

PIFO

偏锋新艺术空间
PIFO GALLERY

A to B and Back Again

an interview with the artist Benjamin Appel

由 A 到 B 周而复始——艺术家本杰明·阿普尔访谈

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About the Author

Adrian George has degrees in Dance and Theatre Studies as well as Fine Art with Art History and graduated from the influential MA curating programme at the Royal College of Art in 1998. In 1999 Adrian began his curating career at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York and shortly after he became Assistant Curator at Tate Modern and was involved in many large scale projects and touring exhibitions including: *Performing Bodies; Century City; Juan Muñoz Turbine Hall Commission: Double Bind; Surrealism: Desire Unbound and Barnett Newman*. As Curator: Exhibitions and Displays at Tate Liverpool from 2002 Adrian produced projects with the Liverpool Biennial (2002 and 2004). His exhibition: *Art, Lies and Videotape: Exposing Performance* was the first Tate project to explore the presentation of performance in the gallery and the exhibition catalogue was nominated for an AXA Award in the same year.

Currently Deputy Director and Senior Curator with the UK Government Art Collection Adrian has commissioned site-related artwork in Europe, South and East Asia and the United Arab Emirates. He has made exhibitions and display projects in places as diverse as Chicago, Dublin, Hong Kong, New York, Shanghai, Skopje and Taipei. Adrian delivers a post-graduate programme in applied curatorial practice currently in conjunction with Goldsmiths College. He is a member of the International Association of Art Critics, trustee of the Bomb Factory Art Foundation (a charity providing art spaces and studies in north London), a selector of the Welsh Pavilion for the Venice Biennale 2017 and a selector for the 2017 London Art Fair's De'Longhi Art Projects Artist Award. He writes and curates independently, recently publishing *The Curator's Handbook* with Thames & Hudson which has been translated into Japanese, Korean, Russian with the Chinese version being launched in Beijing in March 2017.

关于作者

艾德里安·乔治 (Adrian George) 拥有舞蹈与戏剧研究、艺术史等多个学位，并于 1998 年获得皇家艺术学院的策展硕士学位。1999 年，艾德里安在纽约的新当代艺术博物馆开始了他的策展生涯，之后他回到英国担任泰特现代艺术馆的助理策展人一职，参与了众多大型的展览及巡展，其中包括：律动的身体 (Performing Bodies)；世纪城 (Century City)；Juan Muñoz 为泰特“涡轮车间”展厅所打造的《双重束缚》 (Double Bind)；超现实主义：渴望自由与巴内特·纽曼 (Surrealism: Desire Unbound and Barnett Newman)。艾德里安于 2002 年起出任泰特利物浦美术馆的策展人，策划了利物浦双年展 (2002、2004) 及众多个展与群展。他策划的“艺术、谎言与录影带：探索行为艺术 (Art, Lies and Videotape: Exposing Performance)”是泰特第一次尝试在美术馆空间内展示行为艺术，展览画册于同年获得 AXA 奖提名。

目前，艾德里安任英国政府艺术收藏副主任兼高级策展人，曾在欧洲、东亚、南亚以及中东等多个英国驻外场馆订制艺术作品，也在芝加哥、都柏林、香港、纽约、上海、斯科普里、台北等多地策划展览和艺术项目。他目前协助金史密斯学院设计了应用策展实践硕士课程并授课。他是国际艺术评论协会及炸弹工厂 (The Bomb Factory) 艺术基金会 (一家于伦敦北部提供艺术场地和学术研究的慈善机构) 的成员，并担任 2017 威尼斯双年展威尔士馆和 2017 伦敦艺博会德龙艺术项目 (De'Longhi Art Projects) 艺术家大奖的评委。他利用业余时间独立策展及写作，Thames & Hudson 出版社为他出版了《策展人手册》一书，是其艺术类畅销书之一，并被翻译成日、韩、俄语，其中文版于 2017 年 3 月在北京面世。

A to B and Back Again

an interview with the artist Benjamin Appel

Adrian George July 2017

In advance of the launch of his first solo exhibition in China, *Flowerbed in the Cellar* at PIFO Gallery, Beijing, the artist Benjamin Appel discusses his work with London based curator and writer Adrian George.

Adrian George (A): Your practice is very much about space, your physical relationship to space and existence within any given space. I wondered therefore, how the two PIFO Gallery residencies have affected your work, your practice and your approach to you your current exhibition?

Benjamin Appel (B): Yes, that's right. I think it's developed gradually. It's one of those things I do because 'I can't not do it'. I'm rather slow and need a lot of time to reflect and work. I believe that if you consistently do what you want – follow your instincts – then the result will be very close to what you want.

Being in Beijing for extended periods of time has been very important in the development of this exhibition particularly. It's great to have the luxury of space and time to prepare for the exhibition and I really value the support I've received from PIFO Gallery.

A: PIFO Gallery was designed by Han Wenqiang of *archstudio* practice in Beijing. It's an interesting space to curate as the design is quite open plan and sightlines are offered from above to below, below to above and into the various spaces. I imagine this is an exciting space for you to work in, ideal for your paintings as well as the sculptural installations. How have you approached the space? Do you spend as much time there as you do in the studio, which I think is a drive away from the gallery?

B: Han Wengiang's design is great! The spaces are very open and conversely, they are also very intimate spaces at the same time. What I'm attempting to do with the space now is to create a total installation. The individual pieces are autonomous and yet fragments of a whole. It is very important that every piece is complete in itself and has the strength to stand alone. And yet, every piece on display has to be presented as fragment. Through the placement of the structures, an intermediary space arises between the two spaces at hand. This describes its own space and simultaneously opens the space that is already present. For me, it's very important to be in the gallery spaces as often as possible. I had plenty of time to think about this exhibition in Germany. Now it becomes concrete.

A: One of your previous texts reads like a series of instructions for creating your installations or for directing someone's perception of a space. In our early conversations I mentioned Yoko Ono's *Instruction Pieces* – where the work exists, from the artist's perspective anyway, as short texts setting out the parameters whereby the reader could/should create a/the work of art or a performance. I also mentioned Bruce Nauman, where, in an early work, he is shown delineating the perimeter of his studio space. Both, to me, seem relevant to your practice. Andreas Beutin

references the work of Mondrian when writing about your paintings in his essay *Thinking Negative Space*¹... I wondered how you felt about these comparisons and references?

B: The works of Yoko Ono, Nauman and Mondrian are very important for me. There are so many artists that are important. Ono and Nauman have a very political presence. I think that this is an important difference. My work is more apolitical. My work is what you see. Concrete, plaster, chairs, tables, paint and a video with fish. When I have to paint, I often think of Claude Monet. I often think of the works by Francis Alys, Bas Jan Ader, even the pictures of Peter Doig. Yesterday I saw a very nice piece by Gillian Wearing. I'm pleased by these comparisons and references. Without these artists, my work probably wouldn't have happened. In relation to my more recent video work I think of *Der Lauf der Dinge* ("The Course of Things") – a Peter Fischli & David Weiss's film from 1987.

A: Andreas also references the use of everyday objects in your sculptures. I would go a step further and suggest that these are often mundane objects, that you have consciously selected the simple, utilitarian items for inclusion in your work. There is no over-design, no ulterior motive to these objects – to put it simply 'they are what they are', a paraphrase of the 'nothing more than what it is' idea set out by Dan Flavin and Frank Stella that Madeleine Frey references in her essay on your work. I'm intrigued to know the process by which these ubiquitous elements are transformed into your highly aestheticised and strict sculptural installations? It is an almost alchemical transubstantiation of the base into something of worth... something a great deal more than what it is.

B: Yes, you're right. However, its not just objects, it's quite similar with the space. The space is there. It exists. When I find an object that interests me, then I understand it as an object. Not in the sense of something ready-made. Now I ask myself the question of how this object can be united with the space. What happens when I put the table in the corner? Gaston Bachelard wrote that 'a piece of furniture is a barrier, a wall covering a roof'.² I don't evaluate the objects. For me they remain what they are. The pictures are paint on canvas. Concrete remains concrete. A fish in an aquarium remains a fish in an aquarium.

Your comment on alchemical transubstantiation I find very good. I think of artists like Joseph Beuys, but also to the deep-field photographs of Gordon Matta-Clark. I do not want to see any sublimity in the concrete. Not in the oil colour either. I only work with it. The floor of the gallery is made of concrete. I have a chair. I would like to combine this with the gallery. So I construct a second concrete floor.

For my work the material is very important. The things are what they consist of. The image is not an image of rectangles. The image is colour that happens to be placed on the canvas in a series of overlaying rectangles. The material is not a medium – it is content. The object "flowerbed in the attic" is a concrete slab and a stool. Not the abstraction of a concrete slab and a stool. The object "flowerbed in the cellar" is a drywall and 5 metal objects. Not the abstraction of a drywall and 5 metal objects.

¹ Beitin, Andreas *Thinking Negative Space*, in the exhibition catalogue *Den Keller mit Beton füllen (Fill the cellar with Concrete)* Galerie der Stadt Sindelfingen am Sonntag, 2017

² Bachelard, Gaston *La Poétique de l'Espace (The Poetics of Space)*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1958

Objects = shape, material and space
Paintings = shape, material and space
Text = shape, material and space
Video = shape, material and space

The things are what you see.

A: This way of describing how you put elements together bring to mind ideas of the *chimera* or the combines of Robert Rauschenberg. Does that have any synchronicity with your practice?

B: Yes, it's very important. With Robert Rauschenberg the goal was a reunification of artistic visual reality with the reality of life. This is an important distinction to the other material artists. When I remove a fragment from a concrete slab and place it on a stool, I take away the stool's function as a stool. Instead of taking up space, it becomes the carrier of a new space. You could say that I'm looking for the simplest intervention to remove an object's significance. Rauschenberg studied with Josef Albers, who is also very important for my work.

A: During your residencies in Beijing have you seen works by Chinese artists that have had a resonance with your work, or that you find interesting?

B: I'm fascinated by traditional Chinese art. The role of the subject and how space is handled is extremely interesting. There was always a very strong separation between subject and object in European art. The space in which the people were depicted was always some sort of backdrop or staged scene. Artists such as Caspar David Friedrich were able to move away from this tradition. Chinese artists recognized this challenge much earlier.

I believe the influence of traditional Chinese art on contemporary global art is very strong. This is about the simple gesture that can cause such a great effect. As an example of this 'light touch' in terms of art practice in China, just a few of days ago I saw a very impressive work – a constructed machine that, with the help of conveyor belts and rollers, very slowly carried tree leaves into the air and then let them fall. The falling leaves fell back onto the belt, which in turn brought them up into the air again.

A: I very much agree with you Benjamin. I think the Western hegemony in history and theory of visual culture has overshadowed the innovative and early developments in Chinese art practice. Time will demonstrate that many so-called advances in the West have been taken decades, if not centuries earlier in the East.

I was wondering how you decide on the objects you use in your installations. Do you collect the objects and play with them, rearranging them, seeing how they fit together or how they could fit together... and then look for materials that could work with that... or is it less conscious, more intuitive? Is it that you walk past a store and see something that catches your eye? I think you previously made some sort of table for PIFO Gallery from an everyday cheap stool that can be bought everywhere in China. Could you tell me a bit about how you find and combine these elements?

B: Intuition could lead us to where we consciously feel that a creative process could be closed. That's what it could be about. In this regard, there's no differentiation between various media. Intuition is probably tied to my experience. I don't have a rational explanation that could describe to me why I become interested in a certain object. It's similar with painting. When I paint, I don't have a conscious idea of what it will look like. There is simply a moment when it is finished. Recognizing this is probably based on intuition. Beyond that, there's a series of instructions that the space as found (any given space) offers me.

A: Your sculptural works are quite bodily – they suggest a human scale – in the way that Le Corbusier resolved many of his design-objects and buildings based on standard human form. In that way each of your sculptural installations, in its most empiric sense, 'feels right' to the viewer. Could you tell me about your experience of space – in the studio, in the gallery etc.?

B: I did a piece that was made up of blueprints. These are from houses and apartment I've lived in. One house it is Puyo, a small town in the Ecuadorian rainforest. Another house is in a suburb of Augsburg, a mid-sized city in Germany. Thirteen blueprints have come together to date. A new one will be added upon the next move. It's amazing that all of the blueprints reveal a very similar room makeup. There's always a certain proportion between hallway, kitchen, bathroom, living room, and bedroom. I find it exciting. All of them are made up of rectangles. All of them have walls, floors, and ceilings. The proportions and the placement of my work follows this thought. The same thing happens when I draw rectangles. Even an aquarium usually consists of rectangles. The basement is usually underneath us, and the bed of flowers in the garden.

A: It is extraordinary how the floorplans of living places are replicated and follow a similar pattern. The rectangular form, as you say, does not appear in nature, yet it has somehow taken over our living environment. Many architects, such as Zaha Hadid for example, resist the rectilinear with their buildings but the interior design often ends up being box-like. However, we should not forget that in many countries, historically and in many places still now, people live in all sorts of different spaces where the floorplan is entirely different. In rural China, in the desert, on the Mongolian planes, circular dwellings and even cave dwellings are still prevalent. This might lead to a whole new body of work for you if your next home were to be a cave or a yurt!

B: When I leave the studio and head towards the gallery, I can see a building from Zaha Hadid. It's beautiful. But that's precisely the point – when an architect decides against the rectangular then it [their building] becomes a statement. When you visit the Uffizi in Florence, you can see very clearly how apparent mistakes can be smoothed over by tricks of perspective. It's very interesting – the rectangle as the ideal perfect form.

Of course you're right. Not all residences are rectangular. I personally spend very little time in my apartment. There's a very large and beautiful wood directly in front of our apartment. That's much more beautiful. I love the Ecuadorian rainforest. If I lived there now, then I surely wouldn't be pouring any concrete slabs. If you take the world of colours there into account, then every attempt to paint appears meaningless. And concerning architectural pragmatism, think of a snail's shell, which for all intents and purposes can be understood as the original hut.

A: I get the sense that the sculptural installations come about much more quickly than the paintings. You've said that the paintings can include as many as 150 layers and you simply keep going with them until they reach a point where you are satisfied with them, or they resolve

themselves in your mind. How do you feel about this different approach to your practice? Would you anticipate that the viewer might respond immediately to the installations, but sit and contemplate the paintings... or does the viewer experience not really impose on your art-making at all?

B: That's right, at least partially. The picture emerges while painting. It is indivisible from the act. I have to paint. If there aren't any sketches, then I can't paint. You could say that the picture is the sketch of a picture. It's similar with objects – the piece emerges from the sketch. To that extent, it emerges from thought. The same thing happens with video pieces. The idea is completed. I commission the execution. This is very interesting.

For its part, the textual work emerges from writing. On the other hand, one can also regard the picture as a building block. Just like sculpture, the textual work, and the video. Only through the interaction do they become complete, in space. I can't know how someone else will view the piece.

A: You can't know how someone will view the piece but you could, in the curatorial project, or more pragmatically in how you manage the space, encourage or suggest that the viewer slow down in approaching one of your paintings. It's often the case that in museums seats are placed in front of paintings where curators feel greater contemplation is warranted.

B: I myself don't consider my pictures so important. At least no more important than the floor. I have to force the floor to carry a bench so that the picture can be viewed. If I were to place a bench in front of a painting then it [the bench] and the floor it stands on would in turn would be implicated in the artwork.

A: It is interesting that your approach to your paintings is very three-dimensional. You treat them as objects in an expanded field. In fact I think that everything in your work, or related to your work conceptually or spatially – be it painting or object (that you chose to work with) or architecture, negative spaces, geography, nature (that you inherit, or are burdened with perhaps) ends up being part of *gesamtkunstwerk* – a sort of 'total work of art'.

Madeleine Frey refers to your paintings as triggering a dialogue between the painted image and the space that it occupies, or at least the experience of the two elements by the viewer. It's clear that no art functions in a vacuum. Every aspect of its presentation – light, volume of space, even the journey that someone takes to see the work – will affect their reception of the work and the 'conversation' that the viewer has with the artworks in the exhibition. I would go one step further with your works and suggest they implicate an entire spectrum of human relations, including an individual's social context. This is what Nicholas Bourriaud refers to in his post-internet writing as relational aesthetics. The experience of your sculptures for instance, that utilise commonplace stools as a material – have a different meaning for someone who uses those stools to the meaning of someone who may recognise the object as an 'everyday stool', but has never bought one, or used one. So to some extent these works as well as discussing space, memory and so forth, could also act as socio-political comments. What are your thoughts on this?

B: Can a work of art function in the vacuum? There are possibilities that a piece of art could work in a vacuum if it took everything into account. That means, the space and everything in it, and that's why it's a part of the piece of art. In other words, the vacuum would be the space that surrounds our universe.

A: This is interesting. Perhaps we should separate this out and discuss two different aspects of it here.

I think probably that an artwork can *exist* in an empty *volume* – particularly if the artist is consciously working with the notion of negative space. The (interior, negative space) casts made by Rachel Whitehead or the household objects filled with concrete by Doris Salcedo both solidify and make real those negative spaces hidden within an object or a place. Those works in turn are placed in the gallery space in a particular way (part of the curatorial project). The relationship between those objects and the space in which they are presented, and anything else in that space, is also therefore charged and becomes, in essence, part of the work.

However, these works are not in seen in a totally sterile environment where everything is accounted for in the making and display. Artists and curators can only account for so much. It's not possible to entirely determine the subjectivity of every possible viewer. I've always strongly held the belief that art is some sort of intangible, dialogical experience (a non-verbal conversation) that manifests somewhere, somehow, between the artwork and the viewer. The variable in this equation is therefore, the viewer.

For visitors to your exhibition, consciously or not, they are likely to experience your sculptures in a kinaesthetic way – relating their body to the work as well as in the space of the gallery. This is encouraged by your use of everyday objects that are easily relatable. The physical response from the viewer is almost intuitive and unconscious... it is our natural ability that allows us to sense objects and people around us without necessarily seeing them.

We spoke very briefly about the idea that the everyday materials in your sculptures and installations undergo some sort of transformation (of meaning but not material) once you combine them and place them in a particular way in a certain environment. As you have mentioned already, even after combining the objects, they are still remain nothing more than a chair, a table, a stool, to you. Do you see both therefore? You see the constituent elements and you recognise the end product as a consummate and complete work of art?

B: If it's removed from its context, a work of art might not be recognised. Let's think about whether we would recognize the black square from Kazimir Malevich if it were positioned on the edge of a highway. Let's consider the concept of the art operating system, coined by Thomas Wulffen in the 1990s. The exception is only conceivable when the work of art would take everything into consideration. The exhibition space, the viewers, the tree outside, the building opposite us, this text, and everything imaginable. Everything is just as important. This is the content of my work.

Yes, that's exactly the way I see it. Art possesses an immaterial experience. A non-verbal dialogue. That's why I believe that a piece of art that depicts a certain topic, the expression of what is depicted. That is a main difference. I'm not interested in the depiction of the chair, but rather the chair itself. The space isn't a topic for me, but rather material.

Yes, there's a poetics of experience. It doesn't possess any constants. However, it's quite similar with verbal language. Even if the word "chair" appears to be objective, we don't always understand the same thing. A waiter will associate a different experience that a carpenter. A small child has to move the chair in order to experience that there's a difference between the chair and the floor.

I don't believe it's about the finished work of art. If it were about that, then it'd be enough to place the chair in the exhibition space. No, I internalize the chair. What happens with it and with myself when I place a concrete fragment on it. Whether that makes the chair art or not is not initially of interest to me. Unfortunately we're very prejudiced, we recognise every painted picture as art.

A: Unfortunately yes, this is the predominance of painting... which has died and come back to life so many times it immortal and all-powerful now! So, let's investigate your paintings a bit.

The British artist David Batchelor's book *Chromaphobia*³ suggests that painters especially throughout the 20th centuries have struggled with the use of colour and in fact the use of colour has suffered as a result of (specifically) Western prejudices.

"It all started with a short visit to an inside-out interior of a colourless whiteness where clarity was confusion, simplicity was complication, and art was uniformly grey, then it would be comforting to think that it might also end there. After all, there can't be many places like this interior which was home only to the very few things that had submitted to its harsh regime. And those few things were, in effect, sealed off from the unwanted and uncertain contingencies of the world outside. No exchange, no seepage, no spillage. Rather isolation, confinement. But this shutting off began to speak more and more about what it excluded than what it contained. What did this great white hollow make me think about. Not, for long, its whiteness. Rather its colour.

...

"If colour is unimportant, I began to wonder, why is it so important to exclude it...?"

...

"It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that, in the West, since Antiquity, colour has been systematically marginalised, reviled, diminished and degraded".

You mention that you work with a relatively small colour palette. Do you find yourself drawn to these colours? Or have you gone through a process of elimination where you have previously worked with more colours / different colours and concluded that they are not right or don't work for you?

B: On the contrary, I'm trying to expand my palettes of colours. For me, the reduction of the palettes of colours seems like a protective mechanism for painters. If you examine one of pictures, you'll notice that none of the hues are repeated. One can approach the problem of colours from various perspectives. There's an interesting relationship between language and colour, which Jacques Le Rider explores in his study *Colour and Words*.⁴ However, I attempt to understand colour

³ Batchelor, David *Chromaphobia*, Reaktion Books, 2000

⁴ Le Rider, Jacques *Farben und Wörter (Colour and Words)*, Böhlau Wien, 2000

as material. This follows a very simple logic, that I wake up in the morning and understand myself as a painter. Then the question of 'what' and 'how' I can paint something arises.

Because I understand space as material, I'm not primarily interested in why the space is white. I take it as it is. I also don't ask myself why concrete is grey. The floor is made up of concrete, and in that way, the slab I pour is made of concrete. Paintings are made up of canvas and colours. So I use canvas and colours. The natural thing about that is what interests me. Just as it's a statement for an architect to design a non-rectangular building, in painting it's a statement when you use chocolate or faeces. David Batchelor's analysis is very interesting and quite clear. However, I think my work is focused on something different.

A: Its obvious how your fascination with the rectangle manifests in the paintings, but I wonder if you always worked in a geometric abstract style or have you previously painted in different styles? How would you describe your journey to abstraction?

B: My painting style has changed greatly. I used to want to paint in a photorealistic way. That was very long ago. You have to know that I grew up in Ecuador. We had very few art catalogues. There was one of Michelangelo, one of Hieronymus Bosch, and one from Eduardo Kingman, an Ecuadorian who painted in the style of Mexican muralism. Quito was the centre of the production of Latin American religious art in the 17th century. There's the famous Escuela Quiteña, from which artists like Caspicara or Bernardo de Legarda came. When I started to paint at the Academy of Visual Art in Karlsruhe, [Germany] I was interested in figurative painting. Then I saw the pictures by Gustav Kluge and Marlene Dumas. Afterwards I worked very long and hard. It was a very slow development.

At some point the figure was removed and other media joined. At some point the perspective was taken out and rectangles remained. In my individual show in Sindelfingen this year I exhibited my first video piece. This exhibition is the first time that I've written a text on the wall in this form. It's also my first video with fish... and my first solo show in China.

由 A 到 B 周而复始

——艺术家本杰明·阿普尔访谈

艾德里安·乔治 2017 年 7 月

在北京偏锋新艺术空间举办的《地下室花圃》开幕之前，艺术家本杰明·阿普尔（Benjamin Appel）与来自伦敦的策展人、作家艾德里安·乔治（Adrian George）共同探讨了艺术家的创作，本展览是艺术家在中国的首次个展。

艾德里安·乔治（A）：因为你的创作实践主要是关于空间，以及你个人与空间和置放于其中的物品之间的实际关系，我想知道，你两次在偏锋新艺术空间的驻留是如何影响你的创作、实践以及本展览的处理方式？

本杰明·阿普尔（B）：的确如此，我想这种关系是一步步建立起来的。其实这是一件我不得不做的事。我做事节奏较慢，需要大量的时间用来思考和进行创作。我相信，如果你坚持做自己想做的事情，遵循自己的直觉，那么结果将会非常接近你想要的。在北京长时间驻留对我来说非常重要，尤其是对本次展览尤为重要。很高兴我能拥有宝贵的空间和时间来准备此次展览，而且我非常珍视偏锋新艺术空间的支持。

A：偏锋新艺术空间的空间设计是由韩文强建筑营设计工作室设计完成的。它是一个很有趣的展览空间，因为它是以一种开放的理念为设计蓝图，无论是自上而下、自下而上还是各个空间之间都有足够的视线区域。我想对你来说在此进行创作是很兴奋的，对你的绘画或雕塑装置而言都是理想的场地。那么你是如何处理与这个空间的关系的？你在这个展览空间是否也花费了和在工作室一样多的时间，我想工作室和画廊之间有一段需要开车往返的距离吧？

B：韩文强的设计很棒！整个空间布局很开放，同时各个较小空间之间也是非常私密的。我现在试图去做的就是要在整个空间内完成一个完整的装置。每件单独作品都是独立的，但又是整体的一个组成部分。每一件作品本身却又是完整的，它完全有能力独立存在，这一点很重要。但是，每一件展品必须又作为一个组成部分来呈现。通过置放不同结构，相互邻近的两个空间之间又延展出一个过渡空间。这不仅凸显了自身的空间同时又延展了另一个原先已经存在的空间。对我来说，在画廊空间停留足够时间很重要，我之前在德国的时候就花费了大量时间去思考这个展览，如今开始具体实施了。

A: 你之前写的一段文字似乎是你创作装置作品的一系列说明手册或是指导他人对某个空间的认知。在我们之前的谈话中我提到过小野洋子的作品《指示作品》(Instruction Pieces)，无论如何，从艺术家的角度来看，作为一个简短的文本，这个作品列举说明了它的读者们所有可能(或应该)实现的一个(或某个特定的)艺术创作或表演作品。另外我也提到了布鲁斯·瑙曼(Bruce Nauman)，他早期作品中描述了他的工作室空间的结构。对我而言，以上两个作品看起来都和你的创作实践中有一定关联。安德烈亚斯·巴亭(Andreas Beutin)在撰写关于你绘画作品的文章《负空间思考》¹中引用了蒙德里安作品。我想知道，你如何看待这些比较和参考？

B: 小野洋子、瑙曼和蒙德里安的作品对我来说非常重要，当然这个世界上有太多太多重要艺术家了。小野洋子和瑙曼的作品有一种政治意味的体现，我想这点是我和他们之间的一个重要区别。就像你看到的一样，其实我的创作并无政治意义，主要就是混凝土、石膏、椅子、桌子、油彩还有一个关于鱼的影像作品而已。当我画画时，我一般会想到克劳德·莫奈(Claude Monet)，也会想到弗朗西斯·埃利斯(Francis Alys)、巴斯·扬·阿德(Bas Jan Ader)甚至是彼得·多依格(Peter Doig)的作品。

昨天我还看到一幅很棒的吉莉安·韦英(Gillian Wearing)的作品。我很高兴自己能和一些艺术家们相提并论。如果没有这些艺术家，也可能不会有我的这些创作。关于我最新的影像作品，我想到的是彼得·菲施利(Peter Fischli)和大卫·魏斯(David Weiss)完成于1987年的电影《万物之道》(*Der Lauf der Dinge / The Course of Things*)。

A: 安德烈亚斯另外也指出了你雕塑作品中对于日常物品的使用。我想进一步指出的是这些物品都是些寻常的物体，而你有意识地挑选了一些简单又有利于你创作的物品融入到你的作品中。这些物品既没有过度设计，又没有暗藏的主旨，就只是将它们按照原本的样子放置在那里，就像马德琳·弗雷(Madeleine Frey)在关于你创作的文章中提到了丹·弗莱文(Dan Flavin)和弗兰克·斯特拉(Frank Stella)所说的“它只是原本的样子”。我很好奇，你是如何将这些无处不在的元素统一转化为具有高审美度又严谨的雕塑装置作品中的？这简直像极了炼金术一般，你将这些基础型物品转化为有价值的东西，并使得它们超越了本身价值。

B: 的确如此，但是，这不仅仅是物品，还与空间非常类似。空间它就在那里，它就如此存在着。当我发现一个让自己产生兴趣的物品，我就认为它只是一个物品，并没

¹ 安德烈亚斯·巴亭，《将混凝土填满地下室》展览画册，辛德尔芬根市美术馆，辛德尔芬根，2017

有联想到现成品艺术概念。当然现在我也会问自己这个问题，我该如何把它融入一个空间？如果把桌子放置在角落里会怎么样？加斯东·巴什拉（Gaston Bachelard）曾写道，“一件家具就是一道屏障，而墙壁挡住了屋顶。”² 我不会评定这些物品的价值，因为对我来说它们始终是原本的样子。那些画面只是画在画布上的油彩，混凝土依然是混凝土，鱼池里的鱼儿终究还是鱼池里的鱼儿。

关于炼金术的评论我觉得很有意思，我既会联想到约瑟夫·博伊斯（Joseph Beuys）这一类艺术家也会想到戈登·玛塔-克拉克（Gordon Matta-Clark）的“深空视场”（deep-field）摄影作品。我并不想在混凝土中探寻一种庄严高贵的气息，包括油彩也是如此，我只是用它来进行创作而已。画廊的地面是由混凝土构成的，而我有一把椅子，于是我只是想把这两样东西结合在一起。所以，我另外又打造了另一层混凝土结构。

对于我的创作而言，材料是非常重要的，是它们构成了所有的画面。然而，画面的构成并不只是一个矩形图像而已，而是一系列重叠的矩形构成的画布上恰巧所呈现的颜色构成了整个画面。材料并非一种媒介，而是内容。《阁楼中的花圃》（Flowerbed in the Attic）中所呈现的物品就是混凝土和一把凳子，并非抽象化了的混凝土板和凳子。《地下室花圃》（Flowerbed in the Cellar）中的物体就是一面干墙和五个金属物体，并非抽象化了的的一面干墙和 5 个金属物件。

物体=形状，材料和空间

绘画=形状，材料和空间

文本=形状，材料和空间

影像=形状，材料和空间

我们所见也是如此。

A: 关于你如何整合这些元素的方式会让人联想到“客迈拉”（chimera）或者罗伯特·劳森伯格（Robert Rauschenberg）的结合体，这与你的创作实践之间是否存在一种关联？

B: 是的，这很重要。罗伯特·劳森伯格（Robert Rauschenberg）的目标是将艺术视觉现实与生活现实统一起来，这两者对于其他材料艺术家而言是一个重要区别。当我从一块混凝土板上取下其中一块并把它放在凳子上面时，我同时把凳子原有的功能

² 加斯东·巴什拉，《空间的诗学》，法国大学出版社，1958

一并消除了。它并非占用了空间，而是成为了一个新空间的载体。其实可以说我正在寻求一种最简洁的介入方式去消除物体的意义。劳森伯格也曾师从约瑟夫·阿尔伯斯（Josef Albers），他对我的创作来说也颇为重要。

A: 你在北京驻留期间，有没有看到过中国艺术家的作品和你的创作产生共鸣的，或者你认为很有意思的作品？

B: 中国传统艺术令我着迷，其主题的作用以及空间的处理方式的确非常有趣。然而西方艺术作品中的主体和客体之间存在一种强烈的分离，人们所描绘的空间总是在一种背景或舞台化的场景中，然而像卡斯珀·大卫·弗里德里希（Caspar David Friedrich）这样的艺术家却有力量摆脱这种传统做法。中国艺术家们更早以前就已经认识到了这个挑战。

我相信中国传统艺术对全球当代艺术的影响力是很强大的，以一种简单明了的姿态就可以带来巨大影响力。以在中国进行艺术实践中的“轻触感”（light touch）为例，前些天我看到了一件令我印象深刻的作品，那是一件重新组装的机器，在输送带和滚轴的驱动辅助下，它缓缓地将树叶吹向空中然后再让它们散落。落下的树叶再次回到传送带上，然后再一次重新被送到上空。

A: 本杰明，我很同意你的看法。我认为历史上的西方霸权和视觉文化理论掩盖了中国艺术实践的创新及其早期发展。时间将会证明，许多所谓的西方的进步已经持续了几十年，不然东方也早在几个世纪以前便开始踏上征途了。

我想知道你如何取舍你在装置作品中使用的物品。你会不会收藏一些物品，然后增进了解，再进行重置，看看它们以何种方式或能不能组合在一起，接着再去寻找可以与之匹配的材料来完成创作，还是说你会更加无意识，只是遵从直觉？这些物品是不是就只是当你经过一家商店而吸引了你的眼球的东西？我记得你之前你用一把很常见的在中国随处可以购买的便宜凳子为偏锋新艺术空间创作了桌子，能不能谈谈你是如何找到并组合这些元素的？

B: 直觉可以带领我们进入一个地带，在那里我们将会清醒地意识到某个创作过程可以结束了，这就是直觉的意义所在。从这方面来看，不同的媒介之间并无什么区别，直觉或许主要和我的个人经历相关。至于我为什么会对某一个物体产生兴趣，其实我并不能给出一个理性的解释。这点就和绘画类似，当我画画的时候，其实我并不明确地知道接下来的画面将会是什么样，当完成的那一刻到来，它就自然而然地完成了，

意识到这一时刻的到来或许就是取决于直觉。除此之外，直觉还会带来一系列指示告知我所找到的那个空间（任何既定空间）带给了我什么。

A: 你的雕塑作品其实是和身体有关的，这些作品都体现了人体尺度，就像勒·柯布西耶（Le Corbusier）在处理他设计的物品和建筑时就是基于标准化的人体工程尺寸。因此，从经验意义而言，你所创作的雕塑装置作品对于观众来说“感觉很对”。能不能谈谈你在工作室、画廊的空间体验？

B: 我曾创作过一个由设计蓝图组成的作品，那些图纸都取材于我一直以来居住的房子和公寓，其中一个房子位于普约，那是厄瓜多尔雨林的一个小镇，另外一个房子位于德国中型城市奥格斯堡的郊区。到目前为止，总共涉及了十三个设计蓝图，等下一次乔迁的时候还会继续增加。让我觉得很惊奇的是，所有的蓝图之间都显露出非常相似的空间布局。走廊、厨房、浴室、客厅和卧室之间总有一定比例的区域，这让我感到兴奋，我发现这些区域都是由矩形构成的。同时，所有这些空间内都会有墙壁、地板和天花板，因此，我所创作的这件作品的比例和布局也与之相互呼应。当我绘画矩形时，我也会有相同感受，我也会想到，一个鱼缸也是由矩形来构成的，地下室常常就在下层，而花圃往往就在园地里。

A: 生活场所的平面图景如何被再造，如何遵循一种相似的模式，这是非常奇特的事。就像你所说的那样，矩形的形式虽然没有自我显现出矩形的样子，但在我们的生活环境中却是无处不在。许多建筑家比如扎哈·哈迪德（Zaha Hadid），虽然他们抵触直线型的建筑，但是其室内设计通常又都是框式结构。我们应该认识到一点，无论是历史上还是在当下，不同地区的人们各自居住生活在平面图景完全不同的地方。在中国农村地区、在沙漠里、或是蒙古草原上，圆形住宅甚至窑洞依旧盛行。如果你的下一个家是一个洞穴或是蒙古包，那么它将会为你带来一个全新的创作。

B: 每次我离开工作室前去画廊的路上我都会看到一个扎哈·哈迪德的建筑设计，看上去很美。但是正因为如此，当建筑师决意拒绝矩形时，他们的设计就成为了一种宣言。当你置身于佛罗伦萨的乌菲兹时，你可以清晰地看到如何凭借视角技巧就可以掩盖那些建筑设计中的明显失误。因此，矩形可以是最理想最完美的形式，这的确很有意思。

当然你说得对，并非所有住宅都是矩形结构。我个人其实在公寓里面停留的时间很少。在我们的公寓正前方有一片巨大又漂亮的树林，看上去很是漂亮。我很喜欢厄瓜多尔雨林，假设如果我现在住在那里，我也不会放置任何混凝土板。如果你把所有色彩都考虑进去，那么你每一次为涂画所付出的努力都会显得毫无意义。还有，涉及到

建筑实用功能时，想想蜗牛壳，无论出于什么意图或目的，它都可以理解为是原始之巢。

A: 我认为雕塑装置似乎比绘画来得更快。你说过这些画最多甚至可以达到 150 多个层次，只要你不断地继续下去，直到达到你满意的一个点为止，另一种情况就是它们已经在你心目中有了各自的处理方式。那么你对这两种不同手法有何感想？你会不会预想观者在装置作品面前或许会立即作出回应，而面对绘画作品时却需要坐下来进行思考，还是说观众的体验根本不会对你的艺术创作施加影响？

B: 对，至少从某种程度上说是这样的。当我忙着画画时，总会浮现一种画面，这是绘画行为不可分割的一部分。我必须画。在没有任何构思的情况下，我几乎无法继续画画。可以说，画面就是绘画的一个草图。选择物品时也是类似，具体物品也来自于构思。从某种程度上来讲，这都来源于思想，包括影像作品的创作也是一样，所有的想法都已经完全成形了，我就像一个委托人一样去执行它，这对我来说是件颇有趣味的事情。

同时，文本作品来源于写作的过程。另一方面，也可以将画面视作一种建筑材料，包括雕塑、文本和影像都是如此。只有通过互动才可以使得它们在空间内完整呈现，我在创作时无法确定别人会怎么看待我的作品。

A: 你无法判定别人会如何去看待一件作品，但是，更务实一点来讲，你知道在展览中如何掌控空间，如何鼓励或者建议观者在接近你的某一件绘画作品时可以放慢步伐。通常情况下，博物馆在绘画作品前方都会放置一些座椅，以便策展人们在此可以沉思片刻。

B: 我认为我的画作本身并没有重要到如此境地，至少不比地板更重要。一般情况下，长凳是用来坐，地板用来放置长凳。可对我来说，假设在画作前方摆放一个长凳，那么这个长凳和放置长凳的地板也都会融入到艺术作品之中。

A: 很有意思，你所选择的接近自己绘画作品的方式非常立体，而且把这些物体拓展到了一个更宽广的领地。事实上，我认为你作品中的一切或者关于你作品的一切，无论是概念层次还是空间层次，无论是绘画或物体（你所选择的物体），或是建筑、负空间、地理、自然环境（你所承受的自然环境），这一切最终都成为了你“整体艺术创作”（gesamtkunstwerk）的一部分。

玛德琳·弗雷 (Madeleine Frey) 认为你的绘画作品激发了你所绘制的图像与其所占据空间之间的一场对话，或者说，至少引发了观者对图像与空间这两个元素的体验。显然，艺术功能并不是存在于真空之中，而在于作品展示的方方面面，包括灯光、空间大小甚至是观众和作品之间的距离，这些都会影响观众对作品的接受程度和他们在展览中与艺术品之间所展开的“对话”。从更深层次来看，我想你的作品体现了一整套的人际关系，包括个人所处的社会语境。这就是尼古拉斯·伯瑞奥德 (Nicolas Bourriaud) 关于后网络时代写作所说的“关系美学” (relational aesthetics)。就拿你的雕塑作品的体验来说，你使用了普通的凳子作为一种材料，其意义对不同的人说是不尽相同的，有些人在日常生活中也使用这种凳子，也有人会辨认出它就是一个常用的凳子但却没有买过或使用过这种凳子。所以从某种程度上来说，这些作品同时也在探讨空间、记忆等东西，可以说也含有一定的社会政治意味，你是怎么看待这点的？

B: 艺术是否真的可以在真空中发挥功能？如果把所有一切因素都考虑进去的话，艺术品也是有可能在真空中发挥作用。这就意味着这个空间包含空间本身及其范围内的一切，这也是为什么空间本身也是艺术品的一部分的原因。换句话说，真空可以是包围我们所在宇宙的整个空间。

A: 这个观点很有意思。或许我们可以一分为二地分别去讨论这个问题的两个层面。

我认为艺术品很有可能确实能够存在于一个虚空的空间中，尤其是当艺术家有意识地在某个负空间内展开创作的时候。包括蕾切尔·怀特海 (Rachel Whitehead) 创作的室内、负空间铸件，以及桃瑞丝·沙尔塞朵 (Doris Salcedo) 用混凝土所制作的家居物品，二者都将隐藏在物品内部或某个地方的负空间予以具体化，让它们得以真实呈现。这些作品其实可以作为展览项目的一部分，并以某种特定的方式在画廊空间予以展示。这些物品与展示它们的空间，甚至这个空间内的其他任何事物之间的关系因此也被固定，从本质上来讲，它们也都成为了这个作品的一部分。

然而，我们无法在一个无菌真空环境中看到这些作品，在这样一个环境里，所有的事物都在艺术创作和展示过程中起到了作用。艺术家和策展人们对此也只能解释到这一步，他们也无法完全决定每一个潜在观众的主观性。我一直深信艺术是一种无形的、对话式的体验 (非言语对话)，艺术品和观者之间的这种对话在某个地方以某种方式展开。所以说，观众是这个问题中的一个变量。

对有意或无意来观展的到访者而言，他们或许只是以一种动态的方式来感受你的雕塑作品，并将他们的身体与作品以及画廊空间联系在一起，你对这些容易与观众发生关

联的日常物品的使用也是一种激励。来自观众的身体反应几乎来自于无意间的直觉，这也是我们的本能，这种本能使我们即使在没有直观看到周围的物体和人时也能感应到他们的存在。

我们之前简单探讨过，当你把日常材料组合在一起并将他们放置在某个特定的环境之中时，你雕塑和装置作品中所出现的这些材料便经历了一种转化（意义上的转化而非物质性转化）。就像你之前提到的一样，对你而言，即使这些材料被组合在了一起，它们仍然只不过是椅子、桌子和凳子。你是否在看到这些构成材料本来面貌的同时也意识到它们被制作成最终成品后会成为一个完美又完整的艺术品？你是否同时看到了这两方面？

B: 如果去除语境，那么我们几乎无法认识到一件艺术品的存在。试想一下，如果把卡西米尔·马列维奇（Kazimir Malevich）的“黑色方块”（black square）放置在公路边上，那么我们能否依旧可以辨认出来是他的作品？我们再想想托马斯·沃尔芬（Thomas Wulffen）在 20 世纪 90 年代所提出的艺术操作系统这一概念。当一件艺术品把所有因素都考虑进去的时候，才可能会出现例外，这一切包括展览空间、观众、外面的树木、位于我们对面的建筑物、甚至这篇文章等等一切可以想象到的东西。所有一切都同等重要，这就是我的创作内容。

是的，这正是我的观看方式。艺术可以是一种无形的体验感受，一种非言语的对话。这也是我为什么认为每一件艺术品都展现了一个主题，主题通过艺术品得到了表达。这中间还有一个很重要的区别，即对于椅子所表达的主题我并不感兴趣，我更关注的是椅子本身，它所处的空间也不是我最关注的话题，我更关注的是材料。

这里面的确蕴含着一种诗学的体验，这里并不包括什么恒久不变的常量。这其实和语言表达有一定类似之处，尽管“椅子”（chair）一词是具有客观意义的，但是我们所指并不一定就是同一个特定的东西，好比一个服务员和一个木匠对此会有不同体验，而一个孩子在搬动椅子的时候体验到的则是椅子和地板之间的差异。

我想这里并不是指完成了的艺术作品，如果是那样，那么把椅子搁置在展览空间就足够了。实际上，我所说的是内化了的椅子，我所关注的是，当我把混凝土块的一角放置在它上面时它会怎么样，它和我之间会产生什么关系。椅子到底有没有因此而成为艺术，这不是我最初所关心的问题。不幸的是，我们都带有偏见去观看，我们只把所有绘画当成艺术。

A: 不幸的是，这的确也是绘画的优势，绘画似乎已死了多少回又重新回来，如今它已是永垂不朽无所不能的了。所以，让我好好再研究下你的画作。

英国艺术家大卫·巴契勒（David Batchelor）在他的著作《恐色症》³（Chromophobia）中表明画家们尤其是生活在 20 世纪的画家们在色彩的使用上备受纠结，事实上色彩的使用问题具体来说就是西方偏见所带来的结果。

“这一切的开端都源于对一个空间内部所进行的短暂探寻，这个空间完全是一个没有明亮色彩的无色空间，在这个空间内部，清晰等同于混乱，简洁即是复杂，均匀的灰色就是艺术，令人感到欣慰的是这一切也将在这个空间内部结束。毕竟，类似于这个内部空间的地方并不多见，这个空间只是针对于某一些极少数可以适应严苛条件的事物而存在的归属之地。而事实上，这些极少数事物与外部世界中不必要和不确定的偶发事件是完全隔绝的。它们与外部世界不发生交换、融入或输出，这更像是一种远离，一种隔绝。然而，这种隔绝却更重视它所排除的事物，而非它内部所包含的内容。这个白色的空间究竟激发我思考什么，它让我很快想到了它的空白，而非色彩”。

“如果色彩并不重要，我便开始好奇为何要尽力摒弃色彩呢？”

“我想，毫不夸张地说，在西方，自远古时期以来颜色一直被系统地边缘化，被贬低，被减弱，被降格。”

你提到你在创作过程中会使用相对较小的色彩范围。你会觉得自己被这些色彩所吸引吗？或者说，你是否经历过摒弃一些你已经使用过的或其他不同色彩，并且得出结论那些色彩感觉不对或是它们并不适合？

B: 相反，我正在试图扩展我的色彩范围。对我而言，减少调色板中的颜色似乎是画家们的一种自我保护机制。如果你细看其中的一张画作，你会发现并没有出现重复的色调。当然，人们处理色彩问题的角度是多种多样的。语言和色彩之间有一种颇为有趣的关系，雅克·勒·里德（Jacques Le Rider）在他的研究著作《色彩与语词》（Colour and Words）中也曾探讨过。⁴然而，我试图将色彩理解为材料。这遵循的

³ 大卫·巴契勒，《恐色症》，Reaktion 出版社，2000

⁴ 雅克·勒·里德，《色彩与语词》，维也纳 Böhlau 出版社，2000

是一个非常简单的逻辑，就好比早上醒来后就意识到自己是一名画家一样，然后就会去想我画“什么”和“如何”画这些问题。

因为我将空间理解为材料，所以我并不特别关心为什么这个空间是白色的，我认为它本来的样子就是如此。我也不会追问自己为什么混凝土是灰色。就像地板就是由混凝土构成的，同理，我灌注的混凝土板也就是由混凝土构成的，画作也本来就是由画布和色彩构成的，所以我必然会使用画布和色彩。真正让我产生兴趣的是自然而然的東西。就像建筑师将设计一个非矩形建筑物当作一种宣言，在绘画中，如果你使用了巧克力或排泄物，那也是一种标榜。大卫·巴契勒的分析非常有趣，也很清晰明了。但是，我想我的作品还是聚焦在一些不一样的东西上面。

A: 显然，你对于矩形的热衷在你的绘画作品中已经可见一斑了，但我想知道你始终都保持这种几何抽象风格还是你之前也尝试过其他风格？你的创作是怎样演变成现今的抽象风格？

B: 我的绘画风格发生过很大变化。我曾经以一种摄影式的写实方式创作绘画。你知道我是在厄瓜多尔长大的，我们能看到的画册几乎少之又少。当时只有米开朗基罗，还有希罗尼穆师·博斯（Hieronymus Bosch），还有一个是爱德瓦多·金曼（Eduardo Kingman），他是一名以墨西哥式壁画为主要风格的厄瓜多尔画家。基多是17世纪拉丁美洲宗教艺术产生的中心，那里有著名的基多画派（Escuela Quiteña），艺术家卡斯皮卡拉（Caspicara）和伯纳多·德·莱加尔达（Bernardo de Legarda）都来自这里。当我在卡尔斯鲁厄视觉艺术学院（德国）开始画画时，我对具象绘画颇有兴趣，然后我也观赏了古斯塔夫·克鲁格（Gustav Kluge）和马琳·杜马斯（Marlene Dumas）的作品。接下来的很长一段时间内，我继续努力创作，经历了一个比较缓慢的发展过程。

有时候，我会删除一些具象图像，再引入其他媒介。有时候，透视会被剔除然后只保留矩形状。今年在辛德尔芬根举行的个展中，我也展出了我的首个影像作品。为了当前个展以这种形式在墙壁上面撰写文字也是第一次，关于鱼的影像作品也是首次展出，这也是我在中国的首次个展。