

Not Vital hanging & waiting

Jan 14 — Feb 18, 2011 | Brussels

Almine Rech Gallery is pleased to present Not Vital's first solo show at the gallery, entitled 'hanging & waiting'. Not Vital (b. 1948) was born in the small mountain village of Sent in the Engadine, Switzerland. Aged 18, he began to travel around the world, first studying in France and then establishing a Nomadic lifestyle that led him to spend extended periods of time in New York, India, Italy, Egypt and Niger. Most recently Not Vital has been spending considerable time in his Beijing studio due to his ever-growing fascination for Chinese language, culture and forms and the extraordinary skill of Chinese craftsmanship. Much of the work in this show was produced in China.

The notion of travel informs Not Vital's work. This can be seen literally in the case of 'A Plane, A Boat, A Car, A Sled'. This work encapsulates both the confusion of different kinds of travel often needed in order to arrive to remote places, as well as wittily and concisely presenting an imaginary, universal travel vehicle. Another piece concerned with travel is 'Buses in Ouagadougou', which raises issues of social awareness. It being an imagined bus stop highlights the lack of centralized community planning in Burkina Faso.

Crucial to Not Vital's work the relationship between form, material and meaning. Not Vital questions conventions of form by abstracting natural or animal shapes, creating mutations and distorting scale. The form of 'Unpleasant Object' originated from a small spiky seashell, yet by enlarging it to monumental scale, simplifying the shape and adding symmetry to the spikes, the work embodies a sense of self-contained objecthood. Similarly '625', a work derived from the sharp angles of a small quartz crystal, typically found in the Swiss Alps, takes on a sensuous and imposing form when the scale is dramatically increased and the sculpture executed in pinkish soap. Indeed, the choice of material in Not Vital's work is never coincidental: the juxtaposition between soft, malleable, waxy soap and hard, sharp crystal; or white brittle shell and shiny silver stainless steel – all create a sensual tension and endow a physical self-consciousness to both the object and its viewer.

A final component of the exhibition is the presence of the animal. It is metamorphic and surreal in 'Rabbit Turning into a Cloud'; abstracted and bordering on architecture in 'White Tongue'; poetic and icon-like in 'Naked Animal with Roof'; and explores mortality and challenges decorative associations in 'Nietzsche' and 'Melting Deer'.

The underlying themes of this exhibition can be broken down as: sensuality and sensitivity of materials; abstraction and mutation; travel and sense of place; animal and nature. All of these elements, and more, contribute to the intrinsic contrariness of Not Vital's sculptures, where they are immediately tangible yet latently enigmatic, presenting themselves as both self-contained object and powerful signifier.

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