

Art and design education is the FutureLab

Wang Jie

WHILE Shanghai's art season ended in November, the artistic spirit lingers at West Bund.

The second edition of "Art and Design Education: FutureLab" is running at the West Bund Art Center through Sunday.

This year's FutureLab is an improvement in both the fair's structure and the quality of works on exhibit.

The 2020 event includes five sections: Exhibitions, Forums, Workshops, Training and Awards. It brings together deans, scholars, teachers and students from more than 100 art and design schools and research institutions from home and abroad. They will co-explore how art and design education should equally prioritize both the present and the future as well as exchange research ideas, teaching practices, management models and creative outcomes.

The Exhibitions section features the latest fruits of art and design education from nearly 20 universities around the world, as well as their teachers and students' key observations and reflections on various topics such as society, culture, economy and science.

It is obvious that different academies have different focuses and directions in their teachings. For example, the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing focuses on the basic and solid techniques on canvas, print and mural. Yet the works on display still surprise visitors through the exploration of the possibilities and limits of each medium with new angles, such as the new content and shape in the classical fresco.

"Poetic Writing" presented by Open Media Lab at China Academy of Art reflects another art trend.

"Open Media Lab is not defined by medium and not confined by media theories," said Yao Dajun, dean of Open Media Lab at China Academy of Art. "When we ask what kind of music you prefer, we never ask if it is piano music, violin music or guitar music. We ask whether you like rock 'n' roll, classical or jazz music. But when it comes to art, why do media become the distinction to tell what kind of art it is?"

According to Yao, the most prominent feature of Open Media Lab is its emphasis on facing and reflecting on the unique reality of China's Internet

media ecology. Current areas of focus include virtual reality, augmented reality, mobile art, live audio-visual, social media art, sound art and algorithmic art.

Among a group of artworks shown under the theme of "Poetic Writing," "Hope the Voyage is A Long One" is a spotlight. As a VR narrative work, it comes from a verse of Constantine Cavafy's "Ithaca." Visitors will embark on a surreal journey through the road built by the game engine, pondering the status quo with no reason and no direction.

The work provides two viewpoints: inside the VR, which is the story of the five people; and outside the VR, which is a fictional dialogue landscape through the visitors' participation. Both focus on the individual and the search for truth in the aftermath of a public event.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic around the world, most schools failed to hold graduation shows this year. FutureLab initiated the 2020 FutureLab Degree Show of Chinese Fresh Graduates also in the Exhibitions category to present the students' achievements over their studies.

FutureLab has a big mission to implement art rather than just as a fair or exhibition. This year, it invites 100 art teachers from local primary and middle schools for on-site practical training, looking to empower these grassroots educators with cutting-edge academic thoughts.

FutureLab has also worked with Shanghai Teacher's Union and Shanghai Education Commission to hold a competition for young art and design teachers at local universities, to honor the city's award-winning teaching talent and share their best practices.

The Forums part features the topics of "Deans' Talk: Changes of Functions and Roles Facing Art and Design Teachers in the Age of Intelligence," "Freedom and Control in Art and Design" as well as "New Media in Design Education."

Public days

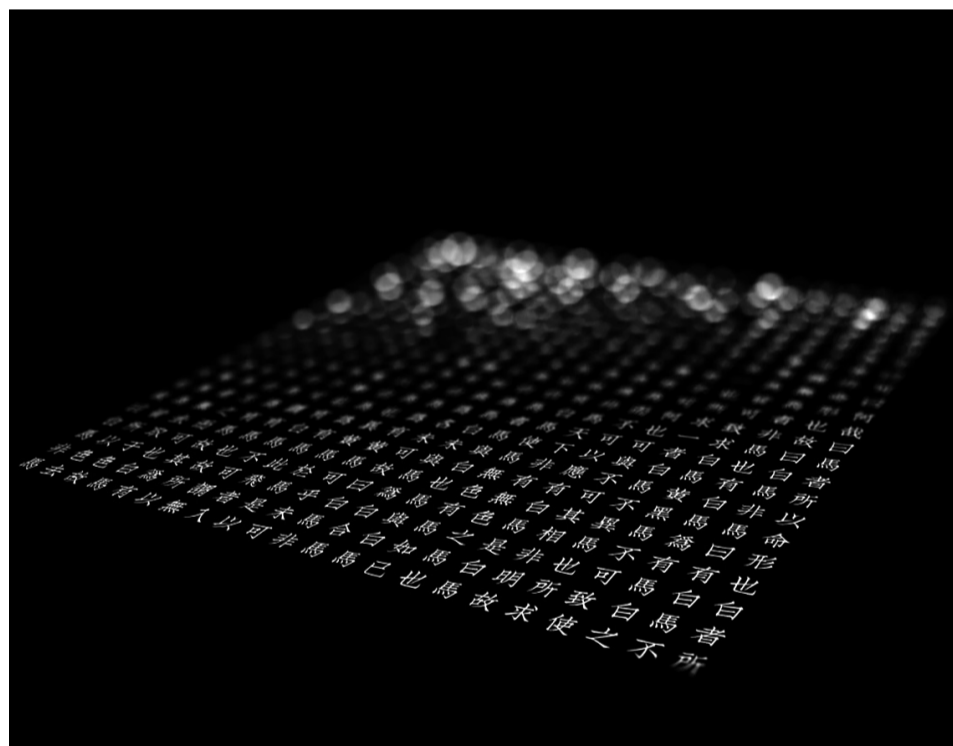
Dates: Through December 13, 11am-5pm (last admission at 4:30pm)

Venue: Hall A and Hall B1 of West Bund Art Center

Address: 2555 Longteng Avenue



"Cave" (front) by Pan Yihe of University for Creative Arts and "Borderline" by Zhang Yilin of China Academy of Art — Ti Gong



"White Horse Is Not Horse" by Yao Dajun in the "Poetic Writing" series — Ti Gong

Reed handicraft portrays Panjin's wetland ecology

ZHANG Shoubo, 37, uses an electric soldering iron to "paint" a reed stalk, outlining the shape of a water bird native to his hometown in the coastal wetland city of Panjin, northeast China's Liaoning Province.

"This is a Saunders's gull, or the Chinese black-headed gull, which is a name card for our city," said Zhang, a farmer who is familiar with reed marshes since childhood and emotionally bonded with such rare species.

Some 10,000 such gulls, around half of the total population of the species, inhabit in Panjin, according to data from local authorities.

After struggling with his livelihood in Beijing, Zhang decided to return to his hometown in 2003 and explore a new career. He learned to create reed handicrafts from elderly craftsmen and has been engaged in producing such handicrafts to introduce Panjin and its scenic beauty to the world.

A reed handicraft has to undergo multiple steps, including material selection, soaking, ironing, composition, decomposition, coloring and framing.

Zhang arrives at his studio at around 8am every day and is engrossed in his creative craft until 9pm.

"Traditional Chinese land-

scape paintings, which mostly portray mountains, water, flowers and birds, have inspired my creations. They convey the harmonious coexistence of human and nature," Zhang said. "I'd like my art to convey something similar."

Panjin's wetland covers an area of 249,600 hectares, accounting for more than 61 percent of the city's total land mass, thereby playing a significant role in climate regulation and air purification for China and surrounding countries.

The city yields more than 500,000 tons of reeds every year, which are mostly used in papermaking and

construction-related works.

"Every autumn when the reeds are ripe, I will go to the wetland to collect the materials," Zhang said. Reed stalks used in making the special handicrafts need to be thick and long.

"Cut open the reed stalk with a knife, flatten it and stick cardboard on its back, and it will become the raw material for a reed picture," he said.

With the advent of e-commerce platforms and booming tourism in China, Zhang's works have been sold nationwide as well as overseas, including Canada, the United States, South Korea and Japan.

The reed artwork has been

listed as one of the intangible cultural heritages of Panjin, and Zhang has become an inheritor. Hundreds of craftsmen like Zhang are creating such handicrafts using reed.

Tourists flock to Zhang's studio every day, and he is invariably delighted to share its production techniques with visitors.

"More people will get to know Panjin's reed handicraft and learn about the city's wetland and bird conservation, which would help people comprehend the ecological concept of harmony between humankind and nature," Zhang said.

(Xinhua)