



“Unordinary Space – Liu Shiyuan, Yin Xiuzhen, and Gentucca Bini. Two artists and one designer reinventing the social space of Aurora Museum.”

Text by Davide Quadrio

Since the inception of *Xin Lu, New Roads*, a continuative program of contemporary art exhibitions initiated 3 years ago, the projects developed by and focused on the Aurora Museum have been analyzing possibilities of expansion and positioning for the institution, its collection and its social space, within the variegated cultural landscape of Shanghai and China.

The choice of operating in the contemporary realm to highlight issues concerning artists’ practice and art creation, has already made of Aurora an innovative platform for contemporary art, devoted to the excellence of ideas and to the challenges of artistic productions.

For the second major show of the year 2015, Aurora keeps following its trajectory, expanding the search for inspirational ideas and alternative angles offered by contemporary art seen as a medium to work on the past and as a tool to understand and build the future of the museum. After organising exhibitions hosted in its premises as well as abroad –as in the case of Qiu Zhi Jie solo exhibition presented in Venice at Fondazione Querini Stampalia–, Aurora has juggled with different mediums, spanning from visual arts, dance and new technologies that have dialogued with and have retraced the museum space.

With the group exhibition *The Making of A Museum*, Aurora challenged contemporary artists by inviting them to interact with its permanent collection of antiques, whereas *Unordinary Space - Liu Shiyuan, Yin Xiuzhen, and Gentucca Bini* sees the interventions of two artists and one designer within the public spaces of the Museum.

The exhibition analyses the architectural and metaphorical environments that connect the Aurora Building –a landmark of the Shanghai skyline– and the Tadao Ando annexed Museum infrastructure. The physical and imagined connection between the two spaces become the thematic thread in the conception of site-specific sculptural installations, which are at the same time inspired by the idea of craftsmanship as a symbol of human presence reflected by the Aurora permanent collection.

For the second time, Alcantara will partner up with Aurora in the creation of the artistic projects, providing its amazingly versatile material as a media for the artists and the designer to play with in the production of their concepts.

The exhibition is articulated in three chapters: the space as a container, the space as

surface and the space as digital platform.

Yin Xiuzhen's *Digestive Cavity*, addressing the notion and nature of *container*, is conceived as the focal installation that embodies and strengthens the physical connection between the entrance of the Aurora Museum of antiques and the Aurora Building public area, creating a metaphorical space of encounter and at the same time introducing an alien element of disturbance in the ordinary flow of the main hall. The installation is thought to create a spatial experience, a cathedral of the intimate, a private sensorial room that invites you to meditate and reflect upon life and its transient nature. The structure for the installation will be built with hundreds of second hand clothing pieces and Alcantara cuts.

The intertwinement of the metal openings with the organic shape of the installation forms a room that depicts a spiritual highway where ceramic made vessels, sprinkled across the textile inserts, represent fragments of lives and people. These Jingdezhen ceramic pieces render the traces of the present and past, clusters of abandoned experiences, casted in a precious, almost transparent material that freezes space and time in a moment of bliss.

The monumental installation produced for this exhibition is part of a series of works that Yin has been making in the last years, although the usage of ceramic elements marks a new chapter in her practice, creating unexpected and alien objects charged with a beautiful yet disturbing physicality.

Crossing the main hall and going into the Chandelier Room, several standing monitors present the work of Liu Shiyuan. Her interpretation of craftsmanship is here metaphorically represented through a sequence of poems, writings and mottos carved and overlapped on patterns, colors and substances, creating a seemingly perpetual process of poetic production.

Somehow the artist is shaping a new language, an international poem that is composed by fragments of poetries coming from everywhere, as evidence of a common human need for lyrical composition as a symbol of beauty but also of universal love. The message of love and care preached by Buddhism is conveyed here by laymen voices, the voices of poets who, in certain time of history, created eternal verses that changed forever the history of their cultures.

This project, shown inside the building and also on the monumental LED screen on the Aurora Building facade, is the lexical equivalent of the detailed, precise, painful work of bamboo's wavers, jades' carvers, painters and writers who, whose virtuosity in interlacing and creating complicated patterns produced, and still produce in the present, outstanding works of art. Hence, Liu Shiyuan is presenting a literary version of the artisanal excellence, making poets the real craftsmen of this immense human production that is literature.

The last invited contributor to the project is not an artist but a designer and architect. Gentucca Bini has been working in the areas between design, architecture and fashion, creating projects that reverse, subvert and challenge the perception of individual and

public environments. For this project, Bini is turning upside-down the chandelier room, one of the most characteristic spaces of the Aurora Building.

This baroque room is transformed by a simple idea – though of challenging realisation– that subverts the space creating an optical disruption of the social function that this space is meant for. Through her gesture of reversing the architecture of the hall, Bini crafts a new space, a ludic and at the same time disquieting one, providing the experience of a contemporary kaleidoscopic room. The visitors will witness the transformation of the overwhelming baroque room into a sensorial space, where the coldness of the marble is counterbalanced by the softness of Alcantara, treated with a complex photographic printing process that makes the material appear as if made of the same marble, glass and shiny elements that compose the real architecture of the room. This contrast between what you see and what you touch, the reversed landscape where up and down become the same, the windows which reveal another Shanghai standing out there, is the result of Bini’s attempt of changing completely an object simply distorting an element, a perspective, and/or its function. Changing the skin –the surface of the room– changes everything, perception and functionality, creating in the public a blackout, a smile, a new experience.

In this monumental exhibition three women comment on the social “containers” that Aurora Building and the annexed Museum represent. In this project though, the Museum’s building is only challenged metaphorically through the intervention that the two artists and the designer bring to Aurora. Without intervening directly on the collection, the three works expand the idea and meanings of craftsmanship, of the creation of decoration and decorative patterns. The three installations change our way of looking at things, inviting us to experience with the mind and heart, and to open ourselves to the possibilities of inter-connections among various cultures and media. They bring us to the territory of the ephemeral and the weightless, a place of light and poetry, a place where the work of the hands is sublimed into spaces of meditation, poesy and repose.

THE ARTWORKS

ARORA MUEUM

by Getucca Bini

Inspired by the images of the Chandelier Hall located in the Aurora Building, Getucca Bini's installation aims at creating a bi-dimensional palindrome of the shiny and rich architecture through the utilization of optical illusions, an immaterial render of what we see when we access the room.

The amazing results obtained through photographic print on Alcantara, have allowed Bini to blur the borders between real and imagined, and to create a flattened upside down reproduction of the unique tridimensional space and its distinctive decoration.

The *matte* surface of Alcantara shimmers, windows and curtains are suddenly flipped, evoking the reflection of the Shanghai skyline on the water surface, and reminding us of the street lights and neon reverberations that makes Shanghai a crazy, fantastic city.

DIGESTIVE CAVITY

By Yin Xiuzhen

For the project at Aurora Museum, Yin Xiuzhen has thought of a large-scale installation that encompasses concerns about life, afterlife, body and spirit.

Inspired by funerary rituals in which the mourners put together the earthly belongings of their departed ones to accompany them in their after-death journeys, the installation embodies the spiritual travel itself, envisioned as a gigantic digestive organ made of second hand clothing pieces and Alcantara cuts.

Porcelain vessels placed in this imaginary stomach stand as representations of our existential travel, becoming the holders of the spirits and experiences of each individual. In Yin Xiuzhen's dreamlike dimension, the interior of the installation provides a warm and inviting environment linked to the heat that our bodies transmit to the clothes we wear, an evidence of our bodily passage through the material world.

LOVE POEM

by Liu Shiyuan

In her work Liu Shiyuan wants to explore the space of poetry, empowering a literary genre that, according to the artist, has nowadays lost its strength, *as an expired medicine*.

Shiyuan considers that, while human civilization has been rapidly evolving under the

predicaments of a fast paced scientific and technological growth, many contemplative aspects of life have been left behind.

For this project, the artist composes *a love poem dedicated to love poems*, a digital collage that combines different languages, cultures, and eras. The video loops, displayed both in the Aurora building space and on the facade LED screen, become the pages of this poem of poems that seeks to become a manifesto of the lyrical nature that has distinguished human civilization throughout its history.

After having collected and translated excerpts of the most famous love poems written in different countries across the centuries, Shiyuan have merged them together, giving shape to a seemingly endless love poem. The viewer is not able to tell where the beginning and the end are, the lines become a flux that ironically breaks the definition of poem itself, breaking the boundaries of rhythm.

As the lines of words pass on the screen, the background continuously changes, showing a myriad of patterns and colors obtained with scans of Alcantara material. This metamorphosing backdrop enhances the heterogeneity of the literary references, and the variety of their spatial and temporal coordinates.