Red and Blue Chair by Leijie Zhou for Gallery All in Shanghai and LA. Rendering © Leijie Zhou

IN THE MIX

The Transcendent Power of Design

Design Miami

FEB 23, 2023

5 Questions with Dr. Xue Tianchong, Curator of Design Miami/ Podium x Shanghai 2023

In less than two weeks, Design Miami/ Podium x Shanghai returns for its second edition!

Produced by Shanghai-based creative consultancy Made in House, Design Miami/ Podium x Shanghai 2023 opens its doors on March 8th, bringing together over 20 international and regional exhibitors to celebrate collectible design commerce and culture.

Ghost Plant Floor Lamp by Naihan Li for 20c Gallery in Shanghai. Photo © 20c Gallery

Alongside installations from galleries and studios, visitors will enjoy a public talks program and a curated selling exhibition—all exploring "象外 / Transcendence," a theme that highlights the power of design to elevate our lived experiences, expand our understanding of the world, and point us toward a higher purpose.

The theme was chosen by this year's Podium curator, Dr. Xue Tianchong, Director of Curating Design & Narrative Environments at the Central Academy of Fine Arts' School of Design in Beijing. Ahead of the upcoming event, we reached out to Dr. Xue to learn more about his unique perspective on the power of design—and to get a much anticipated sneak peak at what we'll see at Design Miami/ Podium x Shanghai 2023.

Dr. Xue Tianchong, Director of Curating Design & Narrative Environments at the Central Academy of Fine Arts' School of Design. Photo © Made in House

What first sparked your passion for design?

During my school years, I began to see design thinking and methodologies as a vital force for imagining new possibilities in the world. Perceiving this power in design made me want to explore and experiment with its endless potential. For me, the charm of design is that it is constantly expanding its boundaries, reaching across disciplines, and reconstituting itself to bring ideas to life. As a curator, it is important to support this force with in-depth research and an ever-broadening perspective.

Picos by Vanessa Barragão for CoBrA Gallery in Shanghai. Photo © CoBrA | Jiao Cao Teapot by Zhenhan Hao for XU Studio in Jingdezhen. Photo © XU Studio

Please tell us about your work at the School of Design, Central Academy of Fine Arts?

It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to talk about the school! The Central Academy of Fine Arts is the best art and design school in China. Through its long history, the school has borne witness to many important historical and artistic changes over the past century.

The Central Academy of Fine Arts' School of Design was the first institution in China to offer a specialization in Curating Design & Narrative Environments. The course focuses on methods of contemporary design curation, spatial narrative-making, critiquing and identifying design trends, and research paths for understanding objects and their contexts. This interdisciplinary approach aims to introduce more diverse and heterogeneous perspectives into the field.

As the course director, I am responsible for teaching undergraduate and some graduate students. At the same time, I oversee the School of Design's exhibition program, planning and designing important exhibitions for the school as well as national design projects, among others. My teaching integrates theoretical lectures with hands-on practice. In this way, I hope to contribute to the development of the discipline and promote design curation in China.

Eskimo Chaise Lounge by Benwu Studio for Benwu Editions in Shanghai and New York. Photo © Benwu Editions

What role should design play in society?

Design can be an edifying and enlightening force in society on multiple levels. In a functional sense, design can evaluate everyday scenarios and propose solutions to problems and better ways of living. It can also overcome limitations by innovating new ideas and technologies. As a way of thinking, design can tackle more complex and systemic issues, formulating new strategies by drawing on interdisciplinary research.

Design must work on multiple levels simultaneously, inclusive of multiple identities, to inspire passion for shaping a better future and build a more caring and beautiful world.

Fauteuil Paillé by Charlotte Perriand, presented by François Laffanour - Galerie Downtown in Paris. Photo © François Laffanour - Galerie Downtown

How did you choose "象外 / Transcendence" for the theme of Design Miami/ Podium x Shanghai 2023?

When I was invited by Made in House to be the curator of this year's show, I wanted to engage the multi-dimensional design orientation that Design Miami/ is known for, combining works from artists, designers, galleries, and brands that embody the ethos of Western design history as well as Eastern cultural contexts.

Through this theme, we are inviting the public to reflect on the spiritual or higher-level values manifested in objects from both the East and the West. Through the objects selected, we are emphasizing current and future design trends alongside innovative production methods and design thinking to celebrate the power of design. We hope this exhibition demonstrates how design—past, present and future—can connect us to the transcendent beyond the material and transport us into a space of unlimited potential.

Fluted Ginkgo 12 Chandelier by Rosie Li, Hydra Lamp by J McDonald, and Trama Chandelier by Héctor Esrawe—all for Objective Gallery in Shanghai. Photos © Objective Gallery

What can visitors to the show expect to see?

The second edition of Design Miami/ Podium x Shanghai will offer visitors an inspiring experience, first and foremost, thanks to the distinct historical venue—the Shikumen compound, ZHANGYUAN. Filled with collectible design that ranges from classic masterpieces and traditional craftsmanship to contemporary, cutting-edge limited editions and digital works, the installation will prompt an interesting dialogue between past and present perspectives.

Highlights among the exhibitors include Galleria M² from Milan and Shanghai, presenting the work of Franco Albini, one of the most important and influential architects of the Italian Rationalist movement in the 20th century. Also, 21st-century Beijing-based designer Shao Fan, whose poetic work combines traditional craftsmanship with the clean lines and geometric forms of contemporary aesthetics to interpret the cultural and philosophical changes experienced in contemporary Chinese culture.

Embroidered Tea Table Set by Shao Fan in Beijing. Photo © Shao Fan

A few more exhibitors I can mention: Beijing-based footwear brand SCRY, specialized in innovative 3D printing, will explore the future of digital design and bridge the visual language of art, fashion, technology, and collectible design. O Gallery, also based in Beijing, will present Zhang Zhoujie's MeshRare collection, an endless series of unique forms, all generated by an algorithm and digitally manufactured. And Objective Gallery from Shanghai and New York will present lighting by Chinese-American designer Rosie Li that blurs the line between product and sculpture, function and art.

By shining a light on the crosscurrents between traditional craftsmanship, new technologies, emerging materials, visionary ideas, and interdisciplinary methods, Design Miami/ Podium x Shanghai 2023 proposes a broad vision of future trends in the field of collectible design.

Thank you, Dr. Xue! ◆

Design Miami/ Podium x Shanghai 2023, a Made in House production, will be held March 8–12, 2023, at the historic Shikumen compound, ZHANGYUAN, in the heart of Shanghai.

To learn more about the event, please visit the official Design

Miami/ WeChat Account:

Design Miami/ Podium x Shanghai 2023

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