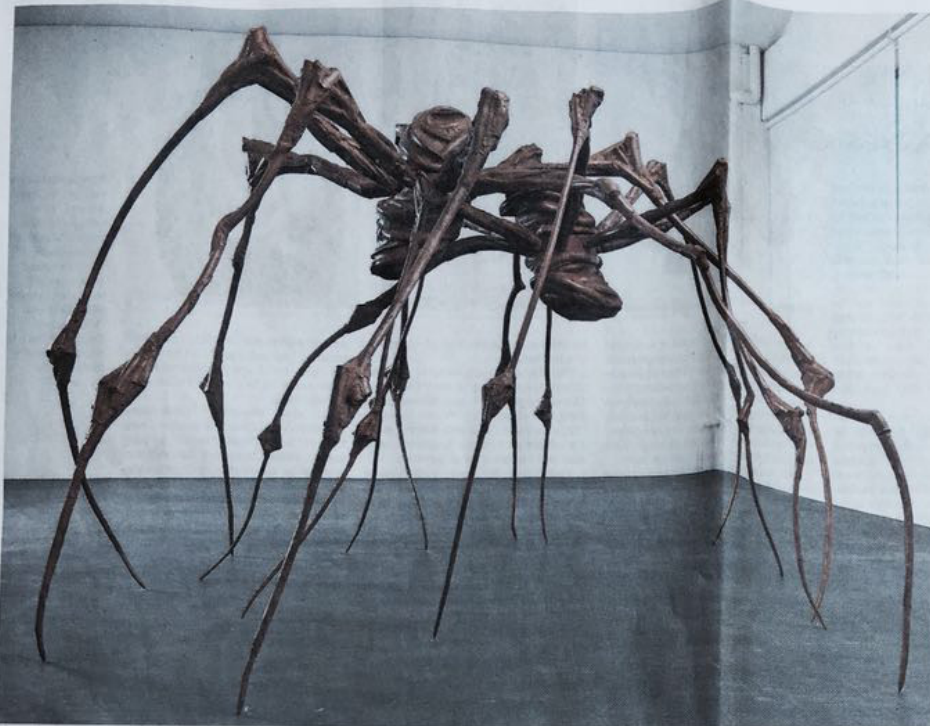


THE ART OF COLLECTING

Art Basel in Hong Kong



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: CHRISTOPHER BURKE/THE EASTON FOUNDATION, LICENSED BY YAGA, NEW YORK; PIERRE LE HOU/ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY, NEW YORK; STELLA ZHANG AND GALERIE DU MONDE



Asian emergence
The works at Art Basel in Hong Kong will include, clockwise from left, "Spider Couple" by Louise Bourgeois (2003); "Saturn Time" (2015) by Matthew Ritchie; and sculptural paintings from Stella Zhang.



Embracing the spotlight

Art Basel in Hong Kong, with its 239 galleries, is attracting a global crowd

BY TED LOOS

For art galleries around the world, one of the most desired and elusive clients is the jet-setting Asian collector.

Hailing from China, or possibly from Japan or South Korea, this buyer has good taste, extraordinary means and, best of all, probably represents fresh business, given that the art market in the region is still relatively new.

The No. 1 place to find a room chock full of this species is the fourth edition of Art Basel in Hong Kong, the fair that runs March 24 to 26 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center. Some 239 galleries will be on hand, and about half of those have a branch somewhere in Asia.

"When I arrived here, over 40 years ago, there was no arts scene to speak of," said Fred Scholle, the founder of Galerie du Monde, one of the oldest contemporary spaces in Hong Kong. "A lot has happened, and Art Basel has really put Hong Kong in the spotlight and helped make it an art hub."

Galerie du Monde is exhibiting the sculptural paintings of Stella Zhang, made with ink, charcoal and fabric, at the Insights sector of the fair, consisting of 28 presentations of contemporary Asian art. "If you're coming to Hong Kong for the first time, and you're keen to know Asian art, go to Insights," said Adeline Ooi, Art Basel's director for

Asia. Ms. Ooi, who is from Kuala Lumpur and now lives in Hong Kong, is in her second year on the job.

The fair's scope means collectors, and even window-shoppers, are advised to start with a sector, theme or other organizing principle. "This year there's also a very strong Japanese element at the fair," Ms. Ooi said. "You're seeing a breadth and depth of works, from the early modern of late 1920s and 30s, through the 20th century and up to contemporary people like Yayoi Kusama."

The booth of Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, for example, will concentrate on post-war Japanese artists like Masunobu Yoshimura and Kishio Suga.

"Asia has enormous economic potential, but not a super-long history of galleries."

Repeat visitors to the fair can see new works on different days if they circle back to the booth of the New York dealer Tina Kim, who shares a space with the Kukje Gallery in Seoul, run by her family. "We take a lot more than we can hang," Ms. Kim said. "We change the booth every day since we have such a wide program." The Dansaekhwa movement, a style of monochromatic painting in Korea, will be one focus, including the works of Ha Chong-Hyun and Lee Ufan.

Over all, the dealer participation at the fair is truly global. This edition of Art Basel in Hong Kong features the first-ever participation of a gallery with a North African space, Selma Ferriani Gallery, with a branch in Tunisia.

"There's a strong surge in the quality

of Western galleries this year," said Marc Spiegler, the global head of Art Basel, which also has editions in Basel, Switzerland, and Miami. Heavyweight newcomers to the Hong Kong edition include Metro Pictures of New York. "It reflects the fact that Asia is important, and one thing this fair does well is deliver new people into booths," Mr. Spiegler said. "Asia has enormous economic potential, but not a super-long history of galleries."

He added that despite the turbulent currency fluctuations and stock markets in China over the past year, he did not envision the demand for art being affected.

The Western galleries that attend Art Basel in Hong Kong are strategic about

what they show.

"We try to bring artists who have had institutional support in Asia," said Andrea Rosen, an art dealer in New York, who is bringing her gallery to the fair for the second time this year. "It's not so much that the artists are Asian, but there has been some kind of presence in the region prior to the fair." Her booth will feature the work of Simon Fujiwara, Yoko Ono and Matthew Ritchie, among others.

Ms. Rosen added that she did not expect to see her usual clients, and that this was the whole point of exhibiting there. "I like to do fairs where there's a different audience for me," she said. "That's one of things I like about Hong Kong: You're there evolving new relationships."

The gallery Hauser & Wirth came up

with a motif that may have resonance for Asian buyers, including works from the estates of four major artists: Louise Bourgeois, Alexander Calder, Philip Guston and David Smith.

"There's a direct theme: the spider," said Neil Wenman, a London-based director of Hauser & Wirth. "It's quite curious to think that all of them did spider-related works. And as it turns out, it's quite an auspicious symbol in Chinese culture." The spider is a good-luck symbol known as the happy insect.

Bourgeois's monumental bronze sculpture "Spider Couple" (2003) and Guston's oil painting "To J.S." (1977) are among the works, and the booth will also have unrelated pieces by contemporary artists like Rifa Ackermann.

The gallery Ink Studio is showing at the fair for the first time this year, and its organization reflects the lack of national boundaries that is becoming par for the course in the art market. Its physical space is in Beijing, but its founding directors are Americans who live in the United States. "Every time we applied for the fair, we were told we were too young," said Craig Yee, one of the three people that run Ink Studio, founded in 2013. Mr. Yee, who lives in Seattle, was speaking on the phone from Mumbai.

The gallery is showing the work of the Chinese painter Li Huasheng, well known in his country for using traditional techniques like ink brushing for abstract ends. "He realized that the Chinese landscape tradition was never about landscapes," Mr. Yee said. "It was an excuse to paint the state of mind of the artist."