

WORLD BEAT

What's going on around the globe

New York

If, like me, you're always fiddling with your hair, then an exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art is just the thing. Perception Restrained, part of its Artist's Choice series, features make-up mirrors that can be used to fix errant strands during a hard afternoon's viewing.

Useful as they may be, the mirrors aren't there for personal grooming. Angle them towards the ceiling and they reflect a television show or movie from a bank of concealed monitors.

The mirrors are part of an attempt to get visitors to appreciate MoMA's vast collection of art in a different way. Curators spend plenty of time planning the arrangement of works. The old-fashioned way is to position them chronologically, so that a viewer can trace the gradual shift of a Wassily Kandinsky or Jackson Pollock from figurative to abstract.

A more recent technique, popularised by London's Tate Modern, is to arrange works by theme. A recent MoMA show about Dada grouped works by cities, rather than the years in which the works were made. This thematic approach shows how works from different times relate to each other.

Perception Restrained, designed and curated by Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, is a radically different way of exhibiting art. Working from the premise that most art museums are too big for the general viewer to get around in one go, they have shrunk the whole of MoMA into one small room.

Great paintings and sculptures

are normally given a lot of space on floors and walls so they can be appreciated. But the curators have done exactly the reverse here. They've crammed the masterpieces together in a few small spaces so they have to shout for attention. The resulting exhibition looks like a marvellous Victorian junk shop containing 110 works by Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol, Salvador Dali et al.

The idea began as one of practicability. When the architects were asked to curate the Artist's Choice show, they found that the allotted space was too small to contain all their selections. "How could we possibly pick out the gems, when we only have gems to choose from?" they said. So they decided to mash their choices together in one small space.

All of MoMA's departments – painting, photography, design, drawings, books and film – are represented. Choice selections are crammed between, behind and over the top of other great works. And it works. There's something destabilising about seeing a Picasso montage bisected by a wiry Alberto Giacometti sculpture, or a Warhol sculpture dwarfed by a giant self-portrait of the artist.

The mirrors are used to view a wide selection of film clips. The curators say they've chosen modern, often violent, films to reflect the aggression of the modern age. *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Taxi Driver* are two of the movies on show. Interactivity is always fun, and visitors enjoy watching the reflections of the clips. A number of them seem to find the mirrors useful for fixing their hair, too.

Richard James Havis

The satellite shows that spring up around the Shanghai Biennale are even better than the real thing, writes Karen Hung

Out of this world



"IF THERE'S A good piece in the show at this year's Shanghai Biennale, it's by accident," says Belgian artist Wim Delvoye, a participant in one of the many off-biennale shows in town this year. Despite the hype, the lack of organisation and the curatorial agenda of the Sixth Shanghai Biennale, titled HyperDesign, have left many artists and curators disappointed.

Instead, independent satellite shows – alternative or underground exhibitions that first came to challenge the official event six years ago – have been creating the buzz around town.

After the furore over the show F*** Off at Eastlink Gallery – an exhibition featuring self-mutilation, body parts and the eating of a human foetus that was banned in 2000 – the authorities moved in and all independent shows surrounding the 2002 Biennale had to be inspected in advance. But by 2004 the satellite exhibitions seemed to be flourishing once more.

This year, many of the museums, galleries and art spaces in the city offer exciting, alternative exhibitions that contrast with the bureaucratic air pervading the official Biennale at the Shanghai Art Museum.

The Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA) Shanghai's Entry Gate: Chinese Aesthetics of Heterogeneity opened one day after the official event on September 5 and is easily the most attractive exhibition in town. Curated by the gallery's creative director, Victoria Lu, collector Uli Sigg, artist and curator Ye Yongqing and Sun-hee Kim of Tokyo's Mori Art Museum, it features works by more than 60 artists and explores the relationship between Chinese traditions and the modern language of aesthetics.

MoCA Shanghai, in Renmin Park near the Shanghai Art Museum, plans to present a biannual Envisage exhibition to coincide with the biennale. Director Samuel Kung says it plans to use the exhibition "as a foundation for continuous research and reflection on the diversity and development of Chinese contemporary art".

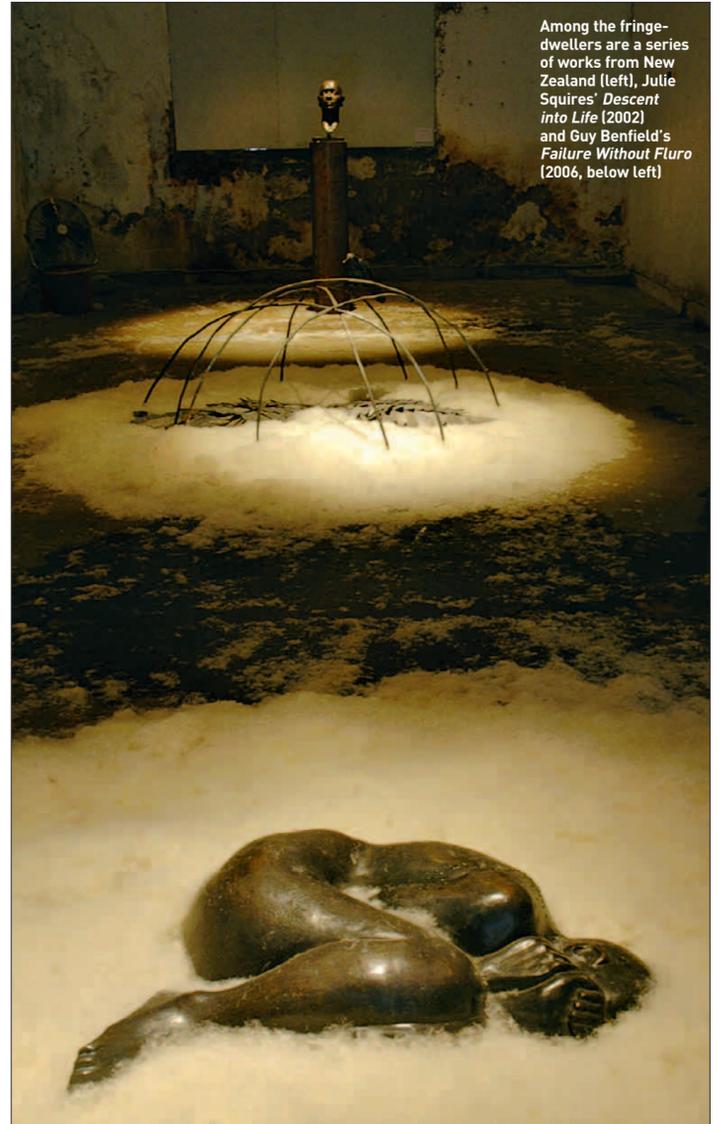
Over in the contemporary art hub at the Moganshan compound, one of the highlights is again at Eastlink Gallery. This year its satellite offering, Extension Turn, is slightly bizarre, but visually arresting – what curator Thomas Eller describes as "snapshots of a range of expansive situations from both the artistic and scientific points of view".

The show is accompanied by a catalogue juxtaposing the works of the 27 participating artists from China and Austria with articles contributed by scientists from a range of disciplines, including quantum physics, neurology and zoology.

At the neighbouring Island 6 Arts Centre, Less Travelled is presented as the concluding exhibition of the Artist Links China programme, a joint project between Arts Council England and the British Council that has encouraged cultural exchanges between China and Britain for the past four years. The works include Anna Bog-

"This is a city festival – a time for the whole of Shanghai to show its best"

Victoria Lu
MoCA gallery director



Among the fringe-dwellers are a series of works from New Zealand (left), Julie Squires' *Descent into Life* (2002) and Guy Benfield's *Failure Without Fluro* (2006, below left)



soundbites

You're an authority on Chinese art history and have supported Hong Kong having its own Chinese ink museum. With the government deciding on museums for the West Kowloon Cultural District, do you think there is still a need?

Professor Michael Sullivan:

"One issue is: what should [a proposed ink museum] contain? And the second is: should it be a separate institution or part of a proven museum?"

"I don't know the Hong Kong situation, but my view is that, ideally, it should be a separate institution. If not, then it's better to have it under a bigger umbrella. But it should be in a separate building within a complex, not just a separate floor. Then it has its own identity."

"The other issue is how much historical depth it has. There's

talk about an emphasis on people's love of contemporary art, but surely the point about the Chinese brush and ink is that it is deeply rooted in the culture. The museum should certainly make that point.

"I don't think modern contemporary should be separated from the rest. It's a continuous story."



How much can an Asian male bare? Not quite enough for Norm

There's more to some of his new exhibition than meets the eye, writes David Evans – but sometimes they're just cute guys

Like many great discoveries, some of the photographs in Norm Yip's forthcoming exhibition *Skin Deep* came about by accident.

Sitting in his Sheung Wan office-cum-studio-cum-home, the Saskatchewan-native says that when he was cleaning blemishes off some nude male shots, he found that by playing with the features of his digital photography software he was able to add a grainy and pixelated surface. In doing so, he created a texture that adds depth to the shots and is further accentuated by their large-scale, light-box presentation.

He indicates the texture in one of the charcoal prints that hangs on his studio wall, and says that people have sat and stared at it for hours. It's this kind of captivation that he's trying to recreate with his photographs.

"I want people to question whether we can see beyond beauty," says the 43-year-old

former architect, who includes wedding photographer and artist on his CV. "I want to enhance that quality, but go deeper into the image and engage the viewer. Large-scale work has been done many times before, but big is captivating and it draws people closer. If you look, the surface is like little islands on the skin – another world. The outcome is a geographic map of the body in a colourful way."

Those familiar with Yip's artistic photography will know that black-and-white images of well-toned, young Asian males are his stock-in-trade in his quest to show a wider audience what he sees as the reality behind Asian beauty. A visit to his website's guestbook proves he's not the only one (male or female) with that view, as does the success of his book *The Asian Male* – I.A.M.

For this latest exhibition, which opened yesterday, Yip has

branched out with some abstract shots – a new departure. Of the dozen or so shots, at least half are manipulated images of males shot against a black background and with heavy use of shadow. The results are a series of disembodied torsos, many mimicking the poses of classic Renaissance sculptures, but with a hue and texture that take the viewer beyond titillation.

This foray into abstraction and manipulation may go some way to answering the question in the press release for *Skin Deep* – "Could there be more than meets the eye?" – in the affirmative. But the response from the other half dozen pictures is a resounding: no". The black-and-white studies of models from Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong suggest that Yip still isn't ready to let go of his roots.

"The exhibition presents a certain view and how people take that in is up to them," he says. "I didn't have an agenda. I wasn't going to show the world that Asian people are beautiful. I just got this itch. I need to show something to people. Every time I saw a face [in the photograph], I didn't get the need to [add the texture]. If the

body is more towards abstraction and the model is comfortable with it, I move away from personalities.

"I tried photographing two models together, but they weren't comfortable with touching each other – you can see it in the pictures. They'd be good for an exhibition on betrayal and cheating, but not for this one."

Yip's mission remains, for now at least, to raise the profile of the Asian male as a thing of beauty. He hopes this will help boost the confidence of Asian men, both in Hong Kong and abroad. He says, for instance, that finding a Hong Kong Chinese model was like pulling teeth without anaesthetic.

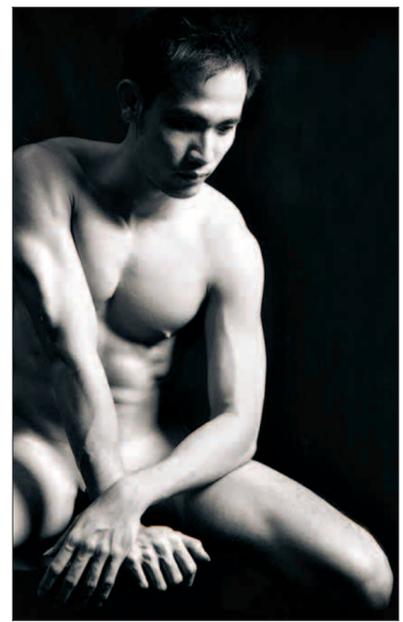
Even among the professional models, and fitness coaches and fanatics he uses from around the region, there's still a reluctance to bare. "There was one model, Amin – his girlfriend introduced him to me. He loves his body, but he put his shirt straight back on after the shoot," says Yip.

And although male visitors to the exhibition are unlikely to feel the need to rip off their shirts and run into the street, Yip's photos offer a hint of what might lie beyond the simple homoerotic



images that fuel a gay fantasy of the Asian male – although Yip says he may have a way to go to before he breaks the stereotype. "Some gay friends I have say: 'Norm, if you move towards abstraction, you're not going to sell. We just want to see more cute guys.'"

Skin Deep, Baileys at the Fringe, Fringe Club, Lower Albert Road, Central. Inquiries: 2521 7251. Ends Sept 28



"I want people to question whether we can see beyond beauty," Norm Yip says of his latest exhibition, *Skin Deep*

Shanghai curators with support from dozens of foundations and sponsors on the mainland and overseas. Artists were challenged by local conditions and, in many cases, had to adapt and improvise their work to the limited resources provided.

Although the project is decidedly alternative, the exhibition includes Shanghai Biennale participant Guan Huaibin and other high-profile Chinese artists represented by the Shanghai Art gallery. Some brought ready-made work, while others attempted to engage with the site and locals.

Australian artist Danus Kesminas presented a punk-dada-absurdist performance with Shanghaiese all-girl band the Happy Endings, which was rehearsed in a week in an abandoned nuclear shelter and featured the band performing in military garb. Fellow artist and curator Richard Thomas also used a local singer, who wore an opera mask and performed atop a three-metre high pile of pig manure adorned with lights and piggy banks in his work *New Gold Mountain*.

Four Japanese artists performed a complex work that involved projections, traditional dance, melancholic references to nihilistic playwright Yukio Mishima, cycles of destruction and the temple rites of ancient Japan.

The second edition of the Duolun Muse-

um's satellite show, Duolun Exhibition of Young Artists, satirises the official style of shows and biennales with its title and allows visitors to vote on the exhibited works.

A Yellow Box in Qingpu: Contemporary Art and Architecture in a Chinese Space – organised by the Chinese Academy of Art and located in the canal town of Qingpu, 45 minutes away from Shanghai – includes works by more than 40 Chinese and international artists and architects and aims to investigate issues of contemporary art in response to architecture and space. Participants in this project include Hong Kong artists Leung Chi-wo and Pak Sheung-chuen.

Reconciliation between the official biennale and the satellite events has become vital and viable. Artists and curators in the city are optimistic that the government will start to recognise the importance of diverse cultural events organised during the time of the Biennale.

"The true meaning of an international biennale is to bring attention to its host city," says Lu. "This is a city festival – a time for the whole of Shanghai to show its best."

Ends Nov 5. For details, go to shanghai-biennale.com

■ Biennale special – see *Post Magazine*