



A SHEAF OF TIME

By Darryn Doull

*Two things, one origin,
but different in name,
whose identity is mystery.
Mystery of all mysteries!
The door to the hidden.*

Lao Tzu¹



An Te Liu's sculptures range across epochs like a sheaf of gathered times. They respond to artefacts of globalized mass manufacture, recasting them in an ancient metallic alloy, synthetic polycarbonate or thermoplastic resin. More than just aesthetic events, his sculptures reveal an intimate relationship with the things of this world - his 2000 Honda or Hello Kitty air humidifier, for example. These objects are reconfigured, re-perceived and occasionally disappeared into an echelon far beyond utility. *Abstraction need not refuse representation full-stop, but it can allow us to think more expansively about the world we inhabit,*² and this is just part of the inherent wonder that saturates *La Durée*.

Walking into the reconfigured space of Division Gallery in Toronto on a sunny afternoon, an inventory of things is arranged before me. Some things float weightlessly, catching beams of light and casting long shadows across the polished floors and whitewashed walls. Other things await my gaze in elegant repose upon miniature concrete edifices of modernist purity that provide a complimentary ground and structural support for the heavy bronzes. The two become mutually dependent. The different scales and visual weights of the slabs and towers bely Liu's architectural background and interest in the post-industrial dystopias and futurities that are a signature of J.G. Ballard's most prescient works.

From across the room, *Shadow* hovers in a distant corner. Excepting a display on a meat hook, the initial impression

could hardly be more visceral. The white stony interior is wrapped in the warm embrace of an inky black cowhide. Portholes conspicuously puncture the hide and one ponders what part of the mammal's body is on display. In reality, the rigid cast is an impression of the front panels of the artist's immanently defunct car, a sort of mechanically powered, mass-produced bullock.

A number of works in *La Durée* take Liu's automobile as a source. But these sculptures and things aren't mere casts or replications. The original factory of workers and machines would suffice to produce another quarter panel or headlight assembly. Here, the works are a memory of an artist's hand and labour as one material transmutes into another. Recalling Henri Bergson, *it is a memory, but not a personal memory, external to what it retains, distinct from a past whose preservation it assures; it is a memory within change itself, a memory that prolongs the before into the after, keeping them from being mere snapshots appearing and disappearing in a present ceaselessly reborn.*³ As the memory prolongs, the work becomes much more than just a personal memento of those who shaped it. *Each relay in the process willingly or unwittingly deforms the signal*⁴ according to a unique time, place, and duration spent looking or feeling.

In this new work, the original things are imagined either only in the voids of the work like phantoms of an origin story, or in a material transubstantiation where bronze supplants plastic. And yet, there is a serene synchronicity as



Liu's touch follows the contours of the car's missing headlights. His hands not only echo a moment in an industrial process, they remake the primary forms as the materials (*relays*) enfold the models (*signals*).

It is not surprising that these works have such an uncanny familiarity. Our perception of them triggers a memory-image that works to complete our cognition of form. There exists an intimacy even if the exact genealogy remains mysterious in the current moment. The feeling is surreal. Autocommunication fails to impart new information even if our ability to develop knowledge is in part limited by our range of past experiences. *Autosuggestion* and *Eternal Return* are two such works that enact this fluid play as they hover between cognition and the elusiveness of a virgin form. They stand like models of fallen monuments from a future past, drawing attention as much to the remaining material as to the voids surrounding them and what could have been.

In an exhibition explicitly calling our attention to Bergson's conception of *duration*, such generous wayfinding goes beyond a simple invitation to look and dwell. It encourages the visitor to be present with the durations of their inner life and body. *Bred in the Bone* and *Halcyon Drift (Bubba)* call for attention as if in an anatomy class on joints and musculature taught by Henry Moore or Francis Bacon. Originally sculpted out of foam, these forms are now fragments of fragments, up-cycled iterations of past work

and a cast of another body's spine that now rest somewhere between object, human, and beast.

The works in *La Durée* have a surprising power. By mirroring our own structures and arrangements, they are ciphers connecting us with both the things in the room and the world beyond it on a different level. *To each moment of our inner life there thus corresponds a moment of our body and of all enviroing matter that is 'simultaneous' with it; this matter then seems to participate in our conscious duration. Gradually, we extend this duration to the whole physical world, because we see no reason to limit it to the immediate vicinity of our body.*⁵ One has entered the time of things outside of oneself: a sheaf of times.

Notes:

1. Lao Tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. English translation by Ursula K. Le Guin with the collaboration of J.P. Seaton. Shambhala Publications Inc., Boston and London (1997): 3.
2. Wilkinson, Jane. *On Resonances*, exhibition essay for John Monteith exhibition at Division Gallery. Published 2 April 2018.
3. Bergson, Henri. *Duration and Simultaneity*. Translated by Leon Jacobson. Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., New York (1965): 44.
4. Kubler, George. *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. Yale University Press, New Haven and London (1962)(Sixth Printing, 1970): 22.
5. Bergson, *Duration*. 45.

Cover image: An Te Liu, *Talismamic 2000*, 2018