

# Christine Cayol at Yishu 8

Christine Cayol lives in Beijing, where in 2009, she founded Yishu 8: a house designed for living well and creating. Here, in this recently restored former Franco-Chinese university building, French and Chinese artists come together in an Asian Villa Medici, which offers its residents a haven of creative harmony. Philosophy graduate Christine Cayol also runs the "Synthesis" firm in Paris, which specialises in support services to senior managers. She talked to us during one of her trips to the capital.

## **How did the idea of Yishu 8 come about? Tell us about the project and its aims.**

It's the story of a dream – the idea of a house where all sorts of people can come together around creativity, artists and an inspiring lifestyle. I opened the first Yishu 8 without knowing or planning anything; I just let things

happen. I had no artistic programme in mind, apart from the opening exhibition.

## **Six years on, how do you see this venture?**

It has had extraordinarily positive results. We have created a model. I am often asked to define Yishu 8... Is it a gallery? A cultural centre? A club designed for soft power and sphere-of-influence diplomacy? I can see that it would be helpful to have precise definitions that refer to what already exists and enable comparisons. The problem is that as soon as I try to describe what Yishu 8 is, I instantly have a desire to say exactly the opposite: Yishu 8 chooses and presents artists, but is not a gallery. Yishu 8 devises and organises cultural events, but is not a cultural centre. Yishu 8 brings together company directors and the elite of the political and cultural world, but is not an elitist club.



Christine Cayol, founder of Yishu 8.



Lionel Sabatté,  
Large goat made of tea.



## The Prodigal Son returns...

A resident of Yishu 8 in Beijing in 2011, Lionel Sabatté took part that year in the FIAC in Paris, where he presented a pack of wolves made of metro "dust". Since then, his works have taken over the tropical hothouse of the Jardin des Plantes and the Aquarium de Paris. This spring, the artist is returning to Yishu 8 for an exhibition of his latest works, this time made of tea leaves. Highly sensitive to living things, both past and present, Sabatté likes to explore metamorphoses in his work – all kinds of metamorphoses.

16 May to 21 June 2015. Yishu 8, Beijing. [www.yishu-8.com](http://www.yishu-8.com)  
[www.associationart8.fr](http://www.associationart8.fr)



### So, what would you say then?

That it goes far beyond all that, because it's a new concept! What is certain is that for the artists, both Chinese and Western, a period spent in Y8 changes something in their lives, and that is the most significant aspect. The most important thing for me is to say that Yishu 8 is a house dedicated to art. A lot of things can happen in a house – like meetings, dinners and discussions. There are works hung on the walls, and artists who live and work there. A house does not exist to make a profit, but needs money to live and entertain. Like any house, it is defined by its "atmosphere" – the spirit that emanates from it, which comes from the interior design, the works exhibited and most of all, the people who live there.

### Since 2011, you have hosted French artists in residence. How do you choose them?

The artists apply to us, and are then chosen by a selection committee consisting of collectors, artists and the director of the ENSBA arts centre. It is chaired by Henry-Claude Cousseau.

### One of these artists, Lionel Sabatté, who was a resident in 2011, is coming back to Yishu 8 for an exhibition. Can you tell us about his career?

Lionel's career reflects his work, which is first-rate, singular and authentic. This year, Yishu 8 is devoting

a major exhibition to him in the former lecture theatre of the house. What is so fascinating and meaningful is that this artist, who often uses waste materials (metro dust, dead skin, etc.) is going to use tea leaves from southern China for the first time in his sculptures.

**With the Yishu 8 China prize, you have also acclaimed two young Chinese artists. What is your view of the current scene?**

Just like China itself, it is huge, highly mixed and difficult to define. But I can see a profound and subtle movement, which does not involve a "return" to tradition so much as the use of traditional Chinese elements, like ink and paper, to invent new things.

**As a privileged observer of the French and Chinese scenes, have you noticed any leanings or trends typical of the younger generation of artists?**

Regarding the artists we choose and host, I have noticed an extreme kind of "intellectualisation" with the French, but also a real sense of a quest – a pictorial gesture, even – that is not afraid to become poetic. That's remarkable. With young Chinese artists, there is a real desire to "succeed" and discover the world, and a freshness in their approach which can seem like naivety, but is something we really need.

**Europe has played a major role in promoting Asian art. Does a Chinese artist always have to be established through the West, notably France?**

Everything depends on what you mean by "established". Many major Chinese artists are stars in their own country but unknown in France, and have never exhibited there. China is a huge country, which is focused on itself and has its own criteria. That said, the fascination for Paris, the capital of art, is as strong as ever.

**Like Jean-Marc Decrop, do you think that "the great artists of tomorrow will be Chinese"?**

I think that the great artists of tomorrow will be neither Chinese nor Western – because that's not the most important aspect. What matters is that there are great artists – and genuine artists.

Interview by Stéphanie Perris-Delmas



Yishu 8, Beijing,  
the Yellow Room.



