

## City Branding and Public Art

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In varied manners and to a greater or lesser extent, “Mobile M+: Inflation!” which took place at the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD), the first ever Art Basel Hong Kong and the HAB (Home Affairs Bureau)-funded “Fotanian Open Studios” engaged with the Hong Kong community in 2013. Mammoth artworks in “Mobile M+: Inflation!” were displayed in the outdoor park of WKCD, welcoming physical contact with the audiences: for example visitors can jump and bounce on *Sacrilege* by Jeremy Deller (UK), or walk and sit among the ribs of the “roasted suckling pig” *House of Treasures* by Cao Fei (China). The curators of the Exhibition expected that by “inviting members of the public to interact firsthand with large-scale inflatable sculptures, ‘Mobile M+: Inflation!’ aims to pose questions about the nature of public art and the ways in which audiences might engage with it.” Whether this could be achieved by freeing the community the etiquette of visiting a proper art museum is up to the evaluation of M+ and its stakeholders. This exhibition, together with the transaction-focused Art Basel Hong Kong, and Fotanian Open Studios which has evolved from a grass-root endeavor to a publicly-funded, commercially-sponsored event, provided reference to how Hong Kong as a “creative city” can be imagined.

Information:

- Local newspaper. For details of newspaper coverage please see Chinese version.
- West Kowloon Cultural District Authority (WKCD) website  
<http://www.wkcd.hk>, <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en>
- Press releases of the Information Services Department, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR)
- The House News  
<http://thehousenews.com/>

### “Mobile M+: Inflation!”

2013/04

- On April 11

WKCD announced that, from April 25 to June 9, 2013, at a site adjacent to the future visual art museum M+, the exhibition “Mobile M+: Inflation!” would be presented, featuring six large-scale inflatable artworks. Participating artists included Cao Fei (China); Choi Jeong Hwa (South Korea); Jeremy Deller (UK); Jiakun Architects (China); Paul McCarthy (USA); Tomás Saraceno (Argentina); Tam Wai-ping (Hong Kong). Artworks by Tam and Cao were going to be new, commissioned works.

It was stated in the WKCD press release that (by) inviting members of the public to interact firsthand with large-scale inflatable sculptures, “Mobile M+: Inflation!’ aims to pose questions about the nature of public art and the ways in which audiences might engage with it. Several of these are derived from everyday objects that have been inflated to outsize proportions as a way of rendering the familiar unfamiliar, more tangible, and uncannily touchable than ever before. Other works in the exhibition question the nature and potential of art and architecture in public space through installations that evoke ephemerality and reflect on human relationships to built environment and to the natural world. By exploring the ever-shifting notions of nature and artifice, intimacy and monumentality, temporariness and permanence, as well as beauty and the grotesque that characterize these exhibits, ‘Mobile M+: Inflation!’ will create a diverse experience that probes the role of public art in the context of an evolving and endlessly mutating constructed landscape.”<sup>1</sup>

- On April 25

*South China Morning Post* quoted from a spokesperson of the WKCD that, while on April 23, pro-Beijing lawmaker Chan Kam-lam warned the “West Kowloon museum” not to confuse art with politics, saying that “works that are indecent, vulgar, political and insulting are not works of art” (Ed: quoted from Chan Kam-lam’s speech made during the discussion of M+ progress in a LegCo small group meeting), WKCD maintained its curatorial and artistic independence.<sup>2</sup>

- On April 27

Two of the artworks in “Mobile M+: Inflation!”, including *Complex Pile* by Paul McCarthy and *Black Lotus* by Choi Jeong Hwa (South Korea), were found damaged on April 26. The *South China Morning Post* quoted a WKCD spokeswoman that “a small hole was discovered on the surface of the piece. We are doing our best to fix it and hopefully we can inflate the artwork as soon as possible.” She said that “the arts hub decided to deflate the work.” She also ruled out vandalism. “We believe it is because of the weather,” she said.<sup>3</sup>

2013/06

- On June 8

The *Oriental Daily* reported that Lars Nittve, Executive Director of M+, was delighted to see “Mobile M+: Inflation!” attracting over 140,000 visitors over the course of one month plus. He believed the strange-looking artworks had successfully triggered a discussion in the community on what art was, and this was what the exhibition had been intended for. Nittve also said that he regarded it a success to have invited the community to show interest in and debate about what art was when “Mobile M+: Inflation!” fell on the same period as the “Big Duck exhibition” (Ed: Yellow inflatable duck designed by Flemish artist Florentijn Hofman, displayed off the Tsim Sha Tsui ferry pier).<sup>4</sup>

According to the *Apple Daily*, Nittve expressed that the significance of “Mobile M+: Inflation!” was to demonstrate to the community that artworks went beyond nice-looking oil paintings. Artworks could be “ugly” and interesting. The “Yellow Duck” on display at “Harbour City” was lovely and brought laughter to the visitors. However Nittve believed that a good piece of art should invite contemplation and inspiration after the visit. The *Apple Daily* interpreted Nittve’s remarks as the Yellow Duck lacked depth.<sup>5</sup>

*Tai Kung Pao* reported that Nittve found the Exhibition successful because, albeit the poor weather, many locals visited. To view the artwork *Poetic Cosmos of the Breath*, visitors had to reach the site at 4am and many found it worthwhile to rise at such an early hour after witnessing the intriguing transformation of the artwork. He also expressed that (even though) the public made comparison of the two exhibitions (“Mobile M+: Inflation!” and the “Yellow Duck”), and retouched images about “the contest of the duck and the feces” were seen online, he regarded it positive for the two to fall on the same period. He thought the overlapping time period was instrumental for the public to consider what art should and could be. He estimated that about half of the people assumed art being nice-looking and approachable. The other half believed art required contemplation. To him, artworks were something produced by artists. His opinion about the Yellow Duck attracting the keen attention of the Hong Kong population and the media was that art could not be defined by the number of people taking pictures of it. A good piece of art could not be described by oral or written text. It has to be experienced. An artwork which could be “experienced” by text alone would not make a good piece of art.<sup>6</sup>

- On June 9

The official visitor figure of “Mobile M+: Inflation!”, announced by WKCD, was 150,000. Lars Nittve said it was encouraging to see the amount of people enjoying the exhibition and the extensive coverage in both local and overseas media. “We’ve been delighted to see the fantastic responses to ‘Inflation’. It shows Hong Kong people are interested and curious about the arts. What is more, on a deeper and more far-reaching level and as we have anticipated, the exhibition has prompted an interesting debate across social media, the press

and on site with our exhibition docents on what is art in Hong Kong's context and the role of M+ in future for the community.<sup>7</sup>

- On June 13

In an interview with the *Hong Kong Economic Times*, Lars Nittve described "Inflation" ("Mobile M+: Inflation!") as very successful: "The exhibition brought citizens to the future M+ site and triggered discussion on art. That is wonderful!" To him, the curious Hong Kong people are going through a "critical moment". The debate surrounding "the feces", "the roasted suckling pig" and "the woman's leg and the cockroach" is to him the critical moment a city has to go through in the process of accepting contemporary arts. "There always exists such a moment when the general public suddenly begins to contemplate what makes art and what not – even though everyone has a different opinion." Nittve admitted that before "Inflation", M+ was more well known overseas than locally. But this is gradually changing. "Hong Kong people are very curious about contemporary arts. Over 60,000 people visited the first ever Art Basel. Thousands went to Fotanian Open Studios. Those are impressive figures. I have high hopes on M+. As long as the citizens feel relaxed about exhibitions that are designed for them, we can attract a lot of visitors." He was direct to describe the administration work involved was bureaucratic. The effort he has to spend can be three times more than when he worked in London and Scandinavia. "There are a lot of red tapes, a lot of scrutiny by the Home Affairs Bureau and Legislative Council. There seems to be a lot of friction in the system. It's frustrating, but luckily there are more often happy times. My team completes projects on schedule without making compromises. Hong Kong can really make a difference."<sup>8</sup>

## Art Basel Hong Kong

2013/01

- On January 16

"Art Basel" earlier on acquired "Asian Art Fairs Limited", the organizer of "Art Hong Kong", and will be presenting "Art Basel Hong Kong" (Art Basel), showcasing artworks from over 3,000 Asian and western artists and early twentieth-century maestros. Art Basel announced that through twenty-four representatives stationed in various countries, Hong Kong would be promoted as the leading art hub to overseas cultural institutions and collectors. William Lim, a local artist and collector, told the *Oriental Daily* that he "trusted that local art development could be pushed forward through international art events. Local artists will have the opportunity to interact with overseas cultural institutions such as museums and collectors. The community will also have the chance to view world-class artworks in person." He hoped that the event (Art Basel) would fall in line with WKCD plans and benefit Hong Kong tourism.<sup>9</sup>

Wen Wei Po quoted from Dennis Scholl, VP/Arts of "Knight Foundation", that with the international influence Art Basel possesses, the art fair would change the city atmosphere of Hong Kong. "Local artists will gain direct access to many genres of international art galleries. The art and culture of Hong Kong can also be highlighted."<sup>10</sup>

Magnus Renfrew, Director Asia, Art Basel, reported in a press conference that over 245 galleries from thirty-five countries will be participating (in "Art Basel Hong Kong"), out of which forty-eight are first time exhibitors. Half of the galleries are from the Asia Pacific, among them twenty-eight are local galleries. Art Basel will be made up of four exhibition sections, namely "Galleries" showcasing representative artworks of the past one hundred years under the collection of 171 galleries; "Insights" focusing on Asia Pacific artworks over the past one hundred years under the collection of forty-seven galleries. Hong Kong artists featured in this section include another mountain man, Ceng Haiwen, Halley Cheng, Hung Keung; "Discoveries" presenting international emerging artists through solo and dual exhibitions with twenty-seven galleries. One of the participating artists in this section will be awarded "Discoveries Prize" worth of US\$25,000. Hong Kong artists featured in this section are Lam Tung-pang and Tang Kwok-hin; "Encounters" section featuring international large-scale sculptures and installation artworks curated by Japanese curator Hasegawa Yuko.<sup>11</sup>

2013/05

- On May 25

On the opening day of Art Basel Hong Kong, Lisson Gallery from the UK sold an Anish Kapoor work for 350,000 Pounds and a Jason Martin work at 30,000 Pounds. The *Hong Kong Economic Times* commented that “(the sales) seems to go well.” *Constellation* by Zhao Zhao, represented by Chambers Fine Art, “has never been exhibited in the Mainland. This is its first time appearance in Hong Kong. The arts is considered sensitive in the Mainland while there is a larger room for art presentation and creation in Hong Kong,” said Mao Weiqing, gallery person-in-charge. “Transactions made through Hong Kong, an open platform, reach better prices. There is a sizeable collector population in Asia. We have been lucky for having achieved good sales results in Hong Kong for the past few years.” Philippe Koutouzis, person-in-charge of FEAST Projects, found an international art fair such as Art Basel is new to Hong Kong and the entire Asia. In Hong Kong, the proportion of collectors to art galleries is low. “Hong Kong people need some time to learn about collecting culture. This is not going to be an easy process but I believe there will be a day when arts transaction matures in Asia.” When inquired if he was satisfied with the number of Hong Kong galleries participating, Magnus Renfrew said, “Twenty-six galleries with exhibition space in Hong Kong participated, making up about 10% of total exhibitors. That is an appropriate proportion.” However, the *Hong Kong Economic Times* pointed out that there were only slightly more than ten local galleries at Art Basel Hong Kong were the local branches of overseas galleries excluded from the total, and questioned whether there was adequate “local participation” in the fair.<sup>12</sup>

- On May 27

A few local artists participating in Art Basel Hong Kong were interviewed by the *Headline News*. Tang Kwok-hin found more international galleries setting up Hong Kong branches since “Art Hong Kong”. “There has been a higher chance of being a full time artist in Hong Kong in recent years.....commercialization is not in itself a bad thing. I believe independent creativity could be nurtured when commercialization reaches a certain stage.” He also found that (the art market) had encouraged artists to paint, because it is easier to sell a flat painting. This reduced the variety of art forms. “To many, art means paintings. I am apprehensive of this misconception being fortified.” He found Hong Kong’s art market and ecology at an early stage. There lacks a full picture of the artist population. “People are always talking about and paying attention to young artists, as if there does not exist an older generation. Yet not that many new artists have emerged in the past few years. The Hong Kong art circle is small yet segregated by serious differences. For the sake of healthy development, I hope there will be more connection and communication.” Halley Cheng found the environment for arts improving in Hong Kong. More galleries are representing local artists. However, large-scale events in Hong Kong are geared towards transactions. “Look at overseas biennales. They are quite different. There are curatorial themes. So far Hong Kong has only got art fairs in which you walk around.” Henrietta Tsui, founder and CEO of Galerie Ora-Ora, believed that there could be more art fairs in Hong Kong. “There are about one hundred art galleries in Hong Kong but only twenty were allowed in at Art Basel. The standard of local galleries could be raised if there are more opportunities.”<sup>13</sup>

2013/06

- On June 5

Sales price of some of the artworks at Art Basel was reported by the *Hong Kong Standard*. On one day during the fair period, de Sarthe Gallery (Hong Kong) made sales of HK\$31.2 million (US\$4 million), all to Asian collectors. A Malaysian collector purchased an artwork by Columbian painter Fernando Botero from Galerie Gmurzynska (Switzerland) at the price of US\$1.3 million. Tina Keng Gallery (Taipei) sold a painting of Wang Huaqing’s at US\$2.6 million. Some of the exhibiting galleries have seen Asian collectors showing higher interest in western artworks.<sup>14</sup>

- On June 26

There was a review and comparison report on Art Basel Hong Kong and Art Basel Basel, closed respectively on May 26 and June 16, in *Hong Kong Economic Journal*.

In Switzerland, over 70,000 visitors were recorded at Art Basel Basel, while there were over 60,000 at Art Basel Hong Kong. The *Hong Kong Economic Journal* described Hong Kong as achieving impressive results, being the first Art Basel Hong Kong ever. 304 galleries exhibited at Basel (245 in Hong Kong), coming from 39 countries (35 in Hong Kong), over 4,000 artists participated (3,000 in Hong Kong). The partition of geographical sections was similar in Basel and Hong Kong. The geographical distribution in Hong Kong is as follows: North America 11%, Europe 34% (out of which 3% from Switzerland), Asia 48% (out of which China 10%, Hong Kong 7%), South America 2%, Middle East 2%, Australia 4%. The share of Asia is 40% higher in Hong Kong than in Basel. According to the data of Art Basel Basel, there does not seem to be any preferential arrangement for Swiss galleries; while Hong Kong galleries make up 7% of the total in Art Basel Hong Kong, only slightly lower than the 10% from China. This can be interpreted as the organizer's respect to the opinion of the Hong Kong arts field. By reviewing the sales data in general, an increasing importance on abstract artworks can be found throughout art circles around the globe.<sup>15</sup>

## Fotanian Open Studios

2013/01

- On January 7

"Fotanian Open Studios" was to be held on January 5, 6, 12, 13, 19 and 20. The *Hong Kong Standard* described the event as "providing a terrain outside of galleries, art exhibitions and auctions for emerging artists to pursue a career in the arts. It also painted a picture of the arts that is rooted in Hong Kong." The *Hong Kong Standard* appealed to participating stakeholders to make an effort to avoid the commercialization of the event.<sup>16</sup>

- On January 12 and 15

An article by Wong Tin-yan, an alumnus of Fine Arts Department, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, was published in *The House News*. Wong believed that "after a shuffling process that lasted over a decade, there are now art galleries, art jamming workshops and overseas artists stationed at Fotan. Some people even claim to 'have a studio at Fotan' as a token of achievement during job interviews. A number of artists move in to Fotan because of the annual 'Open Studios' and operate as an 'annual artist.'" To him, the Government was only interested in quantifiable results and applying top-down interference, resulting in contradiction and opposition. He felt that "artists doing their creative work in Fotan are facing dire situations. They cannot even afford run-down factory units. Where else can we go to set up our studios?" He recommended that as one of the leading Hong Kong art events, Fotanian Open Studios should strive to achieve dissemination. With or without financial subsidies, located at Fotan or elsewhere, the event should continue to let the community, especially parents and students, understand how artists gain a foothold. People should be shown the sparks of the local arts and creativity. He claimed, "the only reason for me to continue participating in 'Fotanian Open Studios' is because I want to show others that I am 'pessimistic but uncompromising.'" <sup>17</sup>

2013/05

- On May 31

The results of the second round applications for "Art Capacity Development Funding Scheme" was announced by Home Affairs Bureau. "Fotanian Arts Program 2014" was one of the funded projects.<sup>18</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> “Mobile M+: Inflation! Inflatable Sculptures Next to the Future Site of Hong Kong's Museum for Visual Culture”, WKCD press release, April 11, 2013. <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/newsroom/news/mobile-m-inflation-inflatable-sculptures-next-to-the-future-site-of-hong-kongs-museum-for-visual-culture>
- <sup>2</sup> “Full of hot air”, *South China Morning Post* EDT18, April 25, 2013
- <sup>3</sup> “Sudden downpour takes the wind out of poop art”, *South China Morning Post* CITY 1, April 27, 2013
- <sup>4</sup> News coverage, *Oriental Daily* A20, June 8, 2013
- <sup>5</sup> News coverage, *Apple Daily* A05, June 8, 2013
- <sup>6</sup> News coverage, *Tai Kung Pao* A12, June 8, 2013
- <sup>7</sup> “150,000 visit Mobile M+: Inflation! The 4th M+ nomadic exhibition ends successfully with fan-fare”, WKCD press release, June 9, 2013. <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/newsroom/news/150000-visit-mobile-m-inflation-the-4th-m-nomadic-exhibition-ends-successfully-with-fan-fare>
- <sup>8</sup> News coverage, *Hong Kong Economic Times* A15, June 13, 2013
- <sup>9</sup> News coverage, *Oriental Daily* A20, January 16, 2013
- <sup>10</sup> News coverage, *Wen Wei Po* A28, January 16, 2013
- <sup>11</sup> News coverage, *Tai Kung Pao* B22, January 16, 2013
- <sup>12</sup> News coverage, *Hong Kong Economic Times* C12, May 25, 2013
- <sup>13</sup> News coverage, *Headline News* P46, 47, May 27, 2013
- <sup>14</sup> “Asian collectors make mark at Art Basel”, *Hong Kong Standard* P08, June 5, 2013
- <sup>15</sup> News coverage, *Hong Kong Economic Journal* C03, June 26, 2013
- <sup>16</sup> “Raw honesty as studios open up”, *Hong Kong Standard* P10, January 7, 2013
- <sup>17</sup> “Fotanian Open Studios 2013: The final sparks before burning out (Part1/2)”, *The House News Art*, January 12 and 15, 2013. <https://thehousenews.com/art/%E4%BC%99%E7%82%AD2013-%E6%95%A3%E7%99%BC%E7%87%83%E7%87%92%E6%AE%86%E7%9B%A1%E5%89%8D%E7%9A%84%E5%85%89%E8%8A%92-%E4%B8%8A%E9%9B%86/>
- <sup>18</sup> “Results of second round applications for Arts Capacity Development Funding Scheme announced”, HKSAR press release, May 1, 2013. <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201305/31/P201305310482.htm>