

East, west and points in between

Super-curator Yuko Hasegawa's flair for fusing cultures and disciplines is ideally suited to Hong Kong

By Caroline Roux, 17.05.2013 Financial Times Online



©Hisashi Kumon

Yuko Hasegawa

Horizontal: it's one of curator Yuko Hasegawa's preferred words, though she is anything but. When we catch up over Skype in the week before Art Basel in Hong Kong, it's 10.30pm in Tokyo, and Hasegawa, in fluent English, launches into an energetic discussion on the shifting geopolitical and cultural landscape and what this means to the wider art world. "Different methodologies, different cultural ideas, and a horizontal approach," she says, leaving the high v low and east v west orthodoxy trailing in her wake.

Hasegawa is one of the contemporary art world's global super-curators, popping up everywhere from São Paulo to Kiev, ushering artists from everywhere into a position that she hopes runs counter to what she calls the "west-centrism of knowledge in modern times". In March this meant assembling the work of more than 100 artists and architects (a third of them from the Middle East) for the 11th Sharjah Biennale in the United Arab Emirates. She included critical work, such as a piece by the young Saudi Sara Abu Abdallah of a veiled girl staring at a written-off car. "It's the nearest a Saudi woman will ever get to having a car," explained Abu Abdallah at the time. "Icons of Christianity are taboo there," says Hasegawa, "and nudity and pornography. But politically, it's very free. I was surprised."

ARNOT

Last year for Art Hong Kong (which has since become Art Basel in Hong Kong following its acquisition by Art Basel owner MCH), she curated a Projects programme of larger-scale work. This year it is reprised as Encounters, with 17 galleries delivering weighty installations that will appear in two piazzas that have been designed into each floor of the fair by architect Tom Postma. While these works – which include a series of brightly coloured acrylic boxes by New York-based Brit Liam Gillick, a Venetian blind installation by the Korean Haegue Yang, and a suspended sculpture by Beijing-based Wang Yuyang, who has been known to create vast spheres from energy-saving lightbulbs – are for sale, their presence is equally intended to widen the visitors' vision and liven up the show. Magnus Renfrew, one of the fair's four directors, says: "In a relatively new market like Hong Kong, it's important to show the full perspective of what art can be."



'Visibility is a Trap' (2013) by Laurent Grasso

This is all extracurricular for Hasegawa. She has a full-time job as chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo (MOT) and is professor of curatorial and art theory at the city's Tama Art University. At the museum she has just presided over the opening of an exhibition of the Mexico-based Belgian artist Francis Alÿs, and is working on an autumn show that will blur the boundaries between art and design.

ARNDT



'Complete Bin Developments' (2013) by Liam Gillick

"I'm interested in cross-disciplinary work. I'll be working with 25 to 30 artists and designers with a focus on how data and information can be visualised," she says. Among them will be Ryoji Ikeda, a Japanese musician/artist/mathematician who creates challenging imagery and music out of binary code. "I'm less concerned with art historical positions and more interested in creating a platform," she says.



Jitish Kallat's 'Allegory of the Unfolding Sky' (2012)

Hasegawa has been a name to reckon with since the late 1990s – she was on the jury of the Venice Biennale in 1999 – but made her mark with the 21st Century Museum of

ARNOT

Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, Japan, where she was chief curator and founding artistic director from 1999 to 2006. She commissioned the Japanese architects Sanaa to create the museum's exquisite circular glass building, and introduced 10 site-specific installations by artists including James Turrell and Anish Kapoor that are integrated into the architecture.

Since its opening in 2004, Kanazawa has been an extraordinary success (and also put Sanaa on the international architectural map). "Everything there is horizontal," says Hasegawa. "There are no borders. The museum is a part of the city and the city is a part of the museum. People come as though they're visiting a shopping mall. They don't know anything about contemporary art. In Japan, there is not such a hierarchical divide. High and low culture are on the same plane."



'La Rite Suspendue/Mouille' (1991) by Chen Zhen

It's this that has drawn her to Hong Kong, where last year she sat on the advisory board of the HK\$21bn West Kowloon Cultural District project, which by 2018 will deliver a new arts complex to the city. "In Hong Kong and mainland China, people don't have much opportunity to see big institutional presentations. In Hong Kong until now there's been little cultural provision, though the film industry is really important. That's the local culture. If I make the right selections for Encounters, it will really expose people to this kind of work. People come to the art fair out of curiosity, and it's an open entry point."

Hasegawa's curation of Encounters does, in fact, have a historical viewpoint. There is an eight-metre wide 1991 installation by Chen Zhen. A Chinese artist who grew up during the Cultural Revolution and emigrated to Paris as soon as Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1986, he represents the artistic diaspora of that decade.

ARNOT



©Todd White

'Log Lady & Dirty Bunny' (2009) by Marnie Weber

“Haegue Yang lives in Germany,” says Hasegawa. “There’s a cultural hybridity there, and an artist making their own reality.” And as for Turner Prize-winning Scottish artist Susan Philipsz, Hasegawa sees her sound art – in this case a piece called “It Means Nothing to Me” in which she sings a traditional Welsh folk song – as perfectly tailored to the Asian sensibility. “Asian people like performance, sound, music and memory. We are interested in temporality. Take calligraphy, for example. A western person will see the final form. But an Asian person will see the process and the work as something imbued with time.”

And with that, Hasegawa has leapt seamlessly from a Turner Prize winner to calligraphy; a woman who, rather like Hong Kong itself, can synthesise west and east.

All works shown above are in Encounters at Art Basel in Hong Kong

Art Basel in Hong Kong, May 23-26, www.artbasel.com

The numbers are impressive. Almost dauntingly so. Visitors to this week’s first Art Basel in Hong Kong will have as many as 250 galleries, originating from some 35 countries, to relish. The organisers make much of the fact that almost 50 per cent of the participants are from Asia and the Asia-Pacific region, as well they might: one of the strengths of their December fair in Miami is its distinctive regional nature (in that case, its relation to its Latin American neighbours), and the last thing we want from a fair is globo-blandness.

At Hong Kong, along with three other distinct sections – Galleries, for 170-plus mainstream international players; Encounters, for large-scale work; and Discoveries, for budding hopefuls – is the Insights section.

This features work that has been made specially for the event, from galleries in the Asia and Asia-Pacific region, and its inclusion reinforces the emphasis on that chunk of the globe – a vast and varied part, but united in its determination to make concrete its not-western identity.

Link:

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/e72cf636-bbc9-11e2-82df-00144feab7de.html#axzz2U7bBQ8uz>