

# A Review of Hu Qingyan's Sculpture

by Richard Deacon

Repetition is a strategy for Hu Qingyan; using an industrial guillotine to cut more or less equal lengths of pipe and welding the ends of the resulting pod like shapes so that they become separate and individual capsules (*The People*); thousands of carefully folded golden gift papers (*Mountain of Gold*); spiraling loops and structures made of randomly cut and joined lengths steel box section. These are all a bit on the dry side, however it gets more interesting when repetition is teamed up with an interest in representation (and the title of his show at Galerie Urs Meile, *Reincarnation in a New Guise*, reflects this).

Hand painted 30m rolls of oil cloth that duplicate simple check and stripe patterns you might find in the market (*A Roll of Striped Cloth*, *A Roll of Plaid Cloth*); the documentation of a single lump of clay as it is variously modeled and re-modeled to duplicate a bewildering variety of different source objects – natural, cultural, industrial, kitsch, humble etc. The task is fascinating and, apparently, endless. In this show the photographs displayed only a small part of the sequence, no beginning and no ending. The objects were only united through the medium of clay and the skill of the artists as each became the next, scale being a consequence of the constancy of the available lump, the material itself remaining curiously mute throughout its transformations, as capable of becoming something else at the end as at the beginning of the sequence (*Narrative by a Pile of Clay*). The size of the pile in *Firewood* is presumably determined, like the lengths of the rolls of painted oil cloth and the motif determining the next modeled object, by some external standard. Like the rolls of painted cloth, we take it on trust that it is the same all the way through, a carefully ordered log pile. We believe that the artist is honest. However, in this case, each log is carved from a larger log to look like a branch or trunk which has then been cut and stacked. The task is immense and absurd. The physical bulk of the pile, its mass, is there – both actually made of wood yet also looking like wood, somehow vanishing behind its own image, uncomfortable in its own skin. Potentially, such a stack is fuel for the fire, prepared and ready to become something else – energy. It's a kind of battery waiting to be connected. Hu Qingyan's doubling up, making a real stack from look-alikes, suggests that image and object, substance and shadow, are similarly connected, a power source waiting to be tapped.