



Marks of the Rural Life

——Traces of Labor and Living in Jiangnan

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Curator's Intro

This curatorial project focuses on rural life and visual culture in the Jiangnan region, presenting a "rural visual scene" that is happening around four creative forms - bamboo weaving paintings, stove paintings, village wall paintings and contemporary peasant paintings. The curatorial project aims to arouse the audience's re-understanding of "rural areas" not only as a geographical unit, but also as cultural experience and daily labor wisdom through spatial re-narrative and local participation. This not only closely connects the artwork with the material and spiritual dimensions of rural life, but also a re-narrative process about rural space, cultural experience and labor wisdom.

In recent years, rural issues have gradually become the focus of Chinese cultural issues. As Raymond Williams pointed out in *The Country and the City* (1973), the countryside is not a single, static geographical concept, but a cultural space that is constantly constructed and redefined in the historical process. The countryside is both the opposite of "nature" and "purity" imagined by the city, and an

important field that carries social memory and local knowledge. Continuing this view, Tim Ingold emphasized in *The Perception of the Environment* (2000) that local knowledge is not an abstract theory, but an experience system embedded in daily life through labor and practice. Rural life, especially the labor and creation of farmers on the land, is the core scene of this knowledge generation. From this perspective, *Marks of the Rural Life* reflects the unique value of "rural" as a source of artistic creation, and presents this point vividly through exhibition design.

The book "The Rural" mentions that the countryside is not a static, closed world, but a dynamic, changeable social field that carries the function of cultural reproduction. Therefore, the exhibition is not limited to displaying works, but by entering the exhibition space inside the Yudong Village residence, an immersive experience environment is created to allow the audience to feel the artistry of daily rural labor. This design breaks the boundaries between rural and urban, traditional and modern, and

Curator's Intro

provides an opportunity for the audience to re-examine rural art, labor and lifestyle.

The "self-discipline" tradition of Western modern art is in fundamental conflict with the "functionalism" characteristics of Chinese rural art. For example, the creation of paper-cutting in Wei County, Hebei Province has always been tied to practical needs such as window lattice protection and solar term blessing, which forms a cognitive gap with the conceptuality emphasized by contemporary art. Art historian Wu Hung proposed that this difference constitutes the possibility of "another modernity" - when paper-cutting artists incorporate contemporary elements such as high-speed rail and QR codes into their works, it is actually "a creative response of local wisdom to technological society" (Wu Hung, 2018).

In the context of the intersection of Chinese tradition and contemporary times, "rural art" is often neglected, over-romanticized, or regarded as a marginal "craft" rather than an expression with artistic value. At the same time, it often lacks connection with

contemporary art, and even in the eyes of some viewers, rural art is just an idealized depiction of tradition. By bringing the audience into the space of "home", this exhibition emphasizes the concept of "labor is expression, life is art", advocating a more natural and balanced view of art.

In short, "Marks of the Rural Life" is not only a display of Jiangnan rural art, but also a re-recognition of rural culture. "Marks of the Rural Life" refuses to objectify the way of viewing the countryside as an exhibit, but instead allows the audience to feel "labor is expression, life is art" in the space of "home" through the exhibition design inside the Yudong Village residence.

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Yu Tongshan

Yu Tongshan is a local artist from Yudong Village, Zhejiang, and an inheritor of bamboo weaving skills. He has been engaged in bamboo production since his youth, and has gradually developed a unique creative path that combines bamboo strips structure with the visual language of peasant paintings. His works mostly use lines instead of colors, emphasizing "weaving" as a composition method, showing the toughness and rhythm of the material itself.

This exhibition will display some of his bamboo weaving paintings and three-dimensional bamboo weaving works, especially presenting several "unfinished" works, retaining the exposed middle structure of bamboo strips, highlighting the process and openness of labor.

Curator's selection reason:

Yu Tongshan's creation is between crafts and painting, breaking the boundary between art and labor. His works give the exhibition a sense of touch and structure, and also reflect the aesthetic potential of rural materials. As a local artist, his participation has transformed the "art village" from an object to be viewed to a responsive and active creative subject.



Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter



Bamboo Weaving Works

Zhu Yongjin

Zhu Yongjin is a senior farmer painter from Jinshan, Shanghai. He has participated in the training and creation of Jinshan farmer paintings since the 1990s. His style absorbs the composition logic of traditional New Year paintings, propaganda paintings and murals, forming a visual language with high-density narrative, strong color blocks and strong sense of story. In recent years, he has turned his creative themes to social hot issues such as China's new era agriculture, e-commerce villages, and rural youth returning home.

This exhibition displays about 10 of Zhu Yongjin's recent representative works, including "Countryman's Noodle Art" and "New Year's Goods", showing the image landscape of rural areas in the new era.

Curator's selection reason:

Zhu Yongjin is an important practitioner connecting "traditional folk art" and "contemporary visual discourse". His works prove that farmer paintings are not only "cultural heritage", but also image recorders of current social structural changes. He forms a dialogue with the "life images" of villagers' murals and bamboo paintings in the exhibition, so that the exhibition establishes a logical closed loop of "local expression-contemporary response".



Returning from Fishing



Spring Festival Goods

Zhang Xinying - Invited

In the "Hearth Paintings" exhibition area, Shanghai Jinshan peasant painting artist Zhang Xinying will be invited to create on-site. Zhang Xinying has been committed to the protection and re-creation of stove painting since the 1990s, and is one of the very few contemporary folk artists who are still practicing this art form. Her creation not only retains the traditional visual language of stove painting as "auspicious culture" and "female handicraft", but also constantly integrates contemporary elements and local narratives into it, making this folk art glow with new vitality in the contemporary rural context.

As a decorative art with a long history, stove painting is rooted in the daily life and festival rituals of rural women, carrying multiple cultural symbols such as family blessings, life cycle and labor aesthetics. Zhang Xinying's artistic practice is a contemporary expression of this spirit of "life is art".

Zhang Xinying was invited to this exhibition not only because of her high skills and representativeness in stove painting art, but also because she hopes that through her creation, the "stove" field will be reawakened as a "rural visual node" intertwined with emotions and memories.



Hearth Room



Kitchen
Commotion

Peasant Murals

In the wall painting area of this exhibition, we plan to adopt a "double-sided wall" strategy.

Yudong Village is known as *China's No. 1 Peasant Painting Village*. Among the more than 800 residents in the village, more than 300 people participate in the creation of peasant paintings. On the walls painted by the villagers, we hope to present their familiar life scenes and traditional symbols, such as dragon and lion dances, agricultural harvests, family reunions, etc., to embody the concept of "life is art".

The other wall is freely created by foreign artists, who are encouraged to explore the relationship between the countryside and the city, and between tradition and modernity on the basis of respecting rural culture and combining contemporary art language. This "dialogue-style" wall painting design aims to break the audience's stereotype of rural art and show the diversity and openness of rural culture.

Through this curatorial method, we hope that the audience will not only be a bystander, but also a participant, who can resonate with the works during the exhibition and re-recognize and understand the value and significance of rural culture.



Mural on the village House



Villagers are painting murals

Format — Hybrid Format

This project can be defined as a hybrid format exhibition practice, integrating exhibition display, community participation and spatial reconstruction. As a joint exhibition, the exhibition presents a variety of works such as bamboo weaving paintings, stove paintings, wall paintings and contemporary peasant paintings by local and foreign artists in Jiangnan, showing the diversity of rural visual culture.

The exhibition includes local creation elements, such as Zhang Xinying's new works created in advance for the stove painting exhibition area, and presenting them in situ; at the same time, it combines public art interventions, such as villagers participating in wall painting and exhibitions embedded in the daily life of the village, strengthening the connection between art and the community. Interactive experience areas such as the bamboo weaving area encourage the audience to practice and experience the beauty of labor and craftsmanship.

Through the reuse of village houses, courtyards and other spaces, the project re-narrates the space and transforms "home" into a place where culture and art meet. Overall, this is a hybrid curatorial project that integrates exhibitions, local creation and public participation to explore the contemporary expression of rural culture.

Public Project (Daily Programme)

To encourage the audience to deeply understand the context of the works, three free oral guided tours led by "village guides" will be arranged every day during the exhibition period (estimated time period: 10:30 / 14:00 / 16:30), and the content will revolve around the life experience and village stories behind the exhibits. The village guides have been trained in advance to provide first-person perspectives and construct knowledge paths in life.

Through the above structure, this exhibition integrates display + education + co-creation + listening, not only presenting artworks, but also constructing a method model of "open rural art gallery". The exhibition itself becomes a "community of co-existence" within a time period, activating the participation, dissemination and redefinition capabilities of rural visual culture.

First Floor

Painting Area

Colored pencils, charcoal pencils, postcard paper, and 5 beautifully printed exhibition brochures are provided for reference. Visitors can create at will or copy the exhibited works. The completed works can be kept as a souvenir or posted on the "co-painting wall" on site to form an open archive of the "Village Art Gallery".

Kitchen

A wall-mounted TV plays the paintings and recording clips from Zhang Xinying's "Kitchen Room" series of projects in a loop, showing the process of rural women expressing art and copying emotions around the stove. With the on-site charcoal ash pottery installation and handwritten text, the viewer can enter the immersive atmosphere of the "Kitchen Art Gallery" in a visual + reading way.

Second Floor

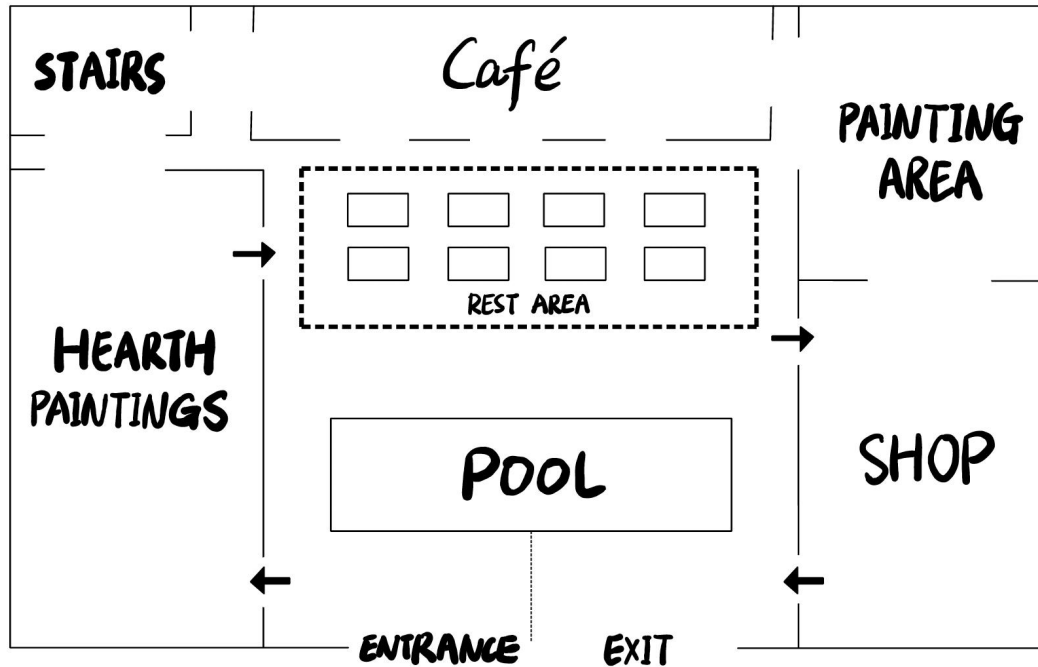
Static Exhibition Hall (Gallery)

•Bamboo Weaving Art Exhibition Area (Yu Tongshan)
Exhibits bamboo weaving paintings and three-dimensional bamboo weaving works by local artist Yu Tongshan. This exhibition area has a silent display and a brief text description. •Chinese Contemporary Peasant Painting Exhibition Area (Zhu Yongjin)
Exhibits 10 representative peasant paintings by Zhu Yongjin. This exhibition area features silent displays with brief text descriptions.

Interactive Area for Bamboo Weaving Art

The exhibition area will play videos introducing the history of bamboo weaving and the creative concepts of artists, and display several unfinished bamboo weaving works, allowing the audience to observe the changes in the bamboo strip structure and the weaving logic. The table provides bamboo strip materials and graphic instructions, and the audience can follow the instructions to try weaving by themselves. From this, you can feel the toughness of bamboo and the rhythm of manual labor, and understand that "weaving" is not only a skill, but also a way of thinking about images and structures.

First Floor

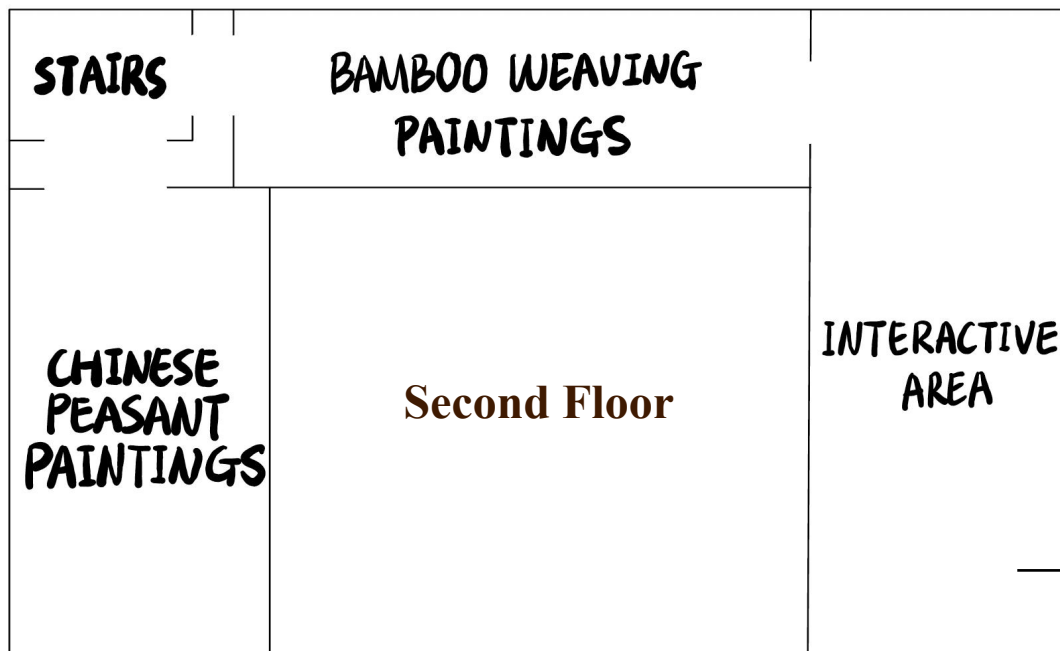


Rest Area (Rest Area & Café)

This project has a rest area and a small coffee corner on the first floor of the exhibition space. Visitors can stay in the open space on the first floor of the village house for a while, enjoy a drink, exchange exhibition experiences, and feel the slow pace and warmth of rural life. The rest area is equipped with comfortable seats, continuing the exhibition's concept of "life is art", making the stay itself a part of participation.

Shop

There is an exhibition shop at the exit to sell art derivatives developed by local artists and villagers, including T-shirts, creative scarves, ceramic utensils, etc. designed with peasant painting patterns as inspiration. These products not only extend the visual language of the exhibition, but also support the reproduction of rural handicrafts in the contemporary context, forming a sustainable and mutually beneficial cultural exchange platform between the exhibition and the community.



The schematic diagram was drawn with reference to the typical two-story residential structure of the Anhui style in the Jiangnan region of China. The specific structure requires on-site investigation.

Sites

The exhibition site is a typical Jiangnan Hui-style two-story residence in Yudong Village, Kecheng District, Quzhou City, Zhejiang Province, China. The building has a traditional pattern of blue bricks and black tiles, wooden beams and columns, a transparent hall and a compact living space, and has the potential for exhibition with daily life, a sense of history and clear spatial logic.

Reasons for selection

1. Locality of geographical and cultural location

Yudong Village is located in Quzhou City, Zhejiang Province. It is a Jiangnan village that retains complete farming memories, handmade traditions and community vitality. As a traditional settlement between inland mountains and rivers, the village continues a slow and self-sufficient pace of life and has a rich local cultural foundation.

2. The architectural space conforms to the concept of "exhibition in life"

The ground floor of the residence is an open hall, kitchen and rest area, which naturally forms a three-section moving line; the second floor is an exhibition hall transformed from a closed bedroom, suitable for quietly viewing plane and installation works. The courtyard space in front of the house is an open painting wall, echoing the tradition of "collective painting" in rural festivals. The whole exhibition seems to be walking into a "home where art is happening every day."

3. Highly consistent with the exhibition content and media

The stove painting is integrated with the kitchen, the texture of bamboo weaving and wooden structure echoes, and the peasant painting and white wall present a spatial emotional contrast. The exhibition does not require additional construction, and can be translated on the original structure, so that art and life, tradition and contemporary form a fluid dialogue.

4. Support from the local government

In recent years, Quzhou City has continued to promote policy directions such as "cultural co-enrichment" and "artistic rural construction", encouraging art to intervene in rural areas and activate local cultural resources. As one of the pilot projects for the protection of local traditional crafts and cultural revitalization, Yudong Village has a good policy foundation and public cooperation conditions. The government not only provides support in infrastructure, publicity and promotion, but also actively promotes exchanges and cooperation between artists and villagers.



Yudong Village has a good tourism foundation. Since the completion of the "China (Yudong) Rural Art Museum" in 2020, the number of tourists has increased significantly and the artistic atmosphere has become increasingly strong. There are many active peasant painters in the village, and painting training classes are frequently held, forming a rural art ecology that integrates creation, display and teaching.



Audience/Publics

The target audience of this project covers three main groups: local villagers, urban cultural tourists, and education and research groups. The curatorial team hopes to establish an open, shared, and empathetic rural exhibition site through accessibility, participation, and co-creation mechanisms.

1. Primary Community

As the core audience group of this project, villagers are not only participants in the exhibition, but also creators and storytellers. Through joint wall painting, daily explanations, and participation in exhibition layout, villagers contribute their life memories and visual expressions to the exhibition. The exhibition space is integrated into the village life path and can be reached without special instructions. The curatorial language also gives priority to the use of diagrams and oral boards to enhance comprehensibility.

2. Urban Cultural Visitors

As a relatively well-known "village in the painting" in Zhejiang Province, Yudong Village itself has a certain degree of popularity and a certain tourism industry foundation. This part of the audience learns about the exhibition information through social media (such as WeChat, Xiaohongshu, etc.), and the appointment system can control the flow and enhance the experience. Interactive areas, villager guides, and exhibits experience have become their main ways of participation. Through touching, taking photos, drawing and portable souvenirs, they extend the exhibition experience back to their daily lives.

3. Educators & Researchers

Including curatorial students, visual culture researchers and art college groups. They can make an appointment through the team to conduct field surveys, on-site interviews, filming and recording and other research contacts. The curator will provide bilingual materials, structural drawings, exhibition texts and video images and other documentary support to promote the exhibition to become a "readable practice archive".

Accessibility & Inclusion

The main exhibition space is located on the first floor, with a flat floor and wide passages, suitable for all audiences to enter. The static display on the second floor is equipped with synchronized video and image content projected on the first floor to ensure equal access to information. The exhibition content provides bilingual texts, illustrations and concise and clear narrative methods, avoiding high-threshold language, so that every audience can "understand, be willing to participate, and resonate".

EDI and Ethics

This exhibition emphasizes inclusiveness, fairness and ethical practices, and establishes a curatorial relationship of mutual respect and knowledge sharing in rural communities. The project refers to ECA's EDI policy and ethical guidelines, and the overall curatorial structure revolves around the following four core principles:

1. Collaboration and empowerment with villagers

The villagers are not only the material providers of the exhibition, but also the creators of the wall paintings and the exhibition guides. All participants will sign an informed consent form to clarify the right of authorship and the right to use the images. The copyright of the wall painting images belongs to the villagers, and any subsequent dissemination will obtain consent and indicate the source to avoid labeling and othering narratives.

2. Child protection and community safety

The project site is open. Considering the participation of children in the interactive session, protection measures are formulated in accordance with the ethical code of the children's art project, including: not photographing children alone, obtaining parental consent before shooting, providing a masked version of the image, and posting reminders in the exhibition area to ensure guardianship.

3. Accessibility and cultural diversity response

The exhibition is held in a traditional village house, with ramps and open doorways to ensure convenient movement. All exhibition boards are bilingual in Chinese and English, with high-contrast large fonts, and refer to barrier-free design standards. The interactive area teaching videos and illustrations are aimed at audiences of different educational backgrounds and age groups, lowering the threshold for participation. The curatorial language avoids a condescending perspective and emphasizes the value of rural labor and storytelling.

4. Intellectual property and signature protection

All artists and villagers' creations are authorized, and copyright and signature strictly follow the ICoM Code of Ethics. The use of exhibits follows the principles of signature, fair use and image respect to avoid unauthorized visual communication. If the work is published or toured, a mechanism for artist fees and copyright income will be set up.

Timeline

	Time	Content
Period One	5 days	- Establishing the exhibition theme and drafting the text
	15 days	- Visit Yudong Village - Talk with local government - Invite artists and villagers
Period Two	20 days	- Zhang Xinying completed the stove painting, and the village wall painting team completed the painting - Design the exhibition space and layout plan were determined
Period Three	15 days	- Exhibition area layout, interactive area construction and safety inspection - Village guide training and content testing - Public projects such as cultural and creative areas and experience areas operation testing
Period Four — open	15 days	- Daily opening hours: 10:00 – 17:00 - Scheduled guided tours and interactive experience activities - Digital promotions are launched simultaneously
Period Five	5 days	- Unpacking and packaging of works, photographing and archiving of wall paintings - Returning items borrowed by the village committee, environmental restoration
Period Six	10 days	- Writing summary report, submitting to platform display

Budget

15

Expenditure items	Details	Amount/GBP
Artists Fee (including artwork usage rights)	This is approximately £525 per artist x 3 artists. As there is no uniform standard for artist service pricing in mainland China, this project refers to Artists' Union Scotland.	1575
Promotional Materials	Promotional posters, paper guides, paper tickets, QR code audio guides	40
Equipment Rental	Two video-playing TVs will be available for rental on the website ; Interactive area materials (brushes, paper, etc.) are available for purchase online.	100
Transportation	Artworks are shipped via Huolala	200
Installation	10 workers to build and dismantle all exhibits and internal structures	500
Others	Recruitment of free volunteers; Meals and transportation expenses for staff during the event; Water and electricity expenses	500
Total		2915

Funding

Expenditure items	Details	Amount/GBP
Government Support	Zhejiang Province Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Special Fund	2000
Sales Revenue	Ticket revenue: adults-5 pounds, students-2 pounds , children-1 pound Revenue from sales at the cultural and creative store	500
Other Supports	Equipment support and manpower support within the village; Sponsors of agricultural products and other related products	500

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