

Time Out
by *Ysabelle Cheung*

Gallery spotlight: CIA

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A covert gallery featuring alternative artists

If you go down to Kwai Chung today, you might be in for a big surprise. Past the local egg tart bakeries, narrow alleyways and chock-a-block industrial warehouses, lies a covert operation whose creative mission is as (morally and conceptually) ambiguous as the artists represented within its four walls. Titled CIA, the gallery space has hosted X-rated Japanese artist Kago Shintaro, performance art group New Noveta and their hundreds of fish – founder Mr Outside* remembers that ‘it took weeks to get the stink out and cats were coming up the building because of the smell’ - and a live music performance by Vagina Dentata Organ that involved repeated destruction of various objects with a baseball bat.

“Our aim is to do something interesting,” says Mr Outside. “Not necessarily good. There is a darker side to almost everything. We’re going behind the scenes.” Having been open just under a year – CIA, which stands for Culture Industries Association, was launched in March 2013 by Mr Outside and his partner, Juiz* - the gallery seems to have already fulfilled that aim with its pick of artists. Their second flagship show is due to open January 17, featuring the works (pictured above) of Slovenian music troupe Laibach. Formed in 1980 in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Laibach’s politically controversial oeuvre has split fans and critics down the middle, with Berlin dance metal band Rammstein on one side and the Archbishop of Slovenia on the other - the latter famously walked out of a concert in 1997. The exhibition is followed by a seminar at Hong Kong City University, and a concert at The Vine (tickets available from January 10).

“We’re putting everything into this show,” Mr Outside says, explaining quite literally, that they had to empty their pockets financially to host the group. “It took us over a year to get Laibach here. All our projects are quite comprehensive and we do everything ourselves – we have to. We’re dealing with

some really alternative think stream. It's a gamble – if it pays off, then we can carry on.”

After Laibach, Mr Outside and Juiz have lined up another controversial artist, Hermann Nitsch, in May. Nitsch was one of the main artists active in Viennese Actionism, a profoundly violent and brief 20th century art movement that is considered by some as one of the earliest forms of European performance art. Best known for founding the highly controversial annual festival Orgien Mysterien Theater (loosely translated as Theatre of Orgies and Mysteries), Nitsch has served three prison terms for incorporating themes of scatology, extreme nudity and bloody crucifixion in his works. Needless to say, Nitsch and other CIA artists' works are not to be taken lightly, but Mr Outside and Juiz clearly state that their intention is not to commercialise art – the website even states that the gallery is 'unable to make profit', a further twist on the model of not for profit organisations.

“The trouble nowadays is the value in art. Art should be the sublimation of an idea so pure that it serves no purpose. These days that's lost,” says Mr Outside. “Well, I have a problem with that. And CIA has a problem with that. Enough.” *Ysabelle Cheung*

Laibach Kunst CIA, Jan 17-Mar 20. Tickets: \$20; ciahk.org

**Under instruction from CIA founders, we have used codenames.*

<http://www.timeout.com.hk/art/features/63329/gallery-spotlight-cia.html>