

Hu Qingyan

Eternal Glory

Exhibition in Beijing: 7.2.–12.4.2015

Opening: Saturday, February 7, 2015, 4–7 pm

Galerie Urs Meile is pleased to announce the opening of *Eternal Glory*, Hu Qingyan's second exhibition at our gallery in Beijing, and the first comprehensive presentation of his unique sculptural oeuvre. Hu Qingyan's approach to sculpture has become more and more conceptual since his graduation in 2010 from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. His teachers were focused on the search for the perfect form, but Hu Qingyan has long moved beyond that. His ideas on representation and space are based on an expanded definition of the medium of sculpture, and he challenges his viewers with his autonomous concepts.

The relationship between an original and its copy is one of the fields Hu Qingyan explores in his work. Here, *Narrative by a Pile of Clay 81-120* (2012-2013, c-prints, set of 40 photos, each 20 × 30 cm) and *Firewood* are exemplary. *Narrative by a Pile of Clay* is an ongoing series of photographs. Each year, over a fixed period of time, Hu Qingyan sculpts objects from his daily surroundings out of a given amount of clay. Once an object is finished, the artist uses the same clay to sculpt another one out of it. The title of the exhibition, *Eternal Glory*, alludes to a similar idea about repeated reoccurrences, and being reborn in different forms. The series *Narrative by a Pile of Clay* is presented in forty photographs depicting the original object next to the different stages of its clay copy. Although sculptures are usually static objects, this sculptural work manifests the process of sculpting, and borders on performance. Hu Qingyan has a strong interest in intermediality, and combines the medium of sculpture with others, such as photography, performance, video, or painting.

Firewood (2012, camphorwood, 200 × 200 × 200 cm [8 m³]) is also the result of an extremely labor-intensive work process. Hu Qingyan carved thousands of logs out of camphorwood and piled them into a six-foot stack. The logs look like firewood, but because of their color and markings, the viewer realizes that they are handmade. According to Hu Qingyan, the finished pile is both an artwork and a cord of firewood, and this ambiguous, shifting context is what interests him. *Black and Yellow Cloth* (2014, acrylic on canvas, 3 rolls, each roll 115 × 3000 cm) is also a copy of an everyday object, but here, the artist is also interested in the relationship between painting and sculpture, as well as in using a roll of canvas in new ways by painting on both sides of it. Most of this laborious work is not visible, because the cloth is presented rolled up. The same is true of *Firewood*: only the logs on the outside of the stack are visible. Another work that exhibits an original use of canvas is *From the Studio to the Gallery* (2014, video on canvas, 135 × 240 cm (canvas size), 62'5" (screening length)). A video is projected on a blank canvas; it shows the same blank canvas being carried from Hu Qingyan's studio in Heiqiao to Galerie Urs Meile in Caochangdi. The swaying, the shadows on its surface, and the noise create a "landscape," which is in turn projected onto the canvas.

Aside from his works dealing with the idea of copies and the replication of everyday objects, Hu Qingyan is also interested in the opposite approach: representing objects and people in sculpture without shaping their original appearance. "Making an object that is, in some ways, very distant from its original, actual form, while at the same time very closely resembling it, is for me, much more interesting than making a figurative sculpture in the perfect form." This becomes evident in works like *One Breath - The Portrait of the Wife* (2015, marble, 15 × 25 × 23 cm) and *The People*. *One Breath* is a series of portraits that are not actual likenesses of the people portrayed. Instead, it makes it possible to see 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. Each one of *The People* (2014, scrap steel tubes, air, 330 pcs, sizes vary from (H) 6 × 35 × 8 cm to 10 × 60 × 35 cm) also contains a small amount of air. Hu Qingyan cut used iron tubing into sections, squashed the ends of the pieces, and then welded them together to make them airtight. Although their shapes and colors vary, they are not inherently different, just like an individual in society or a soldier in formation. From a broader perspective, the individual exists only as an abstract idea. Hu Qingyan has the visitors look down upon and walk over the "stifled breaths": "We sympathize with this dependency: even though we are allowed to trample over them, are we not actually

in the same situation? And so, while looking at them, we are also looking at ourselves.”

The portrait of Hu Qingyan’s teacher, Dong Zengshan, is titled *Memory* (2012, two bluestones, sizes: 50 × 210 × 83 cm, 49 × 210 × 83 cm; two railway sleepers, each 22 × 16 × 109 cm). At first glance, the halved block of bluestone seems a little more traditional, as a figure resembling the late teacher was cut out of each half. But the artist understands the inverted statue as a trace of what his teacher left behind; it serves as a container for all the memories of him. As the title suggests, *The Empty Room* (on display: *No. 3*, 2014, square steel tube, air, 491 × 200 × 157 cm; *No. 4*, 2014, square steel tube, air, longest axis 205 cm; *No. 5*, 2014, square steel tube, air, 15 × 430 × 191 cm) also deals with the empty space inside a space-filling sculpture. Square-shaped steel tubes were randomly cut and then welded together to form a coiled pipeline. The two ends were connected, becoming a closed circuit. To draw attention to the interior, rather than to the exterior, Hu Qingyan had an assistant randomly create the form, so that he exercised no influence over the general shape of the work.

Hu Qingyan experiments with form, medium and representation but at the same time his works are symbolically charged beyond their concept and production process. *Mountain of Gold No.2* (2014, gold paper, (H) 100 × Ø 230 cm) reminds one at first glance of Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s piles of candy. But unlike Gonzalez-Torres’s series, the small paper shapes are not gifts for the visitor, but just the opposite; they are commonly used as an offering. Hu Qingyan folded golden paper in the same way that money is folded when it is burned for the dead. This ritual is performed with the idea that the deceased can use the money in afterlife. Hence, the fake, symbolic money, which is not used in strict accordance with the ritual, is an illusion emblematic of wrong goals and the fictitiousness of currency. The forms used for *Fruitless Trees* (2014, cast bronze, 29 pcs, sizes vary from 11 × 21 × 10 cm to 45.5 × 92 × 56 cm) only accidentally resemble trees. At a metal foundry, the shapes were cut out of the channels through which molten metal flows into sculpture molds. Because the forms that the copper would flow through are cut off, Hu Qingyan calls these “trees” fruitless.

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.