



CHINA – TRADITION & INNOVATION
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Guest of Honour 2009 · Frankfurt Book Fair

The design concept for the Guest of Honour hall at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2009:

Chinese Culture as an Artistic Space

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Shaped like a huge scroll and evoking all kinds of associations, a sheet of paper winds itself through the hall marking the silhouette of an imaginary mountain of books. Underneath, there is an installation consisting of a multitude of movable Chinese characters: From above, water incessantly drips into the centre of this space created from enormous characters. Thus a circular surface of water emerges within the field of square pictograms. On a second level, a video showing moving characters is projected onto this surface. The space which has been designed to frame this central pool of water is enclosed by a so-called 'wall of books' made of more than ten thousand open volumes. A highly complex system of supports links these books in such a way that they combine to form a 'Long River of Reading'.

Thus, four elements consisting of material objects shape an artistic space in which Chinese culture – here understood as a unified, conceptual whole – is rendered both visible and accessible to individual experience through modern forms of artistic expression. When entering this space, the visitor is put in a position to sensually immerse himself in Chinese culture. It is a culture capable of absorbing so many things in so many dimensions, a culture expressed in a language in which so many unsaid associations are attached to each signifier. As through a mild breeze this installation seeks, moreover, to convey a sense of how Asian civilizations feel the relationship between a man-made culture on the one hand and the natural environment on the other.

A sheet of paper, a drop of water, a character, a book – these are, in a condensed form, the elements that bind together Chinese culture.

Hence the design of the Guest of Honour hall is based on the idea that it is the characters – with their iconic reality – which form the central element of Chinese civilization. This concept is inspired by a cultural approach which aims at a sense of inclusiveness, unifying contradictions. Here the real always simultaneously refers to the imaginary, movement is always present in stillness and stillness is in movement and a single brush stroke may allude to ten thousand different things under the sky. This basic cultural concept that centres on the human being and his or her soul in their interaction with a living nature, echoes through the long history of Chinese civilization like a *leitmotif*. For all the changes we have witnessed, this concept is still alive.

Translated from the German by Andrew James Johnston

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