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JC Jessie is a research-based artist, a poet and a friend of nature.



“Panda Alert!” in Vancouver Travelling to Arts 2018

August 21, 2018



PHOTO-FLASH-MOBS Metropolis-at-Metrotown-Cake-Imagery.jpg

PANDAS! It is hard to say no to these lovely creatures. Panda is from China and China only for sure but, would that be enough to prove its uniqueness and popularity? Guess not, well, maybe, we can add into it its adorable spherical body shape, clumsy movement, and black & white patterns. How much has this lovely creature contributed to its land or other nations? Why would they be chosen as the subject matter for a world tour exhibition? There must be something more for me to dig in.

Panda may be one of the most high profile types among the bear family that often appeared on TV, news, and media nationally or internationally. In Chinese history, Chinese people considered panda as a noble and precious animal that even the Empress Dowager Bo of the Han Dynasty had buried one of its skulls in her vault. Nowadays, panda grows to be an unofficial national symbol for China, its international appearance is widely acknowledged, such as the gold panda bullion coin in 1982, the Fuwas mascots in Beijing Olympic, its natural inhabitant status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site designation, and its hometown, The Sichuan Giant Panda Sanctuaries, was inscribed onto the World Heritage List in 2006.

On the political side, the contribution of the panda is not less than any politician. In the 1970s, the practice of "Panda Diplomacy" was launched when China send them to US and Japan as a gesture of friendship and cultural exchange. In the 1980s, they were not gifts anymore but on 10 years loads. Due to deforestation, farming, and other urban development, human drove the pandas out of their homeland and their lives were in danger. Hence, China changed its panda policy; half of its loan fee went into conversation efforts. That was a good beginning of the awareness of wildlife conservation.

In fact, Panda did not expose to the west until a French missionary. Armand David received a skin of panda from a hunter in 1869. About 50 years later, Hugo Weigold, a German zoologist, the first westerner, witnessed a living panda and purchased a cub in 1916. Ruth Harkness brought a panda cub to live at the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago in 1936.

< 1600 PANDAS+ WORLD TOUR > @ Metropolis at Metrotown

This year, more pandas showed up in the west when the < 1600 PANDAS+ WORLD TOUR > had its first debut in Vancouver after touring around the world in over 100 exhibits countries such as Malaysia, the Netherlands, South Korea, Paris and Hong Kong. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and French artist Paulo Grangeon shared a goal to raise fund and awareness of wildlife conservation and sustainability launched the project 10 years ago. The irresistible exhibition attracted a big crowd of panda lovers to the Metropolis at Metrotownran as it ran during the prime "Hot" summer in Vancouver.



These 888 pandas are made of the recycled paper.

I was confused by the number indicated in the title 1600 + and the total no of 888 artworks in the exhibition. After reading a bit more, I realized that 1600 was

referring to the number of 1600 living pandas left in the wild in China 10 years ago when the project got started. Now, after much effort from all parties, there has been a 17% increase to over 1,800 in worldwide zoos and new wildlife conservation measures in China. Thus, the new title is < 1600 PANDAS+ WORLD TOUR >. However, there is no explicit indication of the implication of the 888 artworks. I am not sure if there is any implication related to the Chinese lucky number 8. Maybe I will leave it open to my reading guests to sort out the answer.



There is a slight dissimilarity of each of their expression.

This time, these papier-mâché artworks set out to be an ambassador to spread the wildlife concern and to raise fund for the bears' conservation, wildlife

conservation research and education programs. A series of activities happened before and during the event to convene the public interest and build up anticipation towards the exhibition, such as “Panda Flash Mobs” at Vancouver’s selective landmarks before the official launch, a selfie station and “panda adoption” programs set up for all panda lovers. A few years back, I did not get a picture with the pandas when they were at the PMQ in Hong Kong. My determination gave way to impatience after seeing the LONG queue. This time in Vancouver, I was ahead of the crowd to get a selfie within minutes. Holding one of these cuties on hands, I found that they were finished in fine details with relatively lightweight. Their one of a kind handcrafted features and unique expression were definitely an allurements for all panda lovers.

“Slow” @Parq Vancouver

Other than this tour, there were two big pandas quietly landed Vancouver last year at the new Parq Vancouver. This public art piece captures the bonding time of a mother panda and its baby panda depicts the thought of family love, eternal maternity, and hope for the future. The Parq Vancouver for the City of Vancouver Public Art Program 2017 commissioned it.

These pandas are made of stainless steel so the heaviness of the material echoes to the enlarged size of a giant panda. Furthermore, there is some high-rise architecture with reflective glasses surrounds this sculpture, so as the light source alters during the day, the reflection of light generates on the sculpture surface will illuminate numerous colorful layers and ever-changing visual distortion. Its location and the surrounding environment introduce a query of contradiction—Nature vs. City. While glancing at it, my mind cannot settle with the visual interpretation my eyes delivered. Spectator requires to look at it patiently as there are only a few angles can see clearly the expression of the panda. However, the light reflection on and off the artwork is the most amusing ramifications of this art piece.



“Slow” by Zhang Huan, Stainless Steel, about 5m (L) x 3 m (H) x 4 m (W)

I think people may be happy to hear that they will see pandas at Aberdeen Center at Richmond also. For those who care for the real pandas, on July 6, “Yuan Zai”, the giant panda at Taipei Zoo in Taipei celebrated its fifth birthday. In addition, Calgary Zoo received four pandas, including two adult pandas, “Er Shun” & “Da Mao” and their cubs “Jia Panpan” and “Jia Yueyue” on March 23 from Toronto Zoo, ended their 5 years stay — after a 10-year agreement with China. The four pandas will be spending five years at the Calgary Zoo in their newly built habitat.

In Chinese art history, we see artworks with bamboo and bears but not much panda. Their images reveal more on Chinese art after the 20th century. When the passion for panda grows, the “Panda Diplomacy” will keep on going and manifesting into other forms in art, politic, social and much wider aspects. Hope to see them more in the future.

Photo credit: JC Jessie

More

< 1600 PANDAS+ WORLD TOUR > @Metropolis July10 – Aug 8, 2018

Pandaland @ Aberdeen Centre June 30 – Sept 3, 2018

[Metropolis at Metrotown](#)

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