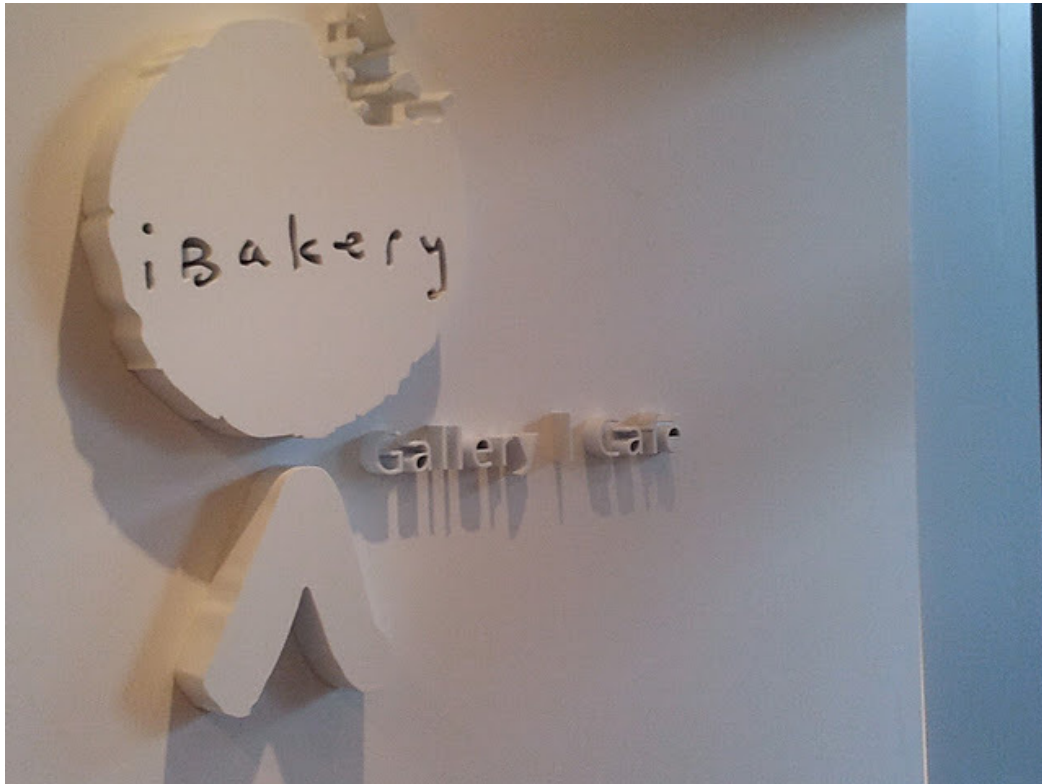


Where there is beautiful encounter

Phoebe Yuen & Catherine Ren

Even a subtropical city like Hong Kong cannot escape the wild chill of winter. Even the roaring winds cannot blow away the hustles and bustles of Admiralty, the central business district, who takes on its usual look with shopping malls, hotels and office towers high up to the sky.

Whereas a slight turn can mean a big one if it is in the direction towards Tamar Park along the harbor. Amidst the evergreen land, the deep blue sky and the hazy coastline, a bright orange "i" pops into your eyes. And there is ibakery gallery cafe, where paints your one of your depressed or monotonous days with a beautiful winter encounter.



Walking inside, smiles of waitresses light up your mood, just like their orange aprons light up the colorless winter. Right in the middle lies a big square table, where customers share light talk and enjoy light meals. In the air pervades the fragrance of a special type of herbs, whose green color so well complements the bright red flowers put in the middle of the table. In the counter, glasses and cookie boxes elegantly reflect the luxurious sunlight onto the shelf behind. Such a bright and beautiful day, you murmur, putting life's tortures temporarily behind to the other side, to the shade of sunlight.

Although the cafe has just opened for a week or so, it is already quite full during lunch hour. Four lunch sets are offered currently, two of which are vegetarian. This matches the concept of the cafe, green. Plants are displayed everywhere in the café and even some of the ingredients of the food are organic. It is not just the staff working here that contribute to the operation of the cafe. Some of the ingredients are planted by residents in the Wong Chuk Hang Complex of TWGHs. Moreover, the dough of pizza is baked by the iBakery in Kennedy Town.

Enjoy the dessert and look around, you would be impressed by the idea of combining cafe and gallery. You would wonder at how well the gourmet and the environment co-ordinate with each other. On the walls are paintings with such striking life and color. Awkward as some of the strokes are, unrecognizable and abstract as some of the themes are displayed, you still could see behind the artists' deep gaze and their extraordinary observations of life and nature- that fishes can be striped with green tails, that a figure with blue eyes and red lips is made up of stiff shapes. You suddenly realize that you've been framed into the stereotype, but beauty itself doesn't rid off any single possibility.



Just like this month, the theme is "Christmas". You can enjoy the colorful paintings while tasting the Christmas cookies. One of the special things of this gallery is that you can actually buy the paintings here. Exhibitions are held from time to time to gather support and raise awareness.

It is a beautiful encounter, where the experienced normals meet with the slow but sincere disabled, where personal benefits meet with a mission, sacred like a religion.

“For my previous jobs, they are simply about making money. But for this one, when I am working, I feel like I am doing good deeds,” said Jerry Cheung, manager of the gallery cafe.

He is a Buddhist himself, and for him, helping others is helping himself religiously. As the only man outside the kitchen, he has to immerse himself into some sweet girly stuff, like a birthday party of the one of staff during post-lunch leisure afternoon time. It is quite hard to believe this middle-aged man with a professional and serious look is actually among a bunch of girls and women, clapping hands with the tempo of a birthday song.

He doesn't feel any superior though. “No matter able or disabled employees, we must treat them fairly. (The disabled employees) they are really nice. Whenever you ask them to do anything, they listen with fear and trepidation. They take your orders very seriously and their attitude would not change however busy they are.”

Indeed, just like On Ni there, she staggers a bit with a tray of food, slowly puts it on the table and adjusts it to the right angle towards the customer. She then smiles satisfyingly with her eyes narrowed into a crescent.

And there is Pui Yan, a sweet snow-white girl with mischievous freckles. She works as a cashier at the counter. She feels happy working there with her colleagues. “Time spent with them is more than with my family. If i do something wrong, they will often help me”. Her favorite place in the whole gallery cafe is just the counter she works, which she comments as “very colorful”. Pui Yan has beautiful eyes which is pure as the autumn lake. She listens attentively and answers each question carefully with words slowly but clearly pronounced.

Cheung Ting Hong, the head chef here has had experiences working with the disabled. “As I have been used to getting along with the disabled, I really know what the best way is to teach them. Don't judge them simply by their appearance and performance, because they have a beautiful mind.” He proudly takes out his cell phone and shows the pictures of his previous trainees, who stand close by each side of him and arm him around his shoulder.

It is a sweet escape on a chilly afternoon. It is a beautiful encounter, when life is taking the same route again and again. Somewhere in this city, modernity encounters tranquility; desires and ambitions encounter a pace of elegance. Somewhere in the city, art encounters gastronomy. Somewhere in the city able as you are, you encounter a group of people who are working as hard, but with a mission, pure as pearl, dreamy as velvet.

iBakery Gallery Cafe, where there is a beautiful encounter.