

Zhang Ruyi

Bonsai

February 2 - March 10, 2019

François Ghebaly is proud to present *Bonsai*, Shanghai-based artist Zhang Ruyi's first solo exhibition in the United States. The exhibition consists of an architectural space in which mundane building materials like cement, steel, and ceramic tiles are reconfigured into a built environment made strange. Doorways are compressed, rubble grows thorns, water seems to flow sideways. Through her collision of interior architecture, desert flora, and the human body, Zhang creates space to consider the individual psyche and the built world through which it is channeled.

In *Bonsai*, Zhang segments, recombines, and reorients elements of domestic architecture. Approaching the exhibition space compositionally, she extends certain geometric vectors using drywall, tile, and pigmented grout. The gleaming white tiles evoke two significant domestic spaces: the kitchen and the washroom. Zhang juxtaposes the associates of each; the kitchen stands for hosting, public performance, and the extension of the outside world into the self, whereas the washroom stands for the personal, the interior, and aloneness. Both are associated with cleanliness and soiling. Tile becomes a metonym—a conceptual stand-in—for broad ideas of how materials articulate personal and public space within the constructed world.

The tiles in *Bonsai* furthermore become the supports for sculptures that reflect the relationship between individual interiority and industrialized society. A cactus, cast in pigmented concrete, becomes a building in miniature. The cactus is a figure with a hard, brutal exterior and a wet, parsimonious inside. Zhang has described these plants as highly rational organisms, ones that are well adapted to times of need. Yet they are plants that hold secrets.

Elsewhere, a chunk of concrete rubble, collected from a demolition site near the artist's studio in Shanghai, is adorned with the spikes of a cactus. In the context of the hard, blasted piece of demolished building, the spines lose their violence, resembling instead a soft patch of grass or a tuft of hair. A drain mounted in the wall and a concrete bar of soap reorient the space. Zhang blurs the lines that separate individual hygiene and urban development, a rich intersection in the urban context of Shanghai, where rapid development leaves an ambiguous, swirling interchange between past, present, and future.

Zhang Ruyi was born in 1985 in Shanghai, China. She earned an MFA in Synthesized Materials at the Fine Art College of Shanghai University. Recent solo exhibitions include Don Gallery, Shanghai (2016); and White Space, Beijing (2016). Recent group exhibitions including Pilar Corrias Gallery, London (2018); Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (2018); K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong (2018); Sadie Coles HQ, London (2017); UCCA, Beijing (2017); CASS Sculpture Foundation, Chichester, UK; and Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing (2016). She lives and works in Shanghai.

Accessibility

Please note that this exhibition is not ADA accessible. It features narrow and low doorways. Please email gan@ghebaly.com for assistance or support in accessing this exhibition.