

Triple Play

John Duff

Ron Gorchov

Alain Kirili

Curated by Lilly Wei

John Duff, Ron Gorchov and Alain Kirili are all artists who came of age in the 1960s and 70s and share a life-long passion for materials, process and the object. Duff and Kirili are sculptors while Gorchov is a painter who verges on the three-dimensional with canvases in relief if not quite in the round that he calls the “2.5 dimensional.” All three are vested—often rapturously, obsessively—in the phenomenological.

John Duff is inspired by knot theory, Penrose tiling with its mirror or five-fold rotational symmetry and other mathematical models and systems that, taken to a certain limit, becomes less logical, less stabilized, even aberrant. He is also greatly engaged by Duchamp’s games of chance, by the slippage between the rational and the irrational, causality and chaos. The five ceramic dice, one of Duff’s works in this exhibition, is representative of a production that exists somewhere between chance and deliberation, symmetry and asymmetry, repetition and difference, subscribing to the Duchampian notion that the world is based on chance and that pure deliberation, theories of everything aside, is insufficient so far to comprehend its infinite conundrums and permutations.

Ron Gorchov, best known for shaped canvases that are often enormous in scale, is represented in this exhibition by recent drawings and color studies in watercolor. Gorchov might seem to have less in common with Duff than Kirili, but in fact the three are all materialists whose works combine, in different ratios, the quantifiable, the sensual and the ineffable and have multiple points of connection. Gorchov’s shield-like or architectonic constructs are variants of the emblematic rectangle of traditional painting. In his characteristic shield format, the support is corporealized by curving its edges to create a torso of sorts, the surface plane made concave, hollowed like a sculpture, like a body. He says that dimensions are attached to emotions and perceptions change because of it. Sometimes he sees things as very round, sometimes he sees the same thing as flat, as did the astronaut who said he saw round for the first time in his life as the moon loomed in front of him.

Alain Kirili works primarily in steel and terra cotta and will also show some recent graphite drawings. Equally predicated on process, his signature steel pieces—often suggesting 3-dimensional drawings—are made in the traditional way, forged, not cast. The steel is heated to the point of incandescence—a state that lasts only for a moment—and must be hammered instantly. Once the mark is made, it is not reversible. It is modeling, he says, that interests him, not fabrication. His chunky, voluptuous terra cotta works are also made “fa presto,” shaped by hand, wrested out of the material. Kirili’s sculptures, surrogates for the body with their roots in Abstract Expressionism, Post-minimalism and European and non-European philosophies of sensuality—are animated by the urgencies of the conscious and unconscious gesture that transforms and liberates the obduracy of the material.

In this intriguing exchange between three veteran artists—an idea originated by Kirili—it is the material substantiality of their work that most resonates, incarnations of form and gesture, the mysteries of which “must be honored,” to paraphrase Gorchov. Playing off each other, the sculptures and works on paper create a vibrant, three-way dialogue that compares and contrasts in illuminating ways each artist’s distinctive, individual vision.

Lilly Wei

Lilly Wei is a New York-based independent curator, essayist and critic who writes frequently for “Art in America” and is a contributing editor at “ARTnews” and “Art Asia Pacific.”