

Not Vital: 十五

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New York, NY: 10 February 2012: Sperone Westwater is pleased to present new sculptures by Swiss sculptor, Not Vital. The exhibition, entitled, 十五, is the artist's sixth solo show at the gallery. In these works of marble, steel, plaster, gold, and coal, Vital presents a distorted, fantastical universe, amassed from snippets of life, dreams and glimpses of memory. These sculptures recall landscapes, animals, figures, and the cosmos. Vital pulls us into a half-familiar world, while forcing us away from our everyday perceptions. The works in 十五 (Chinese for the number "fifteen") have been executed in China, where Vital has traveled extensively since 2008. Vital has sourced materials, including marble and plaster, and discovered techniques, such as hand-welding chased steel, that are unique and exclusive to the country.

In Southern China, Vital discovered Dali stone marble, the surface of which resembles paintings, often of landscapes. These marble "landscapes" emerge in delicate greys and blacks, akin to Vital's monochrome palette. The artist embeds these stones in irregular, hand-crafted plaster forms that act as both frame and plinth, resolutely thrusting the Dali stone into the world as an object.

At his studio in the Caochangdi district of Beijing, Vital has produced stainless steel sculptures such as *Cüq* (2011), *Moon* (2010), and *Tongue* (2010). Their smoothly polished surfaces are highly reflective, and one's perception of the work changes vastly depending on its environment. Fragmented colors and forms are reflected in the variously sized craters of *Moon* and in the long, muscular contours of *Tongue*. The form of the tongue has been present in Vital's work since 1985 when he was in Lucca, Italy, and cast cow tongues in bronze. The shape – raw, elegant, and erotic – pleased him, as did the transformation from daily foodstuff down to "high" artwork. Over the years, Vital has simplified and enlarged the tongue to various heights. Over seven meters high, the stainless steel *Tongue* is a totemic, architectural structure.

Counter-balancing the smooth stainless steel pieces in 十五 are the rugged, brittle blocks of Chinese coal carved into small-scale mountain shapes. The tension of scale brings focus to the work's material and form. Vital juxtaposes the solidity and strength of a mountain by representing the subject in a material that is brittle and fragile, and in doing so, reinforces his tendency towards the bizarre or surreal.

The series entitled *Hanging & Weighting* (2010) presents bulbous plaster sculptures that, although abstract, refer to organic forms or suggest a figure. These pieces hang precariously from stainless steel rods, balanced only by their distributed weight. The rods, as well as a stainless steel base, act as framing devices -- the rounded forms contrast with the geometric, minimal steel pieces. In *Twinned* (2011), animals appear in the form of headless bodies.

Vital's *Golden Duck* (2009-2011) is a solid 18-Karat gold Peking duck, a delicacy in China, and a symbol of Beijing. The use of gold alludes to religious iconography, but the symbolic significance referred to in the *Golden Duck* is contradicted by Vital in its installation. Here, the duck is hung from the ceiling by its neck and swings from a thin string, creating a tension.

Not Vital (b. 1948, Sent, Engadin, Switzerland) studied in Paris and Rome before moving to New York in 1974. At present, he lives and works in Sent; Beijing; Agadez, Niger; and NotOna, Chile. Vital's major recent solo exhibitions include *Plateau of Humanity* at the 49th Venice Biennale, Italy (2001); *Not Vital: Agadez* at Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany (2005); *Not Vital* at The Arts Club of Chicago, Illinois, (2006); *Not Vital: Schlafendes Haus* at KÖR Kunsthalle Wien public space Karlsplatz, Vienna, Austria (2009 – 2010); and *Not Vital: Full On* at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China (2011).

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For more information and images, please contact Maryse Brand at 212-999-7337 or maryse@speronewestwater.com.