

BEIJING

Long March Space

LIU WEI

SHADOWS

For almost two decades, Beijing-born artist Liu Wei has been attempting to visually crystallize the impacts of technological advances and industrialization on China's relentlessly morphing urban environment and society. Liu's ambitiously staged, large-scale solo show at Long March Space saw the continuation of such thematic engagements, with the introduction of bold, new formal elements.

The most recently added trope to Liu's oeuvre is kinetic movement, as seen in his sculptures in the show. The largest work on display, *Period* (all works 2018), greeted viewers with a slow-moving cavalcade of objects large and small. A constellation of globular forms, suspended from the ceiling from specially designed tracks, recall planets rotating in the solar system. Meanwhile, on the ground, cubes of varying volumes and bent sheets of metal slid across the tops of the three-dimensional, geometric platforms on which they were stacked. All in all, there were almost a dozen components, each voyaging at their own speeds.

While the introductory text to the exhibition suggested that *Period* is evocative of a construction site, the work is far too sleek and well-composed to bring to mind a dust-covered, cacophonous setting. Instead, the installation is reminiscent of Beijing's built environment and the energy it exudes, with its countless futuristic buildings, constant motion and slew of information. The movement in the work is precisely mechanized, regular and predetermined, evading any sense of the organic. While in constant flux, the objects suggest that the relationships in our contemporary society have become scripted and transformed into computer-mediated encounters.

At the entrance to the main gallery was *Shadows*, which acted as a gateway to *Period*. The installation consists of a grouping of iron and steel sheets, which form towering blockades, and which are partially spray-painted in black, with dark, earthy tints. Some stand straight, while others are gently sloping. Between the pieces of metal and the shadows that the sheets cast on the floor and on each other, the work creates an enclave, dislocating the viewer from their surroundings.

The employment of shadows to overwhelm and confuse, which gave the show its title, continues in *Airflow*, a kinetic installation with green, yellow, white, black, blue and pink concrete-cast "balloons." The seemingly light and playful objects are strung from the ceiling via a machine that gently moves the cluster above a mirror that is placed on the floor. The mirror becomes a canvas for a composition of shadows and colorful patterns formed by specks and flakes of pigment, which are scraped off as the balloons graze one another. As in *Shadows*, the silhouette of the objects becomes



an integral part of the work, except this time it is in motion. The resulting multitudes of ever-shifting visual possibilities keep us mesmerized and entertained—much like the empty distractions afforded to contemporary society by the countless channels of information.

Moving much quicker than any of the other kinetic works, and encapsulating the disorientation that underlies the entire exhibition, was the show's simplest, yet most powerful piece, *Friendship*. A rapidly rotating globe, belonging to the artist, is placed on a vintage desk. Three monitors were fixed overhead, as if illuminating the globe, and show blurred video footage of Beijing's blinking lights at night. Appearing like stars, the lights are also reflected via the mirrors placed in the desk's two open drawers, as if bringing the skies to the viewer. The installation conveys an intimacy lacking in the other works, due to its human scale and incorporation of Liu's personal possessions. Within an otherwise disconcerting exhibition, this work suggests that we are connected through shared experiences. The majority of us who live in urban centers are familiar with the glamour and brightness of a city at night, even if it obscures the light from the stars in the sky.

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