



Above: Wenda Gu, *Forest of Stone Steles: Retranslation and Rewriting of Tang Poetry, 1993–2005*. 50 slate elements and 50 ink rubbings, installation view. Below: John Van Alstine and Caroline Ramersdorfer, installation view of “Confluence of Opposites,” with Van Alstine’s work on the left and Ramersdorfer’s on the right.

Chinese and English. These poems, authored by several writers, are considered Chinese literary treasures on the order of Shakespeare’s importance to English or Goethe’s to German.

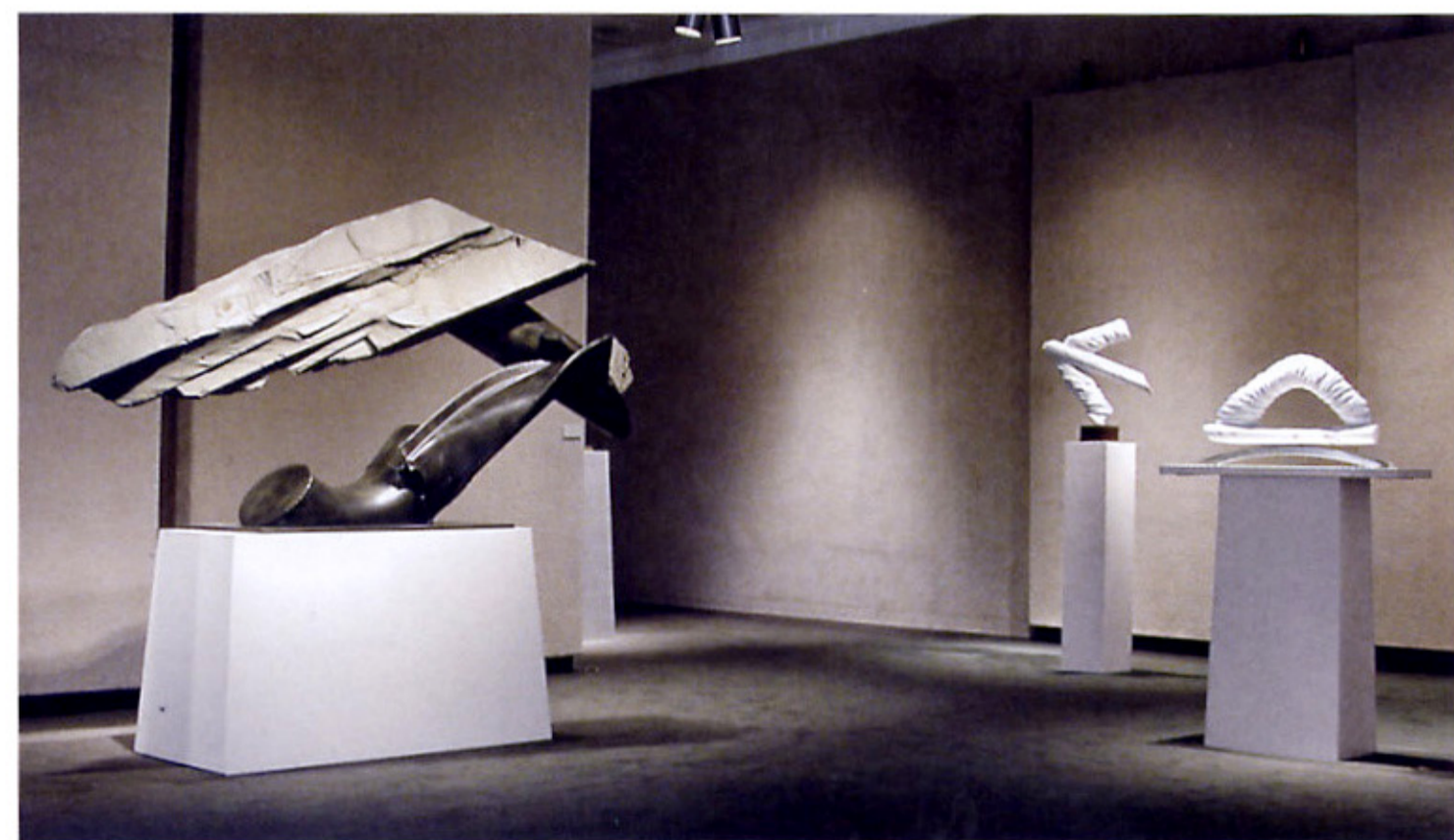
To summarize the content: a presentation of the poem in Chinese characters appears at the top, followed by an early 20th-century English translation by Witter Byner and a transliteration of each English sound into Mandarin (represented by the prominent calligraphy carved on each stone). These characters are then freely translated back into English. Finally, Gu presents an English title and an explanation of the process in Chinese characters. It is noteworthy that the layout forces receptive repositionings on the viewer’s part since one must read the Chinese from one angle and the English from another.

With all the meaningful and indeterminate layers written into Tang poetry, Byner’s earnest translations must be understood as rewritings that miss many meanings. The transliteration offers an absurd reinvigoration of the original by creating cross-cultural “post-Tang” poems. Even the Chinese characters here are not straightforward since Gu invents his own structure and the recombination is not immediately legible. He hires cross-literate scholars to make “post-Tang”

English translations that are humorous, dark, and surreal, with free-associative word play and accidental aesthetics.

Despite the presentation of words immutably “written in stone,” Gu proffers ideas made impermanent and destabilized by purposeful mis-constructions. As markers of global hybridity, the monoliths show that cultural exchange is inherently and inevitably a misunderstanding before it is anything else. Perceiving that these ponderous monuments carry nonsense is to get the joke. To Gu’s credit, the viewer remains fascinated while trying to understand the intrinsic comedy.

—William V. Ganis



LAKE PLACID, NEW YORK
John Van Alstine and Caroline Ramersdorfer

Lake Placid Center for the Arts
John Van Alstine and Caroline Ramersdorfer met several years ago at a Midwestern sculpture symposium and discovered a shared affinity for natural materials and assemblage, but while Van Alstine defies gravity, Ramersdorfer embraces it. Judging from their recent show, a “Confluence of Opposites” occurs as much within each artist as between them. In these delicate new works, Van Alstine and Ramersdorfer have honed in on a clear and assured imagery, distilled from years of reflection and exploration.

“Confluence,” which consisted entirely of smaller works, included several of Van Alstine’s “Sisyphean Circles.” His fascination with the myth of eternal and futile punishment came about when a friend observed him pushing a not-so-mythological stone across his studio. Van Alstine turned to Camus’s re-interpretation of the myth as a metaphor for the creative process and produced a series of pieces that pay homage to the artistic life. *Sisyphean Circle XVIII* is dominated by a simple but elegant steel circle, crossed by an industrial remnant with a red patina. From this hangs a piece of raw New York bluestone. Van Alstine suspends his pieces before welding them, and in this work, the sense of weightlessness persists and creates a nail-biting tension, softened only by the perfection of the circle. In an otherwise monochromatic piece, the surprise appearance of color speaks to the ability of the creative process to reward, perhaps even to dumb-found.

Van Alstine draws on the elegant motions of the human body in many of his sculptures, as in the almost kinetic *Hula IV*, where the weight of stone and steel, pirouetting around a red steel circle, cap-

tures the sweeping movements of a female dancer. *Fleché*, an interpretation of a fencing maneuver, sets contrasting materials at opposing angles to mimic the lunge of the body, the transfer of energy from arm to foil to partner.

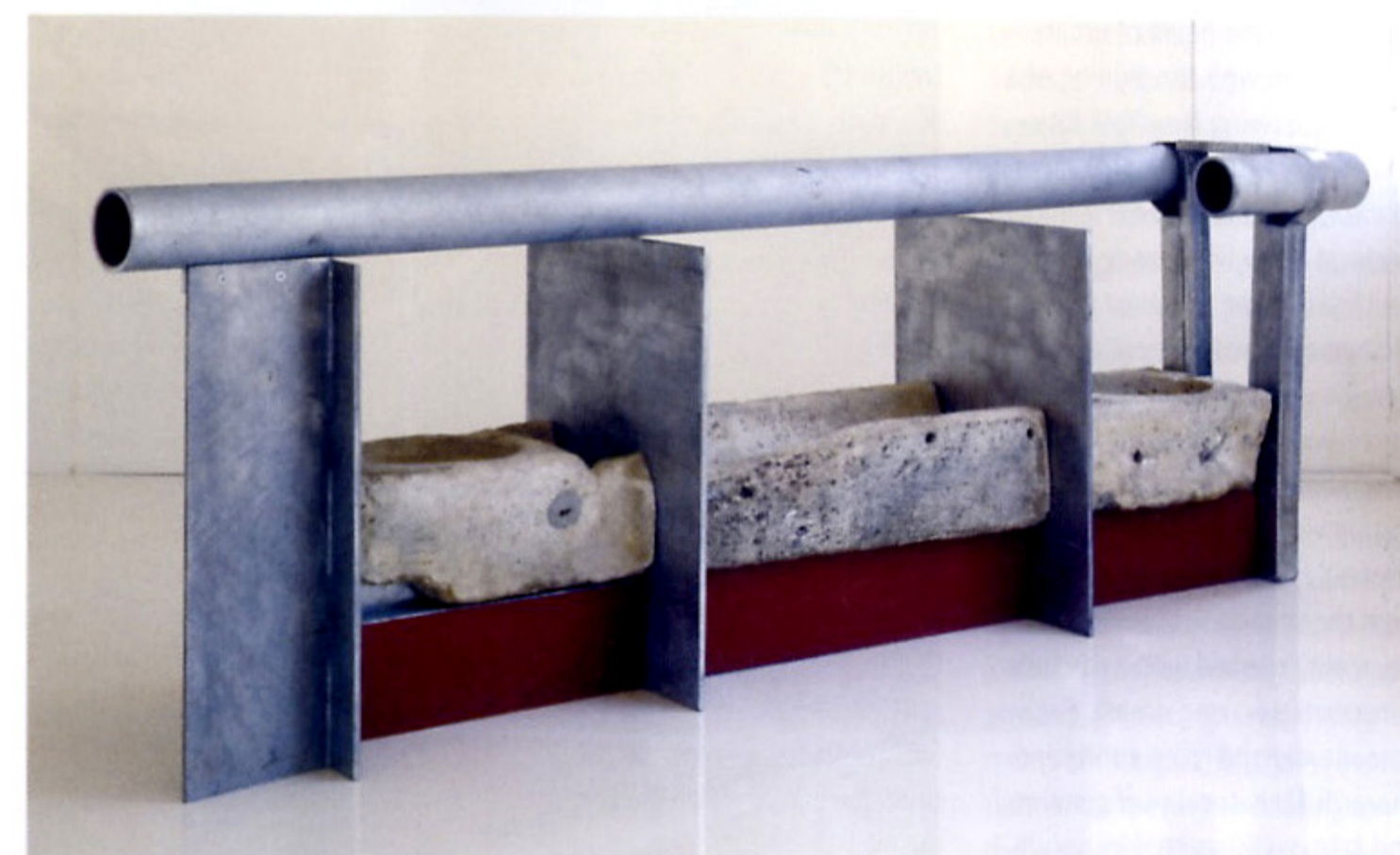
Austrian-born Caroline Ramersdorfer draws on Eastern religions and their interconnected view of the world, which links the smallest of causes to the most significant of events. In “Confluence,” this notion was primarily expressed by the series “Inner Views,” which explores physical and spiritual interiors. Each piece consists primarily of five uniform, diamond-shaped slices of marble slipped into a steel stand and lined up like marching soldiers. Unlike Van Alstine’s constructions, these works are subtractive. Ramersdorfer dug into each slab to create an interior space crossed by a lattice of columns. When lined up together, the pieces pull deep into a multi-layered and complex interior, both earthbound and ethereal. The “Inner View” works range from as large as nine feet square to less than nine inches. *Inner View Reflected*, falling somewhere in the middle, is unusual for its rough edges and the thickness of the slices. The opening, carved with dense ridges, functions like the mouth of a sink hole, relentlessly drawing the eye into its depths.

In the much smaller *Inner View V*, the slices are thinner, more finished and right angled. A compact, granite variation on the theme, it has a flatter and darker aspect, more reminiscent of the subtitle given to other works in the series, “cell structures.” Light also plays an important part in Ramersdorfer’s work: it appears to originate from within the sculptures, illuminating intermediary spaces, creating depth and interest.

Fragmental II is part of another series, characterized by thickly carved, accordion-like arches. Tactile and soft, these works come closest

to converging with Van Alstine’s, transcending their hefty materials to achieve a sense of motion and uplift. Visitors to the summer games in Beijing will have another opportunity to examine the confluence of opposites between these two artists—this time through large-scale works: both Van Alstine and Ramersdorfer are installing monumental sculptures in Olympic Park.

— Jackie Keren



Anthony Caro, *Chalk Line, 2006*. Stone and galvanized and painted steel, 124.5 x 367 x 91.5 cm.

NEW YORK
Anthony Caro
Mitchell-Innes & Nash

Anthony Caro keeps up with the times. This was also said about Edgar Degas well over a century ago, but the meaning was not quite the same. Like Degas, Caro has maintained a strong formalist bent. But Caro’s formal acuity is less about sublimation than it is about a form of confrontation. Whereas Degas—not unlike Cézanne—would sublimate his conflict with the industrialization of the late 19th century, Caro is more direct. Rather than repressing the impact of the world and the advent of recent

technologies, Caro’s galvanized forms seek a paradoxical extension of this state.

Another point worth noting is that the meaning of formalism has changed in the past 40 years. I doubt that one can look at these recent sculptures and simply concede that the form is the content (as was once so often proclaimed). The majority of the large-scale pieces in Caro’s recent exhibition include the word “passage” in the title: these painted steel conduits and asymmetrical habitats

evidence of compacted spaces that exist between one form and another.

In *Slow Passage* (2006), *Long Passage* (2007), and *Lock Passage* (2007), among others, Caro seems less interested in the repetition of earlier metaphysical forms of balance or in the transformation of weighty materials into lyrical phrases than in creating post-industrial forms of sculpture that push from one compartment to another within an elongated system of signifiers. These “Passages” suggest a need

allude to the changing course of things, functioning as psychological metaphors for how we think about form in the post-9/11 era.

Whereas Rosalind Krauss’s expanded field may still be a focus of architecture as practiced by Zaha Hadid, Richard Meyer, and Steven Holl, it no longer occupies the same pervasiveness in sculpture that it held three decades ago. Historically and psychologically, the human condition has retracted toward a less expansive, more traumatic position. Thus, what I see in Caro’s works are trans-monumental habitats that express a recent form of transport through the

for security and safety, but on a somewhat ironic level.

When I use the word “ironic” in relation to Caro, I am careful to admit that this aspect of his work is most often concealed, but rarely avoided—at least, if we are speaking about the works of the past 15 years. This period, incidentally, marks the flowering of Caro’s remarkable career, much like Philip Guston’s figurative, expressionistic paintings transformed him from a quintessential formalist into a major figure in the history of art. I feel much the same about Caro as revealed in these new sculptures.

—Robert C. Morgan

TOP: JULIE MAGURA, JOHNSON MUSEUM / BOTTOM: COURTESY THE ARTISTS
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