

Mascha Mioni – My two months stay in China

Exhibition at the China National Silk Museum, Hangzhou
10-day trip with Textile Artists and Textile Specialists
Artist in Residence at the JinZe Arts Center for 1 month

This is a report on how I was inspired and what I did out of it at JinZe Arts Center and not very informative on how to handle Artists in Residence.

The setting and freedom I had were optimal for me. Based upon our mutual experience I hope the management of JZAC got a better feeling on what it has to specify and what it can expect from future Artists in Residence and what possibilities it sees for them.

It is a great opportunity to get to know a new culture, a new country and new people during a longer stay and to be confronted with foreign customs and values. Not only to develop views obtained by hear-say, but to experience everything and let it sink in.

Staying at JinZe Art Center as Artist in Residence gave me the opportunity to implement my feelings right on the spot. The close contact with the residents was important to me. Thanks to their openness and warmth this took place under optimal, cheerful conditions.

Without giving it much thought, but discovering my surroundings with open eyes, I did what I already did at home in Switzerland for a lifetime: using my hands as tools to try to express something that you can not put into words.

Upon our arrival in China the first thing that overwhelmed me was the Chinese writing! Everywhere characters that I could not decipher. Very fast you realize, that this means, you can not move far on your own! Not being able to read village and street names is quite problematic!

After the initial shock, I adjusted myself to this new situation and enjoyed and marveled at the beautiful, aesthetic characters the Chinese use for communicating. Those are all small pictures, small works of art! I could not get enough and admired the characters on every large billboard! A seal-maker offered to engrave my name in stone; I took the opportunity and was proud to have a picture of my name! I should only need to know what's the top and what's the bottom ... but this problem arose only later ...

The fascination with the characters probably induced my first artistic expressions of the host country. It raised my desire to try out ink and brush. It was very fortunate, that not only a wonderful calligraphy room from the old days could be used, but also a young JinZe employee could introduce me to this fine art. But I quickly discarded all the necessary discipline and - using the traditional tools - let my creativity run free Thus my ink drawings were created!

A new phase began when the calligraphy-room ceased to be at my disposal, because it was renovated and I had to re-orient myself. I still was occupied with my identification through characters and I am grateful to fate that it led me back to an obvious personal mark: the fingerprint. The inconspicuous proof that every human being is really unique! So I planted more than 5000 fingerprints on paper and made pictures and formed sculptures out of it. I thank the management of JinZe Arts Center for giving me totally free hand for my activities. This is also how the eleven meter long ladder came to be from the discarded rice-straw, that was rotting in the garden. It is to me a symbol of higher, higher, higher, step by step up

towards a target until it will go no further in my work, because the apex is coming and in life, because the end of life's journey is approaching.

During a stroll through near-by JinZe town I discovered a basket filled with white, fluffy cottonballs! For the first time in my life I saw the small balls with the seed from which the precious cotton came from. The shopkeeper gave me a plastic bag full of it as a present and the saleswomen of the next shop that we passed, showed me that this was not only cotton, but that I had to separate the fluff from the seeds it surrounded ... (now slowly also communication without words began to function). Separating the cotton from the seeds can teach to have respect for something that nature gives us and is worn by the entire world population on the body. I can not say much more about the origin of this installation. An ode to the wonderful product of nature: cotton!

When we went to eat at the canteen, the black bottoms of the soup-pan would always be put on a cotton cloth to keep the table clean. Fascinated by the black and grey shades of this cloth I asked the cook to give it to me and he additionally scraped the soot from the bottom of the other pans to give me more "dye". Together with black bricks in the courtyard, paper and red fingerprints I turned his cotton cloth to the work Phoenix – the bird that rose from the ashes, somewhat like JZAC is built out of the old decaying industrial buildings.

Not knowing what might inspire me at JZAC, I prepared some shibori-silk work in Switzerland to make dresses from, the two "Dresses for a JinZE-Girl".

I am extremely pleased that my work can be crowned with an exhibition. The encounter with the many dozen persons working at JinZe Arts Center will be unforgettable for me. I go back to my small mountainous homecountry Switzerland with the confidence that faraway there is a terrific nation full of wonderful people that calls itself the Middle Kingdom.



Dresses
for a
JinZe-Girl

Fotos:
Fung Leung
Pan, JinZe
Arts Center,
Shanghai

