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Festival fosters youth cultural exchanges – food meets art

By Zhang Ruinan in New York | China Daily USA | Updated: 2017-10-24 09:15



The breadth of contemporary Chinese culture was on display at the first Creative Chi Festival, a three-month event geared toward fostering collaboration between young artists from China and the United States.

The festival concluded its run recently in New York after tours in Boston and Los Angeles.

"I know a lot about traditional Chinese culture and arts, such as Chinese calligraphy and painting, but I didn't know Chinese contemporary arts could be so interesting and creative," said Vincent Marchetti, a young designer from New York who attended Eating the Culture exhibition by the Beijing-based multimedia artist Song Dong at Mana Contemporary in Jersey City.

Song, who has been building model cities around the world using biscuits, cakes and pastries and has invited participants to eat them in his series exhibition since 2003, is at the vanguard of contemporary Chinese art.

"Eating is a very important part of Chinese culture," said Song. "There's an old saying in ancient China that goes: 'Food is the first necessity of people (Min Yi Shi Wei Tian).'"

Song said that when he first went overseas, he could not speak English, but everyone seemed to be very interested in Chinese food.

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"So, the idea came to me - combining food with the art as a way to communicate with around the world, because the food is essential to everyone," Song added.

Song's exhibition was just one part of the festival hosted by The Beijing Contemporary Foundation and supported by the Chinese Ministry of Culture as part of the China-U.S. and People-to-People Dialogue framework. The festival featured movies, music, fashion design, contemporary art, and a focus on the city of Nanjing.

For instance, in the design exhibitions sector, a coterie of young Chinese designers, including Lu Yang, whose work featured a balance of intense color, body parts and Asian motifs. Angel Chen and Wu Min, represented a new generation of internationally influenced artists.

"There are not many exchanges between the young generation in China and the US in fields such as contemporary arts and urban culture," said Cui Qiao, the president of the Contemporary Art Foundation. "We want to change that, and we want the festival to be a platform that enables young Chinese to collaborate with American institutions and institutions in other countries."

"Young Chinese artists now have a more international outlook," Cui said. "They are active in the international sphere such as exhibiting their work overseas and collaborating with institutions in other countries."

Cui said that when Americans think about Chinese culture, they think about the traditional culture in the abstract. So the festival brought many works from young artists in China that exposed a different side of Chinese culture - one that is more creative, dynamic and modern.

"American audiences were really surprised and inspired by these works," Cui said.

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