

SHANGHAI

REACTIVATION: 9TH SHANGHAI BIENNALE

Gu Ling

The Shanghai Art Museum is split into two parts; both were opened on October 1, 2012, the 63rd national anniversary of the PRC. One part is called the China Art Museum, Shanghai, and is devoted to Chinese modern art. It is located in the China Pavilion (a relic from the Expo in Pudong); opposite it on the west bank of the Huangpu River sits the Power Station of Art (PSA), where the 9th Shanghai Biennale takes place. Its smokestack stands as the landmark for this ex-power station turned contemporary art museum.

It took Chief Curator Qiu Zhijie and Li Xu, Vice Director of PSA, eight months to set up the museum and the Biennale, and all the installations were completed within just two weeks. It

is a “miraculous achievement” in the words of Associate Curator Jens Hoffmann, who contributed a long list of artist nominations together with Boris Groys and Tsong-zung Chang. The enormous space is crowded with artworks, and audience visits are estimated at 6000 per day — a proud tally. But the curators’ have exceeded even this, thanks to their network of Inter-City Pavilions, a highly original concept that maps artistic creativity in cities worldwide and goes beyond the nationalist mode of the Venice Biennale. It is a perfect theme for Shanghai — the metropolis that has led China’s urban revolution in recent decades — and also resonates well with the eight previous editions of the Shanghai Biennale, which indexed various



BRIAN JUNGEN, view of Vancouver Pavilion.

orientations across the city. “Resources,” “Revisit,” “Reform” and “Republic” comprise the four categories for the themed pavilions in the PSA, spread also across thirty City Pavilions and Zhongshan Park. Pavilions for Berlin, Pittsburg, Düsseldorf and Dakar are especially notable. Qiu Zhijie foresees the City Pavilion as a potential mode that can be replicated, and which can liberate the Biennale from imported Western structures. The PSA’s iconic smokestack is the site of

a new work created by Roman Signer. In a signature gesture, the artist dropped a massive sphere filled with blue paint into this towering structure. Unfortunately, the interior of the smokestack has yet to be retrofitted for safe visitor access. Until then, the visual results of Signer’s blue discharge — which by default has become the first work to enter the PSA’s permanent collection — will remain enigmatic.

OSLO

ASTRUP FEARNLEY MUSEUM

Gesine Borchardt



The sun dances on a sail-like rooftop. Wooden walls rise up to the water, facing a little park and beach. No way around it: the new building of the Astrup Fearnley Museum in Oslo, designed by Renzo Piano, is a gem in Scandinavia’s museum land-

scape. Located on the peak of the semi-island Tjuvholmen, in walking distance from the city hall, it is run by the collector Hans Rasmus Astrup. Still, the building belongs to the city, which aims to upgrade this investor’s area to a cultural site. It is a public-private

partnership that may become a role model.

Director Gunnar Kvaran now has 4,000 square meters in which to play around with the collection: 1,500 pieces with a focus on art from the US. These works used to be hosted by Astrup’s office building, on a much smaller scale. “Now we have two buildings,” says Kvaran, “one for the collection and one for special exhibitions.” So what is notable about the collection? “We own many works by a few artists instead of accumulating historical movements,” he explains. That is why the museum has an enormous number of pieces by Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman and Robert Gober.

Hence, it almost sounds protestant to call the opening exhibition “To be with art is all we ask,” a title borrowed from Gilbert & George. Large-scale installations by Matthew Barney and Damien Hirst almost rage against the museum walls. Huang Yong Ping’s *Colosseum* (2007) opens onto the highest galleries where Nate Lowman, Wade Guyton and Kel-

ley Walker traffic in New York cut-and-paste irony. There is a lot of figuration in the show, circulating around identity, power, sex and violence — which points to, as Kvaran claims, life in the city. In 2013 things will become more precise: solo presentations by Paul Chan and Cindy Sherman will be followed by an exhibition on art from Brazil. Indeed, the new museum has made Oslo go global for good. At one time the city was quite self-absorbed with residencies, life-long pensions and shows on art from Norway. In recent years though, spaces like 1852 and Standard (OSLO), as well as international curators like Mats Stjernstedt at Kunstnerens Hus, have opened up the scenery. Yes, Tjuvholmen looks like a yuppie area. But the new museum will attract not just major local gallerists like Peder Lund or Gerhardsen Gerner from Berlin. The National Museum will also start a new building soon. It’s all about the company.

Astrup Fearnley Museum exterior, 2012. Photo: Nic Lehoux.