

Edouard Malingue Gallery

馬凌畫廊

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20 September, 2019

Curatorial text by Ying Tan

London 4pm  
Beijing 11pm  
Vancouver 8am

Listen | Wang Wei

Venue  
St Saviour's, Aberdeen Park,  
N5 2AR, London, UK

Opening  
26 September | 6 - 8 PM

Date  
27 September – 3 November 2019

Opening hours  
Mon - Sat, 10 - 6PM  
or by appointment

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The feeling of an existence in different time zones is familiar to anyone who has recently taken a long-haul flight. A state I exist in now, recovering from jetlag, as I try to pull myself back to Greenwich Mean Time, my mind wanders to what I could be doing in these different time zones, cities, almost parallel universes. Somehow my experience seems like an absurd fiction, sci-fi in its own right, that an alternate 'me' could be having porridge, eating Sunday roast and singing Jay Chou at a karaoke somewhere else.

How intricately one can be affected by the vestiges of time's push-and-pull. An inescapable, physical force, the possibilities which exist in the slippages of time and space. I think of my own surroundings in a different location's time. How time and space can continue to amorously engage or confuse us.

Wang Wei's interventions often exist within these slippages of physical manipulations of space, which can be experienced in a real, visceral way. Walking into a room, for example, something we can all imagine regardless of the actual dimensions or fixtures of the room itself. Although just as time zones bend and take affect on our bodies and minds, Wang Wei's works somehow changes the self-awareness to our relationship of the spaces we occupy.

Wang Wei's multi-disciplinary practice has unfolded as an extensive, sustained investigative journey of, around, into and about space itself. This is informed by his experiences as a member of the Post-Sense Sensibility group of artists active in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The Post-Sensibility shows were a series of self-organised underground exhibitions characterised by radical, DIY-style tactics and unrehearsed forms of experimentation.

'Listen' is a work originally staged in 2006. It comes from the context of a series of works which look at the specificity of space. Starting from 2001, where he designed 'Close Contact', a mechanism for forcing viewers to weave through a small, glass-walled labyrinth that was barely wide enough to squeeze through sideways. Developing these interventions through a range of dramatic approaches, for example, 'Temporary Space', which he made in 2003, where Wang Wei invited ten labourers to work for him on a project which took the form of a process of construction and demolition over the course of a three-week period. The workers collected 20,000 old bricks, which they delivered to the exhibition space, to construct a space within the space measuring 100 meters squared, 4 meters in height. Once completed, the structure was dismantled upon the end of the exhibition and the bricks taken away to be cleaned and resold.

He believes that we are often quite unaware of the impact that the spatial proportions of our surroundings exert upon us, that this is a direct result of how we experience the violent and unpredictable age in which we live: the protective barriers we seek to erect, the safe distance we maintain. It is precisely the elasticity of this 'safe distance' that Wang Wei uses as his physical material. These works are as much about the physical labour of making space as it is about

inhibiting it. Where does our gaze sit within the work? How do we even approach this question? Fast forward to 2019.

'Listen' is a site-specific work which has been remade for a grade-listed building in Islington. Physically, this work involves a large frosted rectangular glass box in which a person stands, eavesdropping at regular intervals on the visitors. Lit from within, the person's silhouette outlines through the glass, making them, in turn and instead, the subject of attention.

Subject and object are blurred as is audience and participant. Existence in multiple layers of reality and conjured realities. Who is doing the watching and who is being watched. Again, I find myself asking how our gaze sits within the work and again, I am confounded by how to even approach this question.

Rooms, boxes, bricks and people – these already existing forms all seemingly never really intend to be more than what they are, but for Wang Wei they bear a particular visual, social or aesthetic value. Our gaze, and the ways, reasons and directions in which we choose to focus, is active, it demands attention to the situational and historical and doesn't exist without context. But as Wang Wei's works demonstrate, if we conflate a single factor, such as re-aligning the gaze, what results is transformed. His practice is intuitive rather than overly concerned with the historical ideologies of surveillance. What is heightened is our relationship in space, a heightened awareness mixed in with the artifice of an already artificial environment of a temporary art gallery.

It is in these heightened moments whereby I encounter Wang Wei's works that I am even more self-aware of the double realities that exist. Time zones and the many fictional realities that might occur at every hour, the jetlag which ensues, both ordinary and magical at the same time.