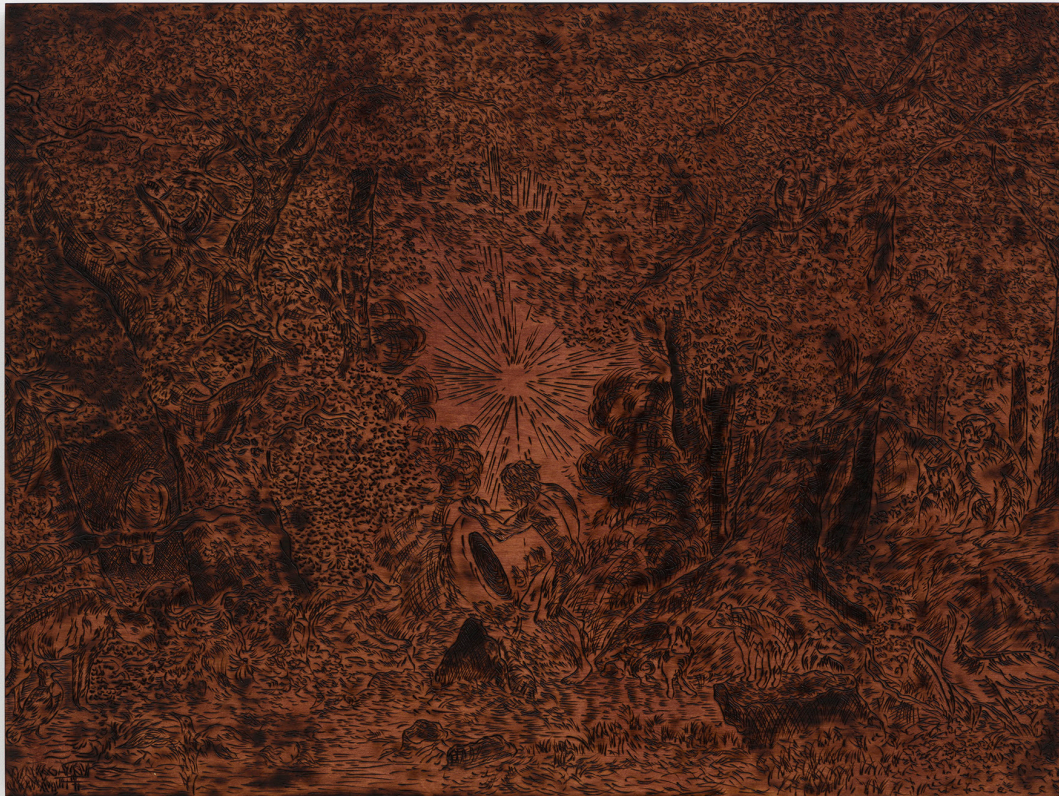


Cole Lu
Millennium Approaches

*Opening December 9, 2022 / 6–9pm
December 10, 2022–February 4, 2023*



Cole Lu, *Time was longer when October was the eighth month of the year, when everything was thicker, a year in three hundred and four days. Long days sunk into the earth inside him. He dug and dug and dug until a trickle of music entered the forest from the trees. The vibration of timber encircled him, guiding his hand to guide his hand to sleep.* (Gate), 2022, burnt birch, 30 x 40 x 2 inches (76.2 x 101.6 x 5.08 cm)

Nir Altman is thrilled to present *Millennium Approaches*, Cole Lu's first solo exhibition with the gallery.

On view as 2022 turns into 2023, a survey of seven new works shifting in scale and effect continues Lu's world-building, producing relics from a realm of myth and personal history. Incorporating classical approaches and often surprising usages of distinctive materials, Lu's further use of poetry is visual as well as formal in that each title is almost an artwork on its own. There is a shape-shifting that happens here, in the figure and the medium. The work, like everything, is a continuation – of a belief system generating renderings of an inner transformation. Lu creates a lushly sculpted world weaving between media, constantly surprising while invoking mythologies that are both alien and familiar.

In *Millennium Approaches*, Lu creates portraiture with engraving and pyrography techniques. He writes with fire, scorching the portrait into a mural of historical fiction (mythical retelling) and historical facts (USSR memorabilia). His writing/burning is also a portal of material and linguistic transition. Written on the occasion of the show, a letter to Lu from his dear friend and long-time colleague Rindon Johnson mentions how "sculpture and poetry are portals to elsewhere, and inside the work, the mark, the material is also a portal to an elsewhere as is the title too (of course). A portal is a projection, like the moon, a planet beyond, a kind of impossibility." Here, quite literally, we're offered a portal into two contemporaries' friendship. It's with this generosity that we get a new dimension to the simultaneity that Lu has already invited us to ponder.

The way one column can stand for a complete ruin, Lu's work asks you to explore artifacts from an unknown future. This portal (friendship) allows you to travel there.

Johnson's full letter to Lu is included below.

Dear Cole,

Congratulations on your new show. I figured I'd write earlier, but then my kid gave me an ear infection, and I have had fluid stuck in my middle ear for almost two weeks now. There's not much that can be done about it. Ride it out is the advice I choose online. I can feel it coming and going, a kind of crackling against my eardrum, impossible to move, the pressure is on its own schedule. My voice has been either too high or too low, I watch people wince as they speak to me in confusion, the already implicit layer of translation, an American, a black one, in Germany heightened by a change in state, I come home from the shop and think to myself, alas I am a little monster trying to get by. I laugh. I thought of you. I got back to writing.

You know more than I do about being sequestered by sickness. Remember your quarantine when you saw yourself as Beauty's beast in the mirror? Monster in name, outside of and still within the meaning of it, the other and the myth always touch on the circle. Years ago, around when I met you, you were talking about your time machine¹. This was before the violences of now but during others, after a reading of mine; we talked about language and art and how they are the same; I took the wrong train home so I could keep speaking to you. Your new show continues within this proverbial labyrinth of your own making, like your last show *The Temple of Sleep*. In sleep we dream and we dream to forget. To forget gives us rest, makes us over. If you cannot sleep, you cannot heal. To forget we free ourselves.

There's lots to be free from. For one, the mounting paranoia of then and now. Your *Millennium Approaches* is both a kind of nod backward and a kind of premonition. The millennium approaches, and at this rate it continues to approach and to pass us by again and again: a dawning of a continued new. New means change, right? Like legions and a death of another thing because of this other thing or those other things. Whose monument is this and how can it be refashioned? When did this begin again?

Is the beast nothing but a man who is ill? Some people think I am ill and not a man but a beast. They don't know we exist, and sometimes we forget about them. We forget as we are so in the kingdom of beasties and this forgetting means ignorance of how high the stakes really are, in other cities, other states, other countries; what kind of man could I ever be? Not a pure one. Funny too that I seek out spaces of transition, translation. The road between is a good home, don't you think? You were saying the other day that there is a supernatural sense that one begins to possess as the other, like how birds scatter first from the trees. We're the bird in the tree, and we are scattering. We are human in a dance with a myth; the one who wakes to being someone new. Burn the birch, burn the linen. This is the same and yet the same is not ever possible.

You told me once about the green lion eating the black sun. You let the lion into your work, you even let him eat the sun. But your alchemical ambitions do not seek to rest with gold and this purification of the sun. In your theater of connection, nothing is ever pure, containable, nameable. Your work and mine both depend on this trick: sculpture and poetry are portals to elsewhere, and inside the work, the mark, the material is also a portal to an elsewhere as is the title too (of course). A portal is a projection, like the moon, a planet beyond, a kind of impossibility. That's why your Geryon heads there, a trance, a projection, a leap into an opening void.

I've been thinking that writing is a form of projection, throwing yourself into someone else's subconscious. Right now are you hearing these words in your voice or my own? Both, right? What's mine is yours. So then, in a narrative all rules are suspended. There is no purity, no hierarchy unless it is written. (To be clear: anything that's part of a vertical hierarchy likely reinforces systems which should be destroyed.) In your narrative what is known becomes a new acquaintance, and what is not known is an open and graceful proposition disguised as maybe a landscape, or maybe a character, or maybe a reckoning. You guide the viewer to a seat for the work that's kin to screenshot, open for interpretation: a frame. Your titles are a frame, materials are a frame, scale is a frame. After establishing your frame the work (art, labor) is done or rather the work (art, labor) is done or rather the works (art, labor) begin another life. Everything written can be written again. Written by your hand specifically, there is nobody between you and the wood, the linen, the stone. Who decides who is the other? Even demonstrations of power, control, mark-making can be reoriented. Humanity's desire to occupy, to take control in an endless cycle of depletion and deflection causes trauma in the form of an ever-present, one that wears different on us all.

Thinking about wearing, about putting something through its paces, showing what it can become reminds me of the charge of your burning in the wood, the linen. Like, to do the mark-making the way you do it, scratching, burning, engraving, you ignite a kind of spark within the material, that makes a vibration which then creates a web (your theater of connection). The material of this web is built mostly of emotion so that all us players are suspended by our nerve endings, and it's in this suspension that the work exists. It is just as much about the line within the material, within the composition, within the story as it is about the line in your mind outside the story, anticipating the material as it is, following its nature, the prevalence of alteration. A scar. Blowing through the wind of the unconscious mind. I mean you know how it is: nothing looks the same from a different approach. I digress, I've been rambling, I miss you. I can't wait to see your show.

Love always,
Rin

1 you said it's just a glance behind, swallowing grunt, the heap an ark afloat in the short-breathed staircase (Time Machine Modulus), 2014-18, volt-ammeter recorder, lumber, metal, birch, helmet, binoculars, lightbox, transparent sheet, blind embossment. 35 x 24 x 38 inches (88.9 x 60.96 x 96.52 cm)

Cole Lu (b. Taipei, Taiwan) lives and works in New York, NY. His work has been exhibited at *Chapter NY*; New York; *Company Gallery*; New York; *The Drawing Center*, New York; the *Institute of Contemporary Art*, Philadelphia; the *Contemporary Art Museum*, St. Louis; *La Casa Encendida*, Madrid; and the *Pulitzer Arts Foundation*, St. Louis, among others. His writing has appeared in *Coffee House Press*, Minneapolis; *WONDER*, New York; and *The Seventh Wave*, New York. His publication *Smells Like Content* (Endless Editions, 2015) is in the artists' book collection of the *Museum of Modern Art Library*, New York.