

the container



The artists Sandra Kunz (Swiss) & Yang Jian (PRC) have proposed to create an architectural, spatial creation which shall couple elements drawn from the aesthetic and cultural heritage indigenous to both the nations of China and Switzerland.

As an interdisciplinary piece, “The Container” attempts to bridge intercultural divides, encompass questions and paradox of form and content as well as parody transcultural miscommunication. An original architectural/spatial creation, the artists Sandra Kunz and Yang Jian have actively collaborated on a work which would serve to manifest as an epitomal artistic creation in address of the predominant themes of misunderstanding & the misinterpretation which exists in between different cultures. In an era of post-modernist invention, the alternation between diverse themes and formal concerns is represented, to an extent, in a secondary role in the Container’s conception.

What is “The Container”?... The project is an attempt to transcend cultural barriers and limitations in the completion of an original inter-disciplinary collaboration. The Container is metaphorical in nature, drawn from a direct parallel to thought patterns which are created and engendered by media diffusion, educational prototypes & a mass unconsciousness.

An enormous prototype of a cultural fusion which has pronounced features belonging to each of the indigenous cultures of China and Switzerland, in a broader context, of the East and West, an inflatable hybrid which is at once ephemeral and physical, a work both temporary and permanent. Paradoxical? Its’ inception lies in a venture between the visual language of two cultures and their relative symbolism. Hybrid, the work seems to be at once innovative yet prey to cultural iconography, the attention to details which appear as “belonging” to one culture yet refer within the architectural schemata to being as necessary to the “Other”. A conflict of dichotomy Yes, yet, the creative process has been organic rather than pre-determined or “possessed” by a rigid social-cultural engineering.

The configuration and rendering are at an optimal reductivism, and incorporate such contrastive elements as architectural styles of antiquity in stark contrast with those of a globalized, post-modernist model which has superceded former conventions of scale and volume & taken an a priori consideration in the modern urbanization of international metropolis. A stark mountainous peak is host to an unconventional architectural installation, a contrastive aspect which is equally mirrored in the oppositional play of colour/light and sound/noise. This enacts a rupture with the prevalence of a media “stasis”.

The form of the inflatable soft plastic creation fills in volume due to the use of air pressured compressors, the exterior supple and organic in appearance, and greater detail is found in the secondary features. The key construct is derived from the architectural style unique to the South-East of China, a visual reference to an atypical phenomena, the structure is identifiably Chinese yet remains outside the predominant architectural styles of the mainland, those most commonly depicted as being “Chinese”. The senses are stimulated by way of intermittent lights and sounds, sampled from direct sources of media: the light sources, an alternating spectrum of color, sounds yet without a cognitive reference. The experience is hence one which equally deconstructs pre-established norms & preconceptions.

Close observation yields attention to the artist’s attempt to authentically replicate architectural traits which are inherent in each of their indigenous cultures. Lattice styled roofing bears immediately on that usual to that of a traditional Chinese or temple. The rounded exterior of a sole corner of the facade suggest a neo-colonial hybridization which is often remarked in cities of the PRC which were first exposed to the European influences. Yet, in so doing, the creative

impulse of both artists' runs into an approximate new sphere of invention where, while certain original or prototypical influences may be found, the question of adoption and copying here relates a result of the essential quality of change: whether the European tendency towards preservation or that of modern China's zeal for it.

A rather obvious reference to the famed peak, the Matterhorn, in Switzerland, is made, the summit is inversed and the mountain itself manifests as a reversible objects which funnels out water from within, the Container is in itself and ironic reference to misinterpretation and mis-adaptation of formal concerns when in equation of transcultural practices in contemporary art...the famous peak, whose presence was first felt in the European continent millenia ago due to a trans-continental tectonic shift, grafting the summit from what is today Africa, now demonstrates a symptom which might echo the phenomena of global warming, while equally attempting to make greater sense & express the inherent absurdities and paradox commonplace in trans-cultural interpretation.

Greater details is found in the stairwell, window frames and foyer towards the interior (which remains near entirely) concealed from external view), the housing style is atypical and the in-situ placement in the external exhibition space(s) of the giant metropolis of China lends further allegory and acts as a contrastive comment upon the extremes between the two cultures and socio-environmental situations. As a collaboration between artists of Chinese and Swiss origin, the Container equally enacts upon audio & spatial perception. A mountain peak which houses an architectural construction which emits light and sound in a manner synonymous to the cultural dialectics which otherwise divide individuals and peoples of different cultural origins. As a further example, the inflatable red ribbons which are offered in Chinese custom to welcome others...how would they be perceived by the uninitiated?

To equally employ elements which appear as qualifying factors in cultural, individual and national identification with a conscious & deliberate intention to clarify & emphasize cultural and perceptual divides between two peoples is the central mission of The Container. One may observe the Matterhorn, another, the majestic summit of the Himalayas. One may associate the white shed from the mountain with that of the Swiss flag, another the red shed from the architecture with that of the flag of the PRC. A unifying note is carried within the emission of sounds which yield no sense of origin or association with humankind, belonging to those derived from media and radio. A mountainous form only discernable only when dark has fallen, and natural light from above diffuses within it's cavernous interior only when once capsized.

The Container exists & has come to exist in the exploration of our confused, erratic & often misinformed attempts to render coherent a language spoken between different spheres of cultural latitudes: this errant tongue has become it's own dialectic, one which we rarely stop to either examine nor question. In the attempt, both Sandra Kunz and Yang Jian have been able to mock certain of our preconceptions, yet, deliver a work whose conception lies in an in-depth examination of the "ghost in the machine" of transculturalism. Our fears dissipate in the ironic undertone of the undertaking, its execution having proven to be an enlightening, frustrating & maddening revelation for both the authors'and audience alike. To quote Braque, "...the role of science is to reassure, of art, to provoke...".

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