

### **3. Activity- Margaret Shiu**

Artists have great contributions to make to civil society, and artist residencies are becoming creative communities providing platforms that will facilitate and support artists, thinkers and activists from many sectors who work for change. Creative communities are acting as international hubs for innovative strategies towards cross sector initiatives for proactive change in local, specific situations.

Our Case Study to be presented at the panel is *Art as Environment : a culture Action at the Plum Tree Creek*

Bamboo Curtain studio, situated along the mouth of the major river in New Taipei city, is a private culture NPO. I have, in the past 17 years witnessed a major change in the local ecology and urban development. Being an economist myself, I have been keenly aware of the creative contribution of the arts in asking the inconvenient truth, seeking the impossible goal and providing creative solutions to our daily lives. It is based on that belief, that we have been offering creative residencies to local, regional and international artists. We also initiate collaborations of like minds, but from different expertise, to work together, as joint action has unique impact to our social, historical, cultural and especially our concern, environmental impact in our local community.

A case for reference is our Plum tree creek, where we worked for the past years as the hub for art and ecology towards revitalization of the local creek. This is the tipping point for Chuwei, as it needs concrete steps of changes to this densely populated community. It has increase over five folds, from 10 thousand to 50 thousand in the last ten years within this district. Like many in Asia, this farming village has seen major changes, from a post war industrial township, into a bedroom community with dense condo units, thus the local waterways have thus suffered badly in the process. The elders in the community had told us many times the deteriorating situation, but local authorities are more concerned with water shed and flooding issues, and not water pollution and sustainable ecology matters.

We worked with eco artist Ms WU Mali, as chief curator, and the Studio as the executing team. We have five art groups of various focus: from community theatre, city planning, urban farming, local eco-education, naturalists. We all approaching the issue from different artistic perspective, and initiated long term engagement with residents, all under a curatorial grant from our National Culture and Art Foundation.

We knew that these ecological problems takes time and takes repeated engagements, thus we have repeated invitations for residencies to international eco artists like Reiko Goto, and Tim Collins , to seek their experiences from their Three Mile Run in Pittsburg; and others like the Harrisons from San Diego; and working with David Haley on Green house Britain project in UK, Ichi Ikeda from Japan, Alessandro Carponi from Italy, etc., .....Their viewpoints provided the local resident teams with creative collaborations, and became part of our local discussions, and joint culture actions. The intention of this art as environment project is to seek through various artistic expressions to illicit community joint action for a more natural and healthy environment for all residents. therefore, having artist and planners speaking up and writing proposals to various authorities, plus art workshops in local schools and communities, the awareness is broadened and understanding deepen in the minds of diverse groups, from local representatives to officials, politicians to PTA, students and church groups. They now agree and will seek negotiation for more open space and balanced ecology in development, plus improvements in access to the water source of their community. Now they seek to be at the discussion table for the future planning of the new waterworks.

We are happy to see in the recent year, our engagement has aroused enough collaboration from other disciplines too: university's architecture department, water conservation units, and the Green party, environmental groups, urban farming associations to women association for sustainable ecology, all joint in to help us in our local and international resident artists to promote our local ecology art festivals, children's workshops, community theatre.... Now the community uses our Studio's link as the designated website for observations and discussions. We now are also asked for local consultation, by the authorities, for upcoming changes by the various departments. The real outcome is: Chu Wei is now marked

for major infrastructural waterways changes.

However, financial support is not sufficient to help our Studio to sustain this effort. Our experimental curatorial grant is now ending, we have to evaluate our real impact and strategy for sustaining our volunteering efforts on this noble cause: **Art as environment: a culture action.**

We see artists' role in society as the instigator of matters of concern, we see our unique role as facilitator of meeting of minds from near and far in a neutral zone of a working residency, where art does not have to be right or wrong but asking **why not.** The best way to help promote change is by initiating awareness, then physical engagement, and onto real collaborative actions for change.