

HU QINGYAN “借尸还魂 Reincarnation in a New Guise”

Exhibition: 1 February – 30 March, 2013

Opening: Friday, 1 February, 2013, 6 – 8 p.m.

Under the title “借尸还魂 Reincarnation in a New Guise”, Hu Qingyan’s first solo show outside of China, the artist shows us the broad scope of his exploration of the theme of sculpture. Raised in rural Shandong province, Hu Qingyan (*1982) studied sculpture, first at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts and then at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. The young Chinese artist realizes his works in diverse materials, such as marble, wood, clay, canvas, and paper; however, he does not assign any particular significance to the materials themselves. Rather, he tries to test the possibilities and the limitations of the medium.

The monumental installation *Firewood* (2012, camphor wood, 200 x 200 x 200 cm; 8m³ stere) is the major work in the current exhibition at the Galerie Urs Meile in Lucerne. Hundreds of wooden logs are stacked in a pile more than six feet high, and each log has been carved by hand. Against initial expectations suggested by a cursory glance, the inside of the cube is not empty, but also filled with wooden logs. Hu decided upon the cube as his presentational form, because it is, in his eyes, a *pure, simple form*, just as wood is, for him, a *pure, simple material*. “Perhaps my attitude toward reducing the conceptual elements to a minimum and employing this elaborate, workmanlike process is somewhat stubborn. But when I’m doing this work, it is important to me to think that the wood that comprises the installation is basically firewood, both before and after, even though during the creation of the work every piece of wood was carved by hand in a meticulous process,” says Hu about his work.

Transformation—the transition from one form to another—is yet another important theme in Hu’s artistic practice. To make the forty-part photo series *Narrative by a Pile of Clay 41-80* (2010-2011, C-print, unique, set of 40 photos, each 20 x 30 cm) he used a certain amount of clay to model the shapes of various ordinary objects from his everyday life. The clay takes the form of a gym bag, for instance, a statue of the Buddha, a sphere, or a stone. The photographs document both the process of creating the objects and the process of destroying them, so that the individual images are constantly appearing and disappearing. This subverts the specific significance of each object and ultimately diverts focus to the process, the eternal cycle. While other sculptures are object-related, this work manifests as the investigation of a specifically defined period of time. Since the aspect of time is so crucial to this work, the artist plans to continue the series and will realize a group of works every year.

Other serial works are the marble pieces *Cloud* (2012, marble, 45 x 96 x 55 cm) and *One Breath* (2011, marble, 31 x 25 x 18 cm). Hu gathers a loose series of self-portraits under the title *Cloud*, while the sculptures *One Breath* depict curators, collectors, and fellow artists. The artist’s body mass at a specific point in time determined the amount of marble used for the *Cloud* series, while for *One Breath*, each person portrayed breathed once into a plastic bag, so that the contents of each individual’s lungs determined the form and size of the sculpture. Artistic concepts, such as the idea of transforming something as extremely ephemeral as human breath into a weighty marble sculpture, connect Hu’s art to American and European Conceptual Art. At the same time the selection of materials and the way the artist uses them in his works relates to the specific cultural context in which his works of art are created. Through his works of art, Hu Qingyan succeeds in questioning our ingrained perceptual and visual habits, while using the means of sculpture to create works that are more than just object-related.

A catalogue will appear in conjunction with the exhibition.

Karin Seiz

Translated from German: Allison Plath Moseley