

ARTFORUM

A Fair to Remember

Hong Kong

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By Doretta Lau



Left: Sir David Tang and West Kowloon Cultural District Authority CEO Graham Sheffield. (Photo: Enrich Publishing) Right: ARTHK10 director Magnus Renfrew. (Photo: Doretta Lau)

LAST MONDAY, shortly before the vernissage of the third annual Hong Kong Art Fair, the city's government inaugurated the first-ever Hong Kong Art Week. That night, [Ben Brown](#) Fine Arts held an opening for [Candida Höfer](#)'s stately exhibition "In Italy, Naples, and Florence," which served as an unofficial kickoff to the attendant slew of private views, parties, and panels. Conversation moved from unfettered admiration for the photographs ("I love these!") to focused anticipation for the fair, whose list of exhibitors had increased by some fifty galleries since the preceding year. The crowd, which included Sydney-based dealers [Roslyn Oxley](#) and [Conny Dietzschold](#), curator [Josef Ng](#), and artists Hiram To and [Jonathan Thomson](#), traded notes on the parties to hit and tried to hammer out a general strategy for getting through the week. A game plan was of utmost importance.

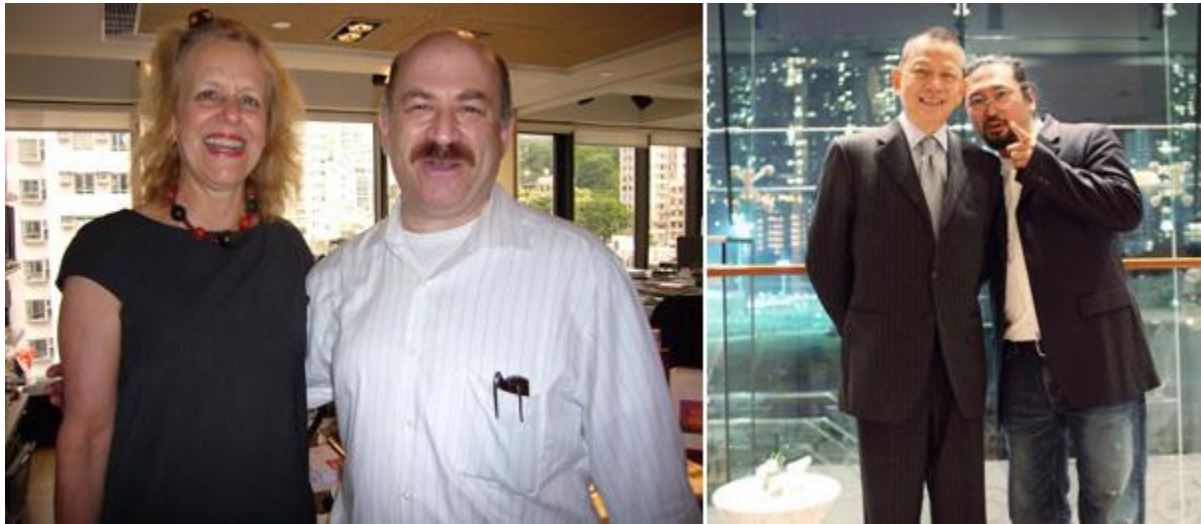
The next night I stopped by the opening for Wu Yuren’s exhibition at Tang Contemporary Art. “My wife likes to come to Hong Kong to consume,” Wu said. “I am an artist—I am meant to be consumed.” A perfect attitude for the week. Later that evening, [Emmanuel Perrotin](#) held a dinner for the Japanese pop artist [Aya Takano](#) at the Hong Kong Jockey Club in Happy Valley. Artists [Takashi Murakami](#), [Zhang Xiaogang](#), and [Yoshitomo Nara](#) were on hand to celebrate Takano’s solo exhibition at the fair and the publication of a book on her work. Nara had made it to Hong Kong the night before, having traveled from his home in the Japanese countryside to Tokyo before reaching Hong Kong. “I usually don’t go to art fairs, but I had to install,” he said between bites of a monkfish exquisitely prepared by chef [Alain Passard](#) of Parisian restaurant L’Arpège. Art Basel codirectors [Marc Spiegler](#) and [Annette Schönholzer](#) had flown in a mere four hours earlier, and their joint presence seemed another sign that ARTHK had arrived. Like many, Spiegler had hit the ground running. “I went to the hotel, took a shower, and came straight here,” he remarked.



Left: Chef Alain Passard of L’Arpège, artist Aya Takano, and dealer Emmanuel Perrotin. (Photo: Guillaume Zicarelli) Right: Curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, writer Sarah Thornton, moderator Deborah Kan, writer Tim Marlow, and artist Antony Gormley. (Photo: Courtesy Intelligence Squared Asia)

The week’s relentless pace continued. At Wednesday night’s vernissage, the halls of the convention center swarmed with people. “Who says we don’t have art audiences in Hong Kong!” Asia Art Archive’s [Claire Hsu](#) said amid the bustle. Near the entrance, at Tang Contemporary Art, Rirkrit Tiravanija’s installation *Ne Travaillez Jamais*, which featured live birds flying in two towering cages, won over new art audiences. Nearby, White Cube had a selection of [Damien Hirst](#) works on view, including *The Inescapable Truth*, a white dove suspended in formaldehyde. This piece wasn’t initially for sale, but a persuasive collector snapped it up for \$2.6 million. Persuasion, apparently, isn’t cheap.

Along a walkway, director [Baz Luhrmann](#) sat atop a ladder near the 10 Chancery Lane booth, which contained a project, *The Creek, 1977*, he had made with the Australian artist [Vincent Fantauzzo](#). It was difficult to hear Luhrmann speak, his voice lost in the crush of bodies clamoring for a view. In a cluster of media booths, Sir [David Tang](#) signed copies of his book *A Chink in the Armour*, and near the back of the fair, artist [Samson Young](#) conducted an iPhone orchestra playing his composition *21 Etudes for iPhones*. As the evening went on, people trickled over to the nearby Grand Hyatt hotel, where Modern Media, publishers of [Philip Tinari](#)'s *Leap*, was hosting a cozy after-hours by the poolside. "I hope people will swim," Tinari said. "Then it'll be a really good party." The editor of a local weekly looked around the open space and noted, "It's not the usual socialite crowd—there are actually artists and collectors here." Among the masses were curator [Eugene Tan](#), art historian [Tony Godfrey](#), photographer [Virgile Simon Bertrand](#), and artists [Chow Chun Fai](#) and [Nadim Abbas](#). By midnight, around the time sound artist and curator [Yang Yeung](#) arrived on the scene, the party wasn't showing any signs of winding down.



Left: MoMA curator Barbara London and David Solo, board member of Asia Art Archive. (Photo: Doretta Lau) Right: Artist Takashi Murakami with Ken Yeh, Chairman of Christie's Asia. (Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli)

Despite being out late, a solid crowd made it to the Asia Art Archive the next morning for a VIP breakfast and the opening of "Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art from 1980–1990." Once again, AAA was the education partner for the fair, presenting a series of discussion panels, "Backroom Conversations," which provided an academic counterpoint to the market hustle. Performance artist and activist [Choi Tsz-kwan](#) gave a riveting presentation on two local protests, while curator [Yukie Kamiya](#), discussing the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, made clear the issues that Hong Kong will face in its attempts to establish its first museum for contemporary art, slated for construction soon in the much-anticipated West Kowloon Cultural District. [Michael Rush](#), former director of the Rose Art Museum in

Massachusetts, gave a passionate talk, too, referring to the art fair as “the three-hundred-pound gorilla in the room,” then continued with a lively discussion with [Martha Rosler](#).

On Friday, [Antony Gormley](#), writers [Tim Marlow](#) and [Sarah Thornton](#), and [Hans Ulrich Obrist](#) debated the topic “You Don’t Need Great Skill to Be a Great Artist” at Intelligence Squared (Gormley and Marlow speaking for, Thornton and Obrist against). The result: 248 voted for the motion, 157 against, with six audience members remaining undecided. That night at Osage gallery, a large crowd ventured out to catch [Lee Mingwei](#)’s opening in the Kwun Tong space. “I’m beyond tired. I’m catching my second or third wind,” artist [Adrian Wong](#) said. At least he could still count his—others seemed beyond the pale. Artist [Lee Kit](#) revealed that he was “feeling better today because I gave up waking up early and slept in until three. Now we just have to keep this up until Sunday.”

The end was indeed in sight. On Saturday I finally caught up with fair director [Magnus Renfrew](#) at the convention center. “I’m already thinking of improvements for next year,” he said. He gestured at the numerous people walking in and out of booths. “But it feels like a real fair, doesn’t it?” Moments later, curator [Davina Lee](#) echoed his optimism: “The weekend crowds make it harder and harder to ignore Hong Kong’s hunger for art.” Indeed, the fair seemed to answer a hot-button question: Can Hong Kong actually sustain a large contemporary art museum? If this week offers any evidence, it seems the answer is a resounding yes.



Left: MoMA PS1 board members Diana Picasso and Richard Chang with Thyra Thomson.
Right: Artist Vincent Fantauzzo and filmmaker Baz Luhrmann.



Left: Asia Art Archive's Phoebe Wong and artist Stanley Wong. Right: Artist Candida Höfer and dealer Ben Brown. (Photos: Doretta Lau)



Left: Tony Oxley with dealer Roslyn Oxley. Right: Osage director of exhibitions Eugene Tan and Tony Godfrey, director of research at Sotheby's Institute of Art. (Photos: Doretta Lau)



Left: Artist and curator Yang Yeung. Right: Artist Jonathan Thomson and curator Josef Ng.
(Photos: Doretta Lau)



Left: Artists Scott Redford and Hiram To with dealer Pui Pui To. Right: Artist Wilson Shieh.
(Photos: Doretta Lau)



Left: Curator Tobias Berger with artists Adrian Wong, Erkka Nissinen, and Amy Cheung. Right: Artist Lee Kit. (Photos: Doretta Lau)