

PRESS RELEASE

52. International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia The Exhibition of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum of Taiwan

Organized by Taipei Fine Arts Museum of Taiwan

Press Preview 7-8-9 June, 2007

Dates 10 June - 21 November, 2007

Venue Palazzo delle Prigioni, Castello 4209, San Marco, Venezia, Italy
(Boat station: S. Zaccaria, next to the Palazzo Ducale)

Exhibition Title *ATOPIA*

Curator Hongjohn LIN

Artists Ming-liang TSAI (b. 1957), Huang-chen TANG (b. 1958), Kuo-min LEE (b. 1969),
Shih-chieh HUANG (b. 1975), and VIVA (b. 1975)

The Taipei Fine Arts Museum announces the selection of "Atopia" by Hongjohn Lin as the curatorial plan for the Taiwan Exhibition at the 2007 Venice Biennale. Five artists, representing a variety of different disciplines, will take part: Ming-liang TSAI, Huang-chen TANG, Guo-min LEE, Shih-chieh HUANG, and VIVA.

On October 16, 2006, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM) publicly announced the solicitation of curatorial proposals for the Taiwan Exhibition at the Venice Biennale (formally known as "the Exhibition of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum of Taiwan for the 52nd International Art Exhibition of La Biennale"). Proposals were accepted through December 15, 2006. During this period, three curatorial proposals were submitted. On December 17, a seven-member jury appointed by TFAM, including Jun-jieh Wang, Chia Chi Jason Wang, Cheng-kuang Ho, Ping Lin, Goang-ming Yuan, Chieh-jen Chen and TFAM director Tsai-lang Huang, selected "Atopia" by Hongjohn Lin as the most outstanding curatorial plan for the exhibition. Hongjohn Lin is an artist and independent curator who currently serves as associate professor at the fine arts department of National Taiwan University of Arts.

For more than a decade, the Taiwan Exhibition at the Venice Biennale has been a major venue for dialogue and exchange between Taiwan and the international art community. In 2007, as in the previous six Biennales, the Taiwan Exhibition will appear at the Pallazzo delle Prigioni.

From the outset, TFAM worked energetically to gain permission for Taiwan to take part in the Venice Biennale, which it did for the first time in 1995. This year, TFAM will be responsible for the Taiwan Exhibition for the seventh time. Over the past six consecutive Biennales, a total of 26 artists have taken part representing Taiwan. Taiwanese guest curators have been invited to curate four of these exhibitions. From the 1990s through the beginning of the new century, this has proven a highly significant experience for Taiwan in international contemporary art exhibition, concretely revealing to the world the aesthetics of uniquely Taiwanese cultural images and major trends in the development of Taiwanese contemporary art. This successful exhibition of the works of Taiwanese artists has become a major event attracting the concern and attention of the Taiwanese art community, as many of the participating artists have gone on to exhibit their works in other regions of the world. Taiwan's participation in the Venice Biennale is highly meaningful, as it has substantially contributed to the island's international cultural exchanges, and won considerable international goodwill.

Curatorial concept

At the beginning of the last century, utopia was a hopeful yet uncertain desire for an ideal society where people could be both harmonious and free. But by the end of the century, with the collapse of communism and perhaps "the end history" -- as claimed by Francis Fukuyama -- utopian thoughts died. No longer does the model of progress inspire. The omnipresence of a New World Order as the logic of globalization dominates. German sociologist Helmut Willke suggests, therefore, that serious consideration should be given not only to utopias but also to atopias and heterotopias (a concept first introduced by Michel Foucault). The utopias and heterotopias are still places of differences, but atopia is a 'non-place,' which is not constrained by any boundary because of the transformation by the economic and political dynamism of globalization. The disappearance of boundaries-- the mixing and merging of cultures, virtual space shaped by internet and information technology, and transnational consumption and post Ford production -- indicate the effects of globalization where spatial configurations cannot be subsumed by a single nationality and identity.

Yet the disappearance of boundaries does not assure necessarily individual freedom. Our practice of everyday life is the site the biopolitics exerted by a homogenous terrain. In re-territorialization and de-territorialization of merging boundaries, concepts of bodies, life plans, routines, and itineraries can be even regulated and disciplined according to the given logic of the new empire as

defined by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. No longer are our bodies the expressions of pure will and desire, but marked by combined powers of technology, merchandizes, social mechanism, and even cultures. The omnipresence of the new empire makes true individualism be possible through articulations by various forms of reinventing identities to empower oneself.

Atopia also means that a place cannot be placed, displaced, or simple "non-place." The impossibility of legitimate representations refers to atopia as a state of *de facto* without *de jure*. Atopia is a place without its place-ness. One can envisage that Taiwan is a non-national nation, or a nation without nationality, yet is neither post-national nor pre-national: in short, an atopian nation *par excellence*. Losing a its proper name, atopias signify "in-the-name-of-others," i.e., to creates its identity through *différance* not through difference as Derrida has indicated. Its true identity has always-already been configured in supplements by reiterations in memories and forgetting, and thus arrests the open secret or paradox of atopia.

These multifarious and hidden aspects of atopias are exposed in the artworks selected here. **Kuo-min Lee**'s photographs of the inhabitants of Treasure Hill document the socio-historical fabrics of quasi-squatters resulting from the transition of political pasts and urban developments. Treasure Hill is a community where live many inhabitants who moved to Taiwan around 1947 without realizing that they would never return to China. Lee's photographs tell human conditions in the state of emergency in relationship to their belongings - boxes, suitcases, and furniture - intertwined with private and collective passions and memories. A related aspect is addressed in **Ming-liang Tsai**'s work based on alienated existence, which is not grounded in a place, lost in transition. Taiwan acts as a bizarre setting of his films, where the condition of no-place determines the mood of the individual sexuality as in his feature films 'Wayward Clouds' and 'What Time, Is It There?'. How to travel and to live with oneself is a part of the **Huang-chen Tang**'s work. In her video project that imitates the scene of a well-known Taiwanese tourist photograph, she brings participants in different cities from Seoul, Madrid, and Paris to reconstruct the still picture as moving images involving interactive performative process. **VIVA** draws comics of a new social realism to depict everyday life of computer geeks in Taiwan in the format of cosplay, a cultural mimicry from Japan. **Shih-chieh Huang** is a bricoleur of low-tech objects and installations through his hands-on instructions to alter mass-produced appliances.

These works altogether speak not only to the thematics of atopia, but also to an

acting-out from the everyday reality of Taiwan. They address the issue of locality in the global context. This is when tourism, urbanization, technological stance, subculture and individual existence all meet at the crossroad of atopias, which borders on nothing but a play of the others.



Mr. Tsai-lang Huang, Director of Taipei Fine Arts Museum (left) and Mr. Hongjohn LIN, the quest curator of The Exhibition of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum of Taiwan for 52. International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia

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