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Review of Two Rooms: Wang Wei by Katherine Volk

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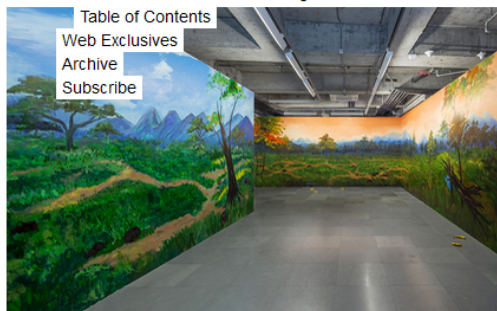


TWO ROOMS WANG WEI

KATHERINE VOLK
EDOUARD MALINGUE GALLERY

HONG KONG CHINA

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Installation view of WANG WEI's "Two Rooms" at Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong, 2015. Courtesy Edouard Malingue Gallery.

Earlier this year, Edouard Malingue Gallery inaugurated its new and expanded gallery space in the bustling central business district of Hong Kong. For its international launch, which coincided with the city's Art Basel week in March, Edouard Malingue chose to present a solo exhibition of Beijing-based Wang Wei, who specifically created an immersive painting installation that currently fills the walls of the gallery. Entitled "Two Rooms," the show is a continuation of Wang's zoo-inspired installation projects, exploring the assimilation and appropriation of nature in an artificial environment.

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As a member of the "Post-Sense Sensibility" movement—an experimental underground group in China, active in the late 1990s and early 2000s, whose practices ran against the rigid grain of institutionalization—Wang's artistic style developed with an impromptu quality, which brought his work into the territory of performance and installation art. In 2007 Wang visited the Beijing Zoo, where he became fascinated with the wall designs of its animal enclosures, which included painted depictions of natural habitats, from the desert to the jungle to the tropics. It is an experience that has had a lasting impact on his subsequent artistic practice. Who was the wall décor intended for? Was it for the animals in the cage or the human visitors? Inspired by the fictional representations of natural habitat and fabricated spaces found in the zoo, Wang began a series of installation projects that appropriate such habitat enclosures. The outcome of these projects have been exhibited at various locations, including Vienna's Kunsthalle Wien Project Space in 2007 and, more recently, Guangzhou's Observation Society in 2013.

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WANG WEI, *Two Rooms* (detail), 2015, wood, paint and aluminum, 300 x 1,554 cm. Courtesy Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

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For "Two Rooms" Wang reproduced painted designs from the baboon house at Beijing Zoo. Walking into the gallery, visitors also encounter a radiator trapped within a metal cage. Emphasizing the unnatural dwellings forced upon animals at the zoo, the radiator is reminiscent of those placed inside the animals' cages to maintain temperatures similar to their natural habitats during Beijing's freezing winters. The caged radiator at the gallery is a stark reminder that, despite the intent to recreate the natural environment of the animal, the warmth emitted from a man-made appliance will never be a complete substitute for the heat of a jungle or desert.



WANG WEI, *Two Rooms* (detail), 2015, wood, paint and aluminum, 300 × 1,464 cm. Courtesy Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

The tedious repetitiveness of the fabricated environments is highlighted by the similar way in which two time periods (day/night) and the four seasons are portrayed. The paintings, spanning nearly 15 meters in length, engross the viewer in the space and compel them to engage with the imaginary and artificial habitats that Liu has created. Vast lands painted onto the wooden boards give the false impression of an endless space that reaches out beyond the mountains, to a place that we will never be able to fully access as captives within the confinements of a gallery space.

By recreating backgrounds of animal cages, within the white walls of Edouard Malingue Gallery, Wang decontextualizes the zoo habitat in order to shed light on the ludicrousness of such pseudo-natural environments. Utilizing the architectural layout of the gallery, Wang creates an immersive world that visitors can experience, making "Two Rooms" a truly ambitious departure from traditional gallery exhibitions.

"Wang Wei: Two Rooms" is on view at Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong, until April 15, 2015.

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