

SINGAPORE

Wee Hong Ling

Sculpture Square

A cat hides behind the china cabinet, and a dog sleeps under the studio bench where the artist works. The presence of these two pets in Wee Hong Ling's "No Place Like Home," albeit in the form of two-dimensional vinyl cutouts, may seem like a playful gesture; but they are essential to the décor that frames and contextualizes the ceramic works of this Singapore-born and New York-based artist.

Wee's exhibition takes place within the framework of the home. Two-dimensional vinyl cutouts on the floor delineate rooms, amenities (such as bathtub and toilet), and some furniture (such as bed and sofa). Actual tables and shelves serve as display units for Wee's ceramics. Within this context, the two pets are more than afterthoughts; instead, they form an integral part of the space, inviting visitors to suspend disbelief and imagine that they are in their own home or any home of their desire. Whether one prefers a cat to a dog or vice versa, one cannot deny the pet's place in that house of the imagination.

Like the 1980 romantic sci-fi tragedy *Somewhere in Time*, in which physical trappings such as attire and fashion accessories (together with the power of self-suggestion) allow for time travel, in Wee's installation, the cat and the dog draw the viewer into the dialectics of the artist's world. The reason is simple: pets are generally not allowed into gallery or exhibition spaces. But, they are here—or are they? And if that is so, where is the viewer? In a house or in a gallery? And what, then, are Wee's works? Utilitarian ceramics or sculptures or both?

Wee repeatedly teases the viewer with these questions. A large celadon porcelain bowl placed on a dining table serves the dual purpose of functional vessel and decorative centerpiece. The area marked "Bathroom" contains a sink of similar form, with the difference that this vessel has a hole at the bottom for the drain.



Above and detail: Wee Hong Ling, installation view of "No Place Like Home," 2011.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard wrote that a house "constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability." Wee's installation, however, playfully challenges that notion of stability. By expecting each simple object to serve more than its obvious function and to also inspire creativity, sustain one's reverence for cultural symbolism, and forge ties to ancestry and heritage, she effects change and shakes stability.

Wee asks whether a house, as Bachelard claims, actually "shelters day dreaming" and "protects the dreamer." By creating an installation

that raises questions about the nature of the objects exhibited within the context of a house, Wee also interrogates the concept of "home." Such questioning of the obvious is an inevitable function of art and of the artist.

—Phan Ming Yen