

China 2008

November 16, 2008

China was like going to another world. And they probably think the same thing when they come to the States. It was the first time in my life where I definitely didn't look like I was from there. In Ireland, England and even Argentina (due to the large amount of European immigrants) I was at least able to walk down the streets and fit in. It wasn't until I opened my mouth that it was obvious I wasn't from there. In China though, I was a tourist and there was no doubt about it. I never felt like a tourist though. People were very kind and patient, except the people trying to sell me a knock off designer handbag that is. They were a little pushy.

Really the only problem I had was the language barrier as it related to eating. Although many people spoke English very well, they did not know the word for everything and spoke in general terms. For example, if some one tells you it is seafood that includes anything that lives in the ocean. There are many things that live in the ocean that other people eat that I am not accustomed to eating. Now at least I can say with confidence, I do not like to eat snails.

As Americans, especially living in metropolitan areas, like New York City I believe we feel very worldly. We have neighbors from around the world, we can get any nationality food, and purchase anything made anywhere in the world. A week in China has let me know that I am not very worldly or cultured or even cool. I have traveled much, and I feel that I am a tolerant person, but it is not until you are immersed in a culture not your own that you discover you have a lot to learn. It was difficult to go to another country and say, "Look, you have a problem with domestic violence. We do too and we hope that we can educate you a little on the subject." I was afraid that people would be insulted and stand offish. I was totally wrong. People were curious, kind, and attentive. They took our information postcards and actually read them and didn't just throw them to the ground. I feel that as Americans we assume Human Rights is an American thing. We as Americans think that it our responsibility to solve the world's problems, but in truth everyone in the world wants a safe home, and

a loving family, and the right to live a happy life. We don't have to tell them that.

-Coco Chanel

November 10-16, 2008

Eva here. WOW four days back in NYC and I am still amazed I was just in China! What a whirlwind trip, what an incredible experience, what a massive city; Shanghai is home to 20 million people! Where to begin? Having just read Edith's post, I will not give a play-by-play. I will share however my personal story of a Shanghai experience that included:

1) As a [mostly] vegetarian, I had prepared to be 'open' regarding food. I have no idea that I would eat sea snails, various unidentifiable parts of octopus, pork, lamb and 'meat'.

2) I was pick-pocketed on the Bund on our last night and had my credit card, ATM card and license stolen, along with some cash. Passport was safe... phew!

3) I haggled for a silk scroll on the streets

4) Went to a gorgeous Taoist temple

5) Wandered back alleys where poverty and poor living conditions were beyond what simple words can express.

6) Performed feminist street theater in a police state...

...perhaps not such a 'typical experience', but all just a day in the life of a Guerrilla Girl on Tour!

I left for China EARLY Monday morning the 10th of November. I brought the following with me around the globe:

Openness:

As a [mostly] vegetarian, I had prepared to be 'open' regarding food. I had no idea that I would eat sea snails, various unidentifiable parts

of octopus, pork, lamb and 'meat'. It seems that most Chinese people eat according to Chinese medicine principles, so the idea of not eating the foods prescribed for a season is pretty 'foreign'. There was no way to eat with groups of people and not consume animal products.... So I dug in... OH and beware next time you are in China, the 'vegetable dumplings' may just have pork in them 😊!

Awareness:

After reading and hearing about the poverty in China, I knew I might see some things that were disturbing. I vowed to carry compassion in my heart and be realistic in my sensitivities. On Saturday, after the performing part of the journey was over, Edith and I went wandering through back alleys in Old Shanghai. Poverty and poor living conditions were beyond what simple words can express. As I strolled past housing complexes that were home to eight or more families sharing one bathroom and kitchen and seeing that a bathroom/ kitchen might consist of a hose, several plastic basins, a hot plate and a hole in the ground, I also realized that life in other parts of this country were worse still. I carry these memories with me now and am still sorting out my emotional reactions to what I have seen.

Stories:

On the day we performed our piece 'Silence is Violence' all over the city [in parks, on streets, in malls] the press was everywhere and always wanted to chat! One particular question prompted me to share what I was bringing to the piece. I thought for a moment and realized that even in China, I bring to this work every story I have heard, witnessed, experienced of violence against women. As we performed, I gathered more observations to take with me on the road. Several times over the course of the day, a couple would show up and begin to watch. One of us would extend a flyer to the woman, the man would grab it and once he read it would drag her away. The flyer contained only simple statistics and information regarding domestic violence in China, yet this seemed threatening to many of the men in the crowds. Of course, and in all fairness, many men, and women, completely embraced the message and our presence in their communities!

Trust:

When leaving for this trip, friends and family members were a little worried. After all I was going to a country where political, feminist street theater might not be readily accepted by authorities. However, we were brought to Shanghai by the Zendi MoMA and were assured that they would take good care of us. That is exactly how it happened! We were chauffeured around on the city on the day of the events, photographed, video taped and protected every step of the way. We were part of a team, part of a vision, part of an international arts community and I thank all the organizers for doing a brilliant job!

Thanks for reading!

Love, Eva Le Gallienne

November 10-11, 2008
Shanghai, China

Shanghai! Such an adventure! First of all, I stayed up all night. I had to be across town at Aphra's by 3:45 AM. I left my abode at 3:15, hailed a cab, and arrived at my destination by 3:18. No traffic. I sat in the lobby until Aphra came downstairs and we headed for the airport together. We were to meet Eva Le Gallienne there and Coco Chanel at our stopover in Atlanta.

It was a very, very, very long flight.

Left on a Monday and arrived on Tuesday at 5PM. We met Zenda MOMa's curatorial assistant, Hu Yun, at our hotel in the Pudong district of Shanghai. What a lovely young man. He checked us in and we made arrangements to meet the next day and go over the plan for our performance piece. Eager to get a first glimpse of the city we thought we'd stroll to the river, see the view and get a bite to eat but unfortunately the darkness overcame our enthusiasm and we couldn't even guess the way. We discovered every corner had a street map but they were in Chinese which was, of course, no help to us at all. We settled for the plaza across the street from our hotel which turned out to hold a lovely Chinese restaurant where I promptly embarrassed myself by ordering in English sending the waitress running. In the weeks leading up to the trip everyone was telling me

how divine the food was going to be and this meal was quite satisfying. We then went into a giant supermarket called Carrefour for water and then home to bed.

November 12, 2008

Up we got – early! We were promised a Chinese breakfast and we got one. Yum. We attempted to walk to a park before our meeting but by the time we got there we had to change course and proceed to the museum. Aphra promised we would return and we did later when we went back to rehearse. We slowly made our way down one of those winding staircases to the MOMa staff offices. Hu Yun gave us a brief overview of Intrude Art and Life 366 and together we made plans to tour the selected sites of our street performance on Friday. We met more staff and then sat down for a press interview via the internet. I typed for everyone. Technology wise I'm such a dunce, it was fun to feel so useful and accomplished. ;). We left to rehearse in the park - it was a gorgeous day only flawed by the occasional threat of being run over by cars, mopeds, bikes and staining our pants with the fallen berries on the ground. (Street theater, you know).

FYI, invoice or receipt in Chinese sounds like this: "fapiaow". Along with "hello" and "Thank you" these are the only words I can speak in Chinese.

We met up for drinks with a vivacious student of Chinese culture that Aphra met on Tripadvisor.com. Some of her friends joined us and we all spoke English talking mostly about Obama. He's just the man, isn't he? In China too.

Next up was dinner with MOMa curator Biljana, Hu Yun, and Su Ye the location scout. I enjoyed myself immensely. So much vegetarian food, I should travel to China more often. The vegetables were everywhere. The beans were everywhere. Even where you least expect it, ask what's in it, and there's beans figuring in there somewhere. Yum! Now, what did we talk about? I think it came up that there are a lot of men making art in China. There are a lot of men making performance art in China, and there are a lot of shows with no female artists. The women all go to art school but get discouraged and give up shortly after they graduate. Sounds

familiar? At least there is one female curator in Shanghai. Afterwards we head to Mural Bar where we do a short promo (translated by Su Ye) of our event. "From the East Coast to the West..." has now circled the globe. Chinese beer and good times follow. (Along with dancing with Eva Le Gallienne)

November 13, 2008

Again with the fabulous breakfast. (In China I tend to speak with a Jewish accent.) We met Hu Yun somewhere, or maybe he came to us, no matter, we got to ride in the metro. It was really sci-fi and cool. And it was so silent. That's one thing I'm really noticing in New York as I get older, the subways are so loud, especially the 'C' line. I have to wear those little ear plugs if I'm down there too long – such a nuisance! Not so in China. We got off in a place in the western part of Shanghai, and walked a bit to get to the shopping mall where we will perform at 6PM on the 14th. I liked the walk. This area had a different character than the Pudong, more people selling and cooking on the street and laundry hanging about everywhere. The site was perfect. You're going to read that a lot. All the sites were really perfect. Technically it was outdoors but it was the inside ring of the mall. There was also a nice fountain, a slightly elevated walkway, and a circular area to choose from. Like I said, perfect. Second sight was a park with a little stage, a pond behind us with a bridge, (where we witnessed someone fishing and getting whisked away by security), and a pretty open walkway/plaza type area. Again, lots to choose from and a busy intersection. That would be our 12 noon site. The third was another park but more near where people come out of the subway. Very plaza like, and wide open - the 9AM site. Good vibe as well. We were so pleased and excited about our sites. Apparently the museum had to get permission from the government for us to perform at all the sites and that was quite an ordeal.

Next, we split up, Hu Yun to go back to work and we to go sight seeing. We decide to go to the open air food market near old town.

The market is very big. A bit of an odor to it. Some veggies, some chickens and ducks, jumping fish and boxes of snakes – everything fresh as can be because it's all alive! We witnessed one snake trying to escape but the snake wrangler came by and tossed it back in its

box. Be grateful you are not a snake in China.

Jet lag hits us hard in the afternoon. We attempt to rehearse a bit back at the hotel. It didn't work. We were too tired. We all fell asleep on one bed and Aphra shook us all awake and told us to meet at 7AM at Starbucks for our big day. Thank you in Chinese sounds like this: "sheh sheh."

November 14, 2008

The most exciting day. We started off rehearsing in the plaza by the museum and people came around and watched. I think that was the most distance we had from our audiences all day. The first site was really busy – it was a little before 9am and everyone was out in the park doing Tai Chi! There was a lot of press and photographers standing around waiting for “Silence Is Violence”. And a poet had painted a poem in water on the plaza. We chose to perform in between the verses. As soon as we began we knew we were in a different country. People came right up to us...I mean right up to us...nose to nose almost. They were literally standing right next to me and looking at me and taking it in as if I were a sculpture. There was great curiosity in the way the audience observed us. Even though they were so close, you knew they weren't going to poke you or push you, it was how they wanted to watch and interpret. The response after was interesting. I was particularly fond of an older woman, whom I couldn't understand and no one could interpret because she was from the country, but she was enthusiastic and excited about the performance piece and was holding up her domestic violence postcard and made the peace sign so I think it was a positive experience for her. For me, it was a very emotional experience. I didn't expect to feel so much during the piece itself. But the poses are held for so long and I think the physicality of it, the intensity and tenseness of it got to me. The emotionality of the performance got more intense and deeper through the thirty second poses instead of getting easier. Then each pose built on the next one until the end when the tension breaks. It was hard to walk away from it. (NOTE: “Silence Is Violence” was performed by three GGOTs who each held a 30 second pose depicting a woman who started in a violent situation and ended in recovery. The entire piece lasted 10 minutes and each pose was performed in staggered starts by the

performers. To the side one GGOT passed out postcards containing information and resources about domestic violence in China.)

The next performance was also in a park but a little later in the day. People here watched more from a distance and I felt they had a slightly challenging attitude towards us. I was handing out postcards and had to go after people and hand them to them. A group of women came late and missed the piece so we did it again, in a slightly different location, a little more into lunch hour, and the audience was again very different. They were more aggressive about surrounding the performers and taking postcards on their own. Eva, Coco, and Aphra really felt the difference of the two audiences - I'll have to read what they say. I also found my new boyfriend. A little boy, who was too shy to get close to me but from a distance was really comfortable exchanging facial expressions. Lots of children in these parks. Good fun.

Please in Chinese sounds like this: "tchien"

We then went to have a fabulous lunch. As Eva said – “spicy, with lots of flavor”. Then onto performance #4. This time the public walked right through us - people, dogs, and children all so close to us as we posed. It was so fascinating. I felt like every little thing I did was being observed – from the breathing to the little finger motion to the shift of weight on foot. It almost made it feel like slow motion or something. Then unfortunately a man was watching us so intently he drove his bike into a moving scooter and crashed. A huge argument ensued. Thank goodness we had just finished. Oops.

The shopping mall was next – performance #5. We had a little break so we had coffee/tea and our entourage – our videographer, photographer, Su Ye and Hu Yun all went off for smokes. I had a hard time getting a sense of the shopping mall performance. I think this is the one where Aphra said there were a lot of couples and the men very specifically took the postcards even though his female partner was trying to reach out. Again, people came up very close as if they were just passing through our performance to the next event in their lives.

The last performance was back at the plaza in front of Zendai. It was night and somewhat dark and, yes, a crowd gathered and stood really close. It's a very absorbing piece to be performing in. I have no idea what's going on and I'm really alert at the same time. I think overall it did have an impact -- many people watched and made opinions about street theater, women, China, America, artists, and domestic violence, and public art. A really intense day.

For dinner we had fries and beer, and I slept really well that night.

November 15-16, 2008

Hello in Chinese sounds like this: "knee how"

Touristing. Shanghai Museum, and a really great walk through the unknown territory of Old Town. I won't say much, you'll have to go yourself, and go soon as they are renovating the entire city. You don't want to miss seeing this part of their history. I will mention walking through a small street and I'm pretty sure we were the only tourists there and a young man on a bike screamed out to me "Obama!" (I had a pin on my bag.) I said "yes" and he said again "Obama Good!" And we both smiled. Obama good. Shanghai good. Eliminating domestic violence very good.

Yours truly,

[Edith Evans](#)

November 17, 2008

New York City