

CURATORIAL MANIFESTO

‘The In-Between’ is not in the middle

From François Jullien to a curatorial practice unique to FUQIAO

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‘The In-Between’ is not a space situated between two pre-established positions. It is what becomes possible when their encounter alters the way we see, feel and think.

Neither centre nor compromise

We readily speak of an ‘in-between’ as a space situated in the middle: an intermediate zone, a point of equilibrium or a compromise between two extremes. This conception seems obvious. Yet it proves misleading. It presupposes that the two terms exist first, separate and stable, and that a neutral space can then be delineated between them. The ‘In-between’ would then constitute an interval to be traversed, a void to be filled or a middle ground to be reached.

For FUQIAO, the ‘In-Between’ is not in the middle. It is neither halfway between Europe and Asia, nor a harmonious synthesis of East and West, nor a hybrid aesthetic achieved by the addition of cultural signs. It does not erase differences nor does it seek to resolve them. It emerges when distinct works, gestures, materials, temporalities or imaginaries are placed in close enough proximity for an unforeseen relationship to form.

The ‘In-between’ is therefore not a given. It comes into being. It is not a position: it is a process of establishing connections. It does not pre-exist the encounter: it is produced by it.

François Jullien’s starting point

François Jullien’s thinking constitutes a decisive starting point here. His work on the relationship between China and Europe does not aim to compare two civilisations as two closed systems.

Comparing ‘ ’ often leads to classifying cultures under common categories, and then measuring their similarities and differences. Jullien proposes a different approach: to make the gap work.



Difference classifies. It identifies and separates: this is Chinese, that is European; this belongs to one, that to the other. The gap, on the contrary, keeps the terms at a distance whilst placing them in relation to one another. It creates a tension. Within this tension, every thought momentarily ceases to be self-evident; it discovers its choices, its habits and its unthought aspects through the other. This is how the gap opens up the ‘in-between’.

For Jullien, therefore, the ‘In-Between’ is not a common ground that is already available. It possesses no substance of its own and does not constitute a third world where differences might be reconciled. It is an active resource: a space of circulation and dialogue produced by putting the gaps to work. The common ground is no longer the starting point; it becomes the reality that the encounter can gradually bring to light.

Fuqiao shares this fundamental insight. A culture cannot be reduced to an immutable identity. A work of art is not an illustration of an origin. To connect does not mean to standardise. The true encounter begins when each of the terms remains sufficiently singular to shift the other.

From the philosophical exercise to the curatorial situation

Fuqiao takes up this line of thought, but shifts it into the curatorial field. Here, the ‘In-between’ is no longer merely an intellectual operation between two traditions of thought. It becomes a situation constructed from works, bodies, sounds, images, matter, light, space and time.

Curating, then, consists neither of demonstrating a thesis through the works nor of bringing artists together simply because they share a style or a theme. It seeks to create the conditions for resonance. Two works may come from very different contexts and bear no formal resemblance; yet their joint presence can bring to light a question that each carried within it without being able to reveal it on its own.

This resonance is not the same as a fusion. In a fusion, the elements tend to lose their contours. In the ‘In-Between’, they remain recognisable, sometimes even more clearly than before. But the way we look at each of them has changed. The relationship operates without abolishing the separation.

A field of multiple relationships

FUQIAO's 'In-Between' is therefore not limited to the interval between two geographical areas. Europe and Asia constitute a structuring dimension of it, but not an exclusive boundary. The 'In-Between' can emerge between:

- the visible and the invisible;
- appearance and disappearance;
- memory and the present;
- the still image and the moving image;
- gesture and matter;
- sound and silence;
- the artwork and the space that houses it;
- the artist's intention and the visitor's experience;
- physical presence and its inner persistence.

It can also arise between several works, several people and several stories. It can take many forms. It constitutes a relational, fluid and provisional field, within which intensities circulate without being assigned to a single origin.

Porous Instant: the first laboratory

Porous Instant is the first fully developed laboratory based on this curatorial concept. The encounter between Robert Cahen and Cécilia Ho is not based on any immediate similarity. Their media, their artistic trajectories and their visual vocabularies remain distinct. Robert Cahen explores the duration of the image, slowness, memory, erasure and fleeting appearances. Cécilia Ho explores breath, circulation, matter, weaving, openings and the invisible forces that permeate forms.

The project does not ask one to illustrate the other. Nor does it transform their differences into an opposition between a supposedly rational Europe and a supposedly spiritual Asia. It places their works in a relationship that reveals shared concerns, albeit expressed differently: how does a presence take shape? What remains when an image fades? How does emptiness operate? How does matter retain a passage, a memory or a breath?

The 'In-Between' serves as the framework for the project; the 'porous moment' represents its sensory experience. The 'In-Between' denotes the relationships brought into play. The porous moment is the instant when the visitor experiences them: when the boundaries between an image

and a memory, a material and a breath, an external space and an internal space become momentarily permeable.

The visitor does not merely observe the ‘Entre’: they pass through it

Because it does not seek to be an idea suspended above the works, the ‘Entre’ engages the visitor. The exhibition design asks them to slow down, to cross thresholds, to accept moments of waiting, to draw closer or to keep their distance. It allows for pauses and transitions. It does not immediately reveal all the connections; it allows them to be discovered, constructed or even missed.

The visitor is not invited to find the ‘correct’ interpretation. They become one of the agents of l’Entre. Their movement connects separate works; their memory prolongs an image that has vanished; their attention transforms a silence into duration. The exhibition is no longer merely a collection of objects displayed in a space. It becomes a temporary environment of relationships.

The ‘Carte-Pont de l’Entre’ extends this experience. It is not intended to confine the works within a definitive framework. It gives the visitor the opportunity to chart a route, to recognise a resonance and to suggest a connection. The bridge does not eliminate the gap: it makes it traversable.

An ethics of relationship

This approach entails a curatorial responsibility. Simply bringing European and Asian works into contact is not enough to create a dialogue. A relationship can become decorative, asymmetrical or reductive. It can exoticise one of the artists, impose the categories of the other, or mask differences under the convenient vocabulary of harmony.

The ‘In-Between’, on the contrary, demands that the distinctiveness and autonomy of each practice be preserved. It requires recognition of differences in language, history, power, reception and institutional context. It does not promise agreement. It can accommodate tension, misunderstanding and disagreement, provided these do not shut down the relationship but compel it to be reformulated.

Fuqiao therefore does not claim to speak on behalf of Europe or Asia. Its purpose is to create situations in which their diverse resources can engage with one another without being reduced to two homogeneous identities. The bridge is floating because its supports are never permanently fixed. It must continually adapt to the works, places and people it brings together.

Manifesto of the ‘In-Between’ according to FUQIAO

- 1. The ‘In-Between’ is not in the middle. It is not measured by an equal distance between two poles.**
- 2. The ‘In-Between’ is not a given. It is produced by a relationship that transforms the perception of what it connects.**
- 3. The ‘In-Between’ does not merge. It preserves singularities, differences and opacities.**
- 4. The ‘In-Between’ is not merely cultural. It is also spatial, temporal, material, sensory and human.**
- 5. The ‘In-Between’ does not seek resemblance as its primary aim. It brings out resonances between different forms.**
- 6. The ‘In-Between’ is not necessarily harmonious. It may contain tension, silence, resistance and discord.**
- 7. The ‘In-Between’ is not a theme applied to the works. It is a method for selecting them, juxtaposing them and constructing the experience of their encounter.**
- 8. The ‘In-Between’ does not end with the exhibition. It continues in memory, conversation, mediation and the new relationships that the project makes possible.**

Creating the conditions for an emergence

François Jullien has endowed ‘L’Entre’ with its philosophical power: the gap shifts thoughts, opens up a space for circulation and makes possible the production of a common ground that was not predetermined. Fuqiao follows in this tradition, but transposes it into the field of art.

In this transposition, the ‘In-Between’ becomes a practice. It is constructed through the selection of artists, engagement with their works, the arrangement of neighbouring spaces, attention to thresholds, the exhibition design, the duration of the exhibition, and visitor participation. It is no longer merely a matter of thinking about the ‘In-Between’, but of bringing it into being, making it perceptible and allowing what may emerge from the ‘In-Between’ to take shape.

This is the curatorial role that FUQIAO sets itself: not to bridge distances, but to make them fruitful; not to establish a central position, but to open up a field of circulation; not to fabricate unity, but to create the conditions for a relationship.

The ‘In-between’ is not a place where one settles. It is a passage that one keeps open.

References

- François Jullien, **L’Écart et l’Entre**. Inaugural lecture for the Chair on Otherness, Galilée, 2012.
- François Jullien, **Entering into a Thought, or On the Possibilities of the Mind**, Gallimard, 2012.

— François Jullien, **There Is No Cultural Identity**, L'Herne, 2016.