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'The Hong Kong art fair reaches out to the wider world'

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The Buddhist-inspired work "Three Heads Six Arms" by the Chinese artist Zhang Huan is on display along the harbor through June.

HONG KONG

The annual event is now under the umbrella of the Art Basel group

BY JOYCE HOR-CHUNG LAU

It's no surprise that Hong Kong's art fair has taken another bound forward, given its quick growth since it began in 2008. But the rising number of galleries taking part — now at 260 — is not the only reason that 2011 is turning out to be a watershed year.

Internationally, the owners of Art Basel are now majority stakeholders in the Hong Kong event, it was announced at the start of May, a turn that promises to give the fair more prominence.

Locally, ART HK, which opened to the public on Thursday, has spread beyond the confines of the exhibition and convention center. The large number of outside events has created for a first time what feels like a real citywide art week. The fair has already succeeded in

pulling in top galleries and orchestrating million-dollar sales of works by celebrity artists like Damien Hirst. The Hong Kong market is awash in cash, particularly that of newly moneyed collectors from China and other parts of Asia. Auction houses are getting into the act too.

Christie's is the most prominent among them, and has a casual partnership with ART HK to hold its spring auctions in the same venue, at about the same time. From now until June 1 at the convention center, Christie's will have

Galleries and auction houses flock to a market awash in cash.

13 sales of art, antiques, wines, watches and jewels. Other companies, particularly smaller Asian auction houses, are following suit, with sales planned at hotels around town.

Local galleries also have waited for this week to open new spaces or major shows.

Hanart TZ Gallery — run since 1983 by Johnson Chang, an established deal-

er of contemporary Chinese art — opened its new space on Tuesday with a ribbon cutting by David Tang, the founder of Shanghai Tang, the luxury goods chain, who has been a busy man. The day before, Mr. Tang had opened a show for 10 Chancery Lane Gallery, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary. Both galleries are participating in the fair.

New galleries are also using this week to raise their profiles.

The most booked man in town seems to be David LaChapelle. This week, Mr. LaChapelle, the New York fashion and art photographer, unveiled a 3-meter, or about 10-foot, collage inspired by Géricault's "Raft of the Medusa" for his first Hong Kong solo show at de Sarthe Fine Arts, which opened in March. Mr. LaChapelle then held a private film screening, served as host for a party at a nightclub called Privé, and showed up at a Champagne breakfast a few hours later. On Friday, he will be debating whether art must be beautiful at Intelligence Squared, a British debating association.

ART FAIR, PAGE 13



Some 260 galleries are represented at the Hong Kong fair, which opened on Thursday.

Hong Kong art fair reaches out into the world

ART FAIR, FROM PAGE 12

Edouard Malingue Gallery, which opened late last year, worked with the Pace Gallery of New York this month to install a massive Buddhist-inspired sculpture by the Chinese artist Zhang Huan at a harborside hotel and shopping complex. "Three Heads Six Arms" will be showing in the courtyard outside the complex, Hullett House, a renovated 18th-century colonial building, through the end of June.

But the main buzz has been over the buyout of Asian Art Fairs, ART HK's owners, by the MCH Swiss Exhibition Group, though the deal will not be official until July. The Basel-based company said that it would keep the local management basically intact through 2012. The only immediate change will be moving ART HK from its May slot to February, to fit in nicely between Art Basel's events in Miami Beach, usually each December, and in Basel, Switzer-

land, each June.

Marc Spiegler, a co-director of the two Art Basel events, said by telephone from Switzerland that the goal was to have "three events on the arts calendar covering four continents, with Art Basel Miami Beach representing both North and Latin America."

"We are not interesting in just copying and pasting the same fair in three locations," he said. "Along with greater interest from China, we are looking at many rising art markets from Australia and New Zealand, to Singapore and Indonesia." Mr. Spiegler said. "The Asian market is developing so quickly, it's hard to say what it's going to look like in five years."

Annette Schönholzer, another co-director, added that the Hong Kong fair would eventually be rebranded as an Art Basel event.

"Art Basel's involvement will bring unparalleled expertise and contacts

that will take ART HK to a new level," said Magnus Renfrew, ART HK's director. "It will make us the third most important art fair in the world."

There was unprecedented interest in ART HK, even before the Art Basel announcement, he said. "We were inundated with about 500 gallery applications and only accepted about half," Mr. Renfrew said. "And while there are big

The main buzz is the buyout of the Asian fair by Art Basel.

names from New York and London, we've made sure to preserve the Asian flavor of the fair."

One new feature at the fair this year will be the Asia One section, with 47 galleries representing a dozen nations, from the Turkey to India, Japan to New Zealand. "Because Asia One will consist of solo shows, it will give viewers, par-

ticularly collectors from the West, a more in-depth view of what is on offer," Mr. Renfrew said.

Corporate interest has not lagged, either. DeutscheBank, a longtime sponsor, continues to be involved with the fair. Then there are quirkier offerings from companies like BMW, which is bringing in a Jeff Koons-decorated "art car," or the Mandarin Oriental, which has afternoon tea cakes co-designed by the Chinese artist Zhou Tiehai.

G.O.D., the upscale local retail chain that specializes in homewares and interiors, created the fair's V.I.P. lounge. And if you can't afford the minimum entrance fee of 7,500 Hong Kong dollars, or \$960, for a group of five, you can hang out with the plebeians at the Veuve Clicquot Champagne bar next door.

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