

I See, I Site, I Sight

Through the factory windows of the Two Lines Gallery, the hazy skyline of Beijing encases the work of three artists; Weissensteiner, McCormick and Scott, who consider the self in this city. Walking through three distinct spaces, the viewer perceives three questioning statements from three perspectives and, thus, art and city merge. Does the artist become a transient in a physical and virtual nomadic world? Weissensteiner, McCormick and Scott have travelled in and out of each other's location as insiders and outsiders—Melbourne, Vienna, Beijing.

I See, I Site, I Sight.
I see, I site, I sight.
The self, the city, the object.
To see is also to understand.
To site is also to locate oneself.
To sight is also to visualise.

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Weissensteiner, McCormick and Scott have travelled in and out of each other's location as insiders and outsiders—Melbourne, Vienna, Beijing. In August 2006, they came together in Beijing to investigate how they see, site and sight themselves in this rapidly changing city.

On entering the gallery space, the viewer first encounters the subtle questioning of Weissensteiner's multilayered photographic images of body parts, hands, eyes and faces as well as everyday objects encased in resin transparencies and, in the center, a sculpture of two hands on a piece of gum tree bark. I See means the physical act of perception and the mental act of understanding. Creative understanding means doing. Both eyes and hands are needed.

But, do we really understand when we see? Or, do we see after having understood? We say that we grasp something when we understand. Does this mean that we have to touch before we can understand? For Weissensteiner therefore, understanding a new world demands investigation of the uncertainties of the familiar. Can a relationship be mapped? Can the perception of objects be unambiguous? Her semi-transparent, manipulated, photo-based panels carry their inquiries with their material. Do you see what you understand? Do you grasp what you see? The small sculpture is made of everyday materials, wire mesh and tape. By sitting on gum tree bark, they refer to her current home, Australia, where she has moved from Austria three years ago. For the Austrian artist Weissensteiner, Beijing is the third layer of her reality transparencies.

Moving through the gallery, the viewer encounters a predominantly black and white space with body maps printed onto vinyl banners by McCormick. On closer inspection, some seem familiar and appear to be subway maps. Indeed they are, but from which strange cities do they come and how does one read such a map? Other, equally questioning maps appear on adjacent walls, with visual statements such as "triangle + square = circle." Such references require the viewer to decipher the map metaphor in order to engage with the meaning of this work.

McCormick's personal cartography engages the viewer in a dialogue with the artist around changing concepts of cultural identity in a global world. As part of the process of the dialogue between the artist and the viewer, the viewer is invited to contribute their own "mapping" by responding to the question, "What cities are you connected to?" McCormick sites the dialogue between the city experience of Melbourne, Beijing and Vienna on the urban self. Through a metaphoric layering of the subway maps of cities onto the artist's back, the body and the city become one. As the body moves, the city moves in a state of urban consciousness. McCormick's interest is in the subliminal experience of the urban site.

In the third space, a Beijing real estate poster confronts the viewer with a painting out of unauthorized advertising and graffiti created by the local authorities that, in itself, could either be considered an act of vandalism or an act of art. In the gallery space, the poster is now photographed and encased in a large industrial light box and placed high on the wall as an echo of the street below. Again, the street poster is in dialogue with the city. But now this dialogue has changed. As much as the original was one of silencing—something should be taken out of sight—the new dialogue is about understanding and inquiry.

Three different stages of transformation, photography, encasing and new location, lead to a focus on the aesthetic qualities—a newfound object has been recovered. When Scott sights an object in the streets of Beijing, he invents its future transformation into an object of local reflection. He sights the changing cultural streetscapes as a location of the self. His sculptures, made of fake jewelry and acrylic glass, pick up this process of transformation by discovery and thus literally tell about the exchange between East and West. Through arrangement and display, fake ivory becomes the precious material of questioning and the understanding of cultural influences.

Finally, the viewer might take one last look into the maze of industrial buildings of 798, in the Dashanzi District in Beijing. Galleries and studios are multiplying beside old-style factory workshops. Wondering and curiosity are alike in the eyes of visitors and workers. How do we see, site and sight ourselves in this rapidly changing city of Beijing, and in the equally changing connections between the East and the West?

Both Weissensteiner and McCormick were in Beijing as Red Gate Gallery artists in residence. Scott works as an artist

and curator with Red Gate Gallery. The Bundeskanzleramt in Austria, the Kulturforum of the Austrian Embassy and the Australian Embassy, Red Gate Gallery and Two Lines Gallery, all in Beijing, have assisted Weissensteiner, McCormick and Scott to undertake this exhibition in China.