



An Te Liu: *Transmission*

Anat Egbi, Los Angeles

Hung from the ceiling like a model of a sunken Earth was a bronze disco ball. The facets, far from mirrors, had the sheen of dirty pennies. Missing chunks looked like dried-up seas. This work was *The Party's Over* (2017), which had the most recognizable material source among the bronze and stoneware casts on display for An Te Liu's *Transmission* (June 9–July 15, 2017), featured this summer at Los Angeles' Anat Egbi gallery.

The sculptures themselves wormed back and forth across the title's multiple interpretations. *The Party's Over* emitted, maybe, the tinny sound of a dead disco hit just now reaching some faraway point in outer space. Other works looked less like wholes than "parts"—as in auto parts. *The Voice of Nothing*, *Brown Bunny*, and *Eudaemon* (all 2017) were flattish masklike plates, punctuated with holes and depressions like gaskets or lids, but stood upright like masks on armatures.

Liu's sculptures have a way of taunting what they resemble—being "like" a globe, or "almost" a mask. The chocolaty metal rounds of *Into the Void (the shape of things to come)*, and *Into the Void (vita ante acta)* (both 2017) incorporate slots and arches that suggest—but withhold—a full sphere. One particularly angular squiggle, worming upward from a concrete base like a robotic strand of kelp, is called *Nonorganic Life* (2017). Yet where the living appeared, at Anat Egbi, as a lifeless transmutation, the opposite also became true: in several works, such as *Sentinel (III)* (2016), knobbed hunks of Styrofoam took on an animistic and fossilized

aspect—simply by having been cast in bronze. In this respect, the sculpture also suggested the "transmission" or transport of other, absent objects—the goods once cradled by these specially designed pieces of packaging, whose past purpose is as mysterious as it is specific.

Other works in *Transmission* riffed on the greatest hits of modernism, as if to anchor Liu's globalized forms in a recognizable history. *Gnomon* (2014–2017) is a vertical stack of cast foam blocks flipped or rotated 90 degrees in geometrical "translations." Rising nearly six feet, the sculpture unsubtly recalls a Brancusi "stack." Yet the formalist innocence of the last century's bronze or wood gets a twist, as Liu's sculptures derive not from the imagination or from an interpretation of nature, but from the insoluble solutions of product design. *Leaders of Men* (2017) looks like a loosely futurist bust, vaguely human. Yet mostly, the work resembles what it is: a piece of extruded polystyrene carved with a hot knife then cast in bronze. Form, here, is abstract; material is not.

The sculptures at Anat Egbi were displayed on a low platform along one long wall of the gallery, windowless and white; two were mounted on that wall, some sat on the platform directly, and others on pedestals of various widths and heights. The setup resembled a museological, even ethnographic exhibit; the objects seemed like artifacts more than art. Liu's hang exacerbated the sense that the sculptures were manufactured, "pressed" by machines, even though his objects' purpose is unclear (or at least has yet to come down to us—or came only as a gar-

bled transmission). However fluid the process of their making, Liu's sculptures certainly reached a final petrification. The contents of the show were shoved over to one side of the gallery such that, rather than stroll around them, the viewer consistently encountered the exhibited objects from a distance. The few feet of low platform incorporated into the show took the sculptures out of the round and vitiated them, placing them into a sort of picture gallery. This physical distance between the art and the viewer, combined with the sculptures' formal illegibility, led the viewer to only faintly recall such historicized objects as products of our own, present culture. Instead, Liu's works read more clearly as transmissions from the past. They begged for a didactic guidebook that remains to be written. Who were the people that made these things, and what happened to them?

—Travis Diehl

above: An Te Liu, *Transmission*, 2017, exhibition view [courtesy of the artist and Anat Egbi, Los Angeles]