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Manray Hsu and Jun Yang

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Left: The exterior of the Taipei Contemporary Art Center. Right: TCAC's office.

After five months of intense preparation, the Taipei Contemporary Art Center, an independent initiative founded by artists, curators, critics, and cultural activists, opened on February 27. Here, two of the founders, curator Manray Hsu and artist Jun Yang, speak about the project's beginnings and aspirations.

THE IDEA FOR THE SPACE stems from Jun's work that was in the 2008 Taipei Biennial. He proposed a project that provoked questions about the conditions of exhibiting contemporary art. It began with the wall—whose wall is that? Who is paying for it? Is it a private space, a governmental space, an alternative space, or an apartment? The project focused on Taipei, so the first step was to talk with the Taiwanese art community.

That work functioned like an office in a way; we put a flag on the top of a building that we occupied during the biennial, which read A CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER TAIPEI—A PROPOSAL. There was also a conference that brought together local art professionals to discuss what is going on today in Taiwan. Jun's solo project grew into a collective project that tried to fulfill the hopes and wishes of everyone involved, but it also took seriously claims of how it could act as a broader platform for discussion that would be independent of political or economic influences.

The Taipei Contemporary Art Center is a more focused attempt by artists, curators, and critics who are really trying to think of how a space can be run and programmed. For the first phase of the project, we were given a space last summer from a real estate developer who had bought many buildings in the Ximen area in downtown Taipei. The developer gave us two connected four-story buildings. Of course we needed to raise funds for renovations, so our first show, which opened on February 27, features donated works by prominent Taiwanese artists—including Michael Lin, Chen Chieh-Jen, and Wu Mali—that will help generate operational funds for the space.

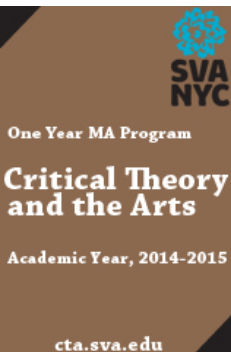
We want to do more discursive events like talks, lectures, or artist presentations. We'll also have film screenings and performances. You can compare it to any alternative artist-run space, but you can also compare it to any museum. This project is trying to reflect these different models while also trying to come up with its own model. We aren't trying to reinvent the wheel but we are trying to speak to the specific local conditions in Taipei.

The first thing is that museums in Taiwan now respond less and less to the needs of the local art community. In this age of neoliberalism everything is regulated—even a museum will organize a show to pump up visitation. We are creating a situation where the art community itself can produce its own exhibitions and can create its own discursive space. This is what museums should do, but in Taiwan, in general, the art community does not have this kind of solidarity. Second, there's a lot of bureaucracy here. And the museums won't organize conferences about this. These conversations about rules and regulations usually happen at small dinners or in a bar. But creating platforms for discourse is one of the main things we want the new space to do. We will hold forums to talk about the production, distribution, reception, and politics of cultural production.

The third thing is that contemporary art from Taiwan is very marginalized. To counteract this, we are building an archive for artists and curators who have worked in the past few years on an international level and we have invited them to continuously update their files. Anyone can come and do research here.

— As told to Arthur Ou

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