

“The Visibility of Labor”

An installation by Tsz Yan Ng

October 24 – November 15, 2015

“The Visibility of Labor” is the latest of a series of installations by Tsz Yan Ng that consider issues of labor in global textile manufacturing through a long-term relationship with Lafayette 148 New York, a New York-based fashion label with a manufacturing facility in Shantou, China.

More specifically it asks the question of how many pairs of hands go into the design and manufacture of a single garment? By focusing on a basic black sheath dress, and by capturing the hands of the workers in New York and China who “touch” the product as it moves from design through to R+D, and from production to shipping, the project attempts to make tangible the invisible labor that underlies what appears to the North American consumer in commodity form.

The resulting series of hands represent not only the breadth and complexity of the process, but also, through their cuts, callouses and folds, talk to lifetimes of work, and through their gestures (decided by the workers themselves) express the many unique moments of enacted labor that go into the manufacture of even a fairly simple garment.

The installation will take place in 9338 Campau, an architect-designed gallery in a former clothing store on a busy shopping strip that still contains numerous other clothing shops. By placing part of the project in the gallery window, we invite passers-by to contemplate the hidden labor in clothing, and by extension, to consider broader socio-economic and political issues.

Biography: The work of artist and internationally-recognized architect Tsz Yan Ng ranges from the design of large-scale textile manufacturing facilities and headquarters, to gallery based installations that explore new processes and techniques in material-making, and bring into question latent histories, politics, and social concerns within our built context. Common to these practices are questions of labor in its various manifestations, underscoring broader issues of manufacturing, human labor, craft, and aesthetics. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Architecture at the University of Michigan.