

A STORY OF AN INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION, A PRIVATE PHILANTHROPIC INITIATIVE BRIDGING DIFFERENT CULTURES

ANTWERP, THE "WORLD DIAMOND CAPITAL" FOR THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHINA AND EUROPE

We were happy to present Dialogue with Emperor Qin: China-EU, an ambitious and philanthropic exhibition. It aims at generating exchanges and conversations around the theme of international cultural dialogue. Dedicated to all art lovers and to all those who want to build peace through cultural exchange; this event answers a long-lasting need and raises an artistic bridge between China and Europe.

We arrived at the end of our epic journey with Dialogue with Emperor Qin and we were able to truly close the circle with

the staging of the exhibition at the Diamond Vessel of Zaha Hadid, Head Quarters of The Antwerp Port Authority. We feel blessed by their great support.

Antwerp has a long and outstanding tradition regarding the ancient Silk Road. In 1722 the company "Generale Keizerlijke Indische Compagnie" also called the Oostendse Compagnie was founded. This company was owned by several famous shareholders and due to the influence of Emperor Charles VI had a monopoly of the commerce between Southern Netherlands and Asia. Today Antwerp is, in addition to this maritime tradition, very active on the new rail land-bridge that connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.



5 warriors like a troupe of Alexander the Great when he conquered his Empir



Marc Van Peel (Chairman Antwerp Port Authority) giving his speech at opening

In 2010, as we were creating this China-EU sculpture exhibition, the Port of Antwerp, the second largest port in Europe, was embarking on establishing further links with China through the twinning of its port with the port of Guangzhou. Guangzhou, one of the most important ports along the historic Maritime Silk Road also boasts of having China's largest repeat-flowering rose garden. In Summer 2011, a container was shipped from Antwerp port to Tianjin, filled with 27 sculptures from European artists (one from each European country). From there they were transported to Xi'an, home of the original Terracotta Warriors and starting point of the ancient Silk Road, where 3 sculptures from 3 Chinese artists were waiting. The 30 soldiers, each almost two metres high, represents an army that neither threatens, nor looks to conquer. It erases frontiers and cherishes freedom. It embraces the universal theme of "Messengers of Peace and Generosity". With this exhibition, our ambition is to present and to demonstrate the many cultures which form a collective humanity.

In 2012, the exhibition was awarded the "EU-China Intercultural Dialogue" label by the European Union and after touring in eight Chinese museums between 2011 and early 2013, it entered its European phase travelling to Tallinn,

Tsinandali (Georgia), Lisbon, Bucharest, Sofia, London, Edinburgh, Brussels and now Antwerp. A sculpture was added when Croatia joined the EU and we were happy to finish this long journey in two Kingdoms, with both the UK and Belgium each staging the exhibition in two cities. The army that accompanied the Emperor in his everlasting sleep has come to life again in Antwerp, "The Diamond Capital," of the world! The city and Antwerp Port continue to build upon their historic links with China through contemporary trade relations and through sustained diplomatic projects with recent highlights including the visit of China's former vice-president now President Xi Jinping in 2009 and the establishment of the "One Belt One Road taskforce". Dialogue With Emperor Qin, with its focus on international collaboration is uniquely positioned to compliment and to build upon these diplomatic projects. The exhibition, a physical manifestation of the continued and sustained relationship between Antwerp, the rest of Europe and China must therefore be seen amongst these other forms of diplomacy.

A NOTE ABOUT THE "MILITARY" CURATION

In the very pristine Zaha Hadid designed Port House, the curation using "hard power" and "soft power" gently

introduces the chock of two civilisations allowing the general public to familiarize themselves and to value both of the two worlds which inspired the curation of the works in Antwerp. It is noticeable in the scenography of the exhibition that the Founder of Inspiring Culture and International Curator of the exhibition Dr Pick Keobandith, wishes to invoke the rich past of two Empires; the Imperium Romanum and the ancient Chinese Empire of the Qin and Han dynasty who were in contemporary existence. As leading world powers, the two empires controlled half of the entire population of the world. But they had minimal interaction and developed independently of each other.

It would be 100 years later, after Alexander's conquest that the unification of China under its first Emperor Qin Shihuang laid the development of long distance trade routes commonly known as the "Silk Road". The curation which combines elements from both civilisations is an original way to make the parallel between the two worlds in this exhibition "Dialogue with Emperor Qin".

For Keobandith: "The idea for the placement and curation of the works at The Port House came from my studies. In order to improve my French, I studied Latin at the end of secondary school for which I had to translate lots of texts about the Roman army and their leadership. It was very strange for me, someone who loves Proust and Musil. I

very much enjoyed reading about their strategy and tactics however the vocabulary was very poor concerning the army. It was also interesting to note that in the Emperor Qin's army and the Roman Army there were no women soldiers.

I discovered the word strategist has its origins in the Greek "stratgos" meaning "Chief of Army". A closer look at the definition of strategist included the word Victori - Strategy & Tactics. Victori is Latin word for "The conquerors". With all of this in mind, I based my scenography on the formation of the Roman Army as if they were preparing their troops to fight. They were the best army one at that time and most of the soldiers in the Roman Empire came from countries outside Italy: from Africa, France, Germany, the Balkans, Spain and the Middle East. The structure of the Roman Army before the battle had as its focus an ambition to keep its troops in order. They believed that one could fight more effectively and generally in a staggered arrangement (en quinconce in French) from the Latin quincunx, by five.

And so, placed in rows each consisting of five sculptures, the works in the exhibition prepare for their mission. Their ambition however is not to conquer but instead to bring a message of peace, to effectively and strategically bring their unique dialogue of cultural exchange to as many different audiences as possible.



H.E. Zhang Ming (Head of China Mission to EU) giving speech at opening

Let's say I am a Fine Strategist. Leading my troop of 31 artists of Peace Builders and their sculptures through China and Europe with a stop in Tsinandali helped by the Silk Road Group in Georgia."

AN EXAMPLE OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

The exhibition "Dialogue with Emperor Qin" seeks to redefine and to shape the image of China and the EU in a different way. It is an initiative which allows for and actively encourages a positive dialogue between the two as well as providing a rewarding project for the private sector actors to be a part of and to help to strengthen cultural diplomacy.

This travelling exhibition instigated in 2011 by Dr Pick Keobandith has taken a long and complex route before arriving at its final destination in the Port of Antwerp. This inter-cultural exchange is of particular relevance in today's shifting and often dangerous political landscape, helping as it does to promote understanding and debate through the arts. Art is often described as a unique language and like all languages, it has its own rhythms, its own depths and of course its own complexities. Sometimes art is easy to understand, instantly readable, accessible for all. At other

times it takes multiple viewings and dedicated attention to allow for its message to be fully understood. Inspiring Culture believes that only through art and the use of art's distinctive language that it is possible to speak to the world about the collective issues that we face today. They are extremely proud to support this touring exhibition and continue to encourage people to look, listen and learn about other cultures. It is inspiring to find others who want to dedicate their energies to focus on the positive aspects of what makes each of us different from next.

Art uniting all people under one language. This is truly a celebration of diversity and of the mix of heritage that we all share and should always be proud of.

International cultural exchanges are part of our DNA, as we are convinced that Art only reaches its full potential when it travels across political and cultural borders. When the core of the artistic creation, the very personal and unique expression of the artist becomes universal and speaks to the humanity. As a private organization, Inspiring Culture balances philanthropic initiatives like the "Dialogue with Emperor Qin" exhibition with more commercial missions, always focusing on international cultural initiatives.



'Veteran' - Shao Jun Wang - One of 3 artists representing China



'Amazone en Armes' - Félix Roulin - Artist representing Belgium



H.E Natalie Sabanadze (Georgia's Ambassador to Belgium, Luxemburg and the EU), Dr Pick Keobandith (Inspiring Culture), Marc Van Peel (Chairman Antwerp Port Authority) and Jacques Vandermeiren (CEO Antwerp Port Authority).



H.E Natalie Sabanadze (Georgia's Ambassador to Belgium, Luxemburg and the EU), H.E Zhang Ming (Head of China Mission to EU), Dr Pick Keobandith (Inspiring Culture), Marc Van Peel (Chairman Antwerp Port Authority) and Tom Monballiu (Deputy Port Ambassador)



Cathy Berx (Governor of Port of Antwerp), H.E Zhang Ming (Head of China Mission to EU), Marc Van Peel (Chairman Antwerp Port Authority) and Jacques Vandermeiren (CEO Antwerp Port Authority)



Director, Founder Inspiring Culture Dr Pick Keobandith showing male guest works in exhibition at opening of exhibition.



Mrs CAI Xiaolin wife of H.E Zhang Ming (Head of China Mission to EU), Linda Brunker (Artist Ireland), Tom Monballiu (Deputy Port Ambassador), H.E Zhang Ming (Head of China Mission to EU), Jacques Vandermeiren (CEO Antwerp Port Authority), Hanneke Beaumont (Artist Netherlands), Marc Van Peel (Chairman Antwerp Port Authority), Félix Roulin (Artist Belgium), John Atkin (Artist UK), Zhivko Sedlarski (Artist Bulgaria), Cathy Berx (Governor of Port of Antwerp), Anne Khayat-Benoist (Director France Inspiring Culture), Anton Grech (Artist Malta), Dr Pick Keobandith (Founder and International Director), Sabrina Tacca-Pandolfo (Director Italy), Alessandro Filippini (Artist Italy), Jose de Guimaraes (Artist Portugal), Ed Liddle (Project Manager), Tamas Eros (Artist Representative Hungary) and Freddy Opsomer (Counsellor New Silk Road).



Pictured left to right, Marc Van Peel (Chairman Antwerp Port Authority), Cathy Berx (Governor of Port of Antwerp), H.E Zhang Ming (Head of China Mission to EU), Dr Pick Keobandith (Inspiring Culture) and Freddy Opsomer (Counsellor New Silk Road).



George Ramishvili (Chairman of Silk Road Group).

We contribute to the “Cultural Diplomacy” policy of our clients or we generate our own and modest “Cultural Diplomacy” where the only interests we serve are those of humanism.

The deep understanding of these diplomatic objectives is essential for the success of our initiatives. Through multiple elements, sometimes unnoticed by most visitors, we work on the alignment of the exhibition and its associated events with the objectives of our partners.

Is it morally acceptable to use the work of artists to serve diplomatic, and often ultimately economical interests of organizations or countries? We are regularly faced with this question.

Our position is that competition will always exist between groups of human beings on this planet and that using cultural exchange to influence is certainly progressive if compared to much more aggressive strategies. We cannot control all possible hidden agendas of our partners. What we control is the sincerity of the cultural initiatives we manage and the fact that they enable thousands of citizens from various countries to be exposed to a large variety of artistic propositions. That alone, is making our planet a better place.

TESTIMONY OF MARC VAN PEEL, CHAIRMAN – ANTWERP PORT AUTHORITIES

The Port of Antwerp is Europe's second largest port and acts as a bridge between Europa and all other continents. With a volume of over 223 million handled goods in 2017, the companies within the port area are serving over 60 percent of the European population, living in a range of 500 km from Antwerp. The port connects the wider European hinterland with the world by sea going vessel, train, barge and road. From a more symbolic point of view, this introduction also tells that the Port of Antwerp is a cross road of goods and cultures, connecting people and ideas, and a source of inspiration for entrepreneurs and artists. The latter is demonstrated in the high number of artworks in which the

port plays a role. And again, this role is very diverse. The port acts as the background, is in the center of the art piece or inspired the artist. This connecting idea is what struck me in the "Dialogue with the Warriors of Emperor Qin" exhibition as the sculptures reflect the dialogue between ancient and modern art and connect the rich Chinese culture with the European views. In an ever globalizing world the intercultural dialogue contributes to a better mutual understanding and respect. In this regard I am grateful that this exhibition is a result of cooperation between the Mission of the People's Republic of China to the EU and the Antwerp Port Authority. Another demonstration of connecting cultures.

M. Van Peel
Chairman

GEORGIA, CHINA AND EUROPE FOR SILK ROAD

Silk Road Group (SRG), a privately held investment company, owned and run by Georgian and European partners, is active in Energy, Transportation, Hospitality, Entertainment, Real Estate and Telecommunications. Every SRG business has been established with the vision that Georgia is an integral part of the historic Silk Road trading route, the ancient geopolitical axis connecting Asia with Europe, where currents from the East link to those from the West, diverse ideas are exchanged and differences bridged by common values.

In a push to rediscover Georgian heritage through the revival of the country's wine making traditions, SRG

invested in a project to restore and promote the famous Tsinandali estate and gardens in the Kakheti region, the 19th Century Chavchavadze family manor house, its landscaped garden, a historic winery, wine cellar, hotel, museum and café, operating as a cultural and educational center. Tsinandali hosts numerous events and exhibitions, including an international classical music festival of growing importance.

George Ramishvili, a Chairman of Silk Road Group:
"We are grateful for the opportunity of being a part of this project. We believe that the modern business is a part of the world's social and cultural community and were happy to contribute by sponsoring the sea transportation of the Army of Peace and Dialogue."

BIOGRAPHY PICK KEOBANDITH

After Ecole du Louvre, Dr Pick Keobandith received her Doctorate in Art History from Rennes II. A distinguished career in Paris followed where amongst other roles, she was an adviser to Sydney Picasso, was an exhibition commissioner with Galerie Piltzer and Galerie Anne de Villepoix. Later she worked at Gallery Templon and taught Contemporary Art Market at Christie's Education. After Paris, Keobandith chose Brussels to be the platform

to share her vision of International Art. She founded Inspiring Culture in August 2016. Working internationally, Inspiring Culture specialises in contemporary and modern sculpture. Our activities include : Exhibition conception and production. Public and private sculpture commissions. Academic research. Writing and lecture presentation. Critical Writing. Artist and Art Institution development.