

# **Creative City and Museum Space**

## **– Current Situation and Development Plan of the Shanghai Museum of Glass**

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A museum can make a city. For urban residents, visiting museums is actually visiting the past of a city, and exploring its future possibilities. An ideal museum should be a place where people can have interaction, experience and share things. It should have the features of public participation and close connection between people and the museum, rather than merely being a “cold” institution with only traditional functions of research, display and education. The social functions of a museum lie in its ability to enhance people’s sense of belonging, and shorten the distance between the public and the museum, the ultimate goal being to create a museum lifestyle.

Shanghai Museum of Glass, located at 685 West Changjiang Road, Baoshan District, the northeast corner of Shanghai, is about 15 kilometers away from the city center. Its predecessor is an old glass instrument factory of the Shanghai Light Industry Glass Co., Ltd. Baoshan District used to be an important heavy industry hub, and the Shanghai Baosteel Group, a state-owned enterprise that is named after Baoshan District, is the second biggest steelmaker in the world. The museum is mainly surrounded by factories, container warehouses, and industrial parks, etc., with very few leisure and cultural attractions. It gives an inherent impression that this area is dominated by factories or abandoned ones.

However, Baoshan District is undergoing a transformation, and entering the post-industrial age at an orderly pace. In the mid-1990s, Shanghai University moved its main campus to this area, and some modern business parks and many residential projects are under construction now. The subway lines 1 and 3 connect Baoshan with the city center, and two more rail lines will be completed around 2020, further improving the traffic conditions. With the improvement of infrastructure, residential and commercial development are expected to improve the overall quality of the area, all of this showing that Baoshan is standing at the forefront of the city’s change, and will be one of the beneficiaries of Shanghai’s urban regeneration.

Baoshan's transformation is the key reason for the Shanghai Museum of Glass's entry into this district. Back in the mid-1990s, Shanghai Light Industry Glass Co., Ltd. made a shift in its strategic focus away from mass production, and left vacant plants here, which provided enough space for the construction of the museum. The cultural re-development played an important role in the repositioning of Baoshan District, and is warmly welcomed by the local government of Baoshan. This is why, despite the remoteness, Baoshan became the location for the Shanghai Museum of Glass.

After nearly five years of effort, the Shanghai Museum of Glass opened in May 18, 2011. Just six months after the opening, in October 2011, the Shanghai Museum of Glass, together with the National Museum and the Terracotta Warriors Museum, was named one of "China's three must-go major museums" by CNN's websites. It's a great surprise for this relatively new museum. Meanwhile, we are also fully aware of our mission and responsibilities which require us to carefully think about the development of the museum.

Currently, a "museum boom" is going on in China. According to data released in 2013, on average, one new museum comes into construction every day in China. And generally, there are three types of museums in China. The first type is the academic ones, with the National Museum as its representative. This type usually boasts of huge amount of collections and a corpus of Chinese cultural relics. The second type is the historical site museums, represented by the Terracotta Warriors Museum, bearing historical traces and memories. And the third type is the interactive and experience-oriented ones which we are now exploring, and we call it the community-based museums.

In fact, if you observe carefully the ongoing phenomena of "Museum Boom", you might find some similarity to the trajectory of China's sports development. Undoubtedly, the purpose of sports development is to enhance people's physical health nationwide. The government spent a lot funds on this cause, but with an excessive focus on the training of elite athletes. Winning a lot of Olympic medals does not mean the enhancement of people's physical health nationally. The general public benefited very little from the campaigns which can be seen as putting the cart before the horse. If the money had been spent on the enhancement of people's fitness, a solid foundation would have been laid for becoming a big sports power. Likewise, nearly 365 museums were built in just one year. But besides creating new landmarks for the cities where they are located, how well can they improve the quality of people's physical and spiritual life? It is based on this concept that we advocate the third type of museums, exploring the new mode of interactive and experience-

oriented museums, putting emphasis on public participation, and trying to meet the people's humanistic and spiritual needs in the post-industrial era.

With social changes and cultural development, in today's society, urban residents' needs for museums are quietly changing, which naturally requires a change in the definition of museums. There is a change in the urban residents' needs for knowledge and information. Regardless of its form, a museum, its visitors mainly being urban citizens, must have both the things to show and the visitors. Without visitors, a museum is merely a warehouse, failing to perform the function of education. For a museum, exhibition is the "body", while the visitors is the "soul". Thus, museums should be people-oriented because we don't need a museum if there are no visitors. The significance of the exhibits lies in both themselves and the knowledge they carry. And the significance and life of the exhibits can only be realized when the visitors really appreciate the knowledge they represent.

To meet the urban citizens' needs of visitation and education, how do museums attract people to pay a visit? As a place to stimulate creative thinking, how do museums lead people to do creative exploration? And how to become more appealing to the public and provide them an environment (with hardware like libraries, shops, coffee houses, etc.) where learning and entertainment are smoothly combined? These are questions that should be thoroughly thought about by the operators of museums.

Take the Shanghai Museum of Glass, with the concept of sharing the infinite possibilities of glass in mind, in addition to holding series of high-level exhibitions at home and abroad, it extends the sharing of glass art beyond merely appreciating the glass works themselves, to the realms of sound and music. The "Listen to a concert of glass" exhibition, jointly-held by the Shanghai Museum of Glass and the Australian Orchestra Band-Ensemble Offspring, effectively showed the audience the infinite possibilities of glass. This year, we offered an international creative glass design exhibition-"Keep it Glassy" with the theme of "Design with love, Protect with heart", displaying over 200 pieces of works by more than 50 artists from over 20 countries into the brand new industrial atmosphere filled exhibiting space of Shanghai Museum of Glass. The avant-garde display design made a sharp contrast to the original glass workshop, complementary to each other and exceptionally coordinated.

For urban residents, to get some spare time to stay spiritually close to their kids is a luxury. In the Creative DIY Workshops of the museum, visitors can experience with their kids the infinite pleasure of glass creation, and make some unique gifts of glass works according to their own design, creating a good memory for the future.

Moreover, in different seasons and at different festivals, all kinds of special events are also staged here: arts and culture lectures, class reunions upon graduation, summer tent camping, autumn “treasure hunting”, funny Halloween and Thanksgiving activities..... these seemingly irrelevant activities can give visitors a pleasant surprise and creative experience in whatever season they step into the museum.

The theme of the International Museum Day 2013 is "Museums (memory + creativity)= social change", and our interpretation of it is that “the old plant with a 100 years history of glass + continuously transcending ourselves=leading the trend of museum lifestyle and sharing with the public the infinite possibilities of glass"

The Shanghai Museum of Glass will never stop its steps of leading the lifestyle of community-based museums. This kind of lifestyle is full of cultural elements and exquisite sense of design concepts, and will be extended to a variety of new areas in the future. At the glass art studios of the museum, ordinary visitors can make creations freely like an artist, communicate and take part in lectures. This platform of art of glass extends the museum lifestyle artistically. With people’s increasing expectations for museums, the Shanghai Museum of Glass has set up a glass art club. During the process of urbanization, clubs should be more than a place where people can enjoy nice food and wine. It should include part of the functions of museums, offering another way of displaying art works. The club of the Shanghai Museum of Glass is not only gorgeously and elegantly decorated, but also filled with artistic atmosphere, with lots of high-end glass artworks, almost all of which are designs of top international crystal brands, a concentration of intelligence and elegance, allowing the museum lifestyle to extend to leisure fields. Currently, the Creative Wedding Garden is under construction, and will be unveiled in 2014. In its crystal dream-like space, people can personalize their wedding ceremonies, which is a romantic extension of the museum lifestyle. The Shanghai Museum of Glass will also launch a glass aquarium project as an extension of knowledge of the museum lifestyle, making it a perfect place for kids to acquire marine knowledge and taste the charm of glass through ingenious combination of vivid glass art simulations and real marine life. Subsequently, to accompany the aquarium, a creative glass design center will be built, which will bring together many modern design elements and bring innovative extensions to the museum lifestyle. By that time, a new museum lifestyle with aesthetic qualities of the post-industrial era will take shape, closely connecting with the life of urban residents through the bridge of creativity.

Museums are the cultural name cards of cities. As collection halls of human culture, museums, in a sense, play the role of cultural coordinates during the process of social development, and with

profound cultural heritage, endow the cities with spirituality and artistic conception, quietly adding to the enhancement of the image of cities. The style of museum architecture is usually classic, monumental and permanent. Museums are cultural image and landmarks of cities, and important places where people can acquire knowledge, cultivate character, and improve themselves. Be it the existing Shanghai Museum of Glass, or the Wedding Garden, the Glass Art Design Center and the Glass Aquarium to be completed in the future, they are all closely linked with "Urban Life", combine the atmosphere of museums and trends of the target audience segments, form a unique charm based on emotional needs, namely, the pursuit and creation of "happiness" by modern people.

I hope museums can bring a better tomorrow for all urban residents. Thank you!