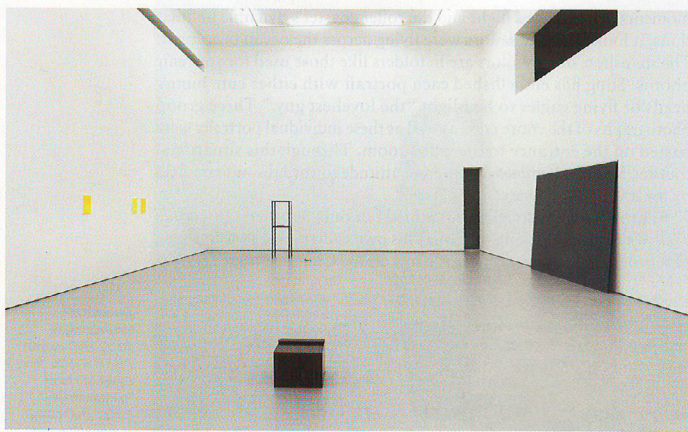


## He Xiangyu

WHITE SPACE BEIJING

Sometimes small surprises are better than big ones. He Xiangyu has previously made a life-size leather tank and reduced 127 tons of soda to coal-like residues, so I was expecting to see grand-scale works again in his latest show, "Dotted Line." Instead, he presented the series "Lemon Flavored" (all works 2014), consisting of small paintings in which the title is repeated on backgrounds of white, green, and yellow. There were sculptures, too, but again, of modest scale—for instance *R&L*, a white sock with the letter R embroidered on it encased in a small metal vitrine and another, bearing the letter L, resting unencumbered on the floor. In *Endless Copies*, a couple of mirrors have been



View of "He Xiangyu," 2014. From left: *Copper*, 2014; *Lemon Flavored*, 2014; *R&L*, 2014; *Endless Copies*, 2014.

placed face-to-face, with the date, time, and place of production of one of them, as stamped on its verso, facing the audience. While the second mirror is slightly larger, leaving a thin, reflective margin in which viewers can catch a glimpse of themselves, the piece unquestionably reveals more about the mirrors themselves than about the person standing in front of them. *Copper* offers another pairing, two sculptures in the shape of a box and a fluorescent tube that have been molded out of the titular material. The semantic difference between the two banal objects is bridged by their unity of material. *Olive Oil* is a subtle gesture, easy to miss: vegetable fat brushed onto a wall inside a square marked in pencil, the greasy liquid gradually seeping past the thin gray boundary lines.

Consistent with its title, the show was full of gaps, presenting viewers with an incomplete picture of the artist's oeuvre; the space looked almost empty compared to some Chinese art exhibitions that seem inspired by a kind of horror vacui to fill up huge, formerly industrial spaces. Furthermore, the material fragments of which "Dotted Line" was composed made sense only in the larger context of the artist's extensive practice. The "Lemon Flavored" paintings, for instance—inspired by such psychological phenomena as the "fake tongue test" and the "sweet lemon" effect, in which subjects are tricked into experiencing illusory tastes and feeling-sensations—point to the artist's obsession with the mouth itself, a fixation manifested by his use of human teeth in earlier works (*Wisdom Tower*, 2012–13), and by his ongoing project of transforming sensations that occur on the tongue into abstract imagery, as in the series "Everything We Created Is Not Ourselves," 2013–. Everything that touches the artist's palate turns into a Borromean-ring space, subjected to radical sensory transformations. These transformations are not limited to synesthesia; they also take place between materials and the syntax of the descriptive language with which we address them. Endowing materials with legitimacy through semantic paradox—usually the dialectics between lightness and heaviness—has been a typical approach for He, as seen in previous works such as *Tank Project*, 2011–13, a life-size tank made of soft tanned leather; *Fin*, 2010, a pair of ivory handcuffs; *200g 99.99% Gold*, 62g *Protein*, 2012, an egg carton made of gold-plated copper; and the famous *Cola Project*, 2009–12, mentioned above, for which the artist boiled down a huge amount of the popular beverage into mountains of dark residue that he has used as pigment for paintings in the style of the Song dynasty. Works such as *Copper* and *Endless Copies* fall into this category. Providing just a tasting of He's concerns, "Dotted Line" succeeded in leaving viewers with an appetite for more.

—Venus Lau