



RELATIVE VALUES ANTONY AND BRENDAN GORMLEY



ANTONY: Brendan's a self-effacing chap, and he probably doesn't see it quite this way, but he saved my life. I was five at the time and we were playing together at the end of a sand spit in Chichester harbour, near our family holiday house. The tide had turned, and as it came past the spit very fast, taking

Our home life was religious and very hierarchical, and my father's idea of a family was stability and order. He was the

It was Brendan's years in Africa that gave him an adequate distance to register his relationship to the family order – and probably to the bigger hierarchies of ➤➥➦➧

religious belief. I very much regret that I didn't visit and experience him in Africa, because I think that's where he gave birth to himself as he is now.

Perhaps we both seek approval by doing things in a large arena, and it's true that we have a strong impulse to try to make a difference. I had terrible crises of self-doubt when I became an artist – that I was navel-gazing and being indulgent, particularly when all my friends and family were doing responsible work. Brendan's work is extraordinary. I couldn't do it, because I'd lose my cool. When I think of the death and deprivation he must have witnessed, I have a huge amount of pride and admiration for what he's chosen to use his life for.

The weird thing is, he never talks about it.

The fact is, we don't see each other very much, but I love him dearly and think of him as the most well-balanced of all of us. Brendan is a thoroughly good person and I consider him a very dear and beloved friend.

It meant an enormous amount to me when he rang to tell me how much he got out of my work Critical Mass, the installation of 60 cast-iron bodies that were scattered around the forecourt of the Royal Academy in 1998. It meant so much because it came from someone I valued in a real way. It's probably the single most important response I've had to my work.

BRENDAN: Although Antony and I have seen each other little over our adult lives, we're very close – closer than the brothers and sisters I've seen more of. We're closest in our world view, philosophically, religiously and in terms of lifestyle. Having been

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brought up in a fairly strict Catholic family, he and I are still the only unbelievers.

Antony was the youngest and, the rest of us considered, the most spoilt one. But he says he had the roughest time because I bullied him and left him cast out. I have a horrible feeling I knocked out his front teeth – he's had problems with them ever since.

I followed in my brother Mike's footsteps through Ampleforth, an old-fashioned monastic boarding school in Yorkshire. We were both influenced by an established way of growing up; I believed in authority and was quite religious. Antony, however, went through flower power, wore no shoes, and was in rebellion from an early age. He was clear about what he wanted to do and marking a path out in a different track. And he was fighting the really powerful influence in our family: our father.

I joined the White Fathers, a French monastic order, and spent a couple of years in a monastery in Ireland. Before that, I worked with drug addicts and alcohol abusers. Religion was a layer of upbringing that gave me an opportunity to serve; it also got me huge kudos in a big Catholic family that didn't have one nun or priest in it.

Then I started rebelling. I was unhappy about the whole contraceptive issue and

about the fact that they wouldn't let us work in Africa, which was another powerful force in my life. Eventually they kicked me out.

There was not much contact with Antony during this time – part of the wonderful thing about being a member of a large family is that you can move in and out of that clan with huge freedom. But we met up again at Cambridge when I went there as a mature student in 1970. Antony was in his third year and very much the centre of hippie alternativism. He was living in a cottage in the country and was pretty spaced out. I spent a lot of time with him and his friends, and we got to know each other better. Instead of being a mature student, I regressed and spent most of my time doped up to the eyeballs and playing darts at the local pub.

Then Antony disappeared to India to paint and live in an ashram, and I joined Oxfam. We both battled to prove ourselves to parents who kept asking when we were going to get proper jobs. My whole life has been about service and validating the scandal that is poverty and trying to get people to bloody well take notice, and the same drive to get admiration – and to be loved, I suspect – for my work is still a major part of my make-up. I think it's the same with Antony. You have to have a fantastic ego to be an

artist, to persuade yourself and everybody else that what you have inside is important. And Antony can be extremely persuasive; in fact, the family line is that he's a much better bullsh***er than he is an artist.

We all give him a hard time about his art. The way he works – being covered in plaster and bandages to make casts of his body, and working with such materials as lead – isn't good. His art is taking its toll. His lungs have collapsed and he's often not well; it's like he's falling apart. Maybe it's that Catholic thing about having to suffer, but he's killing himself. Still, I have a deep pride in his work. Until he won the Turner prize, he was following a difficult path. Now we're all bowled over by his success and thrilled to see the way that Angel of the North has become almost a symbol in the UK. Before the Angel was completed, Antony organised a big family party in the pub next to the statue. We were able to see a community who had vilified it over the year or two it took to build, adopting it overnight. It was stunning.

But it is Critical Mass that is for me the most powerful thing he has done. It spoke to me because it was a bit like being at the site of an earthquake or something. There were piles of grotesque, contorted bodies, and it was a scene of devastation, yet life was going on around them – there was a catering van, builders and people queuing. That is exactly what you see in a disaster; people don't realise that life goes on, that even during a famine the markets are still working, and tanks and taxis are still rolling. That piece captured the overlays of our lives – the desire to show public life and private pain ■