

The Layman's Views on the Art Center

By Wang Shi

The opening of Beijing Center for the Arts on the 23 Qianmen is forthcoming. As Ms. Weng Ling's good friend, I am very happy with this news. Weng Ling is one of the most outstanding art gallery directors and curators. In 2002, she started to host the Shanghai Gallery of Art of Three on the Bund and took the director post of "Urban Creation — 2002 Shanghai Biennale" sponsored by the Shanghai Art Museum. Her "interdisciplinary" work concerning the changes of city gained many commendations from the experts of urban planning and architectural design.

I am an art-lover but a layman. However, Weng Ling graduated from the Art History Department of The China Central Academy of Fine Arts, so she is the professional. If talking about art, I can only listen to her. Her view that "interdiscipline" is the future direction of artistic development has quite aroused my sympathy, because the profession I am engaged in, real estate, is precisely an interdisciplinary domain with multi-professional integration and cooperation. Due to professional reasons, my interest in art mainly focuses on architecture which is a typically interdisciplinary art. My visits to the Venice Architecture Biennales and my meeting with the global contemporary architectural masters who lead trends have been especially enjoyable experiences for me. In daily dialogue, people usually regard architecture as art, but unlike the emotions that art requires, architecture needs more rationalities. Architectural design asks for the strict, scientific, logical language, and it is promoted and changed by technological development. It is established on the foundation of scientific method. It is an integrated art simultaneously involving energy conservation, human engineering, sociology and other disciplines. Precisely because of the interdisciplinary characteristic of architecture, we frequently see that new public building plans raise debates, and the opinions of the design, the engineering, the cost, and the sales departments are always unified. Therefore, architecture, such a comprehensive multidisciplinary art, requires higher comprehensive qualities of designers from the artistic aspect to the technical aspect.

In recent years, China's contemporary art became the focus of the attentions in the world's major museums, art galleries, and the Biennales, reflecting the world's concerns about China. Although the marketability probably brings the commercialization of art, today, when various "contemporary artists lists" are released, Chinese contemporary artists are often at the top, but no Chinese domestic architects make the lists. The prices of Chinese contemporary art repeatedly created new highest records in the auctions in New York, London and Sotheby's of Hong Kong, showing that

the global markets finally recognize Chinese contemporary artists. However, there are few Chinese native architects gaining international reputation. The professional education and the humanities environment should be enhanced.

I once visited a shopping center in Los Angeles designed by Frank Gehry. The multi-layered parking lanes are designed in the form of overlapping to save the traffic area. The parking capacity doubles that of the other parking lot of the same area. Obviously, the designer's mathematical knowledge is quite outstanding. However, the basic trainings of mathematics and engineering in the Chinese architectural education are not enough.

In China's 30 years of reform and opening, Chinese people still lack knowledge of the western modern and contemporary art. Affected by the art theory of the former Soviet Union, most people's aesthetic knowledge remains in the classical genre through Impressionism, at best. They know little of the development of contemporary art. Herein lies the significance of the Legation Quarter Art Center. It offers the opportunity for artists to manifest their values, enhances the artistic knowledge of the public, all the while nurturing masters. In this regard, the folk art center is more receptive to new art concepts, and closer to the ordinary people. Its function is probably greater than that of official art museums. Weng Ling said that she and Li Jinghan (the project developer of the Legation Quarter Art Center) have the common ideal, "Let the contemporary art integrate into the process of urban development and play the really promotional role in the social progress."

Beijing Center for the Arts is the spiritual core of the 23 Qianmen which is a revived cultural heritage. It is not only to be an art center including contemporary art, music, dance, drama, video, and multimedia creations, but also a cultural fashion center featuring world cuisines, luxury brands, avant-garde arts, and high-end private clubs. The whole project's goal is to rebuild the image of the "Chinese Core" in the special place of 23 Qianmen. It begins the attempt of making the multi-cultural art integrate into (and even lead) the urban development.

Wanke in Shenzhen also has a similar purpose. By 2009, the new headquarter of Wanke will be put into use in Dameisha of Shenzhen. The architect Steven Holl designed "a skyscraper lying down", whose length is equal to the height of the Empire State Building in New York. The monomer-architecture includes a variety of functions. It will not only serve as corporate headquarters, but also an exhibition center of green architecture, a gallery, a fashion releasing centre, and a landmark attracting tourists. We hope that it will support the future development of the company, stimulate the

vitality of the surrounding communities, enhance the city image of Shenzhen, and add to the richness of the city texture. Now, as the design of the Wanke Pavilion of the World Expo Shanghai is in process, we deliberately set our sights on Chinese architects, especially the young architects, in hopes of making China's creative team make the biggest impact on Chinese society.