

Mall's impending doom inspires guerrilla art



The 100-odd artists took over office spaces, former shops and even a karaoke lounge, and produced brightly coloured graffiti on the building's facade (above) in the three-week-long event in September

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By **Rachel Loi**

IF YOU'VE driven past Eminent Plaza on Lavender Street recently, you might have overlooked it as just another old building slated for demolition at the end of the year. But keep your eyes peeled, and maybe you'll notice the brightly coloured graffiti on its facade: the "aftermath" of a three-week-long event in September that gave the place a final burst of life before it approaches its imminent end, if you will.

Fondly dubbed An Eminent Takeover, the project saw over 100 people from the creative industry - including musicians, visual artists, street artists, dancers and parkour enthusiasts being given a free run of the space, taking over office spaces, shops and even a karaoke lounge.

"The significance of the Eminent project is one that goes beyond ideas of site specificity," describes 25-year-old Naomi Wang, who works as a curator by day. She is one of the three people who spearheaded the project, along with Razi Razak, 33, and Elisa Lam, 38.

"Projects like An Eminent Takeover reflect a very ad hoc or guerrilla-styled collective effort that bridges art and life. We hoped to bring back this kampong-style collectiveness by inviting artists and musicians from a wide variety of backgrounds."

It all started when Lam (who works in advertising and does shoots in showflats in her downtime) asked some property developers if she could bring artists into a showflat when it was not used. At the time, they didn't have any showflat for her, so they offered her the Eminent Plaza building instead.

From there, things moved in a whirlwind as she invited Razi to join her, and he roped in Wang. Between the three of them, they went through their contacts and invited local artists and musicians to come and create artworks inspired by the building, perform in gigs, or even make films.

Says Lam: "I like how the graffiti and street artists made like a collage of everybody's work. It's different crews, different street artists, different materials, different surfaces, but all in the same area. They incorporated parts of the building like the plant bed, signs, even the fire bell, into the artworks. Everybody reacted to the building, and for me that's the basic thing."

All of it was self-funded by the organisers and the artists themselves, and they relied only on word of mouth and social media for the event to take off. "I think the more exclusive we want the project to be, the more the public wants to know what is happening there," says Razi, who works as a curator at the lifestyle and entertainment venue, Canvas.

He explains that money was never a focus for them along the way: "Elisa managed the project, while Naomi and I curated the programmes for artists and music and bands. We didn't really care about money. And credit goes to the artists, who never talked about money. Once you involve money, there's a certain structure you need to follow."

"And we don't have the luxury of following a structure. We didn't even consider that option," quips Lam.

In fact, the only thing that gave the project any form of structure was the mutual respect among the artists and musicians present, adds Razi.

He says the artists were told: "You can do almost anything, but you can't do something that sabotages anybody else - because if we get shut down, then that's not fair to the others. It's an unspoken trust that people have, and that's what we are curating: we are curating people's behaviour."

For anyone who missed what happened at Eminent Plaza over those three weeks, you can still check out the graffiti art on the building's facade for now. Otherwise, keep a lookout for another upcoming Takeover project.

Razi provides a brief teaser: "I think the Takeover concept - because it was so well received - is something we want to continue. As we speak, we are already looking into a few other projects: other buildings and spaces. People just have to pay attention.

"We still want people to find out on their own about what we're doing, so that sense of discovery is very important to us. Because we are discovering spaces too, and we want people to have that same wonderment."