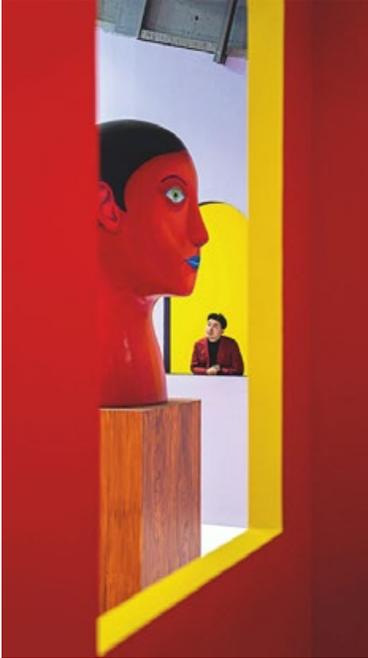


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A TASTE OF ONE OF BEIJING'S FOREMOST CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUMS COMES TO THE DUBAI MALL THROUGH ITS FOUNDER MICHAEL XUFU HUANG

By Rebecca Proctor



Michael Xufu Huang at the Nicolas Party exhibition. Courtesy of M Woods

A contemporary art retrospective in one of the world's largest shopping malls? Really? Yes, indeed. Come March the sleekly polished and refurbished insides of The Dubai Mall's Fashion Avenue will display some of the most prominent contemporary artists working today, paying special attention to Post-Internet Art and current Chinese names. Highlights from M WOODS' permanent collection will be on view in seven specially created gallery-like pavilions throughout Fashion Avenue from 12 March-30 April. Entirely free and open to the public, artists previously exhibited by M WOODS and a taste of what will be on display at The Dubai Mall include such names as Andy Warhol, Mohammed Kazem, Richard Lin, Zeng Fanzhi, James Turrell and Paul McCarthy, as well as Lu Yang, Ouyang Chan, Amalia Ulman, Austin Lee, Lawrence Abu Hamdan.

An independent, not-for-profit art museum founded in 2014 by collectors Lin Han and Wanwan Lei, and co-founded by Michael Xufu Huang, the museum is housed in a former munitions factory in Beijing's 798 Art District. The museum's permanent collection is based on the founders' private collection of international art. Yet it goes beyond the confines of the traditional art museum. It's not about being "new" for the museum but about setting alternative guiding principles to organise the collection outside of what one normally expects from art history. The institution comprises, for example, artwork as diverse as Olafur Eliasson and sculptures by Buddhist monks from the Northern Qi dynasty as well as paintings by Hieronymus Bosch.

The partnership with The Dubai Mall is staged out of the same exploratory vein. “One of the things we loved so much about the idea of presenting significant works from M WOODS Museum in The Dubai Mall’s Fashion Avenue is the connection that luxury fashion brands have to contemporary art,” says Rebecca Jobo, Head of The Dubai Mall. “The experience that we have created is unparalleled in Dubai. We know that both our resident and tourist customer alike will be eager to discover this wonderful collection.”

Furthermore, the show offers a chance to enhance a further artistic and cultural dialogue between China and the UAE. “I love the region, I came to the Louvre opening a year ago,” says Michael Xufu Huang. “The way we are doing this is in a pop-up exhibition way in the manner of pavilions—it’s a really great way for us to be introduced to the region—almost like a little M WOODS pop-up museum. So we are bringing a good amount of our collection as well as highlights from our Chinese artists that will strike interesting dialogues between China and the Middle East. It’s a great retrospective of our artists and a very good chance for me to go through everything that I have done over the last several years.”

Art, believes Huang, serves as a document of our times. Dubai sits at a crossroads between Europe, Asia and Africa and hence is the ideal place in which to stage this pop-up exhibition. “I think the purpose of art is to help a person reflect more about themselves or provoke emotions,” he adds. “We are in an age when perhaps we need to have more understanding of ourselves. I always tell technology companies in China that they should work with artists—they are really the ones that give technology life and meaning. These artists are really good at incorporating art and life.”

A central focus of the show at The Dubai Mall will be Huang’s Heart of the Tin Man, an exhibition that he has curated of his collection on Post-Internet Art. “Yes, we are in the age of Post-Internet,” he says. “This is the art that I am really focusing on as it is reflective of the times we are living in today and how the Internet and technology is changing our lives.” Huang believes that we are “kind of becoming like the Wizard of Oz’s Tin Man.” It is through these artists that he has selected that he hopes to bring back some soul and heart into our technologically driven world.

“I always think one’s collection is better shown outside than in the storage, especially when it comes to showing it in another region and enhancing a cross cultural dialogue,” he adds. This large pop-up exhibition is one such example. “There’s a lot of business happening between China and the UAE, lots of cross investment,” says Huang. “We wanted to do this and make a good impact. Our collection, we gave it the term FAT art, F stands for ‘freedom’, A is ‘alchemical’ and T is ‘timeless.’ We always do shows that bring in a range of media and influences—from Chinese antique art to contemporary Western video art. So we think there is a dialogue that is really like a global language and by doing this show here people will relate to it because it’s a language that is international and we are really trying to show that. People here have a chance to see art from all over the world from different regions and different times.” Amen to that.