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Beijing 798 Art District Is the Epicenter of China's Artistic Scene

Tod Hardin · Thursday, May 2nd, 2013

Nestled in the northeast corner of Beijing is a funky little enclave that has come to be known as the city's hub of avant garde artistic expression — part SOHO, a dash of Left Bank, a smidgen of Mao and a great deal of Mad Max. Sound interesting? It is.

The 798 Art District, or Factory 798 as some call it, is a former military industrial complex developed by the Soviets and East Germans back in the early 50's. After years of decay, its unique open space structures began to be discovered by artists in the mid 90's. Although it has experienced mass gentrification over the years, it still stands as the prominent symbol of China's cutting edge art movement and home to various unchained personalities and wild attitudes — including that of famous Chinese dissident Ai Wei Wei. We recently visited 798 and are happy to share what we found.



Welcome to the 798 Art District!



The [798 Space](#) is the signature hub of activity in the District. Translation of Chinese on wall:

“We wish that Chairman Mao live forever!”



Just one of the hundreds of industrial structures that give the District a somewhat surreal industrially apocalyptic feel.



We're not sure how the festival went, but few people could resist looking at this.



“Three Little Dragons” each holding Mao's Little Red Book.