

CULTURE MONSTER

ART REVIEW

Conformity –
and its absence

BY LEAH OLLMAN

Those looking to contemporary Chinese art for insights into the social and political conditions of being Chinese will find a bit of what they're after in Sui Jianguo's first U.S. gallery show, at L.A. Louver.



SUI JIANGUO's show at L.A. Louver includes several muscular and animate tabletop sculptures

There's the disembodied, disempowered, outstretched arm of Mao, in bronze, and a full-size version of Michelangelo's "Rebellious Slave" wearing a necessarily conformist "Mao suit," the whole painted a uniform white.

Searing and concise, the sculptures satisfy that desire -- arguably burdensome for both practitioner and audience -- for work that is emblematic and at least vaguely didactic.

Sui, based in Beijing, made the pieces more than a decade ago, in 2003 and 1998, respectively, and has since shifted to embodying his experience in far less literal terms. The rest of the show dates from 2014, and nearly every work is provocative and alive.

A large bronze wall (roughly 16 feet wide and 8 feet high) with a dark graphite patina appears to consist of nothing but viscous, downward drips pooling in a broad, skirt-like moat: a minimalist monolith, melting.

Several tabletop sculptures, also in bronze with irregular, oxidized patinas, are writhing, buckling forms, muscular and animate. Sui made their original, smaller versions in clay without using his eyes. The "Blind" pieces record his tactile engagement with the material, the pressure of his body (one floor piece was made by kicking) on the pliable, primal matter.

They feel as personal as they are physical. If the earlier works hinged on notions of control, these celebrate process, improvisation, freedom.

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., (310) 822-4955, through October 18. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.lalouver.com