

## INTERNATIONAL ARTS

# Art Basel Hong Kong: The Reviews Are In

By AMY QIN MARCH 18, 2015

HONG KONG — The busiest week on Hong Kong's contemporary art calendar drew to a close on Tuesday with the conclusion of the third edition of Art Basel Hong Kong, Asia's most prominent contemporary art fair. Any lingering concerns about the change in the fair's dates — moved up from May to March, and starting on Friday instead of Wednesday — were addressed during the brief, three-hour V.I.P. preview on the first day, with what many veteran attendees said were larger-than-usual crowds of wealthy collectors and delegations from major art institutions around the world.

About 60,000 visitors swarmed through the white-walled booths, slightly less than the 65,000 who attended last year, in part because the fair was open to the public for one less day. Adding a bit of star power to the event were celebrities like Susan Sarandon, Gwyneth Paltrow, Wendi Deng and Dita Von Teese.

"This year especially we've seen a lot more action, a lot more interaction, and a lot more interest from local and regional collectors in less-established names," said Larkin Erdmann, director at the Massimo de Carlo Gallery of Milan and London.

Buyers at the fair appeared to be enthusiastic from the start. Within the first hour of the show, David Zwirner of New York sold a work by the British artist Chris Ofili, who was the subject of a 2014 survey exhibition at the New Museum. The large-scale piece, "Dead Monkey — Sex, Money and Drugs," from 2000, was bought by a new client for \$2 million.

By the end of the second day of the invitation-only preview, Hauser & Wirth had sold two paintings by Atsuko Tanaka to the Karuizawa New Art Museum in Japan for between \$400,000 and \$600,000 each, and eight paintings by the Chinese artist Zhang Enli for between \$250,000 and \$350,000 each, among others.

White Cube, which has an outpost in Hong Kong, sold one of Damien Hirst's Black Scalpel Blade cityscapes of Shanghai for about \$1.2 million, while

White Space of Beijing reported that 70 percent of its works sold within the first two days, including several works by the young Chinese conceptual artist He Xiangyu.

But despite the early sales, many galleries noted the tendency of Asian buyers to warm up to the works before buying, a sharp contrast to the fair's sister editions in Switzerland and Miami, where collectors often come in knowing exactly what they want.

"We've always found Hong Kong to be a fair where we expect things to happen until the end," said Ellie Harrison-Read of Lisson Gallery. "It's good because it keeps the momentum going."

Many galleries expressed surprised at the especially strong showing of mainland Chinese collectors. At David Zwirner, two Chinese collectors spent \$1 million each on two separate works by the German artist Neo Rauch, who was on hand at the booth.

Eslite Gallery in Taipei reported that several works by the Chinese artist Xu Bing sold to Asian collectors for unspecified amounts.

David Chau, a young collector in Shanghai, said the overall quality of work at the fair improved this year. Western galleries in particular, he said, are responding to the increasingly sophisticated taste of Asian collectors by bringing better works, compared with past years when the work was often "secondary or not very good."

At the end of the fair, A.M. Space, a local gallery, had one last available work, which was on reserve for M+, the Hong Kong museum set to open in 2018. For its inaugural Art Basel Hong Kong booth, the gallery presented a solo exhibition by Samson Young, a local artist.

In one piece, "Pastoral Music," Mr. Young drew on his background in music composition to present a visual and sound installation exploring the history of Hong Kong's involvement in World War II and the concept of the role of the artist in warfare, more generally.

This year's fair helped further cement Art Basel Hong Kong's reputation as a convener of East and West, juxtaposing emerging Asian artists with established Western artists and drawing buyers from both regions.

The scene at the Galerie Gmurzynska booth one afternoon gave a sense of that blended identity. Perusing the booth at once were Joan Punyet Miró, a grandson of the Catalan painter Joan Miró; the Hong Kong style icon Bonnie Gokson; and Melissa Chiu, the director of the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington. By the end of the fair, the gallery had sold a number of works,

including paintings by Wifredo Lam for between \$150,000 and \$300,000 and a work by Fernando Botero, which sold for \$1.2 million in the minutes before closing.

“It’s an extraordinary moment,” said Ms. Chiu, who once was the director of the Asia Society Museum in New York. “Whereas contemporary art was once exclusive to a small coterie of collectors that were really centered in places like New York or London, now it’s very much a global phenomenon.” Art Basel Hong Kong and its auxiliary events, she added, have helped bring that about.

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