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Installation view of YU FAN's *Gifts* (2017) at Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York, 2017. Photo by Chen Xue. Courtesy of Asia Contemporary Art Week, Beijing Contemporary Art Foundation and Sundaram Tagore Gallery.

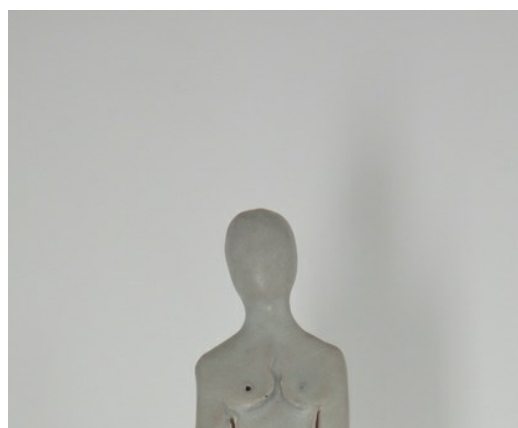
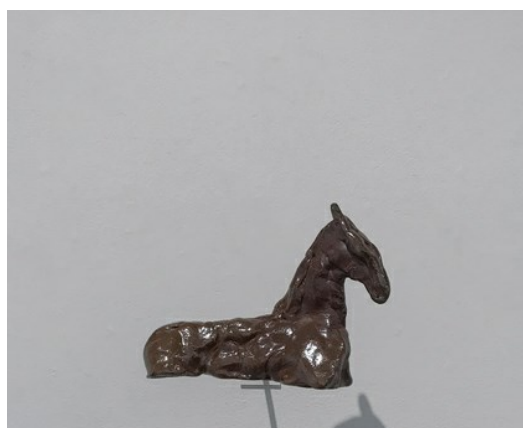
YU FAN

MIMI WONG
SUNDARAM TAGORE GALLERY

CHINA USA

As part of this year's Asia Contemporary Art Week, and co-presented with Beijing Contemporary Art Foundation's inaugural Creative China Festival, Beijing-based artist Yu Fan mounted an exhibition of 20 sculptures at Sundaram Tagore Gallery in New York. The ceramics on show were drawn from a set of 80 hand-sized sculptures, collectively known as *Gifts*, made during the artist's month-long residency this year at the School of Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts in Boston. To create a body of work of that size in a relatively short period of time was a departure for the artist, whose practice normally involves a great deal of sketching and planning beforehand. For Yu, these new, diminutive works represent an exercise in "not thinking."

Yu contrasts his new pieces against the classical Western sculptures that he describes as being imbued with individual identity—whether animal or human, god or king. Instead, he sought to mimic what he has observed in Asia, highlighting "the sculpture as an object." Indeed, an everyday quality permeates the shapes of a horse, a small bird, an elephant trunk and a headless torso with splayed legs. In the gallery, various animals and human bodies protrude from the walls, as if floating in mid-air. The concept for the pieces, as well as the method of presentation, came directly from the Boston's Museum of Fine Arts and its world-renowned Asian art collection. Yu drew particular inspiration from the museum's traditional Indian sculptures, as perceptible in the abstracted human forms of a woman's body, a crying child and a crawling baby.





YU FAN, *Gifts*, 2017, soda fired ceramic, 20 works, dimensions variable. Photo by Mimi Wong for *ArtAsiaPacific*.



YU FAN, *Gifts*, 2017, soda fired ceramic, 20 works, dimensions variable. Photo by Chen Xue. Courtesy of Asia Contemporary Art Week, Beijing Contemporary Art Foundation and Sundaram Tagore Gallery.

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Though the dimensions and scope of Yu's new work gesture to art from India—a country that the artist has visited four times, and whose literature and philosophy he has taken upon himself to study—the subject of the sculptures themselves are “from my memory and from my feeling,” he said. The intimacy and personalization of the pieces thus prevent them from appearing like stagnant reproductions. His “self portrait,” the only piece displayed on the floor, reveals an animated visage, mouth agape in laughter or wonder. The expression perfectly mirrors the joy on the sculptor's own face as he recalled the time he spent in the studio, where each morning brought unexpected surprises. “Every day is really fresh,” he proclaimed. On some days, he would create six new sculptures; on others, none. A single sculpture could take anywhere between five minutes and an hour to complete. This playful and relaxed approach can be seen reflected in the crude, smiling figurine of a reclining person. Allowing the clay to mold itself freed the artist from the beleaguered trappings of his previous projects and the time-consuming urge to constantly revise his pieces. “The whole process is really suffering,” Yu said of his past practice; this time around, he was able to find joy in the creative process.



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Letting go of self-judgment became a meditative experience for Yu, who aimed to clear his mind and be guided by the material, rather than consciously sculpting the clay. Although the exhibition bears no title, Yu said that if he were to come up with one, he would call it “Gift.” The most immediate meaning refers to the sculptures as a gift from the artist to the viewer. Yet, the real gift might be the sense of acceptance and renewal that the artist has given to himself. Yu viewed his recent artistic progression as a new beginning, though he remains open to all possibilities. “One thing is sure,” he mused. “I want to make things [by] not thinking too much.”

Yu Fan's solo exhibition at Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York, is on view until November 4, 2017.

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