

PRESS RELEASE

La Biennale di Venezia – 50th INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION

Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer

Preview: 12 (Press)-13-14 June, 2003 - Open hours 10.00-20.00

15 June - 2 November, 2003 - Open hours 10.00-18.00, Closed on Tuesdays (except 17 June)



NAVIGATING THE DOT. ARTISTS FROM HONG KONG, CHINA
HONG KONG ARTS DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, HONG KONG, CHINA
INAUGURATION COCKTAIL 13 June, 12.00

Arsenale, Castello 2126, Ramo della Tana, 30122 Venice

(entrance front La Biennale di Venezia Arsenale spaces, Vaporetto Station n. 1 Arsenale)

2nd participation of Hong Kong Arts Development Council

Commissioner: Darwin Chen; Deputy Commissioners: Peter Wong King-keung, Wong Shun-kit

Curator: Para/Site Art Space

Artists: Para/Site Collective (CHAN Kai-yin, KAN LIANG Yee-woo Evelyn, LAU Kin-wah Jasper, LEUNG Wan-yee Janice, LEUNG Chin-fung Jeff, LI Man-wai Tim, MAN Ching-ying Phoebe, tamshui, TSANG Tak Ping, WONG Chi-hang Sara, YEUNG Yang)

Project: Navigating the Dot; Co-ordinator: Arte Communications

Introduction

The size of Hong Kong on the world atlas is no more than a dot, merely visible to those who care. On that of world art, the dot hardly exists. Whenever Hong Kong participates in international art events, the issues of visibility, orientation and positioning in relation to her counterparts emerge. Para/Site collective is well aware of the issues and turns it into the strength of their work.

The theme "Dreams and Conflicts - The viewer's dictatorship" of the 50th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia is, in fact, a reflection of the artistic development of Hong Kong contemporary artists. Hong Kong contemporary art started to blossom locally in 1990s. The artists see Hong Kong as their base and the international arena as a platform to discuss their dreams. Nevertheless, there are conflicts in their artistic pursuit. Diachronically, the contemporary art practice is not a continuation of the previous generations. Synchronically, it is detached from the West. The practice of Hong Kong artists seems to be international but, in fact, Hong Kong contemporary art is marginalized culturally from the contemporary art centers in North America and Europe. The artists struggle between the dream of being members of the international art community and the reality of the community's control over their reach-ability.

Lacking the opportunity to take part in the international art discourse, Hong Kong artists tend to adopt an introspective approach to connect their art with the world. The banality of their lives is repeatedly revisited with disconnected cultural references. They search for a transnational position in locating themselves. Most of the artists are locally born with parents from Mainland China. With resourceful local and international references, the artists are able to widen the vision of their predecessors and start to rethink the qualities of being Hong Kong Chinese artists.

Not until the 1980s, the issues of identity were raised in the Hong Kong art community. The Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984 clearly delivered the message of the hand-over of Hong Kong's sovereignty to China. The change in the socio-political environment triggered the artists' uncertainty towards their identity. Most of the artists are educated locally in Hong Kong but the free flow of art information and increased opportunities of overseas travel made them aware of the current development of contemporary art. Their concerns of the changing socio-political environment help build up their confidence in appropriating local references which is not born from total imagination but is inspired from their daily life experiences.



Most of the members of Para/Site collective are the first generation in their families born in Hong Kong. They experienced a long period of cultural uprootness during the British rule. Instead of using their art to intervene the socio-political environment, in which they find helpless, the artists try to find their voices in their homes where banalities are the key components of life. The navigation of their artistic development emerges from their internal needs and reaches out to the urban environment where they spend their lives in order to mirror their personal experiences.

Artwork

Para/Site collective is a team of artists, architects, curators, critics, designers, educators and researchers. The collective generates ideas by discussions through meetings, emails, telephone calls, sketches, photographs and models. Indeed, in an actual world intensely linked up by virtual space, how do we orient ourselves? How can we respond?

In the borrowed time and borrowed space in the Venice Biennale, Para/Site collective continues to play the role of a facilitator. Always already GLObal and loCAL, Para/Site collective builds compartments in the space to interrupt the Venice Biennale sight and site. What kinds of interruption are possible? Will the compartments serve as resting places, docks, temporary shelters, dwellings, or little theatres for visitors? The meanings are up for visitors to imbue, for seeing, walking, smelling, touching, and listening are all creative acts, let alone engaging in dialogues and indulging in dreams. For the collective, the compartments offer multiple possibilities and starting points for interrupting visitors' familiar experiences. The space belongs to Visitors and all boundaries blurred. Visitors, as much as members of Para/Site collective, are everywhere at home, yet nowhere at home.

The horizontally and vertically placed cylindrical compartments are borrowed time and borrowed space on another level, for they provide timely resting places for visitors after an exhausting journey of art touring. Thus the compartments become a space for dreaming and daydreaming. Visitors are encouraged to navigate their path in the artwork and, of course, navigate their dreams in whatever posture they find comfortable. Upon navigating their route in the artwork the visitors experience the frustration and joy of floating, disorientation, lost and found. The fluidity of the artwork reflects the collective's thoughts of navigating Hong Kong in the international art arena.

Biography of Para/Site Art Space

Founded in 1996, Para/Site Art Space is a non-profit making organization in Hong Kong. This artist-run space is funded by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council and private donation, with an aim to promote contemporary visual art. The production of artifacts, exhibition, curating, discussion, critic, publication, research, education and overseas exchange are seen as a cohesive development. Different art activities can happen at the same time in Para/Site.

The Para/Site collective is formed especially for participating in the 50th Venice Biennale. There are artists, architects, curators, critics, designers, educators and researchers in the collective. A similar group was formed in the Gwangju Biennale in Korea in 2002.

Information

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