
The Youth Sale Store

Alternative Thinking in Alternative Situations

Jun 26 - Aug 30, 2010

Press Release

The subtitle of the text "Alternative Thinking in Alternative Situations" draws reference from a recent Apexart, (a privately funded alternative art space in Tribeca, New York City), publication project of the same title. The text grapples with the issues and challenges facing alternative spaces today, including changes in strategies of survival. I was invited to contribute the text, reflecting on the status of alternative spaces in China, and in the region. It was very difficult to draw a parallel between the meaning of what constitutes the "alternative" in the Western world and its current role in China. It was concluded that we are unable to discuss the "alternative" in the same way when speaking of China, an environment in which artists' work and lives are "alternative" by definition. Therefore, the concept of "alternative" in these respects involves the actual living conditions and cultural history and present environment in which the art is being produced, and where there are significant divergences from the Western system and analysis of artistic production.

The project The Youth Sale Store came to fruition as an outcome of such alternative practices. Young artists working in the field don't have a system of support for their artistic productions. The international focus on Chinese contemporary art has begun to fade away, yet the local infrastructure remains undeveloped. Young artists show their work in a few not-for-profit venues, as most of them don't have a place in the commercial sector. Most of them are at an age of maturity, a time when they are expected to become more self-sufficient, but most of them are jobless.

The Youth Sale Store was an experiment driven by a group of young artists based in Shanghai, searching for new possibilities beyond gallery representation and regular forms of market presence. The group collected works by young artists that they knew, and presented these works for a month while trying to explore the possibility of the store-space as a perpetual project—or perhaps even a permanent strategy—showing their work without any curatorial theme. In effect, it is a space where they can bring their new work when they are done, and place it there as part of the show. Thus, it is more of an open-ended format of display rather than a formal exhibition, and this kind of artist-organized initiative attempts to discover a space for these young artists within the art system.

Over the course of the project the show developed into a migrant store, looking to situate itself in a host of different galleries, spaces—temporary or otherwise—taking over the space and showing their work. The works on display would change all the time, and new artists came in with new works. There was no invitation, but the works were collected mainly through an internal - and informal - network between the many young artists around China.

The Youth Sale Store was shown for the first time in Shanghai, in M50, and its next host will be Pékin Fine Arts gallery in Beijing, from June until August 2010.

This and many other projects initiated by artists within the last two years, like Street Gallery, or Observation Society, are projects that introduce new possibilities and approaches to art making, production and the development of infrastructure.

These largely grassroots initiatives are important attempts that refer to what type of model of infrastructure should be implemented in this cultural context in order for it to make a meaningful and effective contribution.

The artists in this exhibition, (not art institutions, nor galleries, nor museums), are the ones who have raised these important issues through their work and activities. But the time has come when activities such as these or implied strategies are not enough. Different social realities provide different contexts, and it is time to view these contexts in relation to one's own knowledge and how one presents one's culture. It is through the writing of one's own history and by challenging established modes of production that artists begin to stop taking the systems of developed countries as a given, and further explore how, with one's own critical contexts, each of us can establish a dialogue with ourselves, our neighbours, or someone that crosses our path even momentarily. It is about re-defining what it means to be "alternative"; examining the notion of "alternative" as it applies in local contexts; and deciding what kind of dialogue we need to re-engage with the rest of the world. Challenging others first requires one to challenge oneself. This should be the starting point for the "alternative".

Project is recommended and introduction text written by Biljana Ciric, independent curator based in Shanghai
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