

# ARTFORUM

NOVEMBER 2014

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

LUCIO FONTANA  
PETER WÄCHTLER  
AVERY SINGER  
GUTHRIE LONERGAN

ARTFORUM

\$10.00





## Lee Ufan

CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES

This summer, for the annual exhibition of contemporary art in Louis XIV's gilded Château de Versailles and the surrounding formal gardens of André Le Nôtre, South Korean artist Lee Ufan installed a group of ten new sculptures from his "Relatum" series, which began in the late '1960s, complementing the marriage of regal symmetry and natural beauty that defines the work of the seventeenth-century landscape architect. *Relatum—The Arch of Versailles* (all works 2014), a chromatically neutral rainbow fashioned from a band of stainless steel some fifty feet long, marks the passage from the mirrored interiors of the palace to the lush expanses of the surrounding park. Punctuating the framed vantage point, two anthropomorphic stones, rough, unfinished, and just about the size of portly seventeenth-century courtiers, sparkle with nuances of color and luster. A carpet of steel, equal in length and width to the arch, runs through its center, down the gravel path, subtly directing visitors' vision and movement. "I used big stones and big sheets of steel," Lee has explained, "but they do not impose their presence on the site. On the contrary, the stones and steel open up the site, the space, the sky, the forest, and the environment shows itself, and tells its story."

The wind rustling through the grass inspired *Relatum—Wavelength Space*, forty undulating sheets of stainless steel that run down the Great Lawn. Citing the sway of the green blades, the artist arranged two processions of twenty sheets of steel, one laid down and rippling over



the grass, the other standing upright like a billowing wall, faintly reflecting the passersby. With the grand Latona Fountain not far below, the steel sheets seem to flow downward, like a stream of water. For *Relatum—The Shadow of the Stars*, Lee covered an oval at the center of an overgrown clearing with a decadent expanse of white marble gravel. Placing seven rough granite stones atop this pale palette, he enclosed the shape with thirty-six sheets of steel, leaving enough space between each for visitors to slip easily in and out. Beside each stone, he painted a shadow or, often, two overlapping, one in a dark gray, as if cast by the noonday sun, and the other in a light gray, as if thrown by the light of a blue moon. As curator Alfred Pacquement says, Lee's painted shadows, which also overlap with the real ones that fall across the work on clear days, "remind us that he is a painter."

There is something humorous about the two stout granite stones that seem to be trying to peer toward each other, around a rectangular wall of steel that Lee planted between them for *Relatum—Dialogue X*. Likewise, a conspiratorial air envelops the four stones grouped atop four steel panels, as if in treasonous conversation, of *Relatum—Four Sides of Messengers*. In the grassy heart of the Bosquet des Bains d'Apollon, a meadow rarely open to visitors, the artist placed a large stone atop a square sheet of steel, five feet below ground. Framed by dark, loose dirt, like an open grave, *Relatum—The Tomb, Homage to André Le Nôtre* juxtaposes man-made precision with the organic, a signature of both Lee's work and Le Nôtre's.

Inside the château, *Relatum—Cotton Wall* sits at the bottom of the group-entrance stairwell. Cotton, pulled in winter-window-display-like tufts, covers a metal structure as a small stone balances on top, and another nestles in the plush surface below. One senses an intention to evoke the celestial, but the work's heavy theatricality does not allow for the intuitive grace of Lee's materially larger and more solid outdoor works. Yet in his engagement with this historic site, the artist consistently displays a practiced diplomacy via an intense formality that nonetheless seeks pleasure, echoing the founding philosophy behind the gardens.

—Lillian Davies