

Sung Tieu, *No Jobs, No Country*

n.b.k., Berlin  
March 11 – May 07, 2023  
Curated by Anna Lena Seiser

Through installation, video, sound, photography and sculpture, Sung Tieu (\*1987 in Hai Duong / Vietnam, lives in Berlin) explores relationships between art, bureaucracy, structures of power, and the continuous effects of the Cold War. Tieu's exhibition at n.b.k. focuses on "Objekt Gehrenseestrasse," one of the largest dormitory complexes in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), built in the early 1980s in Berlin-Lichtenberg. The housing complex consists of nine identical Plattenbau structures built from prefabricated concrete slabs. From 1982 to 1989, it was predominantly used to house GDR contract workers, particularly from Vietnam, who lived under strict regulations and constant supervision in around five square meters of living space per person. Tieu herself lived in one of the blocks from 1994 to 1997.

After German Reunification, the complex provided temporary housing for asylum seekers and later, refugees from regions including former Yugoslavia and the Middle East. Derelict since 2003, the buildings are currently scheduled for demolition with a new residential and commercial district titled "Quartier Gehrenseestrasse" to be constructed in its place.

Working through a formalism that equally refers to the visual language of minimalism while conflating it with the conforming aesthetics of administration present in both early conceptual art and bureaucratic design, Tieu's work uses the constraints imprinted in administrative documents and built structures that regulate both bodies and subjectivities. From these concerns, Tieu's recent works consider the implementation of surface and volume in regards to social design, as an instrument of governmentality whose organizing force manifests itself in state architecture. At n.b.k., these connections are elucidated through several new and site-specific works.

The steel sculpture titled *Block G (Gehrenseestrasse, Berlin)* is based on the floorplan of the eponymous building and filled with soil from its immediate surroundings. This is complemented by a spatial intervention in which a wall has been perforated to trace the outlines of a window behind it. While this intervention produces a direct surgical cut to open the built space of the gallery, the recesses in the work *Form (for Residence Permit)* point to a void to be filled. These four geometric drawings on plaster bear the size of standard A4 paper and are set discreetly into the wall. These outline the two-dimensional spaces that prospective applicants fill when filing for a residency title in Germany. Five childhood photographs from the artist's possession provide insights into the interior of the building, and testify to private memories from Tieu's first years in Berlin. These intimate snapshots correspond with *Inside the Blocks*, a seven-year-old child's account of everyday life on Gehrenseestrasse. This letter to the editor was written by the artist in response to a 1995 *New York Times* article by Alan Cowell that wrote on the living circumstances of Vietnamese contract workers in the then recently reunified Germany.

Sung Tieu lives and works in Berlin. Her solo exhibitions in Germany and abroad include Amant, New York (2023); MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge / USA (2023); Mudam, Luxembourg (2022); Kunstmuseum Bonn (2021); Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig (2021); Nottingham Contemporary (2020); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2020) and Nha San Collective, Hanoi (2017). Tieu's works were shown at the biennials in São Paulo and Kyiv (both 2021). Tieu's work has also been shown in group exhibitions at venues including Kunstmuseum Winterthur (2022); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2022); Museion, Bolzano / Italy (2021); Kunsthalle Basel (2021) and Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2020).