

Calligraphy from the Far East

Artistic exchange between China and Germany in the Lichthaus

by Dieter Begemann

Bremen in Germany. Which is the connection between Bremen and the Far East? In the Lichthaus, the former administrative headquarters of the AG Weser Shipyard – recently changed into an office building – is presently shown an exhibit, which is devoted to an artistic exchange between Bremen and China.

Reinhild Zietz, living in Bremen and Worpswede, and her colleague Zhao Hong, living in Peking: They met during an exhibition project in Peking, organized by the Bremen City Gallery. This personal contact was continued by mail and email and thus both artists originated the idea of a cooperation project that not only dealt with an exchange of exhibitions but also should directly involve a concrete dialogue.

The idea was fitting: Reinhild Zietz was interested in traditional Chinese art anyway and this was exact emphasis of the work of Zhao Hong.

It should be mentioned that conventional techniques and themes are clearly the main focus of an artist education in China nowadays.

Besides, Zhao Hong's connection to tradition is a very personal one: she originates from an artist family and teaches Painting and Calligraphy at a University.

The common Exhibit Picture. Script in the Lighthouse – which can only be seen for a short time – tries to establish a dialogue between different cultures. Both artists first and alternately set up a list of themes, natural themes like winter or flow, but also ones connected to the present like Megacities, or abstract ones like fragment and developed, each for her own, pictorial ideas. Thus there is a German and a Chinese work of art for each theme.. Common to all that paper is used as carrier. Zhao Hong limits herself with only a few colors to the medium of Indian ink, applied by pen, brush or stamp, where Zietz includes strong watercolor or collage techniques. Remarkably, the Chinese artist remains mainly within her traditional Asiatic formal language, whereas the Bremen/Worpswede painter responds clearly to foreign, especially Asian calligraphy, although turned into the abstract.

How does one's view upon the foreign, but also upon the own culture change in such a dialogic work process? Did the indeed longer duration of the process have an influence?

Without a common language, can people of different cultures reach such drawings and painting? Those were the questions posed, related to a producer and consumer level. The latter ones had to be answered by the visitors of the Lighthouse. The presentation of the artworks in the multipurpose hall on the ground floor of the old industrial complex, however, although architecturally attractive, seemed somewhat careless. The modestly positioned movable walls on the front sides were a solution that did not do justice, neither to the splendour of the room, nor to the artistic project itself. Following the stay in Bremen, the exhibit shall furthermore be shown in three universities in China.

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