

Factory Setting: the space of labor

An installation by Tsz Yan Ng

10 August – 7 September, 2013

In “*Factory Setting: the space of labor*” Tsz Yan Ng plans to install a room-height loom and over the duration of the show weave a large scale blended photographic image of the spaces and activities of a clothing factory she is very familiar with. Tsz Yan will be weaving in the gallery during regular opening hours and visitors are welcome to engage the artist and view the labor and processes required to create the final textile image. The weaving will end at 6pm on September 7th at the start of the closing reception.

Background / Artist’s Statement

Textile manufacturing is a complex global phenomenon. Our understanding of the very clothing that we put on each day, where it comes from, how it is made, who it is made by, is veiled within a network of contingencies. These contingencies, ranging from tariffs to labor market trends, dictate not only the final purchase price of each product, but inform a much larger economy of workers, socio-political forces, and even the landscape of contemporary cities. This project is a case study of textile manufacturing as both subject matter and process of making; it examines the trajectory of its industrialization and, by extension, other manufacturing industries such as the auto industry here in Michigan. It is a rumination on issues of labor, its inherent values, and the notion of workers, both as individuals and as a collective force.

Drawing upon first-hand experience of the textile industry dating back to childhood, and more recently as a professional in architectural production, “Factory Setting: the space of labor”, points to the space of production and those who inhabit it. It is a reminder of the value of labor in textile manufacturing, from the material crafting of a learned trade, to the manual labor necessary for clothing production. It attempts to present the invisible value that is part of any garment, but missing from the label or the price tag. It offers a glimpse into the spaces of the contemporary garment factory, foreign to most in this country, but having a parallel in the industrial past that shaped the cities and social conditions that still surround us.

In 2009 my colleague Mehrdad Hadighi and I designed the factory/headquarters for the New York based clothing company “Lafayette 148 New York” in Shantou, China. Gaining access to the workings of the factory during the design phase opened up a much wider understanding of the intricacies of contemporary textile manufacturing.

In this show I plan to install a room-height loom and over the duration of the show weave a large scale blended photographic image of the spaces and activities of the clothing factory. The images I plan to use are by the Shanghai-based photographer But Sou Lai who was kind enough to extend their use for this show. The weaving will end at 6pm on September 7th at the start of the closing reception.

Biography

Tsz Yan Ng’s work probes questions of perception in architectural production by exposing the artifice of social, cultural, and political construction, often specifically investigating political and socio-economic concerns around China’s rapid global rise in terms of industrialization and

urbanization. Her installations have been exhibited widely throughout North America and she has also undertaken significant architectural commissions such as the design (with Mehrdad Hadighi) of the 11-story global headquarters/manufacturing facility in Shantou, China which is the focus of this show. She joined the A. Alfred Taubman College of Architecture + Urban Planning at the University of Michigan as the Walter S. Sanders Fellow from 2007-2008, and continues to teach architectural design and theory.