

HONG KONG MARKET REPORT

BY DR. TIM LI

Hong Kong is known for its eclectic culture – a result of the interruption of the city's Chinese history by 155 years of colonialism, which gave rise to an identity that is at once Chinese and Westernised, but neither on its own. Following the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997, the psychological unpreparedness of a large Hong Kong population to relinquish their unique identity for a singularly Chinese identity has manifested itself in a number of incidents, the most recent one being the days-long demonstration surrounding the Tamar Central Government Complex in September 2012 against the Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government's decision to launch national education in elementary and secondary schools. On July 1 each year since 1997, thousands of members of the Hong Kong public take part in a march to voice their demands, including the wish for democracy – a trait of Western civilisation – and the eradication of social malaise. Debates have been on-going as to whether or not Hong Kong should be more culturally and politically integrated into Mainland China after the return of its sovereignty to the Chinese Central government, and it remains uncertain if Hong Kong will maintain its uniqueness over the course of time.

Reacting to the debate and threats to the one-of-a-kind 'Hong Kong identity', numerous Hong Kong artists have chosen to deal with subject

matters that speak almost entirely to Hong Kong natives.

CHOW CHUN-FAI (B.1980)

The artist expresses, rather blatantly, the want of an intact 'Hong Kong identity' in the *Infernal Affairs*, *I want my identity back*, one of his works in the *Painting on Movie* series that recreate scenes of movies with paint on canvases, beguilingly creating a hint of irony. He captures the ambivalence inherent in this 'Hong Kong' identity in *Fist of Fury*, *We are Chinese* and *Love in a Fallen City*, *I can't claim to be a real Chinese*, and reveals his wish for democracy in his latest work *Bodyguards and Assassins of the people, by the people, for the people*.

PAK SHEUNG-CHUEN (B.1977)

The first Hong Kong artist to be included in London's Tate Collection, and winner of the Best Artist Award in the Contemporary Chinese Art Awards (CCAA) 2012, Pak emphasises our intimate relationship with daily life by engaging with everyday situations and the common people. The 'hidden hints' he found in the compact city embodies a kind of Hong Kong identity, generated from the ultra-dense living environment. In his *HK Life Series*, he created a 'horizon' of the iconic Victoria Harbour at home by collecting sea water in bottles and he dialed the phone number of a stranger based on the bus numbers at a random bus stop. His unique sensitivity toward

the concept of space is developed into a space travelling experience in his Tate collected work *A Travel without Visual Experience (#2)*, which was featured at the Liverpool Biennial 2012.

LEUNG CHI-WO (B.1968)

Leung recalls memories of Hong Kong's colonial past through his *Victoria Series*, memories that are still embedded in the minds of many living in the city. He added an international context to the Hong Kong identity when he shared his *City Cookies*, cut in the shape of Hong Kong's skyline outlined by skyscrapers, with visitors of the 49th Venice Biennale.

LEE KIT (B.1978)

The artist was selected as Hong Kong's representative at the 2013 Venice Biennale and develops his works mostly based on everyday objects. Lee moved to Taipei soon after the announcement of his participation in the biennale for Hong Kong and subsequent controversy followed, as he said that distance gave him a better sense of what it meant to be 'Hong Kong'.

Other Names to Know

Ho Sin-Tung, Ho Siu-Kee, Hung Keung, Kum Chi-Keung, Danny Lee, Leung Mei-Ping, Wilson Shieh, Kacey Wong, Nadim Abbas, Sarah Lai, Lewis Lau, Joey Leung, Tang Kwok-Hin, Morgan Wong





Foundations and Institutions

M+

In keeping with Hong Kong's 'Asia's World City' status, the SAR government aspires to turn Hong Kong into a regional art hub that can possibly rival New York and London by developing the West Kowloon Cultural District, which will comprise performing arts and exhibition venues, as well as open space for public leisure. The centrepiece is M+, or Museum Plus, a 60,000 square meter space dedicated to 20th and 21st century visual culture. It is expected to open in 2017, with Swedish-born Lars Nittve, Founding Director of Tate Modern and former Director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, as Executive Director. In June 2012, the museum received a donation of 1,463 Chinese contemporary artworks by 350 artists from Swiss private collector Uli Sigg.

HONG KONG ARTS CENTRE

While the construction of the Cultural District is still under way, various organisations and institutions have been helping to foster art development in Hong Kong. Hong Kong Arts Centre, established for 35 years, is a multi-storied building with a cinema, galleries, theatres, classrooms, and offices for art groups. It is home to the Goethe Institut and the Art School.

ASIA ART ARCHIVE

Asia Art Archive, located on Hollywood Road Sheung Wan, where there are a thriving number of commercial galleries, is a public archive specialising in documenting histories of Asian contemporary art. Celebrating its 12th anniversary, it holds more than 35,000 records, searchable in its physical office and online catalogue.

PARA/SITE

Also situated in Sheung Wan is Para/site, which began as an artist-run alternative art space in 1996 and was transformed to a curator-run art organisation dealing with bigger and more ambitious projects since 2005. Currently led by Romanian curator Cosmin Costinas, the art space has hosted a number of exhibitions by international big names, including Vitto Acconci and Ai Weiwei and actively participates in both local and overseas art events, such as ARTHK, the Gwangju Biennale and the Venice Biennale.

OSAGE ART FOUNDATION

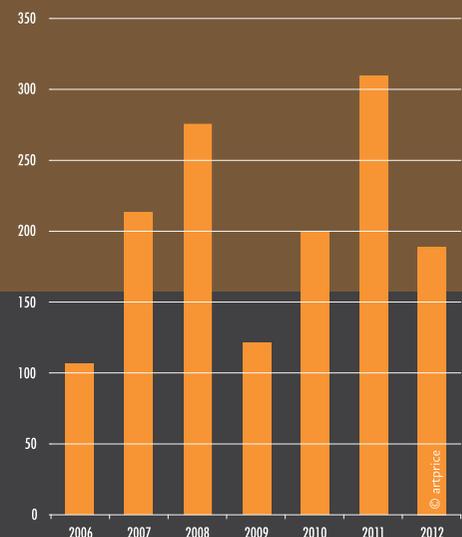
Private gallery Osage runs a warehouse tucked in an industrial building in Kwun Tong, which is ample enough for large-scale installations and art happenings. It is one of the galleries which showcased important Southeast Asian artists in Hong Kong. In 2004, the Osage Art Foundation was established to promote arts in Asia, with supporting arts education for children among its key objectives.

FOTANIAN

Osage is not the only art organisation operating in derelict industrial buildings, which are popularised by their low rental. The Fotanian community can be found in several industrial buildings in Fo Tan in the New Territories. This artist village was formed in 2000, when artists, mostly arts students of nearby Chinese University of Hong Kong, started renting studios in the buildings for private space to work in quiet. Today, more than 50 studios set up by some 180 artists form the Fotanian, which open their doors in January every year under the Fotanian Open Studio Programme to engage the public.

CONTEMPORARY ART SOLD IN HONG KONG

LOTS SOLD ABOVE \$100,000 (US\$)



Never before 2011 were over 300 contemporary art lots sold above the \$100,000 line. While not being as liquid as Beijing with less lots offered at auction, Hong Kong has established itself as the city to buy and sell high-end contemporary art.

ABOVE Chow Chun-Fai, *Bodyguards and Assassins "of the people, by the people, for the people"*, 2011, Enamel paint on canvas, 244 x 488 cm, Image courtesy of the artist.

OPPOSITE Pak Sheung-Chuen, *A Travel without Visual Experience (#2)*, 2010, Multi-media, Dimensions variable, Image courtesy of the artist.