

Hou Hanru and His Mid-Ground Curatorial Strategy in Asian Biennales

by

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Abstract

In my thesis I analyze how Hou Hanru developed and practiced his Mid-ground curatorial strategy in the Asian Biennale and Triennials. Since the biennale format developed out of western curatorial practices, it posed novel issues in its adaptation in the Asian regions. By using the Shanghai Biennale (2000), the Gwangju Biennale (2002) and the Guangzhou Triennial (2005) as three case studies, my thesis documents Hou's efforts to create an open space, network the artistic groups, and motivate interdisciplinary collaborations to resist the pervasive Western-centric biennale format and support the local art ecology. In this way, Hou engaged more sustainable methodologies for Asian biennials based on local context. Hou's biennale practices show that, especially in the context of a globally engaged Asia, curatorial practice must strategically contribute to building discursive space and infrastructure by working with existing agencies and entities.

Asian Biennale, Hou Hanru, Mid-ground, Locality, Globalization, Alternative biennale format.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
INTRODUCTION	1–9
PART I: THE SHANGHAI BIENNALE (2000)	9–17
PART II: THE GWANGJU BIENNALE (2002)	17–25
PART III: THE GUANGZHOU TRIENNIAL (2005)	25–32
CONCLUSION	32–33
BIBLIOGRAPHY	34–37
FIGURES.....	38–60

LIST OF FIGURES

- FIGURE 1: Huang Yong-Ping, *Bank of Sands* or *Bank's Sands* (installation view), 2000.
- FIGURE 2: Huang Yong-Ping and Hou Hanru at the Shanghai Biennale, 2000.
- FIGURE 3: Palmer & Turner, HSBC Bank on the Bund in Shanghai, 1926.
- FIGURE 4: Exterior of the Shanghai Art Museum with Cai Guo-qiang's *Untitled*, 2000.
- FIGURE 5: Opening ceremony of Shanghai Biennale, 2000.
- FIGURE 6: Hong Hao, *Selected Scriptures*, "The New World Physical," 1993–2000.
- FIGURE 7: Hong Hao, *Selected Scriptures Series*, 1988–present.
- FIGURE 8: Hong Hao, *Selected Scriptures*, "The New World Physical" (installation view), 1993–2000.
- FIGURE 9: Project 1: Pause map, Gwangju Biennale, 2002.
- FIGURE 10: The interior of the Gwangju Biennale, 2002.
- FIGURE 11: Libreria Borges, *Canton Mix Express: Continuous Decentralization of the Power*, installation view, Gwangju Biennale, 2002.
- FIGURE 12: Libreria Borges, *Canton Mix Express: Continuous Decentralization of the Power*, 2002, interior view. Gwangju Biennale, 2002.
- FIGURE 13: Libreria Borges, *Canton Mix Express: Continuous Decentralization of the Power*, 2002, interior view. Gwangju Biennale, 2002.
- FIGURE 14: Libreria Borges, *Notice of strike during in the Gwangju Biennale*, 2002.
- FIGURE 15: Libreria Borges, *Canton Mix Express: Continuous Decentralization of the Power*, 2002, exterior view. Gwangju Biennale, 2002.
- FIGURE 16: Ruangrupa space in the Gwangju Biennale, 2002.
- FIGURE 17: Audience in the Project 304 space in the Gwangju Biennale, 2002.
- FIGURE 18: The opening ceremony of the Guangzhou Triennial, 2005.
- FIGURE 19: The D-lab seminar site in the Guangzhou Triennial, 2005.
- FIGURE 20: The D-Lab Program in Hong Kong, 2005.
- FIGURE 21: Design and model of the Times Museum, Guangzhou Triennial, 2005.
- FIGURE 22: Design of the Times Museum.
- FIGURE 23: Exterior of the Times Museum and a view of the residential complex, Guang Zhou.

In Asia, biennales grew from twenty in the mid-1990s to nearly one hundred in 2020.¹ Today, biennials in Asia, especially East Asia, has spread from international metropolises such as Shanghai in China and Gwangju in South Korea to smaller cities that rely on tourism as a key component of their economies. This growth from the central cities to the peripheral areas in East Asia inevitably raises questions about the prosperity generated by biennials. The pioneering curators of these biennales faced a series of challenges. One of the most prominent among them and engaging with these issues is Chinese-born Hou Hanru (b. 1963). His curatorial projects include the third Shanghai Biennale (2000), the fourth Gwangju Biennale (2002), and the second Guangzhou Triennial (2005). Hou's experience living in Western countries, and his collaboration with Okwui Enwezor (1963–2019) for the Johannesburg Biennale (1997), informs his concern for how Western-centric discourses impact non-Western exhibitions, specifically the relationship between global and local. Starting with his Shanghai Biennale, I analyze his desire to develop East Asian biennials with positive influences in the locations where they are held. I examine the phenomenon of international biennials in the early 2000s and analyze the relationships between globalization and its derivatives—capitalist globalization and regional modernization. My investigations reveal that Hou's evolving practices mitigate the negative aspects of the global biennale format through the development of his mid-ground strategy.

¹ Shwetal A. Patel and Ronald Kolb, "Draft: Global Biennial Survey 2018, Survey review and considerations," *Oncurating*, 39, June, 2018, www.on-curating.org/issue-39-reader/survey-review-and-considerations.html#.X7AZIxNcEqw.

Over the past twenty years, according to Hou, “the domination of the global capitalist system and materialist culture has increased immensely and 'triumphed' across the region.”² Hou argues that the East Asia’s tourism industry has used biennials to gain access to cultural and economic resources.³ This has resulted in the development of the local tourism economy while leading to a superficial and deteriorating quality of the East Asian biennials. As I show, the Shanghai Biennale (2000), Gwangju Biennale (2002), and Guangzhou Triennial (2005) trace the evolution of Hou’s desire to challenge the traditional biennale structures and turn this tide. By analyzing Hou’s curatorial practices and performing a close reading of his texts such as catalog essays and interview transcripts, I reflect on his mission to balance global involvement with respect for local cultures. I show that over time Hou develops methods for negotiating the ill effects of globalization.

The East Asian biennials are the direct outcome of the influence of globalization. By following the model of the Venice Biennale which began in 1895, the East Asian biennials have become large and influential, flourishing for more than thirty years. Art historian Bruce Altshuler argues that, along with art works and artists that construct the foundation of art history, exhibitions play an indispensable role in framing our understanding of modern art.⁴ Altshuler introduces the origins of international exhibitions, focusing on the Venice Biennales which

² Hou Hanru, “CapitalPlus,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, no. 13 (2006): 32.

³ Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø, *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen; Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthall, 2010), 167.

⁴ Bruce Altshuler, “Exhibition history and the Biennale,” in *Starting from Venice*, ed. Clarissa Ricci (Milano: Aristide De Togni, 2010), 17–18.

developed from the Universal Expositions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵ These exhibitions served to promote the cultural and economic interests of European states on a regular basis.⁶ The Biennale also acted as an archive for historical retrospection and canonization, similar to the Paris salons. These biennials helped emerging artists position themselves in the modern art historical narratives and popularized their avant-garde ideologies.⁷ In the postmodern era, after 1989, Harald Szeemann played a key role in turning the international exhibition from a reportorial convention of current art movements into a thematic event of cultural commentaries on arts.⁸ He employed particular concepts to select the works and formulated the biennale narratives, while the artists engaging in it had more rights to determine how their work should be presented.⁹ This shift occurred because commercial galleries and art fairs overtook the organization and function of the biennials. The change in leadership also factors into the shifting nature of the biennials. At the same time, the demand for multiple narratives and awareness of cultural inclusion, which paralleled globalization, meant that a single vision of biennale was no longer marketable.¹⁰

In the 1990s, after the revolution of “Magiciens de la Terre” biennale in Paris (“Magicians of the Earth,” 1989), curators turned their attention to artists from non-Western

⁵ Altshuler, “Exhibition history and the Biennale,” 19.

⁶ Altshuler, “Exhibition history and the Biennale,” 19–20.

⁷ Altshuler, “Exhibition history and the Biennale,” , 21.

⁸ Altshuler, “Exhibition history and the Biennale,” , 22.

⁹ Altshuler, “Exhibition history and the Biennale,” , 22.

¹⁰ Altshuler, 23–24.

cultures. This ostensibly provided a route for such artists to display their work and establish channels of communication with the dominant art market.¹¹ The First Havana Biennale in 1984 foreshadowed this expansion of major exhibitions beyond Europe and North America.¹² The Havana Biennale's ideological prototype of postcolonialism became a model for nearly forty biennials world-wide from 1990 to 2010.¹³ As Altshuler notes, increasingly assertive claims of globalization in the United States were echoed abroad in Manifesta, Documenta, and a re-designed Venice Biennale as these international exhibitions shifted their attention from the Western-centric to globalized realities.¹⁴ For example, the 2003 Venice Biennale title, "Dreams and Conflict: The Dictatorship of the Viewer" stood apart from prior themes. In contrast to 1895, even in 1989, "Dreams and Conflict" spoke to concerns of fragmentation and increasing diversity. Championing multiple visions, curators used stories to build thematic narratives, a practice that would become the mainstream.¹⁵

Since the structure of the biennale originates in the West, the application of this exhibition format in East Asia has reproduced and exacerbated some problems. Specifically, multiculturalism, which is the hidden cultural byproduct of globalization, appears more deliberate, and by extension, suspicious in an eastern environment. Multiculturalism first arose in

¹¹ Bruce Altshuler, "Introduction," in *Biennials and Beyond—Exhibition That Made Art History* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2013), 19.

¹² Altshuler, "Introduction," 20.

¹³ Altshuler, "Introduction," 19–20.

¹⁴ Altshuler, "Introduction," 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

the 1970s as a means of overcoming the dominant culture's oppression of alternative cultures, encouraging respect for other cultural traditions, and eliminating racist prejudices.¹⁶ However, as the context changed and globalization expanded, multiculturalism showed its paradoxical side.

As Ray Anne Lockard explains,

Some biennials are para-political events, while others are founded for the sake of tourism to put a city's name on the traveler's map. Whatever the curator's or city's agenda, biennials feature works by emerging artists and, to a certain degree, bring different artists' and curators' voices into the international arena.¹⁷

These potentially practical benefits of increasing name recognition or financial gains contrast with the ostensibly altruistic nature of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism becomes an excuse to make the biennials appear diverse but omit the content related to the specific locality. This process makes local artists in these biennials into global economic benefits producer: their works can be circulated in the global market.¹⁸ This leads biennials to favor Western and capitalist values, resulting in an overall biennale format that overrides the local cultural ecology.¹⁹ This contradiction also explains why biennale formats expended in different regions yet in a similar

¹⁶ Wang Xi, "Multiculturalism: Its Essence, Origins, Practice, and Limitations," *American Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Summer, 2000): 64–65, 73–75.

¹⁷ Ray Anne Lockard, "Outside the Boundaries: Contemporary Art and Global Biennials," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 32, no. 1 (2013): 103.

¹⁸ Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø. *The Biennial Reader*, 167.

¹⁹ Filipovic, *The Biennial Reader*, 167.

way, a phenomenon that references ‘the Walmart effect’.²⁰ In these cases, this respect of diversity is hollow, and it contradictorily manifests a narrow nationalist cultural dignity.²¹

In grappling with issues around globalization and cultural contact zones, Hou sought alternative curatorial paths and developed a concept he called mid-ground. He explained this notion in his essay “On the Mid-Ground: Chinese artists, Diaspora and Global Art”:

Here one should keep in mind that emphasizing difference does not mean to seek “purity” or “originality” of different cultures. On the contrary, it should be understood as a process of “Différance” (referring to Derrida), a process of different cultures negotiating with the history of modernity with their particular contributions through cultural hybridization. It is a process of engendering different interpretations and reconstruction of the nation of modernity while opening up a kind of in-between, “Third Space” (Homi Bhabha), or “mid ground”, beyond the old order of nation-state and the separation between the East and West.²²

Hou’s understanding of a third-space comes from his personal experience and curatorial strategies. The concept of cultural hybridization developed from his trans-cultural living experiences. Born in China in 1963 Hou also lived in the United States and Europe. He developed his initial interests in curating at Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) and then moved to Paris in 1990. This initiated his engagement with the Western art world. Through curatorial collaborations that included Enwezor in the second Johannesburg Biennale (1997), and

²⁰ Terike Haapoja, Andrew Ross, and Michael Sorkin. *The Helsinki Effect: Public Alternatives to the Guggenheim Model of Culture-Driven Development*, 2016, 88–89. This is also sometimes referred to as the “Wal-Mart Effect” to reference cultural projects exported from the West with no regard for existing local characteristics.

²¹ Filipovic, *The Biennial Reader*, 382–383.

²² Hou Hanru, “1.5 On the Mid-Ground: Chinese artists, Diaspora and Global Art,” in *On the Mid-ground* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8 Ltd, 2002), 79.

Hans Ulrich Obrist in the *Cities on the Move* (1997–2000), Hou developed his own curatorial strategies based on postcolonial theories. He brought these curatorial experiences and a globalized perspective to the 2000 Shanghai Biennale after his long absence from China. Combining the experiences together shaped his identity as a diaspora person, paradoxically familiar yet foreign both at home and abroad—floating in the third space. The mid-ground is informed by his artist-peers from the same cross-cultural background. It is Hou’s term for a new identity of the in-between that is a product of a hyper-connected world.

Additionally, Hou uses mid-ground as a curatorial method, developed from Bhabha’s third space concept that “is a space of negotiation that is presented in the ‘edge’ of cultures.”²³ In this space, people continuously negotiate and translate from one culture to another. Mid-ground acknowledges the diversity of cultures, without privileging any specific one. It emphasizes communication as a process between different cultures. As geographer Doreen Massey argued, “although a place may comprise one articulation of the spatial or one particular moment in a network of social relations, each point of view is contingent and subject to change.”²⁴ Mid-ground recognizes that cultures are fluid, controversial, and have multiple attributes.²⁵ Mid-

²³ Di Jing, “Edge World—Homi K. Bhabha’s Postcolonial Theory [translated from Bianyuanshijie—Homi Bhabha Hou Zhi Ming Li Lun Yan Jiu],” (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2011), 16.

²⁴ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 1994), 4.

²⁵ Jane Rendell, “Space, Place, Site: Critical Spatial Practice,” Cameron Cartiere and Shelly Willis (eds), in *The Practice of Public Art* (London: Routledge, 2008), 32.

ground also recognizes this interaction as ever-changing in contrast to problematic concepts such as multiculturalism that ‘other’ non-Western cultures have.

In order to better understand mid-ground as an open curatorial system that Hou proposed, I use three case studies: the Shanghai Biennale (2000), Gwangju Biennale (2002) and Guangzhou Triennial (2005). Each of these were co-curated by Hou Hanru. These three biennials took place during the first decade of East Asia's emergence into the international art market. The asynchronous modernization of East Asian countries has enriched and typified the art ecology of this period. The development process from modern art to contemporary art in this region appears in the exhibition as an overarching landscape that reflects Enwezor's thesis in “Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence.” He states that, “To historicize modernity, it is not only to ground within the conditions of social, political, and economic life, it is also to recognize as a meta-language with which cultural systems become codified and gain modern legitimation.”²⁶ Hou, a curator familiar with Enwezor, designed his biennale based on this principle: the development of contemporary art in East Asia, as well as the legitimacy of its biennale, is based on the meta-language of post-colonialism.

As I have discussed, in the Shanghai Biennale (2000) Hou tried to implement his notion of mid-ground by creating void space to respond to the city's capitalist desires and official restrictions. In the Gwangju Biennale (2002), Hou introduced the concept of networking to address the regional modernization and their shifting cultural ecology. Due to the rapid expansion of globalization in the 2000s, it took time for Hou to explore and solidify his response

²⁶ Okwui Enwezor, “Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 1; 109 (3), (July 2010): 596–597.

to the pitfalls that existed in the Biennale. By reflecting on his practices, Hou's comprehensive and sustainably updated understanding towards mid-ground gradually reveals itself. Hou's dynamic change of curatorial forms and strategies in these biennials also can be glimpsed by describing the specific site of exhibition and the way he collaborated with other curators in the biennale. Mid-ground speaks to Hou's concerns regarding capitalism, regional modernization, and globalization, to reveal his efforts to balance globalization with locality.

Part I: The Shanghai Biennale (2000)

Shanghai's development initiated new cultural interaction, notably the advent of international biennials. Entering the gate into the second gallery of the third Shanghai Biennale, visitors were met by Huang Yong-Ping's (1954–2019) sculpture *Bank of Sand, Sand of Bank* (2000, fig. 1).²⁷ The artwork occupied the entire gallery space and the dome of sand brushed the ceiling of the spacious room. Light spilled from the several floodlights on the ceiling, illuminating the upper levels brighter than its lower, shadowed realm. Its dark earthy color contrasted with the surrounding light-marble walls. As Hou's first biennale project in the East Asian region, the works and themes they represent show his early attempt at addressing in his curatorial practice. Huang Yong-Ping and Hong Hao's (b. 1965) works were incorporated with Hou's concept of Shanghai Biennale, which in turn responded to local arts contexts while encouraging the creation of diversity under global influence.²⁸ Hou proposed a new path to

²⁷ Map of Shanghai Biennale from *Uncooperative Contemporaries: Art exhibition in Shanghai 2000*, 136,141.

²⁸ Hou Hanru, "Shanghai Spirit: A Special Modernity," in *2000 Shanghai Biennale Catalogue* (Shanghai: Shanghai Shuhua Chubanshe, 2000), 5.

reshape the local art ecology. As a rapidly developing city Shanghai possessed the desires and problems of being globally urban: the capitalism carried by globalization had both a supportive function and a negative influence on the locality of Shanghai. Hou tried to balance this local-global contradiction in the Shanghai Biennale (2000) by changing the traditional biennale format.

The selected works showed artists' aesthetic and efficiently revealed Hou's concept. Commissioned by the 2000 Shanghai Biennale, Huang Yong-Ping constructed this replica of a financial bank building by mimicking how a child builds a sandcastle on the beach. Huang tried to retain the building's original formal characteristics by adding neo-classical decorations such as the dome, columns, and windows onto his sculpture. The clear and sharp edges of this sand sculpture suggested that it was pressed into the shape using a casting mold (fig. 2). The materiality determined its aesthetic. Made of fine sand, it appeared fragile and ready to crumble. Meanwhile, Huang Yong-Ping mixed concrete grains into the sculpture to make the surface resemble marble like the façade of the original bank building. Huang's architectural inspiration for *Bank of Sand, Sand of Bank* was a Western-style building that was formerly the HSBC Bank, designed by Palmer & Turner's British architectural firm in 1926 for the Bund site in Shanghai (fig. 3).²⁹ Huang's replica scaled down the original building into a miniature. The replica's structure was ephemeral and unstable due to its materials of dry sand and concrete grains that peeled off over time. Gradually, the sculpture scattered into a pile of an unidentifiable mass.

²⁹ Public Delivery, "Huang Yong Ping's Bank of Sand – A Clever 20 Ton Sculpture," Public Delivery Website, First published on September 10, 2019, accessed December 28, 2020, publicdelivery.org/huang-yong-ping-sand-bank/.

Therefore, depending on when visitors to Shanghai Biennale viewed the piece, they would experience various stages of its continuous breakdown.

Huang Yong-Ping situated *Bank of Sand, Sand of Bank* in the historical and economic context of Shanghai. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Shanghai emerged as an international city, rapidly reshaped by economic policies and global trades. These internationally impactful changes dwarfed the needs of individual citizens. Huang's use of sand to create a miniature of a bank building alludes to the shifting ground that Shanghai finds itself on which is both a product of capitalism specifically and the ongoing entropy of the local when confronted with a globalized force: capitalism, hidden in this unstoppable development, as well as the very grounding—albeit ever-shifting—role of Shanghai in the international market.³⁰

In November 2000, the third Shanghai Biennale opened at 325 West Nanjing Road (fig. 4). This was the former site of the Shanghai Art Museum, which continued to serve as the regular venue for the Shanghai Biennale until 2012.³¹ *Shanghai Spirit*, the theme of the 2000 Shanghai Biennale, invited an international curatorial team led by Fang Zengxian (China), Hou Hanru (France), Toshio Shimizu (Japan), Zhang Qing (China) and Li Xu (China).³² The exhibition brought Chinese and foreign artists together, thus highlighting Shanghai's tradition of

³⁰ Public Delivery, "Huang Yong Ping's Bank of Sand – A Clever 20 Ton Sculpture."

³¹ Since 2012, the Shanghai Biennale has taken place in the new-built Power Station Art Museum.

³² Jane DeBevoise, Lee Weng Choy, Mia Yu, Hou Hanru, Wu Hung, Ai Weiwei, John Tain, et al, *Uncooperative Contemporaries: Art Exhibitions in Shanghai in 2000*, (London: Afterall, 2020), 59.

cultural inclusiveness. This cultural cross-road also marked the first time that the Shanghai municipal government officially permitted a contemporary art exhibition at such a large international scale (fig. 5).³³ Previous biennials in the city were much smaller and focused on Chinese artists. The Third Shanghai Biennale, therefore, was a gamble at balancing the official and imported cultural formats. The curatorial team encountered many challenges while adopting foreign biennale formats into an Asian city. For example, for many years prior the Shanghai Museum resisted juxtaposing artists from the West and the East, until Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang received the Golden Lion Award in the Venice Biennale (1999).³⁴ This recognition brought confidence to the Shanghai Biennale curatorial group, leading them to embrace a more open posture with Western art exhibition formats while seeking a balanced, new direction for the future of the Shanghai art scene.³⁵

In a laboratory-like space titled *New Shanghai Row House* in the third Shanghai Biennale, Hong Hao exhibited *The New World Physical* (2000, fig. 6) from his ongoing *Selected Scriptures Series* (1988–present, fig. 7). He used two colors in his prints, blue and yellow, to mimic a vintage atlas. Adopting the form of an ancient book and using the traditional way of binding found in Buddhist sutras, Hong inserted his own vision of globalization through cartography, carefully delineating a conglomerated fictional land called the *Pacific Continent*. This landmass used the Pacific Ocean as a reference but eschewed all traces of realistic representation. He screen-printed the map and created a map-legend using graphic symbols

³³ DeBevoise, *Uncooperative Contemporaries*, 59.

³⁴ DeBevoise, *Uncooperative Contemporaries*, 59.

³⁵ DeBevoise, *Uncooperative Contemporaries*, 59.

found on the Internet. The symbols speak to the out-sized role the internet has played in reconstructing and connecting our world in new ways. The art work corresponded to the biennale's theme, narrating a *Shanghai Spirit*, through these interconnections between local cities and the larger world.³⁶

As we can see, Hou Hanru followed the turning of biennale curation that resisted turning the Biennale into a national competition similar to the World Expos in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁷ As he explained in *Shanghai, A Naked City: Curatorial Notes, Shanghai Biennale 2000*, "An event like the Shanghai Biennale has an effort to re-endow art with its normal state of being, as I tried to explain above. It has the vocation to bring the issues of space, quality, and freedom back to the agenda on the table."³⁸ He wanted to create a middle ground in Shanghai where arts events happen and manifest under the mutual impetus between the global and local.³⁹

Huang Yong-Ping and Hong Hao's work that Hou Hanru selected in the Shanghai Biennale reflect his understanding of mid-ground in different perspectives. Initially, Hou tried to include Huang's lived experience as an emigrant artist born in China in order to reveal the meaning of mid-ground in the biennale. Huang's diasporic identity illustrates mid-ground through his wandering status, taking an outsider's aspect to exam Shanghai and its colonial

³⁶ Wu Hung, "The Making of a Historical Event," *Art Asia Pacific*, 2000, 46.

³⁷ Altshuler, "Exhibition history and the Biennale," 19.

³⁸ Hou Hanru, "3.6 Shanghai, a Naked City: Curatorial Notes, Shanghai Biennale 2000," in *On the Mid-ground* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8 Ltd, 2002), 243.

³⁹ Hou Hanru, "The 3rd Shanghai Biennale Catalog," September 2000, 6.

history. It builds a critical and non-binary way to examine and interpret globalization.⁴⁰ After comparing the Western cities with the mid-process capitalized city such as Shanghai in 2000, his sensitive observations of the sand bank and use of its metaphor show growing economic issues. He was alarmed that within the rapid development, Shanghai and its residents need to be aware that capitalism will occupy the city and its local culture through a slow and invisible way. In addition, Hong's work cautions against the exoticizing processes of the Western context but while embracing the excitement to rebuild the global networks.⁴¹ Hong's work exemplifies the internet and the reunification of the continent as a symbol of globalization. In his point of view, although the world will be inevitably linked together, it needs to be accomplished in a local-friendly way, such as reimagining a world map and inserting it into a traditional binding book, linking the regions by considering local features. These works' subjects revealed complex concerns surrounding Shanghai's involvement in globalization. These curatorial intentions gave the Shanghai biennale an uncertain and transmutational tone.

Therefore, in order to resist a heedless cultural war spurred by Western ideology and capitalistic consumerism, Hou tried to create a "void" for Shanghai. This space in the biennale attempted to dispose of all pre-existing discourse and ideology.⁴² Expanding from the traditionally Western gallery exhibition formats, Hou added some "mixed-blood" installations. For example, he put the artists' works into Zhang Yonghe's collaborative architecture

⁴⁰ Hou Hanru, "1.5 On the Mid-Ground: Chinese artists, Diaspora and Global Art," in *On the Mid-ground* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8 Ltd, 2002), 87.

⁴¹ Hou, "1.5 On the Mid-Ground: Chinese artists, Diaspora and Global Art," 85.

⁴² Hou, "3.6 Shanghai, a Naked City: Curatorial Notes, Shanghai Biennale 2000," 237–238.

interventions called *New Shanghai Row House*.⁴³ This space was inspired by the traditional Shanghai *Linong*—a typical Shanghai dwelling built in the city center and the former foreign concessions since 1853. *New Shanghai Row House* was one of the solutions Hou offered in order to fulfill his concept of void. Hou has discussed this spatial arrangement in his publication *On the Mid-Ground* by saying that he considered this display space as an empty space in a rapidly developing city that could provide some respite.

Hou installed Hong's two selected pages of *The New World Physical*. They were shown on the third floor at the refurbished Shanghai Art Museum (fig. 8). Hou adapted existing large glass vitrines with metal-framed sliding doors. Hong's two pieces of works were framed and hung side by side in a single glass case. When an audience entered the gallery and tried to view the works, they were required by the installation design choices to gaze at the two framed maps from a prescribed minimum distance outside of the vitrine. The glass reflected two strips of floodlight from the ceiling, interfering with the audience's viewing experience. This experience by the audience, I believe, can be a useful metaphor for understanding the existing and external limitations on Hou and his curatorial partners. Although Hou advocated that, "It's a long-term exercise of strategy, negotiation and determination to achieve a fundamental change of the institutional structure and the ideology behind it."⁴⁴ Zheng Shengtian's reminiscences showed the restricting gesture from the officials, "The Ministry of Culture had not given the go-ahead for contemporary art, and the municipal leaders in Shanghai made it clear that they would not be

⁴³ DeBevoise, *Uncooperative Contemporaries*, 172.

⁴⁴ Hou, "3.6 Shanghai, a Naked City: Curatorial Notes, Shanghai Biennale 2000," 238.

attending the opening ceremony.”⁴⁵ The institutional structure of the Shanghai Museum was not ready to be reevaluated and adjusted as Hou Hanru predicted. Additionally, according scholar Mia Yu, after the Shanghai Biennale 2000, the following two Shanghai Biennials return to a more conservative approach.⁴⁶ Fewer international artists attended the Biennale and did not have conversations with Chinese contemporary artists in 2002 and 2004. This rebounding trend reflected that Hou Hanru’s notion of void became a momentary utopia rather than contributing to a fundamental influence.

Hou Hanru embarked on something new, difficult, and necessary. Shanghai was actively evolving into globalization as were its residents there. Hou Hanru’s “void” space was premised on free discussion and unobstructed criticism, but residents remained uninterested, more accustomed to fashionable knowledge and amused emotion. Taking the attitude and opinions from the local visitors into consideration, the question arises: is the state of being void and suspended not a privilege of those who can escape their material and political realities? The residents who lived in this rapidly developed city with materialist desires had difficulty understanding Hou’s words. As Hou mentioned in his essay, it is true that the biennale should

⁴⁵ DeBevoise, *Uncooperative Contemporaries*, 59. Zheng Shengtian is a former member of the organizing committee and vice-president of the art committee of the Shanghai Biennale.

⁴⁶ Mia Yu in conversation with the author, March 10, 2021. As a curator and researcher, she revisited her researching materials of 2000 Shanghai Biennale and shared her points with me. Mia Yu’s essay “Manifolds of the Local: Tracing the Neglected Legacies of the Shanghai Biennale 2000,” appears in *Uncooperative Contemporaries: Art Exhibitions in Shanghai in 2000*.

not be limited by our material reality and political interest; moreover, it should serve as a space sustaining a long-term practice of strategy and negotiation between the officials and the local citizens.⁴⁷ Because he brought these issues to the forefront, new concerns emerged regarding the educational function of the biennale. This concern accounts for a large part in maintaining the biennials' legitimacy and continuity. Hou's efforts make it possible to organize more biennials especially regarding testing the anti-privilege exhibition format. The role of education in such an exhibition was an expanded question based on his consideration of the local art ecology and local and global balance.

Part II: Gwangju Biennale (2002)

In 1995, the Gwangju Biennale became the first exhibition in East Asia to hold the distinction of biennale. In 2002, the organizers invited three curators to form an international curatorial team for the Fourth Gwangju Biennale. In contrast with the previous three biennials, which focused more on domestic narratives, these curators conceived of four parallel and equal projects according to the theme, *P_A_U_S_E ㄷ*. These international curators—including Hou Hanru (France), Sung Wan Kyung (South Korea), and Charles Esche (UK)—led the first project, titled “Pause.” The curators focused on the modernization of society and the space it has shaped for social life. This reflected the Biennale's still emerging position and envisioning its future development. Yong Soon Min (South Korea) curated the second project, “THERE: Sites of Korean Diaspora,” focused on the historical cultural tension of homogeneity and heterogeneity of Korean migration by tracing the Korean diaspora. The remaining two projects, “Stay of Execution” and “Connection,” examined the traumas rooted in Korea's modernization and

⁴⁷ Hou, “3.6 Shanghai, a Naked City: Curatorial Notes, Shanghai Biennale 2000,” 288–289.

democratization processes through a public act of art for society. The linked histories found in these four projects have together shaped the current patterns of social life in South Korea as well as East Asia. To adopt the international format of biennale into the non-Western regions, Hou collaborated with the other two curators, marked an alternative path and invited diverse artists to balance the local in a globalized setting.

Gwangju is a metropolis located in the Jeolla region far from the capital city of Seoul. On May 18, 1980, the citizens of the city took part in the Democratic Uprising. This uprising gave Koreans outside of Gwangju a strong and enduring political role.⁴⁸ The central government marked the Gwangju Biennale acts as a cultural festival and a chance to reap economic benefits while elevating its tourism impact.⁴⁹ Sung, one of the co-curators in the first project noted that, “A majority of the internationally respected biennales rely on the creation of spectacles or the parade of didactic ideas to build a palace of art.”⁵⁰ Therefore, to escape from the pace of globalized biennale format, they shifted to an alternative concept—a state of pause. The title of the biennale—*P_A_U_S_E*—refers to a status of in-action that carries an additional nuance. However, the use of Chinese characters, is common throughout East Asian countries. In Hou’s narrative, the use of this character, specifically 停 (*ting*), acts as a translation of “pause” and

⁴⁸ HaeRan Shin, “Cultural Festivals and Regional Identities in South Korea,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 2004, volume 22, 626.

⁴⁹ HaeRan Shin, “Cultural Festivals and Regional Identities in South Korea,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* volume 22, (2004): 630.

⁵⁰ Wan-kyung Sung, “How Can We Make *P_A_U_S_E* Realized?,” *Gwangju Biennale 2002, Project 1: Pause Conception*, (Gwangju: Gwangju Biennale Press, 2002), 22.

enacts the biennale's theme. Based on the consensus with other curators on this theme, Hou Hanru extended this concept. This theme also can be understood as a place of rest, because the pause character is a combination of two, meaning person and pavilion.⁵¹ To further study the biennale's theme and Hou's alternative formats, my investigation focuses on the first project, Pause, and specifically looks to the work by a group of artists known as Libreria Borges from Gwangzhou, China.

As the co-curator of the Project 1: Pause, Hou collaborated with the architects Chang Yung-Ho and Young-joon Kim.⁵² Together, they used an experimental way to create the galleries of the Biennale by inviting twenty-eight groups of artists to construct temporary site-specific spaces (fig.9). Hou aimed to build connections among them.⁵³ The resulting space contained small galleries, constructed of low-cost materials such as plywood (fig. 10). These construction materials contrasted with traditional materials used in biennials, notably dry wall which created the phenomenon of a white cube.⁵⁴ The inner galleries of the biennale were re-

⁵¹ Gwangju Biennale, *Gwangju Biennale 2002 – P_A_U_S_E: Programme Guide* (Gwangju: Gwangju Biennale, 2002), 15.

⁵² Hou Hanru, "Event City, Pandora's Box," in *4th Gwangju Biennale catalog*, (Gwangju: Gwangju Biennale Press, 2002), 31.

⁵³ Chung Seo-young, Sung Wan-kyung, "Discussion and Presentation of Projects in the Forum of the 4th Gwangju Biennale," (Gwangju: Gwangju Biennale Foundation, March 2, 2002), 1.

Tallied by author.

⁵⁴ Hou, "Event City, Pandora's Box," 29.

imagined as a loose federation.⁵⁵ Hou endeavored to create distinct local spaces in a unified public platform. The material choices and methods of constructing the biennale space mark an effort by Hou to balance the local with the global.

The network-built method as the by-concept of mid-ground is central to Hou's curatorial practices. As Hou explains in his essay "2000 As the Theme," art is inevitably affected by extensive globalization as its audience is paying more attention to art's social functions.⁵⁶ The most urgent concern for non-Western culture is to take advantage of globalization, instead of playing a supplemental role.⁵⁷ Therefore, art needs to create a new way to position itself in this fundamentally changed era. Hou proposes a new form of interrelated city networks based on existing architecture and environments. For the artists' groups, this refers to their specific art space and everyday surroundings. The network should connect the cities and provide resilience to maintain local character when confronted by the force of globalization. He named it the "Global-local" status.⁵⁸ This status stems from the art spaces, which are independent from the cultural institutions, warehouses, and commercial galleries. It locates in the residential area and serves itself as a platform to hold both the avant-garde and grassroots art projects. These self-funded spaces are connected together by their sharing experience of running in a local community.

⁵⁵ Hou, "Event City, Pandora's Box," 31.

⁵⁶ Hou, "2000 As the Theme," 140–141.

⁵⁷ Hou, "2000 As the Theme," 140–141.

⁵⁸ Hou, "2000 As the Theme," 154–155.

The artists' groups benefit from Hou's network-built curatorial practices. Libreria Borges, an art group from Guangzhou, China, created a networked alternative space. Their work *Canton Mix Express: Continuous Decentralization of the Power* (2002, fig. 11), recreates a complete scene of their works and their surroundings in Guangzhou. They reproduced their austere space by putting their space content into three shipping containers, and gray containers were set outside of the main gallery of the biennale arranged as a snake, making explicit the connection between Guangzhou and the Gwangju Biennale. In one, they put quotidian objects such as desks, chairs, teacups, ashtrays, etc. in a stark white background, and built a lounge-like space for the audience in the second one. Sunlight shined in through a simply carved tiny window at the top of the container to perfume the inner space with radiance (fig. 12). These spaces allowed the audience to physically inhabit the gallery while engaging with the concept of pause. In the remaining container they displayed various correspondence, documents, photographs of their discussions and sketches (fig. 13).⁵⁹

This marked the first time that the members of the Libreria Borges collaborated together. Led by Zheng Guogu, Borges' members agreed to abandon traditional forms of presentation. Instead, they transposed the free and equal discussion from the original institution Libreria Borges directly to the Biennale. They also posted a large number of notice posters (fig. 14) in the main gallery and their temporary containers about recent strikes in the exhibition (fig. 15). Thus, this brave gesture grew out of the biennale's position that "the exhibition does not necessarily have to be limited to artistic languages, it will be an outspoken expression."⁶⁰ Libreria Borges

⁵⁹ Exhibition catalog, Gwangju Biennale 2002, 23.

⁶⁰ Exhibition catalog, Gwangju Biennale 2002, 23. [translated by author]

also refused to gain an explanation of themselves and boldly left the final project in an ostensibly unfinished state.⁶¹

Both the artists and the curators of the 4th Gwangju Biennale rejected the goal of presenting an exhibition with complete and perfect formats. Hou explained:

In order to resist voices against the highly utilitarian evaluation system dictated by the cultural logic of globalizing, late Capitalism. To the opposite of the culture of the spectacle, projects which deal with slowness, emptiness and openness are conceived to provide such spaces of critique.⁶²

Hou further noted that, the curatorial committee adopted a liberal structure of curation to make the alternative space extend from single gallery to public platform or forum.⁶³ The physical border between the projects were blurred. Different projects' spaces were not arranged in parallel order and were divided by high concrete walls. The steps of negotiation within groups and with institutions, informed by their doctrine to avoid arbitrary consensus, present an egalitarian and democratic way of making decisions. This decision-making process also subtly expresses the art groups' political demands for freedom and democracy. The biennale final implementation reflects both the artist's gesture of differences and the curator's intent of diversities. This space-reconstructing strategy that Hou used in the 4th Gwangju Biennale also demonstrates a resolution to the problem he left in the Shanghai Biennale in 2000: the audiences

⁶¹ Ziyang Duan, Canton (Mix) Express: A Regional/Spatial Model with Ziyang Duan and Xu Tan, *Aisa Art Archive In America*, November 26, 2019, www.aaa-a.org/programs/canton-mix-express-a-regionalspatial-model-with-ziyang-duan-and-xu-tan/.

⁶² Hou Hanru, "Event City, Pandora's Box," *4th Gwangju Biennale catalog*, 2002, 29.

⁶³ Hou, "Event City, Pandora's Box," 29.

were no longer overlooked. The organizations of the group and their project implementation gave all participants a taste of the democratic model as a by-product of modernity.

However, one practical thing to note. Due to the biennale's limited budget, final execution varied greatly from Hou's initial concept. As noted before, the similarity of the wooden constructions resulted in a visual homogeneity of the space. Numerous groups at the biennale carried out similar approaches, including the mosquito net used by Project 304 from Bangkok and a conference room constructed by Ruangrupa from Jakarta. These art projects both designed an interactive agenda to let visitors engage with, for example, a fortune teller invited by Project 304 (fig. 16), while Ruangrupa supplied a feast to let them eat in the space (fig. 17).⁶⁴ These art groups continuously shared their documentation of activities and cooperation using monitors, which projected videos or photos on a white wall or board. Visitors had a hard time recognizing the fact that curators tried to avoid the repetitive formats through text and labels. This was due to the fact that the curators limited their writing of the texts and labels, which made the various art groups too similar with each other. The information-saturated, loosely organized group projects failed to offer distinctive visiting experiences for the general public and made them chaotic.⁶⁵ This sense of chaos is different from the sense of diversity. This confusion raises a question: how explicit were the curators' efforts in alluding to the biennials? Instead of letting

⁶⁴ *Gwangju Biennale 2002 - P_A_U_S_E: Programme Guide*. Gwangju: Gwangju Biennale, 2002, 30, 46.

⁶⁵ Carolee Thea, "Report from Korea," *Artnet Magazine*, accessed April 12, 2021. www.artnet.com/magazine/FEATURES/thea/thea4-24-02.asp#2. The chaotic feeling reference Carolee Thea's exhibition review.

audiences trust their fragmented experience of visiting the biennale, at least, curators' subjective and concrete interpretations of these "layers" should be illustrated. It is not a conclusion but a professional organization based on the asynchronous history of modernization.

There were a wide range of expressions and art groups from different regions to create this network. Hou paid cursory attention to the interaction among them but forgot to show the audience the layers between these self-organizations. The layers here resulted from the dyssynchronous modernizations among the different Asian regions. The artistic collaborations and collectives are examples of a democratic atmosphere of freedom and equality in the biennale. But it should be noted that democratization is often a byproduct of the process of modernization, which is still a Western-import concept for Asian regions and their residents. As Bhabha argued,

They [Postcolonial criticism and perspectives] intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the 'rationalizations' of modernity.⁶⁶

As evidenced in the disjuncture seen in this biennale, I believe that the curators should both present their discussion of homogenous modernity—about democracy, about cultural renewal and mobility with clear acknowledgement of the asynchronous processes of modernization in various countries.⁶⁷ Without this dual-attention, it is easy to fall into a Western-centric trap that simply praises an East Asian artwork as progressive and avant-garde according to its democratic

⁶⁶ Homi Bhabha, "The Postcolonial and The Postmodern: The Question of Agency," in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 171.

⁶⁷ Filipovic, *The Biennial Reader*, 379.

contents.⁶⁸ The future of Eastern art then is left with two routes: to be subsumed into politicized Western art or serve as an Eastern cultural spectacle. Hou's concept pushes back against this by speaking to the region's distinctive characteristics in a globalized biennale structure while not entirely evident in every project. Hou created a path for identifying the ongoing global art networks by emphasizing locality, but lacks the intentional arrangements of translating this knowledge to benefit the residents. Therefore, how many adjustable and interpreted space curators leaving in the biennale structure is the key to organizing the alternative biennale and avoiding being a spectacle in Eastern region biennales. Hou should play a professional logistician in this network and give more explains of specific modernization contexts for different Asian regions. These efforts will cover the shortages in this phenomenal biennale.

Part III: Guangzhou Triennial (2005)

The Guangzhou Triennial in 2005 was the last biennale and triennial that Hou Hanru participated in in the early 2000s. This triennial took place in the Pearl River Delta (PRD). Because Hou was born and raised in Guangzhou, Guangzhou as a part of the PRD is the region he is most familiar with. The Pearl River Delta cultural circle is far from the political center, which allows for a liberal political and cultural atmosphere.⁶⁹ It is also a major foreign trade port close to the former British colony of Hong Kong, and therefore key to the extensive foreign

⁶⁸ Filipovic, *The Biennial Reader*, 166.

⁶⁹ Hou Hanru, "Beyond: An Extraordinary Space of Experimentation for Modernization," *Second Guangzhou Triennial 2005*, (Guangdong: Guangdong Museum of Art, 2005), 33.

cultural exchange.⁷⁰ Guangzhou was at the forefront of the first global and modern undercurrent in China.⁷¹ The title of Hou's co-curated exhibition, *Beyond: A Special Experimental Space for Modernization*, speaks to themes of OPENESS and invites discussion on the diversity of modernity based on the distinctive living and cultural environment of the Pearl River Delta.

Hou considered the delta as an experimental space in which new possibilities for modernization can be realized in Chinese society.⁷² He collaborated with Obrist and Guo Xiaoyan (fig. 18), divided the thematic exhibition into six sections that addressed the multi-layered exploration of the notion of hyper-city. This included the comparison between raw and man-made urban landscapes, the care for individuals living in the city, and the renewal of the city through globalization. Hou also established a series of fascinating collaborations with self-organized spaces, such as a German artist residency program at the aforementioned Libreria Borges, the Happening Group's cultural sampling, and the research in the Pearl River Delta (PRD) region outside of Hong Kong. These also included special projects such as the *Pearl River Delta Film Retrospective* (1898–2005).⁷³

⁷⁰ Hou, "Beyond: An Extraordinary Space of Experimentation for Modernization," 33.

⁷¹ Duan, "Canton (Mix) Express: A Regional/Spatial Model with Ziyang Duan and Xu Tan," November 26, 2019.

⁷² Hou Hanru, "Beyond: Context, Subjects, and Strategies," *Second Guangzhou Triennial 2005*, (Guangdong: Guangdong Museum of Art, 2005), 58.

⁷³ Guangzhou Biennale, "Special projects," *Second Guangzhou Triennial 2005*, (Guangdong: Guangdong Museum of Art, 2005), 397.

In the midst of this diverse structure, the Guangdong Museum of Art displayed two important and innovative projects in its Times branch. These were *Delta Lab* (2004–2006, fig. 19), and *The New Design Project of Time Museum, A Member of Guangdong Museum of Art* (2005). The Delta Lab began on November 28, 2004, and lasted until January 2006.⁷⁴ It aimed to bring international artists to the region to conduct research and create works, while providing a platform for organic exchange and collaboration with local artists.⁷⁵ The project extended to locations beyond the museum throughout Beijing and Hong Kong (fig. 20). The voices of nearly 100 scholars and visitors who participated in the project were recorded to render into an actual art project in the final triennial. This on-going project played publicly every four to six weeks.⁷⁶ The project also framed Hou’s theories regarding hybridity and how this exhibition should be constantly self-tested and self-proven. He asserted that, “Culture is by destiny hybrid and we should learn to live with it.”⁷⁷ Through the on-going events and archiving mechanism, more arguments and conversations surrounding cultural hybridity were exhibited in the triennial. In these innovative forms of engagement, Hou committed to produce a triennial that emphasizes diversity and difference in resistance to unsustainable exhibition structures.

⁷⁴ Hou Hanru, “Beyond: An Extraordinary Space of Experimentation for Modernization,” 33.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁷⁷ Hou Hanru, “Dynamic Pause or Alternative Global Collaboration: Some Idealistic Ideas On A Proposal,” in *On the Mid-ground* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8 Ltd., 2002), 158.

In 2003, Times Real Estate and the Guangdong Museum of Art established the Guangdong Museum of Art Times Branch in the Rose Garden area.⁷⁸ In 2005, under the framework of the Guangzhou Triennial, Guangdong Times Art Museum emerged as a new architectural space, with the hope of building it into a center for artistic experimentation in the PRD. In *The New Design Project of Time Museum, A Member of Guangdong Museum of Art* (fig. 21), architects Rem Koolhaas and Alain Fourallx worked with Chang Yung-Ho to create an art museum in the community of the triennial. With dark and red colors forming the main visual of building design, specific building interior plans were listed in the exhibition. The handmade model of the museum was also laid out in the exhibition. Clear acrylic sheets were used in the model to simulate the floor-to-ceiling glass of the rooftop. The roof supported by these acrylic sheets and x-type load-bearing columns that functioned as a horizontal billboard. Red and black colors were inkjet printed on the inner side of foam board with the museum's name and slogan. The contents could also clearly be read from the street level. By integrating the surrounding city landscape, this building achieved a kind of communality.⁷⁹ The terrace for sculpture work, reading cafe, all spaces on the rooftop were looped together by corridors located in the residual space of the existing building. Under the rooftop was the residential building with the scattered

⁷⁸ Artron.net, “Guangdong shidai meishuguan shehuihuazhilu: minyin meishuguan chixu yunyin de weiyi chulu? [The path to socialization of Guangdong Times Art Museum: The only way out for private art museums to sustain operations?],” Artron.net News, July 4, 2017, accessed March 24, 2021, <https://news.artron.net/20170714/n944663.html>.

⁷⁹ Hou Hanru, Yang Zi, “Interview with Hou Hanru,” *Leap* 13, April 9, 2012. 1. Tallied by author.

museum functional modules throughout it. It was a boldly design building combining the residential with the museum. Being cooperative with the capitalists, architects designed a nineteen-floor building with residential units to contribute to the city's cultural ecology in the long-term (fig. 22).

Both of these projects attempt to change the established program by creating transitional events: programs that only exist at the time of the exhibition when the viewer is present.⁸⁰ Thus, they compress and dissolve the "safe" distance between the dominant culture and the alternative culture in multiculturalism. Hou developed the concept of void which was established in the Shanghai Biennale (2000), from exhibition space into urban space. In the Guangzhou Triennial, the Times Museum becomes the material representation of this concept. Hou explains that, "The central program of the Biennale, instead of continuing with a more conventional form of exhibition, should be developed into a more open system, or an exhibition as a live event."⁸¹ This is evidence of using alternative ways to create an experimental space to resist the homogeneity of globalized reality and construct beyond-ness in the triennial, although Hou's experimental practice garnered some negative feedback from the critics.⁸² John Clark is Professor Emeritus in Art History at the University of Sydney, who researches on comparing the Asian Pacific Biennales, criticizing *The New Design Project of Time Museum* stating, "If there had been any

⁸⁰ Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Canton Calling: Metabolism and Beyond," in *Second Guangzhou Triennial 2005* (Guangdong: Guangdong Museum of Art, 2005), 45.

⁸¹ Hou, "Dynamic Pause or Alternative Global Collaboration: Some Idealistic Ideas On A Proposal," 164.

⁸² Hou, "Beyond: An Extraordinary Space of Experimentation for Modernization," 32–34.

doubt about the mendacity of high architectural theory when it was allied to brute economic desire, it was no longer possible to pass it by in the cruelly alienated lives shown by the real-estate models for the new museum annex found in the gallery space site.”⁸³

This argument seems to boldly defend the purity of an art museum and suspect the motivation of the capitalists. However, stemming from consideration of the long-term impact of a new art institution on the local artistic ecology, not any architecture project proposed in biennials can be realized like the Times Museum. The museum was finally established as one of the earliest non-profit art institutions founded and supported by private capital in China. Therefore, Hou’s ambition was not to build spectacle architecture in a globalized city. Instead, he sought to keep the contemporary art effectively engaged in the urban development. In 2010, the new building space was fully completed and the Guangdong Museum of Art Times Branch was transformed into an independent art institution, the Guangdong Times Art Museum, officially opened to the public on December 31, 2010 (fig. 23).

Hou effectively reshaped capital’s support into a channel, instead of letting the arts lose freedom and autonomy during the negotiated process with capitalism. “Art activity should learn to become a laboratory of such a kind of alternative projects. It enjoys, or should enjoy, the freedom that others don’t have. It should introduce another kind of dynamism: global but articulating differences, productive but immaterial, dealing with the real but remaining

⁸³ John Clark, “Contemporary Asian Art at Biennales and Triennales: The 2005 Venice Biennale and Fukuoka Asian Triennale, the Sigg Collection, and the Yokohama and Guangzhou Triennales,” (New York: *College Art Association, Inc*, 2006), 11. Tallied by author.

imaginative, and even utopian.”⁸⁴ Because inter-disciplined collaborations among architects, curators, and real estate made themselves the creative and ambitious tacticians and capital lost its dominant status. Hou’s plan conceded the power of defining the achievement of the project to the residents, then to the time. Following museum directors’ and staffs’ contributions, the Times Museum remained committed to the private art museum model while playing an active role in supporting local artists and bridging the natives to the latest international art works. This is the important part of maintaining the autonomy of Guangzhou's art ecology, which in the present day, is still active in its art scene.

The Guangzhou Triennial differed from *Cities on the Move* (1999), an exhibition that tried to illustrate the rapid development of variously-scaled cities, which Hou and Obrist collaborated on together. It inherited Hou’s concept of pause in the Gwangju Biennale.⁸⁵ The theme of slowness in the Triennial enabled long-sighted and sustainable projects but the innovative questions proposed in the Triennial were more complex. Whether a biennale (triennial) was successful for local art ecology or not needs to be estimated by the temporary triennial itself, by local artists’ continuous practice, and by residents’ passions of integrating with art events. Because the questions about the biennale were aroused by the contradiction which produced by urban expanding during globalization. With the newly launched concrete architecture in the city, the new challenges of living in the contradiction between locality and globality were faced by all individuals. Different from the artist and artistic group such as the

⁸⁴ Hou, “Dynamic Pause or Alternative Global Collaboration: Some Idealistic Ideas On A Proposal,” 158.

⁸⁵ Hou, “3.6 Shanghai, a Naked City: Curatorial Notes, Shanghai Biennale 2000,” 244.

Libreria Borges, who tried to digest this new contradiction like guerrilla warriors, the residents need more fundamental artistic education recourses to build their own understanding of living in this diverse city. These recourses can be offered by long-existed art institutions which Hou facilitated in the Guangzhou triennial.

Conclusion

When examining an exhibition, it is a methodological flaw for a curator to disregard residents' experiences of the exhibition. Selecting works and projects with informative texts and a complete thematical concept is not enough for a region that deny to the hegemony of traditional biennale format. It can be concluded that the Biennale is one of the most appealing but dangerous gifts brought by globalization. Hou precisely pointed out that, "A large number of these exhibition were thus turned into exercises in 'redemption' and 'self-satisfaction' intended to maintain the old, two-sided Western conflict of 'us' and 'them' and the structures that supported this."⁸⁶ Biennials may be a tedious product created by capitalism, but they can be a homogeneous method for cultural modernization in the globalized process. Both are obstacles to the successful localization of biennials. From the process of theorization to implementation, curators should be cautious of the superficial and alienating cultural promises of biennale.

Hou's evolving practice proves that the negative aspects of biennale format can be effectively minimized in East Asian biennials. Hou's coherent curatorial vision of mid-ground and continually evolving revised curatorial strategies become clear when examining these three international exhibitions. By adapting the concept of void, he tried to build the Shanghai

⁸⁶ Hou Hanru, Evelyne Jouanno, "The Dwell in Movement...", in *On the Mid-ground* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8 Ltd., 2002), 208.

Biennale (2000) as an accepted place where arts can be observed and evaluated from local context.⁸⁷ The biennale was modified as a manifesto to balance the local and global. Based on it, East Asian modernizations in different regions were explored on the premise of examining the local-global in the Gwangju Biennale (2002). Hou invited many artistic groups, by creating a network among them, to explore alternative ways of pausing the historical process and considering the byproducts of globalization in Asia. By the time he (co)curated the Guangzhou Triennial (2005), he had refined his stance on the homogeneity of modernity and the harsh artistic realities of globalization. The mid-ground strategy in Guangzhou Triennial thus presents as a relatively sustainable structure to resist the temporary and Western-centrism of the traditional biennale format. This progression evidences that, for Hou, the way to adapt the mid-ground curatorial strategy into the biennale format is to present alternative interpretations of the experience of globalization and modernization that are continuous and dynamic.

⁸⁷ Hou Hanru, "Shanghai Spirit: A Special Modernity," in *2000 Shanghai Biennale Catalogue* (Shanghai: Shanghai Shuhua Chubanshe, 2000), 5.

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Figure 1. Huang Yong-Ping, *Bank of Sand, Sand of Bank* (installation view), 2000, sand, concrete. Third Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai, China, 2000. Photo from Art-ba-ba.com.



Figure 2. Huang Yong-Ping (left) and Hou Hanru (right) at the Shanghai Biennale, installing Huang's work *Bank of Sand, Sand of Bank*, 2000.



Figure 3. Palmer & Turner, HSBC Bank, on the Bund in Shanghai, 1926.



Figure 4. Exterior of the Shanghai Art Museum, with Cai Guo-qiang's Untitled, 2000, Photos by Tatsumi Masatoshi, © Cai Studio, 2000.



Figure 5. The opening ceremony of Shanghai Biennale, 2000. Photograph by Wu Hung.

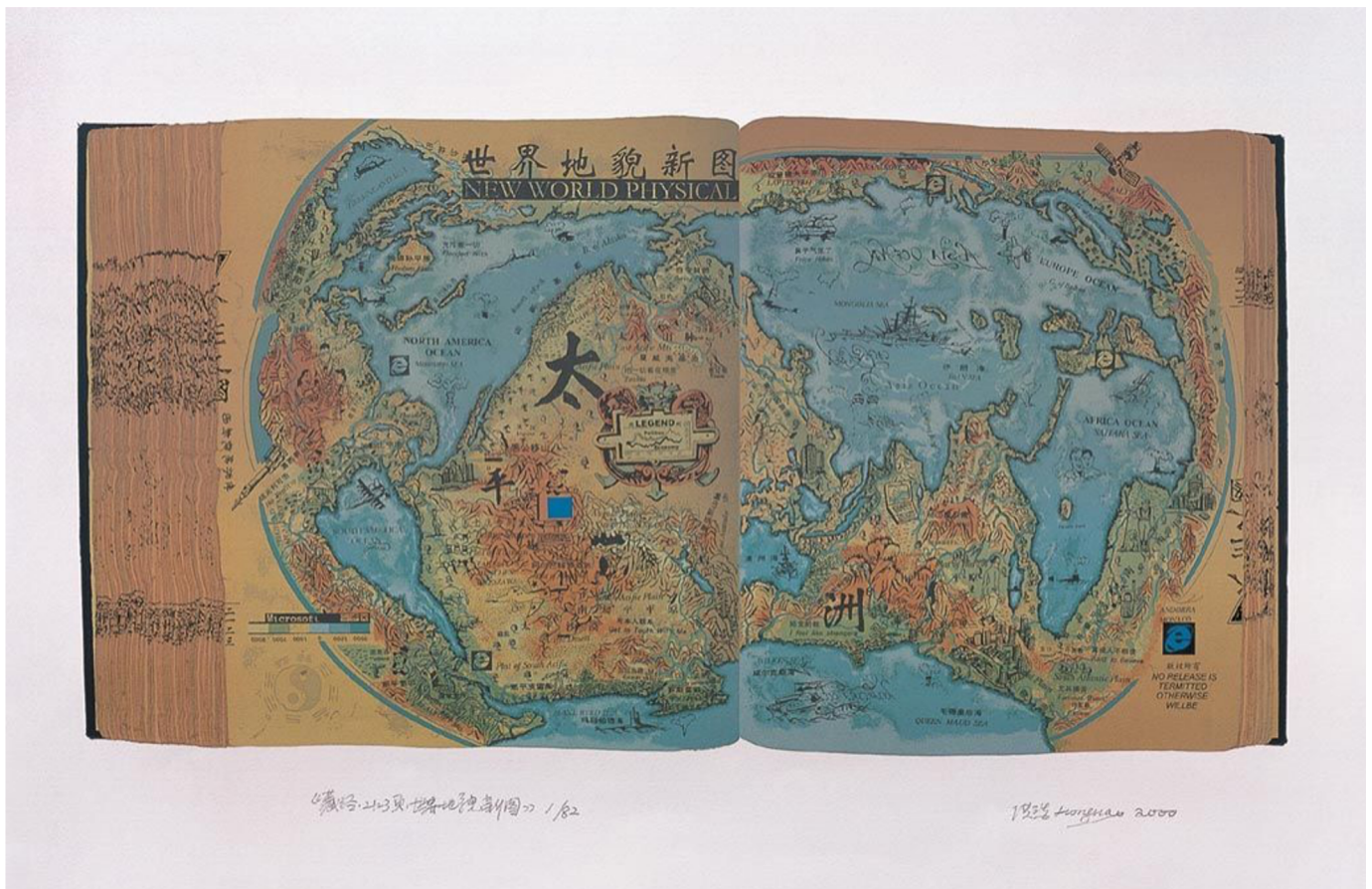


Figure 6. Hong Hao, *Selected Scriptures*, “page 2123, The New World Physical,” 1993–2000, screenprint, 54 x 78 cm. Image by Beijing Commune.



Figure 7. Hong Hao, *Selected Scriptures Series*, 1988–present, screenprint, 54 x 78 cm. Image by Beijing Commune.



Figure 8. Hong Hao, *Selected Scriptures*, “page 2123, The New World Physical,” 1993–2000. Installation view, third floor of Shanghai Art Museum in the Shanghai Biennale 2000.

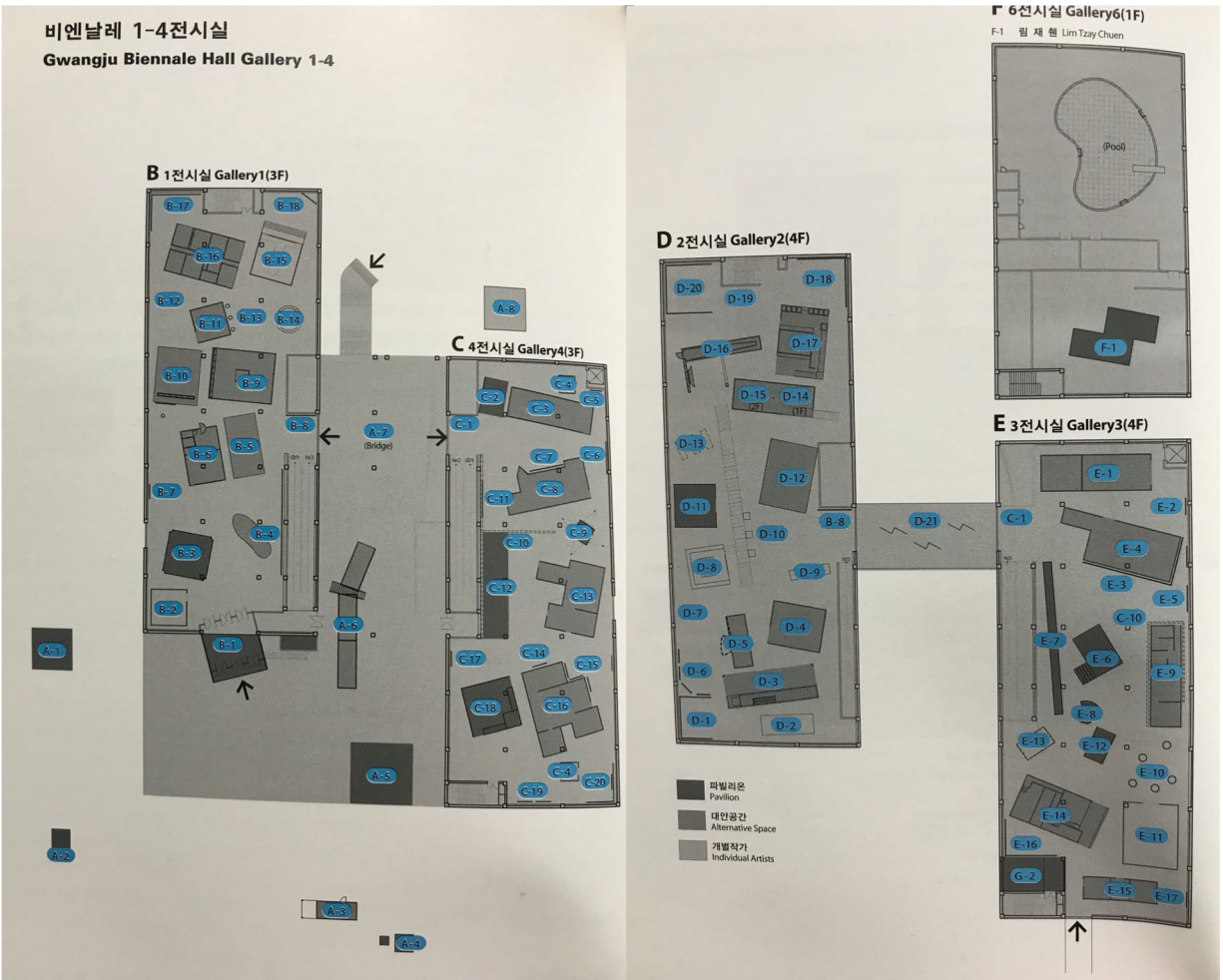


Figure 9. *Project 1: Pause Map 2002*, from the Gwangju Biennale Catalogue.



Figure 10. The interior of the Gwangju Biennale, 2002. Image by Para Site.



Figure 11. Libreria Borges, *Canton Mix Express: Continuous Decentralization of the Power*, 2002
Gwangju Biennale, installation view.



Figure 12. Libreria Borges, *Canton Mix Express: Continuous Decentralization of the Power*, 2002, Gwangju Biennale interior view. Image by Para Site.



Figure 13. Libreria Borges, *Canton Mix Express: Continuous Decentralization of the Power*, Gwangju Biennale, installation interior view, 2002. Image by Para Site.

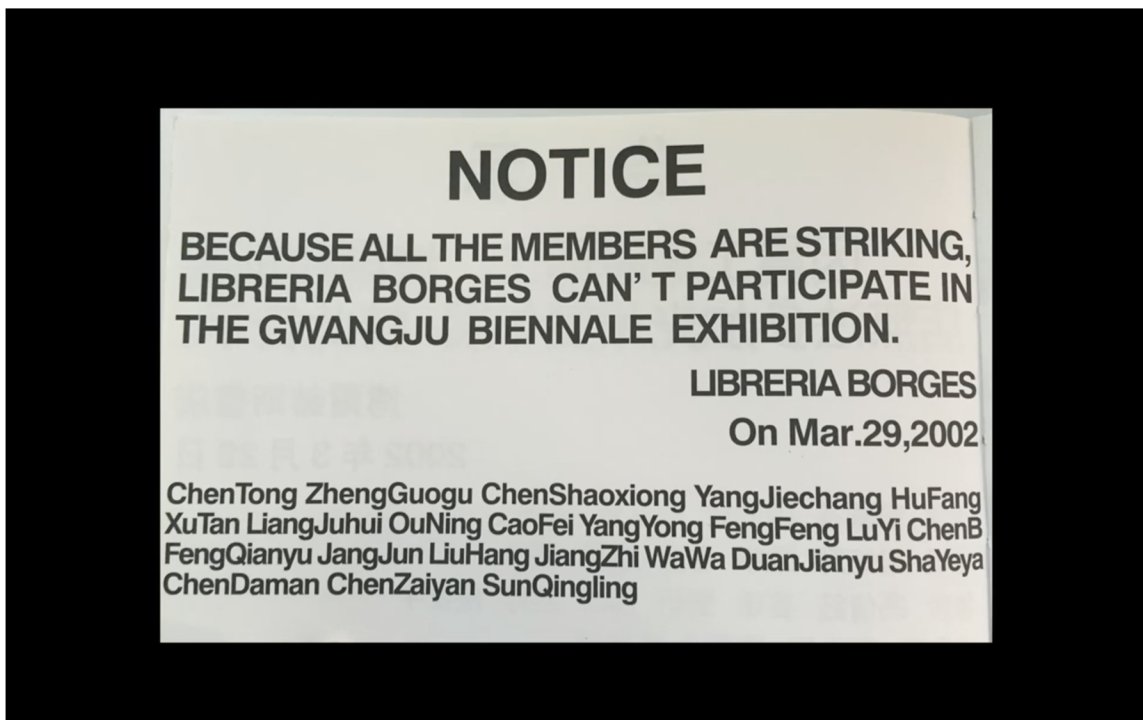


Figure 14. Libreria Borges, Notice of strike during the Gwangju Biennale, 2002. Image from Asian Art Archive.



Figure 15. Libreria Borges, *Canton Mix Express: Continuous Decentralization of the Power*, 2002, Gwangju Biennale, exterior view. Image by Para Site.



Figure 16. Ruangrupa space in the Gwangju Biennale, 2002. Image by Ruangrupa.



Figure 17. Audience in the Project 304 space, 2002, Gwangju Biennale. Image by Ruangrupa.



Figure 18. The opening ceremony of Guangzhou Triennial. Group photo of guests, 2005. Image by the Guangdong Museum of Art.



Figure 19. The D-lab seminar site in the Guangzhou Triennial, 2005. Image by Wangxu Design.

→
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 三角洲實驗室 第二屆廣州當代藝術三年展 (香港項目)

交易場域 珠江三角洲的文化想像

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Cultural Imaginaries of the Pearl River Delta
 A Hong Kong Programme of the second Guangzhou Triennial 2005

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 Agnès b. 電影院, 香港藝術中心 入場費全免
 SYMPOSIUM 21 November 2005, 10am- 6pm
 Agnès b. CINEMA, Hong Kong Arts Centre Admission Free

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Figure 20. D-Lab Program in Hong Kong, 2005. Guangzhou Triennial. Image by the Guangdong Museum of Art.

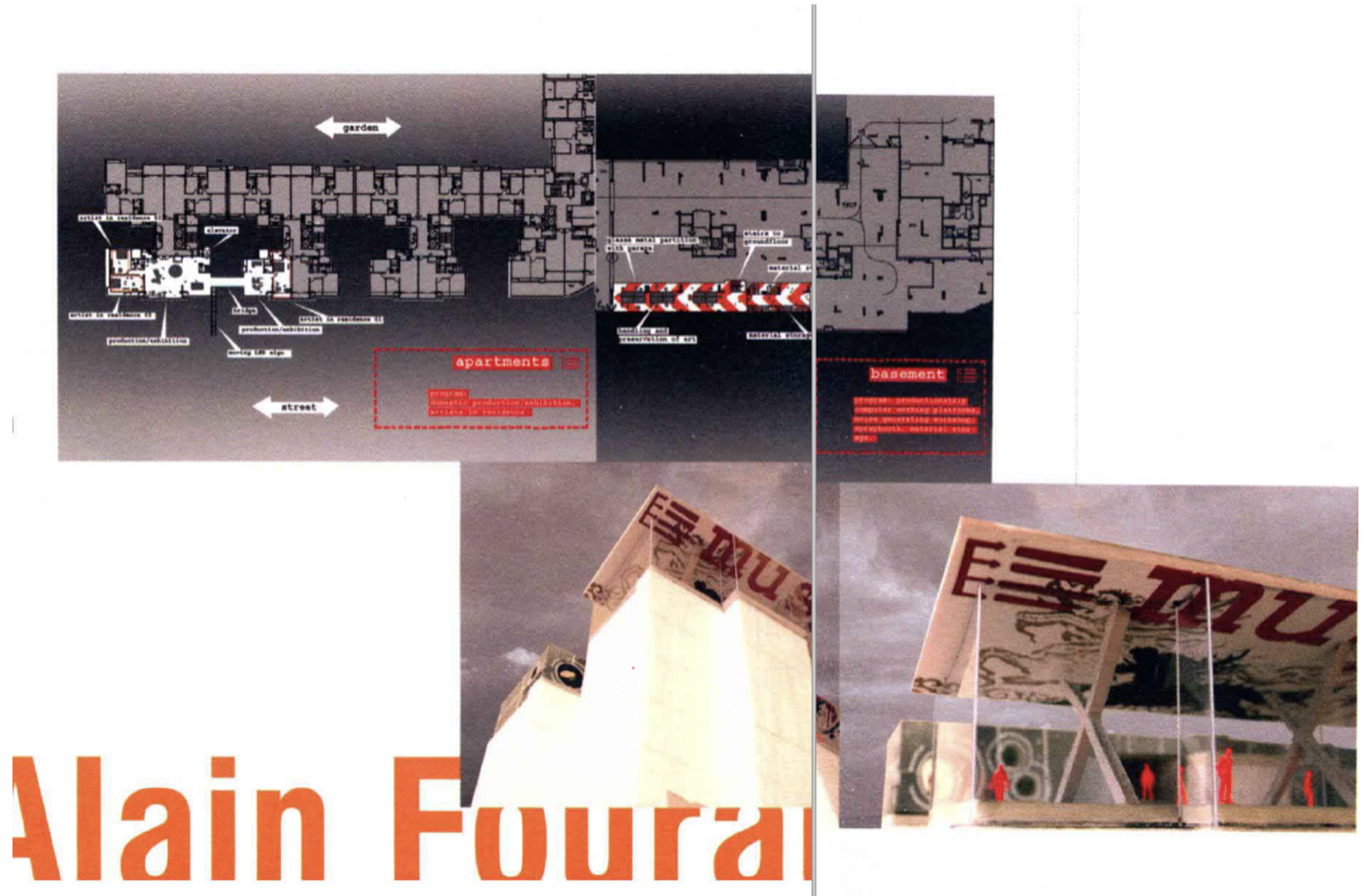


Figure 21. Design and model of the Times Museum, 2005, Guangzhou Triennial. As appears in exhibition catalogue.



Design: Rem Koolhaas & Alain Fouraux
Local architect: NODE architecture, Doreen Heng Liu

设计者：雷姆·库哈斯 艾伦·弗劳克斯
合作建筑师：刘珩（南沙原创建筑工作室）

Figure 22. Design of the Times Museum. Image from the Asian Art Archive.

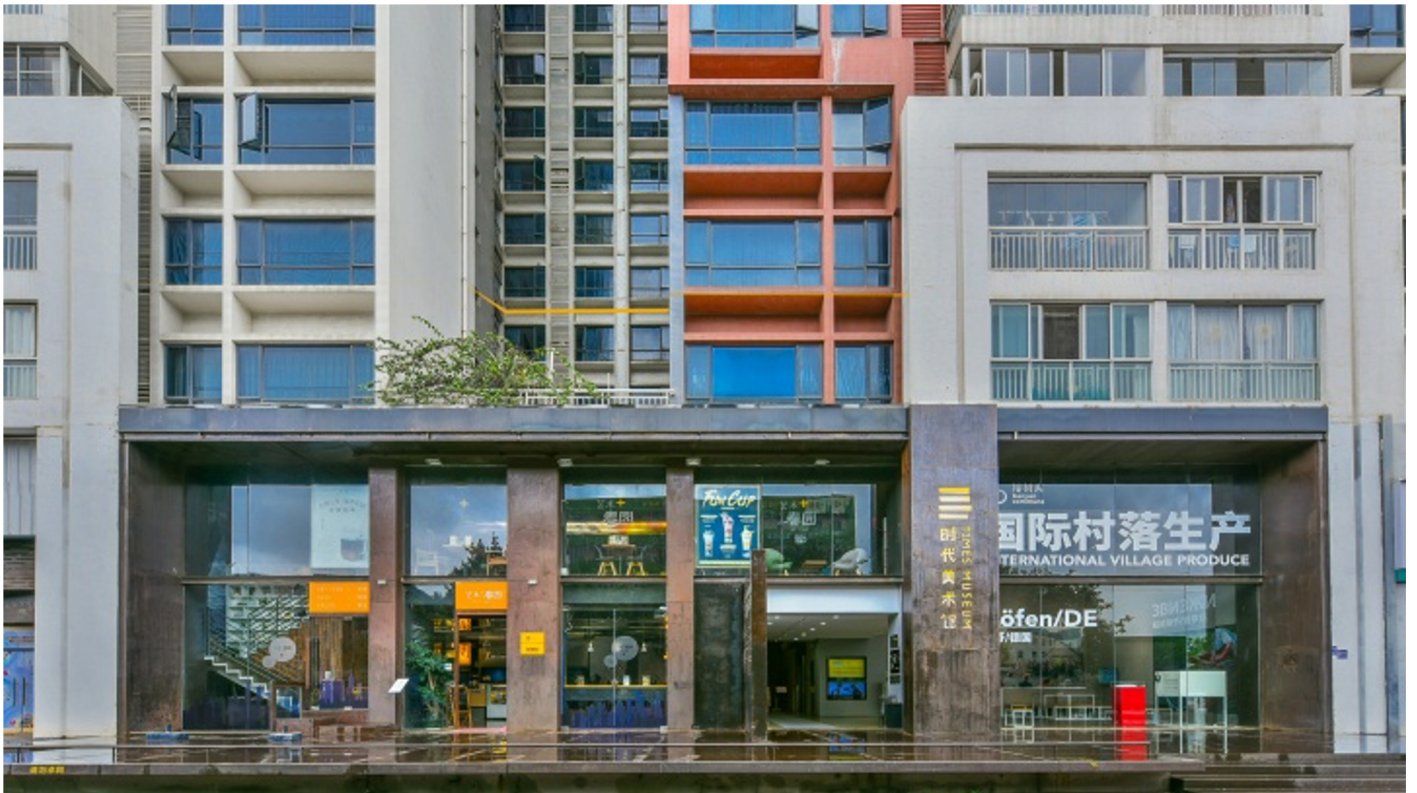


Figure 23. Exterior of the Times Museum and a view of the residential complex, Guang Zhou.