
Liu Dao Collective

The inception and continuation of the Shanghai based artistic collective, Liu Dao, is of a pivotal importance in the mainland of the PRC, and on the basic premise of collective experiences and conceptual mandates alone, it is near unparalleled and without rival. The collective mandate has, since its beginnings four years earlier, enacted the realization of a laboratory for contemporary and experimental artistic explorations with new technological mediums and interdisciplinary actions which have incorporated the visual arts, new technological mediums, physical dance and improvisational techniques, documentation and site specific manufacture of objects and works which are signed by the collective as the active force.

Site specific and in-situ creation are relatively recent concepts in contemporary artistic practice, with few centers and institutions actually encouraging the initiative for emergent artists to experiment within a specific locus rather than exhibit prefabricated works which are more easily accessible in accordance with the dictates of commercial ventures and related interests. Liu Dao offers a dramatic counterpoint amidst the actuality of contemporary China where the legacy of the demographically sound and socially engineered necessity of one child policy, "Open Economic" reform (post Deng Xiaoping), echoes with the praise of individual merit, personal gain and where mass-egocentrism is rife.

At the academic level, today young talents are often discouraged from collective orientations due to the saturated commercial value of contemporary Chinese art on the world stage, hence, a detrimental counsel is often elicited by professors and academic counterparts who seek to introduce curatorial projects to the graduate level. Viability in the market dictates individuality, and the production of signature series which act to demarcate the young talent. In effect, the former collective spirit which initially afforded greater discourse, solidarity and strength for the foremost generation of Chinese artists, who creatively and strategically merged in order to retain their collective stamina in face of aesthetic individualism and social limitations, has now been near entirely replaced by systems which curtail collectivity and which limit the creative potential found in spontaneity and group spirit.

In recent years, the collective spirit has been resuscitated in a positive direction, to an extent, by individual artists, curators and critics who have been able to assess the strengths of past initiatives. Having become disenchanted with the capitalist dichotomy of prefabricated, "wholesale" artistic practice intended for immediate representation in commercial galleries or with expectations of obtaining mere social status via conduits which bear weak art or thoughtless mimetic works, concerted efforts have arisen amongst the younger generation.

A scarce handful are to be found throughout the mainland, most notably in Kunming, Chengdu, Chongqing and Xi'an, yet in the commercial and cultural bastions of Beijing and Shanghai, virtually none are able to or have been able to resist the temptation and tide of change which has come with burgeoning economic growth and correlated market-centrism.

In light of this historical precedent, it is fascinating to witness the activity and developments which are found within the Liu Dao collective since its inception a few short years before: a virtual blink in time when one relates the experience and traditions of modernistic art in China this century. One crucial aspect lies in the

polyvalence of artists which has been awakened with experimenting with the Liu Dao collective, and whose expansion of experience, knowledge and practice in pursuit of their creativity has amplified.

The collective has sought to further the consciousness and awareness of the multiplicity of contemporary art, whether regarding formal applications or conceptual instigation. The core ten creators behind Liu Dao have emerged with a surprising and remarkable production co-signed within the collective, yet the work is appraised as being none other than the singular "moment" of extensions of the artistic direction's mandate. Polyvalence is matched by cultural plurality; while Liu Dao is not exclusive as an arts collective, the group surpasses, or overwhelmingly, stimulates the participation of international artists and projects whose origins lie beyond the national boundary.

The plurality, presence of an indigenous participatory body of artists, and emphasis on electronic and new technological media —while not to exclude more traditional medium— have created in truth an active lab wherein artists converge and depart with individualism, preconceptions and limitations of the ego challenged if not entirely subverted by way of experiential process.

International curatorial processes and an acute expertise offered by new participants assist in enhancing the creative scope and transnational perspective due to the open exchange and facilitated dialogue. This aspect is both constituent for Liu Dao and crucial in the collective's development and progressive advent in the artistic sphere of its native Shanghai.

The platform of experimentation has offered sustainability to otherwise highly specific disciplines, and trans-disciplinary approaches, reminiscent of Warhol's Factory, which embrace digital media, computer generated imagery, interactive installations, LED units of varying dimensions and capacity, interactive sound creations, and similar hybrid methods in the exploration of contemporary art. Allegorically, the kinetic spirit of Fluxus is shared by the Liu Dao collective, as an inevitable retort against predetermined iconography, dialectics and market collusion is mirrored in the creative inventory of the collective.

Latent potential has consolidated in an artistic trajectory of great promise. The stage for creation established in 2007 and hyper-elasticity in the ebb of consistent production have offered continuity and community in the municipality of Shanghai. Liu Dao has proven sustainable, and yields tremendous creative license and artistic potential.

The visceral aspect of experimentation and process-oriented creation have today allowed for certain recognition on the international tier of non-academic, noncommercial artistic action. Numerous creations signed by the collective are now exhibited in independent artistic institutions, are collected by diverse interests and have won representation at prominent sites such as Red Gate Gallery (Beijing), MOCA (Shanghai), Albert Benamou (Paris), Loft (Paris), and White Rabbit (Sydney), to name a few.

While this eventuality may at first appear as being counter to the artistic direction's original impetus, in fact, the success and recognition of the collective concept and actual authenticity of artistic production act as testament of the rebirth of a manner near forgotten in the post-1980s generation. Collectivity and communal spirit stand again as potential signifiers of emergent artists' strength and intelligible creative motives.

Within the Shanghai vicinity, the lack of critical thought and absence of theoretical, thematic curation have sadly increased since the consolidation of several art districts, and it is of some importance that Liu Dao has challenged, survived and over won the commercial sphere due to the vigilance of the artistic direction, in which each participant is invited to engage.

To observe the comprehensive incentive and rationale of Liu Dao in contrast with various tendencies which have surfaced within the societal fluctuations, political manifestations and divergent trends of individualism-being essentially consumerist driven and bound to the "globalization" (read American Capitalism) and subsequent "cult of the ego", has been to witness an impressive resilience of the founder, artistic director, and exceptional performance/sound/visual artists.

Liu Dao is made of those who share a vision towards the new within a dynamic experience of a site-experiment which axiomatically generates noncommoditization, avoids mainstream absorption and stagnant dogmatic proclamations. This unique project encapsulates innovative production in synthesis with the enrichment of individuals at work in concert towards an emancipation found in a collective experience within the cultural strata of Shanghai. Undergoing investigations and research of the era, urban absorption refracts as transformation of the experiential occurs. Exceptional, provocative and experimental, Liu Dao is an actual conduit of perpetual self-engenderment.

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