



# A COLLECTOR'S Journey

DEBORAH ISKANDAR VISITS  
ART BASEL HONG KONG

After visiting countless art fairs and shows, I firmly believe that Art Basel Hong Kong is proving to be one of the highlights of the art tour in Asia. This year was no exception, with an increasing number of artists joining in the festivities, including some prominent names from the Western art scene such as Jeff Koons, Antony Gormley, Tracey Emin and Wolfgang Tillmans drawing in the crowds.

Both Koons and Tillmans are represented by David Zwirner, who recently opened a new space in the H Queen's building in Hong Kong – a purpose-built high rise for galleries, now considered as the new epicentre for the city's art market. The building boasts 24 floors and currently 11 floors have been converted for

seven art galleries and one auction house. All the details and facilities have been carefully and thoughtfully designed, as there is even a gondola system for lifting large and heavy crates.

The David Zwirner gallery featured Wolfgang Tillmans' book launch and solo show, which also happened to be his first exhibition in Hong Kong. Faithful to the German artist's previous shows in the past year at Tate Modern in London, the Fondation Beyeler in Basel and the Kunstverien in Hamburg, this one also presented a broad selection of works which connect to the surroundings, but at the same time exist in a self-contained environment. Taking over the four exhibition spaces of the gallery, the show examined the contrast between in-

imate pictures of friendship and human contact with the world viewed from a larger scale. Tillmans' exhibitions have sometimes been criticised for being too eclectic due to the presentation of unrelated subject matters such as portraits together with abstract images, placed next to random landscapes and a still life here and there. However, his approach can be best summarised with the title of his 2003 show: "If One Thing Matters, Everything Matters".

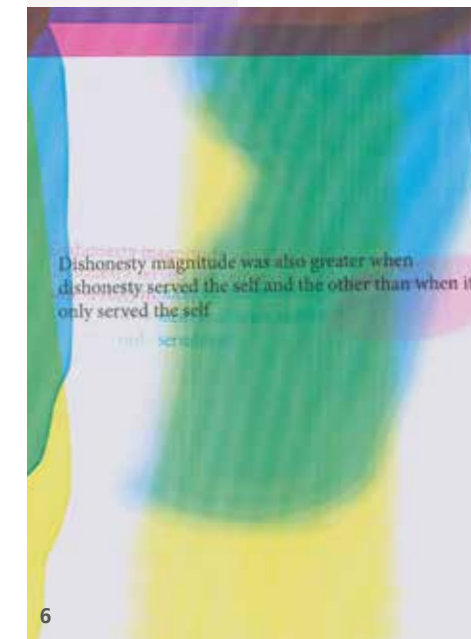
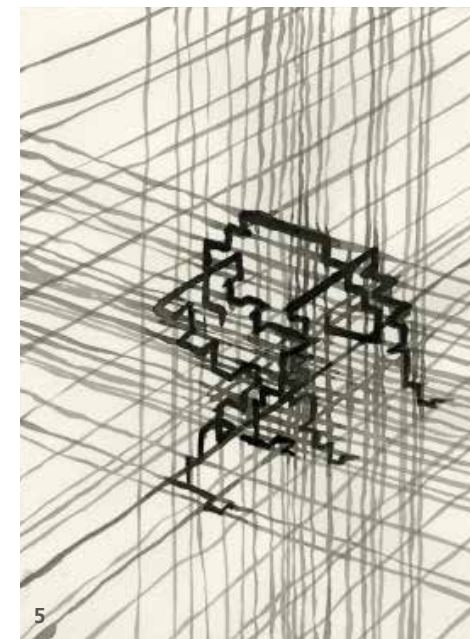
After closely following the art business for over 20 years, I have noticed that photography as an art form has slowly earned the respect of the international art community. With the rise of new media art, collecting photography has gained in popularity and collectors are shifting their focus from traditional forms of art such as painting to video, photography and even sound art. It seems that photography is often more accessible than fine art painting for instance, because it conveys a more direct message which can be easier to relate to. Setting the hyped photographers aside, the prices can still be relatively affordable compared to fine art paintings, therefore the decision to buy may require less planning. Surprisingly,



collecting photography can be a great investment, as shown by the sale of Andreas Gursky's "Rhein II", at a whopping \$4.3 million dollars in 2011.

At Art Basel Hong Kong, my favourite artwork was probably Jeff Koons' "Bluebird Planter" (2010-2016), a nearly 3-metre long bird made out of mirror-polished stainless steel with real floral details. Showcased at the David Zwirner booth, the 'little' bird was in good company amongst three sculptures from Koons' "Gazing Ball" series and his "Swan" (Inflatable) (2011-2015). The gallery had not only brought Koons' artworks to the fair, but also the artist himself who was at the booth greeting visitors in his calm and composed manner. The king of pop art who had just flown in from his show at the Gagosian in Los Angeles, is arguably the most recognisable artist in the world, figuring 54th on ArtReview magazine's Power 100 list. He is also known as the king of auctions, since his "Balloon Dog" (Orange) sold at a New York auction for US\$58,400,000 in 2013, causing a global sensation. Attending the Art Basel Hong Kong since its inception, Zwirner has invited other big names to join him at the fair in previous years, including Luc Tuymans in 2017, Michaël Borremans in 2016 and Neo Rauch in 2015.

With two spaces in London and one in Hong Kong, White Cube gallery also had some sizzling names on their artist list, presenting works by Georg Baselitz, Tracey Emin, Theaster Gates, Wang Gongxin, Antony Gormley, Damien Hirst, Minjung Kim, Zhou Li, Julie Mehretu, Seung-tae Lee, Raqib Shaw and many more. I was especially interested in the works of Antony Gormley, who is very much in demand right now with his iconic sculptures. Coinciding with the fair, White Cube Hong Kong opened Gormley's solo show "Rooting the Synapse", featuring works from the artist's "Rooter" series realised in the past two years. In this series, the iron sculptures apply a plant-like branching system to map the human body. This idea is strongly inspired by Goethe, who compares the human brain to a



seed, from which the central nervous system extends to the rest of the body.

Both Gormley and Tracey Emin also participated in the Harbour Arts Sculpture project. It is the first international sculpture park in Hong Kong, curated by Mori Art Museum director, Fumio Nanjo, and Royal Academy of Arts artistic director, Tim Marlow. Emin presented a new bronze sculpture "A Moment Without You" (2017), comprised of five cast birds placed on high poles, while Gormley showed his cast-iron sculpture "DAZE VI" (2016).

We still tend to think that Asian art is more affordable than Western art, but it is catching up fast. At Art Basel Hong Kong, the highest selling artwork from a Western artist was from Willem de Kooning, sold at Lévy Gorvy Gallery for \$35,000,000. On the Asian front, Zao Wou-Ki had important works prominently displayed at Tina Keng's gallery, where the most expensive sold for approximately \$24,000,000.

In my opinion, Art Basel Hong Kong is now competing on the same level as the venerable Art Basel in Switzerland. It has certainly cemented its position in the international art

world, attracts more visitors each year, and even the biggest galleries clear their calendars to attend the event. The success of Art Basel Hong Kong also has far-reaching effects, because it contributes to spreading awareness and knowledge about Asian art, thus increasing its street credibility in the West.

1. Jeff Koons, Bluebird Planter, 2010-2016 © Jeff Koons Bluebird Planter, 2010-2016, Courtesy David Zwirner.

2. DAZE VI, 2016  
Cast iron, 178,2 x 35,5 x 43,5 cm  
Installation view, Harbour Arts Sculpture Park 2018, Central and Western District Promenade and Wan Chai, Hong Kong, 2018, Courtesy of Harbour Arts Sculpture Park, Photography by William Furniss.

3. Jeff Koons, Swan (Inflatable), 2011-2015 © Jeff Koons, Swan (Inflatable), 2011-2015, Courtesy David Zwirner.

4. ROOTING THE SYNAPSE, 2018, ROOTING THE SYNAPSE, 2018, Installation view, White Cube, Hong Kong, 2018.

Photograph by Kitman Lee

5. FEEL 2018 Carbon and casein on paper, photo Dawn Blackman.

6. Wolfgang Tillmans, CLC 004, 2017 © Wolfgang Tillmans Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/HongKong, Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne, and Maureen Paley, London.

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