



The New Design Museum

Space designed as a place to release artistic energies
by Val Wang

The graffiti artist Zhang Dali lumbered onto the stage wearing an anti-radioactive suit and wheezing, Darth Vader-like, through a mouthpiece, then Sheng Qi tied a bird to his male organ and let it fly around the room. Thus opened the Beijing Design Museum on March 2, which promises to be a fresh place to be outrageous in Beijing.

The behavior of the audience seemed to be more of a performance than the performance pieces themselves. After drinking tea and hobnobbing in the museum's salon for an hour waiting for the performance to begin, they finally saw Zhang perched in a window in the back of the room. He sprang out and, as he walked to the front, 200 people jostled for optimum viewing position, standing on tables and chairs. Flashbulbs snapped and cameramen elbowed their way to the front. Zhang, with jet-brush in hand, spray-painted "18 K dui hua" onto the bare chests of four workers, then spray-painted "18 K Dialogue" onto their backs. He then wrote on a big cloth, "shijie shi nimen de" and then "The World is Yours," finishing the piece with his characteristic graffiti heads. Following him was Sheng Qi's performance "Beijing! Beijing!" in which he stood with a red bandanna on his head, an army uniform on top and naked from the waist down, save for paper wrapped around his penis and a bird tied on a string to his penis. The last work was Zhang Nian's "Bomb," in which he threw eggs at a board on which were written his name and the date.

The newly founded Beijing Design Museum, located in a suburb northwest of Beijing, is a new alternative space for performance art, video installation, conceptual art, film, photography, drama and so on. Its founding director, He Yaohua, has changed his private museum into a more open forum for experimental art forms.

"The development of new China needs new arts to re-identify its new vision. The purpose of my museum is to fulfill this requirement," says He. Alternative art spaces have been blooming all over Beijing since last November. For instance, there is the Chinese Archives and Warehouse in southwest Beijing, the Front yard Gallery in Tongxian, as well as the upcoming Beijing branch of the TEDA Art Museum in Tianjin. The Design Museum is the biggest among these venues.

A nationally known art designer, design archivist, and curator, He has been collecting posters and folk art for 20 years. His collection of 3,000 posters is the largest such collection in China. The main gallery on the first floor of the Design Museum is 400 square meters, while the downstairs houses a smaller gallery and a spacious artists'salon, where the performance was held. His upcoming project, called "Departure from China" will present 50 new works of art, covering installation, photography, sculpture, painting, film, design, architecture, performance and video to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the People's Republic of China. This exhibition is scheduled to open in April.

He has already staged several large performances in the space. On the Saturday before the Spring Festival, a young conceptual artist, Wang Mai, did a performance piece entitled Cultural Colon: Chun Jie Lianhuan Wanhui (Spring Festival Extravaganza), modeled on the annual Spring Festival extravaganza televised on CCTV.

Design Museum

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Hours: 10-5 every day, salon open until 10 pm