

BEN BROWN FINE ARTS



NOT VITAL: *Landscapes*

22 May– 10 August 2013

Ben Brown Fine Arts, Hong Kong, is pleased to present *NOT VITAL: Landscapes*, an exhibition of the Swiss-born artist's most recent sculptures, primarily created in China. This is the first time Vital's works will be shown in depth in Hong Kong. *Landscapes* will run concurrently with the exhibition *FRANK AUERBACH: Portraits* at the gallery, both opening during Art Basel Hong Kong.

The exhibition presents three major bodies of sculptural work by the artist: the '*Lotus*', '*Cow Dung*' and '*Dali marble*' sculptural-relief series. Since 2007, Vital has been creating sculptural iterations of the lotus, a tropical flower revered throughout history for its divine beauty and symbolic potency, referenced in Greek mythology, ancient Hinduism and Buddhism. Vital has monumentalized the form in reflective stainless steel, creating unique hand-chased lotus flowers that lean against walls or stand freely outdoors. This surreal distortion is a common trope for the artist, who presents organic forms using unexpected and incongruous materials, instilling the works and the objects they represent with new meaning. The exhibition will bring together three new '*Lotus*' works, each over 3 metres tall.

Vital leads a nomadic existence, living and working throughout the year between Brazil, Chile, China, Niger and Switzerland. Wherever he resides, he aims to build a deep connection with the land and the people. During a visit to Nepal in 1990, Vital was approached by a man whose son had suffered burns by getting too close to a fire, which is typically made by burning cow dung as wood is too scarce there. Vital brought the boy to a hospital and there befriended a doctor who informed him that many of the children in the hospital suffered burns for the same reason and that the hospital desperately needed a burn unit. Moved by this encounter, Vital left Nepal inspired to help, which resulted in his '*Cow Dung*' project. He began casting 1000 unique pieces of cow dung in bronze and donated the proceeds to build the burn unit at the Nepalese hospital, and has continued the project to now work on building a school in Agadez, Niger. He recognizes the irony that while cow dung is coveted as fuel in poorer parts of the world it is discarded in wealthier nations. He is now selling it in bronze to those who would typically reject it in order to help those who value it.

In 2009, Vital established a studio in Caochangdi in Beijing, a renowned art district since Ai Weiwei first moved to the area in 2000. Vital works in a high-ceilinged, windowless studio with dramatic skylights, often with the assistance of local studio hands who are adept in the near-obsolete craft of hand-chasing. Vital sources and is inspired by materials from the region, recently discovering Dali stone from the Yunnan province in Southwest China, a marble renowned for its natural striations in milky tones of black and white that are highly suggestive of ethereal landscapes. Vital selects slabs of the marble and sets them in irregular, three-dimensional frames of handmade plaster. This is reflected in the titles of the works: *Glacier*, *Seascape*, *Mountains* and *Vadret*, the Swedish word for weather. The works are sculptural reliefs, mounted to the wall yet jutting out at irregular and warped angles.

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

Not Vital was born in 1948 in Sent, Switzerland. He studied in Paris and Rome before moving to New York in 1974. He currently works and lives in Sent, Switzerland; Agadez, Niger; NotOna, Chile (a private island owned by the artist), and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Vital's work has been exhibited internationally at venues including the Ullens Centre of Contemporary Art, Beijing; Museum der Moderne, Salzburg, Austria; Kunsthalle Wien, Austria; The Arts Club of Chicago; Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany; and the 49th Venice Biennale.

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