

After Art Basel announced their purchase of ART HK, the Hong Kong art fair, international collectors, curators and gallerists flocked to Hong Kong. Despite international enthusiasm, Asian gallery directors voiced concern regarding the change of the fair's management. However, this year's fair, its last iteration before being rebranded in the light of Art Basel, has become a must-see event.

In its fourth year, ART HK has developed from underappreciated local event to the center of Hong Kong's international art week. Beijing-based gallery insiders have accredited the fair's quick ascent in prominence to gains in the Asian art market, but especially to ART HK's director Magnus Renfrew's leadership and insight into the Asian art scene.

As the largest art fair in Asia, this year's installment showcased 260 galleries from over 38 countries. Two sections were added to the fair itself: Art Futures, sponsored by Lane Crawford to showcase emerging artists and galleries in Asia; and Asia One, comprised of gallery-curated solo exhibitions of Asian artists. ART HK has teamed with the Asian Art Archive to develop an educational program. Additionally, summer auctions will be held in the week following the fair, with Christie's auction previews displayed in the exhibition center and many Asian auction houses renting space in nearby hotels for their previews.

HONG KONG

ART BASEL HONG KONG

Orianna Cacchione



Inside the Hong Kong Art Fair

Despite ART HK's growth, the sudden interest and last-minute travel was spurred by MCH Swiss Exhibition Ltd.'s acquisition of a 60% stake in Asian Art Fairs Limited, which runs ART HK. The deal also provides MCH Group the possibility to acquire the remaining 40% in 2014. MCH Group organizes the Art Basel and Art Basel Miami Beach art fairs. The purchase skyrocketed Hong Kong's importance in the international art fair circuit, but has left people wondering how it will change under the direction of Art Basel.

Magnus Renfrew maintains that

the fair will keep its Asian flavor. This has been emphasized by MCH Group. However their press release reveals their intent "to develop the Hong Kong International Art Fair under the Art Basel brand and make it into the third platform for this group of internationally leading art shows."

Both Renfrew's and Art Basel's statements have not been able to assuage Beijing-based gallerists' fears about the fair's future. Claiming last year as the turning point in the fair's international reputation, galleries worry that they will be priced out as big name Western gal-

eries vie for access to the growing Asian art market. Grumbles were heard after the initial announcement of participating galleries, as many Beijing galleries had to petition to get space at ART HK11. The trend of international gallery participation began last year and has increased for this year's fair. Under Art Basel, it is predicted that even more booth space will be devoted to American and European galleries.

Gallery directors in Beijing have also voiced concerns that the tone of the fair will shift from a regional event focusing on the development of Asian collectors to a run-of-the-mill art fair, exhibiting the same galleries as Frieze, Art Basel and Art Basel Miami. These concerns were verified once Art Basel announced the date of next year's fair during the first week of February — in the middle of the Chinese New Year holiday. Scheduling will prove problematic to many Chinese galleries, as most laborers, framers and shippers travel home during that holiday. Despite the press release's justification of spreading out its international fairs throughout the year, Beijing gallery directors are not buying it. One director has claimed that the choice of early February is intended to drive Art Stage Singapore, the Singapore art fair directed by Lorenzo Rudolf, a former director of Art Basel, out of business. Or worse yet, driving it into obscurity as a second-class fair.

DUBAI

LAWRIE OF ARABIA

Adrian Murphy



Dubai's art scene received international attention when more than 15 galleries opened there between 2005 and 2008. Now, following a lull during the financial crisis, a second wave of galleries have opened earlier this year in the city's two art hotspots, Dubai International Financial Centre and Al-Quoz.

One of the more recent is Lawrie Shabibi, which opened in March on Al-Serkal Avenue in the heart of the Al-Quoz industrial estate. The gallery is a collaboration between William Lawrie, 32, former Director of Middle Eastern Art at Christie's in London and Asmaa Al-Shabibi, 39, former Managing Director of Art Dubai.

Lawrie, who moved to Dubai to oversee Christie's first auction

there in 2006, was convinced that the art scene in Dubai was not saturated. "The main reason for this growth is Dubai has more private collectors than any other Gulf city, enough to make a gallery system sustainable." In retrospect it is clear that the Christie's auction was a catalyst to a more integrated art scene. Christie's presence was followed by the first Gulf Art Fair [now Art Dubai] in March 2007, the announcement of the Saadiyat project with the Guggenheim and Louvre museums and the subsequent Art Paris Abu Dhabi fair.

Lawrie said that when the Lehman Brothers bank collapsed in October 2008 it hit the world art market hard, but Dubai was least affected, with none of its

art galleries closing. "What happened during that time was people's tastes developed and the result of that has been extremely helpful for the art market and creativity in general," he said. "The interest in art now to what it was five years ago is incomparable, and this means artists are producing the kinds of work they would not have done before." Recent programming shows how Lawrie Shabibi aims to embrace the energy of young and emerging artists, such as Iranian Shapour Pouyan and Palestinian-Iraqi Sama Alshabi, whose works have been exhibited alongside that of more established artists like Nabil Nahas from Lebanon and Turkey's Selma Gürbüz.

William Lawrie outside his gallery with business partner Asmaa Al-Shabibi.