

What's caught our eye at Art Basel Hong Kong and Art Central

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Art fairs of the calibre of Art Basel Hong Kong offer a unique opportunity to glimpse an annual overview of the worldwide art market and its interests.

However, fairs at this heady level rarely capture the world's other concerns, largely forgoing contentious issues such as the rise of populism, Donald Trump and his policies, regional tensions, intolerance of refugees, terrorism, Brexit and a possible European Union breakup. None of these were much glimpsed around Art Basel's exhibition halls.

[Shock and awe: first impressions of Art Basel Hong Kong 2017](#) [1]

Art Central, in a large tent on the Central reclamation, has fewer pretensions, and, though much of the art was decorative, offered glimpses of political and social concern in its organised talks and performances.

Richard Koh Fine Art from Kuala Lumpur featured a diverse line-up. Anne Samat's "Huntsman" series replicated a wacky tribal wall hanging, but used kitchen utensils, beads, woven cloth, rattan sticks and common knick-knacks. Kuala Lumpur-based Haffendi Anuar's enamel-on-board paintings created a

3D effect using conventional geometric patterns.



Selections from Anne Samat's "Huntsman" series. Photo: John Batten

Chinese University fine arts teacher Frank Vigneron's continuing series of geometric drawings were presented as beautiful three-panel retablos at Lucie Chang's booth.

A subtle public space intervention was New Zealander Glen Hayward's *Everyday People*, presented by Paul Nache Gallery and featuring hand-carved wooden snails and nails "hammered" into a corridor wall, creating an incongruous but pleasing perspective as people passed by.

Over at Art Basel, Asia Art Archive strove to display one source of artistic endeavour. One hundred artists were asked to name a book that was an inspiration for their work. Philosophy and art theory books led the choices.

However, South Korean collective Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries gave a tongue-in-cheek answer by nominating Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends & Influence People*. They realised that all of the qualities Carnegie identifies to be successful – being positive, pleasant, conversational and agreeable – were those they did not have, and “that’s when it hit us that we had all the failings – sorry, qualities – necessary for the life of the artist”.

[Global sales of art fell 11pc in 2016, new report says, and dealers at Art Basel see fewer Chinese collectors this year \[2\]](#)

The book and literary theme continued throughout the art fair.

At Goodman Gallery, South African William Kentridge's short stop-animation video *Soft Dictionary* saw him flipping through an old dictionary featuring his characteristic hand-written text and drawings, with word plays. “Slaughter”, for instance, morphs a few pages later to “laughter”; likewise “s/mother”. Images of African dictators flash on screen, significant dates are noted, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping appear. The video is a 164-second summary of the significant influence of the 1960s Maoist revolution in Africa, now replaced by the soft power of Chinese investment.

At Mind Set Art Center's booth, Taiwan artist Shi Jin-hua's impressive *A 100km Walk* showed two 10-metre-long canvases. On one canvas he drew, back and forth, 100km of pencil lines; resulting in a dense and luminously layered durational drawing. He walked over the other canvas, and the resulting fine graphite particles as he drew were “caught” by his shoes and organically worked into that canvas. The two canvases, created between 2012 and 2017, were presented with a jar of used pencil stubs, a

video, a framed artist's statement, and the worn shoes.



Shi Jin-hua's *A 100km Walk* features 100km of pencil lines that he walked across wearing the shoes above. Photo: John Batten

Likewise, in *Gallery Exit*, Kong Chun-hei's *Stuff XI* is a carefully copied ink drawing of a large piece of crumpled paper, but stronger is the impression – captured like a photograph – of not just the wrinkled

paper, but the endurance of artistic effort.



Kong Chun-hei's *Stuff XI*. Photo: John Batten

Many galleries exhibited excellent examples of Anish Kapoor sculptures and Jean Dubuffet paintings, while Michael Werner Gallery showed two great abstract inverted head paintings made by Georg Baselitz in the mid-'80s. Hauser & Wirth showed Philip Guston's contorted 1979 painting *Forms on*

Rock Ledge and recent mixed-media flotsam by Phyllida Barlow, who will represent Britain at the



coming Venice Biennale. Phyllida Barlow's *Untitled: Standup 1 and 3*. Photo: John Batten

Galerie du Monde showed an excellent overview of the Fifth Moon Group of modern Chinese ink painters, led by Liu Kuo-sung and featuring a refreshing display of historical photographs and memorabilia of these modern artists.

Known for its decades-long support for landscape ink painting works, Hanart TZ Gallery intentionally presented a booth of landscape paintings featuring other media. Emily Cheng's acrylic paintings include chakra and meridian lines in abstracted landscapes, serving as delicate cosmic interpretations

of the physical world. Feng Mengbo uses the unusual combination of tempera and digital imagery, replete with cracks, to build conventional landscape-genre paintings.

Sundaram Tagore Gallery showed Singaporean Jane Lee's paintings of violently syringed, dripped and spread slashes of paint. Impossibly thick, the canvases are specially shaped to give an impression of great paint thickness. They are hypnotically chaotic and wonderfully messy – the paint seemingly wanting to ooze out of the confines of the stretched canvas, the gallery booth and the art fair itself. Taipei's TKG+ displayed Joyce Ho's videos, kinetic sculpture and mixed-media work that complemented her installation in the public section of the fair.





Kinetic installation Pull Me Up Softly by Joyce Ho propels a pair of red boots upward, then lets them free-fall and disappear from view when observed from afar. Photo: John Batten

Photography was not as prominent this year, but Naoyoshi Hikosaka's photographic documentation of his 1970 latex-paint pouring performance *Floor Event No 1*, shown at the booth of Misa Shin Gallery, was a fascinating slice of significant performance history. Hikosaka poured latex over the tatami floor of his apartment and continued living there over the following 10 days as it dried. These photographs document the original performance, which was repeated in other settings during the '70s.

As people leave Art Basel, they pass the Trade Development Council's Design Shop, in whose windows are a series of photographs titled "Stylish Hong Kong", with such captions as "High-level view of Hong Kong from Prince's Building". Reality hits a few steps farther: the doors to Immigration Tower are closed, and a line of sitting domestic helpers start to queue for the overnight wait to secure a next-day immigration appointment. With a blink of the eye, they could be Syrian refugees, or from anywhere, awaiting an asylum interview.

Fortunately, artists can be critically cutting of themselves and the illusion of pretension, promotion, marketing, advertising – all that an art fair embraces. They're illusions we all inhabit alongside the stark realities of life.

In American Barbara Kruger's *Untitled (Project for Dazed and Confused)*, she cuts to the core, with text on the piece stating, "I'm very serious. I'm brilliant and beautiful. Too beautiful for you. I'm looking into the distance, away from you. I'm thinking important thoughts. Things you can't quite grasp. Someday, you'll understand."

Topics: Art Basel 2017

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[2] <https://www.scmp.com/culture/arts-entertainment/article/2081202/global-sales-art-fell-11pc-2016-new-report-says-and>