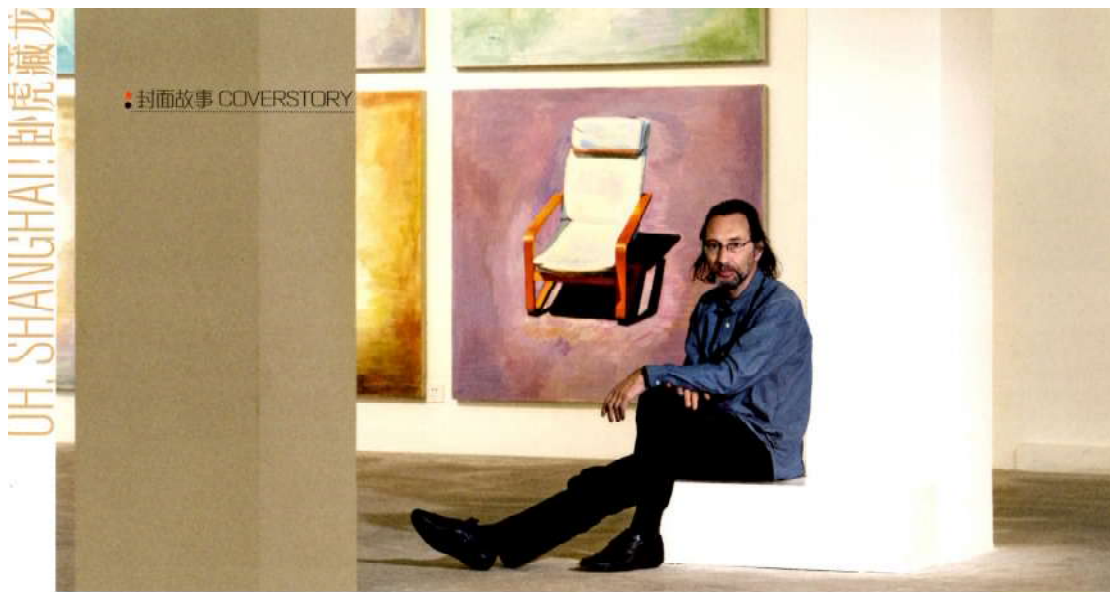


Lianhe Zaobao, Supplement Zb Now, ZbBz Art, *Center of Experimentation*, text/ ZHOU Yan Bing, P30-33, June 2014



ShanghART's Lorenz Helbling describes Shanghai as the centre of the world. (Photo: Daniel Zhang)

ZbBz
艺术
报·报志
art

Sitting in the rooftop garden of his ShanghART Gallery in Moganshan, Lorenz Helbling looks out at the cityscape around him and speaks of the opportunities it offers gallery owners like himself. "Shanghai is like the centre of the world; here, the horizons are broad. Here, you feel like you are both in the Western and Eastern worlds at the same time."

The Swiss national is one of many art enthusiasts who have opened galleries in Shanghai, with an increasing number started by foreigners like himself. So common it is to be greeted by a non-Chinese face when buying Chinese art, that a joke going round the art circle is how English has become the second language of Shanghai's art gallery world.

Art galleries emerged in China only in the last two decades. Shanghai has over 300 of them and the best window displays can be found in its art gallery zone that covers the Moganshan, Bund and French Concession areas, where many of them congregate, generating excitement in the air for the fledgling business of retailing art.

Helbling arrived in Shanghai in 1988 to study Chinese and contemporary Chinese history at Fudan University and opened his gallery in 1995. His gallery represents as many as 50 contemporary artists, including Zeng Fanzhi, Zhou Tielai, Xu Zhen and Yang Fudong.

Although the number of art galleries is on the rise, the industry is still in an embryonic stage, he says. "In terms of its population and the size of Shanghai, there are actually too few galleries. We can accommodate more art galleries, art institutions and museums here. It is precisely because there are too few galleries here

CENTRE OF EXPERIMENTATION 艺术实验场

If there is one thing that art dealers in Shanghai agree on, it is how the city has the essential qualities for nurturing the growth and promotion of Chinese art

不管是画廊界的中流砥柱还是新兴力量, 都在上海找到了发展和探索的动力。

TEXT CHOW YAN PING / 周丽冰

that we are able to work with dozens of artists at the same time."

Some insiders are also of the opinion that a rush of galleries have opened to meet the hot demand for Chinese art but are narrowly focused on short-term gains and unwilling to spend time to promote their artists. They may also not be familiar enough with what the international standards of the art world are and become a disservice to the artist and the customer. Galleries that have been able to stay the course and establish strong brands in Shanghai are thus far and few in between.

Matter Of Time

In the last few years, Chinese art has seen healthy sales domestically and generated much interest internationally. This might give the wrong impression that Chinese artists are having an easy time.

"Thirty years ago, artists did not have the 'market' that we have today, and matters such

as access to a studio or artistic development were not high on their list of priorities. Today, although artists now have access to a market and more information, and even have a contemporary art history that belongs to them, they need to be able to feed and clothe themselves," says Helbling.

"Urban life is becoming increasingly expensive and very few artists actually become famous. Many artists are finding it difficult to survive. While in Europe, artists can apply for fellowships, grants and residencies from the state and corporations, this sort of environment does not exist in China."

This is why art galleries have become a key source of support for artists. "Here, there are many people who wish to work in art and there is plenty of art talent. We art galleries do not have to push for more artistic creation; we only need to provide artists with a platform and the opportunities. We just have to till the ground a little bit to have beautiful flowers grow."

LEO XU PROJECTS

Part of that tilling is to wait and watch artists as they mature in their artistic language and gain acceptance by collectors. Helbling would typically observe an artist for four to five years before deciding whether to hold a solo exhibition for the artist. In the meantime, he would promote the work of internationally renowned artists as part of the gallery's operations.

In his opinion, it is only a matter of time before Chinese art moves to an even larger stage. After all, while New York's museums have over a century of history behind them, Shanghai has but just begun on this journey.

"I think it's wonderful that private museums have been established and I also think that having more art galleries is a good thing. One can only improve by seeing more and being exposed more to intellectual stimulation. In the future, Shanghai's art galleries will become more varied and begin to specialise in certain types of art as they develop their respective advantages."

In September 2012, ShanghART opened a gallery in Singapore, at Gillman Barracks. In contrast to his enthusiasm for Shanghai's scene, Helbling is more reserved about the gallery's prospects on the island. "I still do not feel much for Singapore," he says. "In Shanghai, I can hold exhibitions that visitors don't quite understand, as long as I believe that the works are meaningful or would be appreciated and admired in five years or so. There is a 'who dares wins' spirit here. In Shanghai, everything is possible."

In contrast, things in Singapore are usually done after too much consideration, with the safe option chosen in the end. "Perhaps this is as long as I believe that the works are meaningful or would be appreciated and admired in five years or so. There is a 'who dares wins' spirit here. In Shanghai, everything is possible."

In contrast, things in Singapore are usually done after too much consideration, with the safe option chosen in the end. "Perhaps this is

because Singapore is so expensive and there is little room for errors. While sometimes with art there must be some impulse, I do not dare to be impulsive in Singapore."

Young At Art

If Helbling's gallery is one of the mainstays of Shanghai's contemporary art gallery scene, then Leo Xu Projects located in the city's French Concession district represents a new force made up by young Chinese entrepreneurs.

Proprietor Leo Xu, who studied Spanish and English in university, worked as a curator at several Beijing and Shanghai galleries before striking out on his own three years ago.

He calls his not a "gallery" but "projects", which reflects his understanding of how the role of art galleries has changed. "Not only should an art gallery retail artworks in its space, participate in art fairs," he says. "The plethora of new brands, buildings and urban plans today has given art galleries a host of new possibilities."

This is why any corner of Shanghai can become an exhibition space for Xu. For instance, an exhibition of Argentine artist Leandro Erlich's works last year was held at the public square of the Kerry Centre in Jing'an District, a move that was widely welcomed by the public. Xu is also the mastermind of Shanghai Surprise, the first art exhibition held by the K11 Art Mall on Huaihai Road. "We look into new ways of working with artists and other organisations based on their interests as well as seek new sources of financial sponsorship."

Xu's gallery is a three-story structure. Xu is also the mastermind of Shanghai Surprise, the first art exhibition held by the K11 Art Mall on Huaihai Road. "We look into new ways of working with artists and other organisations based on their interests as well as seek new sources of financial sponsorship."

Xu's gallery is a three-story structure



ShanghART Taopu complex hosts studio spaces as well as a gigantic warehouse. (Photo: ShanghART)

converted from old residential housing and, outside the gallery, neighbours would hang their laundry out to dry in the open air. Xu tells ZbZ that he circled Shanghai on the back of his real estate agent's motorcycle to look at 50 locations over three months before discovering this spot. "I don't want a large space in which to show large installation pieces. That's the kind of thing you see in the New York Times. I am not interested in establishing a gallery in an abandoned factory or as part of an art gallery cluster. I prefer to be in the city, where I am surrounded by an entire Shanghai neighbourhood, by history and culture, by the various layers of consumerism and historical periods." To visit his gallery is to visit a slice of real Shanghai, he feels.

Xu's approach to running a gallery obviously breaks the mould of how traditional art galleries are run and his understanding of the scope of contemporary Chinese art is also different. "Many of our contemporary artists are not artists we can identify with. They have created mainland art that foreigners can identify easily with rather

Xu's approach to running a gallery obviously breaks the mould of how traditional art galleries are run and his understanding of the scope of contemporary Chinese art is also different. "Many of our contemporary artists are not artists we can identify with. They have created mainland art that foreigners can identify easily with rather than works that have truly changed the form of art and aesthetics. I hope that my gallery can work to fill this gap."

Although there are very few good galleries in Shanghai, the city has the right cultural conditions as well as the economic conditions to make it a true cultural centre in the broadest sense of the term, he feels. "Here, there is colonial culture and it is also an international city. It is both related and unrelated to China. It has a very special identity and it is also able to take in many influences. This is something Beijing and Hong Kong lack. Shanghai is more interesting and it is closer to the culture Leo Xu Projects is exploring. It is a massive centre of experimentation."

ShanghART Gallery

Building no. 16, No. 50 Moganshan Road, Putuo District, Shanghai

Leo Xu Projects

No. 3, Lane 49, W. Fuxing Road, Xuhui District, Shanghai



Artist Chen Xiaoyun's solo exhibition at ShanghART Moganshan. (Photo: ShanghART)

封面故事 COVERSTORY

上海莫干山香格纳画廊总监何浦林 (Lorenz Heibling) 是瑞士人, 访谈那天, 他坐在香格纳画廊屋顶的小花园, 说着他眼中的上海。 “上海像世界的中心, 这里地平线宽广, 无论西方或东方世界, 感觉就在其中。”

何浦林坐落上海画廊界近20年。他1988年到上海复旦大学进修中文, 学习中国当代史; 1995年开设画廊至今, 眼下画廊的代表艺术家多达50人, 包括曾梵志、周铁海、徐昱、杨福东等。

上海画廊太少

画廊行业在中国兴起是近20年的事。上海大小画廊估计有300家左右, 较集中的地段包括莫干山、法租界及外滩, 画廊业主除了中国人也包括越来越多像何浦林一样的外国人。一些当地艺术圈人士开玩笑说“英语已经成了上海画廊界的第二语言”。

尽管画廊越来越多, 不少人却认为当地画廊业不够规范成熟, 业者急功近利, 不愿花时间精力推广艺术家, 只想尽快通过艺术买卖获利。能长期坚持, 且在上海树立品牌的画廊凤毛麟角。

对于上海画廊的增长及发展, 何浦林认为就2500万人口的上海而言, 它其实还在萌芽阶段。 “以人口和上海的规模来说, 数量非常少。我们完全可以容纳更多画廊、艺术机构和美术馆。就是因为太少, 我们才会同时和几十个艺术家合作。”

虽然中国艺术不论在国内销售量及国际买家兴趣方面, 都是近年来最引人注目的新兴艺术市场, 但何浦林说中国艺术家仍面对巨大挑战。 “30年前的艺术家没有所谓市场, 也无所谓工作室或艺术展; 今天的艺术家尽管有了市场, 接受的资讯也比过去多, 甚至也有了属于自己的当代艺术史, 却急需解决温饱生存问题。城市生活越来越贵, 成为名家的人少之又少, 很多艺术家生活困难。在欧洲, 政府和基金会提供奖学金、基金、艺术进驻计划供申请, 不过这在中国不存在。”

凡事都有可能

画廊因此成了艺术家很大的支撑力量。何浦林说, 并不是每一个他旗下的艺术家, 都过着大家想象中的成功艺术家生活。艺术家需要耐心等待艺术语言的成熟, 等待藏家的出现, 尤其新媒体艺术更须等待藏界更广泛的接受。

何浦林眼中的中国艺术充满动力。 “这里有很多希望在艺术圈做点事的人, 艺术家才济济。作为画廊, 我们不需要去推动艺术创作, 只须给艺术家提供平台和机会。在泥土上轻轻一耙, 就能长出灿烂的花朵!”

何浦林经常会上四五年时间观察一名艺术

家, 才决定是否要为他推出个展。等待期间, 他会推出国际大牌型艺术家, 用销售他们作品的盈利来支撑画廊的运作。

中国艺术更上一层楼, 在何浦林看来只是时间问题。纽约美术馆有超过百年历史, 而上海只是刚开始。 “有私人美术馆成立我觉得非常好, 有更多画廊也是好事。看得多, 精神和思想受到冲击才能进步。未来的上海画廊形式将会更多样化, 专注呈现某种类型的艺术, 发展出各自的特色和专长。”

2012年9月, 香格纳画廊在新加坡吉门湾房开辟新空间。相较于对上海的踌躇满志, 何浦林对新加坡的发展显得有所保留。 “我对新加坡还缺乏感觉。在上海, 我可以大胆做一些没人看得懂的展览, 只要我相信这些作品有意思, 或许五年之后会受到欣赏, 变得重要, 我就去做。有一种‘谁怕谁’的气魄。在上海, 凡事都有可能。”

那么新加坡呢? 何浦林认为, 在新加坡做事, 很容易前思后想, 做了一番准备之后却选择安全牌。 “或许因为新加坡过于昂贵, 容许犯错的空间很小。但艺术有时候需要一股冲劲, 在新加坡我不敢冲动……”



在法租界民宅区的 Leo Xu Projects. (Photo: Daniel Zheng)

走出画廊框框

如果何浦林代表了上海当代艺术画廊的中流砥柱, 在上海老法租界复兴西路的Leo Xu Projects则代表了由中国年轻人创建的画廊新力量。

大学学西班牙语和英语文学专业的许宇, 原本在北京及上海不同的画廊和美术馆当策展人, 三年前他决定自己当家做主。

许宇的画廊不叫画廊 (Gallery), 而叫做项目 (Projects), 反映了他对画廊角色的不同诠释。

“画廊到了今天, 应该有不同的定位。它不应只是在空间里面摆卖艺术品, 参加艺博会。今天有那么多新品牌、新建筑、新的城市规划, 给我们提供很多新的可能。画廊的版图和方向在改变, 有新的角色。”

所以, 上海的任何地方都可以是许宇的展览空间。譬如去年阿根廷艺术家 Leandro Erlich 的展览, 把巨型装置艺术带到静安寺附近的嘉里中心广场, 受到市民很大的欢迎。他也策划了去年淮海路K11艺术购物商场的第一个展览 “上海惊喜”



许宇认为画廊的空间与定位正在改变中。(Photo: Daniel Zheng)

(Shanghai Surprise)。“我们按照兴趣探索和艺术及其他机构的新工作方式, 寻找新的赞助经费来源。”

巨大试验场

画廊空间是旧民宅改建成的三层楼房子, 门外居民晾晒的衣服在风里飞舞。许宇说他当时看了50个房子, 每天乘看中介的摩托车在上海转, 三个月后才找到这里。 “我不是要一个很大的空间, 展一些大装置, 一些《纽约时报》里你会看见的东西。我也没有兴趣在废弃工厂或画廊区办画廊, 我喜欢在城市里。被一整个上海邻里包围, 被文化历史包围, 被大众消费空间和时代不同的氛围包围。你来看画廊, 也同时感受到上海的魅力。我也可以和周围的大众有互动。”

许宇对中国当代艺术的想法与众不同, 他口中的华人不仅是中国人, 还包括散居各地的华人艺术家。他也对新媒体艺术情有独钟。 “很多这一代的艺术家其实并不是我们认可的艺术家。他们只是做了一些外国人容易理解的大陆艺术, 不是真正改变艺术形态和审美趣味的作品。我希望我的画廊能弥补这方面的缺失。”

许宇认为上海的好画廊很少, 但是上海拥有很好的文化环境, 是文化消费流通的地方, 是真正广义上的文化中心。 “这里有殖民文化, 是国际城市, 和中国有关也无关, 身份很特别, 包容性很大。这是北京和香港没有的。上海更有趣, 和我项目探索的文化更接近, 是一个巨大的实验场。”

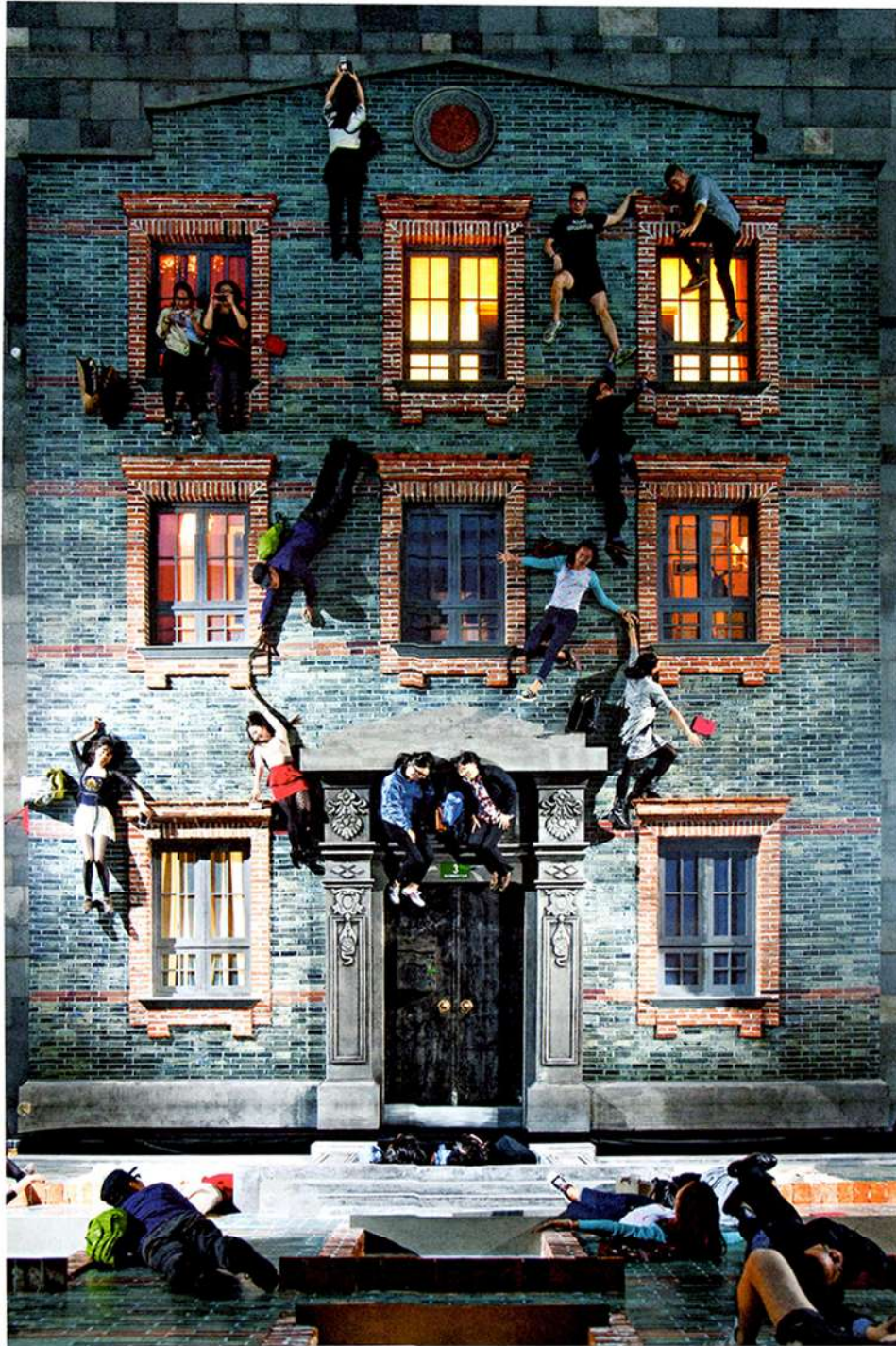
香格纳画廊

上海市普陀区莫干山路50号16号楼

Leo Xu Projects

上海市徐汇区复兴西路49弄3号

LEO XU PROJECTS



莱安德罗埃利奇的公共艺术装置《石库门》。利用材料让观众参与制造假象。
2013年，上海。
(Photo: Leo Xu Projects, 版权艺术家 Leandro Erlich, Photography, JJYPHOTO)