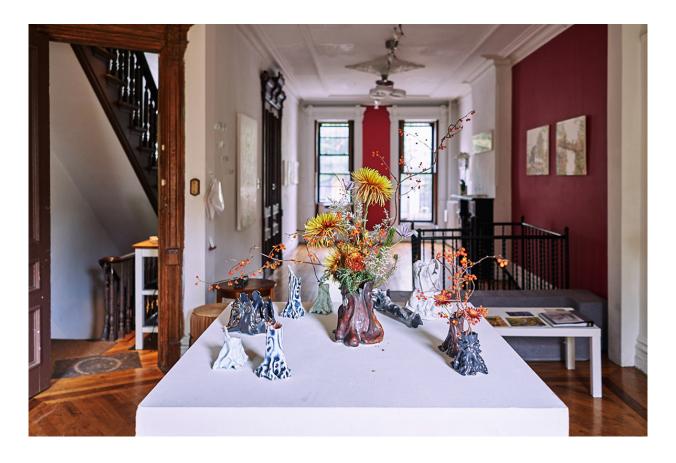


Fou Gallery

October 21, 2019



Tucked away on a tree-lined street in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, Fou Gallery offers more than the usual openings, artist talks, and receptions. It's also a space for relaxation and community, hosting private dinners, tea ceremonies, and a monthly performance series. Founded in 2013 by Echo Hé, the gallery defines itself against the mainstream New York art scene.

"Traditionally, commercial art galleries operate on a very simple business model: sell artworks to a very small group of collectors to support the gallery's operation. Normally the gallery is in a simple white cube to make the business straightforward," she says. "Collectors tend to buy works from big galleries with a track record of artists that have 'investment value,' and smaller galleries struggle to be part of the game."

Neo Cha.





Hé wants Fou to be different. While the gallery sells artworks to sustain itself, Fou also presents cultural, culinary, and other programming to attract a diverse group of people. The Chinese character it's named for, 否, means negation, and is made of the components 不 (bu, no) and \square (kou, mouth). "So, silent," Hé explains. "We wanted to more silently promote ourselves. Plus fou means crazy in French and drunk in Scottish."

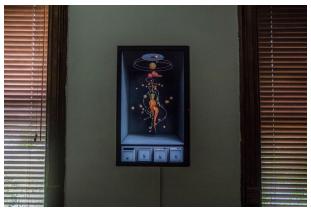
Fou specializes in works by Chinese artists, as well as other artists working in traditional Chinese mediums. "A lot of Chinese artists in New York, especially the young generation who came here to study, can't find places to show their work," says Hé. "It's hard for them to break into the community." At Fou, artists can show their work and build relationships with their peers.



NeoCha.



Fernando Villela & Zhe Zhu: Time Flies So First Things First / Photographer: Eugene Neduv



Liu Chang: The Light of Small Things / Photographer: Nadia Peichao Lin

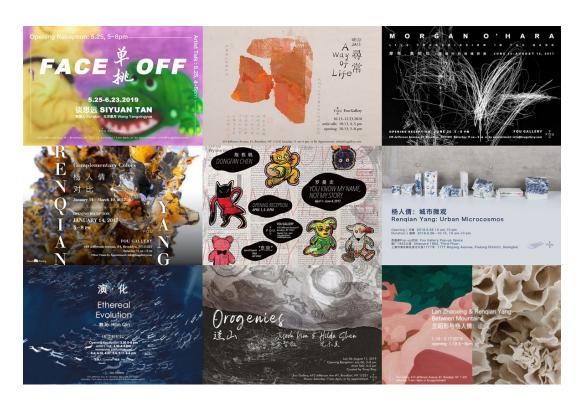


Han Qin's exhibition Ethereal Evolution / Photographer: Nadia Peichao Lin

Liu Chang, an artist who held her first solo exhibition at Fou in 2016, is a firm believer in the gallery's vision. "Many young artists, including myself, held their debut solo exhibition at Fou," she says. "Instead of being limited by the constraints imposed by traditional or profit-driven galleries, artists are given the opportunity to showcase their work the way they want to here."



Recent exhibits have showcased work by glass artist Du Meng, photographers Zhe Zhu and Fernando Villela, painter Chen Dongfan, multi-media performance artist Han Qin, and more. But the gallery also helps support collaborating artists in less tangible ways. "When I did a two-month artist residency and worked on a few exhibitions in China over the summer, I sent my portfolio to Echo," Han recalls. "She told me that it should be updated; my two latest exhibitions weren't in there. I was touched. It felt like I had someone truly on my side, someone who's invested in my growth, an industry insider who can offer expert advice. It can feel quite lonely as an artist sometimes, so having a mentor like that is uplifting."



Traditional Chinese artistic values, with their emphasis on connections to the natural world, are central to Fou's goals. Echo believes the gallery offers an alternative to the monetary emphasis of the mainstream art scene. "Nowadays, there are two main religions: technology and money. So there is a deep need for people to go back to their hearts. And I think old Chinese aesthetics can help with that," she says. "What I'm trying to create or present in this space is old-soul tradition. It's about an appreciation of god—not a singular god from any religion, but a universal connection to the earth and back to the universe."

Meo Cha.



On the day of my visit, Michael Eade's past is present is future was on display, and it's hard to miss what Hé is going for by showing this kind of work. Eade's paintings depict different versions of the Tree of Life, incorporating world mythologies and exploring different cultural relationships with nature. These images of trees and forests from around the world are paired with the real trees from the garden outside tickling the gallery's windows. More than simply presenting art by ethnically Chinese artists, Hé's goal is to foster real connections between art, humans, and the natural world.





Meo Cha.



The gallery also operates outside its own walls, striving to bring art to alternative locations. "For instance, we supported artist Chen Dongfan to present public art project The Song of Dragon and Flowers with a NYDOT and Chinatown Partnership, changing the 64-meter Doyers Street into a mural." Fou also hosted a one-day program for Wix Academy's design students, which included an art workshop and concert, and it will curate a special art program for the China Institute's 2019 Blue Cloud Gala, which will showcase works from Yang Rengian and Liu Chang.



One day with Wix Design Playground / Photographer: Yotam Kellner



One day with Wix Design Playground / Photographer: Yotam Kellner



Hé studied business at Peking University. She was well on her way to her master's program at the Guanghua School of Management when she realized she had chosen that path not for herself but to please others. After a stint abroad in Amsterdam, she returned to Beijing, graduated from her program, and moved into an underground artist community for a year.

That's when she chose art. She interned at Pace Gallery Beijing and eventually applied to study Visual Arts Administration at NYU. "In New York, I continued to work part-time at Pace and also did an internship at Christie's," she says. "That's where I found out that I did not want to pursue a career in auction houses. Monetary value becomes the main concern there, rather than aesthetic value, and there aren't many opportunities to work directly with artists. Art becomes part of the capital game."



Hé came up with the idea of opening an apartment gallery with classmate Jiaxi Yang, and they launched Fou in 2013. The gallery moved to its current location in 2016, a historic brownstone in Bedford-Stuyvesant, in 2016. Yet finding a permanent home was not easy,



and after months of searching for a suitable and affordable site, Hé was close to giving up. "I still clearly remember that winter day in 2016. I met up with Du Meng, who was also graduating from school. We both had visa problems. On that windy street, I told her if I found a new space then we had to do a show together." And they did: Du held her first solo show at Fou.

"This is a space where life and art become indispensable to each other. And it's not staged dependence—it's real. From the very beginning I wanted the gallery to have a kitchen," Hé says. She wants Fou to feel like a home, and it probably helps that it is one: the space also serves as Hé's apartment.



An installation by Lin Jing at Artificial Boundary / Photographer: Lin Jing



Du Meng: The Climb, The Fall / Photographer: Liu Zhangbolong

Hé hopes Fou can be a space where artists, writers, performers, musicians, scientists, architects, and creative people of different professions can meet and collaborate. She believes too much of modern life occurs on the internet, accessible to everyone but genuinely experienced by no one. "The real joy of life is not to think of yourself, but to consider the wholeness of the world," she says. "That's what this gallery really wants to do."





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