

Dreamscapes cast in shadow

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At first sight, the dreamlike images captured by Irene Kung's camera look like paintings on canvas or a fresco.

Her *Dreams of China* exhibition showcases the country's architecture as she shot it during a month-long trip to China last year. It recently opened in an ancient temple hotel in Beijing after winning critical acclaim in London, Milan and Rome.

"For me, the camera is like a brush," the 54-year-old Swiss artist says.

"It's a tool to create images with."

Kung started as a painter before turning to photography. That endowed her with many gifts, including a knack with light.

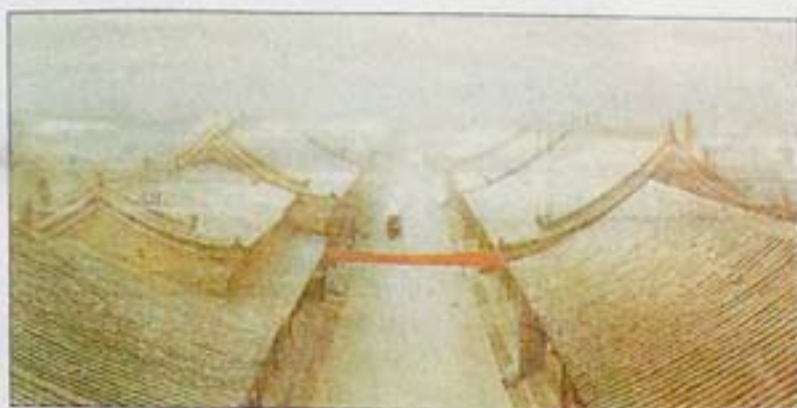
The artist hopes to use brightness and shadow to reveal architecture's inner realities with dreamlike presentations.

"I work a lot on light, so it becomes like a painting," Kung explains. "I put in the darkness to create a silence so that people can focus more on the building itself."

Most of her works are of national icons — the Great Wall, the Forbidden City and the Bird's Nest in Beijing, Pingyao's old town, Xi'an's Grand Mosque and Shanghai's landmark skyscrapers.

She recalls getting off the train in Pingyao, Shanxi province at 5 am. The sleeping ancient town was blanketed with morning mist.

"It was empty. Nobody was around, and the atmosphere flowing was just what I wanted. I decided I wouldn't take breakfast but take



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IRENE KUNG
PHOTOGRAPHER

photos first," she says.

"I talked to everybody, even though I don't know the language. We just smiled and laughed with each other, and people on the street invited me to dinner at their houses."

Kung shot her best photo that day. She sold *Pingyao* for 8,000 euros (\$10,400).

Kung's assistant Giulia Derege says five of the eight photos she shot of Pingyao were sold during their three short stops in Europe.

Kung claims European visitors said her photos overturned their ingrained stereotypes of China and inspired their interest to visit.

Beijing is her favorite city.

She had her guide take her to a part of the Great Wall closed to the public and waited for the stars to come out to snap her photo.

Part-time photographer Song Xiaomei, who visited the show's opening, says: "Chinese photographers don't usually do it this way. We put too much emphasis on colors. But her works make me feel quiet and peaceful with brilliant mixes of color and light."

Kung believes most urbanites are too swept up in daily trifles to notice the beautiful things around them.

"I want to tell them to stop and look ... take a breath and say, 'oh, it's beautiful,'" she explains.

The exhibition perfectly fits its surroundings — a centuries-old temple converted into a hotel. And visitors to the show can even spend the night.

IF YOU GO

11:30 am-2 pm, 6 pm-9 pm,
daily until Feb 8, 2013. Temple
Hotel, 23 Shatan Beijing,
Dongcheng district, Beijing.
010-8400-2232.

