

Chinatown Urban Play Day
a.k.a **Community Olympics / Town Olympics**
rough draft.
Taeyoon Choi 9.20.2008

Short Description

“Town Olympics” (Chinatown NYC) is a community-specific performance art project by Taeyoon Choi. The piece is a unique hybrid of folk game, urban sports, dance theater exercise, designed in collaboration with the local residents of Chinatown, New York. The piece is created as a result of workshops with various groups in the area, in which the participants create a piece of game/sports that reflects their interest and culture. It is an artist lead workshop, which participants make and perform their own creative sports games, which reflect often under represented life of recent immigrants living in the area. The final piece will be conducted by the artist and completed by active participation from the local community, in a "Sports Day" style event.

The project consists of one month period of weekly preparatory workshops, one day public event, and two week exhibition following the event. The workshop will invite special interest groups in the area, such as community of dance hall, chess players, PC gamers, merchants, illegal workers, and second and third generation immigrants. Artist will assist them to make their own - urban play which reflects their interest, concerns, and portrays self image in the society. The event borrows the structures of a common festival 'Sports Day' in Asia where locals gather to play sports and enjoy themselves. The project will be realized in collaboration with various artists, organizers, and volunteers and support of local community centers, arts organization, and individuals. The project is designed specifically for Sarah D Roosevelt Park in New York City for the community of Chinatown residents and beyond. The project aims to build a bridge within the diverse community members and also to construct a collective portrait of the local people.

ARTISTIC VISION of Town Olympics:

(Key words: Local, Site specific, participatory, community based. performance art, game art, new media art)

Creating one of kind performance art that crosses boundary between art, theater, sports, and folk games. The work reflects diversity of local community, Chinatown and beyond. The central focus of attention is on the Chinatown community, however the event is widely publicized and inviting people living in other parts of the city.

Art historic Background

The project is, in formal perspective, about expanding the boundary of participation within the contemporary art. The project owes learning from early performance evangelists like Allan Kaprow, Art games of Dada, Fluxus Happenings, Participatory Art of Suzanne Lacy and Lygia Clark among others. The project continues the community oriented art practice, while reflecting contemporary issues such as lack of public space and event, disappearance of 'play space' for youth, lack of communication between race/age/ social groups. The project reaches out to the public a step further, by inviting them to generate content of the piece. Artist's role has transformed into an organizer and 'cultural translator' between the community and the rest of the City. Artist is exploring the potential of playful activities as a 'vehicle of integration', a 'tool of communication', and a 'framework for social service'. Artist plans to create a sense of community based on collective performance. The community might only be temporary, but the success will set a new method of artist working with community, and community can organize it by themselves in a sustainable manner.

Meet the Artist.

Taeyoon Choi is an international artist, born in USA and raised in South Korea, who has been creating various projects with playful interaction with participants in urban space. He has deep interest and knowhow on using digital media as a artistic medium to communicate between participants and etc. Previous projects have dealt with the issue of urban public space, surveillance, tourism, while audience participation is integral to the project. The role of critical artist in the future is socially engaged, organizer, activists, educator, researcher. He does not believe in projects that will stereotype minority or disadvantageous group. He believes every community and individual deserves attention of artist and the world. Artist has been working with various community groups and art in public spaces, with or without support from Fine Art and New Media Art Institutions. In his projects, sense of humor and joyfulness enables voluntary cooperation, helps to get across critical messages, and participation completes the project.

Beijing Olympics and Town Olympics.

Contrary to the Beijing Olympics in 2008, which was a nationalistic propaganda with capitalist support in artist's opinion, The Town Olympics celebrates diversity, struggles, displacement, adaptation and isolation of the community. It will be everything that the Beijing Olympic was not, voluntary, creative, spontaneous and cooperative.

Where as the Beijing Olympic Ceremony was based on a solitary artistic vision of Jang Yemo, the Town Olympics is founded on collective vision of participants.

Where as the Beijing Olympics is competitive, Tow Olympic is only partly competitive. People are not spectators, they are participant which makes integral part of the event. It does not celebrate nationalism, it celebrates diversity.

Contents of the Town Olympics

The specific rules and scripts of the piece is impossible to describe at the current state of planning, because the contents are depended on local participants input. However, there are few guidelines. Previous works and research by the artist will also help understanding and imagining the content.

The guidelines

- There will be a beginning and end.
- There will be some sort of competition method, and a fixed duration.
- Beginning and end will be celebrated with choreographed performance, which everyone can follow the leader to do.
- Maximum 200+ people are able to participate at any given point
- Some sort of grouping method will divide people into smaller teams. They are visibly marked by uniform or tag.
- There will be some elements of the piece using props; flags, panel, etc.
- The piece takes elements from sports/game/play/flash mob/folk games of local culture/ computer game/ dance/ theater. It is designed and conducted by the participants with guidance from the artist.
- The piece is (partly) original and credits the authors and references.
- The games can be a bit obscure in its intention and abstract in the structure of competition, but it is important to be expressive and joyful in nature.

The Public Component

New York Chinatown Community Olympics Project:

“People who live in Brooklyn, they pass by Chinatown rapidly on a hip single speed bicycle. Youngsters with dragon tattoo play hand squash on the court near Grand B/D station. Old folks play Chinese Chess in the parks. Some recent immigrant young men spend hours day and night, playing video game in PC cafes. Elders at the park usually talk among themselves.” (excerpt from the artist's note)

The project is specifically designed for the Chinatown locals and visitors to learn about each others life, break the cultural barriers, and converse via the universal language of joyful interaction from a hybrid form of participatory entertainment that mixes sports, game play, and art. What if all of the people could play together, teach each other of their own games, plays, sports. All in central location of Sarah D Roosevelt Park. It is most important that people of different background get to learn about each other via the play. Elders get to share their experience with young ones. There can be choreographed dance, singing festival, potluck food, cooking contest and etc. The project is an open framework for collaboration and community building. Goal of this public project is to create an event that functions as a foundation for bonding of community. The project is a social art work that tries to mix a group of disintegrated people into a situation where they will voluntary interact with one another in a personal manner. Artist works as an intermediary between the immigrants and the rest of the population. However the distinction is not strictly binary, and the project does not try to represent a specific culture or groups of people. Rather it is open frame work for which can be modified and interpretation by the community.

Why Chinatown?: condition of permanent settlements for illegal and legal immigrants

The project is based on the observation of Chinatown in New York, where artist resides. Isolated from the rest of New York City by language and cultural barrier, large population of the town is not integrated in the city. Most New Yorkers only know Chinatown as a tourist sites. Although the infamous gang related violence and illegal business that highlighted 1990s is not visible on the surface, the town still is struggling transformation and inhabits large number of illegal immigrants and Chinatown has been expanding to the neighboring Little Italy. Hidden by the touristic attraction and much of their story and life is unseen and unheard by the others in the city. The neighborhood, between Canals st and Grand st, and Allen st and Mott st, is inhabited by recent immigrants from main land China, specifically Fu Zhou province, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Second-third generation immigrants, American and other national and cultural background. Compared to culturally enriching neighborhood of Soho and Lower East Side, the Chinatown does not receive as much of artistic attention and cultural exchange.

Disintegration among social/economic class and isolation of individual is the common side effect of urban life style. The metropolis is growing relentlessly, population is becoming more dense, but the urban culture is being replaced with corporate advertisement and gentrification. Every community deserves a public space, and communal events which the participants are center of the attention. The project does not strive to solve the issues of urban isolation and misrepresented minority. However the work celebrate the diversity and suggests a new way of using existing public infrastructure and resources to create a monumental event for the everyone. The piece will premier within the context of a 'Sports day' event. The event will be organized in cooperation with a local organization. It will be a half day program that also invites community dance groups, sports teams (kids soccer, tai chi groups, etc), marching bands and etc to take a part. The event will also invite groups from other parts of Manhattan to come and participate.

The “Town Olympic” project is an open platform, which can be adapted to different community. The project is open source, it welcomes other community leaders and artists to implement to their local setting. The project does not attempt to portray the local group as a solitary portrait. Everyone in the neighborhood is vibrantly unique in their heritage. The event will be more of chaotic mix of eclectic events, everyone will be invited and outside of few key happenings, general mood of the event is free .

The Preparation Process

During the weekly workshops, local participants will design and perform their own performance. Their projects will be a unique kind of play which functions as a way to express their identity and use it as a medium to communicate with others. Where they come from. The workshop will raise awareness of the project, and create a solid group of supporters. Each group will be making their own logo types which then will be used for T-Shirts and Flags.

Three or more New York City artist (who have been working in the field of participatory, community art, psychogeography, or urban intervention) will be invited into a paid position to guide, adviser and mentor in realizing the project. The artists will be paid hourly. Three or more volunteers or supporters will be selected as a translator between artists and the community. Some artist will be selected upon the skills of fluent Mandarin or Cantonese speaker.

Prior, during and after the event. Artist and the team will use an empty store front, or gallery as an office and exhibition space. The space must be donated or rented very cheaply. The space will function as an office and gallery space that shows the concept of the project. It will be used to host workshops prior to the event, and exhibit documentation after the event. 'ABC No Rio' in Rivington Street is a potential site.

Ideally the event will take place in end of spring or beginning of the fall. In case of rain check, everything will be postponed for one day after the date.

The Total time artist will devote full time for the project is 3 months.

First two month and half is preparation. There needs to be two weeks after the event for finishing documentation. The preparation and research is an integral part of the project.

Partners, Collaborators.

Artist is searching for production partner who will be responsible for <Production, Finance, Publicity> of the event. Art projects are most successful when artist is independent from the labor of funding and production. The event can be run by an external organizer. Partnering institutions responsibility includes working with local organizations, religious and community groups.

Artist's responsibility is communicating directly with the participants, guiding and motivating participants to advance the specific projects, realizing aesthetic and conceptual beauty within the project. Artist will need assistance of more artists.

Following is the list of potential partners.

Artist Collectives:

Glowlab

Institute of Aesthetics

Institute for Infinitely Small Things

You are not here

Art Institution:

LMCC – Public Art Fund

New Museum of Contemporary Art – Museum as Hub program

Creative Time – Public Art Institute

New York State Arts Council

PERFORMA – Festival of Performance Art, Rosalee Goldberg

Produciton:

ABC No Rio

Organization:

Conflux – festival of urban psychogeography
Come out and play – festival of urban play
Chinatown Elderly Association – Community Center
Blue Stockings – Independent Bookstore
Communtiy Center in LES
Church and religious groups in Chinatown

Media Partner:

Iminlikeyou.com – web game agency
Not an alternative – publicity, local network

Technical Support:

Eyebeam – art and technology center: Technical support, equipment loan, etc
Documentation: video and photo production and Editing will be commissioned to a professional

Funding

The scale of project is depended on institutional funding. However, in case of failing to meet the ultimate funding amount, the event will be organized with a shoe string budget from donation and fund raising based on support of local economy. The project will need to reshape according to the available resources. Actual process and structure of the project will remain intact regardless of the funding. However, the level of promotion and scale of production will reflect the funding status.

Production Fee:

Rental Vehicle

U haul = \$500 for 3 days

Transportation of donated or burrowed resources (tents, tables, chairs etc)

Rental Equipment:

PA Sound System Rental \$ 1000/day

Sound Operator: \$ 250/ day

Publicity:

Advertisement at local news paper

Part time publicity staff payment

Printed T-Shirt: Free for staff and participants 100.

Silk Screen T-Shirt Making Stand: Material cost

Sales: \$10+@ donation

Event coordination Staff:

Promotion

Issues of Translation

people in charge of translating are performing a critical role as an intermediary person. Their task is not limited to translating language, but cultures and values. Bilingual assistants are young artists, students, and volunteers of any age who speak Mandarin or Cantonese and Fluent English. Their role is communicating between the artists and the participants.