

West Kowloon Cultural District

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Since 2003, *Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook* has been keeping track of the progress of the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) in the “Public Issues” section. This ongoing endeavor has lasted 12 years while we are yet to learn the exact opening schedule of M+, “the new museum for visual culture in Hong Kong” as described by the WKCD Authority (WKCA). At the beginning of 2015, the official description about M+ was that it had been “scheduled to be completed in 2018.”¹ In a press release from November, the description had been amended as “opening in 2019.”² Arguably construction completion and opening are not the same. What is intriguing is the choice of vocabularies. Michael Lynch, CEO of WKCA, resigned in February, followed by the decline of contract renewal by Lars Nittve, the Executive Director of M+, in October. Global recruitment started all over again.

Information:

- Local news coverage. For details please refer to Chinese version.
- WKCA website <http://www.westkowloon.hk>

January, 2015

• On January 7

WKCA announced that two pedestrian walkways were currently under design, namely the footbridge connecting the “Artist Square” and the subway connecting Austin Road. These walkways will be the key access points to the WKCD. Construction is scheduled to kick-off at the beginning of 2016. The walkways will be open to the public in 2018 when Xiqu Centre and M+ open.³

• On January 23

The WKCA Board announced the re-appointment of existing members and the appointments of eleven new co-opted members to its committees. The appointment term is from January 1, to December 31, 2015. New members include Fung Wing-kee Raymond, Ho Kar-kuan Tisa, Lau Yin-ling Stella, Roger Garcia, Lau Ka-ming Alan, Lo Wing-sang Vincent, Uli Sigg, Wong Ying-kay Ada, Yim Sen-kee Rocco, Chan Fu-keung William, and Yu Tin-yau Elvin.⁴

1 “West Kowloon Cultural District marks the construction of M+ museum with planting of commemorative Time Capsule,” WKCA press release, January 29, 2015. <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/newsroom/news/west-kowloon-cultural-district-marks-the-construction-of-m-museum-with-planting-of-commemorative-time-capsule>

2 “Artists announced for Mobile M+: Live Art,” WKCA press release, November 6, 2015. <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/newsroom/news/artists-announced-for-mobile-m-live-art/news-type/press-release/page/3>

3 News coverage, *The Sun* A06, January 7, 2015.

4 “Appointment of Committee Members under the Board of the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority,” WKCA press release, January 23, 2015. <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/newsroom/news/appointment-of-committee-members-under-the-board-of-the-west-kowloon-cultural-district-authority-699/news-type/press-release/page/3>

- **On January 29**

M+ Time Capsule Ceremony is held today to mark the countdown of M+ completion, scheduled in 2018.⁵ The time capsule contains artworks by six primary students, personal messages from Carrie Lam, Michael Lynch and Lars Nittve to a future Hong Kong generation, along with art newspapers of the date, photos of M+ construction site shot from different angles, a piece of accessory/ building materials taken from the sample façade of M+ building, etc. The time capsule is to be placed on the M+ site, to be uncovered and unsealed 100 years hence.⁶

February, 2015

- **On February 10**

WKCD announced that Michael Lynch had handed in his resignation, with effect from August 3, 2015.⁷ Lynch said that “it has been an enormous privilege to have led the WKCD project. I believe profoundly in its vision and that the WKCD will be an arts and cultural landmark that everyone in Hong Kong can be proud of. I leave with great pride in what has been achieved over the four years of my incumbency.” He thanked the Board, in particular the Chairman, for their understanding and support throughout the past years. A global search for a replacement will commence immediately.

Tsang Tak-sing, the then Secretary for Home Affairs, expressed his gratitude to Lynch for his contribution to the development of HK’s cultural hardware and software.⁸ Tsang said that “(Lynch) has diligently overseen the design and construction of world-class performing and visual arts venues, notably the Xiqu Centre and M+, which are essential cultural infrastructure to develop Hong Kong into an international cultural metropolis.” Tsang described Lynch as dedicated and professional, making use of his extensive international network to providing local artists with international exposure by featuring them in major exhibitions, thereby raising the international profile of Hong Kong and the WKCD project.

Carrie Lam, Director of the WKCD Board, met the press after the Board meeting.⁹ She revealed that Lynch told her his resignation plan on February 4, 2015. The Board accepted his resignation during the Board meeting on February 10, with the prior approval of the Chief Executive. Lam appreciated Lynch for having successfully kick-started the construction of various venues within WKCD, and contributing significantly to the expansion of the arts and cultural scene in Hong Kong by spearheading innovative visual and performing arts programs. WKCD will commence a global search to identify Lynch’s successor, with Lam as the chairman of the recruitment board. When asked if it would be a better option to hire a local, Lam said that a global recruitment was required for the best candidate to be identified. She did not see any relationship between Lynch’s resignation and his remuneration.

5 Note: M+ completion date in this report varies due to the inconsistencies among sources of information.

6 See footnote 1

7 “Michael LYNCH leaves WKCD to take early retirement,” WKCD press release, February 20, 2015. <http://www.westkwoon.hk/en/newsroom/news/michael-lynch-leaves-wkcd-to-take-early-retirement/news-type/press-release/page/3>

8 HKSAR Government news release, February 10, 2015. <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201502/10/P201502100612.htm>

9 HKSAR Government news release, February 10, 2015. <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201502/10/P201502100910.htm>

Henry Tang, ex-Chief Secretary for Administration, was sorry for Lynch's resignation. He said it was a great loss to Hong Kong for Lynch to resign while various WKCD projects were being developed.¹⁰

- **On February 11**

Lynch's resignation was extensively covered by the local press.¹¹

Wong Ying-kay Ada, Chief Executive of the "Hong Kong Institute of Contemporary Culture," said in an interview with *Sing Pao Daily News* that what WKCD needed most was to involve local people. To Wong, Hong Kong has not seen a plan like WKCD before. A large sum of fund has been invested and it is critical that the WKCD solicits the support of local citizens. Wong has heard from young artists that they don't have high hopes on WKCD, while the citizens are indifferent. She doesn't think Lynch's resignation will be problematic because the entire WKCD plan has been laid out, construction kicked-off, and a Development Director (editor's note: the position is "Executive Director, Project Delivery" according to the WKCD website) in office.

Chung Shu-kun Christopher, Chairman of the "Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of the West Kowloon Cultural District Project," required the Government to explain in details the reason for Lynch's resignation, and whether that had anything to do with "the over-budgeted projects and the mal-planned collection acquisition."¹²

Sing Pao Daily News reported the estimated two-year delay of the opening of M+.¹³ The design plan of M+ has been completed in 2013 but its construction did not start until January 2015. Notwithstanding the earlier plan of 2017 completion, the date has been repeatedly amended and the most updated target is to complete construction in 2018 and open to the public in 2019.

Sing Tao Daily reported¹⁴ that three senior executives had stepped down from their posts halfway through their contract terms since WKCD's establishment six years ago. In June 2009, Angus Cheng resigned barely one week after appointed the CEO. In 2011, Graham Sheffield submitted his sudden resignation by claiming sickness, but reported duty to the British Council in a month. Prior to Sheffield's appointment, WKCD put forward the requirement for the CEO to be a cultural practitioner. Yet in order to do his job, the CEO has to know everything from culture to construction to politics. Informant told *Sing Tao Daily*

10 News coverage, *Ming Pao online news* (21:05), February 20, 2015

11 News coverage, *am730* A04, February 11, 2015
News coverage, *Sing Pao Daily News* A01, February 11, 2015
News coverage, *Sing Tao Daily* A04, February 11, 2015
News coverage, *The Sun* A04, February 11, 2015
News coverage, *Wen Wei Po* A13, February 11, 2015
News coverage, *Apple Daily* A08, February 11, 2015
News coverage, *Hong Kong Daily News* A03, February 11, 2015
News coverage, *Wen Wei Po* A13, February 11, 2015
News coverage, *Hong Kong Commercial Daily* A04, February 11, 2015
News coverage, *Hong Kong Economic Journal* A12, February 11, 2015
News coverage, *Tai Kung Pao* A04, February 11, 2015

12 News coverage, *Sing Pao Daily News* A01, February 11, 2015

13 News coverage, *Sing Pao Daily News* A01, February 11, 2015

14 News coverage, *Sing Tao Daily* A04, February 11, 2015
News coverage, *Hong Kong Daily News* M02, February 11, 2015

that the two foreigner-CEOs had been regarded as lacking the knowledge of local political ecology, hence their difficulty and frustration accommodating to the bureaucracy. Lynch listed three requirements for his successor: knowledge of local politics, familiarity with local culture, and a global vision. Two individuals are considered qualified candidates by some government officials: Raymond Young, ex-Secretary for Home Affairs who has recently retired, and Duncan Pescod, ex-permanent Secretary for Transport and Housing (Housing), who joined the WKCD as COO last year.

In the meantime, Lynch told the press that he found the politics of Hong Kong complicated. There had been difficult LegCo reporting. He preferred a more leisurely life so he decided to return to his family in Australia earlier than planned. *Sing Tao Daily* reported that Lynch had lumps in his throat when talking about the reason(s) for his resignation. He described the day as “a sad day” because he would not be able to witness the completion of the first WKCD building.

Professor Sing Ming, Division of Social Science, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, told *Apple Daily* that WKCD's bark has been worse than its bite. With another senior executive resigning, it makes one wonder whether it is the intricate people network that makes execution difficult for overseas experts. Ho Sau-lan Cyd, LegCo member representing the Labor Party, recalled that Lynch had once been criticized by the pro-establishment members as a foreigner who lacked understanding of local culture. Those members interfered with the collection acquisition based on political considerations. She cited the example of Chung Shu-kun Christopher accusing WKCD for acquiring an artwork of Ai Wei Wei's, the eyesore of the Communist Party of China. Ho worried that foreign arts experts would be reluctant to work under such conditions. She suggested to the WKCD to fill the vacancy with a local arts expert.¹⁵

The *Oriental Daily* quoted LegCo member Chan Wai-yip Albert describing WKCD as a “mega-size white elephant.”¹⁶ Chan found the over-spent situation beyond control and called for the project to be terminated immediately. Otherwise even more public money will be wasted in a bottomless pit. Chung Shu-kun Christopher criticized that the construction delay contributed to the over-spent. He thought WKCD had too much leeway in acquiring museum collection and to him this equaled a waste of tax-money. He urged the government to identify as soon as possible a new CEO with financial skills and global vision.

The *Hong Kong Economic Journal* described Lynch's resignation as “jumping off a (sinking) boat”: on the surface it was for health reasons, for the unhealthy wife, for more family time, while the real reason remained unknown. The *Journal* commented that the WKCD project has been dragging on since 1998. It is estimated that it will not see its full completion until 2030. The latest cost projection made in April 2015 was between forty and fifty billion Hong Kong dollars, over 100% more than the original estimation. Additional funding will have to be sought. For a project that has dragged on for over a decade, costing tens of billions of dollars, and its CEO changing again and again, taxpayers can't help wonder whether they are paying for a white elephant with no value except for it looks. Even if there will be just enough amount of funds to complete the construction, WKCD will not be able to support itself in the future. The Government will have no choice but to subsidize its operation, just like feeding a massive amount of food to a white elephant which doesn't produce anything at all.¹⁷

15 News coverage, *Apple Daily* A08, February 11, 2015

16 News coverage, *Oriental Daily* A13, February 11, 2015
News coverage, *Oriental Daily* A02, February 11, 2015

17 News coverage, *Hong Kong Economic Journal* A02, February 11, 2015

- **On February 17**

The Sun covered LegCo Member WONG Yuk-man's criticism of WKCD, saying that its development had been a waste of public money and important land resources. He appealed to his fellow Members to interfere with further funding request by the government with filibuster, which he believed would be supported by the public.¹⁸

Wong Ying-kay Ada wrote in *am730* to point out that the largest potential problem of WKCD was not about its change of CEO, but about the cynicism of the stakeholders who see the CEO position as one that brought bad luck. They are also indifferent with and pessimistic of WKCD. Wong said that the young people who had been to "FreeSpace" events might enjoy the open space of the WKCD Park, but for those who had not, they might not even know the fundamentals. There are 1.74 million Hong Kong citizens who are under thirty (based on 2014 statistics). Whether they see Hong Kong as their home depends on the quality of her policies, cultural policies inclusive. The WKCD must convince this group of young people that WKCD is not just Hong Kong's most-expensive-ever cultural infrastructure, but an infrastructure built for them. The next CEO has to connect with the young people, earn their trust and know what it means to be "honest and genuine." He needs to understand the value of the Hong Kong identity to the new generation and let them participate. The youth should be able to feel their connection to WKCD and Hong Kong's culture.¹⁹

- **On February 23**

M+ presented its first moving-image-focused project: "Mobile M+: Moving Images," its exhibition component opening on March 13 to showcase video works from twenty-four international artists. According to Yung Ma, the theme of the exhibition covers "migration", "diaspora", and "home", concepts with growing complexity related to soaring immigration as a result of globalization and various societal situations. In the 1980's and 1990's, a series of films around the issue of immigration had been made in Hong Kong when the 1997 handover was approaching. Ma hoped that one could reflect on today's situation by reading into the past. Ma stressed that the exhibition demonstrated M+'s multi-disciplinary approach of integrating films and videos. However, Ellen Pau found that while the project had been presented as a contemporary art exhibition in an art museum, thematic screenings (including those of contemporary video artworks) would take place in cinemas. Such a venue choice might not invite the audience to look at the videos from a contemporary art perspective.²⁰

March, 2015

- **On March 3**

WKCD announced the re-appointment of eight existing members and the appointment of seven new members to its Consultation Panel for a period of one year from March 1, 2015 to February 29, 2016. Leong Chi-yan John has been re-appointed as Chairman of the Panel. New members included Ching Cheung-ying, Chow Yick-hay, Lena Lee, Ng Cheuk-yin, Ng Yuen-ting Yolanda, Tang Shu-wing and Yiu Si-wing.²¹

18 News coverage, *The Sun* A04, February 17, 2015

19 News coverage, *am730* A20, February 17, 2015

20 News coverage, *Hong Kong Economic Times* C11, February 23, 2015

21 "Appointment of Consultation Panel Members under the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority," WKCD press release, March 3, 2015. <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/newsroom/news/appointment-of-consultation-panel-members-under-the-west-kowloon-cultural-district-authority-735/news-type/press-release/page/3>

- **On March 13**

In the *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, Cheng Jing-han raises the question of whether the development of WKCD should continue.²² Once a member of the “Subcommittee on West Kowloon Cultural District Development,” Cheng did not support the WKCD as he saw it as a property development project packaged as a culture project. The single-tender stipulation inevitably invited speculation on the transfer of benefit between the government and the merchants. Cheng proposed that the project should be terminated upon the completion of phases one and two. M+ should not acquire international artworks but should be dedicated to the enhancement of local arts and culture, local ethnical heritage, crafts and creation. He urged for the re-planning of West Kowloon as a district. The remainder of the land should be used for combined development of private and public housing so that the problem of land supply deficiency could be solved. Cheng pointed out that land has been Hong Kong’s priciest resources and should be deployed with great care. As WKCD has seriously over-spent and that the West Kowloon land was precious, it should only be partially allocated to the cultural district.

- **On March 19**

M+ announces the acquisition of *S. S. Rajputana leaving the port of Bombay – 29th August 1931*, a painting by the contemporary Indian artist Atul Dodiya. The purchase was made possible by the Brown Family Annual Acquisition Fund, established by Rosamond Brown, for M+ to acquire work at Art Basel in Hong Kong over a course of ten years. This year’s jury consisted of Doryun Chong, Chief Curator, M+; Lesley Ma, Curator, Ink Art, M+; Josefina Cruz, Director, Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Manila; and Mika Yoshitake, Assistant Curator, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C. Chong said that “(M+ has been) gradually expanding our purview to include South and Southeast Asia. Dodiya is a perfect addition to the collection in that regard.”²³

- **On March 25**

The Hong Kong Arts Development Council and M+ announced that showing in the 56th Venice Biennale would be “The Infinite Nothing,” a solo exhibition by Hong Kong artist Tsang Kin-Wah. The M+ curatorial team members are Doryun Chong and Stella Fong, with Lars Nittve as Consulting Curator. “The Infinite Nothing” consists of four stand-alone video installations that form a narrative of transformative journeys through stages in life, exploring a perpetual cycle of self-inquiry and discovery. Tsang Kin-Wah said, “This new series of work echoes Nietzsche’s views on truth and interpretation and also alludes to the fragility of the absolute, the instability of things, and the uncertainty of life. I am also interested in how these ideas connect with the Hindu/Buddhist notions of karma and reincarnation.”²⁴

22 News coverage, *Hong Kong Economic Journal* A22, March 13, 2015

23 “M+ of West Kowloon Cultural District acquires new work by important Indian artist with the Brown Family Annual Acquisition Fund,” WKCD press release, Mar 19, 2015. <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/newsroom/news/m-of-west-kowloon-cultural-district-acquires-new-work-by-important-indian-artist-with-the-brown-family-annual-acquisition-fund/news-type/press-release/page/3>

24 “Tsang Kin-Wah The Infinite Nothing Collateral Event of the 56th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia,” WKCD press release, March 25, 2015. <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/newsroom/news/tsang-kin-wah-the-infinite-nothing-collateral-event-of-the-56th-international-art-exhibition-la-biennale-di-venezia/news-type/press-release/page/3>

April, 2015

- **On April 27**

Edman Choy, Project Director, Herzog & de Meuron, the architecture firm for M+, talked to *Sing Tao Daily* about the building's characteristics of space design and materials.²⁵

The building will be connected to the WKCD Park, Airport Express Station, and the “Elements.” Its pavilion and cinemas will operate independent of M+'s open hours. Scheduled to put into operation in 2019, the construction cost of M+ is 49.8 billion dollars. About half of the base work has been carried out and if everything goes smooth, this part of the construction will be completed in the third season of the year. Tender process has started and is scheduled to complete also in the third season. Choy described the status as “so far so good.” He looked forward to introducing to Hong Kong a new architectural experience. While positioned as a visual art museum, M+ welcomes non-art-lovers also. “An important fact to bear-in-mind is that the M+ building does not ‘sit’ on the ground. It is deliberately raised by one floor above ground so that people could walk freely (around it). The building has to be approachable, open, comfortable and welcoming.”

There is no main entrance to the M+ building. It is accessible from and connected to different parts of the District. The horizontal part of the inverted-T shape building is where the exhibition area going to be, while its roof will be a large park. The building is equipped with a flexible “White Cube”, a “Garden Gallery” built with bamboo for a taste of oriental culture, and a “Focus Gallery” with raw concrete walls for a sense of contemporaneity.

May 2015

- **On May 12**

Sing Tao Daily reported²⁶ that due to the construction delay of Guangdong-Shenzhen-Hongkong Express Rail Link (XRL), WKCD is yet to learn the return schedule of the land occupied by MTR. Without the land returned it is impossible to kick off WKCD's phases two and three construction works. Lo Wai-ki, a Board Member and an engineer himself, admitted that the construction cost of phases two and three would increase as a result of XRL delay. In the previous year, HAB estimated that, at an inflation rate of 6%, for every month's delay, the cost of WKCD would increase by 20 million dollars. Michael Tien, a member of the “Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways,” found 6% too conservative an estimation. Ma Fung-ki, LegCo Member, said that while it was impossible to conclude the total over-spent amount at this point of time, the initial estimation of 200 billion dollars had been far from realistic. Ma said that commercial and residential area has been reserved within the District and he was positive that the future land-sale income would make up for the soaring construction cost. Ip Ngo-tung, a Board Member, agreed that the government had been at a passive position when over-budget was concerned. The government's hands had been tied except for meeting the XRL management for status updated. “Yet there is no schedule for the return of land. It is inevitable that the construction cost for phases two and three will rise.”

25 News coverage, *Sing Tao Daily* A08, April 27, 2015

26 News coverage, *Sing Tao Daily* A20, May 12, 2015

- **On May 21**

WKCD announced its partnership with the “Google Cultural Institute” to make online exhibition “NEONSIGNS.HK” assessable to worldwide audience. Over twelve street views, 150 new and rare archive photos, videos, sketches, documentaries and the M+ neon sign collection will be shared across two digital exhibitions to foster deeper understandings of neon signs and their connections with visual culture and history. To supplement the project, Google captured a unique series of panoramic night views of Hong Kong so users could explore some of the dazzling neon signs in detail.²⁷

- **On May 31**

Lars Nittve said at an interview at Venice Biennale²⁸ that artworks with political message were not necessarily good artworks. It did not take an artwork to carry political message for an artist to be concerned with politics. “I think it is inappropriate for us to be messengers of political manifesto. If an artist decides to do that, it would be his personal choice, not ours.” He said that this year the curatorial unit deliberately invited an artist who was very different from the one from last exhibition, someone who was reliable, aggressive, and capable of dealing with the scale of Venice Biennale. Two years ago there had been controversy on the artist selection procedure. To tackle that, for this exhibition, the unit came up with a shortlist of five artists for internal discussion (ADC assessment team inclusive.) Nittve described the process as “a more comprehensive one.” He said he was very happy with “The Infinite Nothing” because “it is a holistic experience, like a symphony. What surprised me most was the room with windows and dripping rain. It slows and tranquilizes. This is new compared to Tsang’s other artworks.”

Nittve believes that participation in Venice Biennale provides international exposure for Hong Kong and her arts. Lee Kit was well received in the previous exhibition. There have been less skeptical comments this year because the M+ team has proved that its resources and experience ensures the best chance of success for the artist. One reason (for the controversy about last exhibition) was a result of the (dissatisfaction) of a small group of curators. They felt deprived of the opportunity of international exposure. “The Infinite Nothing” will be showing for six months and the estimated spending is ten million dollars, to be paid by M+ and ADC. Nittve regards the sum “reasonable – not massive, but not small.” He noticed the gradual change of the Venice Biennale due to globalization and the commercialization of the arts. He didn’t like what he saw but he believed the exhibition had its edge on country level which helped it counter commercial influence. “Venice Biennale has its resources and its market separated and this is what set it apart from other biennales. It therefore remains to be the most important biennale.”

July 2015

- **On July 1**

Ming Pao Daily reported that LegCo would be discussing the latest financial situation of WKCD on the coming Tuesday. According to the documents submitted by WKCD, in the financial year 2018/19, there would be an estimated over-spent of 1.8 billion dollars due to the increased salary, planning and management cost as a result of the delayed completion. WKCD

27 “West Kowloon Cultural District partners with Google Cultural Institute,” WKCD press release, May 21, 2015. <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/newsroom/news/west-kowloon-cultural-district-partners-with-google-cultural-institute/news-type/press-release/page/3>

28 News coverage, *Ming Pao Daily* P09, May 31, 2015

once estimated that 0.55 billion dollars would be generated annually from retail and catering facilities from 2014 onwards. Yet due to delayed construction, only 35% of such facilities would be completed upon phase one completion, resulting in lower-than-estimated rental income. The latest estimated income for 2018/19 is below 0.1 billion dollars while the cumulated loss for operating phase one facilities will be 0.4 billion dollars, an amount much higher than estimation.²⁹

According to the *Oriental Daily*, there is still a big gap between the funding required by WKCD, and what it actually has. To make up for the difference, the Board has instructed the management to explore alternative financial arrangements. WKCD is actively looking for donations and sponsorship, for example, online donation collection, sale of naming rights, and to register itself as a charity organization so that donations to WKCD would be tax-free.³⁰

- **On July 7**

Carrie Lam, Chairman of the WKCD Board, attended the meeting of the “Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of the West Kowloon Cultural District Project” to report the latest status of WKCD.³¹ She reported that the construction of the Arts Pavilion had commenced in April, scheduled to complete in 2016. The base construction of M+ started last August and the building had been scheduled to complete in the second half of 2018. Carrie Lam admitted that with the completion of phase one facilities, WKCD would need funding for operation. Yet, the income generated from retail and catering facilities would not be available as planned due to the extended project development time, hence insufficient to support the operation of phase one cultural facilities and the WKCD.

- **On July 8**

The *Oriental Daily* covered Carrie Lam’s report to the LegCo on the previous day. Members from both the pan-democratic and pro-establishment camps criticized the government for its failure to closely monitor the progress of WKCD and its repeated budget overrun. Chung Shu-kun, Chairman of the Joint Committee, blamed the government for its haste budget estimation. He was apprehensive of LegCo “becoming a cash withdrawal machine.” Tse Wai-chuen, Member of the Architectural, Surveying and Planning Functional Constituency, urged the government to expedite the commercial facilities of WKCD so that income thus generated could be used for supporting cultural facilities. Leong Kah-kit requested the government to re-calculate the budget of the entire WKCD project, to avoid it becoming a case similar to that of XRL where over-spending had only been discovered years after the project started.³² Coverage on the same subject was published in *Sing Pao Daily News*³³ and *Wen Wei Po*.³⁴

Oscar Ho, Program Director of MA in Cultural Management, CUHK, said in *Apple Daily*³⁵ that when Carrie Lam made the

29 News coverage, *Ming Pao Daily* A04, July 1, 2015

30 News coverage, *Oriental Daily* A23, July 1, 2015

31 HKSAR Government news release, July 7, 2015. <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201307/03/P201307030631.htm> (Chinese version only)

32 News coverage, *Oriental Daily* A01, July 8, 2015

33 News coverage, *Sing Pao Daily News* A06, July 8, 2015

34 News coverage, *Wen Wei Pao* A13, July 8, 2015

35 News coverage, *Apple Daily* A17, July 8, 2015

claim of “improving livelihood, following up on WKCD”, she had to “support the citizen’s participation and appreciation of the arts and culture, and confirm their cultural identity.” To Ho, the government and cultural institutes regard the citizens’ indifference to the arts as ignorance of the arts and hardly ever reflect on why such indifference. After years of operation, the M+ team had still not come up with a solid position on local popular culture and associated acquisition. To this Ho feels unsatisfied. Last year, M+ removed “popular culture” from the four main genres in the proposal submitted earlier on, saying that “popular culture” was to be assimilated in other genres. Yet “popular culture” had been listed as one of four main genres in the first place because it was critical, it was developed along a unique system, and supported by a unique dialect. To Ho, the foreign experts should make an effort to learn and understand local culture even if they could not speak Cantonese. Ho pointed out that in the past few years, He Jianshi, Hong Kong comic artist from late Qing Dynasty, had been widely researched and recognized as the first political cartoonist in China, a forerunner of Hong Kong’s and Mainland’s comic art. Yet his authentic works were priced only around HK\$30,000. The M+ team should possess the knowledge and the network to acquire artworks as such. Instead of spending millions of dollars to acquire contemporary artworks of Mainland artists, the team should spend more effort researching. The resulting acquisition would be more relevant to Hong Kong people and would ease the financial pressure of WKCD.

- **On July 9**

The *Headline News* commented that WKCD’s financial strait was both structural and an outcome of the previous administration’s planning mindset. The critical consideration of the government should be whether a cultural district was needed. If yes, phase three development should be confirmed as soon as possible because the lyric theatre planned for phase three is a critical supplement to Xiqu Centre and M+. The government has got the money but not the right to spend. As it had been difficult to have the consent of LegCo Members to allocate more funds to WKCD, the government changed its course to build a new cultural center in East Kowloon area. It showed that in order to take the easy path, the government has ignored whether the plan was in line with Hong Kong’s cultural development in general.³⁶

The Sun commented that the alternative financial propositions raised by Carrie Lam were unlikely to be implemented because they would require the advancement of commercial facilities development. WKCD would face strong opposition to awarding associated development rights.³⁷

- **On July 13**

The Oriental Daily and *The Sun* reported the result of the public survey done by the “Oriental Press Group Ltd.”³⁸ 46% of the respondents believed that the construction cost of WKCD would only get higher because of its shifting completion schedule. 28% found the planning hasty and poor thought-out. 12% thought that WKCD would not see its full completion.

36 News coverage, *Headline News* P40, July 9, 2015

37 News coverage, *The Sun* A09, July 9, 2015

38 News coverage, *Oriental Daily News* A18, July 13, 2015
News coverage, *The Sun* A04, July 13, 2015

- **On July 21**

WKCD A officially appointed Duncan Pescod as the next CEO, after obtaining the prior approval of the Chief Executive of the HKSAR as required by the “West Kowloon Cultural District Authority Ordinance.” Pescod will assume duty on August 3, 2015.³⁹

September 2015

- **On September 10**

Ta Kung Pao reported that a big neon sign of the Sammy’s Restaurant at the Western District, made over 30 years ago, had been donated to M+. Duncan Pescod believed that the neon sign would fall into the permanent collection of M+. Before the opening of M+ in 2019, the sign will be shown at “neonsigns.hk” online exhibition.⁴⁰ Pescod talked about the first-ever M+ summer camp in July during which cultural practitioners had been invited as instructors. About one hundred secondary school students, regarded as future M+ visitors, participated.

- **On September 26**

WKCD A announced the signing of M+’s main construction works contract with Hsin Chong Construction Group Ltd. Main works would commence in early October 2015 following the completion of the M+ foundations in September. The ground and lower basement levels of M+ would provide access to the WKCD Park and other facilities. There would be a learning center, a moving image center, museum shops and cafes, creator’s studios, and back-of-house functions. Conservation and storage facilities for the museum collection would be accommodated in an ancillary building to the north. Construction of M+ is scheduled for completion in late 2018.⁴¹

The above news was covered in *Ta Kung Pao* on September 30.⁴²

October 2015

- **On October 5**

WKCD A announced that Lars Nittve would step down from Executive Director of M+ upon completion of his current contract.⁴³ Pescod said that “while we are very sorry to see Lars go, we have to respect his decision to leave after spending five years in Hong Kong. He has made an immense contribution to the Authority and we have ensured he will continue to be available to provide advice and support in the role of External Advisor.” A global search will begin as soon as possible to identify the successor of Nittve, who will serve his current role until January 9, 2016. He will further develop the program

39 “Duncan PESCOD Appointed WKCD A Chief Executive Officer,” WKCD A press release, July 21, 2015. <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/newsroom/news/duncan-pescod-appointed-wkcd-a-chief-executive-officer/news-type/press-release/page/3>

40 News coverage, *Ta King Pao* A20, September 10, 2015

41 “M+, Hong Kong’s new museum for visual culture takes a major step forward as main construction works commence,” WKCD A press release, September 26, 2015. <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/newsroom/news/m-hong-kongs-new-museum-for-visual-culture-takes-a-major-step-forward-as-main-construction-works-commence/news-type/press-release/page/3>

42 News coverage, *Ta King Pao* A20, September 30, 2015

plan for the next three years and for the Arts Pavilion, which is due to be completed in 2016 and will act as a temporary home for M+ exhibitions.

- **On October 6**

Ming Pao Daily online news reported that Nittve had not explained the reason for his departure upon the completion of his current contract terms in January 2016.⁴⁴ Nittve believed it's time for him to consider whether he could commit his full attention to M+ until its scheduled opening four years later, or if he should step down at this point. "Upon serious consideration, I choose the latter." Nittve was to become the external advisor of M+, term of service to be confirmed. Pescod said he was sorry to see Nittve go. Nittve had built up the M+ collection currently worth of 14 billion dollars.

- **On October 28**

Just nine weeks after Michael Lynch's last day with the WKCD, Lars Nittve announced that he would be stepping down. In an interview with the *South China Morning Post*,⁴⁵ Nittve pointed out that he was not really leaving. His current contract, which expires on January 9, 2016, will be replaced by a new one as a "consultant." He will work in the office for one week each month "for at least a year, maybe longer." Nittve said, "I am not doing this for health issues. I am not doing this because of the new CEO, Duncan Pescod. And I am not doing this because I have a new job." What it boils down to is the horrendous delay in construction. "When the opening date of M+ was 2017, it was possible to stay for that. But now that it's going to be 2019, I really cannot commit to another four years in my current role and it would be much worse for everyone if I leave in the middle of those four years," he said.

Nittve admits to feeling frustrated by politicians who level unconstructive criticism at WKCD and M+, on issues such as having foreigners in leadership roles. The fact that so many people in Hong Kong are disenchanted with WKCD is not conducive to a great working environment, he says, but that's not the reason why he's stepping down. He also dismisses concerns about the artistic freedom enjoyed by his team, saying he has not come across any attempt by Beijing to intervene in M+ operations, where the acquisition policy may be deemed politically sensitive. "I am not looking for a job. I want to live in my mountain house in Sweden and write more," he says.

November 2015

- **On November 6**

"Mobile M+: Live Art" will take place from December 4 to 20. The project expands the definition of the work of art from a static object to a situation, where the main medium is the artist or performer's body and looks to voice, breath, movement and physical effort as channels of artistic expression. Set across multiple sites in Hong Kong, the project features ten artists of

43 "WKCD announces that Lars Nittve will stand down as Executive Director of M+," WKCD press release, October 5, 2015. <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/newsroom/news/wkcd-announces-that-lars-nittve-will-stand-down-as-executive-director-of-m/news-type/press-release/page/3>

44 News coverage, *Ming Pao Daily* online news, October 6, 2015. http://news.mingpao.com/pns/dailynews/web_tc/article/20151006/s00002/1444068464431

45 "Lars Nittve: why I'm quitting Hong Kong arts hub role," *South China Morning Post* online news, October 30, 2015. <http://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/arts-entertainment/article/1873107/lars-nittve-why-im-quitting-hong-kong-arts-hub-role>

different generations from Hong Kong and South China, Korea, Singapore and the United States. “Mobile M+: Live Art’ will not only challenge the conventional practices of both exhibition and performance, but also reflects the increasingly boundary-crossing, multidisciplinary practices of contemporary artists, who have long expanded their art making beyond galleries and exhibition halls into theatrical stages and public spaces,” said Doryun Chong, co-curator for this exhibition.⁴⁶

- **On November 16**

M+ and Design Trust announce the recipients of the “M+ / Design Trust Research Fellowship” 2016: Joseph Grima and the team of Daniel Cooper and Juliana Kei.⁴⁷ In its second year, the Fellowship is hosted by M+ and funded by Design Trust, the Hong Kong-based non-profit grant-making entity. It aims to support high-level research relating to design and architecture history and contemporary issues focused on Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta, in relationship to the rest of the world. Research Fellows are selected by a jury consisting of M+ and Design Trust representatives. Recipients spend between three and six months attached to M+, at the end of which they produce a paper and public talk. Fellows receive a monthly stipend and one-time travel grant. Inaugural Fellow Ling Fan will present the results from his research at “Power, Economics, and Urban Forms: How Hong Kong Helped Shape Beijing and the Contemporary Chinese City” on November 24, 2015.

- **On November 25**

Betty Fung, Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs, yesterday reported to LegCo the financing plan for the final phase of WKCD. The Government owns the development rights to the WKCD lands devoted to commercial purpose. On top of that, to the west side of the integrated theatre scheduled to complete in 2020, three pieces of land have been reserved for office and residential purpose. A total of 65,000 square meters of surface area could be deployed for development. According to the *South China Morning Post*,⁴⁸ Fung was positive that the development plan would ensure enough construction funds for phase three. Ma Fung-kwok, LegCo Member for the Sports, Performing Arts, Culture and Publication functional constituency, held the view that the development rights should be handed over to WKCD. “The Government should regard 216 billion dollars a loan to WKCD, who will repay the loan with the income generated from land development.” Ma estimated that the land is worth between forty to fifty billion Hong Kong dollars. Vincent Ng, President of the Hong Kong Institute of Architects, sees the handover of rights a reasonable option and urges for in-depth research on the idea.

*Hong Kong Economic Journal*⁴⁹ reported that, according to Betty Fung, the Government has been considering to hand over (wholly or partially) the land development rights to WKCD at market rate. The pre-requisite is that the government should not bear any loss. She wishes that a financing plan could be settled in the coming year. In the meantime, about twelve acres of WKCD land is currently occupied by XRL construction and the earliest return date is expected to be in 2018.

46 “Artists announced for Mobile M+: Live Art,” WKCD press release, November 6, 2015. <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/newsroom/news/artists-announced-for-mobile-m-live-art/news-type/press-release/page/3>

47 “M+ and Design Trust Announce 2016 Research Fellows, and Conclusion of 2015 Fellowship,” WKCD press release, November 16, 2015. <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/newsroom/news/m-and-design-trust-announce-2016-research-fellows-and-conclusion-of-2015-fellowship/news-type/press-release/page/3>

48 “Funding shift mooted on West Kowloon project,” *South China Morning Post* online news, November 25, 2015. <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education-community/article/1883059/funding-shift-mooted-final-phase-hong-kongs-west>

49 News coverage, *Hong Kong Economic Journal* A06, November 25, 2015

December 2015

- **On December 2 to 4**

“Mobile M+: Live Art” has been widely covered in local news.

Both *Sing Tao Daily* and *Ming Pao Daily* reported that, according to Lars Nittve, the M+ Pavilion will open next July. Temporary exhibitions will be presented, the first one being the solo exhibition of Tsang Kin-wah.

- **On December 7**

Young Hay, an artist exhibiting in “Mobile M+: Live Art,” talked to *Hong Kong Economic Times*, which described (the project) as “systematically organized the live art development in Hong Kong. Artworks by Frog King, Young Hay, Pak Sheung-chuen and others have been displayed. These artists are representatives of Hong Kong’s live art from 1970’s to 2000’s.”⁵¹

- **On December 11**

Sing Tao Daily reported that⁵² “M+ Sigg Collection: Four Decades of Chinese Contemporary Art” would take place by the end of next February, tentatively planned at the ArtisTree, Taikoo Place. Selected artworks from the “M+ Sigg Collection” will be exhibited for the first time. The exhibition will run for one and a half months. Its format will be similar to that of the “M+ Sigg Collection: Chinese arts from 1970s to Now” held at The Whitworth, the University of Manchester, in July 2015. WKCDA said that signature works of Chinese contemporary artists in the last forty years would be highlighted. Extensive education and outreach programs would be presented alongside the exhibition to facilitate the audience’ understanding.

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50 News coverage, *Hong Kong Economic Journal* C07, December 2, 2015

News coverage, *Ta Kung Pao* B16, December 4, 2015

News coverage, *Sing Tao Daily* A33, December 4, 2015

News coverage, *Ming Pao Daily* A17, December 4, 2015

News coverage, *Headline News* P16, December 4, 2015

51 News coverage, *Hong Kong Economic Times* C11, December 7, 2015

52 News coverage, *Sing Tao Daily* A31, December 11, 2015