

Ocula对谈 | 王凝慧 (Alice Wang)

李博文撰文 2017年10月17日

在19世纪或更早的时期，在现代性发生之前，自然科学、哲学等学科总是混为一谈的。现代性的转向分隔了事物以及我们的不同感知能力，创造了技术性的生命。在创造雕塑时，我感兴趣于形式以及这些形式的功用。科学启发了我对这些材料的兴趣，而这些材料与形式的关系是密不可分的。



展览现场图片：王凝慧（2017年9月2日至10月18日），胶囊上海，上海。图片提供：艺术家及胶囊上海

王凝慧 (Alice Wang) 在胶囊上海 (Capsule Shanghai) 的展览「王凝慧」(2017年9月2日至10月18日) 展出了包括《无题》(Untitled, 2017)、《无题》(Untitled, 2017) 及《无题》(Untitled, 2017) 在内的一系列新雕塑作品。这些雕塑作品最显著的特点便是其物质特性：蜂蜡、铁陨石、苔藓、含羞草、来自德克萨斯州的一亿年前的蛤蜊化石，甚至是风——这些雕塑并不以形成某种整体叙事为任务，骄傲地孤立于彼此，有条不紊地运作着、自然生长着，稳定地与熵发生关系。尽管王凝慧在创作雕塑时更多地强调其实践方式的前主体间性本体论特性，在考虑作为一个整体的展览时她戏谑地使用非传统的新闻稿写作方法及展览呈现方式来抗拒传统艺术市场的压迫性倾向。

王凝慧目前为止的所有展览几乎都叫做「Alice Wang」(或「王凝慧」)；她的几乎所有作品都叫做《无题》(或「Untitled」，此次展览中唯一一件单独命名的作品是她在今年与唐嘉豪 (Ben Tong)

合作创作的《Oracle》)；对于她来说，为展览或作品命名本身即有极强的政治意义，而不命名则意味着一种在理念层面及实际层面同样有效的积极的抗拒。

在2017年10月15日，王凝慧在上海现代艺术基地（Modern Art Base）发布了其艺术家书《无题》（Untitled, 2017, Capsule Shanghai + Sming Sming Books）。这是艺术家的第一本「艺术家书」（artist book），其中有2012年伦敦奥运会花样游泳比赛决赛时西班牙代表队比赛时的图片，另有一篇由btr受委托撰写的文章。就像是王凝慧的雕塑创作一样，书籍设计、图片及文字彼此独立，而btr



王凝慧，无题，2017，艺术家书，银箔纸上黑白打印。
13.97 x 12 cm。图片提供：艺术家及胶囊上海

的文章大量引用路易斯·卡罗（Lewis Carroll）这件事，也为持有多伦多大学计算机专业及国际关系专业理科学士学位、在创作中频繁引用天文学、物理学及古生物学等纷杂学科知识的王凝慧提供了另外一个有趣的类比：《爱丽丝梦游仙境》及《爱丽丝镜中奇遇》的作者、充满可怖想象力、原名为 Charles Lutwidge Dodgson 的卡罗，事实上也是《国会代表制度原则》（The Principles of Parliamentary Representation, 1884）、《行列式初步，及其在线性与代数方程式组中的应用》（An Elementary Treatise on Determinants, With Their Application to Simultaneous Linear Equations and Algebraic Equations, 1867）等著作的作者。

Ocula 在上海与王凝慧进行了对谈，以下是对谈的节选。

关于你，最简单化的描述就是「来自洛杉矶的中国女艺术家」。你同意这个说法吗？

「来自」这个说法对我来说值得商榷。我在西安出生，曾在成都、上海、杭州、纽约、多伦多、日本前桥和洛杉矶生活……洛杉矶是我目前为止最长期的住所，但是我也不觉得我是「来自」某处的。

你对于中国当代艺术界的发展的印象是什么？

我的印象是中国当代艺术界正处在一个非常让人兴奋的阶段，因为这里充满了正面及负面的变化，是不稳定的。

展览新闻稿及海报都是非常不寻常的。新闻稿全文是：**H He Li Be B C N O F Ne Na Mg Al Si P S Cl Ar K Ca Sc Ti V Cr Mn Fe Co Ni Cu Zn Ga Ge As Se Br Kr Rb Sr Y Zr Nb Mo Tc Ru Rh Pd Ag Cd In Sn Sb Te I Xe Cs Ba La Hf Ta W Re Os Ir Pt Au Hg Tl Pb Bi Po At Rn Fr Ra Ac Rf Db Sg Bh Hs Mt Ds Rg Cn Nh Fl Mc Lv Ts Og Ce Pr Nd Pm Sm Eu Gd Tb Dy Ho Er Tm Yb Lu Th Pa U Np Pu Am Cm Bk Cf Es Fm Md No Lr**；而展览海报则是一只海中虾蛄的图片，尽管展览中并没有出现这只虾蛄。有化学或是生物领域特殊知识的观众是否能够更好地理解你的展览？

我觉得这些特殊知识背景不是观展必需的。对我来说，元素周期表仅是一种普遍的基础知识，而我本身是个科学极客（science geek）——化学也是我最喜欢的学科。元素周期表如此神奇，又如此和地球的一切息息相关。我曾谈到，在我看来，展览新闻稿是艺术作品的延伸。我过去展览的新闻稿也类似这样。但我不想要写一份满是浮夸形容词的、用来进行市场推广的新闻稿。所以这是逃避市

场的一种方法，也是表达我自己的方法。或许甚至与自我表达无关，而的确是作品的延伸。而关于展览海报上的虾蛄：虾蛄有独一无二的视觉系统，有十六种视锥细胞（人类只有三种），我觉得这很棒，与我们想要看到更多的愿望相关。

你在和Carol Bove的对谈中曾谈到「阅读」似乎是与当代艺术最为相关的行动。也就是说，我们应当「阅读艺术」，而不是「看艺术」。我的印象是，在中国，有许多观众倾向于自由地去「看艺术」而不进行「阅读」。

我们第一次见面的时候我就问你，中国的人们是如何看待艺术史的；我很高兴人们非常关注作品的形式以及接触到作品时的切身感受。然而，作为一名艺术家，我既不能太顾虑艺术史的遗产，又不能完全忽视这些。我意识到，在创作时，我在和过去出现过的艺术相沟通——你不能逃避艺术史。展览新闻稿也是这样的：元素周期表式的新闻稿就是与既定语境相沟通的一种方式。这不是什么新鲜的做法。对于我来说，在中国做展览是有困难的，因为观众所处的语境、拥有的知识和经验和我的不同。具体来说，在创作雕塑的时候，你不能忽视极少主义、观念艺术或是大地艺术等。在离开了创作背景之后，作品的意义便开始游离。但是我不想要控制作品的意义，尽管我意识到我们在面对一种「意义的危机」（crisis of meaning）。我想要探索作品的意义，作品的所作所为。



王凝慧，无题，2017，艺术家书，银箔纸上黑白打印。13.97 x 12 cm。图片提供：艺术家及胶囊上海



王凝慧，无题，2017，铁陨石，30.48 x 8.89 cm。展览现场图片：王凝慧（2017年9月2日至10月18日），胶囊上海，上海。图片提供：艺术家及胶囊上海

如果观众仅是「看」，而不去「阅读」作品，你会感到沮丧吗？

这就是有冲突的方面：在美国，我想要开拓一个可以自由地「看艺术」的空间，因为每个人都已经在「阅读艺术」，后者也因此变得不那么重要。在和Bove的对谈中我们尝试去探索Felix Gonzalez-Torres为观念艺术带来的空间：人们可以在机构批判语境中去「阅读」他的作品——艾滋病危机、身份政治等等——但他的作品又是如此现象学式的（phenomenological）：观众去吃那些糖果、走过一扇帘子、感受灯泡带来的温暖……我想要开拓这种空间。但是在中国，这里满是「看」的空间。在奥运会上，短跑运动员起步前的预备动作就像是某种历史语境。没有了这种预备动作，在中国的我就像是在真空中一样。

但你并不是有意在此变得晦涩、难懂、难以让观众接近。

我只是想做自己而已。我并没有要特立独行。我的每一次展览的新闻稿都是这样的。这不是什么哗众取宠的把戏。我在2013年的首个个展中就以类似的方式探索语言的形式，讨论人们是如何在展览场合使用艺术语言的，并以展览形式做不同的实验。一般的展览新闻稿乃至展览本身都与解释作品有关，成为了某种广告领域的产物。想要逃离这种庸碌的广告话语是困难的，这可能将我置于尴尬的境地中，因为人们可能「看不懂作品」，我也会最终陷入不被认可的境地中去。但是我决定不以那种方式创作、写新闻稿、举办展览。

你是怎么看待包括VR、AR、AI在内的新技术及这些新技术和当代艺术发展的关系的？

虚拟现实当然也有某种物理特性，但是对于我来说这些技术在目前还是过于偏重非身体性、非物理性层面。这些技术在物理层面的探索目前并不吸引我。这是因为我还是非常注重物理现实性。你不能在虚拟现实转移化学语言。在一个虚拟世界中，物理也是不起作用的。我身处的环境非常重要，而美国太空探索技术公司（Space-X）离我在洛杉矶的住所不远。我也常去沙漠考察，因此约书亚树（Joshua Tree）区域几乎是我的第二个家。能够亲近星空、清楚地观察到星星，对我来说很重要。这种物理实在就是我关注的事物。

你在讨论艺术创作时自觉地混淆不同的语言：艺术史的语言、生物学的语言、化学的语言、冥想的语言，神秘学的语言等，甚至时常提到《道德经》、《易经》等经典。你是怎么考虑这些众多语言组成的整体艺术实践话语的？

这不是什么新鲜事。在19世纪或更早的时期，在现代性发生之前，自然科学、哲学等学科总是混为一谈的。牛顿是一名炼金术士，只不过人们不愿意讨论他作为炼金术士的成就，单纯把他视作为现代物理学的奠基人而已。因此这种话语的混淆是有悠久历史的。《道德经》对于我来说与哲学、自然、精神性有关，也与建立价值有关……现代性的转向分隔了事物以及我们的不同感知能力，创造了技术性的生命。

在创造雕塑时，我感兴趣于形式以及这些形式的功用。以我用蜂蜡制成的作品为例：我想要使用非物质性的元素——风——但是也想要使用与新陈代谢相关的材料——蜂蜡。科学启发了我对这些材料的兴趣，而这些材料与形式的关系是密不可分的。

这种典型于中国传统文化「语言的混淆」也常见于古希腊神话或凯尔特人神话中——哲学、科学和精神性探索在这些文化中被混为一谈。然而，我不觉得我的思考模式是非常常见的。这可能和我的家庭背景有关。我的母亲有的时候会教我一个什么成语，她会告诉我这个成语背后的故事，但是你有时候不能确定这个故事的真实性，真实性也不重要，重要的是语言的混淆在此带来了新的事物。

展览中唯一一件不是「无题」的作品是影像作品《Oracle》（2017），为什么这一件作品有名字？

这是我首次和他人（唐嘉豪）合作完成的作品，因为是和他人合作的，我并不想在这作品上强加我的个人原则。我放弃了一些诸如此类的原则。你需要灵活地进行创作，让这个合作作品得以成立。我们没有翻译这个作品的名称，因为「Oracle」的中文含义（神谕）过为实在。在英语中，「Oracle」的双关含义是：神谕，来自他者的指示；而生物圈二号（biosphere II）所处城市的名字也叫做「Oracle」。

但是你曾如此描述你的影像作品及雕塑作品的关系：前者和后者没什么关系。

在今天，我们已经习惯了在画廊或美术馆中观看影像作品这件事，但是我觉得这和电影体验还是非常不同的。从买一张电影门票到在漆黑的电影放映厅中坐下，面对一个巨大的银幕呆上一个多小时——这是非常不同的体验。另外，在某种意义上，我认同格林伯格（Greenberg）的现代性任务：我想要探索绘画作为绘画的本质、雕塑作为雕塑的本质以及电影作为电影的本质。我想要为某种特定艺术形式负责。弹吉他和吹小号肯定是不同的，尽管这都是音乐创作。对我来说，去考察一件雕塑意味着去考察艺术的可能性。有人曾问我，为什么不是绘画或摄影；这是因为，我在绘画或摄影中没有发言权。我没有画过画。我不知道绘画的问题，但我使用了大量的时间和精力去思考物质性和三维世界。但我当然也感兴趣于作为雕塑的绘画、摄影或文字。

既然我们提到了音乐：在洛杉矶生活的你听什么样的音乐？

我的父亲在北大学习物理的时候曾是非常优秀的小提琴乐手，他曾偷偷手抄被禁止演奏乐曲的谱子——这是多么个人、多么有批判性和政治性的行动啊。受他的影响，我从小就练习钢琴。我对于古典音乐非常感兴趣，尤其是赋格曲式非常感兴趣，也钟情于巴赫。赋格曲在声音图景中创造漩涡，而巴赫的赋格曲层次分明而丰富。他经常谱写教堂风琴曲，而这奇异的乐器几乎就像是什么宇宙飞船一样，能把人带到天堂或是别的什么地方上去。诗歌或文学中的赋格形式也让我着迷。我很喜欢一出名叫《火线》（The Wire）的电视剧——用赋格曲式讲述的故事。

你觉得你和哪些艺术家有直接或间接的谱系关系？

Allan Sekula、Trisha Donnelly及Carol Bove——Donnelly及Bove都是我的老师，影响了我对于物质性的思考、对于雕塑理念的思考以及对于形式理念的思考。我们曾经谈到这件事：人们在今天频繁混用艺术媒介或形式，因此我想要回到原点、回到形式的基础。这也是为什么我钟情于巴赫——他的许多曲目仅是练习曲而已。我想，雕塑能够真正地为我打开一种空间，而这种空间往往是不可见的。Sturtevant、Eva Hesse、Robert Smithson、Lee Lozano也给我带来了深远的影响。

你强调你的创作是「雕塑」，而不是「装置」，这似乎是反潮流的。

我不做「装置」。对于我来说，雕塑与本体论有关，探索存在的本质。什么是存在？什么是这种存在展现的现实？我的一件早期作品是一个盆栽的照片。这作品的雕塑性在你的头脑之中。在你关于这盆栽的记忆中，这盆栽在慢慢长大。装置不能提供这样的思考框架。

在提起你在洛杉矶Itd艺术机构的展览（Alice Wang, ltd, 洛杉矶，2017年3月25日至4月26日）时，你曾提到：「在黑暗中，在摸索时，我们用手去感知，而不用眼睛。」这让我想起德里达的《盲人回忆录》（Memoirs of the Blind）。

那个描述完全是与这本书有关的。

Alice Wang's exhibition "Alice Wang" at Capsule Shanghai includes the artist's recent sculptural works - *Untitled* (2017), *Untitled* (2017), and *Untitled* (2017). The sculptures are best recognised for the materials used: beeswax, iron meteorite, moss, mimosa pudica, clam fossils 100 million years old from Texas, even wind - the sculptures does not form a grander entity, and are proudly being independent from each other, operating and developing themselves orderly and naturally, and are related to entropy in a somehow stable fashion.

Although Wang emphasises a pre-intersubjective ontological aspect of her practise, she'd at the same time resist the speculative tendency of the market by composing and presenting unorthodox exhibition press releases and posters. All of Wang's solo exhibitions so far has been titled "Alice Wang", and almost all of her works *Untitled* (the only exception at the recent exhibition is *Oracle*, a collaboration between Wang and Ben Tong); political as it is, the decision of not giving exhibitions and artworks names means a resistance that is



王凝慧, 唐嘉豪, *Oracle*, 2017, 影像 (高清), 9'33. 展览现场图片: 王凝慧 (2017年9月2日至10月18日), 胶囊上海, 上海. 图片提供: 艺术家及胶囊上海

positive and powerful on both the level of ideas and that of practises.

In October 2017 Wang also launched at the Modern Art Base in Shanghai her first artist book *Untitled* (Capsule Shanghai + Sming Sming Books). Included in the book is a series of images from the 2012 London Olympics synchronised swimming games, featuring Team Spain, and a commissioned text composed by Shanghai writer btr. Very much like Wang's presentation at the Capsule, the elements of design, images and the text of the artist book are quite independent from each other. And the fact that btr takes as his point of departure the story of *Alice*

in Wonderland and *Through the Looking-Glass* and *What Alice Found There* (as perhaps hinted by Alice Wang's name), brings about an interesting comparison between an artist that is a recipient of a BS degree in Computer Science and International Relations, frequently using knowledges and experiences of "astronomy, physics, palaeontology, and biology", interested in synchronised swimming, and an author that composed *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Principles of Parliamentary Representation*, and *An Elementary Treatise on Determinants, With Their Application to Simultaneous Linear Equations and Algebraic Equations*.

I for a second wanted to frame you as a Chinese female artist from LA.

The idea of "from" is very problematic for me. I was born in Xi'an, spent time in Chengdu, Shanghai, Hangzhou, New York, Toronto, Paris, Maebashi, Los Angeles..... so far, LA for the longest time has been my home, but I still don't think I am "from" somewhere.

What has been your impression of the Chinese contemporary art scene?

It's apparently a very exciting time because of the instability I heard about here in China.

The whole of the press release of the recent show at Capsule Shanghai is:

H He Li Be B C N O F Ne Na Mg Al Si P S Cl Ar K Ca Sc Ti V Cr Mn Fe Co Ni Cu Zn Ga Ge As Se Br Kr
Rb Sr Y Zr Nb Mo Tc Ru Rh Pd Ag Cd In Sn Sb Te I Xe Cs Ba La Hf Ta W Re Os Ir Pt Au Hg Tl Pb Bi Po
At Rn Fr Ra Ac Rf Db Sg Bh Hs Mt Ds Rg Cn Nh Fl Mc Lv Ts Og Ce Pr Nd Pm Sm Eu Gd Tb Dy Ho Er
Tm Yb Lu Th Pa U Np Pu Am Cm Bk Cf Es Fm Md No Lr

Do you think there is a certain decoding involved in reading a press release like that, like reading a morse code? Do you think for a more informed audience it is more rewarding reading a press release like this?

Not necessary. Regarding the periodic table: the idea is a general knowledge, because I am a science geek, Chemistry is my favourite subject. It is so magical, but it is very much about the earth. We talked about this before, the press release as an extension of the artwork. I don't want it to be just a form of marketing. So it was a way to bypass marketing, and insert something that is related to myself. Not necessarily myself even, but the work. For example the image in the exhibition poster is that of a mantis shrimp, a shrimp that can see a lot of different colours. It has 12 colour receptors, and we humans have 3.

An appropriate review of the show might be written in periodic table as well.

That would be great.

You talked about boxing when you were having a conversation with Carol Bove.

Yes, and it is like when you are in a driving or biking situation, in which you respond not with your conscious brain, but with a different part of your brain, that is not logical or rational.

You talked about also "reading" art. My impression is that, in China, people tend to "look at art", instead of reading art. I guess by proposing "reading art," you are presupposing that contemporary art is not superficiality itself.

The first time we met, the first question I asked you was how art history is treated in China. On the one hand I am glad that it is about the formal aspect of the work and the immediacy of the experience when they encounter the artwork; on the other hand, I am also conflicted. As an artist I try not to think too much about the legacy of art history but on the other hand I cannot ignore it. I feel like when I make art I am also in conversation with all those that made art before. That is a given. You cannot escape art history. A press release like that was about engaging with what is around. It is not something that is new, what I am doing. It is kind of difficult coming to China facing an audience that does not have the background knowledge of what I am engaged with. Specifically, when it comes to sculpture, you cannot ignore minimalism, conceptual art, earth works. When you leave the context you are coming from, the meaning starts to shift. But I don't really want to control the work's meaning.

You wouldn't say you are frustrated if people just look at the artwork, instead of reading it.



展览现场图片：王凝慧（2017年9月2日至10月18日），胶囊上海，上海。图片提供：艺术家及胶囊上海

This is where it is conflicting, because in America, I wanted to open up a space where people don't read the work, because everyone reads the work. In that interview with Bove, we wanted to pinpoint the moment when conceptual art sort of opened up a little bit with Felix Gonzalez-Torres' work, as you can read it in the institutional critique context - AIDS crisis, identity politics moment - but at the same time his works are so phenomenological: you eat the candies, you go through the curtains, there is warmth from the light bulbs. So I am trying to also open up that space. But in China that space is wide open. It's like running, in the Olympics, the runners kick off. The kick off for me is the historical context. Without that kick off, I am in a vacuum in China.

But you wouldn't say deliberately you are trying to deny knowing more or being known more in China.

I am just trying to be myself. I am not trying to be different. For every show of mine, press releases have always been this way. That's not gimmicky. From my first show in 2013, I have always been experimenting with the form of language - how is the art language used when you are having an exhibition - and also experimenting with the format of exhibitions. Normally it is about explaining the works, and it becomes advertising. So it is difficult when you want to bypass that advertising language, it might also be to my disadvantage, because people will not "get the artwork", and I would be buried in non-recognition. So I choose not to play the game this way. I risk my own non-existence in the art world. And that is okay with me.

Caught in-between Shanghai and LA, like in a J. G. Ballard work you once talked about. I was interested in the time you are living in as well. You don't identify yourself too closely with the hip stuff today - the AI, VR and AR, what have you - do you?

That is just not my interest. I don't know enough about it. I am interested in the materials and materiality. Also physicality. So a virtual reality has a physicality, but at the moment it is for me too cerebral - it has a lot to do with the mind. But the physical manifestation of it is not something that appeals to me at the moment. Primarily because I value the physical reality. You cannot translate chemistry into virtual reality. And even physics does not apply to that world. I live where I live, and Space-X is sort of close to where I live, an hour's drive. I think my mind very much exists in here (the space between places). And also because I shuttle a lot between deserts, so Joshua Tree is like my second home. When I leave for LA I am going back straight to the desert, so all in all a long journey. Being so close to the stars, being able to see the stars, it's really important for me. This physical existence is where my mind is.

And it seems to me that there is this very deliberate confusion of languages. From the language of art history, to sometimes the language of mediation - you are interested in Buddhism, Taoism and yoga - the language of physics, of chemistry... Deliberately you'd confuse these languages.

Regarding the spiritual, I had experienced the bodily or the chemical changed by meditation or qigong or by other means: your body starts to change and your perception of different dimensions changes as well. I think that is also why I am so interested in the physical reality of the world. For me, art is an interesting way to explore these other dimensions, specifically sculpture.

Regarding the confusion of languages as you put it, it is not something new. Back in the 19th Century, before Modernity, everything was intertwined, nature sciences, philosophy, nature, science... Newton was a big alchemist, but nobody wanted to talk about that, because they label him as this modern scientist that came up with mechanical physics. So this confusion or intertwining of multiple-disciplines exists for quite a while. The classic Laotzu for me is about philosophy, nature, spirituality, how to be a person... Separating everything and our different senses to me was what happened with the modern shift - mechanical and technical life.

It is more like a necessity to separate witchcraft and alchemy from science, that could be dated back to just about after the Renaissance. I don't know whether for Da Vinci all his different practises are separate or not.

When I think about sculpture, I am interested in the forms, but also what the form does, its function, as in the Beeswax piece (*Untitled*, 2017), when the wind comes out. I wanted to incorporate immaterial elements - the wind - but also to use the metabolic material - beeswax, as coming from the stomach of the bees. What these mean to me comes from science. They are for me inseparable.

I don't think this is very common though. I think it has something to do with my family background. The thing that comes close to this "Chinese confusion" is I think Greek mythology, when things were considered together. Or maybe the Celts, before the philosophical, the scientific, the spiritual started separating themselves. My mom would teach me this Chinese idiom, I might say I don't know about that Chinese idiom, then she would start telling me this story about this guy that was alive thousand years ago..... sometimes you don't know whether it is real or not but it does not matter.

The *Oracle* is the only work that has a title to it? What about it that is special?

It's my first collaboration, so I did not want to impose my own rules, I abandoned certain tendencies. In collaborations you don't know when your work ends, when the other person's work starts, and you need a sense of flexibility for something to work as a collaboration. We did not translate the title of *Oracle*, because it be too overdetermining. It's called *Oracle*, because biosphere II is in the city of Oracle, so we like the double meaning of it being both a place and a thing.

But when you talk about your films and your sculptures, you said the former ain't got much to do with the latter.

The *Oracle* is more a video than a film; before this I made two films, one of which is called *Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness*. I made it back in graduate school, and it explored from my mom's perspective the Cultural Revolution. I wanted to stay away from Greenberg earlier in our conversation, because I am to an extent a modernist, wanting to reconsider like Greenberg what is painting, sculpture, and film. Because film is so different. I know the cinema in the gallery or in the museum is quite a norm now but the film experience is so different, the ritual, you buy a ticket, go into a completely dark room, you sit in a comfortable chair, with a giant screen, and you are committed to sit there for the duration of the film, from the beginning to the end. This entire experience is so different from a screening in a gallery, watching maybe two minutes of it and walking away. That is why I consider them to be two different practises, formally. In terms of content, I have this weird romance of China. It's because I left China, though always coming back. When parents raise their children outside of their home country, they constantly talk about memories of what they experienced, especially traumatic experiences. So I sort of inherited my mom and dad's memories. My father was in university when the revolution took place in 1967; mom was teenager. They had different experiences. He was in the epicentre. He did physics in school, but his true love was classical music and violin. So he joined the orchestra, played the violin. He hand copied some classical musics that were banned. What a critical gesture that was not blatantly political! It's like a resistance that's so personal. My grandfather was in fact a spy for the Chinese government. So they got punished and sent down. I don't have time now to explore further, but I'd like to.

It's not a strategic decision because I just want to be responsible for the form. To apply some rigour to the practise. I have to consider it. When you are a musician, playing on the guitar has to be different from blowing on a trombone, using completely different parts of your body. Art making is that. Why am I exploring sculpture to think about what is art? To me looking at sculpture is looking at what the possibility of art is. Somebody asked me in Beijing why not painting or photography, my answer was I cannot speak on painting, because I never painted, so I don't know the question of painting. But I invested a lot of time and energy thinking about materiality and the three dimensional world. And also the possibility of sculpture as painting, photo, or drawing.

Speaking of music, what music do you listen to? Coming from LA, with a violinist dad?

I am very interested in the fugue form, as composed by Bach. Fugue creates vortex in the soundscape. It could easily resolves in chaos, but Bach got these layers together, creating a different dimension. He used a lot of organ, and organ's almost like a spaceship. It travels up and gets you almost into the heaven.

I am also interested in fugue in the tradition of poetry and literature. I am obsessed with the tv series the Wire that uses a similar form.

Who would you cite as your major influences?

Allan Sekula, Trisha Donnelly, Carol Bove - both Donnelly and Bove are my teachers, and they changed how I think about materials and the idea of sculpture and the idea of form. Because all mediums intertwine with each other today, I wanted to go back to the basis. That's also why I like Bach, because a lot of his works are just exercises. I think with sculpture it can really open up some spaces that are really just invisible to me now. Also Sturtevant, Robert Rauschenberg and Lee Lozano among many others.

Your insistence on the term "sculpture", instead of "installation" or even "immersive installation" - for you, it has to be sculpture and it has to be different from what is known today as installation, right?

I don't do the latter. To me sculpture talks about ontology, the nature of being. What is being, what is the reality that being manifests? One of my earlier works is this photograph of a bonzai. The sculptural aspect of it is in your mind, in your memory of it it grows. Installation does not allow that sort of framework to consider the nature of being.

You talk about your show at ltd in LA, and you talked about feeling in the dark. That reminded me of Derrida's Memoirs of the Blind.

Yes it's exactly about that!