



The satellite revolution Pi Li and Boers built Universal Studios near but not in Dashanzi

Sino-Japanese collaborator, 'Summer Holiday'

21st century boys

Two local curators are re-inventing the way we view art in China, writes **Stacey Duff**

At 32, Pi Li is one of the most exciting young minds in the Beijing art world. Besides teaching at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, he is also a prominent critic. His eyes sparkle when he voices his opinion that China's creative hour has arrived: 'Chinese artists have never experienced a time like this. They've got freedom – love of money included – but they've just never experienced this kind of creative intensity.'

When Pi Li's partner at Universal Studios-Beijing, Waling Boers lets it slip that China has a kind of honesty about it, Pi Li can't help but guffaw. 'Let me explain,' says Boers, who goes on to say that what he really meant by 'honesty' was that Chinese artists lack the self-referential irony of their Western counterparts.

'We want to find a new model for exhibiting art in China,' says Pi Li. He

and Boers are pounding a point home, wherever home might be, that you can't always get what you want just because you have a lot of cash. Art is not just a product, but a way of life. Like salvation, clean air and bad breath, it can come free of charge.

So what exactly are they doing that is different? 'For starters, we're more diverse in our approach,' says Pi Li. 'We offer suggestions to larger institutions, we commission work, and we often help the artists produce the work. We are not just buying work, hanging it up and selling it. We are involved in the making of the work, which is good for Waling and me since we both come from a curatorial background.'

Universal Studios-Beijing, the space that Pi Li and Boers both founded, is tucked away among fields, shacks and birches. Located just ten minutes from Dashanzi, in Caochangdi, it still feels out there.

Intense times and inspirational places attract creative minds. Earlier this summer, Guangzhou artist Cao Fei premiered her latest video at Universal Stu-

dios before taking it to the Sydney Biennale. The August show at Universal Studios featured a joint effort from China's Chen Shaoxiong and Japan's Ozawa Tyoshi, in which the artists designed a 'playpen' exhibition for their respective families.

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But unlike the theme park that goes by the same name, Universal Studios-Beijing is more than entertainment. 'Chaos Cities,' the current show, features 12 young artists who take a provocative look at China's urban explosion. While urbanism has been a topic in Chinese art for almost a decade, these artists aren't elegising. 'The new urbanism is all about attitude,' says Pi Li. 'and if their expression involves politics, it is the intimate politics of daily life.'

Boers, who also runs the space BüroFriedrich, in Berlin, says that 'there are a lot of very commercial aspects to the Chinese art scene right now. And in between there is actually nothing. We're trying to mix it up. We're trying to find a way to make projects like Chaos Cities possible. What we really want is to find a model for the 21st century.'

How feasible is that model when Chinese art is still so young, and most major institutions are still abroad? When *Time Out* asks Pi Li whether he thought the art world was too New York-centric, he doesn't miss a beat. 'I've never been to New York,' he belts out. Now it's Boers who's laughing. 'You see. That's what I meant by honesty. Who in the West, in the art world, would admit they hadn't been to New York?'

'I just never had a chance to go!' says Pi Li. But if there's such a thing as an innocent smirk, Pi Li has got one – New York will have to wait. 'Chaos Cities' runs until October 15 at Universal Studios-Beijing. See listings for further details, call 6432 2600 or check out www.universalstudios.org.cn.