
Cai Duobao 蔡多宝

The artist Cai Duobao (born 1973, Guangzhou, P.R.C.) is a Graduate of the Guangzhou University School of Arts and Design, Faculty of Fine Art. An interest in medicine and medical study may have led him to explore sculptural creations due to his fascination with clinical matters and physiological traits yet his work surpasses a spatial quest alone. Cai should be considered a conceptual artist at first, (in part due to his contrastive stance in the selection of materials and the question of form in sculpture) and a sculptor second. His central research into interactive sculpture and digital media creations has proven to be provocative and a process wherein transformation plays a pivotal role. A transformation of physical properties, materials and representation is at hand. With an underlying irony and satirical vein, his recent works confront the sensibility of the audience in near absurd contrast of materials and mannerism.

As the artist has become a core part of the collective Liu Dao (island6 Lab), and hence, an artist accustomed to a process orientation in a collective spirit, this aspect of his creative direction has been further augmented. For the exhibition, "Automata", we have two original works nonetheless, each remarkably different. With "Long Live the Crane" the artist has given a stainless steel replica of traditional paper art, similar to Origami, a semi-abstract crane stands in a rigid posture with harsh geometrical planes delineating its form. Immobile and placid, we are able to observe a textual finish that has occurred due to the circular polishing of the sculpture's surface. The classical Oriental reference to the spirit of nature and of its' creation normally rendered in an exquisite minimalism is now parodied in process. Industrial in the place of refinement, angular instead of supple, weighted rather than ethereal in physical and visual aspects.

Another work, "Revenge at the Hairdressers" in collaboration with Dai Enfu offers a unique piece, one exclaiming death and questioning time and survival. A taxidermist by trade, here, the latter artist reveals a male cat mounting a male dog in an attempt, however absurd and grotesque, to copulate. The static object affixed to a simple lightbox may not appear to deliver much in the way of an extrapolation of the theme of "Automata", until one is able to hear the diffused sounds echoing of the two animals' effort and simultaneous protest. Both the cat and dog are "real", once alive with flowing blood and cell tissue, now immortalized and static, dead, yet with the appearance of life. It is a poignant and consummate statement, and one of our oldest sciences, of however obscure an origin, is transformed as a medium of artistic expression. The lightbox emits an alternating spectrum of RGB colors, which serves to animate and highlight the otherwise "deadlife".

"CFC Hibernation" (Chinese Fried Chicken) is an exploration into mechanism, sound and perversion, in the literal sense, of intention, perception and embodies the same acclaimed black humor. A flock of chicks with their beaks open and heads lifted emit weird sound bytes: phrases concocted in a separate sound studio in collaboration with Liu Dao. What happens, as one approaches, is an orchestra of voices made near abstract and indiscernible due to the modifications of the recordings comes to life. The tiny chicks, products of taxidermy, emit the random nonsense of sayings from the street, pop lingo and proclamations. "You want a sexy chick?" "I had a dream..." "You want a little sexy chick?" "You want to buy a bag? Shoes? A watch?" "Look at that dog over there getting f***ing by the cat!" "You want a piece of me?" Ad infinitum. The interaction is intense, humorous and

beyond the confines of moral parameters. In part, Cai's direction is one which attacks moral paradigms and which belongs to a subversive continuum rather than mainstream or commercially viable use of objects and invention. "KFC?"-Kentucky F***ing Chicken!

What is Cai talking about? Do his subjects/objects reflect upon the crass consumerism of contemporary China? Does the work sustain itself in a viable manner as the retort on marketed goods, the importation of "Western" norms of living which act in entire disservice to public health, casual slight on sex workers and street vendors echoes in the gallery in a continual audio rampage? Tragically, yes, it seems that they do. Cai Duobao invents an audio and visual language that fills one with simultaneous laughter and revulsion. Provocative works, which are confrontational rather than subliminal, are the better part of his recent creations, moral paradox & sensational reference the themes at work behind the mask of grotesque science marrying absurd conceptual actions.

R A Suri - 12.02.2009