

International Sculpture Competition in Shanghai, China

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INTERNATIONAL SCULPTURE COMPETITION IN SHANGHAI, CHINA

JAMES BLIESNER

Ses œuvres sont empreintes de mémoire, des nôtres et de celles de la nature qui tranquillement reprend sa place dans les carrières abandonnées et puis revisitées.

L'artiste s'intéresse aux notions de ré-appropriation et leur confère, dans la retransmission et la répétition de gestes et de traces, une signification plus profonde.

Conversation Adu s'adresse à la mémoire locale en reconstituant le lieu; elle relève aussi l'histoire des artefacts accrochés à l'intérieur de *10/19 Ellipse* par leur décoloration, quelques chiffres inscrits dessus, et les taches du temps — ces matrices qui, au départ, servaient à la création d'un monument de granite à la mémoire d'une personne. Mais plus encore, elle nous invite à nous tourner sur soi, dans notre propre univers, et à nous laisser bercer par nos souvenirs. Le thème de la mémoire revient constamment et avec force dans l'œuvre de Whittome qui se dit traductrice des sites qu'elle parcourt. Elle rejoint chacun d'entre nous puisque nous gardons tous en mémoire des souvenirs parfois intimes et personnels, d'autres familiaux ou communautaires, voire même patriotiques, qui refont surface au cours de nos vies. La Nature, elle aussi, a en mémoire ce qu'elle fut, et n'hésite pas à s'en souvenir pour reprendre sa place... même dans le granite. ←

Irene F. Whittome,
Conversations Adu
Galerie d'art de l'Université Bishop,
Lennoxville
12 mai – 26 juin 2004

NOTES

1. Irene F. Whittome a reçu le prix Paul-Émile-Borduas en 1997 et le prix du Gouverneur général en arts visuels en 2002. Elle vit et travaille à Montréal.
2. Laurier Lacroix, le commissaire de l'exposition, a écrit un essai pour le catalogue qui sera publié en septembre : Gaétane Verna, directrice de la Galerie d'art de l'Université Bishop, a aussi contribué au catalogue : le CD des bruits ambiants composé par Carey Dodge sera aussi inclus.
3. « Stone Shed » est une expression locale pour les manufactures de granite.

The City government of Shanghai, China, has approved a general land use plan that calls for the placement of dozens of new works of public art over the next five years. In partial fulfillment of that commitment, the Shanghai Pudong Urban Sculpture Committee has contracted with Jinglu Yu, Ph.D. President of the Shanghai Grand Theatre Fine Art & Design, Co., Ltd. to implement an international competition for work to be placed at two prime sites: the Central Greek Park, in the Lujiachui Financial District, and Riverside Avenue, along the Huangpu River. Three hundred design proposals from 31 countries have been submitted, of which a committee of five experts selected by City officials is making an initial review.

An international jury of seven will make a second level review. It will select the two winning designs. Finalists are being asked to submit electronic images of their proposed work.

An effort has been made to encourage "site-specific" work by providing images of the proposed sites at www.PDSculpture.net. This is an innovation in public art and though it will be difficult to actually assess the two sites from the Internet, it is the beginning of an understanding about the intimate relationship between the site of a work and the final design. The two finalists will be given the opportunity to modify the final design after they have been able to visit the sites.

Shanghai city officials are motivated by the spectre of the upcoming 2010 World expo. The City is implementing a torrid pace of reconstruction, removing over one million central area residents to "newtowns" outside of central Shanghai. The removal of old properties has been followed by the construction of hundreds of new high-rise office and residential towers. Newly designed park sites are emerging, providing acres of space for new public art.

The effort to undertake an

international competition is unique in China. "At a time of economic globalization the conflicts, exchanges and interactions between different cultures are a natural and much needed trend," said Julia Yu. Normally, under centralized government, decisions about public art are made by political or bureaucratic appointees who may or may not have knowledge about art.

Local officials have had an impact on the competition structure. For example, the original announcement called for installations at three sites. That has been reduced to two. The original funding for the competition was reduced mid-stream. A proposed international symposium on the topic of "site-specific public art" was cancelled, perhaps to appear at a later date. And finally, management of the competition was transferred from the regional Pudong officials to the City of

sculptors, in order to prepare them for the new international arts community."

In general, sculptors in China, once certified, receive a regular government stipend that is modified based on outside income. Costs for supplies are the sculptor's responsibility.

Tu Feng, a recognized Shanghai sculptor, confirmed Dr. Yu's comments: "Even though I receive a basic stipend, which barely meets my normal costs for living, I must always struggle with finding materials with which to work. Commissions do not appear very often and more recently we have been encouraged to participate in the free market and find opportunities to sell our work. There are not many galleries, and commissions go to 'friends' without any bidding or open announcements. Even though the economy is becoming stronger, awareness among Chinese people of art and culture, especially of



Shanghai. Pudong is a sub-region of Shanghai. The quest for transparency continues, and may yet be obtained by the layered selection process.

The participation of Chinese sculptors has been tenuous. "Chinese artists are not familiar with the competitive process. They assume that they do not have a chance at winning. Sculptors from Western culture must compete in order to survive," said Dr. Yu. "We must promote this, especially in Shanghai among the new generations of highly skilled Chinese

CHEN HUA, *Elements*, 2004. Photo: courtesy of the Shanghai International Sculpture Competition.

sculpture or more modern art, is limited. So our markets are mainly tourists from Western countries who have this tradition of buying art. So I am reluctant to bid on this competition, because I think the results are already determined or I have no idea where I can get the money to build it. But, I am very, very excited about the idea of an international jury and amazed to hear of so many artists bidding.

ICE FOLLIES

VIRGINIA M. EICHHORN

Maybe this will open new opportunities, if it can work.”

Dr. Jinglu Yu manages artists and sells art in both San Francisco and Shanghai. She maintains one of the most successful galleries in Shanghai, located just in the shadow of the Grand Theater, in the new central area of the city. She represents both Chinese and Western artists. “When I first proposed this international competition there was skepticism. Once we began, it was clear that it was gaining momentum and would be a great success.



HANS VAN DE BOVENKAMP, *Portal of Compassion*, 2004. Photo: courtesy of the Shanghai International Sculpture Competition.

Government officials are pleasantly surprised, and since it is a new experience there have had to be changes along the way. But we are learning and growing from experience. The key is to achieve some landmark work from internationally recognized artists. We even invited Maya Linn from the US. However, she was busy and did not want to have to compete. We would have loved to have included her in this process but chose instead to try and maintain the integrity of the selection process. Maybe later, once we have succeeded she will reconsider and come to China and see the possibilities.”

According to Dr Yu, cities all over China are expressing an interest in making public sculpture a part of the emerging urban form. “I intend to build a portfolio of sculptors and represent them to these cities over the near future,” said Dr Yu. ←

It was over a century ago that Lord Dufferin said “A constitution nursed upon the oxygen of our bright winter atmosphere makes its owner feel as though he could toss about the pine trees in his glee.” It is this euphoria that the bracing northern climate induces that curator and gallery director Dermot Wilson celebrated in his bringing together several artists from Northern and Southern Ontario to create temporary public art works on frozen Lake Nipissing. These works, exhibited under the title *Ice Follies* responded to the theme of ice-fishing, specifically, ice-fishing huts.

Wilson’s intention in mounting this exhibition was to get art out of the gallery and explore what happens in a non-traditional setting. Projects such as this allow for a different kind of interaction between artwork and viewer. By bringing it into the public realm the work is often perceived, especially by those who do not frequent galleries, as being more accessible. There is a greater freedom and less restrictive feelings in how the work can be addressed and responded too. These kinds of exhibitions have an important and singular role within the cultural community. In the late 1960s French museologist Georges-Henri Rivière proposed the idea of “ecomuseum” which was an interdisciplinary museological approach that emphasizes the importance of place. This stimulated the development of non-conventional and decentralized small museums. Essentially these museums were organized around their communities’ interrelations with their physical and cultural environment. They aimed at developing the autonomy and searching for identities under changing cultural and economic situations. In keeping with this kind of responsive philosophy, *Ice Follies* allowed the WKP Kennedy Gallery to present contemporary sculptural artworks in an austere, yet interesting (and unavoidable) setting, while at the same time cel-

ebrating our community and our northern landscape.

The artists chosen were asked to bring to the project their own ideas about the wilderness, architecture, our relationship to nature or lack thereof, the whimsical in public spaces and the ironic connections between contemporary art practice and a disappearing wilderness. The artists invited to participate have also worked with structures and assemblage or within the politics of hunting. They also worked closely with the Ministry of the Environment in North Bay to ensure that artworks are respectful of the lake and the environment and that the icy sites are returned to their original state after the three-week run of the exhibition.

Dan Elzinga created Ice Hut #1 titled *Fishing for Meaning, A Tribute to Clifton Whiten* — a local community member who died recently. From outside, the hut looks like a humble, cobbled together shack. However, within the ice hut one finds a number of significant objects and mementos, chosen for their associative relationship to Clifton Whiten. These consist of strange wood, glass and lead sculptures. Inside visitors could a time delay device that turns on lights and a soundtrack that is built into the shack. Elzinga has stated that his intention, as well as creating a memorial with a specific intention, would also be evocative for those who didn’t know Whiten. Essentially, as the title indicates, visitors must find — or fish for — their own meaning in this work.

Ice Hut #2 was created by Ivan Juraki, a Hamilton-based artist, currently completing his Master of Arts degree at the State University of New York. *Lure* is a pure white toy-like hut that blends into its surroundings except for the doorway. Through a large keyhole cut into the door of the hut a strong light shines enticing the viewer to look inside. This keyhole is the only access to the interior of the piece. Entry is frustrated. In doing so *Lure* acts to stimulate the viewer’s imagination. One doesn’t know what is inside, it might be something horrible or it could be something fasci-

nating. The locked door and the tantalizing title combine to create a work potent with possible meaning.

Through the Looking Glass is Keith Campbell’s crystalline work of art. Made completely of mirrors, this work is all about reflecting back in a kaleidoscopic way the beautiful landscape of Lake Nipissing. Additionally, this cre-



ation integrates the visitor within the artwork itself. There is a synthesis happening, a becoming one with the work. Additionally the piece is always in flux as it continually changes depending on what it is reflecting. The material — mirrors — compositionally references the site, specifically the ice and water beneath. It gives one reason to pause to reflect on what is the “real” reality — that which is around one or the one reflected back. In a certain sense it was somewhat disconcerting in how the piece integrated itself so completely within its surrounding landscape. Campbell, a North Bay native, is an internationally renowned ceramics and mixed media artist specializing in porcelain constructions.

Kim Adams’ entry into the *Ice Follies* is a monumental work described as being of “subversive engineering.” Adams will be

DAN ELZINGA, *Fishing for Meaning: A Tribute to Clifton Whiten*, 2004. Photo: Liz Lott and Snapdragon Photography.