

October 1969, an image from the series was broadcast, unannounced, for a few seconds twice every evening during regular programs for a week. On the last day, Arnatt was invited for a discussion on *Self-Burial*. It is not clear if he was probed for the meaning of the work. In a discussion of *Self-Burial* for the exhibition catalogue, Mike Sperlinger refers to similar attempts at vanishing by other artists, seeking to relate it to Roland Barthes's essay *On the Death of the Author*, published two years earlier, and quotes Arnatt: "Of course when [Self-Burial] is taken out of the context of art history, out of the climate of ideas which generated it, it becomes quite opaque. It is this opacity which had some bearing on its use on TV."

Dissociated from its history, art could lose its meaning. And if art died, the artist could die, too. Couldn't he have meant *Self-Burial* to mean just that? Or the disappearance of the artist? Couldn't he have foreseen a deep crisis, if not the death, of art?

The awareness of art's role in society for its [art's] meaning, evinced in Arnatt's statement above, was present in his thought at least since the early 1960s. In a statement in 1961, he said: "Many artists today would disclaim any responsibility to society; it would be an unwarrantable intrusion into their private worlds of fantasy and self-expression. The present system of teaching painters and sculptors, by continuing to produce belated impressionists, realists, and expressionists adds to the existing confusion. What possible contribution can practitioners of such art make to society? Their work is a form of escapism and is a denial of the scientific spirit. Our views upon the nature of reality are constantly modified by the evolution of science. The concern of art with the visual aspect of reality can, by purely creative means, continually expand our perceptual awareness. This will involve changes in perception itself. It is this expansion of visual knowledge with which the artist and the teacher should concern himself. It calls for new working methods and techniques which

allow for a rational approach and development."

Osman Jamal

## HONG KONG

### Twinkle Twinkle Red Star at Contemporary by Angela Li

The title of this group exhibition speaks of revolutionary and ideological mainland China, but it also addresses Hong Kong popular culture, fuelled by movie stars and action. *Twinkle Twinkle Red Star* is the name of a powerful 1970s' Chinese propaganda film but it also refers to the golden age of Hong Kong cinema. In this respect, the red star could just as easily be an aggressive ideological slogan as well as a famous Hong Kong movie actor.

This duality of meaning lies at the heart of this group show, which features artists who were growing up in China and Hong Kong during the 1970s and 1980s. Curated by Fang Lei, the works raise issues about the simultaneous demarcation of the two cultures and, conversely, their inevitable permeation of one another.

Featuring sculpture, painting, installation, and video, the exhibition was curated with apparent ease, fostering dialogue between the various pieces. Most obviously a connection occurs between the sculptural installations of Xu Bing and Sui Jianguo. Xu's *Birdcages*



Sui Jianguo, *A Manmade River*, 2009, mixed media, dimensions variable. Image: Courtesy of Contemporary by Angela Li.



Wang Xiqiong, *Secret Formula Honey*, 2009, sweets, dimensions variable. Image: Courtesy of Contemporary by Angela Li.

(2003) comprises three small metal cages each inhabited by fake birds and invisible motion sensors. Hanging gracefully in the gallery window, the three cages are constructed from a framework of either English or Chinese words. The words form the answers that the artist frequently gives to questions about a prior work entitled *Book From the Sky*. By housing the new work in the literal explanation of a previous work, the artist references his own artistic practice. The viewer's attention is thus drawn to the inevitable layers of meaning in an artwork, evolving from both the artist's past practice and past responses from the audiences. In this sense, they can see themselves, in their reaction and critique of the piece, metaphorically entering into a future dialogue in Xu Bing's work.

Installed on the floor beside *Birdcages* is Sui Jianguo's *A Man Made River* (2009). Employing a washing machine drum and small craggy rocks, Sui rises to the challenge of replicating the power of a natural river that, over time, transforms rocks into pebbles

and sand. Staring into the worn and industrial open drum is to look at his man-made river in the face. Set to spin at three meters per second, the motion emulates the typical flow of the Yangtze River. Over the course of 100 hours, the rocks crash and careen into the sides of the drum, creating a disrupting, cacophonous noise. To the left of the drum, in a modest tray, the artist's victory in his quest to compete with the natural ecosystem is displayed: smooth pebbles and grains of sand. When activated, the torrent of rocks circulating in the drum sends the nearby sensors in Xu's birdcages into a frenzied response and the fake birds sing and twitter loudly. Both works are noisy man-made versions of nature and both display a level of sentimentality in their aesthetic, utilizing traditional or old metalwork.

Away from all the noise, at the entrance of the exhibition, is the most memorable work in the show, Wang Xiqiong's *Secret Formula Honey* (2009). Installed directly on the gallery floor, the work comprises hundreds of hardboiled sweets in colorful polythene wrappers. The brightness of the sickly sweet mosaic does little to reassure the gallery visitor who is asked to break a cardinal rule and literally walk over the work. Cautious of damaging, disrespecting, and misbehaving, the viewer is coerced by the artist into a position as far removed from the childhood joy of eating sweets as possible. Simple pleasure is brought into focus in the installation: we eat sweets though they have no nutritional value, and as we grow older we come to realize that it is more sensible to avoid them. And yet, we still recognize

the gratification that one small parcel can bring and recall the sugary taste in the mouth. However, seeing the sweets in such a vast quantity removes the intimacy of the act of eating one and instead conjures up notions of consumerist mass production and how we are embroiled in something more than the innocent seduction of sugar. For a second time we are coerced by the artist into an uncomfortable position, acknowledging our desire for simple pleasure and the manipulation of the impulse by the larger force of consumerism.

In these sculptural highlights of the exhibition we witness references to Hong Kong's consumerist culture and the overtones of China's revolutionary ideology. When Xu Bing includes a justification for his art, we also notice how the caged bird still sings. When Sui Jianguo makes a man-made river to rival the Yangtze, we think of the forces running through mainland China, both natural and political. The exhibition suggests that the cultural climate in which the artists grew up and experienced each other's respective cultures is an unavoidable feature of their artistic practice. It may not be the direct source of content or style, but it is certainly the overriding backdrop to this interesting show.

Kate Bryan

### Aries Lee at Neuberger Gallery

Few Hong Kong sculptors have achieved international reputations. Aries Lee is an exception. Although born in Hong Kong he was educated at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, in the late 1960s, and later studied sculpture at the Staatliche Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf, Germany. His profound interest in European art and his teaching experience in China, along with the works from his studios in Tokyo and San Francisco, where he now lives, Lee's sculpture, both private and public, are informed by a rich cultural knowledge.

His frequent participation at international exhibitions has also helped greatly to shape his career as a sculptor.

His recent show in Hong Kong is a small retrospective of abstract forms in a variety of materials—bronze, plastic, fiberglass, and stainless steel—made between 1988 and the present. Immediate impressions of Lee's work are of an artist who is confident in his artistic vision and is at ease with his varied media. Lee is not a sculptor who is given to jumping from one fad to another. This is clear from the works in the show, which range from the small bronze entitled *Skandha 1* (1988), a rounded organic form that appears to be opening up to the light of day, to his large, painted stainless steel *Mars v. Venus* (2008) and the lyrical fiberglass *Couple (2)* (2009).

Lee's sculptures have a solidity about their forms that alludes to the power of nature, both in its most rugged manifestations and in its softer, more lyrical forms. These suggest that his ideas are rooted firmly in the earth's reality, natural phenomena that can be manipulated through different materials and geometry to engage the viewer's imagination beyond the surface of things.

A work such as *Skandha 1* recalls the early solid forms of Henry Moore, while Lee's stainless steel works, including *Mars v. Venus*, remind one of the art of the late Taiwanese sculptor Yuyu Yang (Yang Ying Feng) whose vibrant works in this medium were an extension

of his profound understanding of both Chinese philosophical traditions and how sculpture enlivened the natural spaces into which he placed them. So it is no accident that Lee's work is informed by traditional Eastern thought and 20th-century Western modernism that consistently drew from a wide range of sculptural traditions to meet the aesthetic demands of a new age.

Lee's appreciation of how an astute sense of the drama of a mixed geometric line can make to the success of a work is clear in all his media. At the same time, a recent work such as *Couple (2)* shows how more lyrical he has become in realizing the complexity of his forms. This is a work that suggests a new fluidity, a willingness to open up to reveal something more of his own emotions. This is a very good thing indeed.

Ian Findlay

## INDIA

### Gurgaon

#### Where in the World at Devi Art Foundation

A team drawn from the faculty and students of the School of Arts and Aesthetics (SAA), Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi curated *Where in the World*. The works are from Lekha and Anupam Poddar's private collection of contemporary art.

The works are displayed in a remarkable building called the Devi Art Foundation, the first privately run museum in India, which was created by architect Aniket Bhagwat. This building boasts a perfect combination of curving brick and rusted metal with open spaces.

The exhibition examines the impact of globalization and economic liberalization on contemporary Indian art, as well as issues such as death, love, the environment, and war in a language that makes Indian art unique. During the past 15 years, this has become clear with the India's unprecedented worldwide exposure. This contact with the wider world has brought new influences, opportunities, and audiences, as well as a new dimension to creativity among Indian artists. Experimenting with different media—videos, found objects, photographs, installations, kinetic and digital art, for example—is now essential among Indian artists.

*When the gun is raised, dialogue stops.... August 2000* is a collaborative installation by Sheba Chhachhi and Sonia Jabbar, depicting the difficulties of women's lives in Kashmir in times of war and terrorism. Photographs of individual women from the region are juxtaposed with their own testimonies, showing their experiences. We see women victimized as Kashmiri and as women, struggling against the men's macho attitudes, which leads to violence on both sides. The work takes us beyond the



**Above left:** Aries Lee, *Mars vs. Venus*, 2008, stainless steel with car paint, 126 x 100 x 100 cm. **Above right:** Aries Lee, *Couple (2)*, 2009, fiberglass, 83 x 110 x 94 cm. Images: Courtesy of Neuberger Gallery.