

Nature's bounty perfectly packaged in this exhibition

Yang Yujie and Wang Jie

Inspired by lush rice fields, Jiayuanhai Art Museum has devoted an entire exhibition space to it.

The exhibition, "Rice: Verses for the Hungry Soul," has already attracted more than 5,000 visitors since its opening in early November. Nestled within the rice fields of Dayu Village in Malu, it showcases a captivating collection by artist Shen Shaomin.

Through the use of natural materials sourced from the fields, Shen crafts a poetic homage to rice. Part of the rice straw has been transformed into Xuan paper, while the remaining straw was burned to create ash — the finest ash crafted into rice ink, and the coarser ash molded into ink bricks. The harvested rice has been elegantly transformed into a bowl, showcased prominently in the exhibition hall.

"I have visited numerous art museums globally and have organized many exhibitions, yet I have seldom encountered an art museum featuring such a rice paddy," Shen remarked. "The renowned Japanese architect Tadao Ando masterfully extended seven concrete pillars into the paddy field, seamlessly integrating it into the art museum. It left me truly inspired, sparking a bold idea: let all the creations flourish from this rice paddy."

The entire exhibition is designed for the Jiayuanhai Art Museum, featuring a diverse array of mediums including painting, installation, performance, video, and more.

A massive rice straw rope lies outside the museum. The rope, made of 2,000 strands of common straw, extends to the museum's terrace.

The design not only blurs the line



The layout of the exhibition emits a sense of poetry.



The ink blocks are crafted from the ash of burnt straw.



A sculpture made of 10,000 ceramic straws by artist Shen Shaomin

between indoor and outdoor environments, but it also conveys the impression of a big rope connecting the museum space, the sheep flock and the rice paddies.

The exhibition's entry features 1,320 ink bricks imprinted with the artist's 81 poems.

These ink blocks are manufactured

from rice straw ash that has been treated with nontoxic incineration technology. This transition not only demonstrates respect for rice as an important crop, but it also prompts thinking about agricultural civilization and natural ecosystems.

The artist uses a sophisticated smokeless incineration technique to convert rice straw into ash, which is then ground and screened to get the fine-grade ash.

The ash is then transported to an ink facility in Anhui Province, where it is combined with other natural ingredients. Multiple rounds of grinding, stirring and crushing transform it into a fine ink.

Finally, the artist pours the ink into custom molds engraved with poems. Once the ink solidifies, it is removed from the molds and left to dry.

The ink blocks gradually acquire shape, and the artist's poetry becomes obvious.

There are numerous ways to depict the life story of rice straw. The artist developed 10,000 ceramic straws that not only keep their natural appeal and unique texture but also "freeze" the straw's life for eternity.

The next surprise for the visitors is a bowl of rice.

"A poet whose memory is filled with hunger must recall poetry in the stomach rather than the heart, just as life is always more important than art," Shen said.

Date: Through March 2 (closed on Mondays), 9:30am-5:30pm
Admission: 80 yuan
Address: 39 Dazhi Rd
大治路39号



A massive rice straw rope lies outside the Jiayuanhai Art Museum in Jiading. — Photos by Yang Yujie