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THE NEW SHANGHAI ART STREET: YONGKANG LU – CNN TRAVEL

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THE NEW SHANGHAI ART STREET: YONGKANG LU

Moganshan Lu? Been there, seen that. The new vegetable market-turned-art street to check out is Yongkang Lu

By Hunter Braithwaite

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Alexis Kouzmine-Karavaïeff, ifa gallery director

Yongkang Lu is a stronghold of old Shanghai, a grimy love letter to how things once were, replete with underwear dangling like prayer flags. It is also the home of several galleries recently opened by Zane Mellupe, a Latvian artist and curator.

The Yongkang Lu art project strives for interaction between the arts community and the locals, and, unlike so many other creative initiatives in Shanghai, this one actually seems to be working.

Zane Mellupe, ???

Image not found or type unknown
Zane Mellupe, Latvian artist and curator

“I wanted something new. Art is accessible to so few people [in Shanghai]. I thought about creating a residency space for foreign and upcoming Shanghai artists and to give a chance to the minorities,” says Mellupe, the former creative director of island6, of how her Yongkang Lu project began.

So she began talking to developers on Yongkang Lu, a former vegetable market that was slated to become a fashion street. “Instead of one space I decided that I should get more. The developers trusted me. I just had No. 83 in the beginning though; the landlord said I could use it for one month. Now it’s a coffee shop.”

As the galleries opened one after another, the neighborhood began to feel different. It was livelier than before, with the locals taking a genuine interest in the art. Normal questions of gentrification — so common in other parts of the city — do not apply because most people own their apartments.

“The locals say, ‘oh it’s good you’re doing this.’ It attracts people to existing businesses,” says Mellupe.

But an intrusion, even one for art’s sake, doesn’t go unnoticed.

“You don’t want to offend or intimidate the local people. We had to have a meeting about putting in an air conditioner because we didn’t want to disturb the woman upstairs.”

These factors also affect Mellupe's curatorial mission. She displays the work of local artists, some of whom are untrained.

"We're planning a show with local performers. I want to take an ayi off the street to talk about art. The idea is interaction," says Mellupe.

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— Zane Mellupe, brains behind Yongkang Lu gallery development

INTERACTION

There are often people outside of No. 64, staring through the windows at Constantin Bayer's installation, "The Rise of No Revolt." The German artist makes art that comments on the interchange between locals and cultural implants.

Local culture inspires Bayer. "The Shanghainese energy is attractive. If the Starbucks come in, it's hard for the artist. When local culture goes, the art goes too. It's just not interesting."

ANOTHER DISTRICT

Alexis Kouzmine Karavaïeff, the director of IFA Gallery, stands in front of a Liu Bolin photograph on display at "Fist" in No. 59, which he temporarily rented from Mellupe. Karavaïeff is a fan for the street and its direction.

"There is big potential here. I believe in Yangkang Lu, and in the work that Zane is doing," he says.

"Yongkang Lu doesn't need to be full of galleries, maybe five maximum." This will develop the street, but still leave room for the local community he says.

Most importantly, "there's still a contrast between local and foreign. But this street shows that you don't have that on the Bund [for art]," says Karavaïeff.

Things are still developing, but Yongkang Lu promises to be another stop on the Shanghai art circuit, one that thrives on much-needed communication between galleries and artists, and artists and the communities they exhibit in.