

Panel 9

Urban Space and Public Art

Beyond Exhibition: Photography Festivals as Sites of Curatorial Negotiation in China and Singapore

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In the past two decades, photography festivals have proliferated across Asia, serving as platforms for cultural exchange, urban branding, and curatorial experimentation. This paper examines two representative cases: the Jimei × Arles International Photo Festival in Xiamen, China, and the Singapore International Photography Festival (SIPF). While both festivals are rooted in local contexts, they share a transnational dimension—mediating between global photographic discourses and regional cultural identities. Through a comparative analysis, this study highlights how curatorial strategies, institutional structures, and modes of audience engagement shape their respective trajectories. Jimei × Arles, co-founded by France’s Rencontres d’Arles, positions itself as a cultural bridge, channeling European curatorial frameworks into a rapidly developing Chinese cultural landscape. By contrast, SIPF, Southeast Asia’s longest-running independent photography festival, emphasizes critical discourse and educational outreach, foregrounding regional voices within a global network. By drawing on fieldwork, archival research, and semi-structured interviews, this paper investigates how these two festivals negotiate questions of cultural translation, curatorial independence, and sustainability. The findings suggest that while both festivals generate visibility and cultural capital, their models expose tensions between internationalization and local rootedness, between artistic autonomy and institutional demands. This comparative study argues that photography festivals in Asia must move beyond rhetorical claims of “global dialogue” to cultivate genuine critical spaces for image-making, viewing, and curating. Ultimately, the analysis of Jimei × Arles and SIPF underscores how photography festivals function not merely as exhibition sites, but as laboratories for transnational collaboration, cultural positioning, and curatorial identity.

Biography

Lyu Peixuan is a final-year research degree student in Art Theory at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, specializing in exhibition and curatorial studies. Her research focuses on photography festivals in Asia, with particular attention to their global dimensions, curatorial practices, and negotiation of cultural and thematic issues.