

May 2014

Artforum

"Critic's Pick: Phillip Lai, Camden Arts Centre."

ARTFORUM

London

Phillip Lai

CAMDEN ARTS CENTRE

Arkwright Road

April 11, 2014–June 29, 2014

"Besides," Phillip Lai's current exhibition at Camden Art Centre, is an ascetic wraithscape. Humble and subdued, the London-based sculptor here transforms everyday objects into shell-like abstractions. His Spartan works bear a resemblance to offerings fashioned from the waste of a back alley—only scraps remain. In *Skin and bones* (all works 2014), for instance, a coterie of cutlery snuggles in the folds of a coarse blanket, while *Me and my hyperbole* makes use of a white plastic crustacean, umbrellas, and a translucent polyethylene drop sheet. For *Untitled*, strips of car tires grace the lid of a trash can. In each case, Lai displays a bare structure—a sculptural program founded on a gesture of recovery and recollection.

The title of Lai's exhibition suggests a paradigmatic aesthetic: objects placed apart and in comparison to one another. This idea is most clear in *Certain pressures*, where aluminum cylinders teeter on reflective Perspex. The cylinders were manufactured in a novel process in which each was spun at high velocity while being pushed against a tool. The mirrored surface doubles these urn-like objects, and the gallery space extends downwards. The act of manufacture, spinning, exposes a bottomless form. The effect appears to empty Lai's urns of all content.

Hollowed out, Lai's sculptures appear to have been sucked bone-dry. His work is best viewed on a spring evening when shadows are long and melancholic. With the sun at your back, light and shadow rake across these ghostly surfaces. Stroked by time, these objects are animated as if shipwrecked by the evening air.

— Andrew Witt



View of "Phillip Lai," 2014.