

Yu Honglei's practice is intimately tied to exploring means of communication, yet in his first solo presentation at Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler the use of verbal and linguistic signs altogether disappear. The artist's new series of sculptures and a video installation leave space solely for what can be seen, and probe the efficacy of visuality in affecting our embodied reality.

Departing from his previous work, which often traffics in a symbolic play between the sculptural objects and their enigmatic titles, no words are registered in this exhibition. Yu takes aniconic signs like punctuation marks and letters out of conventional sign-systems and re-attaches them to his sculptures by way of pictorial resemblance: "I," as used in the title *I#I* of the standing sculpture in the first room, no longer has any inherent meaning, instead serving as an iconic sign that resembles the shape of the standing sculpture. Streamlining signification circuits, Yu exposes the polyvalent nature of semiosis and highlights the visual layer alone.

Yu goes on to explore the evolving shapes of human cognition in a visual culture heavily dominated by digitalization and computation. The gallery is populated by a series of sculptures in a state of animated suspension. Either standing on the floor or resting on plinths, their material and formal qualities evoke a series of polarities: the primitive feeling given by the oxidized surface and crude texture of the brass series *,#I – ,#7* sharply contrasts their novel shapes, reminiscent of contemporary emojis. And while their display on plinths in an almost classical repose recalls lifeless artifacts or consumer products, their anthropomorphic expressions and the chili peppers (made of paper) grafted onto the top of their heads exhibit properties of life and subjectivity.

Standing amongst the brass heads is *I#I*, the artist's sculptural rendition of a body, which is composed of several identical heads. In a knowledge economy where brain activities are increasingly valued over the physical, the totemic pole becomes an apt representation of the post-human body, with all parts becoming mere extensions at the brain's service. In *I,,,,,,,,*, another standing sculpture is next to a row of scaled-down heads that appear to have gone into a state of hypnosis. The further erasure of the body in this installation evokes a strong sense of foreboding. By juxtaposing and conflating the patterns of relation—between the old and new, inert and organic, passivity and agency, Yu eschews these dichotomies in his interpretation of "heads" and "bodies", and reflects on the way humans transform, cognitively and physically.

In a media-inundated information society, scanning and browsing has become the *a priori*. The sculptural installation *I[]#I*, which includes a video, tracks the pattern of visual communication today. A slim sculptural body stands in front of a TV, gazing at the sleepy heads while with its back facing the screen. The video is a close-up sequence of an obscure action scene (is it the artist tossing

clay to make a sculpture? Or is someone kneading dough?), routinely interrupted by the headshot of a wild boar staring back at the onlooker. The sequence mimics the universal process of cognition—we are constantly looking, and everyone is susceptible to some form of attention deficit disorder. Standing in a community of Yu's sculptural objects, this interplay of images activates our relation to them—at once fraught, frighteningly ambiguous, and excitingly provocative.

– Alvin Li

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