

6 Thursday July 1, 2010

**METRO
SHANGHAI**

CULTURE

**GLOBAL
TIMES**
DISCOVER CHINA, DISCOVER THE WORLD

What's On

Lecture

Storytelling

Francoise, a French storyteller will use stories from all over the world to entertain children and adults at the Little Prince Library. Stories will be told in French, and free soft drinks will be available.

Date: July 3, 2 pm to 4:30 pm

Venue: Alliance Francaise de Shanghai 上海法语联盟

Address: 155 Wuyi Road 武夷路155号

Admission: Free

Call 6226-2595 for details

Cinema

Asian Film Club

This biweekly movie event will screen the 1997 Hong Kong movie *Happy Together* directed by Wong Kar-wai who won Best Director at the Cannes Film Festival for this film.

Date: Today, 8:30 pm

Venue: The Memory of Shanghai 印巷

Address: Lane 175 Jinan Road 济南路175弄

Admission: 80 yuan

Call 6320-1020 for details

TV Programs

International Channel Shanghai (ICS)

6 pm Hannah Montana

6:30 pm You Are the Chef

6:45 pm Cool Edition

7 pm Real Fun

8 pm EXPO360

9 pm ICS News

9:15 pm In Chinese

9:30 pm DocuView

10:03 pm High Drama

HBO

2:30 pm Entourage

3:05 pm Bill Maher ... But I'm Not Wrong

5 pm Love and Other Catastrophes

7 pm Kung Fu Panda

8:30 pm Moulin Rouge!

ESPN Star Sports

6 pm ESPNNews

7 pm Total Rugby

7:30 pm Sportscenter Asia

8 pm KIA X Games Asia 2010 - Show 4

9 pm Red Bull Air Race World Championship 2010

10:30 pm IRB Sevens World Series 2009/10

Discovery

2 pm Overhaulin': Chip & AJ

Trading Places

3 pm American Chopper: Dryvit Bike

4 pm American Chopper: Darien Lake Bike

5 pm Cash Cab

6 pm Cash Cab

7 pm Killer Jellyfish

8 pm River Monsters: Alaskan Horror

9 pm River Monsters: Death Ray

10 pm Deadliest Catch: Empty Throne

Zhang Huan in his workplace.

► Warehouse wonderland takes creativity in a new direction

The art army

By Nick Muzyczka

In the relative wilderness of southwest Shanghai, where the city finally starts coming to an end, where factories begin to share the terrain with planted fields, is an art space like no other. The Global Times has been granted access to a place almost unknown and rarely visited. This is the workplace of reputed performance artist and sculptor Zhang Huan, one of the most influential contemporary artists in China.

Zhang's early works as part of a small artistic community, known as the Beijing East Village, centered on a number of controversial performance pieces, usually involving the artist being naked. He spent some time in New York in 1990s, where, along with a number of other Chinese artists, he enjoyed tremendous success, returning home in the 2000s as an international superstar with works in many prestigious galleries.

For several years now, Zhang has resided in Shanghai and has adopted a very unusual mode of production based around the concept of large-scale artworks, co-produced by a small army of assistants.

His current premises are truly fascinating, with around 120 employees on-site, a group that not only includes artists but

also office workers, chefs and drivers.

"A fifth of our employees are young artists or authors who are graduates from art schools. Among our employees we also have craftsmen specializing in folk wood-carving, copper forging, taxidermists and craftsmen in other areas as well. They're all very talented," Zhang said.

"They come from all different areas of the country, different cultural backgrounds, and speak different dialects, as well as some who have returned to China after living abroad. The studio is like one big family," he added.

Variation and vitality

When we visited the grounds, the place was teeming with activity. A multitude of smaller workshops housed groups of artists variously shaping cow skins into small sculptures, banging away at sheet steel to produce reproductions of Zhang's Expo Boulevard piece, *He He, Xie Xie*, or working on his fabulous "memory door" pieces.

These latter works consist of big, beautiful old doors that are partly covered in photographic work and partly wood-carved into intricate designs that are intended to preserve various moments in time.

As you walk around the grounds you get the feeling that there is nothing quite like this place anywhere else on earth. Ev-

erywhere you look interesting details can be found, such as the sculptures dotting the lawns, or the fact that every tree on the premises is considered a piece of art and has been sculpted to Zhang's tastes.

"The studios stand on grounds that span just over three hectares and are some of the few remaining old-style factory buildings still around in Shanghai. We have also planted many fruit trees and rare species of trees," Zhang said.

Visitors' attention may also be grabbed by the massive stack of old blue/grey bricks that Zhang has collected from housing demolition projects around Shanghai. This project for the future is one of the many examples here of the directness of Zhang's artistic vision.

While people all over the city are talking about how sad it is that the old buildings in Shanghai are being torn down, Zhang has had the imagination and the financial backing to go further, making sure that history is preserved. Whatever piece of art he eventually creates with this mass of bricks, it is likely to be loud, powerful and hit at the center of the issue.

At present Zhang's studio is focusing on large-scale sculptures and ash paintings. One of the most impressive works on display in the ash painting gallery is called *Digging the River*, an enormous piece of nearly 2 meters tall and 6 meters wide, which shows a great number of workers, shovels in hands, carving out a huge channel of earth to create a canal.

The wood frame used for this work alone took five carpenters a whole week to create. In order to keep the painting consistent, Zhang chose four artists with similar painting styles to complete the work.

The scale and the intricacy of *Digging the River* combine to generate an arresting sense of the impact of humanity on the environment. It is also another example of how Zhang uses size in a very specific, considered way: his subject - nature - is also vast and intricate.

Thinking big

None of this, however, prepared us for the three



A "memory door" piece by Zhang Huan.

Zhu Gangqiang
and *Giant Man*
No. 1 in Zhang's
warehouse.



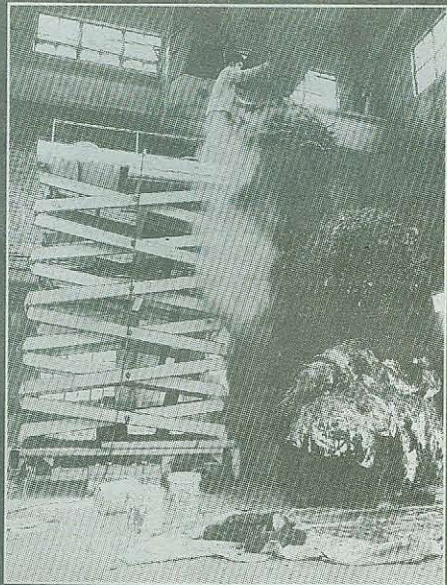
Zhang's vision

► The, from Page 6

pieces of art that awaited in the largest of the warehouses. Moving quickly through a huge space containing forklift trucks, industrial cranes and endless stacks of wood being chopped and sliced, we found a room that can only be described as spectacular.

To the left sat an enormous sculpture of a giant, maybe 6 meters long and 3.5 meters high, covered in cow hides in various shades of brown, black and white. Entitled *Giant Man No. 1*, the work intends to present us with another view of the hero figure, sleeping after a hard day's work.

The various tumors growing out of the body and a small second head cozily positioned on the giant's neck gives an eerie quality to a figure that would otherwise be cuddly and cute.



An employee works on a sculpture in the warehouse. Photos: Courtesy of Zhang Huan Studio

It is hard to pin down exactly why *Giant Man No. 1* is so utterly engaging. Maybe it is the size, or perhaps the beautiful hues of the hides, or the fabulously expressive qualities of the faces. Whatever the reason, the work grabs you and will not let go.

Turning to our right, we came upon a train. Three massive carriages of a massive train, lying partially derailed on tracks and totally smashed up, a twisted heap of metal.

Qiao Wei, Zhang's studio manager, explained that the artist had bought this train for several million yuan after it was destroyed in the devastating Sichuan earthquake in 2008.

Zhang's intention is to exhibit the work in Beijing and then sell the train at auction as a commemorative piece for a huge profit. He will use the money generated to set up education projects in Sichuan Province.

It seems Zhang even does "found-art" on a terrifyingly large scale. This is not only a truly haunting, horrific piece of art, but the project also shows off his qualities as both a philanthropist and a sharp businessman.

There is one further story to tell about this room, and it concerns a pig. Trapped in the wreckage of the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, a pig that came to be called "Zhu Gangqiang" managed to survive alone for over 40 days.

One of two famous pigs to survive prolonged confinement during the disaster (the other being the more celebrated "Zhu Jianqiang," who survived only on rainwater and a bag of charcoal), Zhu Gangqiang was eventually bought by Zhang and now lives on his property, just behind the warehouse.

In yet another display of his direct, highly ambitious approach to art, Zhang plans to further the career of his pig by sending it up Qomolangma, "as a performance art piece to speak out against global warming," according to Qiao.

Qiao also said that Zhang has been in talks with British entrepreneur and pioneer in the field of commercial space flights, Richard Branson, to discuss the possibility of sending Zhu Gangqiang into space. While we are unsure of the artistic underpinning of this extraordinary idea, it is yet further proof of the possibilities that open up when sizeable artistic vision meets sizeable personal wealth.

Individualism versus collectivism

Zhang's venture does, however, raise some difficult questions: How happy is his staff? Do they mind working for one man who takes all the credit? When answering these questions, Zhang shifted into business mode.

"Our studio is organized and run like a company; every worker has signed a labor contract. I provide the concepts and ideas for the pieces and my assistants help me to realize it. I also decide when the piece is finished (the final effect)."

Mike Chen, one of Zhang's artists, told the Global Times: "Here, I can find inspiration in solitude in the garden, read about the world of art in the extensive library, and learn about the business end of the current art market from experts."

Chen believes that the feedback and rewards system used by the company are useful for motivating staff: "Great works

are made publically known and rewards are given accordingly. The environment pushes me challenge myself constantly and encourages healthy competition," he said.

Yin Guodong, who works as a photographer for Zhang, was equally positive: "I feel proud from the bottom of my heart when a piece of work I've participated in has been exhibited or reported by media. We are a team, everybody playing his or her own role."

"I think it is similar to the production of films or operas. Zhang is like the playwright and director, while we assistants play the roles of the cameraman, lighting engineer, make-up artist and so on," added Yin.

Speaking to us about this issue this May, founder of the Island6 gallery in Shanghai, Thomas Charvériat said: "I really respect Zhang Huan and admire his work. I especially respect the fact that he reinvests every penny of his money back into trying to be a better artist. But I don't like the way he has structured himself, because all the people who work for him are artists and this setup reflects the cult of the ego."

A second charge some may want to level at Zhang is that he has moved from being an artist to simply being a businessman in control of a factory. This is a subtle question, and one for the art historian to investigate, but it is interesting to note a couple of details.

In the metalwork shed, the artists were still banging away with hammers and hand-held drills, individually crafting the *He He, Xie Xie* replicas. This is not exactly a mass-production setup.

Secondly, and potentially more important, is the brutal fact that Zhang's warehouses contain an immense quantity of genuinely impressive pieces of art, far too many to mention in this article. Almost everything viewed by us was innovative, striking and fundamentally interesting.

As a parting question, Zhang was asked about what goals he has left for the remainder of his career.

"I feel that one thing in an artist's life's work should be to move art forward along its path, while another is to leave that path and forage over new ground. I feel that I haven't been successful in either of those tasks, but I personally prefer the latter. I like to get away from 'traditional' art and open up the frontier, to blur the concept of what art is, and in doing so, redefine it," he said.

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What's On

On Stage

The Dublin Philharmonic Orchestra

The Dublin Philharmonic Orchestra is bringing together Irish and European musicians, with Irish conductors, soloists and composers. The orchestra will perform Sarasate's *Carmen Fantasy* and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, among other popular classical works.

Date: July 6, 7:15 pm

Venue: Shanghai Grand Theater 上海大剧院

Address: 300 People's Avenue 人民大道300号

Tickets: 120 to 380 yuan
Call 6217-2426 for details

Lille National Orchestra 2010 China Tour

Under the direction of Maestro Jean-Claude Casadesus, the Lille National Orchestra from France will perform accompanied by Chinese pianist Xu Zhong. The orchestra will play Milhaud Darius's *Le Boeuf Sur Le Toit*, Ravel's *Piano Concerto in G* and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6*.

Date: July 8, 7:30 pm

Venue: Shanghai Oriental Art Center 上海东方艺术中心

Address: 425 Dingxiang Road 丁香路425号

Tickets: 80 to 680 yuan
Call 6854-1234 for details

Exhibitions

It's A Small World

This exhibition showcases collaboration between several Danish design, art and architecture institutions. It features design, craftwork and architecture from Denmark, all dedicated to exploring unconventional roles for designers.

Date: Until July 10, 8 am to 10 pm

Venue: Nordic Lighthouse 北欧航标

Address: 32 Qinhuangdao Road 秦皇岛路32号

Admission: Free

Visit www.nlh2010.com/small-world for details

Neon Paradise

German photographer Peter Bialobrzeski is bringing his *Neon Tigers* series to Shanghai. These photos mainly focus on urban landscapes filled with large buildings and mansions around the cities in Southeast Asia over the last 10 years.

Date: Until July 11, 10:30 am to 6:30 pm (Tuesday to Saturday), midday to 6 pm (Sunday)

Venue: M97 Gallery M97画廊

Address: 2/F, 97 Moganshan Road 莫干山路97号2楼

Admission: Free

Call 6266-1597 for details

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