

AN TE LIU

TRANSMISSION

Mimicking the language of modernist art and ancient artifacts, An Te Liu's elegant bronze works possess a refinement that belies their acute witticism and wry humor. Intriguing in shape and poetically titled, Liu's pieces conjure an unexpected string of references, becoming increasingly dense in meaning as well as progressively delightful and droll with extended consideration. In his most recent exhibition at Anat Ebgi gallery in Los Angeles, the Taiwan-born, Toronto-based artist presented a dozen bronze creations across an expansive white platform that exuded the dramatic impulse of a theatrical stage. With an edge of institutional critique, Liu mimicked the manner in which many museums present the disparate practices of modern sculpture and cultural artifacts, recalling and conflating traditions such as the adoption—or appropriation—of African masks in works of art by Pablo Picasso, Amedeo Modigliani and the School of Paris contingents.

Central in the arrangement and towering over the group of works was *Gnomon* (2014–17), a cast-bronze totem that rests placidly on a simple square tile of travertine. Its repeating geometric motif draws immediate comparison to Constantin Brancusi's *Endless Column* (1918). However, Liu's work is a "column for infinity," as Brancusi called his own work, in a different way. The sculpture, like the others in the show, is cast from Styrofoam components, a material known to never fully decompose, according to *National Geographic* and the US National Park Service. Each of the bronze works on display are cast or carved from Styrofoam packaging used as insulation and protection for computers, televisions, rice cookers and other technological trinkets as they travel through the commercial logistics chain and distribution channels. In an ironic inversion, the disposable Styrofoam packing will likely last much longer than the treasured electronics it once cradled, a fact that Liu brings to our attention by casting the foamy, trifling material in hefty alloy.

A group of sculptures cast from thin slices of Styrofoam packaging—*Brown Bunny*, *Eudaemon* and *The Voice of Nothing* (all 2017)—were assembled like a triad of ancient artifacts from Neolithic or Bronze Age China, resembling mirrors, jade blades or warrior masks. Like the multitudinous connotations of the show's title, "Transmission"—of ideas, disease and power; or, the complicated machinery of a car, boat or lawn mower transmission—their referential titles give license to embark on a stream-of-consciousness, free-flowing repartee of meanings and likenesses, in both appearance and language.

Leaders of Men (2017), an abstracted bronze bust cast from carved Styrofoam, undulates with rippling movement like a work of Italian

Futurism, with a surface that seems as if it were machined and tooled out of metal. The top of the sculpture appears withered like that of ruins and rubble, perhaps a pointed comment on the troubled, deteriorating leadership upon today's political stage.

Two matching, identical Styrofoam components are fused together and face each other with the severity of soldiers in *Sentinel (III)* (2016). Finished in a verdigris patina, the sculpture approximates the mysterious *taotie* "monster mask" adorning many ancient Chinese ritual bronze vessels. Like the *taotie*, which continues to stump scholars with their exact function, what conundrums will our contemporary society leave behind?

The Party's Over (2017) is the surprising twist at the end of this theatrical presentation. A discarded, damaged disco ball, also cast in bronze, looms over the other sculptures like the Death Star, the moon-shaped weapon and destroyer of planets in *Star Wars* that is eventually obliterated. Portending a future not as dramatic as in scripted Hollywood franchises, but no less insidious, the disco ball is missing sections of its mirrored mosaic, revealing its unexpected interior: a crumbling Styrofoam core. Liu's sculptures excavate the present day and monumentalize the current moment, forcing us to consider our legacy not just in the latest creations and commodities, but in the enduring waste we leave behind.

JENNIFER S. LI

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The Party's Over

2017

Cast bronze, diameter of 30.5 cm.

Courtesy the artist and Anat Ebgi, Los Angeles.

