

# HK Art Fair not purely local affair

After only three years since its inception, the Hong Kong International Art Fair has become the biggest art trade fair in Asia. But, while the city's general cultural scene benefits, are local artists under-represented? **Doug Meigs** reports.

**A**n artist who shreds and knits paper into elaborate installations, garments and tapestries, Movana Chen was among the few local artists at the Hong Kong International Art Fair.

Because she participated in the first fair in 2008, she was able to return this year with a Beijing gallery now exhibiting her work, after she collaborated with luxury Hong Kong retailer Shanghai Tang for Art HK 08. She minced heaps of clothing catalogs into full-figure body socks, titled *Body Containers*. The peculiar work caught the attention of Pekin Fine Arts.

Her recent work, *Art Diary - issue 1* (made from magazines reviewing her work), appeared in the Pekin Fine Arts stall, one of 155 galleries from 29 countries at Art HK 10.

"When my friends meet me here, they ask, 'Why are you here? Are you on duty?'" She said amid a fit of giggles. "Then they see my work and realize I'm showing, then they say, 'Where is this gallery? Oh ... Beijing!'"

Chen is an internationally acclaimed artist based in Hong Kong, who, working from her studio in the Shek Kip Mei Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre, has had her artwork shown at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum and galleries in Miami, Beijing and Korea.

Twenty-two Hong Kong galleries participated in Art HK 10, and Chen estimated that only 10 or so Hong Kong artists exhibited at the fair this year. Regardless, she said this is an improvement.

"Compared with last year, you can see more Hong Kong artists," she said.

Notable examples of local Chinese artists and art at the event include a video installation by Teddy Lo in Input/Output Gallery; Lee Kit and two other local artists at Osage Gallery; a young artist named Tang Kwok Hin at Amelia Johnson Contemporary; and a live performance by Doris Wong Wai Yin at Gallery Exit.

A handful of other local artists at galleries scattered throughout the fair included Grotto Gallery's all-local artists, Simon Birch, William Furniss and Another Mountainman at 10 Chancery Lane, and Michael Wolf at m97 Gallery.

International collectors and casual aficionados swarmed into the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre to buy/see the hottest names in contemporary art from March 26-30.

Artwork at the fair ranged from conceptual artist Damien Hirst - famous for sliced animal cross-sections, painted butterflies and decorated skulls - to Chinese "Cynical Realist" Yue Minjun - painter of grinning caricatures frozen in laughter - and Baz

Luhrmann (director of the film *Moulin Rouge*) who created a Caravaggio-esque installation altar with painter Vincent Fantauzzo, designed for the fair.

A separate Christie's auction in the expo center coincided with Art HK and will continue through today. The auction attracted attention with the display of a Picasso to be sold for an anticipated 40 million pounds in London.

A Mao series by Andy Warhol sold for HK\$6.62 million in Hong Kong, while fierce bidding for Chinese contemporary and classical art included bids on *String Quartet* by Chen Yifei, which sold for HK\$61.14 million, as money and art orbited one another at the fair.

Hong Kong art as a genre still has a long way to go before attaining mass commercial success, said Henry Au-yeung, director of Grotto, the only gallery in the world specializing in Hong Kong Chinese artists.

"The genre is very new to the market. So for it to be sustainable, you have to look at it in a long-term strategy; you have to build up the market. A lot of (gallery owners) don't want to do that," Au-yeung said.

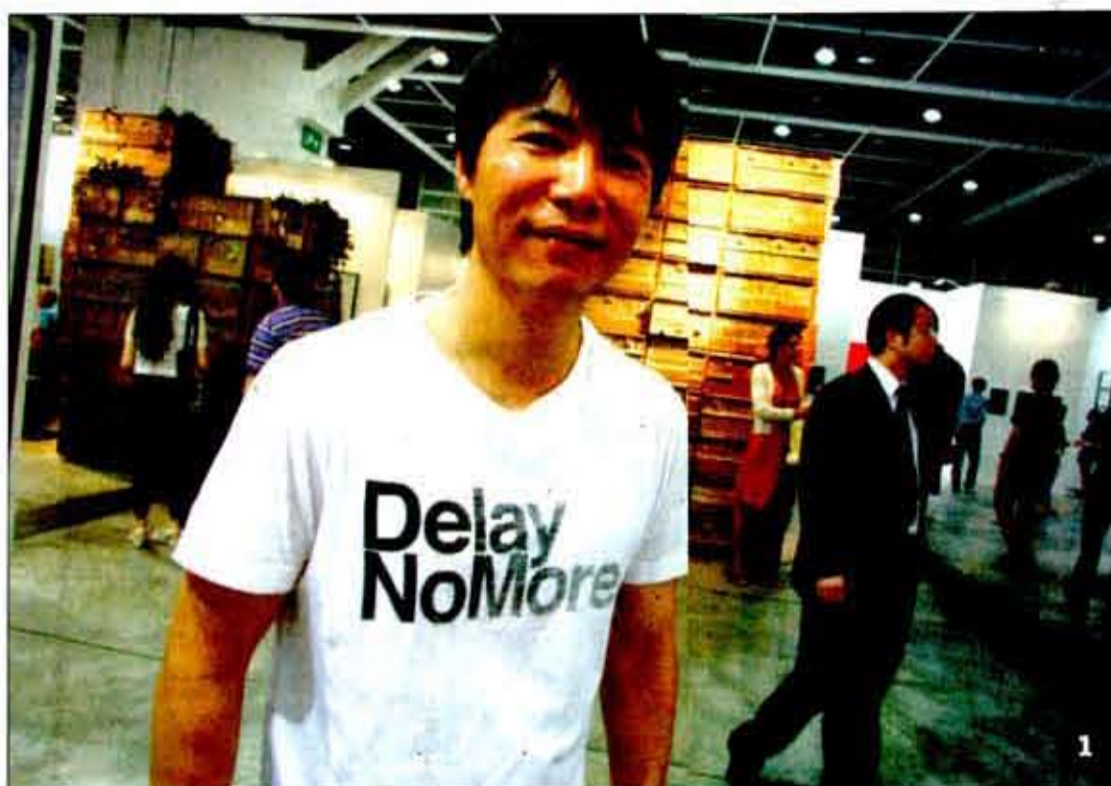
He said Hong Kong art is Chinese art with unique local characteristics; it tends to be object-oriented and iconographic, while mainland art tends to be more background-history oriented, with the object secondary.

"If you ask me how you define Hong Kong art, I would say it's very personal, very intimate and subtle. It doesn't take on the grand narratives. It's more of a personal narrative. It's not suppressed. It's not rebellious or loud. On the other hand, it has a quieter taste. It could have a darker humor or subversiveness," Au-yeung suggested.

Local artists at Art HK played a noticeably smaller role compared to many other international art fairs in big cities like New York and Tokyo. Au-yeung said it seemed as though the New York fair reserved half the floor space for local artists. Owner of the local Gallery Exit, Aeon Loo, said he observed a similar concentration of local artists at Tokyo's international art fair. However, both gallerists added that Hong Kong's talent pool is more limited than New York's or Tokyo's.

"Tokyo is lopsided, there's a lot of good artists, but the collector base to support those artists is very small," Loo said. "Hong Kong is more level; if there's one good artist, there will be one good collector to buy. I think there are 50 to 70 collectors who (regularly) buy Hong Kong art," he observed.

Local expat artist Simon Birch has lived in Hong Kong for 13 years. He started his art career in the city



and now sells internationally. He has shown artwork at Art HK for the past three years with Chancery Lane.

Birch dismissed the suggestion that Art HK should do more to promote local art.

"That's not its role; that's the role of the government," he said, adding that he thinks the government is failing in its duty to provide sufficient infrastructure and sponsorship for the arts.

Douglas Young (founder of Goods of Desire, a local home and lifestyle boutique) has a different opinion on the ideal role of the fair.

"I would like to see the fair progress to become more of a platform for local artists to exhibit side-by-side alongside the international big names. We generally have talent here, but opportunities for them to shine through are lacking," Young noted.

Young's company donated furniture for Art HK, and he built a series of local-style tenements with copper panels mounted on steel frames. He said the goal of his sculpture (and his company's mission) is to embrace local grassroots culture and develop Hong Kong's brand name.

Emmanuel Perrotin is a French gallerist with a solid sense of art branding; he has jumpstarted the international careers of some of contemporary art's biggest names. He showed Damien Hirst's first solo exhibition at his Paris-based Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin in 1991 and now works with Takashi Murakami, the king of Japanese high-brow-low-brow culture.

Perrotin has visited Art HK since the beginning, but 2010 was the first year his gallery participated. He came to meet new clients, and had not expected to find an especially strong local scene, considering the exorbitant real estate prices and lack of galleries and museums in Hong Kong.

He said that he was impressed with the quality of Art HK, "This makes a very good complement to Basel." Art Basel is widely regarded as the world's premier contemporary art trade fair.

On Sunday, Perrotin left Hong Kong for Venice en route to Art Basel. At least one Hong Kong-based artist is preparing for a similar journey.

German-national Michael Wolf, who is based in the city, also showed at Art HK. After Asia's biggest art fair, he will take his photos of local urban density to the world's biggest art fair on June 16-20.

1. Douglas Young is the creator and owner of Goods of Desire, a lifestyles boutique in Hong Kong. He showed *The Copper Towers* at Art HK 10.

2. Movana Chen is a Hong Kong-based artist with a studio in Shek Kip Mei. She participated in Art HK for the second time in 2010. She was showing at the event with a Beijing gallery.

3. Simon Birch begins his art career in Hong Kong and has lived in the city for 13 years. He showed the oil painting *Northwood* with 10 Chancery Lane Gallery at Art HK 10.

4. Gallery staff encourage visitors to stand on top of Korean artist Do Ho Suh's *Floor* at the booth for Lehmann Maupin, a New York City-based gallery.

5. Rosanna Wei-han Li's grogged clay figures titled *With a Full Stomach* are shown at Grotto Gallery at Art HK 10. Grotto is the only gallery in Hong Kong, or the world, to specialize exclusively in Hong Kong's Chinese artists.

6. Large wooden birdcages replicate notable Hong Kong buildings, the IFC and FCC, at near the main entrance to the HK Art 10 showroom floor. The piece is titled *Ne Travaillez Jamais* by Rirkrit Tiravanija.