NORTH BUND: A NEW BENCHMARK FOR *CONTEMPORARY LIFESTYLE AESTHETICS IN SHANGHAI*

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Abstract: This article serves as the preface to the album Rendez-Vous at North Bund. Since 2021, C.V. CHANNEL and the Publicity Department of the CPC Hongkou District Committee of Shanghai have jointly built the cultural and tourism project brand Rendez-Vous at North Bund. It includes art exhibitions, video column recordings, artist residencies, field trips, and salons. The artworks cover Chinese painting, calligraphy, seal carving, oil painting, watercolor, pastel, illustration, sculpture, ceramics, and other forms. The themes include Fall in Love with the North Bund, Set Sail from the North Bund, See the World with Broad Vision, The World Views China, Celebrate the Spring Festival in Museums, Ride the Wind and Waves to Set a New Course, among others. This book collects masterpieces selected from the previous Rendez-Vous at North Bund art exhibitions, created by more than 100 Chinese and foreign artists. Rendez-Vous at North Bund has built an international platform for exchanges between Chinese and foreign artists, opened an important window for the world to see China and for China to see the world, and represents an ingenious creation that brings art into urban public life. It reflects the new changes brought by reform and opening-up to the contemporary Chinese lifestyle.

Since I came to Shanghai for postgraduate studies in 1987, I have lived and worked here for several decades. Had it not been for my participation in Rendez-Vous at the North Bund art exhibition organized by C.V. CHANNEL, I might still not have known about "North Bund" in Shanghai today.

C.V. CHANNEL is a communication platform supported by China Digital TV channels, integrating the advantages of new media and committed to promoting classic Chinese culture while combining art and tourism. Its operating entity is the Shanghai Center of China Digital TV Traditional Chinese Culture Channel. Since 2021, it has, together with the Publicity Department of the CPC Hongkou District Committee of Shanghai, jointly built the cultural and tourism project brand Rendez-Vous at North Bund. The project includes art exhibitions, recorded video columns, artist residencies, field trips, and salons. The artworks cover Chinese painting, calligraphy, seal carving, oil painting, watercolor, pastel painting, illustration, sculpture, ceramics, and other forms. Participating artists come from all over China and around the world. Themed events include Fall in Love with the North Bund, Set Sail from the North Bund, See the World with Broad Vision, The World Views China, Celebrate the Spring Festival in Museums, Ride the Wind and Waves to Set a New Course, among others. This book selects and compiles works by more than 100 artists, featuring outstanding pieces from the previous Rendez-Vous at North Bund art exhibitions. They are precious records of the historical footprint left by the sincere cooperation and joint efforts of C.V. CHANNEL, the Hongkou District Committee, and Chinese and foreign artists over the past five years.

The development of Rendez-Vous' brand at North Bund was based on solid preliminary groundwork. On December 24, 2018, with the support of the Hongkou District Committee, C.V. CHANNEL held the first Essence of Chinese Art Famous Shanghai-style Painting, Calligraphy and Seal Carving Exhibition at Shanghai White Magnolia Plaza, launched a TV col-

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umn, and held the inauguration ceremony of C.V. CHANNEL Art Institute. On December 31, 2019, the first Bright Moon Over the Sea National Oil Painting Masters Invitational Exhibition was held, and a TV column was launched. On January 18, 2020, a forum on life aesthetics and applied aesthetics was held. On April 20, 2020, the Promise of Great Scholars National Invitational Exhibition of North-South Flower-and-Bird Painting Masters was held. In May 2020, production began on the Twenty-Four Solar Terms video column, which was broadcast on China Digital TV's Traditional Chinese Culture Channel on New Year's Eve, January 31, 2022. From December 2020 to May 2021, the first Fall in Love with the North Bund Chinese Painting Masters Sketching and Creation Activity was continuously held, and the Fall in Love with the North Bund TV column was produced in advance. The holding of these events laid important groundwork for the launch of the flagship brand in 2021, focusing on the North Bund.

On June 17, 2021, the Essence of Chinese Art – Fall in Love with the North Bund TOP Invitational Exhibition was held grandly at the Sky Hall on Level L of White Magnolia Plaza. This marked the debut of the North Bund cultural and tourism brand. In November 2021, a series of events for the 2nd Fall in Love with the North Bund National Oil Painting Masters Sketching and Creation Exhibition were held. In 2022, during Shanghai's most severe lockdown, offline art exhibitions were suspended. C.V. CHANNEL launched the online series Poetic Sentiment and Artistic Conception, featuring more than 300 classic episodes that brought spiritual comfort to people suffering during the pandemic, allowing the audience to embark on a journey through poetry, painting, recitation, and music. On September 21, 2024, the Fall in Love with the North Bund International Watercolor and Oil Painting Masters Exhibition was grandly held. In addition to White Magnolia Plaza as the main venue, exhibitions were held at the Shanghai Mansion, the China Securities Museum, the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum, and the Former Site of the League of Left-Wing Writers. In January 2024, the series of special Spring Festival programs, Celebrate the Spring Festival in Museums, was launched, inviting watercolor, Chinese, oil, and silk painters to create special programs. As a social aesthetic education initiative to bring art to life, classic art was officially installed at the China Securities Museum. On February 22, 2024, the launching ceremony of Rendez-Vous at North Bund "World Meeting Salon", an upgraded version of Fall in Love with the North Bund, was held. Artists from more than 20 countries sent congratulatory messages, hoping to build an international platform for cultural and artistic exchange at the North Bund, bring together artists from various countries for in-depth exchanges, encourage more international artists to fall in love with the North Bund, and help Chinese artists go global.

During the 2024 Labor Day holiday, the second season of Rendez-Vous at North Bund "World Meeting Salon" arrived as scheduled, and the C. V. CHANNEL Art Center was officially opened to the public at the Pujiang Hotel. Representative works by 100 famous artists in six art categories – Chinese painting, calligraphy, seal carving, printmaking, watercolor, and oil painting – were presented to the public. During the 2024 Mid-Autumn Festival and National Day holiday, the third season of Rendez-Vous at North Bund, "World Meeting Salon," was held at White Magnolia Plaza, and the art space of the C. V. CHANNEL Art Center there was officially opened to the public. From January 21 to February 28, 2025, the special Spring Festival program Celebrate the Spring Festival in Museums – Master Open Classes was held. On the Lantern Festival, February 12, 2025, the launch ceremony for the series Ride the Wind and Waves to Set a New Course was held grandly. From March 31 to April 5, 2025, on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Italy, the Rendez-Vous at North Bund International Artist Residency Program – "Engraved Memories, Dreams Between East and West" series was splendidly launched. On April 25 and 26, 2025, artistic charm by the Danube met Shanghai-style charm by the Huang-

pu River, as Austrian artists and Chinese poets visited Hongkou, Shanghai, to start a field trip, depicting a splendid picture of the integration of Eastern and Western cultures with artistic brushstrokes. On September 9, 2025, the Rendez-Vous at North Bund International Contemporary Print Exhibition opened. On December 31, 2025, the inaugural Rendez-Vous at North Bund International Artists Residency and Field Trip Masterpiece Exhibition opened.

From 2021 to 2025, amid the pressures of the pandemic and economic downturn, the organizers, with indomitable will, rich creativity and diverse themes, have built Rendez-Vous at North Bund into an international platform for exchanges between Chinese and foreign artists and an important window for the world to see China and China to see the world, greatly enhancing the visibility of the "North Bund" in Shanghai, across China and internationally.

The Bund in Huangpu District is the iconic symbol of Shanghai. Home to the iconic International Architecture Complex on the Bund and the bustling Nanjing Road Shopping Street, it is widely known as "a landmark known to everyone under heaven". Yet few may know that to the northwest of the confluence of the Huangpu River and Suzhou Creek, in Hongkou District, lies North Bund, a riverside area with equally unique and unmissable scenery. Here stands Waibaidu Bridge, the final gateway where the Suzhou Creek empties into the Huangpu River; here winds the enchanting golden waterfront, perfect for leisurely strolls and lingering moments; here sits the Shanghai International Passenger Terminal, now a harbor for international cruise ships; here you find the "the Best Viewing Spot of the Pujiang River"——Shanghai Mansion Observation Deck; and here stands White Magnolia Plaza, the tallest skyscraper in Puxi, whose L-level sky hall offers a panoramic overlook of the Bund's architectural complex. Together with the Bund and Lujiazui, North Bund forms Shanghai's "Golden Triangle," creating a striking, three-pronged urban skyline.

North Bund boasts not only exceptional geographical advantages but also unparalleled historical and cultural heritage. It is home to 48 historic protected buildings, blending Gothic, Art Deco, Modernist, and Eclectic architectural styles—living fossils of modern and contemporary Sino-Western architectural exchange. Here lies the site of Huishan Wharf, from which early Chinese Communists set sail to study in France; here stands Shanghai General Post Office Building, hailed as the "Far East's Grandest Hall" and the cradle of modern Chinese postal services; here stands Astor House Hotel, China's first Western-style hotel, where world-renowned figures such as Albert Einstein and Charlie Chaplin once stayed. It was here that China's first telephone was connected, its first electric light was lit, the first Western semi-sound open-air film was screened, and the first Chinese ballroom dance was held. The League of Left-Wing Writers was founded here, where Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Ding Ling, and others created their literary masterpieces.

This land, rich in profound historical and cultural heritage, was praised by General Secretary Xi Jinping as "the birthplace of Shanghai-style culture, the source of advanced culture, and a gathering place for cultural celebrities". My greatest gain from participating in the creation of the Rendez-Vous at North Bund brand is rediscovering and fully appreciating the geographical, historical, and humanistic beauty of North Bund—beauty I had previously only partially understood, or even overlooked, failing to honor its splendor.

Rendez-Vous at North Bund brings outstanding works by Chinese and international artists into bustling modern public spaces. Through immersive experiences, art exhibitions extend into communities, campuses, office buildings, and venues, adorning and illuminating daily life. In the context of global and Chinese contemporary aesthetic trends, this can be regarded as a masterstroke of "the aestheticization of everyday life" or "life aesthetics". The concept of "the aestheticization of everyday life" was first proposed by British sociologist Mike Featherstone in his keynote speech of the same name at the Popular Culture Association Conference in New Orleans in April 1988. It refers to the social phenomenon in modern Western developed countries where art permeates daily life, life is filled with art, and the divide between life and art is bridged. In 1990, he further analyzed this phenomenon in his book *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. In 1997, German aesthetician Wolfgang Welsch revisited this widespread aestheticization in his book *Undoing Aesthetics*, calling for aesthetics to

transcend its traditional boundaries and establish an "aesthetics without aesthetics" capable of explaining this phenomenon. At the beginning of this century, having achieved basic material prosperity, the Chinese people began to aspire to a "beautiful life". The concept of "the aestheticization of everyday life," introduced by Western scholars, was later taken up by Chinese scholars, including Tao Dongfeng. In my view, "the aestheticization of everyday life" essentially means "the beautification of everyday life" (Qi, 2016, p. 374). Art is a vital form of beauty, and "the beautification of everyday life" in effect means "the artification of everyday life". A good life is not merely about food and shelter; it also requires "poetry and distant lands". Thus, the theory of "life aesthetics," centered on the artification of life, was proposed by scholars such as Liu Yuedi and has become a distinctive landscape in contemporary Chinese aesthetics. The emergence of "the beautification of everyday life" and "life aesthetics" in contemporary China can be seen both as the spread of Western theories in China and as a theoretical response by Chinese scholars to the reality of prosperous Chinese people pursuing a better life after decades of reform and opening-up.

After decades of reform and opening up, China has achieved tremendous economic progress. In 2010, China's GDP surpassed Japan's, making it the world's second-largest economy. This laid a solid material foundation for the emergence of "the aestheticization of everyday life" and the pursuit of "life aesthetics" in contemporary Chinese society. Shanghai stands as the vanguard of reform and opening-up, and its "Golden Triangle"—including North Bund—best embodies the economic achievements of reform and opening-up, as well as the new face of "the beautification of everyday life" and "life aesthetics." It is precisely in this sense of "art entering public life" as "Comprehensive Aesthetic Education" that Rendez-Vous at North Bund has made significant contributions—and its future potential is boundless!

The tide surges at North Bund, and the wind fills the sails. Standing at a new historical starting point, North Bund is committed to becoming a new cultural benchmark for Shanghai, an international metropolis. Colleagues, let us unite, work hand in hand, and strive together to create greater glory!

(Translated by Hu Jun, Shanghai Academy of the Social Sciences)

Reference

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