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THE FREEZE ART FAIR

BEAUTIFUL, EPHEMERAL AND READY TO MELT THE HEARTS OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE LOVERS EVERYWHERE, THIS YEAR'S 'SNOW SHOW' IS READY TO GIVE THE WINTER OLYMPICS A RUN FOR THEIR MONEY

'I'M SWEATING BULLETS. Who knows, we could have no snow. Global warming definitely affects the project.' Curator Lance Fung is getting atypically hot under the Prada collar about his latest large-scale project, *The Snow Show 2006*, to be held this February at Sestriere in the Italian Alps, in conjunction with the 20th Winter Olympics in Torino. It's an act of supreme optimism, for which the driven, dynamic, persuasive Fung has convinced six architects, including Sir Norman Foster, to collaborate with six artists – some also giants in their field, including Yoko Ono, Kiki Smith and Daniel Buren – to create giant installations made, ambitiously, of snow. While some of the artists Fung knew (he worked with Ono at last year's *Snow Show*), others, such as Foster were strangers. But the unstoppable Fung was never going to let a situation like that last for long.

He has organised two *Snow Shows* before, in 2003 and 2004. The latter took place in the frozen wastes of Lapland where – at temperatures hovering around the minus 20C mark – 17 partnerships, including artist Rachel Whiteread and architect Juhani Pallasmaa and artist Cai Guo-Qiang and architect Zaha Hadid, dreamt up idiosyncratic confections fashioned from snow or ice. Hadid created twin monuments – one in ice, one in snow – which the famously pyromanic Guo-Qiang then sprinkled with vodka. When ignited, it burnt bright orange, then cobalt blue.

Fung is a slick operator, fine-tuned and slender and almost always dressed in a sharply contemporary but subtly corporate suit. (Not for our Lance the disarray of popular boho art-world costume.) He looks too young for one who graduated from college in 1986 (he studied an unusual medley of biology, art history and art at the University of California at Davis). He later worked his way up to a directorship of New York's Holly Solomon Gallery, leaving there in 1996 to open his own space, The Lance Fung Gallery, which showed work by artists from the Fluxus, minimalist and conceptual periods, including Nam June Paik, Sol

LeWitt and Robert Barry. It was while working with Barry in 2000 that the germ of the idea for *The Snow Show* was formed. Barry was planning to integrate an artwork into a university building, but its architect began to take the upper hand, leading to a tension between them that revealed to Fung the potential antagonisms in artist-architect relationships.

He became entranced by the idea of matchmaking artists and architects. But the idea for the annoyingly catchy – almost Disney-esque – monicker, *The Snow Show*, came when Fung visited Lapland and was inspired by the natural winter beauty there. 'I was struck by the overabundance of snow and the kitschy things people build there – ice hotels and snow castles, with all their magical connotations of Santa Claus, elves and Eskimos. So it became clear to me almost immediately that other architectural structures could be made. The material of snow became interesting to me, too, because I thought it would act as a neutralising factor, that it would create a level playing field on which neither artists nor architects could pull rank on the other.'

Fung's bulging art-world contacts book gave him a headstart when it came to persuading artists to take part. But when it came to the architectural side of things, he was a relative newcomer. 'I'm not from the architectural world, so I had to do more research, and ask my friends who they would recommend. I then sent invitations blindly. Surprisingly, around 99 per cent of the architects accepted.'

This time around, it proved even easier to approach the architects. 'Potential participants could see that working with snow and ice was actually less of a daunting task than it might originally have seemed,' says Fung. Although, presumably, the ability to namecheck the more illustrious participants from previous shows – artists included Tatsuo Miyajima and Ernesto Neto, and Tadao Ando and Arata Isozaki were among the architects who took part – must have helped.



DETAIL OF THE TOP CHANGTRAKUL & LOT-EK ICE WALL, 2004





PAOLA PIVI & CLIOSTRAAT: proposal for *The Snow Show*, 2006

While Fung is clearly speaking a spectacular vernacular, the idea of working in nature is hardly new. 'But *The Snow Show* can't be categorised as land art,' he insists. 'I didn't want to throw land artists into the mix. You'd get artists saying that they'll only use a certain material, wax, say. Land artists bring their own baggage.'

The conditions for this year's *Snow Show* have shifted. In 2004, participants worked on flat ground, this year they will work on slopes and, more challengingly, with snow not ice. Lapland's extreme sub-zero temperatures ensured that the often huge ice structures remained intact until the summer. Snow is more ephemeral, visceral and unmanageable. And the temperatures on Sestriere's sunny slopes will be higher.

You'd imagine that architects, who one might expect to want cast-iron control of their environment, would bridle at the inherent element of chance. The artists, says Fung, can be 'very casual', and the architects, 'Sometimes haven't anticipated the variables. It means I have to do some tapdancing.' By that he means they might have to be charmed and cajoled into going with the flow. But not all. Some architects are delighted by the idea of working with a transient material – and by the challenge posed by working with the tricky contingencies thrown up by unforeseeable weather conditions. 'As creative processes go, to spend seven years realising a building is very unusual. To realise a project in as many months and for it to evaporate in less time is a great stimulus,' says an enthusiastic Norman Foster. He is collaborating with Spanish artist Jaume Plensa to create what the latter calls a 'geographical portrait' that will consist of numbers embedded in the snow and, using the navigational Global Positioning System, will give coordinates that point exactly towards the precise locations of Plensa's Barcelona studio and Foster's London office.

The artists seem equally enchanted by the notion of working with snow. Daniel Buren, who has paired up with architect Patrick Bouchain, is no stranger to working with furtive



YOKO ONO & ARATA ISOZAKI: proposal for *The Snow Show*, 2006

materials. In one public installation in the Canadian Rockies he made use of trees and snow, and has created a splash with gargantuan fountains in Paris and Lyon. 'My work deals with ideas turning around the ephemeral and the evanescent, shadows, movement of the earth around the sun, fleeting light changes...'

The yoking of artists with architects has proved largely unproblematic, given the increasingly multidisciplinary direction in which both art and architecture are moving. 'In the 1980s, architecture schools didn't talk about contemporary art and art schools didn't talk about contemporary architecture,' declares Fung. The artists and architects in this project are apparently glad to be working in tandem. As Sir Norman Foster puts it, 'The creative process is about sparking off sympathetic and intelligent individuals. So working with Jaume Plensa has been totally in that spirit. Notwithstanding the abstract dimensions of our shared piece, it nevertheless has to confront the practicalities of material fabrication, so inevitably there is a fusion of art and architecture.'

Despite these harmonious collaborations, Fung insists he won't be staging another *Snow Show*. 'I don't want this to become a formula,' he says. But he is enthusiastic about the upcoming one, partly because its affiliation with the Olympics will guarantee worldwide TV coverage, thus making it more accessible to a less-specialised public. Yet it's not sure that 'the masses' are, strictly speaking, Fung's real target. While he seems as excited by the hyperbole, ultimately the show will be as ephemeral as the snow and ice it has capitalised on. But there's little doubt this isn't the last we'll be hearing of Lance Fung.

DOMINIC LUTYENS

The Snow Show is at locations in Sestriere, Italy, from 5 February, www.thesnowshow.net