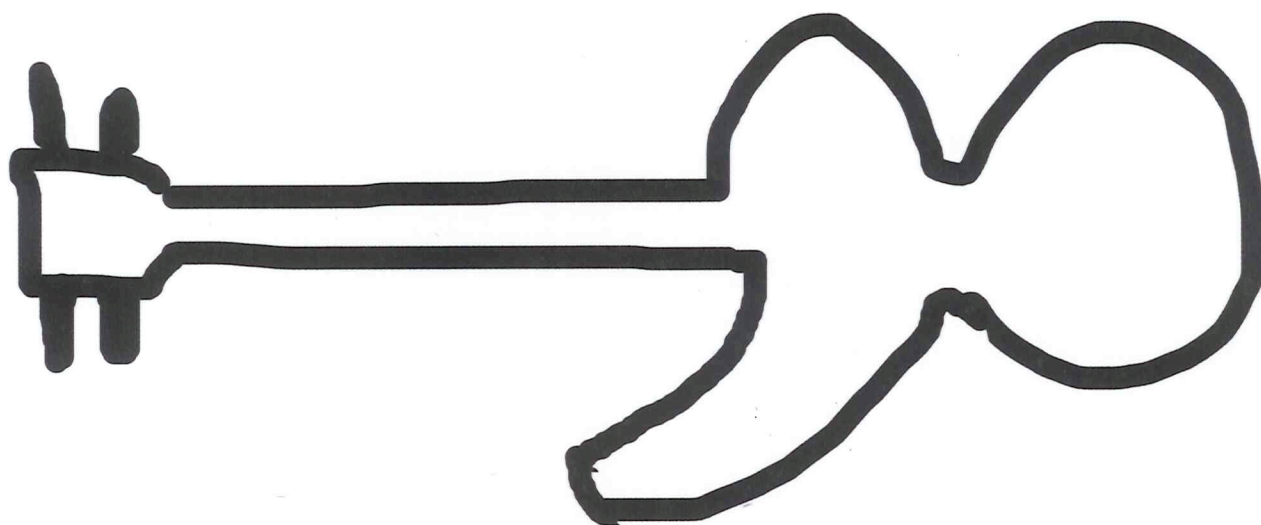


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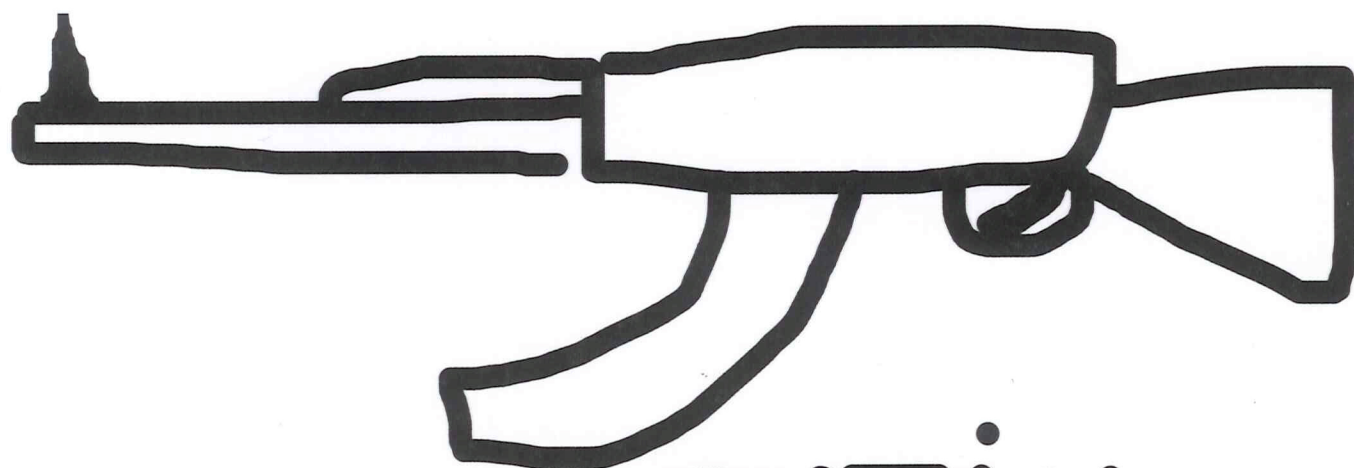
NEW ART & CULTURE

ISSUE 6 APRIL 2014

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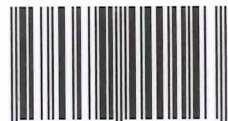


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A WORLD OF THEIR OWN DESIGN

WOMEN MAKING A DIFFERENCE TO THE ARTS IN HONG KONG

Hong Kong is a melting pot of opportunity and a hive of activity across all levels of business and industry. The cultural sector has been through a rapid and important series of changes over the past decade, much of which can be attributed to a small group of successful, passionate women. In this series of interviews, *VAULT* introduces five of Hong Kong's most dynamic women in the arts, heading some of the most relevant and inspired organisations, initiatives and projects in the city. Through these interviews, we get a glimpse of how Hong Kong has changed in its recent history and what the future holds. We also get a sneak preview into a selection of not-to-miss shows that will be on during Art Basel Hong Kong this year.

By Tamsin Nugent

AGNES LIN

Agnes Lin moved into the arts after a successful career in publishing and merchandising. Drawing on her already established experience and networks, Lin launched the Osage Gallery and Foundation in 2004.

YOUR BACKGROUND IS IN MERCHANDISING; WHERE DID THE INTEREST IN ART COME FROM? DO YOU THINK FASHION AND ART NATURALLY OVERLAP IN HONG KONG?

I have always been a collector with very broad interests. One of my earlier interests was Philippine excavated gold. These objects date from pre-Hispanic times and are exquisite pieces that demonstrate superb craftsmanship and speak volumes about the culture that created them, but represent an aspect of Filipino art that is almost unknown outside of the Philippines. The qualities embodied in these objects – of uniqueness, virtuosity and the ability to speak across time and place – are all things that I look for in all different kinds of art.

It is not just fashion and art that overlap, but art and everything else. And not just in Hong Kong, but everywhere. I think art is connected to everything that we do – both individually and collectively as a society – and a lot of what we have tried to do with Osage is to show how these connections can be made more explicit. This benefits everybody.

SINCE 2004, OSAGE HAS GROWN TO INCORPORATE THE OSAGE ART FOUNDATION, OSAGE GALLERY, OSAGE DESIGN, SIGMA PROJECTS, SIGMA ART SERVICES AND OSAGE ART CONSULTANCY. THIS IS QUITE A FEAT. OF COURSE, YOU MUST HAVE A GREAT TEAM TO HAVE ACHIEVED SUCH GROWTH, BUT ALSO A GREAT FOCUS. WHAT IS THE MISSION OF OSAGE AND HOW HAVE YOU MAINTAINED SUCH CONSISTENT RESPECT AND SUCCESS IN THE HONG KONG MARKET?

Each of these different divisions is connected. Each is the best vehicle or platform to get what they do to the people they need to connect with. In this way, for example, Osage Art Consultancy and Osage Gallery are both clients and draw on the technical skills of Sigma Art Services and the award-winning skills of Osage Design. Likewise, Sigma Projects may get assistance from Osage Art Consultancy. Through our processes of building, we learn from each project experience and further build on it, expanding our knowledge and network, creating more opportunities for our artists, consultants and designers. This allows us to contribute to art development work and to be part of weaving the cultural fabric of our time in the Pan-Asia region.

What is the mission of Osage? Making connections, developing creative capacity, developing a cultural community, and supporting cultural exchange, experimental projects and publications.

HONG KONG IS SUCH A COMMERCIAL CENTRE; IN YOUR VIEW DOES THIS INCREASE THE NEED FOR NOT-FOR-PROFIT SPACES OR DOES IT MAKE IT HARDER FOR THEM TO OPERATE?

Not-for-profit art activities are a crucial part of every society's cultural fabric. The laissez-faire attitudes in Hong Kong can make it difficult for non-profit spaces. For example, when funding agencies decide that these spaces have built enough of an audience that they think can then support the space without any public subsidy. These non-profit spaces thus become a victim of their own success.

IN YOUR VIEW, WHAT IMPACT HAS THE RELATIVELY RECENT INCREASE IN INTERNATIONAL GALLERIES MADE TO THE HONG KONG CULTURAL LANDSCAPE?

International galleries presenting a selection of artists from different countries offers viewers the opportunity to see more, build knowledge and decide what they like.

WHAT IS THE BEST THING YOU HAVE SEEN IN HONG KONG?

Outside of Osage, the best things I have seen have been Asia Art Archive's *Song Dong: 36 Calendars*, *Building M+: Museum and Architecture Collection* at ArtisTree, and the *Journeys* of Leung Ping Kwan held at Hong Kong Central Library, curated by Oscar Ho.

WHAT WILL OSAGE BE SHOWING DURING ART BASEL HONG KONG THIS YEAR?

Osage Art Foundation will be showing the third edition of its annual series *Market Forces*, this time titled *Erasure: From Conceptualism to Abstraction* and curated by Charles Merewether. The concept for *Market Forces* 2014 is to question the increasingly over-determined economic interpretation of the value of art.

osagegallery.com
oaf.cc

Agnes Lin



MIMI BROWN

Mimi Brown is the founder and director of Spring Workshop, a not-for-profit art space dedicated to enabling the artistic process. She is an avid supporter of the arts community in Hong Kong and serves as a director of Asia Art Archive and an advisor to Para/Site Art Space.

HOW DID YOU GAIN AN INTEREST IN ART?

My original passion is for music, but when I arrived in Hong Kong, my friend Defne Ayas (current director of the Witte de With in Rotterdam) introduced me to Tobias Berger, then curator of Para/Site, and another friend Ben Cha introduced me to Claire Hsu, director of Asia Art Archive. From that moment on, I was in love with those two organisations and the people who made them work. Through them and through 'culture culture' sessions – where Alexandra Seno, Yana Peel and I would spend an afternoon in a rickety van driving around town to see every art show that was up – I came to see the fabric of Hong Kong's artists and organisations, and was delighted as a newcomer to begin to know the city of Hong Kong in such a sensually and culturally rich way.

SPRING WORKSHOP IS SUCH AN ASSET TO HONG KONG; HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THE IDEA?

The idea for Spring arose organically. I was standing at a crossroads in my life and made a long list of people and things that I found wonderful. Then I tried to imagine a project that would make as many of those people and things intersect as possible – in Hong Kong's unique context. The result is Spring Workshop.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF SPRING WORKSHOP AND WHY DO YOU THINK THESE ARE IMPORTANT IN HONG KONG?

Spring is a five-year non-profit arts initiative. We offer artist residencies and a series of free public programs, as well as space for other non-profit organisations' private and public programs. Spring's goal is to experiment with the way art is created, enjoyed and supported. We are interested in both the artists and their audience.

In terms of enjoyment, Spring focuses on the audience experience and an exploration of how we all come at art. Some of us are art professionals, some of us are enthusiasts, some of us are artists, some are professors of art, some are students, some are just passersby. We also focus on the physical comfort of the audience, deploying coffee, wine, dinner and beanbags (my favourite perch for film screenings) whenever possible. I have set a five-year timeline for Spring because we want to stay nimble and attuned to Hong Kong's public and its organisations, with the intention of adding to that in a complementary way instead of replicating what already exists. So as Hong Kong's arts profile changes, so will we, with the goal of staying useful and fertile.

HOW DO YOU THINK THE ARTS IN HONG KONG HAVE CHANGED OVER THE YEARS AND WHERE ARE THEY HEADED?

It is encouraging that, lately in Hong Kong, the artists who have been doing meaningful and thoughtful things for many years seem to finally be getting the greater attention they deserve. Our arts infrastructure is also expanding, with various venues coming online including West Kowloon Cultural District, the Central Police Station and so on. Now, many of us are hoping – and putting effort into ensuring – that the audience for the arts will continue to grow along with the burgeoning art scene.

WHAT IS THE BEST THING YOU HAVE SEEN IN HONG KONG?

Over 400 Hong Kongers of every stripe seated at tiny desks painting their contributions to Song Dong's 36 *Calendars* project organised by Asia Art Archive and M+; Para/Site's Lygia Pape *Divisor* performance that found a tribe of 50 heads peeking up out of a white sheet that paraded along a main street downtown; the Burger Collection's wondrous takeover of the historic Cattle Depot site with a thought-provoking array of artists as part of their *Quadrilogy 2* project; the Hong Kong New Music Ensemble's outdoor avant-garde music concerts in Chai Wan, where a huge marimba and 10 different drums made a chilly day feel hot; almost anything at Gallery EXIT.

WHAT WILL SPRING WORKSHOP BE DOING DURING ART BASEL HONG KONG THIS YEAR?

We have invited artist Christodoulos Panayiotou to take over the entire space at Spring as he wishes. The exhibition will involve children and flowers and labour issues. Who doesn't enjoy those topics?

springworkshop.org

**SOME OF US
ARE ART
PROFESSIONALS,
SOME OF US ARE
ENTHUSIASTS,
SOME OF US
ARE ARTISTS,
SOME ARE
PROFESSORS
OF ART, SOME
ARE STUDENTS,
SOME ARE JUST
PASSERSBY**

Mimi Brown
Photo: Glenn Eugen Ellingsen



CONNIE LAM

Connie Lam joined the Hong Kong Arts Centre (HKAC) in 1997 and has been the executive director of the organisation since 2009. She is also a board member of the Hong Kong Arts Administrators Association, a board member of the Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre and a member of the Committee on Venue Partnership of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. Lam has a strong background in video and media art, as well as curatorship. She is an award-winning video artist and the executive producer of the award-winning film *Big Blue Lake* (2011), the first feature film produced independently by the HKAC. She has collaborated with international curators for various exhibitions and is a huge devotee to the promotion of public art in the Hong Kong community and beyond. In 2006, she initiated the Comics Exhibition Series, focusing on the art of comics in Hong Kong. The series continued for several years before taking the form of Comix Home Base – a group of revitalised Grade II historic buildings in Wanchai in 2013. She is also involved in such audience-building programs as the Street Music Series and Open Dance amongst others.

THE HONG KONG ARTS CENTRE IS ONE OF THE MOST ESTABLISHED CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN HONG KONG; COULD YOU BRIEFLY TELL US ABOUT ITS HISTORY?

The Hong Kong Arts Centre (HKAC) is the first and largest civil art initiative in Hong Kong that is operated solely on a self-financed model. As a pluralistic art organisation, HKAC takes up the mission of promoting local contemporary arts through art exhibitions and art education in an extensive variety of art forms. Before 1977, the government City Hall was the only venue available for art exhibitions and performances. Hong Kong, as a prospering city at that time, was in great need of a new space for arts and cultural activities. A group of intellectuals led by Dr. Tao Ho and Dr. Lo King-Man initiated the first civil art movement in Hong Kong to arouse public attention for such need. The Hong Kong Arts Centre building itself is the symbol and the embodiment of this civil art movement. Within this 19-storey Bauhaus-style building, the Centre is an organic combination of multidisciplinary art venues for exhibitions, performances and education.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE MOST IMPORTANT FUNCTION OF THE HONG KONG ARTS CENTRE AND WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO TAKE IT IN THE FUTURE?

Following in the footsteps of those who have preceded us at HKAC, we are pressing on to act as an arts centre for diverse art forms and to promote and intensify the development of the art scene in Hong Kong and overseas. Having been rooted in the energetically creative city of Hong Kong, HKAC is ready to be more daring, have bigger dreams and focus on exploring opportunities for collaborations amongst artists in Hong Kong, Asia and Europe and make an impact on the international art scene.

APART FROM THE HONG KONG ART CENTRE, WHERE IS YOUR FAVOURITE PLACE TO SEE ART IN HONG KONG?

I enjoy going to all sorts of contemporary art spaces and my best favourite place is Xubaizhai (虛白齋), a gallery in the Hong Kong Art Museum, which exhibits traditional Chinese ink paintings. I am in love with this art form. The 'void' provides audiences with the mind landscape to gain breath and space for imagination. I believe it is the spring of my creativity.

IN YOUR VIEW, WHAT IMPACT HAS THE INFLUX OF INTERNATIONAL GALLERIES AND ART FAIRS TO HONG KONG HAD ON THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE?

The influx of international galleries and art fairs in Hong Kong is a result of the success of the Hong Kong Art Fair and Art Basel Hong Kong. There are pros and cons to this phenomenon. The greatest advantage is that Hong Kong's branding in the international art scene is indeed enhanced with the presence of these international galleries and big names. Local artists also gain more opportunities for exposure in the international arts arena and hence the practice of local art patronage is gradually cultivated. However, these international galleries may also become a strong competitor for local galleries and their over-emphasis on the commercial consideration in art collecting may result in a loss of balance for the cultivation of cutting-edge art works.

WHAT IS THE BEST THING YOU HAVE SEEN IN HONG KONG?

Hong Kong is one of the most energetic and creative cities I have ever seen. We have a long tradition of hybridity and have developed a strong adaptability. Not only are Hong Kong artists always ready to accept different art forms and media, but they are able to digest and integrate such rich ingredients to creative new forms. Therefore, Hong Kong local contemporary arts are pluralistic and diverse.

WHAT WILL HKAC BE SHOWING DURING ART BASEL HONG KONG?

The HKAC's fourth annual Open House will offer visitors a one-day art journey of exploration, amusement and wonder right in this creative hub. Guided tours will be available throughout the day in which visitors will get to explore the entire building and visit entities of diverse specialties. We're also showcasing a range of events, including the second *Collectors' Contemporary Collaboration*, our *Public Art Showcase*, *Street Music Series*, a number of short film screenings and more.

hkac.org.hk

Connie Lam



THEIR OVER-EMPHASIS ON THE COMMERCIAL CONSIDERATION IN ART COLLECTING MAY RESULT IN A LOSS OF BALANCE FOR THE CULTIVATION OF CUTTING-EDGE ART WORKS

CLAIRE HSU

Claire Hsu is co-founder and director of Asia Art Archive (AAA), a non-profit independent organisation dedicated to documenting and enabling research on the recent history of art in Asia within an international context.

WHAT MADE YOU START ASIA ART ARCHIVE AND WHAT ARE ITS GOALS AS AN ORGANISATION?

AAA was set up in response to an urgent need for research, scholarship and critical thinking in the field, which was due to a general lack of access to materials and information. Since its founding in 2000, AAA has been dedicated to documenting and increasing access to information on recent histories of art in Asia – histories that continue to be difficult to research because material and documentation are scattered and writings are sparsely translated. Through its research and programs, AAA attempts to balance the way in which knowledge around contemporary art is accessed, produced, activated, engaged with and circulated.

THE ARCHIVE IS A HUGE PRECIOUS AND IMPORTANT RESOURCE. HOW ACCESSIBLE IS IT TO THE PUBLIC?

AAA's collection of material is freely accessible from our physical space in Hong Kong and searchable from our website. In 2012, in order to make more of our collection available to the public, AAA began a major digitisation initiative and launched the Collection Online. This continuously growing digital archive contains primary source material culled by individual practitioners and researchers in cities across Asia. AAA is also focused on increasing digital access to its collection through connectivity with other knowledge networks and platforms. Our new website also features Field Notes, a bi-annual bilingual (English and Chinese) e-journal of perspectives from the field.



Claire Hsu

WHAT WILL AAA BE DOING DURING ART BASEL HONG KONG THIS YEAR?

AAA will once again present Open Platform, a series of 'meetings without walls' that take place in AAA's booth at the fair. Open Platform is an integral part of our endeavour to enable new thinking about recent art in Asia. For the second year in a row, AAA will invite cultural practitioners from all disciplines to submit proposals to host open meetings during Art Basel in Hong Kong in May 2014. Meetings are intended to further participants' ongoing projects, catalyse new ones, or simply make connections. Selected researchers, curators, writers, artists, students, academics and art organisations may request the use of AAA's contact list to reach out to people they wish to invite. Topics of discussion reference the concerns of the Archive and its research interests. Meetings aren't recorded but applicants are encouraged to contribute material to enrich AAA's collection.

TO YOUR MIND, WHAT ARE THE MOST NOTABLE CHANGES THAT HONG KONG'S CULTURAL LANDSCAPE HAS UNDERGONE IN THE PAST 5 OR 10 YEARS?

AAA will turn 14 this year and during this time, we have been witness to incredible shift in the public's interests in art within the city. The most visible drivers have undoubtedly been the government's support of the West Kowloon project and M+, one of the most ambitious cultural hub projects in the world, as well as the further positioning and strengthening of Hong Kong as a market for art with the establishment of Art Basel Hong Kong, the opening of major Western galleries in Hong Kong and the increasing role of the auction house. At the same time, we are seeing individuals and non-profits take up more ambitious programming, presenting local and international artists side-by-side, addressing some of the gaps and needs within the arts infrastructure.

aaa.org.hk

YANA PEEL

Yana Peel is the CEO of the Intelligence Squared Group, the world's leading forum for live debate. She co-founded Outset Contemporary Art Fund as a cultural foundation in 2003 and maintains board and advisory positions across the arts, which include: the Tate Executive Council, British Fashion Council, V&A, V-A-C Foundation Moscow, Para/Site Art Space and the Asia Art Archive.

WHERE DOES YOUR PASSION FOR ART COME FROM?

My great passion is for bringing people together around interesting ideas. In my life, many of the people whose views have inspired me and challenged my own preconceptions about the world have been artists.

YOU ARE KNOWN FOR FACILITATING DIALOGUE AND DELIVERING OPPORTUNITY TO THE ARTS IN HONG KONG. WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO YOU AND HOW DOES HONG KONG RESPOND?

I arrived in Hong Kong five years ago with my family and realised that my greatest contribution to the arts ecosystem would be a continued focus on catalysing conversations around the most relevant issues of the day. Hence, with four months to go before what was then Art Hong Kong, I started coordinating a debate that would become the first of many Intelligence Squared activities in the region. The debates in Hong Kong have been thriving ever since, expanding into Singapore and China.

HONG KONG IS SUCH A COMMERCIAL HUB; DO YOU THINK ART HAS A ROLE TO PLAY IN BUSINESS AND WHAT CAN THIS DO AT A LOCAL LEVEL?

Most of the dialogue around art in Hong Kong focuses on the commercial realm, as high rents dictate strong sales as a basis for survival. I am not concerned about the business of art; I am more interested in the art of constructive conversation and critique around the underlying issues. As Andy Warhol said, "Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art."

Yana Peel



WHAT DO YOU THINK HAS BEEN THE GREATEST CHANGE TO THE ARTS DURING YOUR TIME IN HONG KONG AND WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

When I arrived, the gallery landscape was nascent, though Asia Art Archive and Para/Site were already doing very meaningful work. I was delighted to become involved with Asia Art Archive, where I proudly still serve as an advisor to Claire Hsu and her excellent team. I was also privileged to be invited onto the board of Para/Site, Hong Kong's most respected contemporary arts space committed to exhibition and education. I now co-chair the board with Alan Lau and am thrilled with the platform we have created for growth, as the institution looks to its third decade.

I remember when my great friend Ben Brown told me of the transformation he had planned for the Pedder Building. Before I knew it, Nick Simunovic was guiding me and my visiting friend, the great collector and arts patron Anita Zabludowicz, through the shell that would become Gagosian HQ. It has been wonderful to see the proliferation of galleries and interesting to watch the seminal role that auction houses have played in encouraging and educating collectors.

WHAT IS THE BEST THING YOU HAVE SEEN IN HONG KONG?

I recently took my children to ArtisTree to see M+'s first architecture exhibition, *Building M+: The Museum and Architecture Collection*, which was great. Also, the opening of Spring Workshop over a year ago in the Wang Chuk Hang industrial area was also a landmark – Mimi Brown's generosity of spirit and brilliance of mind have catalysed an extraordinary creative community and created a vital platform for expression in Hong Kong. **V**

intelligencesquared.com