

Global Readers and Thinkers
Art-book review “The Little Bridge”
Hangzhou, 12 January 2019

Thank you, Jasmine Chou!

Good afternoon.

First, I would like to introduce myself a little bit before introducing my art-book “The Little Bridge”. My name is Kim Engelen and work as a contemporary artist. I am from the Netherlands and now for almost 14 months in China. ~~I hold a Master of Fine Arts degree in “Critical and Pedagogical Studies.”~~ Because of my art career of 19 years, I have worked and lived as a contemporary artist in 6 countries and my artworks have been shown in 24 countries.

My specialty lies in social oriented performances, video and iPhone photography. And my topics of interest rotate around communication and self-development (pursuit of superiority). I have several ongoing art-projects I am working on and one of them is my art-project “Bridges”. ~~“Bridge Performances” are mostly temporary encounters of co-creating.~~ For me as an artist, the bridge is a wonderful tool to work with. The bridge stands as a metaphor symbolizing connection, but also process and transition.

~~As Alfred Adler says: All problems are interpersonal relationship problems. My art arises out of my own shortcomings in connecting with others. In an allegorical way I work with these shortcomings. In the meeting (or absence of meeting) with others through conscious reflection, development or deterioration can take place. More positively speaking or ideally, my artworks are about self-development, critical thinking and humanity.~~

The art-book “The Little Bridge” that I am presenting today stems from my artist in residence 4 months ago. From 1-7 October 2018 I lived and worked at *Meihuazhou* Scenic Spot in Jiaying. By living and working I mean by having a dialogue with life, I got my ideas. And for 6 days, I created new artworks while residing at *Tanlu Qiling* Homestay.

This artist in residence has been made possible via Jason Xu from *Tanlu* Cultural Travels.

During my artist in residence, I collected via word of mouth stories, legends, images, songs, poems and all things essentially related to the more than 1000-year-old *Sanbu Liangpan* bridge. Every day I made 1 new artwork and exhibited the new work the same day while continuing to make new artworks. The exhibition space I presented as an artist studio where people could walk in to see the artworks in progress.

Each day the exhibition changed and grew, until on the 6th day, the final day of the artist in residence, 6 new artworks were presented in an exhibition titled: “The Little Bridge”.

According to Xie Qiang who wrote the foreword in the art-book “The Little Bridge”:

“Bridges have special historical significance in China. Bridges are woven into the transportation network of China’s history, extending in all directions recording the history of China. In the artworks, the bridge, a Chinese element, is used extensively, which not only has a deep, almost tangible sense of history, but also reflects the antiquity of Chinese culture”.

And: “The bridge is not only there to play the role of physical connection, more importantly, through the concept of the bridge, that is to build a bridge between people’s hearts and minds.”

On DAY 1 // October 1, 2018 // I showed: “1 person has 1 mind, 100 people have 100 minds”. These were 6 metallic pink envelopes (hongbao) placed horizontally next to each other. With the number six in mind being a lucky number for many Chinese people. Hongbao’s are usually given by the Chinese people to their loved ones wishing them good fortune and are filled with money. In Western society in general, the wish is more important than the actual value of the present. Above the hongbao’s were placed production certificate stickers, on which I had handwritten: Day 1, Day 2, Day 3, Day 4, Day 5, Day 6. Each representing one day of the residency at *Tanlu Qiling* Homestay.

Below each hongbao was 1 small colorful sticker heart, similar to those given to schoolchildren in order to praise their good behavior. But for me, they allegorically represent the hearts of all people ideally; playful, happy and free. Since hung artworks are usually untouchable, one cannot know with what these envelopes were filled. Was there something inside? Money, good wishes, stories, or nothing? What does the visitor wish is inside? At the end of my 6 days stay the 6 little envelopes might be filled with lucky-art. Each envelope filled with 1 good day at the artist in residence at the *Tanlu Qiling* Homestay at *Meihuazhou* Scenic Spot.

On DAY 2 // October 2, 2018 // I showed: “3-steps, 2-steps”. I exhibited 10 square calligraphy papers on which photocopies in black and white presented: the *Sanbu Liangpan* bridge, an upcoming gānbēi moment (cheers!), the courtyard puppy named Ling Ling, a menu-card (showing the *Sanbu Liangpan* bridge), the homestay door-card (also showing the *Sanbu Liangpan* bridge), my working table at the artist in residence and 2 photographs of me taken by visitors of the *Meihuazhou* Scenic Spot.

The rims of the black and white papers were colored bright yellow with a marker.

The peculiar *little Sanbu Liangpan* bridge consists of 2 smaller bridges, each only 2 to 3-meters long. The monks from the *Shifo* (Stone Buddha) temple built it during the Tang dynasty.

For me the name of this little bridge is like a powerful positive message: after you made the first 3 steps, the next 2 steps will be easier. Signifying: Start, make the first steps and after this you can possibly reach a different mindset. In order to get somewhere you have to move your own body. You yourself have to do the moving of your body and mind. As a comparison, the visitors of the *Meihuazhou* Scenic Spot. First, they have to do the planning for the travel, then the actual traveling and then once they have made the journey, they can enjoy being in a different place, for example in *Meihuazhou*, where it is beautiful and peaceful.

On DAY 3 // October 3, 2018 // I showed the art-work: “My blood is your blood”. This is a A3 size white paper hanging vertically. On it were 12 white post-it notes from the Taipa Houses Museum in Macau. On each post-it note was a non-identical fingerprint in red ink. On the left bottom rim of the A3 paper was stamped with a decal in red ink in both Chinese and English: Original. On the right bottom side of the paper was a stamp also bilingually and in red ink: Contemporary Artist Kim Engelen 2018.10.03. “Mi casa es su casa” is a Spanish proverb meaning you are welcome and please feel at home. That is how warm I felt being welcomed during my delightful artist in residence at *Tanlu Qiling* Homestay. On my second evening while I was here, there was a big hotpot dinner with 12 guests. One of the guests asked me if I thought donating blood is healthy. I replied with: Yes, I believe it is. I asked him in return if he thought donating blood should be mandatory. He replied: Yes, not only because it is healthy but because it can save lives. At once the new artwork came to me. Everybody present at the dinner dipped their finger or thumb into a cushion of red soaking ink and gave their own unique fingerprint. Which contributed to the art-work: “My blood is your blood”.

On DAY 4 // October 4, 2018 // I showed “Perspectiefwisseling”. I had found two stones near the more than 1000-year-old *Sanbu Liangpan* bridge. I had placed them together in an L-shape, representing the two parts of the bridge. On the stones I had glued 4 black and white photographs showing the *Sanbu Liangpan* bridge from different perspectives. The *Sanbu Liangpan* bridge consists of 2 small single arch stone bridges, with the bases connected. One North-South oriented part and one East-West oriented part. You can walk onto the bridge from 3 different directions: the East-West part, the North-South part and via a path that leads you into the middle (base). Only if you come via this path can you choose which direction you want to take, the left side (North- South) or the right side (East-West). I named the artwork “Perspectiefwisseling”, which is Dutch for (ex)change of perspective. For example, if you are sitting with someone at the table and you both look at the bottle in front of you, you can’t see what the other person sitting across of you sees and they can’t see what you see. Maybe you see the label of the drink with its name and logo. Your friend maybe sees the label with the ingredients of the beverage. Yet by talking and sharing both can learn more about the drink.

On DAY 5 // October 5, 2018 // I presented “Simple symbol”. I showed 63 bags filled with single use kuàizi (chopsticks). The bags were transparent with green print and the chopsticks had the typical light wooden color of throwaway chopsticks. I had fastened the bags including the chopsticks with transparent tape and had placed them on the dark grey tiles of the floor in the shape of 1 bridge. For me it’s important to come together and talk about ideas. And to come together at least 2 people are required. Like the chopsticks who have a perfect cooperation. By working together things can be accomplished. The quaint *Sanbu Liangpan* bridge also consists of 2 parts connecting together and so making it 1 interesting bridge.

The bridge to the me stands as a symbol for connection, process and transition. On a bridge one can go back and forth to collect and, similarly, contribute. The chopsticks relate to food and home, which are 2 essentials in life. I felt welcome and at home at the *Tanlu Qiling* Homestay where I worked diligently for 7 days. Here I met great people, had wonderful dinners in which human encounters and inspiring conversations took place.

On DAY 6 // October 6, 2018 // I showed 9 short art videos with the *Sanbu Liangpan* bridge as its stage (except No. 1). All 9 videos featured the bridge as the main protagonist. The videos were projected on the paulownia wooden door of the temporary exhibition space, showing the woodgrain through the projected light of the videos. During the day the doors were opened facing inwards, which created an intimate square space between the wall and the dark wooden door. This made that new area also a bit darker than the rest of the well-lit space. In this space within a space, I projected the 9 videos, creating a sort of small cinema. The art videos shown of the more than over 1000-year-old *Sanbu Liangpan* bridge, small in size but big in character, were presented in a humble way, the video projector was placed on the floor and the videos were projected in a small size of 70 x 58 cm. This way the exhibition title “The Little Bridge” was taken into consideration and the videos were presented in a smaller than usual projection size.

With the support of Haiyun Chen from *Tanlu Qiling Homestay* I realized my artist in residence. With the generous support of the leaders of the *MeiHuaZhou Scenic Spot*, the artbook “The Little Bridge” was printed. The artbook shows photographs of the artworks and the production processes and are bundled together with texts about the artworks and with a foreword by Xie Qiang, one of the visitors.

Discussion in relation to Alfred Adler's philosophical and psychological ideas and teaching:

1. In the artwork "1 person has 1 mind, 100 people have 100 minds". I had placed below each hongbao 1 small colorful sticker heart, similar to those given to schoolchildren in order to praise their good behavior. But for me, they allegorically represent the hearts of all people ideally; playful, happy and free. Alfred Adler was very critical of education by rebuke and reward. 1. He think it is the tasks of the child to learn not of the parents. Since we are not living to satisfy other people's expectations. 2. And the idea of rebuke and rewards is a form of manipulation but also instill the long-life carving we have for recognition outside of us. Which makes us unfree.

2. When I was talking about the artwork "3-steps, 2-steps" I was saying in order to get somewhere you have to move your own body. You yourself have to do the moving of your body and mind. I gave as a positive comparison, the visitors of the *Meihuazhou* Scenic Spot. First, they have to do the planning for the travel, then the actual traveling and then once they have made the journey, they can enjoy being in a different place, for example in *Meihuazhou*, where it is beautiful and peaceful. For Adler the "I" is holistic. The body and mind are in 1 container. It is not something separate. He also said the "I" has to stand on its own feet. To be self-reliant and in harmony with society.

3. In the art-work: "My blood is your blood" the 12 people present at the dinner gave their non-identical fingerprint in red ink. To Adler *horizontal relationships* are "equal but not the same". No one is less or more. We are equal beings. Alfred Ader also pleads for *community feeling*. That that is the source what can gives us happiness. I think the dinner guest who replied with: Donating your blood is not only healthy but because it can save lives. He was making a strong case for Adler's idea of "Contribution to the Common good".

4. Thinking about the art work "Perspectiefwisseling" in the light of etiology (the study of causation/Freud) and teleology (the study of the purpose of given phenomenon). In this regard Adler's idea is diametrically opposing Freudian thought on trauma. Adler doesn't believe in the past and denies trauma. Adler thinks about "goals" and not past "causes." For example, one creates a fear to achieve a goal. I don't want to go out. Which you make it your goal and then you adjust your life story to it. Freud would look for the cause why it is that this person doesn't want to go out. To give a simplistic allegory. Let's say you are going to the doctor since you have a flu. Adler would give you the bitter medicine*. But Freud would talk about how you got sick. I think both viewpoints are import. Now you will be healed from your cold. And next time you will put on a coat when you go out in order to prevent catching another cold. How about if we don't choose the one over the other. But use both to get "well"? (*Being you have to do your living, nobody does it for you.)

5. In the art-work "Simple symbol" I talked about in order to come together at least 2 people are required. Like the chopsticks who have a perfect cooperation. By working together things can be accomplished. Also the chopsticks relate to food and home, which are 2 essentials in life. Adler goes so far as to say all people's problems in life are Interpersonal Relationship Problems. Since we see people as competition instead of comrades.

6. In the foreword Xie Qiang wrote: "In the artworks, I can feel Ms. Kim Engelen's love for Chinese culture and her desire for a better life." And: Artworks using artistic means to freeze some beautiful things, so that people who see the artwork can return to the nature of simplicity in order to save the best things. This is the most meaningful thing. He might have felt it right or how Alfred Adler sees life: simple!

----- Kim Engelen