





State of the arts

ART HK 09 not only brought local passion and creativity to the fore; it also painted a rosy picture of the future of the art market in Hong Kong. **Peter Sabine** draws his own conclusions

The international art glitterati came out in force for ART HK 09, a five-day extravaganza of 110 galleries at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. Public officials, socialites, gallery owners and aficionados gathered at the opening night vernissage to survey the art – and people – on display. Air-kissing and outrageous outfits proved de rigueur, and negotiations that began in hushed tones sometimes developed into spirited arguments carried out with aplomb.

The invited guests rushed around a maze of booths looking for bargains or just the hottest art lovers to seduce. Others contented themselves by sipping multiple

Chardonnays while examining pieces by Antony Gormley, Anish Kapoor, Andy Warhol, Francis Bacon and Julian Opie, who were on display alongside top Asian contemporary artists.

The appearance of tennis legend Martina Navratilova drew a crowd curious about her unusual piece of performance art: Slovak artist Juro Kralik dipped tennis balls in paint and directed the nine-time Wimbledon champion to hit them against a canvas to create abstract art. A bemused and slightly tipsy mob looked on, and a few sniggers broke out. Art or nonsense, no-one could debate its good cause, as proceeds from the court-meets-canvas creation were going to the Sovereign >>

Hyung Koo Kang's *Woman*, 2009, by the Korean artist exhibiting with Arario Gallery



Above: Part of Christie's Sales, Indian artist TV Santhosh

Art Foundation's rehabilitation, education and therapy initiatives for disadvantaged children in Hong Kong.

Although prices came down this year, ART HK 09 also saw some high-profile sales. White Cube gallery sold *Paws* by Gilbert and George for HK\$3.56m, and *I love you more than I could* by Tracey Emin for HK\$653,000. A collector from Hong Kong bought a Warhol and Basquiat collaboration for HK\$16.8m from Galerie Michael Schultz. Opie's *View of boats on lake Motosu below Mount Fuji from route 709* sold for HK\$650,000. Meanwhile, Arario Gallery had buyers for two portraits by Hyung Koo Kang at HK\$620,000 each.

Moving on up

Hot on the fair's tail came an array of auctions. Asian Auction Week – a combined sale by Korea's K Auction, Japanese Shinwa Art

Auction, Kingsley Art Auction from Taiwan and Singapore-based Larasati Auctioneers – brought prominent Asian contemporary pieces and took in HK\$18.48m. Seoul Auction received a cool HK\$13.37m for Damien Hirst's *Tranquility*, becoming the artist's most expensive work sold at auction in Asia, while the auction took a total of HK\$42.8m. Japan-based Est-Ouest Auctions included paintings by Renoir and Chagall and the sale earned a total of HK\$16.8m. Bonhams' sales of Chinese art and paintings took in HK\$17.44m.

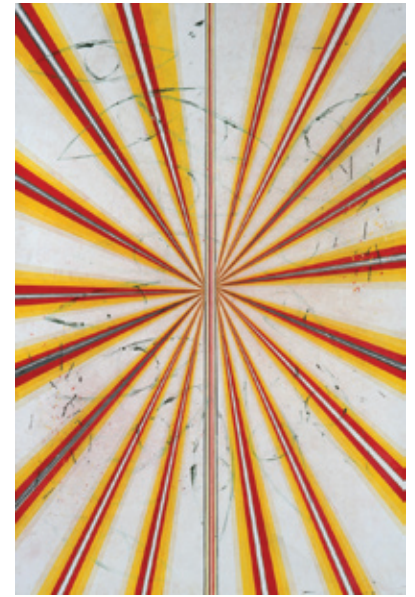
In Christie's Hong Kong spring sales, the combined evening and day sales of Asian Contemporary Art and Chinese 20th Century Art brought almost HK\$283m. Liu Ye's *Rising Sun* fetched three times its estimate at HK\$3.26m.

"A new surge of confidence in the Asian market resonated across sales," says Eric Chang, Christie's

head of Asian Contemporary and Chinese 20th Century Art. Meanwhile, its sale of Fine Chinese Modern Paintings totalled HK\$68.92m, with *The Namo Amitabha Buddha and Calligraphy*, a triptych by Qi Baishi and Qi Gong, selling for HK\$4.58m. The Southeast Asian Modern and Contemporary Art auction pulled in over HK\$20m with Belgian artist Adrien-Jean Le Mayeur de Merprès' Balinese-inspired *Ni Pollok* selling to a European private collector for HK\$3.62m.

Art fight

If the frenzied buying and selling, social events, exhibitions and artistic debate did not satisfy, Hong Kong also hosted a round of the global design competition Cut & Paste Digital Design Tournament at the Hong Kong Exhibition Centre. The event sees artists formulate ideas in categories including 2-D, 3-D and motion



graphics, racing against time to produce designs under set themes. A cheering crowd watching creations come alive on the big screen add extra pressure, and stakes are high, with winners earning a place in the global final in New York against 45 other designers.

Scene and heard

Some of the major exhibitors and artists at ART HK 09

Rossi & Rossi – Fabio Rossi

Promoting a range of artists from the Himalayan region, Tibetan diaspora and other parts of Asia, Rossi & Rossi has built a worldwide name from its London base. Fabio Rossi, whose mother founded the gallery, put the focus on two artists at ART HK 09. Hong Kong-based Caroline Chiu, takes portraits using large format 20x24 inch Polaroids that are now out of production and

a camera that weighs 500lbs. “It’s a thoughtful process, and Caroline has to carefully plan shots, as they cannot be manipulated digitally,” says Fabio. Rossi & Rossi also exhibited provocative Tibetan painter Nortse, who employs images of nature, white cloth bandages and blood, referencing everything from environmental catastrophe to childhood memories of his father’s death in a road accident.

Arario Gallery – Thorsten Albertz

Warehouses, movie theatres and department stores fit somewhat incongruously with art, but for Arario Gallery, the mother company and its collector/artist owner has been nothing but a perfect fit. Starting in Korea and opening in Beijing and New York, Arario pushes contemporary Asian art, particularly from Korea. New

York gallery director Thorsten Albertz arrived at the fair to be flung straight into the opening night mêlée. “A showcase to see and be seen,” he says. After hangovers had died down and glasses cleared, sales at Arario took off. Though well-organised, Thorsten says the fair needs more international galleries to equal world-famous fairs such as Frieze and Basel. When asked if some work is of more artistic value than others, he comments galleries have to balance artistic importance and commercial potential. “Some artists have triggered demonstrations and protests through their art, but galleries must also appeal to the mass audience.”

Gagosian Gallery – Nick Simunovic

New York-based Gagosian Gallery is expanding globally, and managing director Nick >>

Left: Rossi & Rossi’s provocative Tibetan artist Nortse’s piece Father’s Violin, 2008. Top right: Gagosian Gallery’s Untitled (Butterfly with Green Eyes), 2008, by Mark Grotjahn. Bottom right: Austrian artist Oliver Dorfer’s The palemoon project 02, 2009, at Hilger Contemporary



Simunovic is bringing its collection to Asia. “The fair has got it right as far as Asian galleries go, but it needs a greater number of collectors, because success depends on whether people buy,” says Nick. Featuring renowned artists such as Andy Warhol, Jeff Koons and Takashi Murakami, Gagosian needs little introduction in the art world, as evidenced by the number of times interested collectors came over to make enquiries during our interview. “Parties and social events make fairs much more desirable destinations, so Hong Kong should focus on this.”

10 Chancery Lane Gallery – Dinh Q. Lê

“My art is a mixture of childhood memories in Vietnam during the war, growing up in America, and Hollywood memories from films

*Above: “The crashing helicopters are like wild beasts drowning.” Dinh Q. Lê’s *South China Sea Pishkun*, Still #2, 2009.*

*Opposite page: Part of Ron Arad’s recent *No Discipline* exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris*

like *Apocalypse Now* and *Platoon*. I’m interested in how these merge and make memories that are neither fact nor fiction. My family escaped Vietnam and I moved to America at the age of 10. As a child in Vietnam, I had learned grass mat weaving from my aunt and now use it as a metaphor for the weaving of cultures and identities. I remember when my aunt was killed and communists invaded my hometown. Another memory is of news reports broadcasting heroic songs, images of soldiers charging, and pictures of skulls and bodies. It made me think I would have to go fight and might not survive.

“While initially wonderful, I felt lost in America; it was the wrong place. I returned to Vietnam but have been away for 15 years and even today, there are days where I’m very American.

I started a non-profit organisation to support contemporary Vietnamese art, we have brought museum curators and international directors to Vietnam as locals don’t get access to these resources. As the government considers me a foreigner, I’m not allowed to teach in universities.

“I’m showing a video installation called *South China Sea Pishkun*. It depicts the last day of the Vietnam War, when US helicopters, fleeing in a panic, couldn’t find aircraft carriers and crashed into the ocean. *Pishkun* is a Native American word referring to the outsmarting of buffalo by creating a panic and driving them off a cliff. The crashing helicopters are like wild beasts dying and drowning. To me, it is a reminder: have the US learned anything from the Vietnam War?”



Ben Brown Fine Arts – Ron Arad

"I have an aversion to convention, and am interested in things that are new. Swarovski approached me to do a chandelier, so I had this idea of embedding LEDs in the crystals and making the chandelier receive text messages that scroll down like a ticker tape.

"Boredom is the mother of creativity, and it can come from something as small as a pair of earrings, or as big as an opera house. I studied at art school and without too much planning, found myself in design. The 1960s made it to Tel Aviv as well and I'm very much a child of that era. When I moved to London, I became a foreigner. But the advantage is that you are not so permissive to the lies of the land.

"My recent piece, *Oh, the farmer and the cowman should be friends*, is



a bookcase shaped like the map of America. The name – which comes from the musical *Oklahoma!* – is the first thing that came to my head. It hit the internet like fire and people have debated whether it is about the relationship between art and design. And the debate is a very good outcome. In the end, you discover there's no wrong interpretation. Function and aesthetics are not at odds.

"I want my collectors to have taste and intellectual integrity, but sometimes you go to a home and think 'bloody hell, why does *he* like my work?' Other times I'm in really good company, and they also have some Kiefer and Basquiat.

If my pieces get wrecked, at the end of day, it's theirs, not mine. I'm not neurotic about it. Collectors are not stupid; these chairs (points to a picture on his iPhone) cost €1.3m. It's often surprising to see my stuff that is 20 years old go up for auction in immaculate condition. I can't keep anything like that!

"Hong Kong likes itself, sometimes you go to a city and the people need to apologise about it. Here, they want you to like it, which means they like it. Though I went for a meeting yesterday and I said 'Ah, it's great you have my chair!' Turned out to be a copy..."