

HONG KONG

Andrew Luk and Chu Teh-Chun

DE SARTHE

The twenty-first century is made of materials that will last forever. And this promise is something we have already begun to regret. Our walls swell with expanding spray foam, held in with stainless-steel mesh and coated with paint thinner. Nonbiodegradable and chemically complex, these easily discarded products become permanent somewhere on earth. Largely petroleum-based materials give us, in Hong Kong artist Andrew Luk's words, "a taste of an uncomfortable bile-like future," and "art that embraces this reality is like a vaccination." The object of "is like" is critical here, as we all continue to wait for a scientific solution to Covid-19, the disease that prompted Art Basel to cancel its Hong Kong showcase this year. Luk was to premiere his work for "Shifting Landscapes" in the curated *Encounters* sector, and the abstract landscape paintings of Chu Teh-Chun (1920–2014)—one of the "three musketeers" of Chinese modernism, the other two being Wu Guanzhong and Zao Wou-Ki—were to be shown in the gallery's booth. This past April, de Sarthe showed both inside the gallery, allowing a number of visitors.

The exhibition centered on Luk's installation *Haunted, Salvaged*, 2020, one of his most ambitious undertakings to date. Rough-hewn orbs made from layered magenta and pink polystyrene hung like Calderesque mobiles in a planetary constellation. Balancing out these spheres were glued-together clumps of found sea glass from the beaches of the Yau Tong neighborhood of Hong Kong. Neither as elegant as Calder's mobiles nor as delicate as Luk's previous work, the orb formations did not inspire wonderment but instead appeared as a haphazard arrangement. Suspended from a rotating motor, one of the formations spun, the device's hum heard faintly throughout the gallery. The large area beneath these hanging sculptures was constructed from expanding yellowish foam that had pushed out bulbous forms from beneath a stainless-steel mesh, the overall effect reminiscent of Dr. Pimple Popper videos. Brancusi-inspired stacks stood at attention on the foamy toxic desert of the installation. These towers—composed of cast-concrete handheld electronic devices glued together with more expanding spray foam—were festooned with clusters of cast-polyurethane mushrooms.

Luk's work has always interrogated the innate sculptural possibilities of common building materials. He manipulates chemical agents

like an alchemist, following the grain of foam boards and steel mesh to create his forms the way traditional Chinese sculptors may follow the grooves of tree trunks to carve tea tables. His preoccupation with dangerous materials and construction may be inspired by his hometown itself, which is developing so rapidly that even signs of gentrification are immediately terraformed over. Missing from the exhibition was the smell of toxicity and traces of process work, even though the exposure of the process in which these materials find their way to us seemed to be at the crux of Luk's exploration. The materials had been ripped from their context of hardware stores and building projects, their use value completely reoriented toward artistic production.

What disturbed Luk's alchemical magic were the concrete towers made of handheld devices. Cast from his own outmoded electronics, the assemblage of Nokia cell phones, and Sony Walkmans felt anachronistic, making the art seem to belong more to the circa 2010s post-internet preoccupation with the manufactured obsolescence of technical devices than to the present. Here, concrete and expanding spray foam are not interrogated for their sculptural properties, but used conventionally: concrete as cast clay, foam as glue. *Dipole Antenna*, 2020, is similar. A little brother of *Haunted, Salvaged*, this sculpture would be apt for an open studio but detracted from the model of the universe already shown in full force. Luk's handwrought work is a world-building project—the stuff of big dreams—and a laudable attempt to turn indissoluble matter back into natural forms. As Luk writes, "The world will never be saved by the strength of a superhero, or the belief in some god, or the innovation of some technocrat, or some self-righteous war."

—Hera Chan

Andrew Luk, *Haunted, Salvaged*, 2020, extruded polystyrene foam, paint thinner, expanding spray foam, cement, concrete, steel, polyurethane, sea glass, rotating motor, UV resin, aerosol paint, nylon, 12' 1½" × 28' 2½" × 16' 3¼".

SEOUL

Yun Hyong-keun

PKM GALLERY

If, as Jürgen Habermas says, modernity "revolts against the normalizing functions of tradition," one would analyze the works of artists such as Yun Hyong-keun (1928–2007)—whose chic, methodical paintings seem to be the embodiment of twentieth-century modernity—in purely formal terms. Yet things are not so simple when it comes to historical analysis. In his lifetime, Yun endured the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula, followed by the vigorous anti-Communist politics of military dictatorship on the Cold War front line. In this context, the term *modern* is inherently laden with the impact of one colonization after another; Yun's works have been interpreted as containing so much history (postcolonialist, anti-Communist, Western-influenced) that critics have almost neglected to point out how the artist overcame traditional aesthetic notions using pure formal and plastic means.

Accordingly, in previous readings, Yun's understated art has been interpreted as a postcolonial reinvention of indigeneity, a martyrdom of political resistance, and even an annexation of Abstract Expressionism. Yet if his paintings resist anything, it would be exactly such worldly affairs, which Yun found unfit to interfere with his restrained brand of abstraction. While modernity may indeed encompass such concerns, Yun embedded within the very structure of his works an idea of modernity as an aesthetic striving toward novelty and a certain elitist aloofness in regard to the mundane.

Yun had long used columnar stained forms as a signature motif, and this exhibition, in featuring some twenty paintings made between 1989 and 1999, showed how, starting in the early 1990s, the blotchy oil residues that had appeared on the borders of these shapes gradually

