

Mármakos

Exhibition in Lucerne: 3.3.–9.5.2015

With the group exhibition *Mármakos* (the Greek word for “marble”) Galerie Urs Meile is showing a diverse selection of marble sculptures by Ai Weiwei, Hu Qingyan, Li Zhanyang, Liu Ding, and Not Vital. Marble has been a popular material for sculptures since the beginning of time in both Western and Chinese culture. In China marble from Dali is especially favored. Dali marble is known for its great variety and its natural striations of black and white. Often it is cut into slices and polished, and the various natural patterns seem to resemble mountains or rivers, a popular motive of Shanshui painting. Not Vital’s (*1948 in Sent, Engadin, Switzerland) works (*Landscape*, 2014, marble, plaster, 126 × 65 × 22 cm; untitled, 2011, marble, plaster, 51 × 36.5 × 23 cm; *Mountains*, 2013, marble, plaster, 76 × 45 × 20 cm; *Mountains*, 2013, marble, plaster, 45.5 × 64.5 × 20.5 cm) are inspired by this tradition. Vital selected a slab of marble and set it in a three-dimensional plaster frame. The reliefs mounted on the wall are reminiscent of inverted windows in historic Engadin houses. Combining local materials with references to his home territory in Engadin, Switzerland, is a typical approach for Not Vital, who also has a studio in Beijing and spends time working there.

Chinese artist Ai Weiwei (*1957 in Beijing, China) likes to sculpt everyday objects out of marble, contrasting and ennobling the ordinary object by using the precious material (*Marble Plate* No. 4, 2009, marble, 28 × 50 × 28 cm). Ai Weiwei’s *Marble Tree* (2012, marble, 205 x 87 x 90 cm) is much more abstract than the sculptures of trees he has made out of wood or iron. But, as we can see with Ai Weiwei’s *Marble Chair* (No.5) (2008, marble, 125 × 52 × 50 cm), it is possible to produce very detailed work in marble. The realistic *Marble Rebar* (2012, marble, 11 × 57 × 20 cm) is a critical monument commemorating the Sichuan school corruption scandal. Because they were unprofessionally constructed, many school buildings collapsed during the Sichuan earthquake in 2008 and five thousand students died.

Li Zhanyang’s (*1976 in Changchun, Jilin province, China) *80’000 RMB* (2010, marble, 40 x 55 x 35, cm, edition 2/8), on the other hand, is a personal memorial. Once 80’000 RMB in cash were stolen out of Li Zhanyang’s cabinet. After a lengthy and unpleasant investigation by the police, the money suddenly reappeared in the same place and the same position. Li Zhanyang credited this miracle to a Christian policeman helping with the case and the incident is recalled in the marble sculpture of a stack of money.

The human body is a more traditional subject for marble, but, as the title suggests, Li Zhanyang chose a very unconventional part for his work, *Marble Ass* (2004, marble, 14 x 38 x 28 cm, edition 2/4). In contrast, Liu Ding’s (*1976 in Changzhou Jiangsu Province, China) *Hero* (2007, white marble, black marble [sculpture on base], 210 cm, ø 30 cm, edition 3/8) is at first glance an idealized and traditional marble sculpture. Liu Ding applied the rules of the Russian revolutionary sculpting tradition—which remains the primary style Chinese students study in art academies to this day—to the portrait of an anonymous person. For example, he enlarged the head 1.5 times, made it face the right at an angle of 45 degrees, and highlighted every facial feature. Furthermore he placed this “hero” bust outdoors for a period of time until it was covered with bird droppings and dust, thus giving the classic work a defiant and ironic twist.

Hu Qingyan (*1982 in Weifang, Shandong province, China) studied sculpture with the same traditional approach, but has since developed his own conceptual idea of sculpture. Inspired by a dream in which he was flying through the sky, Hu Qingyan realized a self-portrait as a *Cloud* (2012, marble, 45 x 96 x 55 cm), because he wanted to make a sculpture that deals with the relationship between the image, mass, and the sculpture itself. The marble cloud with a matte finish has exactly the same amount of volume as the artist. Related to this idea is the work *One Breath – Karin* (2011, marble, 27 x 23 x 16 cm). *One Breath* is a series of portraits showing the lung capacity of the person portrayed. The works make it possible to visualize the amount of breath each person can hold. Hu Qingyan asks the people he is depicting to exhale once into a plastic bag. He then translates the bag into a marble sculpture.

Ai Weiwei was born in 1957 in Beijing, China, where he also lives and works today. A selection of his most recent exhibitions includes: *Ai Weiwei @ Large*, Alcatraz, San Francisco, USA; *Ai Weiwei - Evidence*, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, Germany; and *Ai Weiwei: According to What?*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, USA, all in 2014. In 2013 he exhibited in the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennial, and in 2007 he realized his project *Fairytale* for Documenta XII, in which he invited 1001 Chinese people to spend a week in Kassel, Germany.

Hu Qingyan was born in 1982 in Weifang, Shandong Province, China and studied sculpture at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts in Guangzhou and the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. He lives and works in Beijing and Jinan. A selection of his most recent exhibitions includes: *28 Chinese*, Rubell Family Collection/ Contemporary Arts Foundation, Miami, USA; Datong International Sculpture Biennale, Datong, China; 中 (*Middle*), Not Vital Foundation, Ardez, Switzerland; *Building Bridges – Zeitgenössische Kunst aus China*, Wolfsberg, Ermatingen, Switzerland; *Starting – Youth Artists Introducing Plan by China Sculpture Institute*, Today Art Museum/China Sculpture Institute, Beijing, China. Currently his first overview exhibition is shown at Galerie Urs Meile in Beijing.

Li Zhanyang was born in 1976 in Changchun, Jilin Province, China, and lives and works today Beijing and Chongqing, China. Important exhibitions of his works took place in Organhaus Art Space, Chongqing, China; Zhu Qizhan Art Museum, Shanghai, China; China Art Archives & Warehouse, Beijing, China; Rubell Family Collection, Miami, USA; BOZAR, Brüssel, Belgien; Today Art Museum, Beijing, China; The University of California, Berkeley Art Museum, Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, USA; Museum der Moderne, Salzburg, Austria; ZKM – Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe, Germany, and Kunstmuseum Bern, Berne, Switzerland.

Liu Ding wurde 1976 in Changzhou Jiangsu Provinz, China, geboren und lebt und arbeitet heute ein Beijing. Er ist Künstler und Kurator. Seine Arbeiten wurden in der Tate Modern und bei Turner Contemporary, beide London, UK, ausgestellt, der Kunsthalle Wien, Wien, Österreich; dem Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo, Norwegen; dem São Paulo Museum of Art, São Paulo, Brasilien; dem ZKM, Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe, Deutschland; dem Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai, China, und dem Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, China. Er nahm an folgenden Ausstellungen teil: Taipei Biennale 2012, Chinesischer Pavillon an der Biennale von Venedig 2009, Seoul International Media Art Biennale 2008 und Guangzhou Triennale 2005.

Liu Ding was born in Changzhou, Jiangsu province in 1976. He's now based in Beijing and is both an artist and a curator. His work has been shown at a number of art institutions including the Tate Modern, Turner Contemporary, both London, UK; Arnolfini – Contemporary Arts Center, Bristol, UK; the Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria; the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, Norway; the São Paulo Museum of Art, São Paulo, Brazil; the ZKM, Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe, Germany; the Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai, China; and the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, China. He took part in the 2012 Taipei Biennial, the exhibition at the Chinese Pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennial, the 2008 Seoul International Media Art Biennale, and the 2005 Guangzhou Triennial.

Not Vital was born in 1948 in Sent, Engadin, Switzerland and lives and works today there and in Beijing, China. His works were shown at the Venice Biennial 2001 and the Busan Biennial 2014. Important exhibitions of his works took place in Wichtige Malmö Konsthall, Malmö, Sweden; Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany, The Arts Club of Chicago, Illinois, USA; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria; Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China; Cabinet d'Arts Graphiques, Musées d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, Switzerland, and Museo d'arte di Mendrisio, Mendrisio, Switzerland.