leading contemporary composers which was conceived for the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2013) and has since travelled to venues in Tasmania, London, Hong Kong and Denmark. In June 2020 *The Ada Project* will be presented in Birmingham and London as part of Carlos Acosta's *Curated by Carlos* festival, bringing together dancers, musicians, artists, writers and thinkers who inspire him. Shawcross was one of three contemporary artists invited to create works inspired by Titian's masterpieces for the project *Metamorphosis: Titian 2012*, an ambitious collaboration with the National Gallery and Royal Ballet for the Cultural Olympiad. He was Artist in Residence at the Science Museum, London, from 2009–2011, and his first public realm commission *Space Trumpet*, installed in the atrium of the refurbished Unilever Building in London in 2007, won the Art & Work 2008 Award for a Work of Art Commissioned for a Specific Site in a Working Environment. In 2009 he was awarded the Illy prize for best solo presentation at Art Brussels. He was elected a Royal Academician in 2013.

His works are held in permanent collections including: Amorepacific Museum of Art, Seoul, South Korea; British Council, UK; The Hiscox Collection, UK; MUDAM Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg; Museum of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia; MONA Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania; Norman Foster Foundation, Madrid, Spain; The Ovitiz Family Collection, California, USA; RISD Museum, Providence, Rhode Island, USA; The David Ross Collection, UK; The Saatchi Gallery, London, UK; Tate, UK; Vervoordt Collection, Antwerp, Belgium; Zabłudowicz Collection, London, UK; The Extraordinary Collection, Coutts, UK; Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Chongqing, China.

**Additionally, there will be works on view by María Berrío, Secundino Hernández, Ilse D'Hollander, Chantal Joffe, Yayoi Kusama, Wangechi Mutu, Alice Neel, Celia Paul, Howardena Pindell, Tal R, Caroline Walker and Flora Yukhnovich.**

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