

REVIEWS DEC. 28, 2016

Chou Yu-Cheng

TAIPEI,
at Project Fulfill

by Wendy Vogel

View of Chou Yu-Cheng's exhibition "Chemical Gilding, Keep Calm, Galvanise, Pray, Gradient, Ashes, Manifestation, Unequal, Dissatisfaction, Capitalise, Incense Burner, Survival, Agitation, Hit, Day Light. III," 2016, at Project Fulfill.



Chou Yu-Cheng (b. 1976) has become known for an administrative brand of conceptualism inspired by European strategies like relational aesthetics. For the 2010 installation *TOA Lighting*, for instance, the Taipei-based artist, who did his graduate work in Paris, arranged for the private Hong-gah Museum in Taipei to receive modern fluorescent lights and sponsorship from the company TOA Lighting. Recently, however, Chou has abandoned his self-described position as “intermediary” between art institutions and society at large in a series of exhibitions, all titled “Chemical Gilding, Keep Calm, Galvanise, Pray, Gradient, Ashes, Manifestation, Unequal, Dissatisfaction, Capitalise, Incense Burner, Survival, Agitation, Hit, Day Light” followed by a number. His Project Fulfill exhibition was the third show in the sequence.

The title of Chou’s series, with its jumble of terms, could be viewed as a distant relative of Conceptual language works like Robert Rauschenberg’s *Heap of Language* (1966) and Richard Serra’s *Verb List* (1967–68). But it comes across more like a stream-of-consciousness assortment of Instagram hashtags, with its commingling of personal mantras, artistic materials, and references to income inequality. Indeed, the Project Fulfill presentation seemed optimized for sharing on social media, as it brought together photogenic works referencing such trending topics as urban ruins, Minimalist aesthetics, and traditional craftsmanship.

Taiwan has seen much political agitation recently, including the 2014 Sunflower Student Movement and protests in solidarity with Hong Kong’s pro-democracy Umbrella Movement. Chou’s exhibition obliquely referenced this turbulent sociopolitical context through provisional architectural elements. Visitors entered the show behind a wooden lattice installed opposite the gallery’s windows; affixed to the partition was blue mesh of the type that covers building facades under construction. Metal scaffolding was erected throughout the space. The most dramatic gesture, however, lay underfoot: Chou had broken apart the gallery’s linoleum tile, revealing the original wooden boards underneath. Some of the rubble lay in haphazard piles, though the larger shards were propped up against the walls and, in a couple instances, covered with gold or copper foil. The metals recall both traditional Asian gilding and Taiwan’s natural resources.

Contrasting sharply with the rugged space were two freestanding sculptural walls whose vocabulary builds upon that of the work in the two earlier “Chemical Gilding . . .” exhibitions, which were held at Berlin’s Künstlerhaus Bethanien and Hong Kong’s Edouard Malingue Gallery and presented paintings and sculptures related to building materials and economic infographics. Incorporating elements from those installations, the new pieces are sculpture-painting hybrids that combine gleaming stainless-steel disks, corrugated metal panels, gradient images in pleasing sunset hues, and shelves bearing pieces of fruit and gold-leafed plaster casts resembling broken pillars. Suggesting at once religious-shrine worship and decay, the humble offerings on the shelves hover between the purity of the freestanding industrial units and the chaos of the gallery-as-construction site.

The “Chemical Gilding . . .” exhibitions mark a new direction for Chou. If his works were previously understood as demonstrating conceptual methodologies like institutional critique, this group hints at his interest in working more intuitively. But in jettisoning his procedural, bureaucratic working methods for free association, Chou risks losing the political potency of his work.