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Arthur Ou Solo Exhibition "To Preserve To Elevate To Cancel"

Press Release

To Preserve, To Elevate, To Cancel. These three concepts define the German word "aufheben," a term used by Walter Benjamin in his essay "Thesis on the Philosophy of History." It seems fitting that the tri-fold meaning of this term would resonate in Arthur Ou's work – a practice that incorporates architecture and sculpture within the realm of photography. Central to the exhibit is a large replica of a Marcel Breuer fireplace. It anchors the gallery space as an empty vessel which in turn provides a platform and ornamental base for Ou's *Double China* ceramic works. Both of these pieces ask questions about how things are created and manufactured to convey notions of a globalized culture. It is no accident that the Breuer-inspired hearth is as much an ornament and symbol of Western prosperity while the *Double China* pieces suffer from an inability to function based on their hyperactive design. In Ou's *Untitled (Earth Works)* photographs, formations are built from dirt and then placed on lacquered bases, locating them as sculptures and collected objects. The earthen forms at once reference notions of the landscape and ancient Chinese scholar rocks. For *Untitled (Mirror Lake) #1* and *#2*, Ou brought copies of well-known Chinese ink paintings to the site where American photographers such as Carleton E. Watkins, Edward Weston and Ansel Adams have taken some of the most iconographic images of the American West. For Ou, taking on the persona of "nature" photographer was a personal transformation. Not only was the pilgrimage to Mirror Lake a conflation of past and present but it also created an act of cancellation. The manufactured landscape of the East and the iconic landscape of the West cancel each other out in a pictorial juncture of dislocation. Quiet anxiety informs Ou's work; an anxiety laid bare by Ou's effort to locate his work within the space where two cultures meet. Perhaps the only possible resolution lies in the grammar of Ou's presentational language, a language that he employs effortlessly, -- of building, preserving, elevating and canceling -- only to build again his own thesis on a philosophy of history.

Shannon Ebner