Sister Cities: Echoing Shanghai in Basel
By Art Clay

Ironically, through the means of modern communication, we have all become 'close' partners as 'distant' neighbours without cultural contradiction. A natural process of discovery has taken place via reciprocal perception by having to search for the foreign in the familiar in order to tune into the familiar in the foreign for the purpose of celebrating a high level of clarity in cultural identity and at the same time allow for cultural adaptation in times of constant change. The curatorial concept behind the >Echoing Shanghai< project follows this trend and draws a comparison between Shanghai and Basel in terms of landmass, population and density with the goal of having the differences reflect in the selection of the work and their presentation. There is no attempt to bring Shanghai to Basel but to recognize what the „Asian is us”.

Posing the question as to what role size can play in the future for a country that is smaller than most is an interesting one, whose answer, although stemming here from a cultural endeavour, has some relevance to how one might approach the problem of being „small” on not only a cultural level, but on a political and economic one too, and this all in accordance with the idea that „less is more”. If we were to take the ratio of landmass between Shanghai and Basel and were to apply it to art space, we would come up we having to present the artworks in spaces of no more than 4 square meters.

So continuing with the „small versus big” analogy, the curatorial approach to the >Echoing Shanghai< project would be then to simply present a multitude of miniature artworks in any given number of small exhibition spaces. However, the goal of the project is not only to present a quantity of quality artworks, but also to represent the City of Basel in an interesting and viable way to underline Basel’s new city partnership with Shanghai, China. Therefore, the exhibition spaces were not only chosen for their size, but because of their significance to the city of Basel and the artworks that were selected were chosen because of their link to Asian culture.

Fig 1a. A graphic image that shows the relationship of size between Basel, Switzerland (white area) and Shanghai, China (red area). Shanghai is 200 times larger than Basel, has 170 times more people, but Basel has ironically more people per square kilometre.

Fig 1b. The invitation card that is based in the difference in sizes of the two cities. The design includes common bonding elements such as the representation of both the Rhine and the Huangpo rivers and also symbolizes the use of modern communication to signal „connectivity” between „distant neighbours”.

Several of the artworks that will be presented in Basel are native to the „sister” project in Shanghai that was presented this past May under the title >PlayTime<. These artworks will be however presented in Basel in their compact versions. In keeping with the idea of highlighting the city, they will be shown at various venues in Basel that have local and even national significance. Events in the Basel program that were already presented in Shanghai include a performance of >China Gates< by Art Clay for gongs and satellites, Flights of Fancy by windowzoo.ch and Tango Crash (Shanghai Style). A selection of panoramic images of Shanghai and Basel with a viewing system developed on the ETH will be shown at plug.in. >China Gates< will be performed on the Münsterplatz and >Flights of Fancy will be installed in two of Basel’s old-time ferries “Leu” and Vogel Gryff”. The Basler Ferries, outside of
being an attraction in them, link the Münsterplatz and the Cargobar in a type of “Sister Cities Parcours”, which can be experienced by joining one of the planned art tours.

Fig 2b. View of Basel’s Münster (built 1019-1500) from the Münsterplatz. On the North side, the Münster overlooks the Rhine River, where one can also hop on a ferryboat to cross over into „Klein Basel“. The performance of >China Gates< by Art Clay for gong ensemble and satellites will be performed on the Münsterplatz. It was performed in Shanghai in May 2008 in front of Shanghai’s Museum for Technology and Science by a group of Chinese students under direction of the Artist.

Fig. 2b. One of the famed Basel „Fähri” that brings guest across the Rhine River. Two works by window.zoo will be exhibited The „Fähri Ma” of Basler Fähri „Leu” and „Vogel-Gryff” will bring you not only across the Rhine, but are willingly hosts for the artworks being presented here and one of the evenings there is a „Meet the Scientists: Meet the Artist“ event, where project participants can meet in discussion directly on the ferries.

While underway in the Parcours, one can view further works by international artists who are new to the project. To finalize things, a reception will be held in the Cargobar. Here, the installation >Shanghai Echoes< by Art Clay, a performance by >Tango Crash< (lead by Basel’s Daniel Almada) and an >West by East Apero< featuring mixed drinks based on liquors (Lychoid & Absynth) common to China and to Switzerland.

Fig.4a The Cargobar Basel that faces the Rhine River and has been host to many art and music projects for over a decade. Several of the >Echoing Shanghai< events are being hosted by in the Cargobar in Basel. As part of the East West reception, a Basel-Shanghai Drink Book was put together with the expertise of Cargobar’s owner Claude Gacon.

Fig. 4b. The Tango Crash group that includes Basel’s own Daniel Almada. The group has re-coined the term Electro-Tango and has been appearing internationally. Tango Crash performed in Shanghai as part of the East by West reception held by swissnex shanghai and Presence Switzerland in celebration of the opening of the >PlayTime< project at Pudong Expo in Shanghai.
Further, the Literaturhaus Basel will be host to a compact SoundScape & Hörspiel Project under the title >A Diamond in the Mud<. It is an Asian concept rooted in Buddhism that self-cultivation can be developed at home and is not y confined to a temple or monastery. It is believed that enlightened beings are those who "grew" out of the "mud" of the material world. The phrase "a diamond in the mud" is an analogy for this and in keeping with it a call was issued to artists around the world to submit pre recorded works (Soundscape, Hörspiel, Poetry) in regard to the beautiful and the sullied. The audio works were sent from many countries including China and were chosen on their ability to transcend the listeners into a "moment of tranquilly" and out of the confines of the everyday, or as expressed in the Diamond Sutra: "Dwell upon nothing and produce the pure mind."

Fig. 5a. The Literaturhaus Basel will be host to the SoundScape & Hörspiel Project >A Diamond in the Mud< in which SoundScape works, Hörspiel and Sonic Poetry will come together in a common programme.

Fig. 5b. Constructed as a dock for Apple's famed iPod, the iCarta stereophonic audio playback system will be used to play back all of the selected works for the SoundScape & Hörspiel project at the Literaturhaus Basel. The system not only offers an interesting solution for public pod casting, but it also acts uniquely as a bathroom dispenser for the indispensable: Le papier toilette.

Fig. 6. Basel is slowly becoming a City with a “designers touch”. Municipal objects such as the new concrete sign posts, stainless steel containers for trash, Swisscom’s round telephone equipped with mood lighting integrate well into the old city. They place emphasis on modern concepts of city like “better city - better life” and go beyond the mundane and typical ideas for municipal services. To put focus on these design extension, the project 52k-bastard TV will be presented init 0k version as an unplugged media artwork that will mounted on one of the concrete sign posts, acting then as a “media tower” that brings visitors into the world of iconographic geography.

To sum things up, the program invites its participants to experience cooperation in the mood of a city
partnership through sharing as a group a wide range of offerings that fall categorically neither in the East nor in the West but can be found somewhere in between by simply tuning in intellectually and culturally along. By holding events in two diverse cultural locations such as Shanghai (>Playtime Project<) and Basel (>Echoes of Shanghai<) within the pretext of an art festival on two continents, the curator, Art Clay in collaboration with such international institutes as swissnex Shanghai and ETH Zurich and local partners as the Literaturhaus Basel, the Cargobar and more, are providing for fertile ground for international networking on both the cultural, political and scientific levels, bringing Swiss cultural to Shanghai and vice versa in a blend of cultural exchange in regard to tradition and innovation. In the end, the program wishes to pos the question to each on how to find the “Asian in us” in a gesture of acknowledgement for a future that is yet to dawn on us.

- Art Clay, DAW+ Artistic Direction, Basel 2008