

Wallpaper*

Shear success: Helmut Lang's sheepskin sculptures at Dallas Contemporary



By Ann Binlot
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Helmut Lang still has an affinity for material, despite leaving fashion for art over a decade ago. For his current exhibition, 'Burry', on view at Dallas Contemporary until 21 August, the artist discovered a pile of sheepskin that he had lying around after purchasing it on a Manhattan sidewalk, from an organic farm in upstate New York. His curiosity started to draw him back to it: 'The material forced itself to be somehow used and I started to experiment with different ideas, not worrying about the outcome,' Lang explains via email.

Lang stretched the various sizes of the material out on to wooden surfaces, stapling them to the formations, 'to give it a movement it would not have had naturally'. He then coated the pieces with a layer of tar to add a coarse texture to each. The pieces took on lives of their own, becoming, what Peter Doroshenko – exhibition curator and Dallas Contemporary director – referred to as a 'second skin'.

'I think that was always something he dealt with on a one to one when he was in the fashion industry – creating second skin,' explains Doroshenko. 'This second skin we can't wear.'

After making the pieces, Lang left most with just the tar coating, covering the rest in either gold leaf, silver leaf or a glossy white paint, that resulted in a primordial display of various shapes. Some of the works lean against the walls of the gallery, while others dangle from the ceiling. Others are scattered about on the floor; two black sculptures surrounded by a rectangular frame appear as black pools.

'For the planes, I wanted to achieve a strong, nearly archaic surface, presented as a leaning sculpture on the intersection of painting and sculpture,' the artist explains. 'They became, on one point, a take on mythology and related implications, and evoked often spiritual feelings when I showed them in my studio. That was not my original intention, but that naturally became what the sculptures and the exhibition are radiating.'



All images courtesy the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York