

ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE
ART AFTER NATURE
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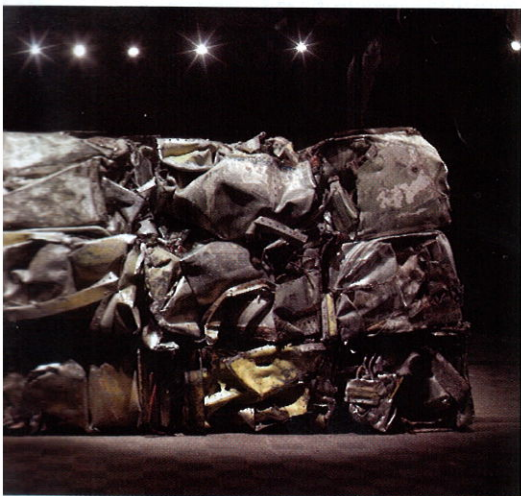
is emphasized by six recent ceramic sculptures, each *tamorphoses/It is all about love*, 2011. Not unlike the earlier work, these are mythical figures, strange gods unmistakably lie in the world of evil and the underbelly of them are voluptuous (there are lots of toned bodies), and they revel in everything God has forbidden. One body into his mouth, blood flows profusely, and skulls and paraphernalia pop up all over the place. As confronting as these images may be, in juxtaposition with paintings, they made “Shifting Systems” a well-balanced new Birza. Inside and outside, good and evil, East and West, I find it all right here. And we could see that Birza has moved to a new world with deep foundations in more than just artistic activity. Both Tintin and Jung would undoubtedly.

—Hans den Hartog Jager
Translated from Dutch by David McKay.

o Sánchez Castillo

ADRID

Sánchez Castillo, one of Spain’s leading midcareer artists, has created an approach to the representation of power structures in his work, typically sculpture and video, is based on the twentieth-century history, but its resonance is more profound, since the implications he draws out from his material are significant. His sculpture typically addresses the monumental-epic glorifying leaders, while his videos often focus on motifs related to classical inability such as the horse—a



of power in Western portraiture—and even the pedestal—Sánchez Castillo has also thoroughly examined the means by which power is attempted to keep crowds under control. In his video “de Guernica” (Guernica Syndrome), his current show in Madrid, a former slaughterhouse that is now one of the city’s largest exhibition spaces, Sánchez Castillo focuses on the architecture owned by the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco. In his work, he makes some notorious attributes of Spain’s successive dictators such as their distressing inability to execute or even make a decision, putting it into his own hands to bring down the curtain of history. The horse, after all a rather spooky symbol of the nation’s recent

history. When Franco died in 1975, the Spanish state took possession of the vessel and in 1992 sold it to a restaurateur whose avowed purpose was to dismantle it for scrap but who instead set it up on dry land as a tourist attraction. There it continued to haunt the nation like a bad dream. For his solo show at Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, in 2007, the artist removed the vessel’s flagpole and showed it in the museum, returning it when the show ended. Now, for his installation in the cold-storage chamber of the old slaughterhouse, Sánchez Castillo has purchased the yacht and, using a metal compactor, turned it into a quasi-Minimalist sculpture, titled *Azor*, 2012. In one of his most effective and precise moves, he achieved something that several governments failed to. The work also uncovers a subversive potential in the seemingly glacial silence of Minimalism against the context of Spain’s political situation in the 1970s, when the artist was born—a time when subjectivity was systematically muted and when raising one’s voice could turn out to be fatal. The installation is strongly theatrical, evoking the time when the yacht was anchored in a field in Castile.

Sánchez Castillo’s cubic form is not materially pure and geometrically perfect but rather a clumsy jumble made of materials such as aluminum, steel, and wood, condensing seven decades of Spain’s infamous history. His version of the Minimalist cube brought to mind an important exhibition held around a decade ago at Madrid’s Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, “*No es sólo lo que ves: Pervirtiendo el Minimalismo*” (It’s Not Just What You See: Perverting Minimalism), organized by Cuban curator Gerardo Mosquera. That show explored Latin American artists’ radically different approach to Minimalism in their will to confront and repel American dominance. In their works, slick and industrial surfaces were impetuously wiped away and substituted by references to the quotidian, the biographical, the personal, and the political. Sánchez Castillo’s specific approach to Minimalism, like that of the figures who used to be called peripheral artists, makes academic primary structures look arrogant in their speechless aura and embrace of hegemonic power. By contrast, *Azor* is anything but silent. Far from effacing a nasty episode of Spain’s history—a past we forbid ourselves to confront—Sánchez Castillo’s sculpture seeks to concentrate its memory in a most vibrant form.

—Javier Hontoria

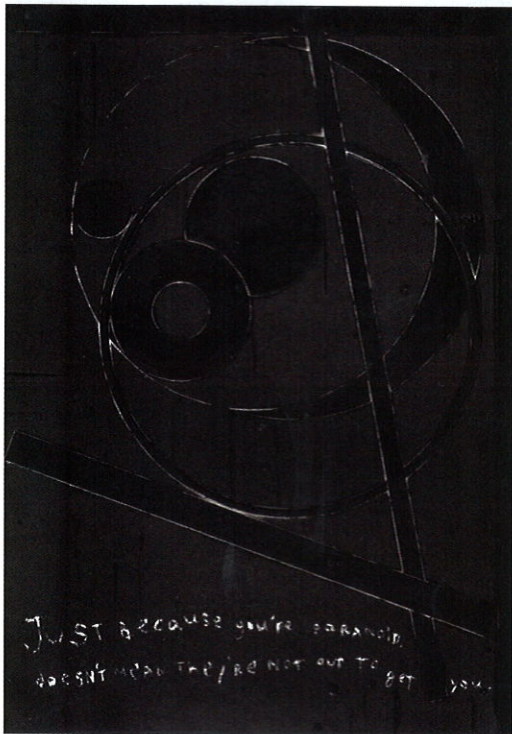
WARSAW

Pravdoliub Ivanov

LE GUERN GALLERY

The first Warsaw exhibition by Bulgarian artist Pravdoliub Ivanov was announced by the Polish word *PÓŁPRAWDA*, “half-truth,” whose upper portion could be read above the bridge between two parts of the apartment building in the center of the Polish capital that houses the Le Guern Gallery. This inscription, made of self-adhesive foil, is one part of a thus-titled two-element work, 1999/2011. The lower half, made of painted cardboard, was displayed on the gallery wall, so close to the ceiling that it seemed to be vanishing into it. For Ivanov, showing the word *half-truth* in two locations is an important way to explore public reactions to this slogan in the different contexts of the street and the art gallery. He has previously shown this installation in various countries, always in their local languages. While the outdoor installation tended to be read politically, the artist told me, the display within the gallery raised questions about text as a matter of art.

This selection of Ivanov’s works brought to the fore his commentary on the artistic heritage of the avant-garde or modernism. *Never Enough*, 2011, is a time-worn paper stencil of the phrase *LESS IS MORE*, pinned to the wall and blacked out by the phrase *BUT NEVER ENOUGH*



Pravidoliub Ivanov, *Just Because*, 2011, acrylic and lacquer on cardboard, 39% x 27 1/2%.

written in black spray paint over it. The maxim “less is more” was attributed by Robert Browning to Andrea del Sarto, expressing the legendary faultlessness of this Renaissance artist, but it is more familiarly associated with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and his ideas for modernist architecture. Ivanov’s graffiti-like gesture emphasizes his skepticism toward this motto. He seems more sympathetic to the heritage of the Russian avant-garde, to which he refers in the acrylic work *Just Because*, 2011, painted in black. Characteristically flat geometric forms are composed in a structure somewhat familiar from Suprematist and Constructivist work. Nevertheless, the move from the rather bright palette associated with these movements to an oily black one inspires thoughts of the traumatic dimension of the first decades of twentieth-century art and politics. In white letters on the surface of the painting, Ivanov has

written the maxim JUST BECAUSE YOU’RE PARANOID DOESN’T MEAN THEY’RE NOT OUT TO GET YOU. It only strengthens the grim character of the image.

In other works, such as *Loaded*, 2010–11, made of suitcases with their sides removed, Ivanov refers to contemporary political issues. *Loaded* was originally made for the show “Suspended Spaces #1: From Famagusta,” which took place in 2010 at the Maison de la Culture d’Amiens, France, and took as its inspiration the condition of the Cypriot city Famagusta, a holiday resort populated mostly by Greek Cypriots, which was attacked by Turkish military forces in 1974 and has been partly empty ever since. Ivanov’s accumulation of empty suitcases, with the material of each side cut away to leave only the frame, might remind the viewer that most of the citizens of this city did not have a chance to take their belongings with them. For Ivanov the situation of losing possessions can be both traumatic and liberating. His ability to bind together the beautiful and disturbing is what made this exhibition so intriguing.

—Sylvia Serafinowicz

BEIJING

Hong Hao

BEIJING COMMUNE

For the past decade, Hong Hao has made work that deals in the economies and aesthetics of accumulation. “My Things,” a photographic series begun in 2001, is made up of composite images derived from the scanned photographs of the artist’s possessions. The objects range from the mundane to the whimsical—books, toilet paper, passport, pens, wallet, toothpaste, letters, and so on. The effect is both intimate and overwhelming. At the time, the series was read as a statement on excess and contemporary China’s burgeoning material and capitalist culture. One piece in particular, *My Things No. 6—The Hangover of Revolution in My Home*, 2002, featuring all the objects from Hong’s house

relating to the Cultural Revolution era, served as the epilogue to the show, making explicit the tension between Cocteau and the consumerist present.

The fascination with found objects continued in Hong’s exhibition, “As It Is.” Scraps of the artist’s own napkins, notes, correspondence, and other kinds of paper were combined into massive displays of collectorship, intricate arrangements of stacks and piles. Hong has chosen to display the blank backside of these documents in pencil the outline of words or images from the front, drawing attention to detail so that they read backward. The materials manifest transactions, some literally, as in *Parasitizing—Transaction* (2011), which displays a history of hefty transactions from the show rendered in reverse. But whether or not they deal in cash, all of the transactions render an exchange of goods, of histories, of thoughts, and, above all, of ideologies. Here, the detritus of society

is often, the pieces highlight a single phrase. In *Reborn—Tigers*, the Chinese characters for the work’s subtitle are drawn in pencil, on the reverse of a Socialist-era poster, around the ground and outline of Mao Zedong’s face clearly visible on the yellowing original. Or they reproduce the entirety of a hall of fame storied as the Chinese Constitution (*Parasitizing—Constitution*), the *Tao Te Ching* (*Thinking to Match the Good—Tao Te Ching*), and so on. Again, they are written backward, traced from the reverse of the original. Hong has remarkable control over the pencil, printed images and typefaces with a precision and delicacy completely credible mimicry.

The title of the exhibition, a classical Chinese phrase from the Han dynasty that invokes the concept of inertia, itself carries a weight in a gallery that has translated it to “as it is,” though some dictionaries translate the phrase as “to make use of momentum.” Accordingly, there is no resistance to the found materials that make up his work. The objects—such as lines traced from the originals’ borders and edges—departing from the originals themselves. But in tracing is also an act of subversion. *Parasitizing—Plan*, *Reborn—Location Plan*, are an English-language word and a Chinese-language map of Tianjin in northern China, respectively, both are useless and barely legible, with landmasses and borders rendered in the wrong direction. A map rendered in reverse is dysfunctional perhaps even heretical in its upending of space and world. The same goes for foundational texts; after all, the constitution is visible in Hong’s *Parasitizing—Constitution* is a nonsensical, inverted version of the original. Although the mechanisms and implications are immediate.

—A

