

it's an eloquent parallel to the interplay between the conventions of both artistic practice and quotidian life at the core of Wurtz's work. Here, five of the artist's recent sock sculptures are displayed on pedestals, echoing the verticality and poor materiality of *Bunch #4*; each comprises a single sock – useless, only half a pair – topped with a black or white shoelace tied in a bow, presented like a shabby gift. These are balanced atop small, formal constructions of marble, wood, metal and wire, which temper the scrappiness of the socks; or, perhaps, the socks temper the formalist artistry of their supports. All untitled with straightforward descriptive parentheticals – such as *Untitled (Red with green stripes sock)* (2016) – these works are characteristically humble, with an earnest appearance that belies their humour and internal logic. They generate a sense of balance between the attentively hand-wrought and the casually discovered, elegance and banality, lightness and weight.

Like much of Wurtz's work, the pieces on view at Lulu share a handmade quality that suggests a tender fascination with rubbish, particularly that which will fail to decompose, as a kind of cultural footprint. Yet, if the artist preserves what we reject, he is equally committed to considering what we need. As far back as 1973, the artist delimited his purview to what might be considered the essentials of living in a formative drawing that notes: 'Three important things: 1. eating 2. sleeping 3. keeping warm.' These are the three categories from which the artist draws his materials, transforming them into art – a genre that is, arguably, inessential. However, Wurtz's art – perhaps because of its common materials, or the subtlety and generosity of his approach – feels intrinsic to a life fully lived.

Dana Kopel



## PROPOSALS TO SURRENDER

### Ming Contemporary Art Museum, Shanghai, China

As I was standing on a stairway signing the agreement that would allow me to enter 'Proposals to Surrender', someone squeezed by and touched me lightly on the arm. I raised my head to catch a woman's friendly smile. In no time, she had slipped into the exhibition to become one of the 'birds' in Eva Kot'átková's *Becoming a Bird (Short Staged Attempt to Escape a Reality)* (2016). To see the show, visitors must sign a three-copy contract and present their ID cards: rites that serve as preparation for entering a highly prescribed space where seemingly random encounters are pre-conceived and carefully planned.

'Proposals to Surrender' is an exhibition of live works by artists from Bangkok, Berlin, Los Angeles, Melbourne, New York, Paris, Prague and Shenzhen, organized by the independent curator Biljana Ciric – a veteran of Shanghai's art scene. The space is filled with performance props and *mise en scène* including plants, wooden furniture made from recycled museum materials and a subtle fragrance composed by Norwegian chemist and scent researcher Sissel Tolaas. These elements are the remnants of two 'occasions' hosted by the artist Isabel Lewis during the exhibition's opening and a few days subsequently. Lewis, who trained as a dancer, stages her works as social gatherings in which she dances, DJs and speaks directly to the audience, aiming to evoke the format of the ancient Greek symposium. Responding to each specific crowd and occasion, Lewis improvises her movements, speech and music to generate something 'between a bar, a lecture and a salon': a convivial atmosphere for bodily relaxation and sensory stimulation beyond the visual. In Shanghai, for example, the artist spoke to a pregnant lady about the sensations she was experiencing.

The plants from Lewis's 'occasions' provide an ideal setting for Kot'átková's human 'birds'. For the piece, the artist asks a group of performers to enact the process of transformation into a flying animal without recourse to a script – by means, solely, of bodily movements, facial expressions and sounds. I caught sight of the girl who had passed me at the entrance, mid-transfiguration amongst a flock of companions.

The exhibition is also filled with a conspicuous assortment of sounds,



**Above**  
Eva Kot'átková,  
*Becoming a Bird*  
(*Short Staged Attempt to Escape a Reality*),  
2016, performance  
documentation

**Below**  
B. Wurtz, *Bunch #4*  
(detail), 1996, metal,  
wood, wire, enamel  
paint, plastic bags

many of which emanate from Ana Prvački's *Daily Practice, Tuning* (2016). The artist has invited local musicians, both professionals and amateurs – playing instruments that included, when I visited, guitars, accordions and flutes – to carry out their daily practice routines in the space. At a certain moment every day, the musicians take up their spots, as if on a public square, and perform simultaneously, without any attempt to harmonize their instruments' varying pitches and melodies. This work is a brilliant attempt to deconstruct the exhibition setting as a highly ritualized site.

'Proposals to Surrender' presents many ingenious practices that challenge the art industry's commodification of artistic thinking. Yet, it also requires a significant level of investment, in terms of both time and money, on the part of the host institution. In this sense, perhaps, it offers a wry commentary on the typical mode of contemporary art consumption in China – specifically in Shanghai, where many museums and institutions favour spectacular shows with mass appeal. 'Proposals to Surrender' poses valuable questions as to what constitutes not only a meaningful exhibition-viewing experience but also meaningful museum practice in ways that challenge both audiences and the local institutional context as a whole.

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