

Modern and Contemporary Art in focus – Art Basel Hong Kong

Boutique hotel in the middle of the Caribbean Sea with hand-carved cornices and columns. Contemporary art.

Limited chocolate box with connoisseur wine. Contemporary art.

Doodle of a frustrated teenager over his mom's financial logbook. Contemporary art.

Like it or not, the term “contemporary art” has come down to mean just about any wishful thing that is loosely posh or out of the way with an artistic twist. Search any media and you are bound to find a headline or two with the term in it. Of course the situation is not as confusing within the professional art world. But to be honest, people are still skeptical. Any exhibitions and art fairs run in the name of contemporary art has to take extra care and attention to avoid the impression of being just a gimmick.

Well, I am not sure how. But if a premiering Asia art show boasts more than 3000 exhibits from 245 galleries from across 35 countries in the world, and expects tens and thousands of visitors, it surely has the vote of confidence from enough galleries, collectors and art lovers alike. Also, truth be told, Asia is now the biggest market for contemporary art, accounting for 43% auction revenue at Southby's Auction House from 1st July, 2011 to 30th June, 2012. Hong Kong itself generates 13% of the world revenue from Contemporary art, with the joint forces of several prominent Auction Houses. World class galleries such as Perrotin, the White Cube, Pearl Lam and Larry Gagosian also set foot in the city, making the art scene more vibrant and profitable than ever.

Such is the premise of Art Basel Hong Kong – an Asian debut of the prominent contemporary and modern art fair previously only ran in Basel and Miami. For more than 40 years, Art Basel is in the center of contemporary art for its relentless spirit of innovation, discovering new artists and art forms that reinvigorate the industry. Taking an Asian twist, Art Basel Hong Kong features more than 100 galleries from Asia-Pacific regions, including China, India, Turkey, the Middle-east and Australia, together with their counterparts from the rest of the world. Among them are well established galleries representing some of the big names in the contemporary art world. For instance, Lisson

Gallery representing the controversial Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, and Victoria-Miro representing Ian Hamilton Finlay. Art lovers are yet to discover what they have to offer in the art fair.

What truly sets it apart is the effort the organizers take to accommodate everyone – whether you are a collector looking for the next piece of gem, a curator looking for new inspiration, or simply an art enthusiast looking for some pleasant stimulation, the show has something for you. The show is divided into four themed areas. If I were to attend the show I would start with the Galleries section, which traces important work from around the world in the past 100 years, allowing visitors a glimpse of the cultural and aesthetics background of various parts of the world. 171 modern and contemporary art galleries displaying the finest works across different forms from the 20th and 21st century. Among those who first set foot in Hong Kong are 303 Gallery from New York, Dirimart gallery from Istanbul, Galerie OMR from Mexico and more. A truly international and exciting mix. Of course we cannot predict what the galleries have to show to surprise us. Secretly I am hoping for some sensory exploration like the current exhibition at New York 303 Gallery – 100 Years by Doug Aitken. The exhibition is a "Sonic Fountain," in which water drips from 5 rods suspended from the ceiling into a concrete crater dug out of the gallery floor. As the flow of water is controlled, the fall creates specific rhythmic patterns varying in tone and volume resembling a song. Picturing that makes me look forward to the art fair even more.

For an exclusive Asian flavor, visit the Insight section of the exhibition. Comprising solo exhibitions, historically themed exhibitions and collective exhibitions, 47 Asian Pacific galleries gives a sketch of Asian aesthetics. Among the exhibits are well known names from the regions, as well as up-and-coming stars including Entang Wiharso from Galeri Canna (Jakarta), Katherine Huang from Neon Parc (Melbourne), Wang Gongxin and Li Yongbin from Xin Dong Cheng Gallery (Beijing). For familiar Hong Kong local names, check out FEAST projects, Galerie Ora-Ora and Blindspot Gallery.

Art Basel has always pioneered in steering the market for up-and-coming artists. Quoting the official website, “a successful fair is one that not only generates sales for exhibitors,

but also spurs new collectors and curators to follow the activities of their favourite artists all over the globe – and drives them to see shows in a year-round spaces of the galleries that have supported those artists so strongly”. The Hong Kong edition of the fair dedicates a whole section to Discoveries, featuring new artists from around the world. Since the list is exhaustive I will avoid citing examples, just to adhere to the spirit of discovery – visit the show, and you will find out.

The last part of the exhibition features large scale sculptures and installation. Curated by Yuko Hasegawa, chief curator of Museum of Contemporary Art and curator of the 11th Sharjah Biennial, the content of the section is kept confidential up to this point. All the better, just to avoid more spoilers.

So yes, this piece has become another piece of media coverage with contemporary art in the headline. I am not sure I have made things any clearer or exciting for you. But at least, I hope it points you to a place where you can find out for yourself.