

Andy Xie predicts China's next bubble: fine French wine

CHINA

INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

中国外经贸 Issue 271 | August 2010
www.cibmagazine.com.cn

The leadership secrets
of Shenan Chuang

庄淑芬

CEO, Ogilvy & Mather
Greater China

China's creative genius

Artist Li Xiaofeng
李晓峰 meets the
Lacoste alligator

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ISSN 1672-075X



editorial

CHINA BUSINESS

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CREATIVITY IN CHINA

Late last year, China promoted itself to the world with a 30-second ad campaign called "Made in China, Made with the World" that featured examples of products made in China, in a bid to highlight Chinese companies' involvement in producing high quality goods. The ad of course prompted the usual discussions about the state of creativity in China. We think creativity is alive and well in China. The country abounds with entrepreneurs and enterprises large and small who are striving to innovate. There are also the Chinese artists, whose work continues to command attention, and record breaking bids, from collectors around the world.

In this issue, we highlight just a few of the many examples of Chinese creativity. In FACE TO FACE we talk to Shenan Chuang, CEO of Ogilvy & Mather Greater China, about how she practices creative leadership. Among her many accomplishments, Chuang created O-Gallery, an exhibition space for young Chinese artists within the company's Beijing office reception area.

Ogilvy is not the only company in China expressing its brand through art. In FOCUS we look at the growing number of companies in China who have been assembling first-rate art collections to showcase in their offices – often featuring Chinese artists both well-known and up-and-coming. In UPSTARTS we look at artist Li Xiaofeng who was invited by Lacoste to design a limited edition polo shirt for their Holiday Collector's Series. And in BUSINESS we look at Beijing-based Opera Audio, whose tube amplifiers are beloved by audiophiles around the world.

And in VIEWPOINT this month, Andy Xie warns us of the emergence of a possible new bubble in China – French fine wine.



Issue 271
August 2010

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Published by
Address International Business Daily
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Tel: (8610) 5836 0013,
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FACE TO FACE



SHENAN CHUANG

"We need people who are really excited and inspired by creativity. They can't just be good. When they think about good ideas or see a good campaign they should get goosebumps."

by **JANINE COUGHLIN**

Shenan Chuang, CEO, Ogilvy & Mather Greater China, began her 25-year tenure with Ogilvy & Mather in Taipei, where she rose to be Chairman, Ogilvy Taiwan Group. In 2003 she arrived in Beijing, where one of her first accomplishments was to transform the company's office — then located in an old carpet factory on the outskirts of town — into something modern where the physical space would be infused with creativity to match her vision for the company's culture and work. She established a "Creative Floor", which integrates creative teams from different disciplines within the company and has become a model all offices in the region now follow. Chuang also set up O-Gallery, a unique art gallery inside the Beijing office, to both support the development of local Chinese artists and further realize her vision of the office as a creative space.

Chuang also knocked down the metaphorical walls between the different disciplines at the company,



> CV

NAME: Shenan Chuang

POSITION: CEO, Ogilvy & Mather Greater China

EDUCATION: Bachelor Degree, Tunghua University, Taiwan

WHAT'S IN HER PURSE: BlackBerry, Motorola A1680 phone, Ricoh GX200 camera, sunglasses, stain remover pen, notebook, Ogilvy badge

which include Advertising, OgilvyOne, OgilvyAction and Ogilvy PR, to foster — and institutionalize — cooperation and teamwork by setting up regular forums for communication among senior and

mid-level managers across the different groups. This year Ogilvy & Mather China ranked 66 out of 100 in the Universum Top 100 Ideal Employer Student Survey and was the only communications/marketing agency to make the list.

Co-founder and current chair of the China 4A — Association of Accredited Advertising Agencies of China — her other accomplishments include being named among the Most Influential Female Business Leaders in 2010 by *Mulan in Business/China Entrepreneur*. Under her leadership the Ogilvy & Mather Beijing office was awarded "Office of the Year" and she was awarded "Agency Head of the Year" by *Media* magazine in 2006.

Chuang sat down with *CIB* at the company's Beijing office on Jinbao Street to talk about creativity and teamwork, her leadership style, the importance of training, and what she sees in the future for Ogilvy China.

► **How did you get into advertising?**

FACE TO FACE

► When I was much younger I wanted to be a writer. I was majoring in history and became very interested in communications. There are only two career paths in communications, one is journalism; the other is advertising. First I tried journalism. I sent out many resumes but I didn't find a job. So I decided I needed to change my career path and I tried advertising. I started as an assistant at a local agency in Taipei. They said I was overqualified for that job but I told them to just give me one year to prove I am capable to be an account executive. So that's where I started. My first account was Bristol Myers. It was a really good start because it was an international client.

► What attracted you in the decision to move from Ogilvy Taiwan to Ogilvy China and Beijing?

► I was in charge of the Ogilvy office in Taiwan and in 2000 I started to feel that I wanted to move on. So I spoke with my bosses, and we initiated a transition plan to develop people in the Taiwan office to take over. And then in 2003 I moved to China.

Before I joined Ogilvy China, TB Song [then Chairman of Ogilvy China and now the Chairman of O&M Greater China] told me there are two cities you can choose, Beijing or Shanghai. I did some research about the two offices and I chose Beijing because it would be tougher. It's a challenging market. I felt that Shanghai was already doing well, so if I went there I didn't see what added value I could bring in the short term. I think when you join a new market you need some short-term results and then you can build the long term.

► What were some of the challenges you faced when you arrived in Beijing?

► When I joined, the Beijing office was in an old carpet factory in an undeveloped part of town. The first year was quite challenging, because the company, its culture, was not really in good shape. The disciplines, like advertising and public relations (PR) were very silo-ed. PR was doing fine, but I think the rest of the disciplines were struggling a bit with the market.

So the first thing I did was to move the office. I wanted to have a creative office environment for people. I wanted to change their mindset. This is advertising. Advertising is fun. And we are not only advertising, we have PR, all the communications should be creative-driven. It's not just about business. So that's why I decided to take on the task of moving our offices to where we are today. And it was a big move!

► What are some of the other initiatives you have developed to promote creativity within Ogilvy China?

► In this office creatives from every discipline sit together on the tenth floor. We call it the creative floor. And to build a creative ambience, we gave them different furniture, a different atmosphere, everything is unique, even the color of the walls is different. We were the first office in Ogilvy to initiate and implement this idea. When our then regional CEO Miles Young [now global CEO] came and saw this he instructed every office in the region to have their creatives sitting together on the same floor. This is something I'm very proud of.

In Beijing we also created the position of Group Executive Creative Director (ECD) so there is creative leadership, someone who can mobilize all the creative resources. We also



"I always admire people who are smarter and more capable than I am."

send our local staff to attend the Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival.

In Beijing we also have O-Gallery [see FOCUS, page 22]. I want people to know that creativity is everywhere, it doesn't just come from advertising or communications, it comes from different places. I also leverage all the company events to demonstrate how creativity can play a role.

► And how do you define creativity?

► It is leveraging your knowledge, skills, and experience to generate ideas that can solve problems, influence people and change people's behavior.

► Why is it so important to put an emphasis on promoting creativity within the company?

► We need people who are really excited and inspired by creativity. They can't just be good. When they think about good ideas or see a good campaign they should get goosebumps. I always say we need special character and blood, people who want to be in a creative business. So people are very important. And you have to put the right person in the right position.

If we have a lot of good people we will go further and grow. David Ogilvy always said if you hire people who are giants, the company will become a giant. But if you hire dwarves, then the company will become a dwarf. In fact when David Ogilvy was alive and still running the company, if you became the managing director of an office he would send you a set of Russian nesting dolls to emphasize this. I think it's a good analogy. So I always admire people who are smarter and more capable than I am.

► How do you manage creative people while still keeping

focus on the bottom line?

► I don't think I really manage creative people. I believe in creative leadership. We actually promote a kind of triumvirate: account people, planning people, creative people. We dismantle the big groups into these small teams to work closely together as partners in a creative atmosphere. I think the sense of partnership is very important. Everyone owns the problem, the Accounts, the Creative. Everyone should work together to pursue excellence. This trinity is quite important if we want to create great campaigns for the clients.

I encourage people. I don't want to set a lot of rules – like 'you need to follow this otherwise you get penalized.' I don't think it would work for creative people. Sometimes you've got to be very tolerant. Some creative people, they have their own character, so you need to know them, you need to engage them. You give them some freedom to do what they think is right.

When it comes to the tasks, or the things we must accomplish, I tend to be very business focused. But when I deal with people I am more their leader than their manager. You can't just behave like you are the boss, a businessperson, and that you don't care about creative things.

"We actually promote a kind of triumvirate: account people, planning people, creative people ... Everyone should work together to pursue excellence."

►What do you see your role being in the company?

► I think my job is to try to make things run smoothly. On the business side, I stay disciplined and calm when an issue comes up. I need to be very patient and to listen. You must be a good listener in my position, to listen to different opinions. And I need to be very persistent, especially after 2008 and 2009, I now know how persistent I can be.

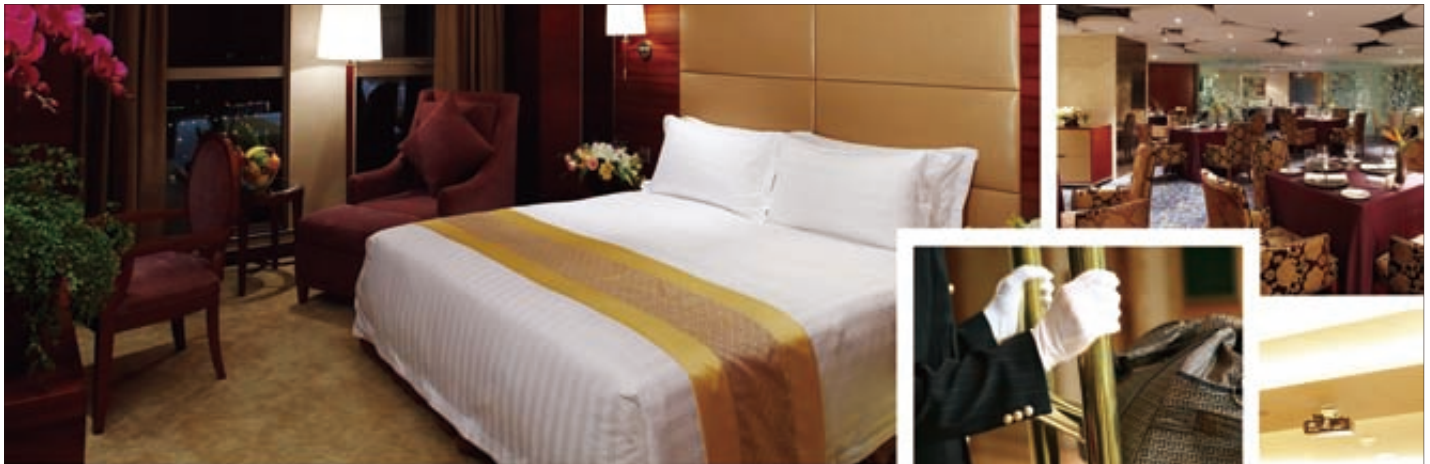
I also try to leverage resources. I think that is important with a group like us. Sometimes I think I am not the best person to deal with or tackle an issue or meet a client. I may even ask people who are more junior than I am to handle something

because they are the best.

I feel female CEOs probably tend to have less ego issues than males do, because I don't feel any shame if I ask for help. I also need to foster collaboration and sometimes I need to be the arbitrator. But you just cannot please everyone so I need to play tough, and even take the blame sometimes. But I think I'm fine, as long as it is for the sake of the group's interests.

I make mistakes, but I think that if after a mistake if you can listen or be open and hear different points of view, you can improve yourself and change the way you do things for the next

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FACE TO FACE

time.

▷Why have you stayed at Ogilvy for so long?

▶Because every stage has had a different challenge, different rules and I have seen different people coming up, different leaders, different groups of partners. I've grown, I'm a bigger,

"We need to think like a publisher or a producer because we are brand stewards that understand how to build relationships with consumers."

and more importantly, a better person. I think that's a good part of this job.

▷How involved are you in the day-to-day business?

▶I think it's important to stay involved. I try very hard to be involved with key clients and some new business pitches. I think I'm a good leader in new business 360-wise, and in new projects. It's also important to be accessible. When people ask for help I try always to come up with, maybe not the best solution, but to at least offer my input and my experience. But they have to make the decision. I say this is my thinking but it's your call. Sometimes you have to be a mentor and coach.

▷What is your secret for mobilizing people?

▶I always create a team spirit. I not only demonstrate what I can do, but what she can do or he can do. It's important that you recognize people, and give them credit and that you do that publicly, not just one to one. I think it is very important for a leader not to always steal the spotlight from their subordinates or colleagues.

I also enjoy working together with a team. The only thing I do alone is writing articles. Most of the time I like to hear different voices before I make a decision.

▷You mentioned that when you arrived in Beijing, the different disciplines were silo-ed. Why do you think it is important to build cooperation across the disciplines?

▶We used to have silos but now Ogilvy China is a matrix structure. You need people to know each other so that they can work together when there is a pitch, or there are client needs to be met. Though different disciplines have different P&Ls, and financially they operate independently, you still need to have horizontal cooperation. Now we finally have a 360 P&L and cross-discipline charging system.

At the operational level we have a 360 Brand team structure. It's for "mega-clients" like IBM, Motorola, Lenovo, Unilever. We have teams composed of different discipline members who sit together.

And to have an institutional platform for regular communication we started the 360 Council and 360 Club in each location. 360 Council includes all senior management and group

function heads and 360 Club gets our mid-level managers involved too. We meet regularly and we share problems, opportunities, talk about clients and key people and company issues. Sometimes I leverage that meeting to brainstorm ideas for company events or other company issues. I urge participants to have a sense of ownership. They need to support me to solve the company issues – we are one team.

▷Ogilvy is well-known for its employee training programs. Why is training so important to the company?

▶In China, especially, we do a lot of training, because the market is so competitive. There is a talent war. Not only will your competitors steal your people, your clients will steal them. So will the media or other companies. I remember once a respected competitor asked me, 'Why do you spend so much time and money on training, when still people will leave and join other companies?' I said I don't mind, we're doing it for the industry. We want to think more positively and long-term.

Also, the market is changing. We have to learn every day. Especially with new media, and China, developing so quickly. China is still opening up – first tier, second tier, third tier [cities] – it's huge. The market has a lot of challenges as well as opportunities so we need to train and develop our people to be ready for the future.

▷You are the co-founder of the China 4A — Association of Accredited Advertising Agencies of China — and this year you are serving as chair for the third time. What is the focus of this group?

▶We foster cooperation among our members. I think for the business we need long-term growth and development. By establishing industry standards, we attract talent to join the business and work together to develop advertising as a respected profession. We also created the China 4A Creative Awards to recognize great campaigns and talents. Right now we have 40 members. Half are international and half are locals. That is exactly our goal, so the members can learn from each other.

▷Where do you think the industry in China is headed?

▶I believe advertising is not advertising in conventional terms. Integration is quite important; online, offline working together. And creativity is getting more recognition from clients. There are so many different media, the key is to have ideas and really tie them together to make a consistent voice. You may have a different message on a different channel but together it contributes to the brand.

Brands are very important. If you have the brand, you have the idea, then you can actually leverage all the channels. Brands should have a higher purpose, what we call a big ideaL™. Everything you do should serve that purpose and make the brand bigger. People want to buy brands that inspire them, and that's where we are heading.

▷And what about the future for Ogilvy China?

▶I believe we will become more like a content creator or content provider. We need to think like a publisher or a producer because we are brand stewards that understand how to build relationships with consumers. We need to tell the story of the brand. So we should continually enrich content by leveraging all the available tools and new media. The only limit is our imagination. ■



**Art can improve
both image and
the bottom line**

Left: *The Dreaming Pigs* by Xu Tan, at SOHO China head office lobby in Chaowai Soho. Below: *Touch Point Series* by Jin Yu, at The Opposite House lobby



Image courtesy of The Opposite House

More and more companies in China are assembling top-notch art collections by MARK GRAHAM

As corporate assets go, art most definitely falls into the well-performing category. Businesses have been surprised to discover that during the financial mayhem of the past few years — crashing markets, bumpy currency rides, red-tinged balance sheets — their in-house art collections have actually gone up in value.

Not that making a dollar is necessarily the *raison d'être* for building a corporate art collection in China, or elsewhere. Displaying paintings and sculptures in lobbies, offices and boardrooms is meant to demonstrate that corporations do have beating aesthetic hearts; even people indifferent to art can appreciate that a colorful and imaginative display livens up dull and bland corporate décor.

Hanging adventurous modern work in a company's public space is something of a new phenomenon in China, partly brought about by the increasing numbers of international companies setting up shop, some of which are energetic promoters of art. In the past, if a company in China did have an art collection it was probably because the chairperson had a taste for a particular genre and wanted to show off his or her taste — and wealth — to underlings and visitors.

Independent curators played no role in that selection: the pieces were picked by the boss alone. But, increasingly, international companies with strong presences in China are

making art a major part of the office-scape, either by buying art locally, or borrowing pieces from the extensive existing

"This is an innovative venture between the financial community and the arts community."

— Zhong De Securities CEO Charles Wang.

collections at their head offices in New York, London, or Paris.

Deutsche Bank has already road-tested the concept by displaying an exhibition of cutting-edge art at the Beijing headquarters of Zhong De Securities (中德证券), a joint venture between the German company and Shanxi Securities (山西证券). The works on display, by young artists based largely in Songzhuang, the artistic community on the edge of the city, are provocative, edgy and distinctive; there isn't a scrap of traditional calligraphy, or a misty mountain scene, in sight.

"This is an innovative venture between the financial community and the arts community, and is aimed at having a platform for the exchange of views," says chief executive officer Charles Wang. "It will be helpful for inspiring a sense of innovation in the financial community and providing a tasteful working environment by creating an artistic atmosphere."

Wang does not explain exactly how the paintings will



Reception area, HSBC Building, Shanghai

Image courtesy of HSBC

is to wealthy individuals or check-wielding corporations. It was ever thus, throughout history, from Da Vinci to Rembrandt to Picasso to Chen Yifei to Yue Minjun.

Having said that, no nation, or era, has ever witnessed anything as fast or frenzied as the contemporary Chinese art phenomenon. Two decades ago, there were a mere handful of boundary-pushing painters, known only to a few aficionados; the genre is now well known in the world at large and produces hundreds of new faces every year, each aspiring to fame and fortune.

CURATING A VISION

There has also been an exponential rise in galleries opening to show the art. Over the past decade, individual collectors have been enthusiastic patrons of this thrilling new form and — rather more recently — curators of corporate collections, armed with ample budgets. Beijing is the national center for art — as it is for most things cultural, creative or political — and now has hundreds of galleries, from tiny boutique operations selling poor quality knock-offs to classy,

"They wanted to show the best of Asia to their clients, and look knowledgeable in their local environment."

– Meg Maggio of Pekin Fine Arts

help with the stock-picking process, but clearly the art displays mark out Zhong De Securities as a pioneering company, prepared to try something radically different.

In addition, Deutsche Bank is bringing works from its head-office art collection for display in China. The first venue to host the art was, perhaps surprisingly, the second-tier city of Tianjin, with the Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen offices set to receive a consignment from the curators in Germany later in the year.

CORPORATE CULTURE

It is increasingly common practice for major organizations to circulate their centrally-stored art around the world in this way. But HSBC, which recently opened its China headquarters office in Shanghai, took a different approach, commissioning work by young Chinese painters for the public areas, meeting rooms and offices of the Pudong building. In particular, the bank bought work by recent graduates from art schools in China, together with works by established artists who are beginning to have some impact in China itself and overseas.

That work is, by definition, innovative. HSBC also has a superb collection of classical-style paintings by George Chinnery, whose scenes of Hong Kong and Macau in the early to mid-19th century are considered a vital historical record of the era, as well as demonstrating masterly technique. Chinnery, a rather louche individual, followed the British colonial-commission money trail to India, later landing in Hong Kong which he made his home.

As well as painting the great and good of those times, Chinnery also captured city scenes in Hong Kong, showing bewhiskered gents clad in three-piece suits and pith helmets in the midst of sweltering summer heat, bare-footed Chinese rickshaw pullers straining to pull their human cargo up steep hills and the majestic harbor, with flotillas of junks under full sail.

In many ways, Chinnery was not so different from today's Chinese artists, who are trying to vividly capture society in their own individualistic way, delivering often-acerbic comment through powerful, sometimes shocking, imagery. And, of course, unless they want to starve for their art, every painter and sculptor has to flog his wares, whether it

Image by Mark Graham



spacious and airy venues such as Pekin Fine Arts, run by former lawyer Meg Maggio.

The American came to the art scene initially as a collector, buying her first painting back in 1985. An interest evolved into a passion, so much so that Maggio quit the legal profession to open her own gallery, plowing her savings into the project.

It is clearly a decision Maggio has not regretted for a moment; she chats about art with the animated enthusiasm of a genuine aficionado, rather than a hard-nosed saleswoman. As well as individual clients, the company has a blue-chip roster of corporate clients, who tap into Maggio's vast store of China art knowledge, acquired over two decades, when deciding on purchases.

One of the gallery owner's largest corporate gigs was to source art for decking out UBS' private banking offices, initially in Singapore, and then later the branches in Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen.

"Singapore was their regional training center, so I said they need regional art on the wall that everyone in the region can respond to," recalls Maggio. They wanted to support young artists, so we did abstract Asian art; it was wonderful, everywhere from the Philippines to Japan.

"They wanted to show the best of Asia to their clients, and look knowledgeable in their local environment, and they don't want to hang anything that is potentially culturally offensive. Most clients like this take it very seriously. They want artist biographies and publish in-house mini catalogues; they make it an important part of their corporate identity.

"A lot of these companies tend to gravitate to abstract

Pekin Fine Arts' Meg Maggio



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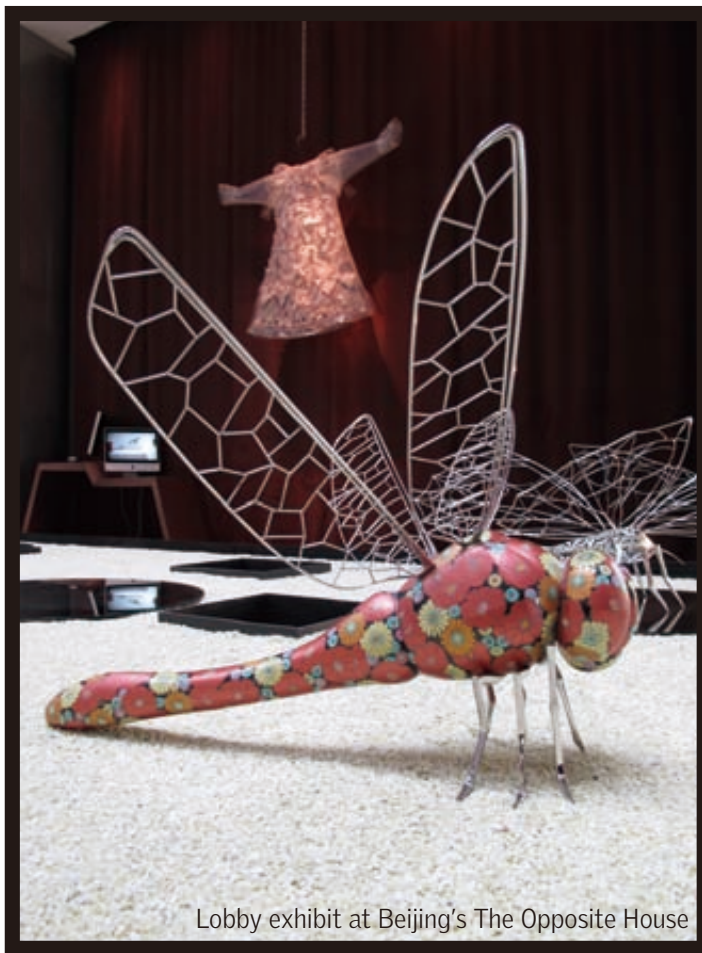
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Lobby exhibit at Beijing's The Opposite House

Image courtesy of The Opposite House

pieces, effectively giving the gallery free exhibition space in buildings such as the Yin Tai Center or the new Aman at Summer Palace resort.

COMMISSIONING AMBIANCE

One Beijing hotel, The Opposite House, features art as a major part of its ambiance. The lobby area, traditionally used for check-in facilities, has been given over to displays of art, some permanent, some revolving. As well as supporting local painters, sculptors and installation artists, The Opposite House also commissions work by musicians and film-makers.

“We are very small, we are niche, and we definitely make an impact on people who are attracted to the unusual and different,” says Anthony Ross, the hotel’s genial general manager. “I have always liked art and this is an opportunity to meet some fantastic people working in the art scene. I am not naturally a tremendously creative person myself, but I do appreciate people who are. We are always looking at ways to involve the art scene.”

The hotel’s owners, the giant Swire Properties, regularly hold exhibitions at their mega-malls spread throughout their home base of Hong Kong. New work is also frequently

“I do commissions in Australia but there are more commissions offered here on the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong and Taipei.”

– Artist Jane Dyer

work, they are not particularly keen on figurative work; they like work that is more neutral. They want to be seen as very democratic, to appeal to the widest spectrum.

“We have never had a bidding war but it is funny that they do tend to like similar things. I don’t want to name artists’ names but I do have clients who have asked for the same artists for their offices. In China and Asia there is always this attempt to bridge, and make the connection between the traditional and the modern. A lot of clients want to pay respect to those two worlds, to engage in some kind of conversation with tradition.”

Companies come to Pekin Fine Arts with budgets that range from USD 5,000 up to USD 50,000 and beyond. The larger international companies often have curators to catalogue and manage collections, and arrange for works to be displayed at offices around the world on a rotating schedule.

According to Maggio, whose clients have included Siemens, Deutsche Bank, Barclays, JP Morgan Chase and Rolls Royce, curators who made wise purchases of Chinese art five years ago would have seen the value more than double. “I think a lot of them are surprised to find that they have increased in value,” she says. “Some have done very well.”

Around a third of Pekin Fine Arts business comes from corporate sales, the rest from regular exhibitions such as the forthcoming *History Lessons* which starts on September 4. Another recent trend has been for organizations to borrow

commissioned: Beijing-based Australian artist Jayne Dyer was hired to create decorative steel butterflies for public areas in East, the group’s new, cutting-edge hotel.

For the wall-mounted butterflies, Dyer reinterpreted an earlier corporate commission in Taiwan, where the Fubon bank arts foundation was the sponsor. The Butterfly Project saw the installation of 8,000 black butterflies, made in card, in three different sizes, in an abandoned Taipei house.



Images courtesy of Ogilvy & Mather China

Dyer's specialty is installation art. For another Hong Kong project she arranged a pile of books in a new shopping mall, all 3,000 of them sourced from Panjiayuan antiques market in Beijing. Like a growing number of overseas artists, Dyer chooses to work in the capital city, citing the cheap living costs, particularly when it comes to having installation-art models made, and the ready availability of corporate commissions as major reasons.

"I can do more ambitious projects here," she says. "If I

"The idea is to invite young artists who don't have a gallery to support them."

– Shenan Chuang

want to make a photograph that is four meters high I can do this, to see if it works, without breaking the bank. If I want to make videos I can hire assistants and technical staff and support staff. It makes such a difference. To try out ideas like this, even on a small scale can be hellishly expensive.

"I do commissions in Australia but there are more commissions offered here on the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong and Taipei. There are more and more projects which means more work. And it pays much more money than in Australia!"

THE O-GALLERY

The corporate world meets the art world in a most convivial way at the offices of Ogilvy & Mather (奥美中国) in Beijing. Art-loving boss Shenan Chuang decided to give over part of an office floor to ever-changing art displays. Instead of a traditional reception area, visitors step out of the elevator and arrive at the O-Gallery, which hosts a dazzling display of contemporary Chinese art. "The idea is to invite young artists who don't have a gallery to support them," says Chuang, CEO, Ogilvy &



Mather Greater China. "I think it is more meaningful because we can help the young artists. Ogilvy is a high profile company in China so it helps them that we use the company name to support the artist.

"It gets a lot of publicity and media attention, we send invitations to clients, the media, even our rivals, and they are all very happy. The artists don't have to be famous but they have to have potential to become great artists. There are no real rules, just that the art cannot be too vulgar. Only once have I said 'no' to the curator; it was not a piece that the curator was comfortable with either."

In the past five years, the company has had a dozen exhibitions, curated by Han Tsungwoo, with a total of some 250 pieces displayed. All the work is for sale – Chuang has even bought a number of works herself and is eyeing a few sculptures in the current *Generational Mash-up* exhibition.

Putting art to the fore, she says, helps project a funky and modern image to clients, and, in addition, helps make the company more appealing to potential employees.

"It is so cool and unprecedented it makes you feel you want to join the company," says Ogilvy & Mather public relations executive Sarah Guldin. "The art made it seem to me like an interesting place to work, and I have heard that from other people as well."

CREATIVE ASSETS

One of the corporate-art pioneers in China was the Soho group, known for its distinctive mall buildings, located throughout Beijing. The big European fashion brands have also made a point of supporting arts, notably the giant LVMH group, whose powerful boss, Frenchman Bernard Arnault, has a personal collection of Chinese art.

Two years ago, the LVMH-owned fashion house Dior took over the gigantic floor space of the Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art, showing a mixture of classic dresses from its archives and specially-commissioned art from the more radical Chinese artists. The most striking object was a truck-sized human sculpture covered in real animal hide, a piece that proved to be a real showstopper.

It is not the kind of artwork that is likely to turn up in the lobby of, say, the Bank of China (中国银行) any time soon. But local companies are becoming more and more adventurous with their choices: Tai Kang Life Insurance (泰康人寿保险股份有限公司) and Minsheng Bank (中国民生银行) are among the organizations with growing collections.

It might be argued that instead of being a luxury or extravagance, art is something customers now expect as part of a modern-day China office, an asset that is aesthetically pleasing and, just as importantly for the company bean counters at least, one that has potential to go up in value. ■

Above: Han Tsungwoo, curator of O-Gallery at Ogilvy & Mather's Beijing office with artists Liu Zhang and Kuang Jun.
Left: Artist Zhang Wei sitting in the O-Gallery.