

AUTOMOTIVE

Rolls-Royce plants roots in Shanghai's contemporary art scene

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Asad Raza plants a forest in Shanghai's RAM. Image credit: Rolls-Royce

By JEN KING

British automaker Rolls-Royce Motor Cars is rounding out its ongoing Art Programme by entering into a benefactor relationship with Shanghai's Rockbund Art Museum.

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Rolls-Royce's Art Programme is a celebration of the automaker's shared philosophy with the world of contemporary art, and sees the automaker support the work of international artists. Patronage of the arts is common among luxury brands due to similar commitments to artistry and skill.

"It very much has to do with the fact that we want to intersect with our clientele in as many places as we can," said Gerry Spahn, head of communications for **Rolls-Royce Motor Cars NA**, Woodcliff Lake, NJ.

"Art is a very important part of our client's lives – some of our clients are the biggest buyers of art," he said. "We want to support artists and in areas that intersects with our clients."

A forest in the museum

The Rolls-Royce Art Programme sees the British automaker, known for its customized commissioned vehicles, partner with leading international art museums and institutions.

Rolls-Royce's program seeks to foster creativity and assist artists to create new projects and explore new areas of their practice, and has seen art talks with emerging and established artists and art drives.

To date, Rolls-Royce has worked with key figures in the contemporary art world including Yang Fudong, Isaac Julien and Ugo Rondinone.

For its latest Art Programme happening, Rolls-Royce has inked a deal to enter a benefactor relationship with Rockbund Art Museum (RAM) in Shanghai. The museum is considered to be at the forefront of China's contemporary art scene and presents world-class programs.



Rolls-Royce outside RAM in Shanghai. Image credit: Rolls-Royce

Classified as a "boutique" museum, RAM holds a unique position in Shanghai's cultural scene and is housed in an Art Deco building that was renovated by David Chipperfield before opening in 2010.

As part of its benefactor role at RAM, Rolls-Royce has arranged to bring American artist Asad Raza's "Root sequence. Mother tongue" to Shanghai.

The artist's installation will be included in the "RAM Highlights 2017: Displace" project. RAM's concept works to transform the museum into a "boundary-breaking experiential space, fostering a diverse and yet open viewing experience."

Root sequence. Mother tongue by Mr. Raza will mark the installation's China debut after its first showing at the 2017 Whitney Biennial in New York.

The work will bring a forest into the museum through the placement of 26 locally grown trees planted in soil-filled wooden boxes. Local Chinese people will then act as "caretakers" of the trees, which Mr. Raza describes as characters in a "living network."

UV lights are strategically placed to encourage photosynthesis and growth of the trees during the installation. Also, the caretakers are encouraged to interact with the trees, by leaving personal keepsakes and even moving them if they wish, to continuously change the the piece.



A personal artifact left by a "caretaker" of Asad Raza's Root sequence. Mother tongue. Image credit: Rolls-Royce

Mr. Raza describes the piece as being similar to a park, giving museum goers a respite from the traditional gallery experience.

Root sequence. Mother tongue will be on view at RAM Sept. 29 to Oct. 4.

Continuing its relationship with RAM and Mr. Raza, Rolls-Royce Art Programme will bring the installation to other museums around the world. Following venues will be announced in the coming weeks.

Art awareness

Rolls-Royce has been upping its art world positioning with museum and art fair sponsorships as well.

The automaker, for example, expanded the experience of Fondation Beyeler's gala to a broader audience through its sponsorship of the Swiss museum.

The Summer Night's Gala always asks a contemporary artist to turn the soiree into a work of art in itself. This year's collaborator, Pipilotti Rist, developed an installation as part of the Rolls-Royce Art Programme that was showcased not only at the Sept. 17 event, but to the public following the gala evening ([see story](#)).

Also, Rolls-Royce Motor Cars recently extended the visibility of its Art Programme by commissioning a public art display during Art Basel Miami Beach in December.

The site-specific art display was placed at the Jewel Box at the National YoungArts Foundation in Miami and was in partnership with Georgia's Savannah College of Art and Design and curated by SCAD Museum and Exhibitions. Rolls-Royce's Art Programme display was on view from Nov. 29 through Dec. 15, with Art Basel Miami Beach being held Dec. 1-4 ([see story](#)).

"[Art Programme] is part of being in the Rolls-Royce family," Rolls-Royce's Mr. Spahn said. "It's an enticement, you can celebrate art with us, and we will celebrate art with you.

"It's not intended as a promotional activity, we don't operate like that, it's just part of celebrating something we both enjoy," he said.

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