



ART FAIRS

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# ART ASIA: Intriguing Western Outlook on the Asian Market

James Donald

Watching the developments of the past few months unfold within the Asian Art market has been a source of both tension and excitement. Yet, while much attention has been paid to the recovery of enthusiasm in the East, precious little coverage has been given to the West, which has been left wide open for rising art fair ART ASIA to take the limelight in Miami last year.

In its second year (Dec. 2-6, 2009), ART ASIA has busied itself with establishing a reputation as the unchallenged focal point for contemporary Asian Art collectors in the U.S. Founders Jeffrey Lawson and Alexis Hubshman—who also founded the Scope Art Fairs—have made clear their determination to provide key leadership for Western art enthusiasts of the Asian market.

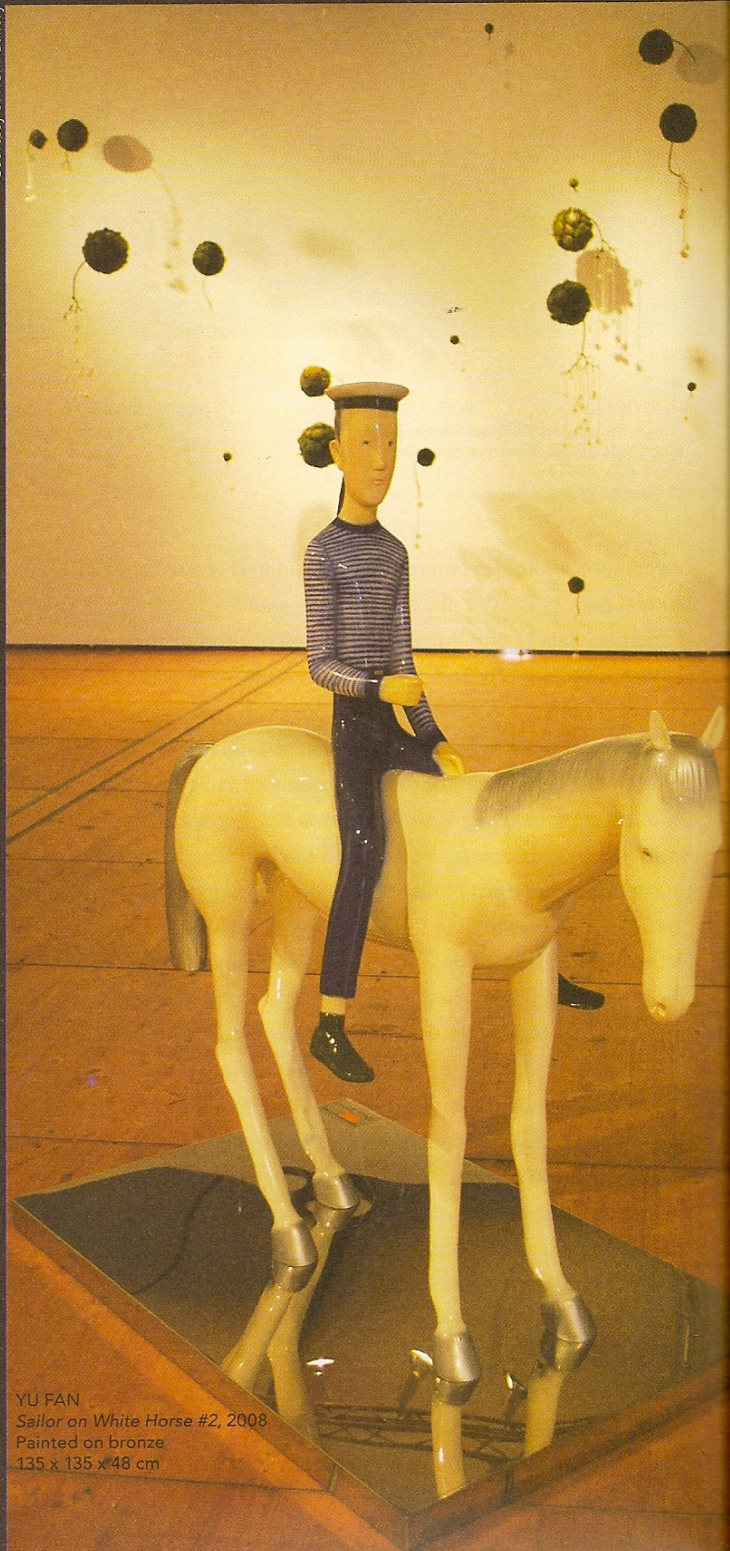
ART ASIA Miami follows on from the preceding ART ASIA Basel 2009, held from June 8 to 14 in Switzerland, also in its second edition. Yet while Basel was well regarded within the context of the uncertain climate lasting up to August, the Miami show also drew momentum from the success of Fall season fairs such as ShContemporary, ArtTaipei and Shanghai Art Fair.

In hindsight, ART ASIA's Miami show could not have been better positioned in the year, which started in a brooding funk, only to dazzle onlookers with a quick recovery during the onset of the Fall season. Held in December 2009, ART ASIA needed only to catch the resurgent wave of Asian Art sales witnessed from August to September, each confirmed with the lucrative results of Sotheby's and Christy's Asian sales, particularly among listed Chinese and Indonesian works, favoring avant-garde pieces between US\$10,000-\$50,000.

ART ASIA Miami 2009 saw healthy numbers, with over 35,000 attendants to see galleries and artists from 15 countries, including Korea, China, Japan, India, Cambodia, Thailand, Lebanon, Pakistan, Taiwan, Albania, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Switzerland, France, and the U.S. Last year's Miami event saw 44 participating galleries from 17 countries flock to the fair's inaugural event, which saw around 30,000 visitors.

There were several factors contributing to the success of ART ASIA Miami this year. Much of its success has correctly been attributed to the resurgence within the market leading up to the fair. However, little attention is paid to other key considerations in its organizational

Courtesy of RCM Gallery



YU FAN  
*Sailor on White Horse #2*, 2008  
Painted on bronze  
135 x 135 x 48 cm



stratification. The fair has been tailored to fit a valuable niche within the global art network. While traditional methods of gallery representation have been forced to contend with the innovations of a new global village, initiatives such as ART ASIA have revealed that the markets of the East and West remain firmly rooted in their own spheres. While the interactive trend becomes excited, so too do the opportunities for middlemen facilitating such exploratory ventures.

Artists such as Yu Fan, Meeson Pae Yang, Danny Lee, and Ran Hwang's *Love Tree*, which sold for \$45,000, were some of the crowd favorites. Sundaram Tagore Gallery's curated show "SIGNS: Contemporary Arab Art" was well received by both visitors and collectors and was cited by Yolande Whitcomb, ART ASIA's global relations representative, as an example of "ART ASIA's commitment to representing a broad range of Asian art." Whitcomb also commented on the favorable outlook toward Southeast Asian art, saying "we see a lot of great Southeast Asian artists emerging and we look forward to welcoming galleries that have a special focus on representing them."

The biggest sales were from Galerie Kashya Hildebrand and Sundaram Tagore Gallery, their sales each bringing close to \$500,000. Meanwhile, according to Whitcomb, total sales at ART ASIA Miami 2009 reached the "multi-million dollar range." When asked about his gallery's performance in ART ASIA this year, Eli Klein, director of the U.S.'s leading gallery in Chinese contemporary art Eli Klein Fine Art said, "we did tremendously at both Art Asia and Art Miami. With the major fairs like Basel and Armory all but excluding Asian focused galleries, the Art Asia fair has quickly become very important."

"The attendance was up and so were the sales," explained Whitcomb. "Many of our galleries reported the number of quality collectors coming through. Several of our returning exhibitors reported a tripling of sales. A newcomer to the fair, Kips Gallery, reported that he sold more at ART ASIA Miami than any other fair that he participated in the past. "ART ASIA in Miami last year really achieved its goal and our mandate of being the leading and only contemporary Asian Art Fair in North America by presenting a range of art that was both unexpected, highly academic and spanned beyond regions that are typically associated with Asian art to incorporate themes and artists from all of Asia rather than just China."

"We presented a well curated fair in which the focus wasn't specifically on Chinese contemporary art—this is important because Asian contemporary art encompasses Korea, Japan, Southeast Asia, Asia Minor etc. We tried to deviate from the standard fair by focusing on educational platforms—educating people about Asian contemporary art as a whole. People were very responsive and many visitors also told us they've enjoyed ART ASIA more than any other fair because it is focused and the art is 'fresh and exciting.'"

ART ASIA co-founder Jeffrey Lawson explained to *C-Arts* in a rare interview that the fair prided itself on its eclectic range of art from under-exposed regions such as Central Asia and the Middle East. "A lot of collectors in Miami are still unfamiliar with Asian art and so ART ASIA is very exciting to them. They are eager to learn about Asian contemporary art as well. Miami also has a large concentration of younger collectors. Miami during December has several major fairs and together we can attract the largest concentration of collectors all over the world. Furthermore ART ASIA is currently the only fair in North America dedicated to promoting Asian contemporary art so of course it makes sense for us to choose Miami during December."

▼  
Right:  
HWANG RAN  
*Dreaming of Joy*, 2009  
Thread, pins, crystal on panel  
180 x 240 cm

Left:  
VALAY SHENDE  
*Scooter*, 2007  
Gold plated metal discs  
112 x 178 x 70 cm

Courtesy of ART ASIA







AHMAD MOUALLA, *Untitled*, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 70 x 118 inches



▲ ▼  
Preview of ART ASIA Miami 2009

"Asian contemporary art is still new for many people and most do lack formal education on the history and development of Asian contemporary art. For our inaugural fair, we had a very focused lecture series that had key speakers like Professor Wu Hung, Dr. Desai from Asia Society, Melissa Chiu and Jerome Sans etc. This year rather than a lecture series, we appointed Leeza Ahmady to curate an exhibition that acts as an education platform."

Fair curator Leeza Ahmady's educational exhibition *Truly Truthful* aims at challenging categorical presentations of "truth" and "reality" in the world. Featuring a lineup selected through nominations by experts in the field, including some members of the Asian Contemporary Art Consortium (ACAC), and Asian Contemporary Art Week (ACAW), Ahmady introduces the initiative as an attempt to establish "a platform that reflects the diversity of artists' backgrounds and practices, dispelling the idea that Asian contemporary art is comprised of works from a single region." Ahmady is an Afghan-born New York-based independent curator and Director of Asian Contemporary Art Week at the Asia Society.

ART ASIA has continued for its second year to provide resources to access understanding of Asian Art in both Europe and the U.S. And while being the only Asian art fair in North America affords them a variety of latitudes in experimentation in their pioneering endeavor, the utter lack of competition has elucidated more than ever the level of ignorance toward Asian art that has existed in the region. One can only hope the success of ART ASIA can serve as a wakeup call to art lovers on both sides of the Pacific and stimulate future curiosity and intercultural understanding.

James Donald is a New York-born Melbourneite and is currently working in Taipei as entertainment and arts editor at Taiwan's English language daily *The China Post*

