

NOT VITAL

HEADS

PARIS MARAIS

22 May 2014 - 26 Jul 2014



[Opening in the presence of the artist on Thursday 22 May from 6:30pm to 8:30pm](#)

Traversing the hinterland between abstracted and representational forms, *HEADS* is a new body of work by Not Vital that also represents significant elements of Vital's artistic progression since creating a studio in China in 2008. The depiction of heads, be it human or otherwise, has recurred often throughout Vital's practice, both in sculpted, drawn and painted form – including a remarkable series of painted portraits that Vital has been working on since the early months of his time in China.

In December 2009, Vital began the painted body of work that foreshadows these sculptural forms. The artist began to execute a dynamic series of painted portraits, very simply focusing on those figures that surrounded him everyday – his assistants, friends and fellow artists in the so-called 'art village' of Caochangdi, on the outskirts of Beijing. In these portraits, Vital often chose to cut out other bodily parts altogether, simply focusing on the head. With a dark, monochromatic emphasis that mirrors *HEADS*, Vital rendered his painted portraits swiftly and sketchily, yet creating a remarkably potent likeness of the sitter. Although these sculptures remain vastly removed from the paintings in terms of their smooth, polished finish, they also share a strongly reduced use of descriptive features and demand close scrutiny. Similarly, these sculptural *HEADS* are some of his most abstracted forms to date, at times possessing only subtle and scarcely expressed facial features which deny individualised identification, instead bearing a weighty, iconic universality of being. This series does however encompass more identifiable depictions, including *HEAD: Li Gao* (2013) and indeed the artist himself, *HEAD: Self-Portrait* (2013).

Presented without a base or plinth, the hollow sculptural forms are placed directly onto the floor, grounded into the earth. This pared down means of presentation further reinforces the impression of these works being reduced to their simplest state of existence. The paucity of detail across the *HEADS* also recalls the earliest types of artistic depictions, the simplified representational articulations of prehistoric painted and sculptural forms. Yet despite these allusions to such archaic art historical predecessors, the artist has rendered this commanding depiction with an aesthetic finish that undoubtedly belongs to this age. The highly polished PVD (Physical Vapor Deposition) coating of the sculpture results in a lustrous, mirror-like surface that encompasses both convex and concave sections. Creating a simultaneous 'push/pull' force, at certain points the surface seems to draw in reflections in a vortex effect, whilst at other points, these are abruptly cast outwards. The viewer is thus disconcertingly both drawn towards and lost in the countless reflected highly polished planes of the spherical form, and yet simultaneously also repelled from the sculpture by its cool, clinical finish. It is such effects, generated by new advances in material technology, which fascinate the artist. The ease with which these can be explored and experimented with in industrialised China remains a continuing source of interest to Vital.

The physical presence of these sculptures creates a particularly distinct atmosphere within the space they inhabit. Their solemnity creates a silence that envelops the surroundings, they possess an air of strong authority yet do not overbear the viewer. Disarmingly, they seem to refute categorization and do not appear to belong to any set time and space. Both individually and collectively, they simultaneously recall primeval iconic figures of the past, though their mass and weight places them firmly in the present and yet also, with their technologically advanced finish, they could belong to a time of the future. Although one can approach the sculptures closely, there is a feeling that they shall always remain at some immeasurable distance away.

Rukhsana Jahangir, 2014