

Ziquan Wang: Under the Skin

88 Walker St ▪ Sept 6 - Oct 4, 2024



Harkawik is pleased to present Ziquan Wang's first solo exhibition in the United States. Born in Shenyang in 1993, Wang studied sculpture at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing; ancient Greek sculpture in Athens, and new media at Royal College of Art, London, where he was awarded a masters degree. During this time, he worked in game theory and user experience design, and soon after the completion of his studies, folded what he had learned into a

nuanced investigation into virtuality, systems, and layers in relation to (and in dissonance with) classical sculpture, human-biological renderings and material reality. Wang's sculpture is itself a tool for the curation and exposition of human encounters, for making visible the interrelationship between intelligence and embodied sentience, and for interrogating the things we think we know about our own bodies, as told to us countless times each day by the devices that fill our world and occupy our minds.

For the past three years, Wang has been focused exclusively on life sculpture situated at the intersection of highly skilled, specialized labor (including the sort of "laboratory accidents" that lead to the invention of new products and services), and raw studio experimentation more closely tied to significant developments in the past 100 years of the practice: Charles Ray, Urs Fischer, Paloma Varga Weisz, Frank Benson, Liz Glynn, Tishan Hsu. Wang's contribution to (and rebuke of) this lineage is his embedding not only the material accident, but the feedback loop between seamless form and accumulated errata deep into the chemical makeup of the work itself.

Three sculptures in a triangular system comprise *Under the Skin*. The presentation renders and expands upon Wang's analysis of medical approaches, bioethics, systems, conceptions of the human and post-human through a strikingly pared-down structure. We observe from a distance and then in close-up a yellow figure with cerulean digits, *Yiyi*, one hand resting delicately on her chest, the other clasping hair in a bun, knee bent, in a moment that retains a degree of ambiguity even as it suggests domestic repose. As we make our way through the space, we encounter *Aiguo* lying prostrate, and then, *Jada*, who props herself into a half-squatting position, staring at the two with a kind of electric diffidence. The ancient art of mold making meets the blistery, effervescent texture that envelops the figures. The colors become otherworldly and beyond any recognizable cultural signifier or marker of difference, thus emphatically breaking from and destabilizing any settled notion of the "human".

As a historical-materialist and a speculative process, the question of the originary figure for Wang's works remains. Is this origin the models that position themselves to be scanned? Or is it the ancient clay Chinese and stone Greek statues that propel forward the classics of art history (and, necessarily, the human)? Or is it something else? The selective organs displayed do not add up to what is biologically rendered a living human body, just as the pieces of code that form today's ubiquitous "artificial intelligence" fall far short (to a degree that is the subject of extensive debate) of actual sentience. The gesture offered by Wang's hand, and the ancient memory evidenced in these bodies is on the other side of such formal concerns. Instead, what is presented is the dissonance between virtuality and reality. The gaps make up the pockmarks texturing the flesh of Wang's sculptures, held in their subtle everyday motions, suddenly and simultaneously mundane and sublime.