

From Pot to Plate: Eli Ping at And Now

JUL-AUG 2020

By Israel Lund



Installation view: *Eli Ping, And Now*, Dallas, 2020. Courtesy And Now.

On View

And Now

June 6 – July 4, 2020

Dallas

It could be said that without light there is no beauty, and Eli Ping's exhibition at And Now in Dallas is a shining example of this. The exhibition's announcement image shows an orange sun hanging above a placid body of water. It's a picture of a single, static moment within a transitory experience, and one that encapsulates the tone of this show.

The round metal sculptures in this untitled exhibition are nothing short of beautiful, and much like the act of viewing a sunset, they bring reverie and introspection through their silence and presence. The show consists of seven sculptures displayed on a table that is situated in the middle of the gallery space. Made from pewter, these objects are formalist in their very nature, seemingly existing for their own sake with their circular shape dictated by the interior of the pot in which they were melted. Each piece is a varying shade of yellow, with a few showing some brown, orange, and purple tones as well. Created by melting and re-melting the same metal over and over, the works retain the quality of liquid metal that has been hardened, while also appearing to melt in real time. They are forms that reflect their past and present states simultaneously.



Installation view: *Eli Ping, And Now*, Dallas, 2020. Courtesy And Now.

Because these pieces are round and mostly flat, they first read as plates—especially since some include leaf-like metal elements that could resemble food. Ping displays these seven plate-like sculptures on a long table, which is draped with a large piece of canvas in lieu of a tablecloth. One sculpture in particular that's placed in the middle is more reminiscent of a serving bowl than a plate, with its higher sides and deeper center. A single sculpture that acts as a point of distribution for idea consumption. Despite the arrangement of these sculptures not adhering to traditional place settings, the set-up is nonetheless inviting. The exhibition of these objects becomes a proposition for communal conversation between the artist, the objects, and the viewers, creating an environment for explication and listening.

A popular disparagement of formalism as an art-making practice is that it is too self-serving and ineffectual—that it concerns itself with aesthetics rather than foregrounding ideas that address a specific subject like geopolitics, identity, etc. However, because of this didactic reticence, art made in a formalist manner allows for a more open approach to making as well as viewing. Rather than the artwork being a substantiation of a certain idea set, it promotes a more speculative experience on the part of both the artist and the viewer, giving way to a new means of communication for the parties involved: an aesthetic common ground for postulation and projection. Without an upfront motive in regards to meaning, formalist objects create an occasion where one can experience nuance and subtleties of material, and thus begin to extrapolate a larger meaning. The question then develops into what else can the ideas and knowledge gained from looking be applied to?



Installation view: *Eli Ping, And Now*, Dallas, 2020. Courtesy And Now.

Ping's exhibition of artworks that don't make explicit their intent is an opportunity, for any who are willing, to become unmoored from conventional viewing expectations and knowledge production. It is an offer to engage with objects that risk uncertainty. Objects that present further questions could be the start of a bottom-up infrastructural transformation that favors open discussions, with self-reflection, silence, and constructive discussion being large parts of this. Communication is advocated in this exhibition in two forms. First with the self, which is represented in the recursive melting of metal, an act similar to mulling over an idea, and in a group, in the installation that resembles a table setting which is a place to present these ideas for possible feedback and refinement. With these sculptures that resemble many things, plates and the sun being just two examples, and of which foment silence, discussion, and idea exchanges that can be applied elsewhere, it's reassuring to know that tomorrow is a new day.

Contributor

Israel Lund

Israel Lund is an artist based in Brooklyn.