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卫**Wang Wei***A Wall on the Wall—A Floor on the Floor*

*Beijing-based Wang Wei (b. 1972; Beijing) graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1996.*

If the title of this work, *A Wall on the Wall—A Floor on the Floor*, is read as a simple statement, it sounds as if, when standing in its presence, there ought to be a catch. There wasn't. Not an obvious visual one. There on the wall of the gallery space was a covering of tiles, small ones like the kind you'd find in a bathroom perhaps, the kind that suggest old European tastes (although for the purposes of Wang Wei's latest installation the choice of tiles was simply what happened to be available, and which felt right for the project). Wang Wei's tiling was also not perfect in its covering of the wall. The odd piece was missing here and there, apparently at random, as if one or two tiles had come off, worn away through time and exposure to the elements. That part, at least, was deliberate, but so deceptively simple was the appearance of this work that it was possible to spend quite a long time wondering if there was a cryptic message embedded within the spaces of the missing tiles.

On the floor next to the *Wall*, slightly offset from it, was the *Floor* portion of the installation. This took the form of a raised platform atop the original flooring, positioned at a jaunty angle to the artist's *Wall*, such that the floor was not butted up against the wall, but rotated away on a horizontal plane. It was structured almost as if in demonstration of a construction process, a manufacturing option: "Here's how we make the layers of flooring, and why you should want it." The demystification of this kind of manufacturing process is a common phenomenon in China today, in what remains an era of first-time homebuyers and novice home decorators. "You too can have a floor just like this one," the work seemed to suggest. "Look, see how it works. Simple."

But this being art, and a work by Wang Wei, the ideas and experience behind it were far from simple. For many years now, this artist has worked with the spaces in which he is invited to show. He has built into these places using basic construction forms and materials, entirely altering the visitors' experience of the space—designing an experience that is his art. He did it first at Long March's original 798 space over

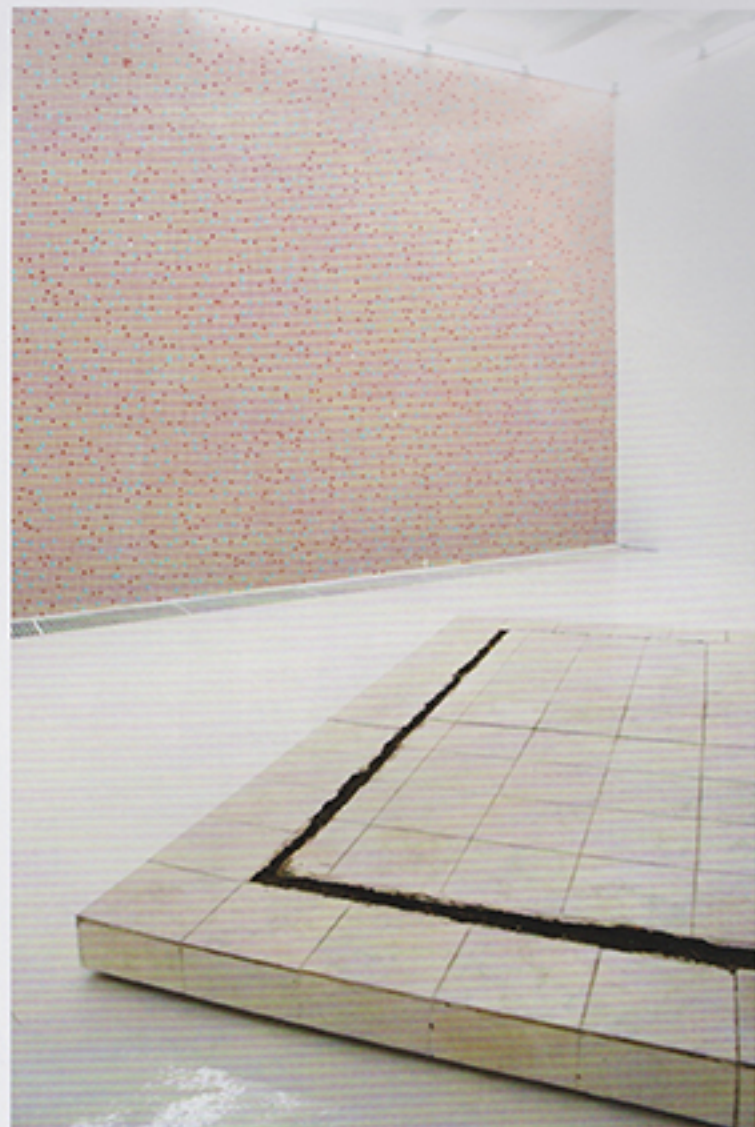




▲ detail of the Wall

the course of a month-long project titled *Temporary Space* (2003) in which he worked with local brick collectors and labourers to build, and then demolish, a building within a building, from which the audience was excluded. He also did it by turning Platform China's Caochangdi space into a giant birdcage he titled *Trap*. On this occasion visitors were free to walk around the work, albeit while ducking scaffolding and birds in flight. And he did it again in 798's Space Station with *Historic Residence* by introducing what appeared to be a public bathroom, but was in fact an as-close-as-possible replica of that from a residence built for Mao Zedong.

*Historic Residence* may well have been more directly related to the orchestration of *A Wall on the Wall—A Floor on the Floor* than the others. At that time, Wang Wei's use of tiled surfaces created a layer of surface finish that was not part of the earlier works. It also seemed like a decorative flourish. The texture was a distraction from immediate readings of the form and of the manipulation of space that Wang Wei does so well. But arriving here at *A Wall on the Wall—A Floor on the Floor*, that problem had clearly been resolved. The work felt like a complete installation—conceptually, visually and physically—while standing in the gallery. It employed the basic mechanics of



▲ installation view

pictorial composition, making them feel physical, three-dimensional. And so you could walk around it and over it, stand on the floor, while staring at the wall, and ponder how hard it was to plot the random nature of the missing tiles; with your back to the wall you could appreciate the angles and trajectories of the floor. There were places where the floor and the wall visually overlapped as you moved through the space, which suggested that the orchestration could shift at any time: an optical illusion, ultimately, but one that was beautifully managed.