

Conversation with Sinta Werner by Carson Chan
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CC

Can you tell me about how you became interested in the relationship between two and three dimensional representation? I'm particularly interested in the two strains within this relationship that you have developed, one that explores collaged space, the other exploring illusionistic space.

SW

It started in 2003 when I was making geometric abstract paintings and experimenting with stripes and perspective lines. I was trying to find a way out of working with illusions in painting and wanted to connect it with other traditions. In this way, I experimented with trying to make three-dimensional canvas forms seemingly flat. This flux between the dimensions was my exit from painting and entry into architectural installations.

CC

What is the relationship between the collaged images of space and the spatially illusionistic installations? Is there a difference between spatial and visual for you?

SW

In the collages there is a lot about the visual experimentation that lead to the spatial installations. The pieces all work in different ways but often I start off with a collage and develop ideas from that. The collages, you can say, function as a sketch. The glass installation ,Displayed Window' I made for Showreel Project also started from a 2D image, and I wanted to bring the actual glass pieces back into it as a way of seeing the relationship between the perception of the dimensions.

CC

I'm curious as to whether your work has agendas other than experimenting with visibility and perception, because much of it reminds me of Gordon Matta Clark's work. Like Matta Clark, you've devised ways to cut chunks out of buildings, but I'm wondering if you also share his political motivations as well. He went to Paris in 1968 and took classes at the Sorbonne and sat in on Guy Debord's lectures about how superstructures can be subverted by reinventing a new

visuality of the urban experience. As naive as his understanding of Debord may have been, when he returned to New York, and started blowing out windows with a gun as a gesture of subverting the architectural and institutional powers that were there, his formal manipulations were always informed by a non-formal cause. Are there such non-formal motivations behind your work, or are you working with visuality and perception within their own boundaries.

SW

My works are not politically motivated but I am always questioning institutions. I'm not talking about institutional critique, but the space of the exhibition itself. I use the exhibition as a place to question architectural space. For example, the work I made at Coma Gallery, Berlin, (Empfang, 2008) was a literal doubling or mirroring of space. I placed an imaginary mirror at the end of their reception desk by building replicas of everything mirrored in MDF, colored paper and cardboard. Visually, it was uncanny – the receptionist was not mirrored, but conceptually, it questioned the importance of the reception area in an art gallery. In the same way that I wanted to break the hierarchy between image and architecture, I wanted to create a tension and dialogue between the gallery, its workers, and the visitors.

CC

Does your work only exist in traditional art exhibition contexts, like galleries or museums, or can they also exist in space in general. Could they be outdoors?

SW

I have never made an installation outside of exhibition spaces but I'm now planning one in a park.

CC

So the work that you do is not necessarily connected to the perceptual habits engendered by exhibition space, but could exist anywhere?

SW

Yes, I guess so. I still need to try it out because I've never worked outdoors before. CC Your work produces strong architectural ideas, but do you ever imagine them in relation to buildings? Have you had experience with architecture firms?

SW

I have never really worked with architecture itself. I studied art and I've always come to architecture reflected through art. I wanted to work with the architecture that was reflected by art.

CC

I'm curious as how you would characterize visual versus physical experiences. In *Der Subversive Raum* (2009), the way these categories become fluid seem to approach some contemporary ideas in architecture. Gravity and verticality is challenged in a way not dissimilar to some of Daniel Libeskind's projects. At what point would you say your work desires to become architecture?

SW

My process is fundamentally different from that of an architect's as I always react to a space that is given rather than creating a new space from scratch. I also don't think about practical demands the way buildings need to – I love that art is completely impractical. I would say that Libeskind is approaching art rather than the other way around.

CC

Can you walk me through the development of *Disjunction* (2007)? It was made for your MFA exhibition for Goldsmith's College, right? SW Yes. For this work, I wanted to mirror whole pieces of the building that housed the show. This was my first real installation, and it was pretty great to be able to do it in a strong space like this Victorian bath house in London. From a particular standing point at the entrance of the room there seems to be a mirror placed in the middle of the room. But instead of a flat mirror, the mirror image is built in three dimensions. The viewer himself is missing in the reflection. I was interested in how the viewer's experience of the space became their performance of it – while being absent. This sensation of disorientation is something I'm continually interested in, particularly how I can construct something fixed, like a constructed perspective, to destabilize our habits of viewing.

CC

I've been thinking that art, in a way, is all about tricking people. We're often tricked into entering the artists' imagination. With your work, it seems that you provoke a sense of self-awareness in the viewers, making them conscious of their position within their spatial context. In this way, when the experience of your work becomes internalized, the piece almost disappears.

SW

Your description reminds me of Claire Bishop's idea that installation art is fundamentally about decentering the self. I made a series of collaborations with Markus Wüste where we incised a circle into various surfaces of a given room, say the wall, or door, and this circular cutout is turned within the hole creating a moment of slight misalignment. We were interested in making a circle in the wall that is like the circle you see when you focus a manual camera. In this work, as the viewer tries to recenter the view, the room appears to skew.

CC

It's funny you mentioned cameras earlier because much of your work deals with the technical manipulation of two-dimensional media. Today, more often than not, images are altered not by scissors and scalpels, but with Photoshop. It seems almost inevitable that software will one day be the prime mediator between lived and represented reality. When altering representations of reality through Photoshop becomes common and habitual – I use it everyday even in just color correcting and cropping random snapshots – we start to experience reality through a Photoshop logic. I was recently in Oslo, and a friend commented on the particularly clear, cloudless, blue sky there, saying that it looked Photoshopped. The logic of the software, rather than the lens of the camera, is becoming this invisible apparatus that mediates our experience of the world.

SW

I just recently started using Photoshop in the development of my installations. It's been allowing me to develop ideas about what the limit of possibility is in my work. I made a sketch on Photoshop where the center of the image swelled like a bubble – I'm wondering if I can build this now. I'm also planning to realize an installation involving the idea of a materialized double exposure, which is an idea developed through Photoshop. Digital media and perception is definitely an area I would like to think more about. I definitely want to start exploring video and projection, which is also territory I have never explored.

CC

The machine-like precision in which your installations are carried out and the exacting nature of your geometric projections lend the work a neutral, matter-of-fact quality; In effect, before the viewer disappears, you, the artist also disappear from the experience of the work. SW I quite like that actually.

CC

Is your work really absent of your biography? SW I've been asked this before, and the only biographical detail that relates to my work was this game I used to play by myself. I would stare into a mirror, and imagine being on the other side. I think the fascination between the perceived separation between logic and magic is one that I've retained from that moment.

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