

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Li Hongbo: Empathizing

398 West Street, New York, NY 10014

June 12, 2021 – September 11, 2021

Opening reception: Saturday, June 12 | 6-8 PM



Li Hongbo, *Standard Space - Cuboid (Detail)*, 2021. Cast iron, rebar.
Courtesy of the artist and Eli Klein Gallery © Li hongbo

New York, NY, May 1st, 2021 - Eli Klein Gallery is honored to be presenting “Li Hongbo: Empathizing” - the artist’s third solo exhibition with the gallery, showing 10 new sculptures utilizing the mediums of stainless steel, cast iron, and rebar. Li Hongbo has received universal acclaim for his “Tools of Study” and “Absorption” series, both of which were paper-based maneuverable sculptures. Li’s mastery in metal was first critically acknowledged when, in 2017, he was awarded the coveted Sovereign Art Prize, which recognizes the most significant contemporary art from the Asia-Pacific region. As an important continuity and progression of his exploration in metal, the exhibition brings a selection of sculptures within this extended oeuvre, showing Li’s sensitivity towards materials other than the use of paper. It invites the viewers to empathize with the contemporary living experiences which are illustrated by the sculpted figures. Such exploration of mediums has become a Li Hongbo speciality reflected in his works from the past two decades.

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The “Stage” series consists of 4 stand-alone sculptures, each approximately 10 feet in height with a ballerina placed at its very pinnacle. Unlike the common expectation that a stage is a somewhat spacious platform to be performed on, these “stages” amount to only a single dot of space that connects the performer to what holds her upright. Poetically highlighting the human dilemma of existence as independent beings, and at the same time, social animals, these 4 sculptures illustrate the bitterness of life - it is a fine line (or dot) to walk in between altruism and selfishness. At the same time, the tall metal poles which are appearing merely to point towards, can actually be interpreted as an extension of the dancers’ legs - an essential body part that physically and psychologically links her to the earth - the ultimate stage that’s without boundaries.

“Standard Space” is the series title of 5 sculptures depicting human figures each hunkered down by the hundreds of thousands of rebar parts that press against his/her body from all angles. These works manifest the constant battle between the sculptor’s subjectivity (to sculpt) and objectivity (to be sculpted) as the sculptor inevitably sympathizes with what’s being sculpted. From the viewer’s standpoint, as sculptors of our own lives, we oftentimes find ourselves encompassed by the very material we have in hand - in this case rebars suggesting the civilization which has resulted from the Industrial Revolutions. Li Hongbo believes that almost all shapes were made out of these 5 standard shapes: sphere, cube, cylinder, cuboid, and cone, each of which is represented by a stand-alone sculpture in this body of work. Presented here, a seemingly primitive yet highly romanticized epistemology recalls Leibniz’s Monadology and Spinoza’s Pantheism. Li Hongbo’s order doesn’t ask for a more methodical approach, but only an open heart capable of empathy.

Ultimately, “Seasons of Flower - Rose,” the largest and perhaps the most romantic sculpture in this exhibition, demonstrates how we balance the need to exhibit and the self-discipline not to. Unlike the figures detained in a world of metal rebars in “Standard Space” sculptures, here the relaxed figure emerges to show only signs of positivity. However, Li Hongbo utilizes flowers as a metaphor that symbolizes our desire for attention which is, unfortunately, being constantly encouraged and rewarded. While we are so accustomed to the new tradition of showing off on all platforms, one must learn to deal with what is not displayed publicly.



A digital catalog with an essay by Dr. Michael Maizels accompanies this exhibition.

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About Li Hongbo

Li Hongbo was born in Jilin, China, in 1974. He earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts from Jilin Normal University, Jilin, China, in 1996. He graduated from the Folk Art Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing in 2001 and concluded his formal education with a Master of Fine Arts from the Experimental Art Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, in 2010.

His work has been the subject of solo museum shows around the world including *The Child with Scarf*, Asia Society Hong Kong Center, Hong Kong (2020); *Li Hongbo: Bloom*, Islamic Art Festival, Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (2019); *Li Hongbo: Rainbow*, China Paper Art Research Institute, Jilin Normal University, Jilin, China (2018); *Made in China - Li Hongbo Solo Project*, Museum of Contemporary Art Yinchuan, Yinchuan, China (2018); *Li Hongbo: The Plastic Models that We Have Painted*, Beijing Normal University Jingshi Art Museum, Beijing (2017); *Quand La Sculpture Devient Créature*, Musée du Papier, Angoulême, France (2017); *Ocean of Flowers*, Eight One Art Museum, Beijing (2017); *Li Hongbo: Irons for Ages, Flowers for Days*, SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia (2015); *Li Hongbo - Out of Paper*, Kunstverein Ludwigsburg, Ludwigsburg, Germany (2013); and *The World -Li Hongbo New Works Exhibition*, Found Museum, Beijing (2011).

His work has also been exhibited in museum group shows including *A Tribute to Tradition: A Tour Exhibition of Contemporary Paper Art Works*, Today Art Museum, Beijing (2020); *Clouds Gathering and Unfolding: An Exhibition of Modern Chinese Art on Paper*, Ichihara Lakeside Museum, Ichihara, Japan (2020); *Guns to Roses: From the Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection*, Maitland Regional Art Gallery, Maitland, Australia (2020); *Emerging Dimensions: Works by Li Hongbo and Cai Dongdong*, Pauly Friedman Art Gallery at Misericordia University, Dallas, Pennsylvania (2019); *Transformative Creation: 5 Artists from China*, Oscar Niemeyer Museum, Curitiba, Brazil (2019); *Havana Biennial: From Chinoiserie to Contemporary Art*, Havana, Cuba (2019); *Memento Mons - Cabinets of Curiosities*, Musée des Beaux-Arts (BAM) Mons, Mons, Belgium (2019); *Beijing: Jeollabukdo Express*, Jeonbuk Museum of Art, Jeonju, South Korea (2019); *The Splendid Language of Paper - Contemporary Art on Chinese Paper Making Culture*, Zhejiang Art Museum, Hangzhou, China [itinerary: Naples National Archaeological Museum, Naples, Italy] (2019); *A Gift to 60th Year - The First Paper Art Exhibition of Chinese Paper Art Research Institute of Jilin Normal University*, Jilin Normal University, Jilin, China (2018); *Emergence*, Toronto Centre for the Arts, Toronto (2018); *Alter Ego*, Macau Museum, Macau (2018); *The Sixth National Youth Art Exhibition*, National Art Museum of China, Beijing (2018); *Following Growth: The CAFA Art Museum Graduate Collection and Recent Works*, Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum, Beijing (2017); *Reciprocal Enlightenment*, Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum, Beijing (2017); *Deep Cuts*, Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, New Hampshire (2017); *Children of Hangzhou: Connecting with China*, Young at Art Museum, Davie, Florida (2016); *TRANS-DESIGN 2016 Shanghai Art & Design*, West Bund Art Center, Shanghai (2016); *CODA Paper Art*, CODA Museum, Apeldoorn, The Netherlands (2015); *Forever Young*, Asia University Museum of Modern Art, Taichung, Taiwan (2015); *Metaplasia - La China Ardente: Monumental Contemporary Sculptures*, Anciens Abattoirs, Mons, Belgium (2015); *FLOW_1: Italian and Chinese Contemporary Art in Dialogue*, Palladian Basilica, Vicenza, Italy (2015); *Experimental Art*, Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum, Beijing (2014); *Stacked & Folded Paper as Sculpture*, The Dennis Museum, Traverse City, Michigan (2014); *Confronting Anitya*, Palazzo Michiel, Venice, Italy (2013); *PaperWorks: The Art and Science of an Extraordinary Material*, Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts (2013); *Hot Pot*, Brattleboro Museum, Brattleboro, Vermont (2013); *All Our Relations*, 18th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2012); *Harmonious Differences - Second Experimental Art Exhibition*, Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum, Beijing (2011); *Journey of a Thousand Miles*,

ELI KLEIN

奕 来 画 廊

Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum, Beijing (2010); and *The Big Bang*, White Rabbit Collection, Sydney (2010).

Li Hongbo's work is in the public collections of the White Rabbit Collection, Musée du Papier, Asian Civilization Museum, Maitland Regional Art Gallery, Artemizia Foundation, Dr. Stanley Ho Foundation, Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum, National Art Museum of China, Wuhan Art Museum, Hubei Art Museum, Wuhan, Shandong Art Museum, 53 Art Museum, Found Museum, United Bank of Switzerland, and 21c Museum Hotels.

Li Hongbo has been the recipient of several prestigious awards throughout his career. Most recently he received the Nomination Award from the China Government Publication Awards, and in 2017 he won Grand Prize from the Sovereign Asian Art Foundation.

Li Hongbo currently lives and works in Beijing.