

AFGHANISTAN
ARMENIA
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MARSHALL ISLANDS
MICRONESIA
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NEW CALEDONIA
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PAPUA NEW GUINEA
PHILIPPINES
QATAR
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TURKEY
TURKMENISTAN
TUVALU
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
UZBEKISTAN
VANUATU
VIETNAM
YEMEN



hong kong

OFFICIAL COUNTRY NAME

HONG KONG SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION

LANGUAGES

CANTONESE, MANDARIN, ENGLISH

POPULATION

7,018,636

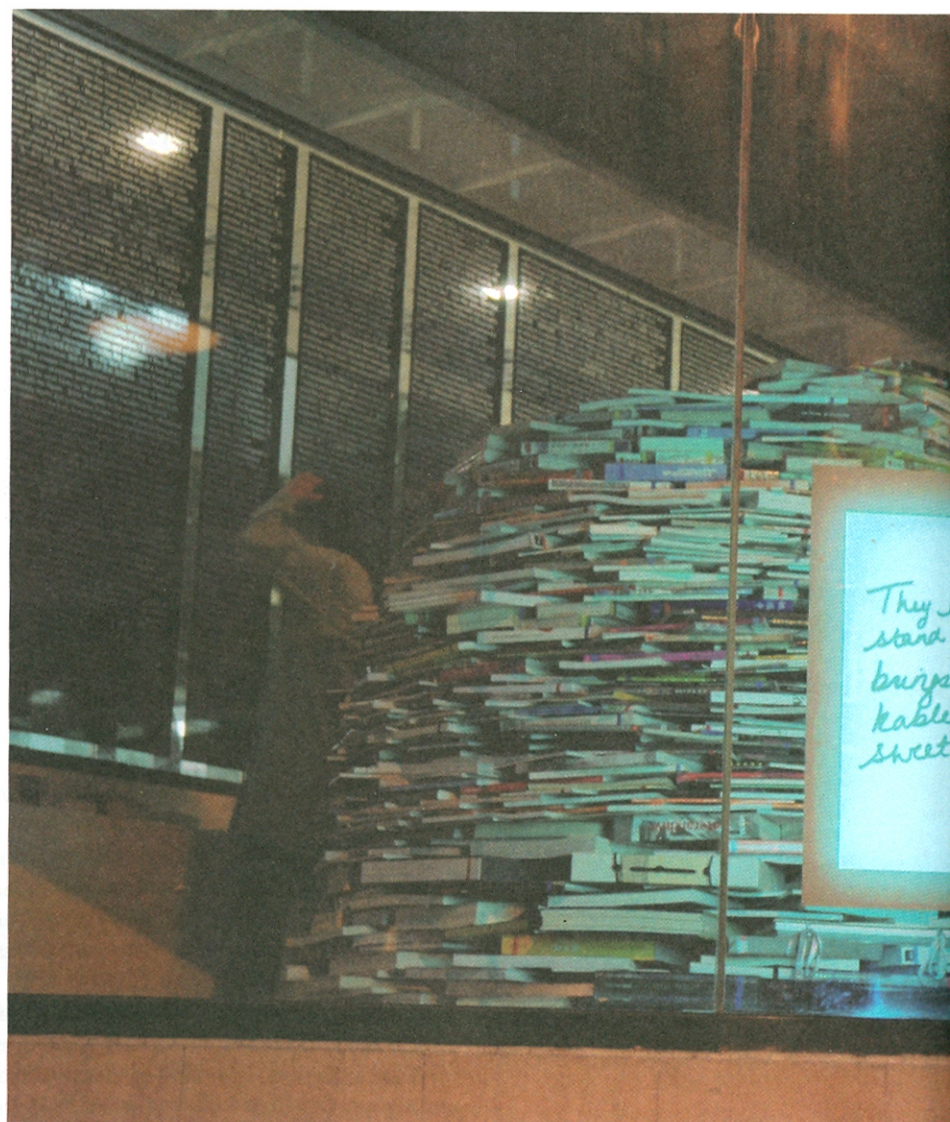
MEDIAN AGE

41.7 YEARS OLD

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT PER CAPITA

US \$42,000

The statistical figures are from the CIA World Factbook.



PAMELA KEMBER, *The Walls and The Books*, 2008, multimedia installation, dimensions variable. Installation view at October Contemporary, Hong Kong, 2008. Courtesy Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong.

Under British rule from 1841 to 1997, Hong Kong developed

finance capital after New York and London, according to *Business Week*. Now after more than a decade as a Special Autonomous Region (SAR) of China, it remains a major entrepot with its strategic location and relatively transparent legal system. While the world's other banking capitals were hit hard by the financial meltdown in late 2008, Hong Kong remains stoical. It endured hard times in recent years: the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98, the SARS epidemic of 2003 and the resignation of its first Beijing-appointed chief executive, Tung Chee-hwa, in 2005. While panic spread through the financial systems in the US and Europe, Hong Kong resisted the hysteria and appears confident about weathering the global recession.

In legislative elections on September 7, incumbent pro-democracy legislators retained 24 of 60 seats, with many voters supporting the government taking a proactive role in the economy. **Donald Tsang**, the chief executive, supports art and cultural heritage in the SAR. In his 2008-09 policy address, Tsang said the government would continue to support the

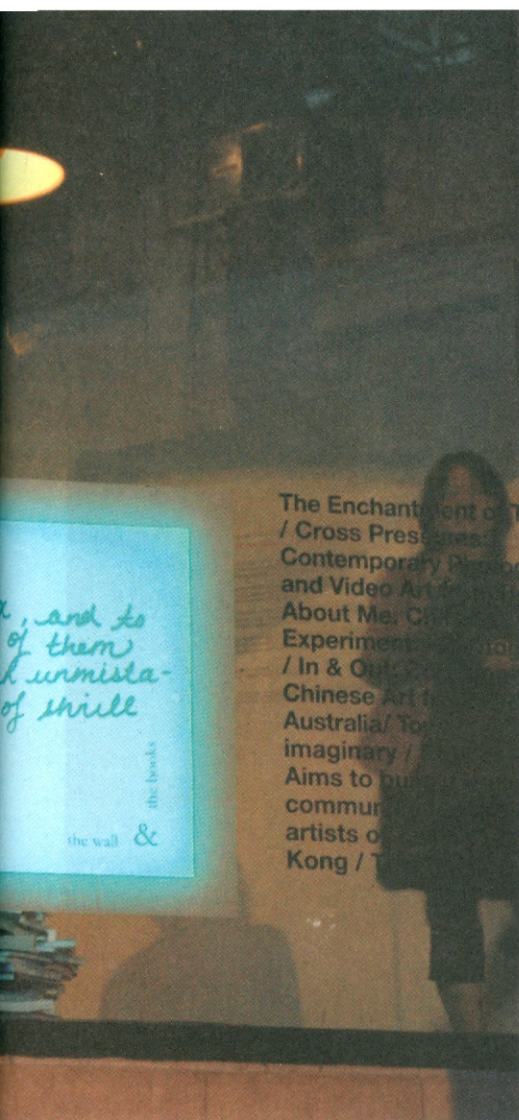
arts, particularly the **West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD)** to "realize the vision of developing Hong Kong into a world-class arts and culture destination."

The WKCD (SEE AAP 44) is a massive cultural development project that has been the source of heated debate. Initially proposed by Tung Chee-hwa in 1998, WKCD was criticized when a formal proposal for the HKD 25 billion development—with a huge glass canopy designed by Norman Foster—was announced in 2005. The dissent was loud enough for the government to rethink its approach. In 2006 a newly appointed advisory group produced a plan called **M+**, or "Museum Plus," a cultural institution spanning art and design genres from ink paintings to comics, which received government approval in May 2008. The actual construction of M+ will cost \$4.75 billion of the \$21.5 billion WKCD government budget, and will proceed in two phases, with the first scheduled for completion in 2015 and the latter in 2031. On the heels of the announcement that Hong Kong is officially in recession and with

TOTAL VALUE OF ART EXPORTED	US \$363,347,464
ARTS FUNDING	US \$167,737,606
ART PROGRAMS (UNIVERSITY-LEVEL)	4
STUDENTS ENROLLED	340
MUSEUMS EXHIBITING CONTEMPORARY ART (PUBLIC + PRIVATE)	7
CONTEMPORARY ART SPACES (NON-PROFIT)	30
COMMERCIAL CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERIES	70
FOUNDATIONS (NGO + PRIVATE)	18

The statistical figures are 2008 estimates. The figures are taken from the most recent censuses and information.

Sources and Acknowledgments: Art Exported – United Nations Comtrade Database; Art Programs & Students Enrolled – Education Bureau; Museums, Art Spaces, Galleries & Foundations – Leisure and Cultural Services Department; Asia Art Archive; Asian Cultural Council; Hong Kong Arts Development Council; Nadim Abbas, Henry Au-Yeung, Tobias Berger, Yuko Cheung, Leung Chi-wo, Margaret Cogswell, Pamela Kember, Betty Mak, Michael Muller-Verweyen, Ellen Pau, Ralph Samuelson, Paul Serfaty, Ann Tsang, Michelle Vosper.

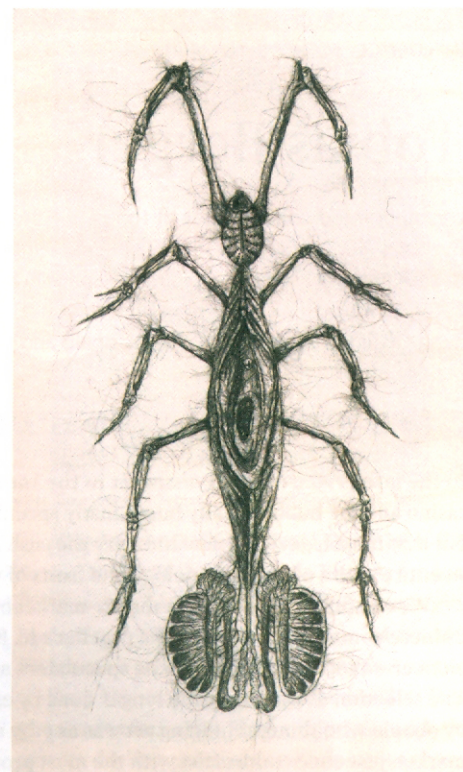


organized by British-run Asian Art Fairs Ltd—drew 19,000 visitors and 100 galleries from 20 countries displaying art worth a total of USD 65 million (SEE AAP 59).

In the auctions, the first half of 2008 saw record prices achieved by **Christie's** and **Sotheby's** in their modern and contemporary Hong Kong sales. Sotheby's Hong Kong, headed by **Evelyn Lin**, holds regular sales in April and October. In April it garnered a striking \$646.8 million, including premium, for modern and contemporary Chinese and Southeast Asian works of art. The sale was controversial, less for the numbers than for the unethical handling of the **Estella Collection**, which was assembled in 2003-06 by an art fund created by dealer Michael Goedhuis and exhibited at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art near Copenhagen in 2007 and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem in 2007-08. Goedhuis promised Chinese artists who sold works to him at concessionary prices that the collection was destined for an institution, not auction.

Christie's always follows Sotheby's a month later with pan-Asian contemporary sales, led by **Eric Chang** (SEE AAP 53), along with Chinese modern and contemporary sales held in May and November. In May, Christie's upped the ante by launching the first Hong Kong evening sale of modern and contemporary Asian art, bringing in a combined total of \$813.8 million for the night and day sales.

However, art and life eventually collided after global banking giant Lehman Brothers went bust in September. Sotheby's October sale in Hong Kong saw a full house but relatively few bidders; the total for the evening and day sales of Asian, Chinese and Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art was \$242 million. Christie's ended the year on November 30 and December 1 with many star properties from gilded sources such as Hollywood director Oliver Stone, and yielded \$261.7 million, in one of the toughest markets in recent memory. Hong Kong's coterie of commercial galleries has thrived in recent years, inspiring new players to open in the SAR. The oldest, **Alisan**



ANGELA SU, *Anisomorpha Buprestoides*, 2007, hair embroidery, 45.7 x 76 cm. Courtesy Grotto Fine Art, Hong Kong.

Fine Arts, founded in 1981 by Alice King, shows some of the best contemporary Chinese ink paintings and presented dramatic works in black and white by Nobel laureate Gao Xingjian (5/22 -6/11), but King's biggest coup was her curated show "New Ink Art: Innovation and Beyond" at the Hong Kong Museum of Art (8/22-10/26), which included work by Liu Guosong, Luis Chan (SEE AAP VOL. 3, NO. 4), Gu Wenda (SEE AAP 26, 56) and Wilson Shieh (SEE AAP 37, 46, 49, 57) in an examination of the history and development of this subtle medium. **Hanart TZ Gallery**, now 20 years old, continued to unearth new talent with Chow Chun Fai's media-bending works referencing blockbuster movies and traditional myths (4/10-30), and ended the year with the quiet dream-like paintings of animals by Lam Tung Pang (9/26-10/21). **Plum Blossoms**, run by Stephen McGuinness since 1987, also focused on the new with a debut

into the world's third largest

unemployment rising to 3.5 percent, Tsang announced on November 16 that WKCD would be fast-tracked to spur new jobs in the city.

Government support for the arts is managed by the **Home Affairs Bureau (HAB)**, under Tsang Tak-sing since July 2007. The HAB allocated \$1.3 billion for cultural heritage, museums and the performing arts in 2008, disbursed through the **Leisure and Cultural Services Department**, and allocated the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, the main funding agency for contemporary art, a total 2007-08 subvention of \$70.7 million.

The duopoly of **Christie's** and **Sotheby's**, and more recently **Bonhams**, hold major sales in Hong Kong (SEE AUCTIONS). Smaller houses in the region, including Taiwan's Kingsley Auction and Ravenel, Korea's Seoul Auction and Japan's Est-Ouest now also have sales there. Homegrown **Atting House**, backed by India-Hong Kong collector and entrepreneur Jai Waney, focuses on emerging Asian contemporary art.

Adding to the mix, the new international contemporary art fair **Art HK** (5/14-18)—



MAP OFFICE, (Detail) *J'aime l'argent (I love money)*, 2008, still image from multimedia installation. Courtesy the artists.

Tobias Berger

was appointed chief curator of the new Nam June Paik Art Center in Gyeonggi-do, South Korea, in 2008 after serving as executive director and curator of the artist-run Para/Site Art Space in Hong Kong since 2005. In 2009, he will be the curator of Pak Sheung Chueng's exhibition in the Hong Kong Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale and co-curator of Fotofestival Mannheim-Ludwigshafen-Heidelberg.

In the late 1990s, when investment in the Internet became a huge casino and the bubble finally burst, many speculators got cleaned out. But that frisson gave the new industry the cash it needed to jump-start an entire realm of new technology, the fruits of which we enjoy today.

We can find an analogue in the art-market boom (especially for Chinese contemporary art) of the past decade. Following the true pioneer-collectors there came the speculators and auction houses. The selection of works was no longer done by engaged experts, but by people who thought judging art was as easy as playing the stock market: just choose the artist with the most promising chart.

Today the Chinese boom has come abruptly—but not surprisingly—to a halt after the geniuses on Wall Street and their ilk learned the hard way that they are not the masters of the universe. So the crash of 2008 may mark the end of an era during which art was judged solely by how much it earned on the auction block (or how much it gained there). Now that this criterion has been wiped out by the very people who invented it, what is left to guide us in the emerging art world of Asia?

How about the “Lean out of the window and jump” factor? In the history of Western art the most successful artists were those who radically questioned everything that preceded them and challenged the existing system to create a new visual language. This changed somewhat after art lost its interest in styles, -isms and movements. But a good antithesis still rocks the boat.

One could argue that Asia is different and more rooted in art that relies on consensus and harmony. That Asian art is not about negation but about perfection. That art should have a place in society somewhat resembling the designated “protest zones” at the 2008 Beijing Olympics—an alibi rather than an alternative model.

This argument seems to have justified the existence of the naïve, decorative and mostly affirmative work that sold for horrendously inflated prices in the last few years and which was celebrated as Asia's New Art. The political correctness implicit in these works may have led us (as certain governments have been known to do) away from the belief that free and critical voices are important for developed/open/democratic societies.

Oddly enough, these cover lots do not appear in the big curated exhibitions nor are they discussed at artists' tables in the East or the West or elsewhere. The most passionate members of the art community seem much more interested in the “Lean out of the window and jump” variety of art. Such works are predominantly critical, funny, political and edgy and made by artists who don't care too much about the contemporary market, but who follow their own minds, take risks and jump into the unknown.

Appreciated and promoted by a few independent-minded artists, curators, activists and even gallerists, such art can generally be found by looking outside the commercial box. You won't find it in the prestigious Beijing Central Academy of Fine Arts but in the studio of an academy drop out. It won't appear at the Hong Kong auctions but rather at the smaller European art fairs. It won't be exhibited in official



Courtesy Tobias Berger

museums but in independent art spaces—perhaps the first in a foreign country or the wider region.

Does this mean that the West will win The Battle of the Philosophy of Art? Of course not. Time and size are too much on the Asian side. As a consequence, we have to foster a more open, critical discussion of art and exhibitions, especially regarding Asian art, to be able to make better educated guesses as to what art means in Asia today.

solo show, "Mushroom Cloud" (5/23-6/7), for rising Lhasa star Gade and his pop-infused Tibetan thangkas with more than 80 percent of the work sold. **Schoeni**, still flying high from the gallery's 15th anniversary celebrations in 2007 and fitted out with renovated spaces, also dedicated exhibitions to young artists. A group show for artists born in the 1980s, "Niubi Newbie Kids" (9/18-10/13), included animation-styled paintings by Chen Fei, 3-D animations by Feng Wei and a mixed-media installation of soft sculptures by Zhao Yi Qian.

The veteran gallery **10 Chancery Lane**, located on a pedestrian only street, is also putting fresh talent forward. "New Horizons – Hong Kong artists and their mentors" was curated by Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University professors picking from among former Hong Kong students (9/19-10/18), and "The Second Sex: India" featured paintings, photography and video by young women artists from India (10/23-11/22). "Between Sky and Earth – White Dew" (9/4-10/11) showcased mural paintings of billowy clouds by Shao Yinong, while photographer Cai Xing was presented at the gallery's industrial annex space in Chai Wan (5/8-8/30).

In less than five years, **Osage** has established an ambitious program with 15,000 square feet in a Kwun Tong industrial building and outposts in Beijing, Manila, Shanghai and Singapore. Osage presented the powerful show "Woman's Work," with 14 artists including Taiwanese Shulea Cheang, Chinese Cai Jin and Korea-based Yuk-king Tan (7/18-8/29), and "On the White" (10/10-11/16), a combination of video, installation and photography by Jiang Zhi, who ruminates on the metaphysics of art and life.

Amelia Johnson Contemporary and **Grotto Fine Art** are pioneers in supporting local and emerging artists. Johnson shows younger



ZHOU YI, *Air Heart 01*, 2008, C-print, 67.8 x 118 cm. Copyright the artist. Courtesy Ooi Botos Gallery, Hong Kong.

artists from the Asia-Pacific region, beginning in 2008 with the haunting reverse monochrome paintings of European masterpieces by Singapore's Eric Chan (4/11-5/3), a playful panoramic installation of female pirates by Australia's Sally Smart (5/9-6/7, [SEE AAP 60](#)) and Larry Yung's pastel colored Americana paintings commenting on loss and desire (9/4-27). **Grotto Fine Art**, run by Henry Au-Yeung, remains loyal to Hong Kong. The gallery presented Angela Su's delicate ink and hair-embroidery depictions of insects (4/16-5/3), and literati-style comic paintings by Joey Leung in "Beyond Presumption" (5/21-6/6). Au-Yeung's curated show, "The Pivotal Decade: Hong Kong Art 1997-2007," which originated in 2007 at the Chinese Arts Centre in Manchester, UK, came home to the Hong Kong Arts Centre (9/1-14).

New on the scene, **Ooi-Botos** focuses on contemporary photography and opened in Wan Chai with surreal photography by Liu Ren and Chen Zhuo + Huang Keyi (5/15-7/5). Ooi-Botos also showed Zhou Yi's anatomical-emotional series, "My Heart Laid Bare" (10/30-1/10/09).

Cat Street Gallery, **Kwai Fung Hin**, **Zee Stone**, **Karin Weber** and **Asia Fine Art** mount regular exhibitions of work from the region including Australia, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, as well as Europe and North America. **Gallery Vee** and **Gaffer Studio** in Chai Wan showcase innovative glass sculpture, with the former dealing privately and mounting shows in collaboration with other galleries and museums. **Anna Ning Fine Art**, originally an art consultancy, launched a full gallery program in 2007 of both established and emerging artists, including a retrospective of Ye Yongqing's paintings of birds over the last three decades (4/5-19) and Jing Ke Wen's nostalgic paintings of old China (11/20-12/4). **Art Statements**, which drew crowds for anime artist Yoshitaka Amano, holds mixed shows by Asian and European artists and also deals in the secondary market. Similarly, **Anna Li Art Consultancy** offers both primary and secondary contemporary Chinese works and gives regular talks on art investing. **Fabrik Gallery**, which opened in 2007, peddles trendy properties from Japanese artist Mr ([SEE AAP 53](#)) to Andy Warhol, mainly in off-site locations such as the W Hotel. **Edge Gallery** and **C&G Artpartment** have determinedly local programs nestled in Causeway Bay and Prince Edward, respectively.

Other international galleries are choosing Hong Kong for expansion. Karachi's **Gandhara-Art** brings some of the best Pakistani artists, including contemporary miniaturists Imran Qureshi and Aisha Khalid and mixed-media artist Atif Khan, to the SAR. **CAIS Gallery** from Seoul re-opened on Hollywood Road in September and held a solo show of Lee Woo Lim's hardboiled psychedelic paintings inspired by Haruki Murakami's fiction (10/6-11/5). **Moon Gallery**, opened in late 2007, also represents Korean art. New Delhi's **Aryan Art Gallery** opened a satellite space in Glenealy Tower in Central and deals in secondary market Indian modernists. After almost a year on the hunt, blue-chip multinational powerhouse **Gagosian Gallery**, is still searching for a local office.

Hollywood Road is a magnet for other



ESTHER YIP, (Detail) *The Happy Tree*, clay, acrylic, gloss medium, 340 x 210 x 280 cm. Courtesy Art HK 08, Hong Kong.

galleries' branches. New York and Los Angeles dealer **Sundaram Tagore** opened his third space with a show entitled "East-West" that continues his family's legacy of intercultural dialogue (5/19-6/14). Further down the road, Beijing and Bangkok-based **Tang Contemporary Art** presented Thai-Indian artist Navin Rawanchaikul's mini-retrospective, "NAVINSOPE: Dim Sum rider" (7/17-8/6).

With so much capital flowing about, Hong Kong should practice more cultural philanthropy. The most active nonprofits are **Asia Art Archive (AAA)**, Asian Cultural Council (ACC) and Goethe-Institut. Now in its eighth year, AAA is the region's finest archive and research facility devoted to contemporary art, and organizes insightful talks and forums in Hong Kong. Highlights in 2008 were the **Museums Conference**, co-hosted with the Chinese University of Hong Kong, with speakers including Tate Modern's Sheena Wagstaff, Tokyo Museum of Contemporary Art's Yuko Hasegawa and Beijing Central Academy of Fine Arts' Su Zhen Xie (5/17), and the South Asia discussion series with artist Rashid Rana (10/14) and artistic director of Khoj Artists Association Pooja Sood (10/20).

Asian Cultural Council, established in 1980 as part of the John D Rockefeller 3rd Fund, awarded 40 fellowships to Asia-based visual artists, curators and art administrators. Among those in Hong Kong that received grants were artists Julian Lee and Beatrix Pang.

Goethe-Institut, housed in the Hong Kong Arts Centre and run by Michael Müller-Verweyen, hosts contemporary art exhibitions by local and international artists. Highlights included Kacey Wong's solo, "Drifting Thoughts" (3/27-4/24), with an installation exploring the issue of homeless people in Hong Kong. On the eve of the financial meltdown, the



CHOW CHUN FAI, *Once a Thief, "Any Self-Respecting Thief Would be Proud to Steal This Painting,"* 2008, enamel paint on canvas, 100 x 150 x 5 cm. Courtesy the artist and the Sovereign Art Foundation, Hong Kong.

art-duo MAP Office presented "j'aime l'argent (I love money)" (8/29-9/29), an examination of value, exchange and positive capitalism. To end the year, Goethe-Institut supported art cult-favorite rock band Kraftwerk's live show at the Asia World Expo (12/5).

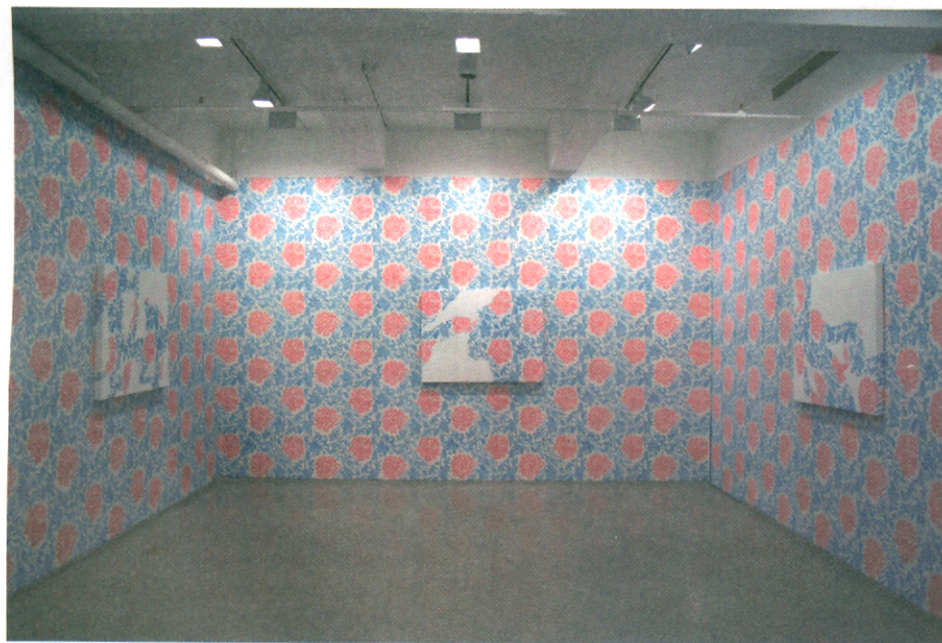
The Sovereign Art Foundation, Robert HN Ho Family Foundation (RHFF) and Bloomberg Emerging Artists (BEA), recently established in association with the Hong Kong Youth Foundation, are the main philanthropies in Hong Kong. Sovereign's Asian Art Prize attracted over 1,000 entries with finalists' works on view at the Landmark shopping mall (10/21-26). The grand prize of USD 25,000 went to Hong Kong artist Chow Chun Fai for *Once a Thief* (10/29). RHFF, which supports the arts, heritage and Buddhist philosophy, was the

lead sponsor of Cai Guo-Qiang's Guggenheim Museum exhibition in New York, "I Want to Believe" (2/22-5/28, [SEE AAP 57](#)). BEA presented its second annual award in October, to sonic artist Phoebe Hui, for her examination of language.

Hong Kong is home to many established alternative spaces. **Para/Site Art Space** leads the pack, largely due to the efforts of outgoing executive director **Tobias Berger** ([SEE P. 168](#)). Among Berger's best shows prior to his departure for the Nam June Paik Art Center in Korea in August were "Asia Art Knots" (5/13-6/20), a survey of influential independent art spaces, and "Where the Lions Are" (5/7-23), exploring the idea of the "foreign" at the Sheung Wan Civic Centre. The new director, Álvaro Rodríguez Fominaya, formerly of the Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno in Las Palmas, Spain, has yet to make his mark.

Videotage, established in 1985 to promote film, video and new media, became the focus of attention when its founding artistic director, Ellen Pau, who retired from the board in 2005, was summoned back after the chairman, vice-chairman and treasurer resigned in March 2008. Many Hong Kong artists complained that Videotage had lost its way after Pau left, cutting back on programs to save on expenses.

Videotage's brainchild, **Microwave New Media Art Festival** is now independent, focusing on the crossroads of art and technology. Now in its 12th year, the 2008 edition, "Transient Creatures," examined controversial bio-art explorations (11/7-23), including SymbioticA's *Tissue Culture & Art Project* utilizing living tissue to create "semi-living entities." **Zuni Icosahedron**, the edgy interdisciplinary arts group known for performances and education, screened their latest production, *God Came to China*, at the New Vision Festival (10/23-11/23). **October Contemporary**, a month-long annual



TSANG KIN-WAH, *MomFDadFdaughterTeacherFJesusFMaryFBillFMonicaFPoliticianFPastorFKidFMomFTeen ...*, 2007, silkscreen, emulsion and acrylic on canvas and paper, 5.1 x 8.7 x 3.6 m. Courtesy the artist and Yvon Lambert Gallery, New York.

festival run by eight leading arts organizations, offered its second installment, "Attr/Action," which examined spectacles ranging from the Olympics to the Venice Biennale to the simple act of attempting to "hijack" public space for art in Hong Kong's dense urban environment.

The art community hopes the WKCD will make up for the lack of contemporary art in the SAR's museums. The **Hong Kong Museum of Art** attempted to right the imbalance by organizing "Hong Kong Art: Open Dialogue," an exhibition series of "new initiatives for the promotion of Hong Kong Art." The four-part series included "Digit@logue" (5/16-7/20), Ellen Pau's sampler of Videotage's video library, and "Looking for Antonio Mak" (11/21-1/28/09), a retrospective of work by the late Mak and the younger artists he influenced.

With the WKCD underway, art professionals will soon be in demand. On November 13, the HKADC distributed \$1 million to over 1,000 primary and secondary schools to groom future "arts ambassadors." The **Visual Art Academy of the Baptist University** is still in its infancy, but has lured local independent curator Pamela Kember to oversee its curatorial program. The **Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)** remains the top choice for artists pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees, and introduced an MA in visual cultural studies in 2007. **Hong Kong Polytechnic University** provides fashion and design degrees and **Hong Kong City University** has the only art program in the SAR dedicated to new media. **Lingnan University** also offers graduate degrees in cultural studies and **Hong Kong Art School**, a subsidiary of the Hong Kong Art Centre in Wanchai since 2000, enrolled 8,500 students in 2008. Para/Site Art Space concluded a six-month pilot program for curating in April 2008, but there are no plans to continue the course.

Abroad, Hong Kong art remains in the shadow of that from mainland China. But **Tsang Kin-wah** (SEE AAP 58), who refuses to blend into the background with his graphic wallpaper, had solo shows at Paris' Yvon Lambert (3/8-4/5) and at the Chinese Arts Centre (6/27-9/28), Manchester. **Map Office** and Beijing artist Cao Fei (SEE ALMANAC 2 & AAP 47, 50, 57, 61) collaborated on a new virtual artwork, **NO LAB in RMB CITY**, presented in the online platform Second Life at the US biennial "Prospect.1" (11/1-1/18/09) in New Orleans. Para/Site founders **Leung Chi-wo** (SEE AAP 55) and **Sara Wong** turned São Paulo's Museu da Imagem e do Som into a temporary bakery during its re-opening celebrations (8/9). Wilson Shieh showed his *gongbi* ink paintings at Berlin's Lothar Albrecht (3/7-5/3).

While 2009 will be gloomy for most of the world, Hong Kong culture vultures can look forward to the extravagant, long-term WKCD project. And in May, ArtHK09 is gambling on becoming the Art Basel of the South China Sea. **EWN**

*ALL CURRENCY IS HKD



NAVIN RAWANCHAIKUL, on right, with ceramic bust and book set from *Quotations from Comrade Navin*, 2008. Installation view at Tang Contemporary Art, Hong Kong, 2008. Courtesy Navin Production, Bangkok.

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