

CRITICS' PICKS

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Liu Xinyi

WHITE SPACE BEIJING 空白空间|北京
No.255 Caochangdi, Airport Service Road, ChaoYang District
September 6, 2014–October 19, 2014

Liu Xinyi's recent exhibition continues his excavation of visual logic used for political ends. The artist was spurred by a 1958 speech by Nikita Khrushchev about his visions for Soviet rule in Hungary. Rather than empty revolutionary rhetoric, he asked, "Isn't it better to have good goulash?" Mistrust and mocked by Mao, the bastardized Chinese formulation became "Communism is stewed beef and potatoes." With such displacements in mind, Liu takes on the imagery of now-defunct Socialist states. *One Night Back to Wartime*, 2014, for instance, is made up of twelve red stars arranged in a circle, evoking a clock's divisions but more importantly representing the twelve post-Soviet states with red stars in their former emblems that now belong to the European Union or are applying to join. Every now and then, the stars light up all at once, jumbling the spirit of celebration and revolution but also hinting at danger. *Surplus Value*, 2014, presents bright ears of wheat made of foam: life-sized replicas of heraldic imagery from twenty Socialist states' emblems; the desecralized symbols evoke ever-present questions of redistribution.

While the works appear to be humorously tackling political themes, the artist attempted in one interview to distance the work from such an interpretation. In part, Liu wants to avoid the straightforward yet shopworn role of the "dissident" which Chinese artists are offered in the West. Moreover, he eschews preset goals, instead opening up a space of experimentation where the ordinary visual logic of political imagery is disrupted and hidden possibilities are uncovered through juxtapositions and displacements.

— Daniel Szechin Ho

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Liu Xinyi, *One Night Back to Wartime*, 2014, beacon lights, timer, acrylic panels, dimensions variable.

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