

## ANYTHING DID HAPPEN WHEN DUNEDIN ART AND FASHION WENT TO SHANGHAI

Jane Malthus, Antony Deaker and Margo Barton

The path through the bamboos leads into the unknown

Ji Cheng 1635

Well, anything could happen and it could be right now

And the choice is yours to make it worthwhile

The Clean 1981

*Anything Could Happen* was an exhibition of contemporary art and fashion held in Shanghai during May-June 2017. The works of some artists and designers from Dunedin, New Zealand, were shown in Yu Gallery in the city's Yu Gardens (Yu Yuan).

Shanghai, with a population of approximately 24 million, is situated on the south side of the Yangtze River estuary, and is a major global financial and commercial centre. It has one of the world's busiest container ports and is known for its distinctive skyline of skyscrapers. Dunedin (population 128,000), a southern city in New Zealand known for its tertiary education, neo-gothic and modernist architecture, stunning landscape, great music, and innovative art and fashion, has been a sister city of Shanghai since 1994.

The exhibition was the result of an invitation from Yu Garden managers to a Dunedin delegation to Shanghai in early 2016. Enterprise Dunedin (Dunedin City Council) then reached out to Prof Margo Barton and others at Otago Polytechnic to propose a curatorial collaboration involving local art and fashion. Curators Margo Barton and Dr Jane Malthus from the School of Design at Otago Polytechnic and Antony Deaker of Enterprise Dunedin worked to plan and implement the exhibition, meeting again with representatives from Yu Garden in Dunedin to discuss plans in late 2016.

*Anything Could Happen* was named after the lyrical song of the same name written and performed by famous Dunedin band The Clean. They contributed to the popular post-punk movement of the late 1970s and 1980s known as 'the Dunedin Sound.' This title was suggested by Craig Easton, who had first-hand insight into both Dunedin culture and the cultural thinking and design philosophy of Yu Yuan. Advice, support and funding for planning, curating and implementing all aspects of *Anything Could Happen* came from the Shanghai Government and Huangpu District Government, Otago Polytechnic, the Dunedin City Council (DCC), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Creative New Zealand, Yu Yuan, New Zealand Trade and Enterprise and the Prime Minister's Scholarship Asia, for student involvement.

The exhibition was inspired by the sister city relationship between Dunedin and Shanghai; the relationship between Yu Yuan and the Lan Yuan (the Dunedin Chinese Garden); the Otago Polytechnic's collaborative fashion projects with fashion schools in Shanghai (especially the longstanding partnership and projects with Shanghai University of Engineering Science); and by wanting to widen and strengthen the creative threads joining our cities. The Sister City Agreement between the cities of Shanghai and Dunedin was renewed in 2016, and the desire to cooperate through arts and culture and also through response to climate change was included in it. The chair of the Standing Committee of the People's Congress of Shanghai, Madam Yin Yicui, came to Dunedin to sign the new agreement in October 2016, and this event included the unveiling of photographic artworks gifted to Dunedin by Shanghai and now on permanent display in the Shanghai Room in the Municipal Chambers. So the exhibition to be sent to Yu Yuan was seen as a very good next step in enacting the renewed Sister City Agreement.

The curators wanted to represent the diversity, quality and connectivity of the many artists who have connections with Dunedin, and were keen to include artists and designers who had or were developing a commercial track record, and could potentially exhibit other work in China. A series of meetings and discussions took place in Dunedin and Shanghai in order to confirm the event, and we were thrilled that the Yu Gallery and Garden offered us a four-week display period. Dave Cull, Mayor of Dunedin, said in conversation, "The relationship between Yu Garden in Shanghai and Lan Garden in Dunedin is hugely important to us and we are very grateful for the generosity of Yu Yuan in hosting this exhibition in their beautiful gallery."

Yu Garden is a famous classical garden located in Anren Jie, Shanghai, and is a nationally protected cultural relic in China. Dating from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), it was created as a private garden by Pan Yunduan for his parents. Yu in Chinese means pleasing and satisfying, and this garden was a place for them to enjoy peace and comfort in their old age.

Yu Garden occupies an area of 20,000 square metres (about five acres). However, its small size belies the attractions within the garden. Pavilions, halls, rockeries, ponds, bridges and cloisters all have unique characteristics and create beautiful spaces for contemplation. Modifications have occurred over the last 400 years, of course, but the garden retains its original beauty and has been one of Shanghai's major tourist attractions since it was renovated in the 1950s.

There are six main scenic areas and more than 40 old buildings in the garden: Sansui Hall and the grand rockery, Wanhua Chamber; Dianchun Hall, Huijing Hall, Yuhua Hall and the Inner Garden. Each area features several scenic spots within its borders, which are formed as 'dragon walls.' Sculptures, carvings, calligraphy, inscriptions and paintings from famous Chinese poets and artists are part of the many details to be found amongst the trees, plants, rocks and waterways. The true treasure of Yuyuan Garden is the Exquisite Jade Rock. Located across from Yuhua Hall, it is one of the three famous rocks in the southern region of the Yangtze River.

The large Ting Tao Tower exhibition hall that housed *Anything Could Happen* comprises two floors of display spaces and cases. We are very grateful for the involvement of the New Zealand Consulate-General in Shanghai in facilitating the planning. Antony was in close contact with them and Jane met consulate staff in October 2016 in Shanghai. They assisted with documentation of the space, going to the Garden to photograph the entrances and spaces for us, among many other things. We kept them informed as the exhibition progressed, and appreciated their presence and support at the opening function.



Figure 1. Yu Gallery staff in front of one of the display cases before installation began.

## SELECTION OF WORKS

An early decision in our planning for *Anything Could Happen* was to make the selection process as democratic as possible, so that anyone who felt they met the criteria could apply with work, even though we knew there would be space constraints. A call to submit images of their work and a short CV or statement about their practice was sent out to many artists and publicised on various networks. These included Ara Toi networks, city galleries, marae offices, direct contact, print, radio and digital media, Otago Polytechnic alumni, and DCC websites and connections.

Applications were received from 60 artists and designers, with nearly 200 works. A panel of five selectors, with a mix of fashion, visual art and toi Maori experience, independently chose their preferences within the established criteria, and then those choices were compiled to reach the final works shown in Shanghai. This process to identify the most supported work from the selectors was also managed independently. Final decisions had to include consideration of the space constraints of the Yu Gallery cases – which are vitrine-like enclosures around its walls with doors opening into them only at the ends – so artists were mostly represented by one or two works rather than a whole suite of works.

The works selected included paintings, photography, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, weaving, ceramics, jewellery, shoe-making and fashion, a rich cross-section of the arts of Dunedin. Thirty-three artists and designers were represented.<sup>1</sup> In early April 2017 the works were gathered together at Otago Polytechnic's Art School gallery for photographing by Justin Spiers, after which they were professionally packed for airfreighting to Shanghai.

A catalogue was produced – mostly before we went to China – including a brief introduction and mayoral message; an essay by artist Dr Craig Easton, a Dunedinite who also lives, works and studies in Shanghai; and text and images from each artist or designer. Eleanor Ainge Roy wrote artist profiles, and Martin Kean designed the overall look and layout of the catalogues. English and Mandarin versions were printed in China and were available free to visitors. Having seen on a previous visit to Shanghai how popular and useful QR codes are there, the curators included a QR code in the catalogue and one for each artist on the label with their work in the Yu Gallery. These codes took the viewer to the Dunedinnz website, to Antony's WeChat feed or to artists' own websites.

## INSTALLATION

Antony Deaker travelled to Shanghai on a nine-week DCC staff exchange. As part of the sister city agreement, the DCC and Shanghai Government host an annual staff exchange and Antony's was the fourth such exchange. He was able to liaise with the Yu Gallery, arrange for the arrival of the artworks and organise workspaces at New Zealand Central in Shanghai for us to work on installation details. Again, thanks are due to the New Zealand Consulate-General's Guergana Guermanoff for the free provision of this space to the City. Margo Barton and Jane Malthus arrived in Shanghai later, accompanying a group of ten fashion and communication students from the School of

Design at Otago Polytechnic who had been awarded Prime Minister's Scholarships for Asia (PMSA) to work on an extended collaborative project in China.

The installation of *Anything Could Happen* was part of their six-week project, and we were very grateful for their assistance and that of local Shanghai artist Joyce Huang, who translated for us when necessary. Students worked with the curators and locals on many aspects of installation; finalising the text, images and printing of both versions of the catalogue, including choosing paper stocks with the local printer; writing the labels; and unpacking, hanging and installing works in cases on the two floors of the gallery. They also filmed the Yu Garden and views of the exhibition for the Dunedin website ([www.dunedinz.com/anything-could-happen](http://www.dunedinz.com/anything-could-happen)) and made their own blog posts.



Figure 2. The works had to arrive at Yu Garden late at night to avoid pedestrian and traffic congestion.



Figure 3. Crates signed in and awaiting opening in the morning. Antony Deaker and one of the Yu Gallery staff members.

We had developed a plan for the placement of objects in advance, of course, but until we saw the actual gallery and case spaces we were not sure it would all work. The gallery spaces presented numerous challenges, being quite different to a Western white box gallery. Some changes had to be made to accommodate access to both galleries and cases. Stair access, a single hanging system, one size of plinth, not being able to easily fix work to the walls or to the ceiling, and an in-case lighting track set-up were all limitations we needed to work within. The hanging system was not best suited to all the works, and some work would not fit around the corners inside the cases. Thank goodness for Kiwi ingenuity. The wonderful staff at the Yu Gallery were welcoming and accommodating, letting us do most of the installation and make our own decisions about arrangements and hanging of works.



Figure 4. Corey Adams and Joyce Huang opening crates with whatever tools they could find.



Figure 5. Antony Deaker, Joyce Huang and Margo Barton working on the exhibition at "NZ Central."



Figure 6. Holly Kumbaroff, Erin Broughton and Katie Willis editing the catalogue and labels.



Figure 7. Choosing paper stocks with the local printer.





Figure 8. In the environs of Yu Gardens, the Otago Polytechnic PMSA students with a dressform that we managed to transport on the metro!



Figure 9. Jack Weily and Erin Broughton installing a fashion photograph of Mild Red.

## ANYTHING DID HAPPEN

The exhibition's title proved to be apt for various other issues that arose during the installation. Working across language, culture and political system differences created some 'lost-in-translation' moments. One rather major hiccup for the curators was that for some unknown-to-us reason, the fashion garments sent in a hanger box with the packed artworks were not approved for importing into China. We were instructed that they had to be removed from the crates before arrival in Shanghai. This happened in Christchurch, and the pieces were freighted back to Dunedin to be returned to the artists. We are grateful to Pip McQuillan for facilitating this. Luckily, we could use the images taken prior to packing, and some that the designers had, to get large photographs printed. Thank you to Shanghai printers able to work to tight deadlines! Luckily too, a few garments travelled in our personal luggage, having not made it to packing in time, so were not subject to the same scrutiny, and we were able to exhibit them

Little things also came under the *Anything Could Happen*

rule: the nails holding the crates shut when they left Dunedin got replaced with square head screws somewhere along the journey (a customs check, we assumed), and it seemed there was no appropriate screwdriver to undo them in Shanghai. Brute strength and levering eventually worked, thanks to student muscle and determination.



Figure 10. The Pounamu

A wonderful and moving occurrence concerned a pounamu stone gift from Dunedin City's Mayor to the Director of the Garden. This was a form of koha from us in return for the generous gift of exhibition space and time from Yu Garden. Ewan Duff had prepared the stone with an inscribed Maori pattern in gold called 'aukaha': a representation of the binding that joins a double-hulled waka. It symbolised the way that the sister cities were binding themselves together over the period of their relationship. The pounamu was the first item of the exhibition for its duration, so also had a guardianship role for all the other exhibits. What we only understood when at Yu Garden was the significance of inscribed rocks in that space and to our Chinese hosts. They are a revered art form throughout the garden. It was fitting too, that Martin Kean's catalogue design featured the rocks of Long Beach as part of Dunedin's turangawaewae, given the significance of rocks in Yu Garden and elsewhere in Shanghai.



Figure 11. The sign outside the gallery entrance.



Figure 12. Joyce Huang, Craig Easton, Antony Deaker, Jane Malthus and Margo Barton after completing the installation of the exhibition, at the site of the forthcoming opening function in the Yu Garden.

## OPENING AND AFTER

The opening event was a collaboration between the sister cities and the Yu Garden. It was held in a courtyard in front of a building called Big Stage, with refreshments featuring New Zealand seafood, lamb and wines supplied and cooked on site by Future Cuisine, a New Zealand company that Antony met while working in NZ Central in Shanghai.

The opening was led by a mihi from Ngai Tahu kaumatua Edward Ellison and was attended by Chinese, New Zealand and Australian dignitaries, artists, designers and creative professionals, as well as media people. Some of the artists were present: Tara Douglas was living in China at the time, as was Craig Easton, and David Shields came for work as well. It was exciting to see the work of Dunedin artists and fashion designers in such an international setting. Yuyuan Garden has the second highest visitor numbers of Shanghai tourist attractions; so 40,000 visitors from all parts of the world got to see the exhibition over its month-long duration.



Figure 13 New Zealand Consul-General Guergana Guermanoff and Dunedin Mayor Dave Cull in the centre, with dignitaries from Dunedin and Shanghai.

After the show opened we all had other commitments, so we were grateful that the Gardens staff and management took real pride in the show, generously hosting the exhibition and introducing people to it. They took various VIP visitors to the Gardens to visit the exhibition specifically, including a mayoral delegation from a French city and government ministers from Thailand. They also engaged with us, sharing their favourite elements, asking questions about what various artworks mean, and have given us great feedback.



Yu Gallery typically shows quite traditional work and, in many cases, antiquities. The staff didn't reveal until after the opening that they were very nervous about having contemporary art and fashion there, and allowing us such curatorial and display freedom. It was unusual for them, but thankfully the director and others were thrilled with the outcome and thought that the show 'has a great feel.' This was significant praise for us. Feel, synergy or feng shui is an important factor in the whole garden.

The staff at the New Zealand Consulate-General in Shanghai also kindly promoted the exhibition to their networks. The consulate invited Antony to various events where he met people running Kiwi businesses and encouraged them to visit the show. Craig Easton – whose PhD from the University of Melbourne was on Chinese literati gardens in connection to contemporary abstraction – brought many local curators and collectors to Yu Gallery.

Yu Yuan is the second most popular visitor attraction in all of China after the Great Wall, and teems with people most days and for most of the day. The gallery is inside the walled gardens which are themselves within a larger zone of traditional tea houses, restaurants, arts businesses and every shade of retail you can imagine. This area is about four large city blocks. The people visiting the gardens are not only local Shanghai families, but also visiting Chinese from other parts of the country and, significantly, large numbers of Western tourists. There are walking tours through the gardens and gallery, and independent tourists come from diverse European and Asian countries, the Americas and Australia. So the exhibition has reached a truly international audience of culture consumers. Yu Yuan staff reported that 40,000 people visited *Anything Could Happen* over its four-week duration.

As Margo pointed out to the *Otago Daily Times*, "The exhibition gives designers a rare chance to promote their work to an international audience at one of Shanghai's leading tourist spots."<sup>2</sup>

## POST-MORTEM

This exhibition was a snapshot of some of the artists and designers working in Dunedin or working elsewhere with strong connections to Dunedin at present. More submitted work, but weren't selected and others again weren't able to submit proposals at the time we opened applications. So what we had in this small collection is an example of the diversity, quality and connectivity of our artists and designers. Yes, there were some big names missing, but this show wasn't curated conventionally: we didn't go out with a theme or a look in mind, we just put the call out to local artists and designers to offer images of the work they had on hand. Our independent panel worked through a blind voting process to select the works in the show and the fact that they came together so well, with obvious aesthetic and intellectual connections to each other, says a lot about the creative energy of our city.

These artists and designers were excited to have their work shown in Shanghai, and especially at Yu Yuan. They of course hoped that collectors, agents and dealers would notice them, but equally they hoped that through this show the artists, designers and curators of Shanghai would feel the call to engage with them. They will welcome invitations to collaborate in Shanghai or with Shanghai people, and we welcome Shanghai to send their artists, designers and artworks to Dunedin soon.

Antony was kept busy after the opening with a programme of meetings and visits that his hosts at Shanghai Municipal Government and Huangpu Government set up for him. He was introduced to some truly impressive museums, galleries, all levels of schools, organisations and institutions including M50, which is an industrial-scale contemporary arts zone with very cool galleries, studios, design stores and cafés. Several of the curators and directors from these spaces visited the exhibition and received catalogues. Shanghai's commitment to its cultural heritage is inspiring – food, architecture, dance, theatre, opera, jewellery, games, arts, dress, literature, calligraphy, language – all are important. They call this 'intangible culture,' and the government has initiated amazing programmes and investment to honour and support this 'intangible culture.'

Margo and Jane and the Otago Polytechnic students continued their project in collaboration with students at the International Fashion Academy at SUES and Shanghai Art and Design Academy; attended China Graduate Fashion Week in Beijing; and visited a number of university fashion and textiles departments in Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen and Hong Kong.

The curators were determined to produce a high-quality catalogue for the exhibition, with professional photographs of work by Justin Spiers and artist profiles penned by Eleanor Ainge Roy, as well as the essay by Craig Easton. Wherever we all went, we gifted Mandarin or English *Anything Could Happen* catalogues, talked about the show and encouraged people to visit it, giving free entry passes when appropriate. Antony was able to guide some groups through the exhibition. Academic institutions, galleries public and private, and other cultural organisations including some in Beijing now have copies of the catalogue.

A catch phrase repeatedly used in different contexts in Shanghai is "yesterday and tomorrow, today." In the context of *Anything Could Happen*, this idea was translated to probing questions about the various artworks' relationship to cultural traditions, a real appreciation of the technical skill shown in the works, and an ongoing conversation about the way artists reflect different influences in Dunedin and New Zealand. Antony's WeChat QR code was included in the catalogue and exhibition signage so he could be contacted directly. Interesting conversations with strangers via WeChat, which has a translation feature, included the meaning of "anything could happen," explaining The Clean and discussion about various artworks.

Through their participation in the preparation of the exhibition, the students learned a great deal about the process of curation; the challenges, joys and synergies of display; and the issues of working under pressure in a country where you don't speak the language, of solving problems as they arise, of working with printers. We were very lucky to have the services of Joyce Huang and recent Otago Polytechnic fashion graduate Yifan Yin to help us all navigate the local situation in Shanghai. And the Yu Gallery staff were very welcoming, helpful and understanding.

## POST-EXHIBITION POSSIBILITIES

*Anything Could Happen* opens us all to the realm of possibilities. Our artists and designers are not constrained by convention. Dunedin has always nurtured an innovative and diverse cultural scene, and what was seen in the show is a snapshot of the creative energy and style of Dunedin. There should be no surprise that Dunedin and Shanghai are both UNESCO Creative Cities.

The exhibition, Antony's exchange and Otago Polytechnic student and staff collaborations have created opportunities for artists and designers to work and exhibit in Shanghai. Offers of collaboration and exhibition spaces in Shanghai have already been made, and the Huangpu Foreign Affairs Office in Shanghai has offered an exchange arrangement for artists and designers to work out of their maker spaces. While this is still in the negotiation stages, one artist/designer has already met with a potential collaborator.

Antony came back to his role in Enterprise Dunedin with plenty of ideas, as well as further development points for future exhibitions and projects. One objective is to create more employment for practitioners in the arts and culture area in Dunedin through the connections established. Exchanges like the Shanghai Film Festival, recently hosted in Dunedin, and this exhibition of Dunedin art and fashion in Shanghai bring our two sister cities closer together. They provide cultural understanding and insights into our differences and similarities.

The project and exhibition was a means to create new and evolving personal relationships – such as artist visits and exchanges, which may be city-level or artist-to-artist, artist to gallery or artist to educational institution. Creative New Zealand are excited about what we have achieved and created in *Anything Could Happen*. Dunedin City's relationships with Shanghai are precious, and need to be continually nurtured. We could not have mounted this exhibition without the many goodwill gestures this relationship inspired, and it was responsible for the very generous four-week exhibition period, in a setting where other countries may be granted a week or two at most.

**Jane Malthus** is a dress historian, lecturer, museum curator and artist.

**Margo Barton** is the Academic Leader for Fashion. She has a Dress Design Certificate from TAFE's Fashion Design Studio in Sydney, Australia, and worked in the fashion industry for many years. Her PhD is from RMIT, Australia. Margo has been a member of the Executive Board of iD Fashion Week Dunedin since 2001 and Deputy Chair since 2015, and is a member of the executive board of the International Foundation of Fashion Technology Institutes (IFFTI).

**Antony Deaker** is the Ara Toi Project Coordinator at Enterprise Dunedin. His role in the Council is to support the economic development of the creative sector in Dunedin, developing projects to support creative tourism, export, audience development, business vitality, career development and more.

- 1 Artists and designers selected for the *Anything Could Happen* exhibition were: Rachel Allan (photography), Jane Avery (fashion), Ariane Bray (fashion), Louise Clifton (shoe-maker), Moira Crossman (weaver), Anita De Soto (painting), Inge Doesburg (printmaking), Tara Douglas (photography), Alan Dove (photographer), Craig Easton (sculpture), Kirsten Ferguson (ceramics), Kate Fitzharris (ceramics), Guy Frederick (photography), Emily Hlavac-Green (photography), Rowan Holt (fashion textiles), Jay Hutchinson (sculpture), Alex Kennedy (painting), Ewan McDougall (painting), Victoria MacIntosh (jewellery), Phillip Madill (drawing), Mary McFarlane (sculpture), Juliet Novena Sorrel (sculpture), Jenna Packer (painting), Steev Peyroux (painting), Abby Pullar and Emilie Van Schreven (fashion), Amanda Shanley (ceramics), David Shields (photography), Holly Simpson-Howe (jewellery), Donna Tulloch (fashion), Fiona Van Oyen (printmaking), Jane Venis (sculpture), Yonel Watene (painting).
- 2 *Otago Daily Times*, 12 April 2017, <https://www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/dunedin-artists-work-bright-lights-shanghai>.

Figures following pages, installation view of exhibition *Anything Could Happen*, 2017.







