

VITAMIN C

CLAY + CERAMIC



IN CONTEMPORARY ART

PHAIDON

An Te Liu's cast earthenware sculpture *Obsolete Figure in Space* (2013) will have a personal resonance for anyone who has ever purchased an Apple iMac computer. The work is a cast of one of the polystyrene packing shapes that hug the machine to protect it during shipping. Liu's version is glazed with copper oxide slip, which lends it a precious sheen like the patina of ancient metalwork. In the process of translating the forms of disposable packaging into fine art, Liu renders the object's original function obsolete and introduces his new version into a system of values based on aesthetics, not utility.

The 'Eidolon' series (2014) similarly uses packing shapes whose anthropomorphism calls to mind ethnographic statues. In ancient Greek, 'eidolon' signifies an idealized person or object, but it is also synonymous with a 'spectre' or 'phantom' in human form, a double meaning that Liu's ceramics espouse by inflecting the sculpture's presence with the suggestion of its absent source material. His slip-cast sculptures – made by pouring a mixture of clay and water into a mould to form a layer on its inside walls – come into being within a void haunted by the spectre of the original utilitarian object whose form they echo.

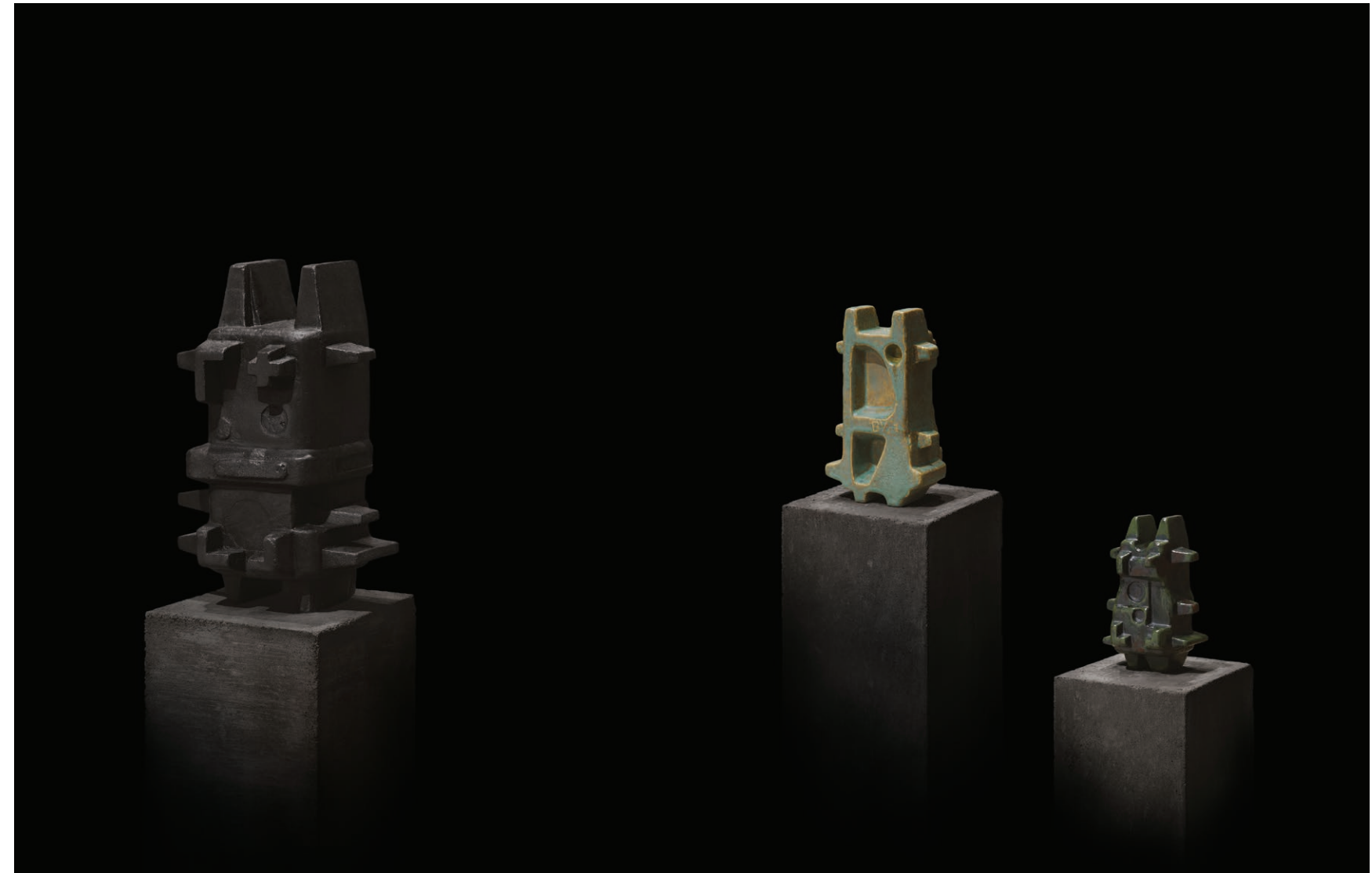
Liu's ceramics begin with the disposable by-products of contemporary technology and commerce. These seemingly throwaway plastic and foam items embody a nexus of concerns related to the global circulation of goods, as well as the value systems at work in the domains of art, taste, technology, labour and the environment. Speaking about an exhibition of his work in China in 2011, Liu noted the irony of transforming cheap goods manufactured in China into valuable works of art that were then shipped back to China to be put on view and admired.

Liu's work also pays homage to art history across the ages, and is reminiscent of ancient devotional statues as well as modernist sculpture. Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi's *Endless Column* (1918) – intended as a monument to Romanian soldiers who perished in the First World War – is a reference point for Liu in his totemic stack of repeated and rotated shapes, *Gnomon* (2013). Many of Liu's ceramics are suggestive of ancient artefacts, wrong-footing us with their muted tones that hint that they might only recently have been unearthed during an archaeological dig. Paradoxically, they seem to be relics from a future moment, objects that have a multiplicity of virtual meanings deep within them, a condition Liu alluded to when explaining how he comes to make his work: 'I need to keep looking at something until my eyes get fooled into seeing something else or morphing into something that suggests something from another genre or another time or another classification of objects.'

• Ellen Mara De Wachter

**An Te Liu** Born 1967, Tainan, Taiwan. Lives and works in Toronto. **Selected Solo Exhibitions:** 2017 – 'Civilisation', Anat Egbi Gallery, Los Angeles; 2016 – 'An Te Liu – Naine Blanche', Musée d'art de Joliette, Canada; 2015 – 'An Te Liu – Des bribes et des morceaux', Galerie Division, Montreal; 'An Te Liu – Solid States', Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art at the Toronto Sculpture Garden; 2014 – 'An Te Liu – In Absentia', Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, Canada and touring to Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Canada; and Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, Canada; 'The Knowing Nothing of the Thing', Art Labor Gallery, Shanghai; 2013 – 'Mono No Ma', Gardiner Museum, Toronto; 2008 – 'Matter', Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin. **Selected Group Exhibitions:** 2016 – 'Terminal P, La Panacée', Montpellier and La Gaité Lyrique, Paris; 2014 – 'Shine a light: 2014 Canadian Biennial', National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; 'Der Brancusi Effekt', Kunsthalle Vienna; 2012 – 'Museum for the End of the World', Nuit Blanche 2012, Toronto; 2011 – 'PARAdesign', San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; 2009 – 'The Leona Drive Project', Willowdale, Toronto; 2008 – 'Hier ist Amerika oder Nirgends', Galerie Ben Kaufmann / Art Berlin Contemporary, Berlin; 2007 – 'Modelle für Morgen: Köln', European Kunsthalle, Cologne, Germany.

## An Te Liu



↖ **Xoanon**, 2013  
Press moulded earthenware with sawdust additions and copper oxide slip  
20.5 x 12.5 x 38 cm  
(8 x 4 7/8 x 15 in)

↑ **Left: Eidolon VII-I**  
Slip cast stoneware with black slip  
19.8 x 14.4 x 31.7 cm  
(7 3/4 x 5 3/4 x 12 1/2 in)

**Middle: Eidolon IV-III**  
Slip cast stoneware with copper oxide slip  
10 x 7 x 17 cm  
(3 3/4 x 2 3/4 x 6 3/4 in)

**Right: Eidolon I-I**, 2014  
Slip cast earthenware with tarnished silver glaze  
10 x 7 x 15 cm  
(3 3/4 x 2 3/4 x 5 3/4 in)

↗ **Overleaf, from left:**

**Obsolete Figure in Space**, 2013  
Slip cast earthenware with copper oxide slip

**Aphros**, 2013  
Press moulded earthenware with sawdust additions, copper oxide slip, pigment

**Order of Solids**, 2013  
Slip cast earthenware

**Gnomon**, 2013  
Cast plaster with pigmented wax

**Chimera**, 2013  
Slip cast earthenware with pigmented wax

Installation view, 'MONO NO MA' exhibition, Gardiner Museum, Toronto

