

REVIEWS

TORONTO

An Te Liu

DIVISION GALLERY

Recently, An Te Liu has been mining his dilapidated Honda Civic for material. One procedure yielded two elongated and pointed plastic forms from a headlight's housing, which the artist cast with a concoction of polycarbonate, epoxy clay, wax, and granules of quartz. Hanging by a wire from the ceiling, *Surfacing* (all works cited, 2018) resembles a duo of motor blades (with holes for screws), and yet the forms have been modified and grafted to each other in ways that suggested organic tissue, perhaps a pair of wings taken from a creature of unknown origin. Also on view and suspended from above in his exhibition at Division Gallery, *The Named and the Nameless* consists of a similar set of joined limbs, here made precious through the laborious application of gold leaf, perhaps completed long ago, as its surface appears worn. Slowly rotating and shimmering in midair, the work encourages reverence, recalling relics with saintly skeletal bits as much as high modernist manipulations of bone fragments, such as those by Henry Moore. However, compared to the likes of Moore, Liu—particularly with the sleek and smooth black bronze relief *Passage*—displays a fetishistic fixation on (machine) body parts in the vein of J. G. Ballard or Francis Picabia: tender and twisting, caring and contorting, intimate and inflicted.

As "La Durée," the title of Liu's sprawling show, implies, the artist's seductive sculptures are additionally about time, particularly cultural memories and prophetic predictions. A relatively tall vertical member rendered in bronze, *Mnemosyne*, registers first as a phallic statement, inserted into a cold, rectangular concrete base. Yet the metal has been completely coated in white automotive paint, and its straightness has been subverted by odd biomorphic attachments: an unsteady steplike protuberance and a pair of absurd, amorphous growths that together recall Max Ernst's ridiculous bronze *Lunar Asparagus*, 1935. In some sense, Liu's work refers to Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*, 1924–29, a scholarly project that was meant, in part, to investigate what Warburg called *Pathosformel*, expressive formulas of emotion and gesture that were evident in ancient models and that manifested again later, across the centuries and continents, potentially within any cultural context, from stamps to stone statues. The cyclical reference holds on a smaller scale: Liu's additions to the upright stem are scraps from earlier projects, and their reuse problematizes the modernist (and imperialist) imperative of progress.

Never glorifying nations or heroes in any conventional sense, Liu's anti-monumental aesthetic is meant, among other things, to anticipate a posthuman realm, one that will be left in the wake of ego- and greed-driven ideologies. Infused with healthy doses of morbid humor, Liu's oeuvre offers sculptural incarnations of species that may outlast the Putins and Trumps of our time. *Shadow* features another strange hybrid of animal and industrial decay: A colossal cowhide, dyed black, was meticulously melded to a gray, petrified mixture of resin and clay. While the latter form actually derives from an incomplete cast of the front half of Liu's deteriorating car, its carefully considered holes, hollows, corners, and contusions provoke speculation about its possible uses (sexual, nutritional, or otherwise). It is reminiscent of some late bronzes by Louise Bourgeois, such as *Echo VII*, 2007, which combine allusions to calcified animal carcasses, surreal fetishes, and industrial contraptions. But Liu also strung up his creature, allowing it to slowly rotate on its cord, further suggesting a butcher's work or a ritual sacrifice. Indeed, his abstracted and adapted renderings of meat and machines became means to explore the body's duality—as a carnal substance (or a site of desire, potentially to be penetrated) and a signifying surface (a site to be interpreted, but never with confidence)—and to thereby venerate the greater simultaneity of opposites: mechanical and biological, rigid and flexible, static and kinetic.



An Te Liu, *Shadow*, 2018, thermoplastic resin, epoxy clay, quartz, cowhide, 105½ × 22 × 16".

—Dan Adler