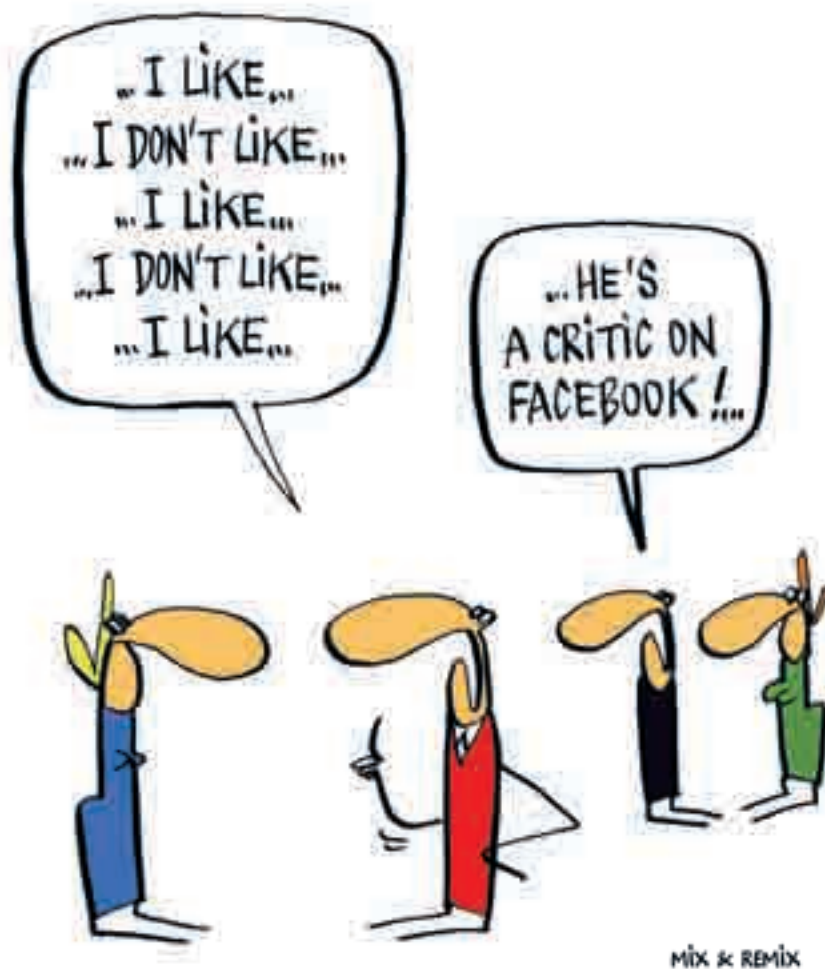


passages



Browsing, Blogging, Tweeting, Tagging Cultural Journalism in Flux

World Traveller with Sketchpad: Cosey in India | Swiss Game Design in San Francisco | CoNca: Fresh Breeze on the Catalan Cultural Scene

Cultural Journalism in Flux



With drawings by turns humorous and whimsical, cartoonists Ruedi Widmer and Philippe Becquelin bring cultural journalism to life.

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grounds that come to life in the films he contributes to. But Scheurer adds that this form of art still lacks a metacriticism along the lines of the art works of Joseph Beuys.

Interestingly, the Swiss Game Design exhibition does include a few works that stimulate reflection about themselves and about gaming, as in the artist Yan Duyvendank's video game *Game Over*, in which the artist himself can be seen shooting at invisible opponents. But with the addition of a self-referential level, such works also distance themselves from the primary goal of offering the player an entertaining pastime. This is made clear by how these works mostly fluctuate between game and video installation; they confront the player or observer with content that justifies itself independently of the course of the game. This creates a possible distinction between gaming culture itself and the art that reflects on that culture. Such critical reflection in the works of artists shows that gaming today is recognized as playing a formative role in many people's lives.

Information on further events can be found on the swissnex website:
www.swissnexsanfrancisco.org

Bettina Ambühl studied German at the University of Zurich. For a year now, she has lived with her husband in California as a correspondent for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

Translated from the German by Andrew Shields

The Attempt to Find a Universal Language



The exhibition series *Action and Video – CH/CN Art Now* in Shanghai shows video art from Switzerland and China and offers artists from both countries a platform for dialogue.

By *Stefanie Thiedig*, Shanghai – Performance and video, form and medium – these are the grand concepts addressed in the exhibition series *Action and Video – CH/CN Art Now*, on show in Shanghai from April to December 2011. The series is a joint production of the Minsheng Art Museum and the Chinese artists exhibiting there and Pro Helvetia Shanghai and the invited Swiss artists – and between them is Li Zhenhua, a curator who divides his time between Zurich and Beijing and serves as the link tying the whole show together. This intermediary position is also occupied by the work of intercultural understand-

ing, which requires a great deal of patience from both sides, as well as the willingness to engage with one another.

Contrasts and parallels

Retrospectives of contemporary Chinese art have been booming in China since the summer of 2010. This past September, the Minsheng Art Museum staged a major overview of Chinese video art. The new Pro Helvetia office in Shanghai and curator Li Zhenhua have also taken up the topic. By juxtaposing contemporary video art from Switzerland and China, the *Action and Video – CH/CN Art Now* project aims



Art students from Shanghai produce the works under the artists' supervision.

Photos: Jin Jing†

to point up contrasts and parallels and offer artists from both countries a platform for dialogue. As part of this dialogue, Swiss artists Yves Netzhammer, Bernd Schurer, Roman Signer, Yan Duyvendak and Marc Lee, along with art historian Beat Wyss, encounter Chinese artists Liu Wei, Lu Jie, Aaajiao, Zhang Peili and Lu Chunsheng. The series was inaugurated on 19 April in the presence of Swiss Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter. The first exhibition featured Yves Netzhammer accompanied by computer and visual artist Bernd Schurer – the original title, *Die Anordnungsweise zweier Gegenteile bei der Erzeugung ihres Berührungsmaximums* (*The Configuration of Two Opposites during the Generation of Their Maximum Contact*) was abbreviated in its English version as *Nature Fear Entity*.

Hoping for the butterfly effect

The exhibition series is not meant as a classical object of contemplation but is intended instead to serve as a means of communication rendering palpable the process of artistic creation as it unfolds. For this reason, the project heads also engaged the Minsheng Art Museum along with numerous Shanghai art students. Once the first murals have been painted, when the installations are in place, the videos integrated and the sounds synchronized – once the basic framework of the exhibition is standing, the show receives finishing touches from the students under the supervision of the artists. Chinese art schools continue to focus mainly on methods and production processes – the Chinese educational system doesn't leave room for much else – but the perspective of contemporary artists is also discernible precisely by way of formal aspects. In reference to the drill system favoured at Chinese schools, Li Zhenhua notes: "Of course our approach cannot change the Chinese system, but who knows, perhaps it will produce a butterfly effect." Accompanying workshops, lectures and visits by schools and institutions are intended to contribute to this process.

The two cultures must also learn together: "Although I've been working with Swiss artists for quite some time already, I

find that I am in the midst of a tremendous learning process as far as the different working methods of Chinese and Swiss artists go," says Li Zhenhua. The Chinese expression *Manman lai* ("Easy does it") gets to the heart of cultural misunderstandings, and Europeans often have difficulty grasping it. Another reason for such misprisions



**Aesthetic experiences become art:
Yves Netzhammer at work**

is the fact that so much is planned and implemented simultaneously in China – which is why it was decided to produce the exhibition series as a work in progress.

New Pro Helvetia office in Shanghai

Because Netzhammer's work is not simple, and cannot be understood at first glance, the students are very cautious with their commentary and often use his animal figures to approach his subjects. "As unencrypted elements not laden with value, animals are ideal bearers of emotion, and afford room for associations," says Netzhammer. The artist's preoccupation with the individual, culture and nature raises questions for him about existence. The surface can no longer be trusted – it provides a glimpse of the psychological space beneath: of our fear of breaking with conventions, of the labile nature of our view of the world. Not everyone is able to read everything, but the aesthetic experiences represented in his scenes have a vital and en-

compassing expressive power that offers participants from both cultures the opportunity to discover a universal language.

The new Pro Helvetia liaison office in Shanghai, officially inaugurated in October of 2010, is also counting on such an effect. Since 2008, almost seventy artistic projects have allowed those involved to test

the waters for a cultural exchange between China and Switzerland. The office has a staff of three local employees: head Sylvia Xu is assisted by Cathy Fu in Shanghai and Eliza Wang in Beijing, who serves as a liaison between Pro Helvetia Shanghai and the capital. "We are a small office, and thus extremely flexible," says Xu, "and our structures are not as hierarchical as they are among the representatives of many other countries abroad." The office's specific focus is renewed each year: this year features video art, while design and architecture are planned for next year. All the same, artists are seldom supported directly; instead, Xu works mainly with Chinese institutions, which provide financial and networking support for individual projects. The Minsheng Art Museum, partner of the current project, is doing pioneering work in this regard, since it is China's first and, so far, only museum of contemporary Chinese art to be

entirely financed by a bank. "Now other banks are planning to found museums," says director Zhou Tiehai. "We are breaking new ground in China – at the moment we are still preoccupied with the fundamental processes of museum work, and with building up our collections."

For information about the current exhibitions and events of *Action and Video* see www.prohelvetia.cn

Stefanie Thiedig works as a freelance arts agent under the name *Kulturgut* in Beijing. In September of 2010, together with Katharina Schneider-Roos, she co-edited the volume *Chinas Kulturszene ab 2000* (*Chinas Cultural Scene as of 2000*), about the arts in China during the first decade of the 21st century (published by Christoph Merian Verlag).

Translated from the German by Rafaël Newman