

A Conversation with Asta Gröting & Ming Wong

29 June 2023

Ming Wong:

Asta and I, we both had our first show with carlier | gebauer in the gallery in Markgrafenstraße more than 10 years ago. Asta in 2011 and me in 2012. And now, over 10 years later, we are making a combined two-person show, which marks both our friendship and also our time as artists working in Berlin over the last 10 years, when everything is changing so fast. This is an opportunity for us to take stock of and reflect on what it means now to be an artist working in Berlin, which is the city of artists.

Asta, I wanted to ask you something because I know the point that started our discussion together was that you were doing a 3D scan of your studio, which then led you to make a 3D print of the space, the miniature studio space.

Asta Gröting:

There are different techniques for 3D scanning and printing and I was very interested in finding out how much fine detail could be shown. The most detailed 3D scans turn every surface into a cloud of millions of points that are precisely positioned in a 3-dimensional space. Each point has coordinates on an x-, y- and z-axis. There is a company that I found in Berlin that does architectural scans and they did a scan during an entire day that captured every corner and then filled all the holes in the dataset. Then, I wanted to build a kind of dollhouse out of it, or some sort of pocket studio which you could put in your pocket, to be independent. The situation of my studio in the Uferhallen was also kind of precarious.

It's better to have a small studio with a lot to say, than to have a big studio and to be only producing big sculptures. Sometimes a small sculpture can be much more interesting. My most vital sculpture is only 2 centimeters: a hole in the wall.

MW:

When I came to your studio, I was very struck about the scale, the size of the space. It also looked like a film studio or a theater set because you have film lighting, you have props, you have curtains. You also have a backstage in a way, where you have your behind-the-scenes with all your tools and equipment, and then there's a kind of showroom space where you have a white wall and it's very much like the theater of an artist's life. I saw it as a kind of scenography and that's how I also think of our collaboration in the gallery space.

I was inspired by the film that you made, when you made a micro-camera to film the 3D model of your 'pocket studio'. You made a pocket film with a mini pocket camera. I've been looking at it on the phone as well as on a computer screen, but in our discussion, we thought it would be interesting to try and show it on a large scale so that we could explore the contrast between the real space, the virtual space, the pocket model, and then placing yourself, the viewer into that kind of theatrical space. This would actually highlight the question about the relation between our bodies, our physical being and the space around us, our working space. In our case it's the studio, because this is something which is fragile, which is being threatened to become miniaturized through external forces - the cost and the commercialization of our physical space. And for me personally, it is really looking at it like a performance, like a theater, and that the space becomes a character, it becomes a protagonist in this ongoing tragedy-comedy-drama of an artist's life in Berlin.

AG:

Ming, I'm very grateful about your reflection about my studio and your idea to translate it within the gallery to a scenography and to make your impression of my studio - and what you understand of it is completely different from how I understand it. To translate it within the setting of the gallery to a scenography with light, sound works, sculptures, videos and collages. So, you translated your impression of how you view my studio, into the show concept.

I look forward to not only the color and light of your new film, but also the performance with the counter-tenor who will interpret a passage from the opera Nixon in China, written in 1987 by Alice Goodman, which refers to the shift in power in the world which we are now experiencing again.

MW:

We started talking to each other a few months ago when we knew we were going to do this show together. I remember we went for walks and you showed me around some of the different sites in Mitte where you made the casts from some of the façades and a lot of the stories you told me about your curiosity about the places, about the sites, and the 'ghosts' of the spaces. It was a kind of a performative experience that gave me an extra dimension to the work.

AG:

We have known each other for around 10 years. On our walk-through Berlin the last time we were talking about the strategy of the city, something that our work is also about. As artists, we are depending on the strategy of the city, more or less. In a way, our work depends on the size of our studios, but not the quality. This is not dependent on it. I think if I were to lose this studio, then my work would have to adapt to the size of any studio. Luckily, I'm doing videos, performances and sound works, so in theory I could do other works irrespective of the size of the studio, but I couldn't do the large façades anymore.

MW:

Coming into your studio, I was very surprised that there was actually a large amount of so-called "emptiness". Something that could be seen as a measure of the conditions of how Berlin artists could have been working ten years or more years ago and how the city has changed in that aspect. The ever-decreasing comfort zones. When I saw your video of the pocket studio I was struck by the color, the light, by the translucency. Everything looked like skin, like flesh, organic and with the interplay of light and shadow and color you could actually see that it wasn't solid. It looked like it was melting, like it was something that could change its state from solid to liquid to gas and back again. This potential to be deformed and reformed was very clear to me in the video. I think this is why I couldn't get it out of my mind for a while and why I wanted to make a new video inspired by this and by the theatricality of the studio, and this will inform how I will shoot it. I want to also work with color to make the studio appear tangible, that you could touch the emptiness, or that it could be solid in its nothingness, through the techniques of cinema.

I will make some collaborative performances throughout the exhibition to have traces left afterwards. Like the memory of a sound or of a figure that walked through the space that remains.

AG:

You just used the word “comfort zone”. The biggest comfort zone for me is friendship. This is something you seldom find amongst artists. And this is much more important than a studio, a big friendship is more important and beautiful than a big studio. We both have our studios in our heads. I really believe so much in your work and I have never seen anything that was not interesting from you. So, this is a very invigorating process to put all our conversations into forms of work in the gallery space.

MW:

Thank you, Asta. When I think about this creative energy and flow between us as friends I am confident that this would somehow translate very well to the audience in the exhibition.

AG:

...and the show's name is *Fortune*.