

# Hui'an

Katrin Korfmann

Stone after stone of hard granite, pushed through machines with a deafening noise, cut to pieces, then drawn upon-elegant decorations minutely drawn with graphite pencil on the ash-grey granite-rectangular stone blocks, frantically beaten with quick and rhythmic hammer strikes; announcing the promise of three-dimensional grace yet to be released from solid rock, in the spirit of Michelangelo's remark that "every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it"-roguish festoons, flower ornaments, fins and scales, grape clusters, a giant figure who is to welcome visitors at a restaurant, or animals coiled up to fit inside the frame-there is nothing too strange or too difficult to release from the stone, in the hands of the stone carvers from Hui'an county in Fujian province in Southeast China, near the Taiwan Strait, a region famous for its stone quarries and its age-old tradition of stone carving, which for a while earlier in the twentieth century was done by female workers exclusively. Along with woodcarving, stone and brick carving counts among the ancient crafts of China. It is a difficult profession and requires dangerous physical labour, back then even more than today. Whatever the carvers from Hui'an are asked to carve they can and do carve, from modern abstract art to kitsch decoration: Buddhas and Mickey Mouses alike, skillfully freed from granite blocks, drift out across the world from a city where every street corner is watched over by sculptures waiting to be transported.

Katrin Korfmann, fascinated by the process of industrial manufacturing of art as opposed to the romantic notion of the lonely artist in his studio, scanned one of the stone workshops in Hui'an, moving her tall tripod meters above the dusty floor and half-finished sculptures to let her photo camera observe the carving process from above; several silhouettes of male and female carvers, surrounded by spaghetti-like electric cables powering their tools, hesitantly stick out against the pale grey of the endless number of dust particles diffusing the entire ambiance. Korfmann's composite panorama assembles a succession of moments into one large, panoramic frame, the infernal din left out, stones and dust and half-finished sculptures flattened into a smooth, seamless photographic surface, apparently as easy an effort as the elegant stone sculptures appear, that are being wrought from the depths of the earth, whose stone quarries are like giant mountains in reverse: negative space transformed into positive sculptural space in workrooms with the appearance of archaeological dig sites. What Korfmann shows is that meaning is not only to be found in a finished art work, but that the anterior and posterior of art can be equally meaningful. Ultimately, *Hui'an* transports the production of art (and kitsch) to the level of art *itself*.

Taco Hidde Bakker

惠安