

Photo exhibit by low-income folks

Nancy Zhang

As Chinese contemporary art fetches astronomical prices by collectors, one expat group is working in the opposite direction — to bring prices way down.

The Art+ Cooperative wants to popularize art for the masses by encouraging everyone to create art and to buy it — at affordable prices. It is forging links between artists and the community by involving charities.

On Saturday Art+ Cooperative is putting on a two-day exhibition and silent auction of photography by disadvantaged, low-income young adults at BAU Architecture Space in Hongkou District.

This both encourages the young people to make art part of their lives and raises funds for the local education charity, Shanghai Sunrise.

The 150 photographs on display have been taken by eight students — all long-term beneficiaries of Shanghai Sunrise. All university and high school students, they were chosen because they had some interest in art that they did not have a chance of developing.

Over a series of four photography workshops in the past three months, the participants learned about light and shadow, line and composition and gained technical knowledge.

“We aim not to be dictatorial. We support them with materials and knowledge, giving them skills, which hopefully means they will continue,” says Greg Baines, co-founder of the

cooperative. “We want it to be sustainable and help artistic groups develop.”

Art+ was started by two teachers at Shanghai Middle School with an interest in art. Anthony Kelly is an art teacher and Baines is a history teacher whose father was a painter.

“My father gave up art because he had to support a family, so I’m very aware of the financial struggle of being an artist,” says Baines. “We wanted to open art for amateur artists and encourage them to create work that can be sold for small amounts at informal exhibitions, for example in a restaurant. This is also more accessible for people who want to appreciate art — it doesn’t have to be elite.”

Their first event was an exhibition of their own works at a local cafe seven months ago. In contrast to silent galleries that have a formal, almost church-like atmosphere, these more informal venues in cafes and restaurants are livelier and more fun.

They sold some art for between 300 yuan (US\$44) to 3,000 yuan — cheap in the art world. They retained a portion to buy supplies and donated the rest to charity, as they felt there was a distance between art and the community.

They also opened up the concept of wider participation, forming a cooperative of seven core organizers, all expat teachers in Shanghai. They plan to host events every three months.

As teachers working with education charities, Shanghai Sunrise was a natural fit. They are long-term partners.

“It’s a wonderful concept because as teachers at



Founders Anthony Kelly (second from left) and David Spear (right) of Art+ Cooperative check pictures taken by two students who learn photography thanks to the expat group which links art and the community by involving charities.

international or key schools here, the organizers of Art+ usually teach a very privileged group of students,” says Helena Nordstrom, marketing and communications officer at Shanghai Sunrise. “But via this way they give something back to ordinary students in China.”

The participating students all come from tough backgrounds, but through hard work they had earned university scholarships through Shanghai Sunrise.

One of the students, friendly and talkative David Zhang, has been sponsored by Shanghai Sunrise since the age of seven.

He and all the other beneficiaries were chosen because they came from low-income families facing

a major life challenge such as one parent falling ill. As parents often choose between paying medical bills and further education, most young people don’t get the chance to go to school after age 15, when the government stops footing the bill.

With the help of Shanghai Sunrise, Zhang attends Jianqiao University to study English and hopes to be a translator in business negotiations one day.

Though he was always interested in photography, Zhang never pursued it since taking pictures didn’t seem like a practical way to earn money. He is the first generation in his family to attend university and his mother has high hopes for him in the future.

“I like the way this photography course is carried out in, I’m learning things I cannot get from textbooks,” says Zhang. His favorite photos have cute, quirky angles on everyday life, like a broken tub making an interesting pattern in his dorm room.

For Baines it has been encouraging to see confidence building quickly in these underprivileged students. In two weeks of training all the students were taking some photos, out of many, that could be exhibited.

Art+ aims to raise 10,000-15,000 yuan this weekend, though Baines says fund-raising is not the point.

“This is more about showing tangible results of

what the students can do. It’s also about getting the community to give feedback and encouragement to the students who will all be at the exhibition,” he says.

Future Art+ events are expected to remain small, varied and fun, raising a small donation for charity each time. They may involve links or exchanges outside Shanghai, possibly with Hong Kong students.

Date: December 12, 12:30-5pm; December 13, 11am-5pm

Silent auction: December 12, 12:30-2:30pm

Venue: No. 17 BAU Architecture Space, 1252 Fuxing Rd E., Hongkou District

Admission: 50 yuan

Ways to promote a healthy lifestyle

Nancy Zhang

EVEN as China surges ahead economically, there is growing awareness of the negative side effects of reckless industrialization and the need to protect the environment.

Like those in developed countries, some newly affluent Chinese are seeking natural, sustainably produced items, pursuing environmental protection and personally seeking balance among mind, body and spirit.

The movement for “lifestyles of health and sustainability,” known as LOHAS, has quickly taken off in China since it was introduced in 2005.

This weekend the 2nd International LOHAS Forum, a major event on the LOHAS calendar,

opens in Beijing.

“LOHAS has developed very, very fast in China — much more than we expected,” says Dr Shen Li of Beijing Normal University, one of the pioneers of the movement in China. “It’s partly because food safety and pollution issues are so serious here. If we don’t aim for a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, then development can only come to a dead end.”

The forum — not for profit — is organized by experts and enthusiasts of the movement for others engaged in creating this new lifestyle.

Compared with last year’s event, this year’s forum is bigger in scale, including international speakers from the United States, Japan and Europe where LOHAS is

LOHAS shares a similar philosophy with Chinese culture, particularly the concepts of healthy living, emotional well-being and sustainability.

considerably more advanced.

Around 200 experts, opinion leaders and business leaders in sustainable industries have been invited to share deeper understanding of a better lifestyle for the future.

Those who wish to participate can apply for 3,800 yuan each (US\$556).

“Sharing a similar philosophy with Chinese culture, particularly the concepts of healthy living, emotional well-being and sustainability, LOHAS has been applied by the Chinese in areas such as

investment, lifestyle and consumer products,” says conference director Jeffrey Lee.

In addition to Dr Shen, other key speakers include renowned traditional Chinese medicine expert Zhang Mingliang, Liao Xiaoyi, environment adviser for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, and New Age writer Masaru Emoto, author of the controversial “Messages from Water.”

Talks are also combined with sessions in meditation and yoga. Tai chi will be demonstrated.

“We hope the forum will become a highlight and central focus in the LOHAS movement in China,” says Lee.

This year there is also more participation from non-governmental organizations such as The Jane Goodall Institute and the China Youth Climate Action Network.

Major Chinese print media have been invited, although not TV stations because, “we don’t believe watching TV is good for a happy life. It’s not LOHAS,” says Dr Shen.

Date: December 12, 9am-9pm;

December 13, 9am-6pm

Venue: Grand Hyatt Beijing,

Chang’an Avenue

Tel: 010-6219-2184

E-mail to register@chinalohas.org for details.