

Space Up: Universal Studios, Beijing

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Along with the international outcry for commercial appreciation of Chinese art being purported by an increasing number of commercial venues (both locally and western funded), private and corporate interests contributing to the implementation of a league of native buyers and ambitious collectors are certainly shifting, especially in Beijing and Shanghai.

Despite an increasing influx of information channels targeting their spotlights on the artistic scenario of the capital, art professionals and cultural promoters can hardly find a trustable parameter and conceptual container to bridge collaborative continuity.



Zhou Zixi.

The functional development of an infrastructure able to produce theoretical networking and integrate global artistic practice within the local context has so far found little initiative and public support. With the opening of Universal Studios in Beijing, co-founders Waling Boers (director of Büro Friedrich, Berlin) and independent art critic and curator Pi Li, who also teaches at CAFA (Central Academy of Fine Art) aim at taking a new stake inside the Beijing art scene. U Space (*U Kongjian*) is set to be a "mediating instance" for the establishment of research and communication as mainstays to the production of cultural stances related to contemporary international visual arts, films, design and architecture. An international programme of 8-to-10-year exhibitions bridging mainly Europe and China with open perspective also to Asian countries is supplemented by panel discussions, open lectures, international art residencies and an editorial desk for books and theoretical publications. This is also contributing to a reality where little if not just Chinese language papers and publications about the state of the art of current art and theory practices are available to both audience and professionals, insofar providing a further platform for confrontation and debates.

The institution is maintained by means of mixed financial partnerships with private people from China and Europe, local private companies and public funds from the Mondrian Foundation. Following a first show and round of lectures in November 2005 with "Open Up" (participating architects Zhang Yonghe, Ole Sheeren, Ai Weiwei, filmmaker Jia Zhanke, artists Monica Bonvicini and Wang Wei among others), "Under the Skin" opens on March 21 as the first official event of U Space, featuring works by Dutch artist Aernout Mik at his premiere in China, Jiang Zhi and Shanghai painter Zhou Zixi.

The curatorial line set by the two directors attempts to build up a singular profile, where projects will be constructed upon an established exhibition networking and presentation of curatorial practices so far very limited in China.

In the making are a street/urban design project (June) where concrete commitment of city planners and art producers from Holland, Germany and China will result in a show and a conference, and a group show (September) presenting artists and trends from three big cities in China: Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong region (Canton/Shenzhen).

Universal Studios is a bright promise for Beijing and for the establishment of both a context and a space for art, facilitating interaction and exchange within Chinese various artistic realities as well. Whereas global issues are more and more transplanted into the Chinese social environment, throughout international corporate and public interests, the very core of certain universal values finds here a new terrain of negotiation and contextual impingements. Development of creative stances and artistic commentaries is an essential condition for Chinese modernization to really partake into world and human advancement.