

Annie Ivanova: Merging Cultures Through the Importing and Exporting of Creativity



Annie Ivanova

- Place of origin: Australia

Experience:

- Taiwan, Taiwan by Design, founder
- Taiwan, MOCATaipei, Wonderland: New Contemporary Art from Australia, curator
- Taiwan Art Taipei, Encoded, invited international guest curator
- Singapore, Taiwanese Media Arts, Illuminations, curator
- Austria, Ars Electronica, FutureLab Program, executive producer
- USA, Impact by Degrees, Australian Embassy in Washington, curator
- Australia, agIdeas Design Week, International Advisory Board

Australian Annie Ivanova is a cultural ambassador who sees it as her mission to create bridges between cultures and their traditions. She views art and digital media as common, unifying languages that transcend the borders of the world and connect its peoples. Over the last four years, she has resided in both Melbourne and Taiwan, taking on a variety of roles dedicated to actualizing this ideal.

Although professionally active for less than two decades, Ivanova has more than eighty international exhibitions, conferences, and public diplomacy projects under her belt, earning her no less than forty-five awards from national or international institutions. She has a background in a broad range of fields, holding degrees in both fine arts and international trade. She first became interested in digital media whilst studying in Europe, where she was strongly influenced by the new but rapidly expanding digital arts scenes growing around events like the annual Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria.

Ivanova went on to co-found and direct Australia's first media arts agency, Novamedia Ltd., representing some of Australia's most renowned digital media artists. In her quest to promote Australian art internationally, she traveled to various global centers of digital media, collaborating with some of the most prestigious arts institutions in the world and taking up positions as curator-in-residence in Denmark, Finland, and Austria.

Australia is a nation that has been historically treated as culturally isolated from its geographical neighbors, and its citizens often encounter misconceptions about who they are. With the goal of promoting understanding about Australia within the Asia Pacific region, the Australian government provides funding to arts professionals interested in doing bilateral projects between Asia and Australia. The program enabled Ivanova to become passionately involved in developing cultural and artistic ties between Taiwan and Australia.

Her relationship with Taiwan began in 2010 when she was invited to be a VIP international curator at Art Taipei (台北國際藝術博覽會). Having traveled extensively in Asia both before and since then, she recalls how the brutality of Taipei's concrete cityscape was initially anything but inspiring. Nevertheless, as time passed, she came to realize that this cold exterior was merely a façade behind which lies the city's true charm and beauty. "All you have to do is turn into one of the city's infinite network of alleyways to discover that Taipei is just a big city with a genuinely communal mentality. People live so closely together and look after each other like you would find in a small community."

In the same year she organized Encoded, the first Australian media art exhibition in Taiwan, followed by the enormously successful Wonderland: New Contemporary Art from Australia at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in 2012. Besides her efforts importing Australian art and design to Taiwan, she was all the while dedicated to exporting Taiwanese art and design. To this end she organized Illuminations, a Taiwanese media art exhibition in Singapore in 2013, and played a role in assisting Taiwanese designers to be keynote presenters at the prestigious agIdeas International Design Week in Melbourne.

"If I could have one dream come true for young Taiwanese, it's that they leave Taiwan for a period of time and then come back. Traveling abroad gives individuals a sense of freedom that may be difficult to find here," contends Ivanova. She sees a lot of creativity and technical skills in Taiwan, but as a society, Taiwan is still opening up to the world, and traveling can provide a massive boost to creative individuals. What's more, she believes venturing abroad can stimulate people's appreciation of what they do have here in Taiwan.

In 2013, Ivanova traveled around Taiwan and met with members from all of Taiwan's recognized aboriginal tribes, compelled to call international attention to the endangered culture of the island's indigenous inhabitants. Being the first foreign curator to participate in such an undertaking, her work was recognized by the Australian Arts in Asia Awards. The Taiwanese government has also acknowledged her contributions by granting her a scholarship to study Mandarin at the National Taiwan Normal University (國立臺灣師範大學). Says she of the experience, "I was honored to accept the offer, and it really helped me to kick-start learning Chinese. I only wish I had the luxury of more time to continue studying the language formally."



When asked about the Gifts from the Star exhibition at Taipei 101, her latest endeavor, Ivanova's eyes light up with excitement and she takes an eager breath before going into the details. Taking place until January 4th on the fourth floor of the chic Taipei 101 plaza, the exhibition features 101 products of up-and-coming Taiwanese designers. Each item is displayed in a gift-shaped box within a gift-shaped exhibition room, with an elegant, 12-meter decorated Christmas tree presiding over the exhibition area. Through this event she hopes to encourage shoppers to buy Taiwanese for their holiday gifts this year.

Ivanova selected the 101 products based on research for her upcoming book about Taiwanese product design and culture. She also has some ideas brewing for Taipei's 2016 World Design Capital designation. Always building up her network of creative contacts, aspiring to coalesce the corners of the globe into one diverse family through art and design, she sums up the simplicity of her passion when she asserts, "I don't see any of it as work. I just do it because it's good to be done."

1. In 2010, when she was invited to be a VIP international curator at Art Taipei.

2. Wonderland: New Contemporary Art from Australia (魔境: 來自澳洲的當代藝術)

3. Gifts from the Star exhibition at Taipei 101.