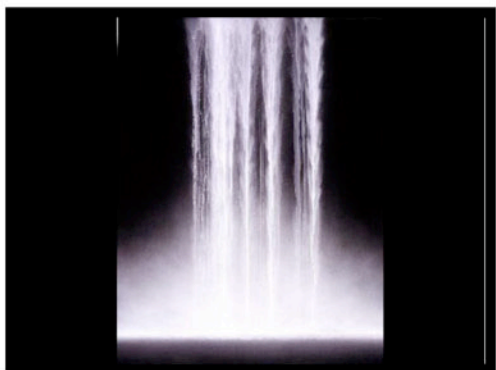


Gagosian, Tagore Boost Hong Kong's Ambitions as Asia Art Hub

Review by Julia Tanski



May 28 (Bloomberg) -- Hong Kong's ambition to be Asia's art hub received another boost with the recent arrival of three top galleries: **Gagosian**, **Sundaram Tagore** and **Tang Contemporary**.

Sundaram Tagore opened on the city's gallery street, Hollywood Road, on May 9 and Bangkok-based Tang Contemporary started in April. U.S. art dealer Larry Gagosian set up his Hong Kong office at the prominent IFC 1 building in Central in September, and may open a show-room in the coming months.

The city is contending with Asian capitals such as Beijing, Seoul and Tokyo as the region's leading center for art purchases and exhibitions.

“To have more international experienced galleries opening new shows here in Hong Kong will open the dialog among artists, collectors, and curators,” said Monique Burger, who owns the Burger Collection of contemporary art with her husband.

Art HK 08, which tries to emulate Frieze Art in London and Art Basel, drew about 20,000 visitors this month as buyers hobnobbed with artists and traded tips on the latest trends. Hong Kong, which levies no taxes on artworks, draws 28 million visitors every year.

“We have decided on Hong Kong partly for structural reasons such as import and export,” said Nick Simunovic, director of Gagosian's Hong Kong office. “Hong Kong is the perfect platform from which to work with collectors across all of Asia.”

Trendsetting

Gagosian is known for his trendsetting ways and sales savvy. **Takashi Murakami**'s paintings were going for \$600,000 in 2004; they jumped to \$2.4 million in November after he joined the gallery. Gagosian has seven galleries in Europe and the U.S., the latest of which opened in Rome last year.

“We will showcase the artists that Gagosian works with in New York, London, Los Angeles and Rome,” said Simunovic, citing **Jeff Koons**, **John Currin**, **Marc Newson**, and **Cy Twombly**.

New York-based Sundaram Tagore showed his aesthetic ideology with “East/West,” his first exhibition in Hong Kong.

“Our mission is to be at the confluence of cultures on an intellectual basis,” said Tagore, in an interview. “The key word is dialog, bringing people and different art forms together.”

Creations by Western artists such as Susan Weil, the ex-wife of the late **Robert Rauschenberg**, and Nathan Slate Joseph (showing his vividly colored galvanized steel work) are exhibited alongside those by Eastern artists.

Unorthodox

Sohan Qadri's paintings are inspired by his tantric yoga practice and are fetching as much as \$52,000. Hiroshi Senju has also been commercially successful, using an unorthodox mixture of media to create huge waterfall-

like paintings on rice-paper screens; they are priced between \$100,000 and \$350,000.

Tagore said he aims to reach out and educate the community through creative use of his facilities. He has lent his New York gallery to Mongolian dancers, an artist residency program in the Hamptons, and for book launches.

Josef Ng, director of Tang Contemporary, echoed Tagore's idea.

``I hope to open communication in the Hong Kong art world on how to put on an exhibition," said Ng. ``In contemporary art, Hong Kong needs to take a step forward and get serious."

Ng said he wants visitors to understand each show as a whole and be able sell an exhibition, not just a sculpture or a video. Ng realized this ambition in 2006 when he sold a large part of an exhibition called ``Navins of Bollywood" by Navin Rawanchaikul from his Bangkok gallery to the UBS Art Collection.

The current solo exhibition ``Focus - Yin Zhaoyang" shows paintings inspired by Hong Kong.

``People can create a very powerful message," said Burger. ``This is needed in Hong Kong."

(**Julia Tanski** writes on art for Bloomberg news. The opinions expressed are her own.)

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Last Updated: May 27, 2008 12:01 EDT