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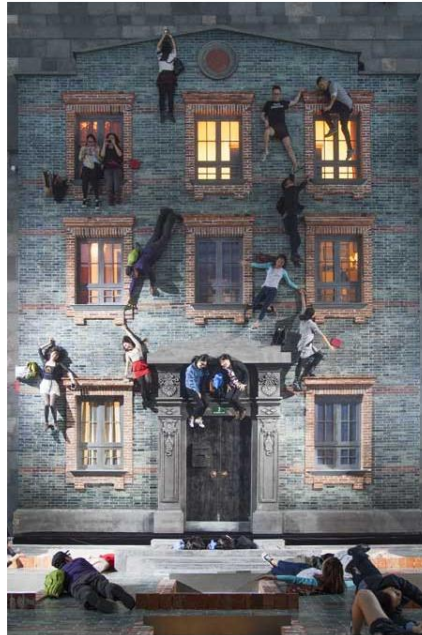
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Art attack

By Zhang Kun (China Daily)

Updated: 2014-01-03 09:08:49

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Visitors play enthusiastically in the interactive installation by South American artist Leandro Erlich, where a life-size facade of a shikumen-style house lies horizontally with a large mirror overhead at the Kerry Center in downtown Shanghai. Photos by Justin Jin / Provided to China Daily

More commercial buildings are seeing the value of art in attracting customers and encouraging a creative, fun space. Zhang Kun looks at some of the buildings that are mixing business with pleasure in Shanghai.

Shanghai's luxury shopping malls are no longer satisfied with hanging festive decorations and running sales for promotion and branding. The new hot attraction to lure shoppers is art. Many new malls are reserving prime spaces for art, putting on regular exhibitions and even commissioning works from renowned artists. Real estate developers in China are trying to pair contemporary art with their branding, says Mathieu Borysevicz, a gallery owner and contemporary art curator from the United States based in Shanghai. He was one of four curators who put together an exhibition to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Shanghai World Financial Center in the heart of the Lujiazui financial area.



Optical illusion art show in Shanghai

Leo Xu, a curator and owner of Leo Xu Projects, has worked with several shopping malls and office buildings in Shanghai, curating art shows and designing art projects.



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Xu worked with South American artist Leandro Erlich to present an interactive installation at the Kerry Center in downtown Shanghai's Nanjing West Road in November.

The project consisted of a life-size facade of an authentic shikumen-style terrace house lying horizontally on the ground with a large mirror hung overhead at a 45-degree angle. It encouraged visitors to sit, stand and lie on it, to create a surreal reflection of people climbing or dangling against gravity.

People waited in line to play on Erlich's installation, treating it like a ride at Disneyland. It was so popular that the Kerry Center extended the exhibition by two weeks.

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Xu says the interactive installation brought the concrete building closer to the community. It connected the modern skyscraper with the old shikumen houses and reminded people of the past and changing urban landscape.

Galleries and contemporary artists are like "people who talk to themselves", says curator Borysevicz. By bringing art work to public spaces, such as commercial buildings, art becomes relevant, and artists connect with the public.

By hosting art shows, the commercial buildings provide not only shopping but also a cultural experience. It enhances the appreciation of beautiful things, Borysevicz adds.

Earlier this year Xu curated the show Shanghai Surprise, bringing together important works from the city's contemporary art scene over recent decades. The exhibition took place at K11, a newly revamped mall on Huaihai Middle Road.

Xu was glad to find, months later, an image from the show appearing as the avatar of an online social network user. "That brings contemporary art to a new context," he says. "It melts into modern life."

K11 Shanghai identifies itself as the first and only "art mall" in China. It was developed by the Hong Kong-based New World Group. The executive director, Adrian Cheng, is a collector of contemporary art himself. The mall has a whole floor reserved for art in the basement, where it puts on exhibitions and hosts lectures and other art events.



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Changing Room, an installation by South American artist Leandro Erlich, is displayed on the ground floor lobby of the Kerry Center in Shanghai.

Several other high-end malls and multipurpose buildings are also presenting artworks in public areas or opening art spaces, such as Lane Crawford and the IAPM mall, both on the commercial center of Huaihai Middle Road.

Shanghai World Financial Center, a landmark building in the center of Lujiazui, Pudong new area, celebrated its fifth birthday with a multimedia art exhibition.

For 20 days over October and November, LED lights were projected onto the building, creating changing images designed by acclaimed artists from China and abroad. The impressive view could be seen from both sides of the Huangpu River.

The celebration featured 13 artists working with four independent curators to present 139 pieces. "Shanghai World Financial Center was the stage for them to perform and let visitors experience the charm of art," says Pan Bei, the media relations manager of the town management department at Mori Building China (Shanghai) Co Ltd, the landlord of the SWFC.

Mori Building has its Mori Museum in Roppongi Hills Mori Tower in Tokyo, Japan, a reputable establishment featuring contemporary art from all over the world. Even though SWFC has no detailed plans, it would love to establish an artistic institution like its Japanese counterpart has in Japan, "to build a bridge of art and culture between China and Japan".

"As always, we will keep on working with art and culture, especially contemporary art," Pan says.



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One of the most acclaimed contemporary artists in Shanghai, Ding Yi, was invited by SWFC to create an LED lighting show that was projected on the facade of the building, as a highlight to mark the building's fifth anniversary.

"It was magnificent to see my creation so high above and so huge," the artist says.

Although only 70 percent of the creative idea from his blueprint was realized in the actual performance, Ding is excited to see how the work engaged the public.

Ding is no stranger to working with commercial entities. He was the first Chinese artist to work with French luxury brand Hermes to print scarves featuring his original design. He also worked with liquor company Johnny Walker and fashion house Zegna. He teaches public art as a professor at the Shanghai Institute of Visual Art.

Conflicts are inevitable when artists work with commercial establishments, he says.

"On the one hand, you want to keep your independence, and on the other, you want to share your perception of art with the public," he says.

The key issue is the particular location of the work. "It has to come from that particular space, and time," Ding says.

He says an artist has to study the canvas and think about how to make his or her original visual presence work in that particular context.



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