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QI ZHUO 齐倬 | BURNED ANGELS 11.03 – 15.04.2017

Edmond Gallery is pleased to present for the first time in Germany the recent works of Qi Zhuo, Chinese artist born in 1985 in Fuxin (Liaoning, China), lives and works in France between Paris and Limoges.

Burned Angels

Edmond Gallery is currently showcasing a series of delicate biscuit porcelain sculptures by the young Chinese artist, Qi Zhou. Although he does not make direct reference to them, the predominant theme of stuffed animals in this series brings the artists Mike Kelly and Annette Messager to mind and their significant contribution to contemporary art around this same theme.

At first glance there is nothing in common between the immaculate ceramic pieces and Kelly or Messager's dirty, mutilated and dismembered teddy bears. Despite a similar take on the aesthetics of recycling, Qi Zhuo does not share the Californian's taste for provocation nor the dark irony of the French lady. Perhaps it is all a matter of generation and culture.

Upon closer inspection, however, the actual operative procedure Qi Zhuo inflicts on our childhood friends is much more abusive and cruel. As a native of the country where kaolin originated, he soaks the stuffed animals in slip before baking them for twelve hours at 1350 degrees. The teddies instantly disintegrate upon contact with the heat and a very thin ceramic layer that once moulded their little shapes is the only thing that remains.

This explains why the sculptures are incredibly light. Lightness and humour are Qi-Zhuo's keywords. Like an illusionist performing a disappearing act, could one be any more facetious than with this kind of technique as a means of artistic creation? The mould becomes the cenotaph and the disappearance a metaphor for the creative process; the price we must pay for sublimation?

The artist forces the teddies through the ordeal of fire to obtain a sort of "albedo" (Whiteness), maliciously exposing us to the dialectics of full versus empty, the reversibility of positive and negative, and the inversion from original to copy.

One could remain satisfied with these simple and amusing alchemist experimentations were it not for the much more frightful images the piece "A Pile of Stuffed Animals" evokes profoundly within us.

In this work, Qi Zhuo bakes the stuffed toys in an pile, reducing them to a shapeless mound of intertwined limbs, reminiscent of the heaps of tiny, unidentified bodies of mass and common graves. In another simple yet poignant installation, "The Raft of the Teddy Bears", the artist shows petrified stuffed animals - little, white fluffs - as though ghosts were piled up on a mattresses on the ground like makeshift beds or drifting rafts.

Light-as-air, delicate like childhood, the uncanny and disturbing porcelain stuffed animals seemed to incarnate the happiness and sweetness of the world. Yet here they are whispering in our ears the very somber truths that remind us the flaws in our adult lives, our fears and our cowardice. The never-ending history deep in our memories, that dates back to a very long time ago.

Stories of sacrificed children, martyr angels, victims of blind bombings, forced migration; from the Massacre of the Innocents in Bethlehem to those in Nanjing or Alep, these stuffed animals recall the toys distributed to children in refugee camps. The teddy bear they lost in the chaos and panic on the road to exile or perhaps the one they never owned before.

Through his sense of humour and poetic engagement, Qi Zhuo's artistic ambition opposes violence in the world, making the lesson in humanity gained from this exhibition as emotional as it is discreet.

Text by Eric Vinassac