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# NEWS & FEATURES

March 07, 2006



The project from Arata Isozaki and Yoko Ono at Snow Show 2006

## Art at the Olympics (and Beyond): A Chat with Lance Fung, "The Collaborationist"

by Meredith Etherington-Smith

Lance Fung has had a nerve-racking month waiting to see if there would be enough white stuff at the Winter Olympics to support his second "Snow Show," which is currently taking place at Sestriere, the village outside Turin which is hosting the alpine skiing events.

At the first Snow Show, held in the frigid Lapland in 2004, concerns about the weather cooperating were obviously not a concern. For Sestriere, Fung—taking the warmer climate into consideration—built the possibility of above-freezing temperatures into the artistic instructions given participants.

All have been asked by Fung to consider the primary building material "as water in its varying states," he says. "I encouraged the participants to embrace the ephemerality of what they were doing, more so than the Lapland teams, which didn't have to worry about melting snow, or even no snow at all."

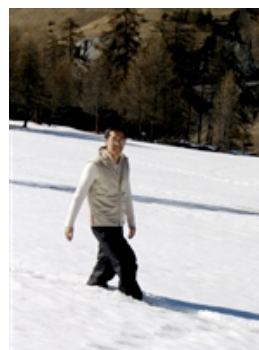
This year's show—the aesthetic centerpiece of the games—will last until the March 19 (or until the snow melts). Six teams of artists are participating: **Arata Isozaki and Yoko Ono; Tod Williams, Billie Tsien and Carsten Holler; Paola Pivi and Cliostraat; Kiki Smith and Lebbeus Woods; Daniel Buren with Patrick Bouchain; and Jaume Plensa and Norman Foster.**

Explaining the origins of the first Snow Show, Fung says, "It was a humble idea, at first, originally inspired by seeing a 30-second promo for the Ice Hotel in Sweden on television," he explains.

This humble idea, however, grew to an enormous scale, with 17 projects in the 2004 version.

And Lance's role as a curator of premise really ripened, so that essentially the Snow Show became a discourse between the worlds of art and architecture. "This wasn't really a topic when I conceived the idea six years ago," he says, "but now has become of importance to both fields."

The present Snow Show, presented on the global Olympic stage, bears witness to the persuasiveness of Fung—and to a lot of luck. "When I



Lance Fung

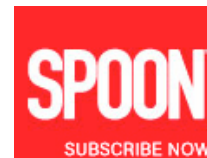
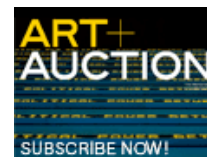


A close-up of the project

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created a preview exhibition of the Snow Show for the Venice Biennale in 2003," Fung told me, "the Winter Olympics Committee saw the word 'snow' in the contents of the Biennale Web site and they asked me to do a show for Sestriere—it was that simple!"

Clearly, pragmatism is an essential quality for someone who puts on daring shows at the mercy of, and involving, the elements. Equally, Fung is obviously not your conventional curator. He styles himself "Lance Fung Collaboratives" and that is what this Chinese-American is—a collaborationist with a rare power, it would seem, to persuade major artists and architects to work on very challenging and physically difficult projects with him.

Before he started work on the original Snow Show, he had his own gallery in New York, which he closed a year and a half ago. Prior to that, he was director of the **Holly Solomon Gallery**, also in New York, which he ran for six years.

Owning his own gallery allowed him to curate exhibitions at, as he admits, "a very minor level. I would barely use the word curate, but maybe organize or select artists to work together or interact, one with another, to create group shows.

"What was great about having my own gallery space to play around in was that it was an incredible curatorial training ground," he explains. "Had I gone on to do a curatorial program after getting my masters, I would have learned how to fund raise, how to manage the money—I would have learned a lot of things, but I sort of winged it, bringing different artists together in shows."

Slowly but surely different institutions invited him to do projects, and they grew in scale until the Snow Show was hatched and realized.

Most recently, Fung has been working in London with the **Albion Gallery** and has used the Norman Foster-architected space to put on another collaboration: "Wall Drawings," on view through March 24.

As he explains, "I considered the gallery space as a work of art, and by integrating the works of **Robert Barry, Daniel Buren and Sol LeWitt**, not only did I bring together three artists whose work is seminal to the Minimalist and conceptual art movements of the 1960s and 1970s, but I imagined a completely different experience for those who visit Albion regularly.

"It is such a unique exhibition space that filling it with the dynamic and colorful works of artists that I both respect and am friends with seemed a fantastic opportunity to explore the two intersecting art historical movements and highlight the architecture of the gallery," Fung says.

But the elements and ephemerality enter even into this Fung equation. "Views through the gallery and to the river outside become," he points out, "an intrinsic part of the exhibition's visual and ephemeral experience, further enhanced by the fact that the walls will be repainted white at the end of the exhibition.

"All the projects that I work on actually have three elements," he explains. "The emphasis may vary from project to project, but they always deal first with collaboration, so that an artist works with a non-artist to develop a work. The second element is a unique environment or situation which is challenging and fresh to the artist. And the third element, often forgotten in the museum and art world is," he emphasizes, "creating art exhibitions that have a wide level of accessibility to the audience.

"What I am trying to do," Fung sums up, "is intentionally create shows that are intellectual, challenging and fun but that also speak to many types of people."

His next show fulfils all these criteria. Fung is operating in an element again—this time water. "**SINK**" is a project where artists will collaborate with scientists, marine conservationists and environmentalists to develop works of art and," he says. "As in all my exhibitions, it brings a gamut of different medias, so it goes from light, sound and media to painting and photography, sculpture and performance.

"But the unique element of this is the cathartic experience for the viewer entering the exhibition. The point of entry," he reveals with relish and flourish, "is submersion in the water, whether it's by snorkelling, swimming, scuba diving, glass-bottomed boat or private submarine. This allows you to free your understanding of what art is, of how art displays should be made, [enables you] to be aware of your life and environment around you, because you hear yourself breathe, you feel your skin tickle as you descend into the depths of the sea.

"And," he points out, "your perception of colour changes. Because of the filtering effect, you don't see red; everything is a very blue haze. Certainly when you're able to see art in a natural state such as a coral reef or a parrot fish or even a shark coming at you, it's awesome and often art tries to mimic what's awesome in life: love, life, death, beauty."

Fung has been working with a "really good group of artists" for the past year for the SINK show, due to open in 2007. "No one has said no, and I have three more people to persuade," he laughs. "There's only one

from Isozaki and Ono at Snow Show 2006



The project from Daniel Buren and Patrick Bouchain at Snow Show 2006



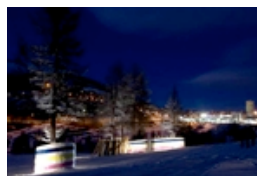
A close-up of the project from Buren and Bouchain at Snow Show 2006



A night view of the project from Tod Williams, Billie Tsien and Carsten Holler at Snow Show 2006



A visitor enjoys the work of Williams, Tsien and Holler at Snow Show 2006



The project from Paola Pivi and Cliostraat at Snow Show 2006



A close-up of the project from Pivi and Cliostraat at Snow Show 2006

reason any artist wants to be in my shows: it allows him to think out of the box, and I try and given him a new and fresh opportunity to do just that."

All photos by Jeffrey Debany; All photos courtesy of Fung Collaboratives



The project from Kiki Smith and Lebbeus Woods



Another view of the project from Smith and Woods



A view of the project from Jaume Plensa and Norman Foster