

*The Churchgoing Satanist (Earplugs)* by Hernan Bas, 2012.

# Fine China

LAST YEAR'S LAUNCH OF ART BASEL HONG KONG PUT THE WASHINGTON ART COMMUNITY'S FOCUS ON THE EAST. THIS YEAR, THE FAIR ELEVATES THE STANDARD OF CREATIVE EXCELLENCE—DAZZLING DC AND THE WORLD. BY SUE HOSTETLER

In just a few short years, Hong Kong has been transformed from a city that many considered a cultural desert to the fourth-largest global market for contemporary art, according to Artprice, an art market information source, with more than \$130 million sold in 2013, partially due to record-setting auctions and the rise of billionaire art collectors in China. As recently as 2008, there were no major art fairs, but the visionaries behind the powerful Art Basel shows in Switzerland and Miami Beach helped push the cultural renaissance forward last year when they debuted Art Basel in Hong Kong.

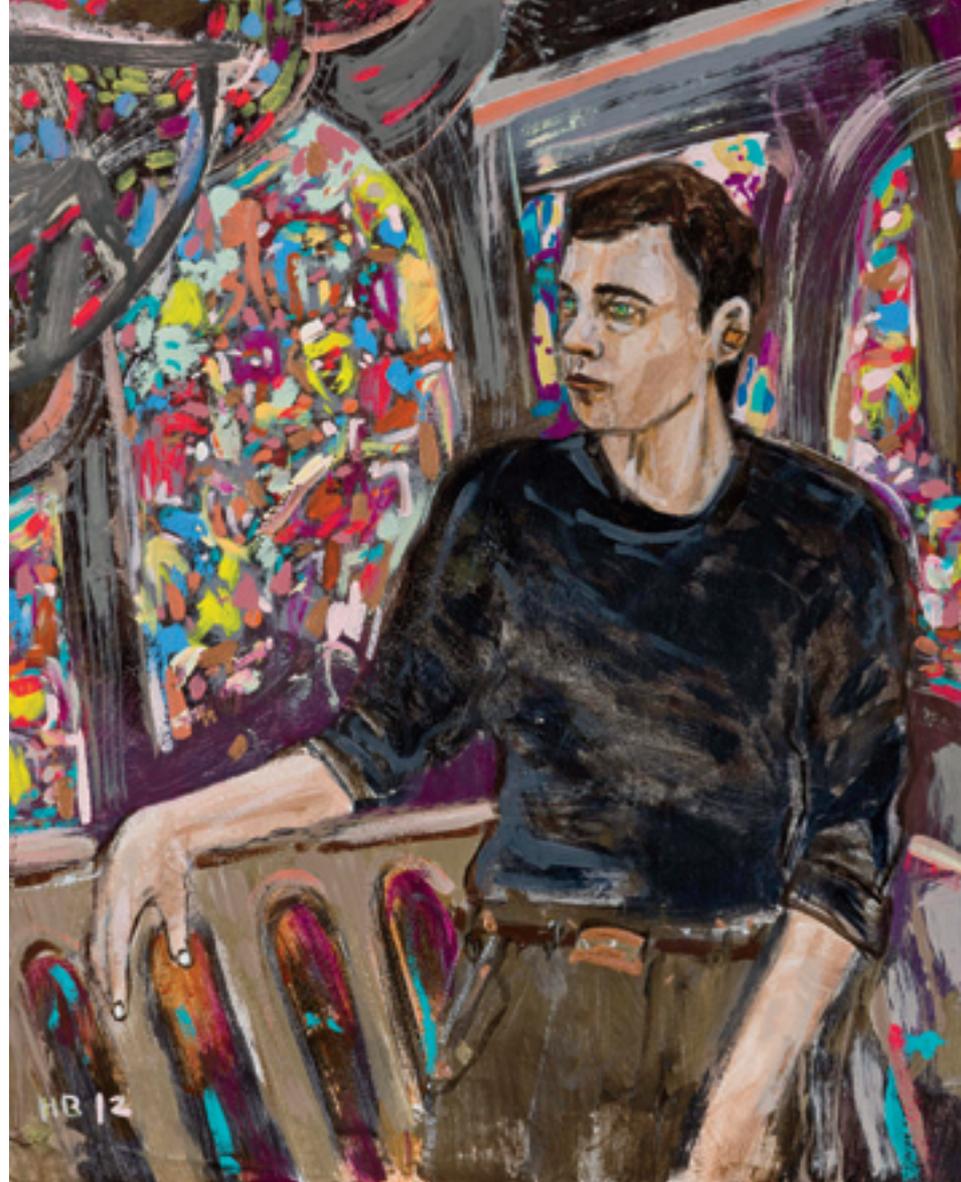
This second annual art fair in Asia—which opens May 15 and features a slate of 245 of the world's most influential galleries from 39 countries—will help add even more international credibility and exposure to the Asian art market. “Every fair has its own mission and vision,” says show director Magnus Renfrew. “Art Basel in Hong Kong aspires to provide a fair for Asia of global stature and the highest quality while retaining its unique regional

“The highlight is being part of that experience of discovery when collectors come to know artists they have not yet seen.”

—MAGNUS RENFREW



FROM ABOVE LEFT: The fair will be held at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, set against the city skyline and Victoria Harbour; show director Magnus Renfrew.



flavor. Hong Kong has long been regarded as the portal connecting the East and the West. It is a major financial hub and as such is designed to allow for more professional and efficient transactions.”

This year's show will continue the strong programming that is a hallmark of the two other Art Basel shows. The Discoveries sector, which is dedicated to solo and two-person exhibitions by emerging artists, is shaping up to be particularly exceptional. A \$25,000 prize will be awarded to one of nearly 30 participants of this sector at the end of the week, a unique element of ABHK that is not seen at other fairs. Much preshow buzz has surrounded the funky Irish gallery Mother's Tankstation and its presentation of the work of Sydney-based artist Noel McKenna, whose figurative pieces contemplate the human condition and make him one to watch in Discoveries.

Also creating excitement is the Encounters sector—featuring large-scale sculptural and installation pieces—curated by Japan's Yuko Hasegawa of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo. “Last year Yuko's selection spurred a compelling discourse around contrasting generational and cultural approaches to artistic practices,” says Renfrew. “I have confidence that her program this year will again present ambitious works that act as conversation points throughout the exhibition halls.”

And one of Miami's most beloved events—the Film sector—will debut in Hong Kong this year, developed by Chinese multimedia artist and curator Li Zhenhua and hosted in partnership with the Hong Kong Arts Centre.

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Chinese artist Zhen Chen created a unique installation for last year's Art Basel Hong Kong.

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Such collaborations with local institutions help Art Basel recognize, support, and promote the exploding contemporary art scene in Hong Kong. Not only is the government pouring billions of dollars into developing a cultural district in West Kowloon, but the new M+, an ambitious Herzog & de Meuron–designed museum slated for completion in 2017, further illustrates Hong Kong's commitment to its future support of the visual arts. But maybe the most significant indicator is the number of respected western galleries, like Gagosian, White Cube, and Lehmann Maupin, which have opened Hong Kong outposts in the past few years. These dealers, along with influential homegrown stalwarts such as 10 Chancery Lane, Galerie Ora-Ora, and Pearl Lam, are instrumental in developing and nurturing the careers of artists and collections in the region.

According to Renfrew, these relationships with the local galleries and institutions (including Asia Art Archive, Para/Site, the Asia Society, and Spring Workshop) are imperative to Art Basel Hong Kong as they create a show “grounded in the city.” “We want to promote long-term arts infrastructure development and encourage associated programming across the city,” says Renfrew. “The growth of Hong Kong's museum sector and contemporary arts education will truly impact the larger discourse in the city, and that is something that we aim—through long-term partnerships—to cultivate.”

The fair's impact and thematic reach are sure to be much broader than just the Asian region. One needs to look no further than the talks planned as part of the Conversations and Salon programs. A discussion titled the “Global Art World/Making Biennials” will feature luminaries Juliana Engberg, artistic director of the 2014 Biennale of Sydney and artistic director of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art; Eungie Joo, curator of the 2015 Sharjah Biennial; and Jessica Morgan, artistic director of the 10th Gwangju Biennale and the Daskalopoulos curator of international art at Tate Modern—moderated by Hou Hanru, artistic director at Maxxi Museum in Rome. “This is a conversation that has real international relevancy, reflecting the transitional reality of today's art world,” explains Renfrew. Programming such as this, coupled with a rapidly maturing Asian art market and the resurgence of Chinese art exhibitions across the US, will undoubtedly help draw record numbers of highly informed collectors to the fair this month.

With so much anticipation building around the fair, what does Renfrew most look forward to? “The highlight is exposing new audiences to the depth of work from the broader Asian region and being part of that



experience of discovery when collectors come to know artists they have not yet seen... or when curators have an opportunity to join in dialogue with artists whose work they have long followed.” *Art Basel in Hong Kong takes place May 15–18; visit [artbasel.com/en/Hong-Kong](http://artbasel.com/en/Hong-Kong). CF*

## EAST MEETS WEST

*Andrea Pollan, founder and director of Curator's Office in DC, talks of the booming Chinese art scene and its resonance here at home.*

**Is there a distinctly contemporary Asian aesthetic?** For artists who engage in more specific attributes of their Asian culture (calligraphy or landscape traditions), I have heard that Western audiences are very receptive but that Asian contemporary markets are more interested in a Westernized aesthetic. A work that looks “too Asian” may be deemed too provincial and not global (read: sophisticated) enough by an Asian market.

**How would you compare the Asian art community with that of the US?** A young curator from Hong Kong told me the artists there felt overshadowed by the art worlds of

Beijing and Shanghai. So Hong Kong's artist community and market may resemble some of the lesser-known art markets in the US like Baltimore [and] Washington, DC.

**Has China's increased interest in buying its own art spurred Western interest in art from the East?** China's interest in buying its own art is motivated by a political mandate and an ambition to reconstruct a cultural history. Of course, markets always follow other burgeoning markets that are perceived to be successful, but bubbles frequently follow. We are seeing that in certain [Asian] sectors.