

Towards a Value Factory for Shenzhen

As Creative Director of the 5th UABB, I am proud to present to you: The Value Factory.

Conceived, designed and programmed to last much longer than the Biennale's duration of three months, this project harkens back to the Biennale's original idea: to create an event that acts as an urban catalyst, setting the tone for the future of the city it is dedicated to. This is why the UABB decided to use Shekou at the city's urban border and a derelict glass factory as its main venue. At first, the factory did not seem to have much worth; now I am sure we have rescued its value.

It took my team 10 steps to get there and you will find or encounter these steps during your visit. Let me reveal them, and guide you through them...

A factory for Shekou. Thirty years ago, Yuan Geng got a chance to set up a social-economic experiment, establishing Shekou as the first industry park in China and at the same time pursuing social and political reforms. The Guangdong glass factory in particular, contributed to the face of modern urban China, by mass producing float glass used in modern China's buildings. This underscores Shekou's historical significance.

Now, once again, Shekou can become a laboratory for future change in the Pearl River Delta and China. And this time it is not industry, as China knows it, but creativity, that is the main driver for change and delight. Welcome to **Shenzhen's Special Culture Zone**.

The factory is the property of *China Merchants Shekou Industrial Zone*. Just like the factory, it is a company with a long history. It prides itself on being a pioneering force for China. This company was supposed to be a sponsor of the Biennale, providing a substantial contribution to the Biennale budget, along with quite some others. And they did sponsor the Biennale. But why would the company just provide financial support, if they could also invest and be the first to make a true Value Factory? So, the **sponsor became an investor**, a landlord becoming aware of the value he already owns.

If it comes to Biennales and other festivals, very often venues are there to provide a background for the program people to come to - a facility. If the architecture is nice, of course it enhances the ambiance. But it contains content. This time the container has become content itself. The **background becomes the foreground**. Cherishing existing qualities, providing a wonderful architectural tour, re-setting and re-charging an almost timeless construction, are key components of the show. They also reflect China's drive to make things.

To underscore the primacy of the building one does not need to deploy the entire repertoire of architecture. On the contrary. When there are so many qualities to the building that already exist, one does not need to do much to capitalize on them: they are best magnified by **doing almost nothing**. What you will explore is a piece of industrial heritage at its best. Its timeless qualities are kept in their glorious original states. A low budget nicely coincides with an ambition to celebrate what is already good.

Doing almost nothing as an individual designer can very easily be seen as a sign of laziness or aesthetical minimalism. Therefore, we did almost nothing together, with a group of about 15 young international architects, who were able to dissolve their desire to leave their personal mark and merged their skills in a collective creativity of all sorts. Value came out of **Value Factory match making**: sharing intelligence, moderated and directed to designing the shift from industry to culture.

Once the glass factory had been preserved and its qualities celebrated, time had come to find the proper "residents" for the factory. We found them by selecting a few international institutions, all with clear

ambitions to transcend their brands by doing new things in China. We call them **Value Factory program partners**. Universities, museums, architecture centers, design labels and design offices, come together to explore each other and the toughness of the industrial environment. No time to set brand new conditions by elevating their own buildings. This is about direct contribution. All are keen on substantiating the factory itself, and generating value on the spot. As a group they demonstrate how this Value Factory can be repositioned in the future.

To direct this Biennale requires tackling many challenges. I guess that's why they invite you in the first place. A remote and derelict place, a very short lead time, fierce competition, and still a desire to present something substantial for Shenzhen, for the neighborhood, and for the design disciplines. A job like that can never be done without building up a practice over years. And it should never just stop at the closing ceremony of the Biennale. It is creativity unfolding, and will continue to unfold in the future. This is a **Value Factory Studio** as its latest guise. Please come and visit us. We are ready to take your questions and work for you. We want to run the Value Factory as a true demo of times to come.

From writing a curatorial statement about China and the world, to polishing a door knob; from preserving unknown beauty and turning it into a new experience and producing exciting new forms; from pondering Shenzhen's future while looking out over its skyline, with Hong Kong and the ocean in the distance, to focusing on technical details and meeting people face to face... This project provides a unique learning experience in creative leadership. It is an experience we want to share with many by sharing a broad curriculum to be followed by an interdisciplinary group of students. Therefore, we founded the **Value Factory Academy**. Enroll now.

But whatever vision we have of developing the Value Factory as a true catalyst for urban change in Shenzhen, we always acknowledged that we are primarily organizing a Biennale. You can change a building, set up new institutional roles and start a school and an office, but first and foremost you need a **Value Factory public program**. So please join us at one of the countless events: performances, seminars, dance events, fashion shows, speeches, theatre plays, harvest parties or enjoy a good meal or special cocktail with ingredients from our own garden.

Dear visitor, these were nine steps towards the creation of a Value Factory. We are sure you will recognize each of them while exploring the Value Factory campus. But before you get there, you will have gone along the **Connecting Road** from city to urban border, and along the Shekou Industry Park potentials. As the Value Factory attempts to revive the power of architecture by re-animating a factory's machine hall, its warehouse, its silo and its outdoor green, you will find on the road towards it, how much more is waiting for ideas and the courage to follow suit.

The Value Factory:

Where value is created.

Where culture can be made.

Where people can have profound experiences of timeless architectural qualities.

Where they can meet and share.

Where China meets the world and both sides can look in each other's mirror.

Where experiment prevails.

This 5th UABB is The Value Factory's first window. Let it be its demo version. Let it be its reality check.

With utmost pleasure I present to you its first program...

Sincerely,

Ole Bouman, Creative Director