

Beijing Minsheng Art Museum



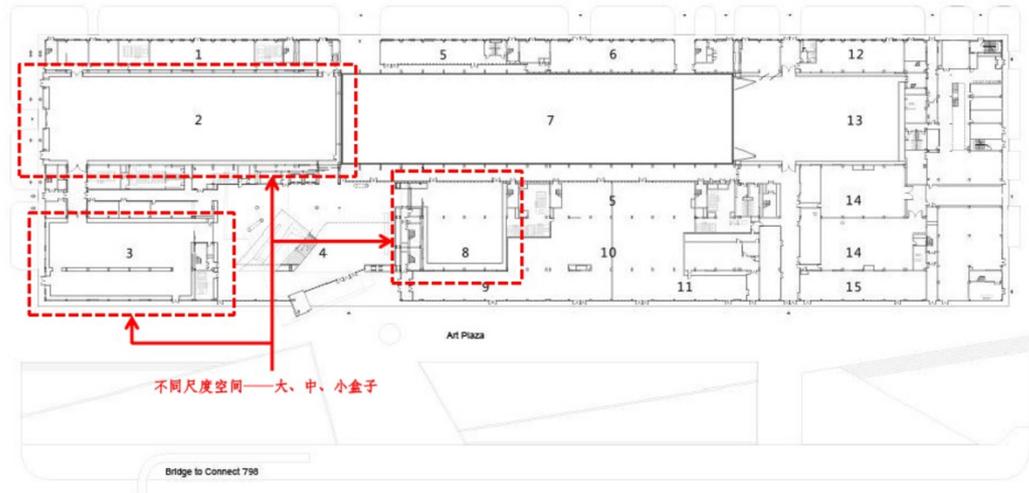
Diversity of the architectural form of Beijing Minsheng Art Museum

Introduction

Minsheng Art Museum is sponsored and funded by the China Minsheng Banking Corporation, which is a non-profit organisation mainly establishing various types of activities that engage in art. It is also the first public welfare organisation within the context of financial institutions in Mainland China. It is based on the study of Chinese modern and contemporary art. It has an international perspective, closely reflecting the trend and the status of Chinese contemporary art, and actively promoting the communication and cooperation between Chinese contemporary art and international cutting-edge art. Minsheng Art Museum will collect and exhibit outstanding artworks from both in and out of China; it also promotes different forms of international communications to support the academic research. Meanwhile, Minsheng Art Museum conducts multiple forms of educational programmes of art and aesthetics for the public. In addition, Minsheng Art Museum also provides a report room, VIP room, literature-based reading room, art book shop and Café for visitors to enjoy in their spare time. All the visitors will be provided with the most user-friendly convenience and plenty of art education resources.

Beijing Minsheng Art Museum was established in 2012 and opened to the public in 2015. Occupying 35,000 square metres floorage and an 8,200 square metre exhibition area, it is located in Universal Creative Park, right next to the most famous contemporary art epicentre 798 Art District. The whole creative park was based on an industrial district appointed by China's previous leader Deng Xiaoping. The future art museum is not the temple palace for successful artists anymore, but more for interaction among the public, artworks and artists. The art museum space is not for displaying art anymore but for creating art, and the triumph of the achievement of an artwork is the moment when the audience get involved in its context. The arts, the public and the art museum as a whole will be the future space for art creation and appreciation.

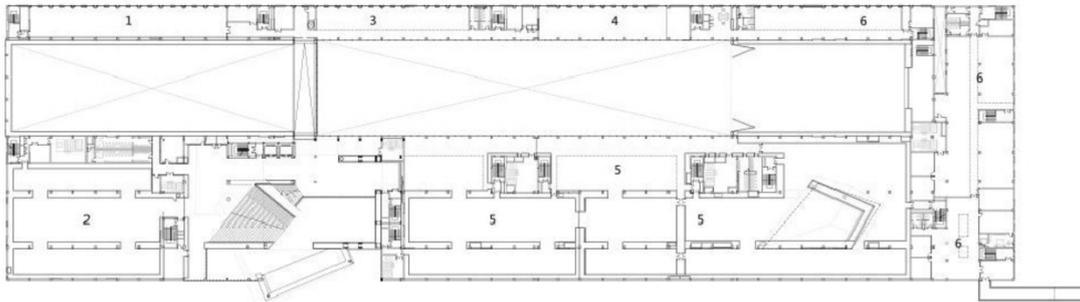
The museum building now is designed by architect Zhu Pei, and the museum design consultant is Thomas Krens the previous president of Guggenheim Foundation. Minsheng Art Museum thus derives in an 80's industrial location, bringing a new atmosphere of publicity, flexibility and modernity to alter the conventional art museum set. The Minsheng Art Museum is in a flexible, diversified and abstract architectural style constructed with several irregular box exhibition spaces, blending the abstraction, contemporary visual effect and the free spirit of the art imagination together. The museum is adaptable to various challenging curatorial compositions and associating conferences, public events and forums.



Level 1

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|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Artist Studio 艺术家工作室 | 6 VIP VIP室 | 11 Restaurant 餐厅 |
| 2 Big Box 大盒子空间 | 7 Courtyard 中心庭院 | 12 Dressing 更衣室 |
| 3 Medium Box 中盒子空间 | 8 Small Box 小盒子空间 | 13 Black Box 黑盒子空间 |
| 4 Lobby 大厅 | 9 Design Bookstore 设计书店 | 14 Art Storage 艺术品库房 |
| 5 Cafe 咖啡厅 | 10 Art Bank 艺术银行 | 15 Film Shop 电影商店 |

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Level 2

- | |
|---------------------------|
| 1 Conference 会议室 |
| 2 Calligraphy Gallery 书法廊 |
| 3 Archi Library 建筑图书馆 |
| 4 VIP Dining VIP餐厅 |
| 5 Perfect Gallery 完美画廊 |
| 6 Office 办公室 |

0 5 10 20 m

Diversity of the interior space and functions of the Museum: floor 1 & 2 plan

Interview

The interview with the Beijing Minsheng Art Museum was conducted in this esteemed space of diversification, it is an honour to listen to the wise and farsighted views from the director Zhou Xujun.

Q: What are some of the most rewarding elements from the extensive art programmes Minsheng Bank is undertaking?

A: The core ambition of Beijing Minsheng Art Museum is to objectively represent the history of Chinese contemporary art, to sum up the developing tendency and achievement of the contemporary art world, to promote young artists, and to collaborate and communicate with international contemporary art institutions, foundations and authorities. I hope the Minsheng Art Museum can shape a new atmosphere for China's art eco-system.

"Post-sense Sensibility", "Revolutionary Evolution in Rotary Way: Xia Xiaowan's Solo Exhibition *Rotation*", "Civil Power", for example, are some of the exciting projects held in Beijing Minsheng Art Museum during the past year. For a new art museum in its first year open to the public, it is only a start as we are ambitious, foreseeing and responsible for the future of Chinese contemporary art. The publicity of an art museum lays the responsibility of the current era to us and our goal decided that our museum events must be purposeful and foreseeing in the art scene. In the past year, our achievement in art exhibitions, artist forums and events must be judged by the public, the art lovers and professionals. From my view, our museum in the past year has met the demands of a diversified, open-minded and dynamic art space of the public.

Q: You outline that the Minsheng Museum programmes are for the public and for learning but do you also take advantage of the opportunities to hold corporate events utilising the museums and the collection? If so, do you feel that it has brought you closer to your clients and even prospective clients?

A: Minsheng Art Museum has been conducting multiple approaches including exhibitions, academic forums, research conferences to study the art history and development of Chinese contemporary art. We do research, collections, exhibitions, education to generate Chinese art. Of course, we also pay close attention to the young artists, trying to cooperate with international art organisations. We want to be professional, international, quality oriented and foreseeing as a comprehensive art museum. The current implications and functions of the art museums are experiencing fundamental changes from simple exhibiting and collecting spaces to social public spaces. This is a global trend, and particularly an inner demand of China's open society.

As a museum we are facing the public. China's public in this new era demand an ideal art space as their stage, living room and temple for engaging with, talking to, living in and worshipping the arts; it becomes a challenge but also an opportunity for our museum team. For our museum, the most important thing in this art-for-publicity context is to establish a unique brand with an integrity of characteristics, styles and tastes. The opening exhibition "Civil Power" has well-presented our brand: "civil" itself is a system continuously generating meanings and values, a system providing imperative resources to the museum to reconstruct the contemporary art, a system of fresh dimensions and perspectives for researching the history of Chinese contemporary art.

Q: One of M21's main aims is to shape the contemporary and the cultural landscape of the new era— what are some of the key observations of this new era thus far? Can you feel a shift or is it too early?

A: The Chinese private museum system has been developing for almost 30 years. The long-term development is the focal consideration of any private museum. Since last year's opening exhibition "Civil Power", it has been proved that the development of private museums in China is coherent with the whole society's openness and advancement. Thus, the future of the art museum to a large extent is associated with the future of our society.

Q: Roughly what percentage of artworks in the whole collection are Western artworks? I know it is important that they have a connection with China – can this be through the artists' physical or emotional connection to the country and also the fact that the artists have inspired many future Chinese artists? What are some of the key examples?

A: Some of our collections are presented in the past exhibitions. In terms of the exhibition, Beijing Minsheng Art Museum has various collaborations with national museums of many countries, such as the National Museum of India and China-France Culture Year series exhibitions. Apart from the opening exhibition, we have held the "Exhibition of Annual of Contemporary Art of China-2014" and "-2015", "Permanence and Impermanence: New Works of Zhang Dali" "Clues. 3" "Thirty Years of Body Art Performance Happening Project: Art Documents" "Upon This Anguish I Repose: Xiang Jing 1995-2011" "Hong Kong-Macau Visual Art Biennale 2016" "One Comes to All Things: Minsheng Art Museum One-year Anniversary Exhibition" "International Video Collection" "Cai Guohe Solo Exhibition" etc. We held international conferences along with these exhibitions to discuss the art spirits as well as case studies in contemporary art eco-system. We aim to promote the thoughts, communication and academic development. Seen from the last year of Minsheng Art Museum, we are on our path in building the brand, identity and ideal in academic research and exhibition system.

Q: One of your core beliefs is that artworks are the best annotations of our times. Thus, can you show challenging and controversial works? Artworks which perhaps show these darker and more combative themes and approaches to art making? Or do you always have to apply a filter to some degree? Do you find this challenging? Does a degree of censorship inevitably have to take place?

A: Beijing Minsheng Art Museum, M21 Shanghai, and Shanghai Minsheng Art Museum are all sponsored by China Minsheng Bank. The bank is the most important supporter in financial development for years. The collection of our museums is the major part of our spending, and it is also our major function as an art museum. We have already built up a considerable quality and quantity of artworks, including those from previous exhibitions, museum purchases and donations from artists, public and collectors.

China's economy and society has driven and will constantly promote the development of art, culture and social charity. Thus, the private museums are facing a bright and open future. In reality, although we are facing many difficulties such as insufficiency of national funds, of policy supports, of social consciousness in art charity, such as the immaturity of mechanism in China's museum community. But in the long term, along with the development of the society, I am optimistic of China's private museums, the future is bright. In the current economic context, the operation pressure of a private museum is huge.

Q: China completed its five-year plan to build 3,500 museums three years early and between 2008 and 2013 an average of two new museums were constructed every day. Now the figure is around one a day. Due to the sheer volume and amount of activity

do you feel that you are in competition with these museums? Are you open to collaborative projects and cross fertilisation or do you have to focus on being your own entity representing the bank?

A: We cooperate with artists, galleries, academies, museums and institutions. Also, we have commercial collaborations. The principle for the cooperation is maintaining the brand value. The short-term benefits are not in consideration as we are disciplined to the museum reputation. The potential of collaboration between art museums and commercial businesses is huge, which is a challenging project that we are exploring. As a form of IP, the art museum can shape a win-win with commercial businesses; thus we are cooperating with top fashion brands in some events. Minsheng Art Museum is a public space, we provide a high quality and dynamic social environment for stimulating participants' creativity and imagination. We want the expansion of an integrity of knowledge, emotions and values. Art museums nowadays have an enormous function as a space of "creating dreams", qualified cooperation in diversified forms is spontaneous for private museums in current society. In the upcoming new year of our development in Minsheng Art Museum, we will focus on the history and progress of Chinese contemporary art to promote in-depth and insightful academic research, curatorial projects, public education and media dialogues. More attention will be paid to public education, Fan space, and MS children park for fine art education. Various collaborations will be operated, we aim to bond art and finance to build a balance between academic proficiency and commerce value.

Q: Since your entering into the art world, has your idea towards contemporary art changed?

A: Before stepping into the arts, I had an idealistic understanding of China's contemporary art scene. For me, contemporary art meant pioneer culture which gets involved in reality life through visual forms. Contemporary art shapes an ideal and better society with critical thinking; contemporary artists represent this criticality and spirit. But now I view it more realistically: there are indeed many good artists and artworks which have touched and enlightened me deeply; but I realise that the artists are also part of this normal society as individuals, they need to survive in this material world. Thus, compared to the western art world which is more systematic and mature, China's contemporary art needs a reasonable system (or "field") to protect the validity (or legality) of itself. So my current view of Chinese contemporary art is based on the system, in which the artists pursue their art spirits; in the meanwhile, this system naturally must involve operations of its authority, realistic values and images, as long as it plays the game within the regulation.

Q: What is the biggest challenge being the director of Minsheng Art Museum? What is the biggest advantage?

A: The challenge is the administration and management of the museum. It is a shared challenge for almost all the private museum directors. It involves the funding, team building, and business expansion. They are not at all an easy job for private museums. Of course, the Minsheng Bank has been a strong supporter for our museum to seek more possibilities. The biggest advantage for me is the management. I am not a professional art historian. My previous field for a long time was in academic management, so when it comes to building and managing a team, choosing projects, shaping platforms for professional talents, balancing the team and external collaborators, and effectively operating projects, I can put my ideas and experience into use. An art museum as a cultural institution needs systematic management to develop.

Q: What do you think of the future of China's private museums? What is necessary for a private museum to keep a healthy development?

A: There has been a phenomena of survival of the fittest in the past decades of the development of China's private museums. But in a macro scene, the museum is advancing consistently with the society. As long as China's overall economy keeps an upward developing tendency, the culture, art and charity will continuously progress. There will be some difficulties for new museums to expand, but the potential is enormous. From the perspective of management, it is important for a private art museum to build its brand. In this extremely diversified society and an era of massive fragmentation of information, the public has more freedom and various preferences in cultural life. Building an art & culture brand is imperative for competitiveness. The brand should represent quality, uniqueness and taste. For any private art museum, the brand is vital for it to compete with other museums, especially the state-owned ones. More social resources and supports decide the future of private art museums.

Additionally, private museums need to establish the concept of "public space". Art museums derived from the western society and transformed from an exhibition place to a diverse interaction space. China's private museums have more autonomy than state-owned museums, so the "public space" can be better formed by us. We want to be a leader in this identity transformation of the art museum, to build public space for our visitors. So for a private museum to keep a healthy development, it is necessary to engage in professional talents, to manage effective departments, to curate various events with an international version and dynamic operation.

Practically, the executive proficiency in many detailed issues is important for museum development. Academic, commercial and public educational features, as well as exhibitions, collections, security and visitor experiences should all be thought through. For the visitors, the satisfaction of experience in an art museum is highly bonded to the quality of all these details. Only the perfection in details through professional execution can give value to the art museum.