

FULBRIGHT CURRICULAR PROJECT

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I. Title: New Models for Exhibiting Art in China

II. Audience: graduate level curatorial practice/studies, undergraduate art history, contemporary cultural studies

III. Goals: to elucidate and comprehend nascent art institutions in 3 Chinese cities as exemplified by 7 case study institutions/organizations.

IV. Essential Questions:

What are the main models for non-profits in China? (using Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou as case studies)

To what extent do they align with Western models, and to what extent are they innovative?

What are some of the differences attributable to?

What are the funding opportunities?

How do these institutions support or work with artists?

How are these institutions regarded within the sphere of cultural production?

How has the recent expansion of the art market in China contributed to the interest in art and the texture of the cultural sphere?

What is the contemporary art audience in China?

What is the role of critical appreciation?

What can we learn from these models?

V. Learning Activities:

Lectures

Research

Guest presentations

Student presentations / discussions

Individual essays

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

The international art market's recent focus on Chinese cultural production has highlighted the dearth of local infrastructure, at the same time as pointing up the material advantages of art making and collecting, albeit often to the detriment of criticality or difference. Lacking a support system and any sustained government or corporate funding, the situation of Chinese artists and art institutions has until the present been more or less by default "alternative." However, in direct contrast to the late 70s/early 80s when non-officially sanctioned forms of art were apprehended as a potential political threat and heavily censored by the Chinese government, contemporary art today is viewed by the same sector as an important, and potentially profitable, part of cultural production.

As a consequence of socio-economic transformation, new types of exhibition spaces have appeared in China's cultural landscape. Private and corporate interest in the arts has resulted in sponsorship and funding support, which occasionally has generated such radical paradigms as the country's first privately funded, public museum (Today Art Museum, Beijing).

The relatively recent contemporary art scene is supported also through the presence of commercial galleries (the first in China opened in 2001), many of which are outposts of successful foreign ventures such as Pace or Galleria Continua, both in Beijing. The 21st century has also seen support mechanisms evolve to include non-profit and hybrid exhibition venues (often modeled on commercial galleries in terms of their funding sources and relationships with artists). These both provide opportunities for Chinese artists and introduce local communities to developments on the international scene. Established in response to a particular set of socio-political and economic conditions by artists or curators (and occasionally corporate moguls), these organizations are characterized by, often unique, structures and approaches to funding and operating. Their reputes have become such that venues like Arrow Factory, or Vitamin Creative Space, for example, have been emulated and even exhibited as successful creative projects, most recently at Tate Modern's *No Soul For Sale* (2010). Their curators—e.g. Arrow Factory's Pauline Yao and Boers-Li's Pi-Li—are internationally acknowledged experts in the field of contemporary art and, as their resumes attest, are often invited to curate projects at arts institutions internationally or write for arts publications. Not least, there is a certain rigor and criticality in their programming, which further distinguishes their ventures from the purely market-driven dynamics of commercial galleries, as well as an emphasis on experimentation and risk-taking (in the sense of supporting emerging artists and conceptually demanding artworks).

By non-profit we are to understand that the organization in question does not distribute its surplus funds to owners or shareholders, but instead uses them to help pursue its goals. Often blurring the boundaries between commerce and culture—Boers-Li and Vitamin Creative Space exhibit at many major art fairs internationally, and the latter's Beijing branch has adopted the tongue-in-cheek name "The Shop"—the Chinese non-profits that are the subject of this project demonstrate a flexibility and adaptability that has enabled them to exist beyond the numerous short-lived initiatives that spring up in the art districts of the major cities forming the focus of this project.

As some of the most exciting developments in contemporary art are happening in China, and the art market has continued to reflect this activity, it is interesting to examine more closely these national/local cultural institutions that are supporting artists and offering them opportunities to

show their work and build their careers. Focusing on three main loci of cultural production—Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai—this project seeks to examine organizations in each of these cities that evince either innovative structures or curatorial models. Through a close analysis of these organizations and their exhibition programs/ curators, we will seek to contextualize their operations within global cultural production. The project aims also at a critical evaluation of the role that these institutions play in supporting artists through offering them opportunities to exhibit, promoting their careers internationally, and, often, selling their work. It also offers an evaluation of whether their stated aims are supported by their programs and activities.

This project could be adapted for inclusion within a class examining different curatorial models as exemplified by innovative non-profit institutions internationally, or a class focusing on cultural developments globally, as well as a class that takes as its subject contemporary art production internationally, or indeed, in China.

ASSIGNMENTS (for both weeks of instruction)

- 1) Assess how far the claims of one of these organizations are borne out by the program and activities it espouses. Provide supporting materials in the form of reviews, etc.
- 2) Which of the organizational models do you consider to be particularly successful and why?

COURSE OF INSTRUCTION

Week 1: Beijing



| Brief contextualization of the city's contemporary art scene as well as brief overview of Beijing's senior role in Chinese art production. (The general bibliography set out below indicates articles and publications, which provide helpful information, as well as specific articles on developments in new models of arts organizations.) Presentation of the mission, program, and selected projects of the following four venues: Art Factory, Boers-Li, Long March Space, Today Art Museum. (Brief information on each is presented below, together with their website URLs and links to articles on each to provide more context.)

1. Arrow Factory (Dongcheng District)

<http://www.arrowfactory.org.cn/>



Founded in 2008, Arrow Factory is an independently run alternative art space founded by an international group of artists and curators. It is located in a 135 sq foot storefront—a former vegetable stand—in a hutong alley (from which it takes its name) in Beijing’s center. Initiated as a response to the conditions facing contemporary art production in Beijing, Arrow Factory claims to resist both the commercialization of Chinese art and its increasing confinement to purpose-built art districts in remote outskirts. The program embodies a commitment to presenting works by local and international artists that are provisional in nature, highly contingent upon the immediate environment, and that form meaningful responses to the diverse economic, political and social conditions of our given locality and everyday lived experiences. Often taking the form of site-specific installations, their projects are designed to be viewed from the street 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The modestly sized space signals an economy of means that informs the organization’s curatorial practice and promotes artistic collaboration, exploration and experimentation across different cultural contexts and viewing publics. Although the owners hold a temporary commercial business license, they do not sell art, but rather subsist on small contributions from friends and colleagues, as well as themselves. They do not hold openings. Their self-stated mission is to provide an alternative: a different context for artistic experimentation.*

[*edited version of text found at: <http://www.arrowfactory.org.cn/?page=about>]

Reference materials:

Lee Ambrozy, “Wang Gongxin, Arrow Factory,” *Artforum*, May 2009

Stacey Duff, “Just around the Corner,” *Time Out Beijing*, December 2009.

Pauline Yao, “Small is the New Big: Arrow Factory” (accessible at:

<http://arthubasia.org/archives/arrow-factory-beijing-with-a-little-help-from-your-friends/>)

Madeleine O’Dea, “Outward Bound,” *The Beijinger Magazine*, August 2009, p.89

2. Boers-Li (798 District)

<http://www.universalstudios.org.cn/index.html>



Boers-Li Gallery was founded by curators Pi Li and Waling Boers in 2005, under the name UniversalStudios-Beijing. Formerly located in Caochangdi, it now occupies old industrial buildings in Beijing's 798 District. The exhibition space of around 9,000 square feet is split into two galleries that show, respectively, large-scale projects (Gallery I) and lesser-known work by young and experimental artists (Gallery II).

The gallery represents a selective group of internationally operating artists. The gallery program is not media-specific, and includes installation, sculpture, painting, works on paper, audio work, photography, video, film, performance, and digital art. Each year, approximately six major solo exhibitions are organized, along with an irregular number of smaller solo and group exhibitions. Boers-Li emphasizes its support for the production of new and experimental work, utilizing its unique position both at home and abroad to open new pathways for artistic development. The program focuses on new developments in international art, as well as on the changing contemporary positions of established or older-generation artists.

In addition, Boers-Li participates in a selection of both Chinese and international art fairs. The program also includes the publication of catalogs, both to accompany major solo exhibitions and to offer retrospectives on our artists.*

[*text taken from, <http://www.universalstudios.org.cn/about/en/About.html>]

Reference materials:

Meg Maggio, "Forged Realities," *Flash Art*, October 2007, p.73.

Ye Ying, "Pi Li's Choice," artzine, 2008, available at:

http://www.artzinechina.com/display_vol_aid514_en.html

3. Long March Space (798 District)

<http://www.longmarchspace.com/>



Long March Space plays a vital role in pursuing new avenues of production, discourse and promotion of contemporary Chinese art on an international platform. Long March Space is renowned for its curatorial creativity, aiding with artist career development and offering one of the most comprehensive service platforms for the local arts community in China.

The gallery was founded by Lu Jie, opening in the 798 Art District of Beijing in 2002. In its seven year history, Long March Space has produced over 70 exhibitions and projects; its four separate gallery spaces provide a leading venue for artist exhibitions and experimentation, helping realize ground breaking programs that push the limits of exhibition formats. Solo exhibitions by influential contemporary artists from China include Zhan Wang, Yang Shaobin, Chen Jieh-Jen, Yu Hong, Lin Tianmiao, Qiu Zhijie, Made In, Guo Fengyi, Wu Shanzhuan, Wang Jianwei, Chen Jie, Chen Qiulin, Xu Zhen, Zhang Hui, Zhou Xiaohu and Xiao Lu. The program also includes group exhibitions by leading artists from around the world.

Long March Space has also organized and help facilitate historical artist solo exhibitions at national level museums in China, including “Garden Utopia” Zhan Wang’s solo exhibition at the National Art Museum of China (May 2008) and “In and Out of Time,” Yu Hong’s solo exhibition at the Guangdong Museum of Fine Arts (April 2009). It was vitally involved in the curating and production of the exhibitions, as well as the publication, video documentation and film production, and full promotional support both locally and internationally.

From curating, to exhibitions, to leading gallery space, the Long March Space’s multi-dimensional platform has earned it a reputation both locally and internationally as the most important art organization in China today.*

[*text quoted from: http://www.longmarchspace.com/about/about_history.html]

Reference materials:

Brian Curtin, “Long March Space,” *Frieze*, issue 118, October 2008

Lu Jie, “The Long March Project”, *Fillip* 2, Winter 2006, available at: <http://fillip.ca/content/the-long-march-project>

Brendan McGetrick, “A Different Long March,” *Art Review*, February 18, 2008, available at: <http://www.artreview.com/profiles/blog/show?id=1474022%3ABlogPost%3A62126>

4. **Today Art Museum** (Chaoyang District)
<http://www.todayartmuseum.com/EN/indexEn.aspx>



Today Art Museum was founded by Zhang Baoquan in 2002. It is housed in a converted industrial boiler house designed by Wang Hui and has 36,000 square feet of floorspace. The museum aims to promote Chinese contemporary art based on an internationalized vision and a contemporary ideology. As the (self-claimed) first non-profit, non-governmental run art museum in China, it is dedicated to exploring an appropriate development strategy for museums of its kind within a Chinese context. The Today Art Museum claims to be "Based upon now and prospecting the future." Its intent is to promote, collect, and exhibit contemporary Chinese art, not least through nurturing young, emerging artists.

Funded by private and corporate money, the Today Art Museum is seeking to develop a funding and operations model for non-public museums, that takes account of economic realities generally and specifically in China.

Collection is an important part of the museum's role and spans three categories (1) the non-profitable collection of Today Art Museum, by which we may understand works that are bought as permanent holdings; (2) contemporary art works collected by Today International Culture and Art Ltd., meaning works which might be considered more as investments and are possibly for sale, and (3) the trusteeship of other collections, by which we may understand works from other collectors that are either housed or displayed by the museum, on various forms of long term loan.

The museum considers publishing an essential aspect of its remit and it has to date published around 300 catalogues and art theory books on the subject of contemporary Chinese art. In addition, the Today Art Museum has a picture library (accessible at: <http://www.artnow.com.cn/>, currently only in Chinese), which aims to gather images of contemporary art broadly.*

[*edited version of text found at: <http://www.todayartmuseum.com/EN/about/general.html>]

Reference materials:

"MOCA of the Month," ZKM, Global Art and the Museum project, available at: http://www.globalartmuseum.de/site/moca_of_the_month/156

Week 2: Shanghai / Guangzhou

Brief contextualization of Shanghai's contemporary art scene focusing on its main site to date—Moganshan Road— as well as the proliferation of short-lived art projects funded either by private money, or by the government in hopes of generating income. Presentation of the mission, program, and selected projects of the following: Art Hub (physical presence in Shanghai although registered as a non-profit in Hong Kong) and Rockbund Art Museum. Introduction to Guangzhou's cultural context and the appearance of Vitamin Creative Space, in 2002, which put the city on the map (in terms of contemporary art production). (Brief information on each is presented below, together with their website URLs and links to articles on each to provide more context.)

1. **Art Hub** (Shanghai Hub, Changning District)
<http://arthubasia.org/>



ArtHub is a multi-disciplinary organization devoted to contemporary art creation in China and the rest of Asia. In collaboration with museums and other public/private spaces and institutions, it initiates and delivers ambitious art projects through a sustained dialogue with visual, performance, and new media artists. Inspired by the opportunities generated by the collective intelligence of thinkers across media, Arthub serves as a collaborative production lab, a creative think-tank as well as a curatorial research platform. Arthub is committed to furthering experimentation, knowledge-production and diversity among dedicated artists, art professionals, scholars, and arts organizations in the region.

Arthub was initially conceived to support the operating costs of the not-for-profit BizArt Art Centre [in Shanghai], allowing it to continue promoting contemporary art in China and to reach out across Asia, especially the documentation and archiving of BizArt-related projects.

With a physical presence in Shanghai, Arthub is registered a non-for-profit organization in Hong Kong, with three directors based across Asia. Having already facilitated more than 110 activities in China and the rest of Asia since its inception in 2007, Arthub has already become the major provider of structural support not only for artists working in China and across Asia, but also for a global community of leading curators, art professionals and producers.*

[*edited version of text found at: <http://arthubasia.org/about>]

Reference materials:

“BizArt/ArtHub Matrix and Shanghai, an interview,” (Defne Ayas in conversation with Davide Quadrio). Available at: <http://arthubasia.org/archives/bizart-and-shanghai-an-interview/>

2. Rockbund Museum

<http://www.rockbundartmuseum.org>



Sited at the north end of the Bund area in Shanghai, the Rockbund Art Museum (RAM) is an international platform for the promotion and exchange of contemporary art. The building that houses the RAM was originally the Royal Asiatic Society (RAS), once the most influential venue for academic exchange and public education in the Far East. In 2007, the architect David Chipperfield was commissioned to renovate the interior of the building that had been used to house the RAS’s collection. The conversion has allowed for around 8,000 square feet of exhibition space.

Considering its mission to be the spread of humanistic values, the Rockbund Art Museum dedicates its efforts to the study, exchange and promotion of contemporary visual arts. Through diverse exhibitions and educational programs, it seeks to use artistic means to stimulate discussions of contemporary topical and social issues. It also hopes that by providing audiences with high-quality aesthetic and leisure resources, it can contribute to social progress and improve the quality of urban life.

As the only contemporary art museum on the Bund, the Rockbund Art Museum benefits from its rich cultural tradition and mainstream location. Thinking creatively to carry forward the cultural heritage of the Bund, it endeavors to integrate art, design and innovation into an aesthetic space for a new Shanghai lifestyle.*

[*edited version of text found at two sources:

http://www.rockbundartmuseum.org/en/en_index.asp

http://www.rockbundartmuseum.org/en/en_index.asp]

Reference materials:

Geert Lovink, "Cai Guo Qiang's Romantic Resolution of the Peasant Question," July 18, 2010, available at: <http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/geert/2010/07/>

3. Vitamin Creative Space (Guangzhou, Chi Gang Xi Lu)

<http://www.vitamincreativespace.com/>



Vitamin

Vitamins are essential for life, Vitamin Creative Space views contemporary art as the vitamin, which keeps our life and society open.

Space

It is a Space of physical and spiritual unity: the "Space" has been developing by the non-stop explorations within the transforming Chinese context, practically and theoretically.

Creative

Life is a process of endless movement and extension. The activities happening in this Space are constantly connected with the floating energies from life.

Vitamin Creative Space (VCS) is a hybrid non-profit/profit space founded by artists in 2002. Specifically geared to the contemporary Chinese context, VCS operates independently from (non-existent) institutionalized funding, by operating as an "independent" art space and as a "commercial" gallery. By merging the two, traditionally opposed strategies for supporting and presenting contemporary art, VCS aims to elevate the search for new Chinese artistic and institutional contributions to a more international, global level. Founded in Guangzhou, VCS is currently relocating to Caochangdi in Beijing, with The Shop. The Shop is a public space produced by VCS that takes a more organic view of art practices, surrounded as they are by daily processes. As a space of daily experimentation and time accumulation, The Shop will eventually not only contextualize but also produce reality.*

[*text taken from, <http://www.vitamincreativespace.com/en/about/browseAbout.do> and edited]

Reference materials:

Fiona He, "Observing contemporary Chinese art through writings," paper written for the annual

Researchers' Meeting at Asia Art Archive, March 2009. Available at:

http://www.aaa.org.hk/newsletter_detail.aspx?newsletter_id=661

“Store Review: The Shop in Beijing,” *The New York Times*, Asia-Pacific Issue, March 15, 2009, available at: <http://travel.nytimes.com/2009/03/15/travel/15foraging.html>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The books and articles listed are useful in giving context and texture to those aspects of the presentation that focus on the Chinese contemporary art scene as a whole, and developments in recent years. They are particularly good at giving context to any discussions around Beijing and Shanghai.

Waling Boers and Pi Li, “City Report: Beijing,” April 20, 2003

<http://haudenschildgarage.com/1758/city-report-beijing-by-waling-boers-and-pi-li.htm>

Stacey Duff, “The Art of No Returns: Non-profit Art Institutions,” *artzine*, 2008

http://www.artzinechina.com/display_vol_aid305_en.html

Alvaro Rodriguez Fominaya and Michael Lee, eds., *Who Cares? 16 Essays on Curating in Asia*, (Hong Kong: Para/Site Art Space, 2010).

Jörg Heiser, China, *Frieze*, 17 October 2007,

http://www.frieze.com/comment/print_article/china/

Peng Lai and Lu Huan, “China: The Road to Art Museums,” *artzine*, 2006

http://new.artzinechina.com/display_vol_aid306_en.html

Pi Li Interview, in Carolee Thea, *Interviews with Ten International Curators*, (New York: D.A.P. / Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., 2009), p. 99

Carol Yinghua Lu, “Shanghai in Art-ion,” *Frieze* blog, June 1, 2010

<http://www.frieze.com/blog/author/13496/>

Wu Hung, *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000).

Wu Hung, ed., *Chinese Art at the Crossroads: Between Past and Future. Between East and West*, (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2003).

Pauline Yao, “A Game Played Without Rules Has No Losers,” *e-flux Journal* 7, June 2009,

<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/74>

<http://goldcurating.wordpress.com/2010/03/09/formulating-a-new-structure-for-the-corporate-funded-gallery-in-china/>

USEFUL INTERNET SITES:

798 district website: <http://www.798district.com/>

Unearthing Asia blog on Moganshan Road: <http://unearthingasia.com/uniquely-far-east/50-moganshan-shanghais-art-district/>

Shanghai Biennial website: <http://www.universes-in-universe.de/car/shanghai/english.htm>

Shanghai Art Fair: <http://www.sartfair.com/2010/eweb/index.asp>

Asia Pacific Contemporary Art Fair: <http://www.shcontemporary.info/English/event/welcome/>