Charles Ray

USING TIME

Umberta Genta

UMBERTA GENTA: Do you have an obsessive personality? I can’t help wondering about it when I look at the extreme perfection of your work.

CHARLES RAY: I would say someone might say that I was obsessive, but really I am not. I have discipline and persistence. Obsession is undisciplined andmindless, two qualities that are out of place in good artwork — or any work, for that matter.

UG: Does your meticulous approach manifest itself in your daily life?

CR: It depends upon what vantage point you view me from.

UG: Compared to other artists, your output seems very thoughtful but also very spare. Is that a function of being a perfectionist, or is it more of a deliberate production strategy?

CR: My sculptures are born from a personal necessity to create and communicate; other aspects of this drive are secondary.

UG: Do you think this “slower” output has had an impact on your career?

CR: Aspects of my previous answer address this question. My output follows the essence of my sculptures. Output and production are not strategies; they are necessary or rather emergent qualities of my relationship to work.

UG: How do you know when a work is finished?

CR: That’s a good question. In the past many people have commented that I am slow. I have often thought that I take a long time to produce a work. Recently I am beginning to understand that one does not necessarily have to take time but can use time to create a work. If you want to think of time as a river eroding stones, you can begin to see how time itself can be used to create a sculpture.

UG: From your earliest works to Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley (1992) to more recent pieces such as Light From the Left (2007), your own image reigns supreme. When researching your

CHARLES RAY, Young man, 2012. Solid stainless steel, 160 x 53 x 34 cm. Opposite: Shoe Tie, 2012. Solid stainless steel, 73 x 74 x 60 cm. All courtesy the artist and Matthew Marks, New York.
work, I sometimes couldn’t distinguish you from your sculpture! Has anyone mistaken this for mere narcissism?

CR: I’m not sure they have, but I never make that mistake myself. They are sculptures and they are directed towards viewers, and that structure between the work and the beholder breaks the mirror of self-absorption.

UG: It must be challenging to reproduce yourself so realistically. Have you encountered any difficulties?

CR: No. Realism is structural rather than emotional.

UG: I recently spent a little time in L.A. My impression was of a place where much of one’s life is concentrated around the home. Do you think that’s accurate? Why are you based in L.A.?

CR: I’ve always tried to live near water. I grew up on Lake Michigan, and when I came to L.A. I gravitated towards the beach. I now live a few short miles from the Pacific.