



Gu Gan, Image courtesy Richard Chang

Taiwanese Artists to Make a Mark with New Media; and Fair's Ambitions.

Richard Chang runs gallery Galerie Grand Siècle in Taipei and he is also chairman of the Taiwan Art Gallery Association (Taga) responsible for organising Art Taipei every year. He introduces the *Hong Kong Gallery Guide* to the history of Art Taipei, its ambitions, and talks to Cristina S.K. about Taiwanese artists position in the region, and worldwide.

"Art Taipei started 19 years ago and has been held annually ever since", says Chang who notes that the art fair has been organised by Taga from the beginning. At the time, Tokyo Art Fair was used as a reference and benchmark, and the fair was created in response to a developing art industry and the necessity to create something similar to Art Tokyo in Taiwan.

Chang was not part of the association back then, at the time it counted a little more than 30 galleries – it has 92 members now.

Galerie Grand Siècle

"The gallery was established in 1999. I was dealing with modern art from overseas Chinese artists" recalls Chang, who then moved on to deal with contemporary art with a focus on Taiwan. "Now, the gallery is mainly dealing with new media art and some other contemporary art forms", he says. "I made the transition because I was thinking about the globalisation of Taiwanese artists and their market. I started from the observation that Taiwan occupied a very weak status compared to other places such as mainland China, Japan and Korea; that it was somehow marginalised. And I considered what kind of artists might be accepted or admitted on the international stage", says Chang. "When I opened my gallery I wasn't a professional art dealer, neither had I been working for a gallery. I didn't do very detailed research at that time, I had a network of Chinese artists in Europe - so I dealt their artworks and started the gallery in Taipei".

Taiwanese collectors

They are known to be the most sophisticated in the Asian region, Chang notes that they evolved together with the galleries, but even now he says, "Taiwanese galleries are not that professional or international even after 30 years of experience in the field".

Recent changes within the collectors' landscape include the movement of returnees to Taiwan, and results in more international insight from the local collectors' point of view. "Collectors acquire artworks from Japan, Korea, mainland China, Indonesia and India; as well as from Europe and the U.S. They are moving on much faster than the galleries", he says.

One of such collectors who adapted and evolved is Shi Jun Zhao. "Zhao collects art in a very systematic way, he started from the very first generation of Taiwanese western painting. After completing his collection in that

category, he got involved with the first batch of Chinese artists, including those from overseas. Finally he engaged in the collection of international renowned contemporary artists", says Chang.

Chang explains that Zhao studies the relevant art histories each time, carefully selecting the best artists. For his mainland China artists collection for example, he acquired the most important artworks in Chinese art history, starting from early Xu Beihong's works.



Liu Yi-Lan, Image courtesy Richard Chang

Taiwan Art Gallery Association

"I joined the Taiwan Art Gallery Association in 2000, you need at least one year of gallery experience to be eligible" says Chang who notes that Taiwanese galleries remained relatively local. "I have been building experience by going to many art fairs abroad, in Europe, and also in the U.S and in Asia. I made my own opinions on how to hold a fair" he says. Since Taga is an association with 15 galleries' directors on the board, Chang has to persuade the other 14 of his ideas, "we are 15, just like the

‘standing committee of the Chinese Communist Party’” he says, “and it is rather difficult to make changes”. The fair receives a small subsidy from the government and covers the rest with the renting of the booths.

“In 2011, 140 galleries applied and we chose 120 out of them”, he adds and confirms that “artists are totally free to express their ideas with any forms of artworks. There are no censorship on religion or politics at the fair”.



Galerie Grand Siècle, Image courtesy Richard Chang

Game of Fairs

“Art HK is of course the best art fair in Asia, however there is a lot to improve to reach Art Basel’s standards. When Basel comes to Hong Kong in 2013, one third of the current exhibitors will not be eligible” notes Chang. About Art Stage Singapore, Chang makes a comparison with European fairs, “Art Stage is like the Fiac or Art Cologne in Europe”, he says – good but not as good as Art Basel. It will most probably attract those galleries that won’t be able to enter Art Basel HK in 2013, “but European and American galleries will aim at going to Hong Kong and coming to Asia only once a year” he says.

“Art Taipei is competing with Art Stage and Art Seoul. Fairs in Shanghai and Beijing are going down because of taxation issues. Both Singapore and Seoul have full financial support from their government, but Taiwan has

an advantage on the collector’s side. We are putting our efforts into improving the fair general standards, the quality of invited galleries and by aiming at inviting hundreds of Asian collectors to come to Taiwan each year. We want to be the number two.”

New Media = room for growth

“New Media art constitutes a very small part of the art market. But it will expand and play a more and more important role” notes Chang, saying that it reflects most of the galleries’ opinions. “Many young artists are creating through new media forms, because they want to express their ideas with new materials, not satisfied with traditional art forms. It is a trend”. He adds that it also constitutes a way for young artists to be noticed outside Taiwan, traditional art forms as painting are competitive, while there is room for hope and possibilities with new media, especially for such marginalised artists as the Taiwanese ones. ■



Wang Ke Ping, Image courtesy Richard Chang



Dang Ruo Hong, Image courtesy Peter Liu

From local to next level in Taichung

Text: Cristina S.K.

Peter Liu, a 34 years old former university art management professor and art writer for *Artist Magazine*, opened his space in Taichung in 2009 - right above his brother's wedding organisation business - with some support from his family and some government entrepreneurial incentives. “My major in university was Spanish, it took me to a one year long trip to Europe. There - I discovered art that I loved. I didn’t know how to paint so I chose other ways to be close to art”, says Liu. “I used to teach art management in the university in Taichung and then I wanted to start my own gallery to introduce local artists from Taiwan’s central and southern areas. It seemed to me that compared to Taipei, artists from the South didn’t have opportunities to show their work”.

Taichung, with a population of around one million people, is the source of many of Liu’s clients, with some also located in Taipei. “My gallery is specialised in a geographical area, it is a one-man company, I don’t plan to go international just now, participating in Young Art Taipei is the most international thing I ever did” explains Liu. “Not many people knew about contemporary art here at first and I spent a lot of time explaining. There were collectors here and they bought a lot, but no contemporary art – many bought impressionist works. They liked beautiful landscapes so I chose landscape works but with a twist, as a way to introduce and educate collectors in contemporary art. Now, the information is well known, and it is easier for people to collect”, says Liu.

About Taiwanese collectors in general, he says that they are of three main types, ranging from the high-end ones - who participate in interna-



Burning View by Emu Nagasaka, Mixed Media, 28 x 45cm, 2010, Image courtesy Peter Liu

tional auctions and seek the best works available on the international market; to a second type that focus on contemporary international art; and a third, representing a group of collectors mainly just interested in Taiwanese artists.

After Takashi Murakami organised the Gue-sai Fair in Taipei in 2009, the young gallerist also picked up a couple of Japanese artists, like Emu Nagasaka – who won one of the Awards during Young Art Taipei, “some Japanese artists’ style is similar to my other artists”. Liu points out at the difference between art schools in Taiwan, “for example in Tung-hai university in Taichung, a large part of the curriculum is dedicated to studying traditional Japanese art, so when those students want to

do contemporary art it always looks like it was inspired from traditional Japanese art, but with a twist - a new take. In Taipei, works are more conceptual or new media oriented, they are different from here but not that different on a regional scale”.

The dealer explains that Japan, Korea and mainland China have influenced Taiwanese culture immensely over the years. Artists employ similar symbols and painting styles despite coming from different places. “For a long time we shared a similar culture, it is deep in our education and art creation. We all live in big cities, and create small works in small places. The pieces are comfortable, sweet and delicate, somehow light – as opposed to what

you see in mainland China: strong, powerful, big; very different from the Japanese and Korean way” he says.

He admits that the artists he represents do childish works at times, expressing raw feelings like anger, “but I like the colours and the composition, I mostly have paintings; and sometimes I cooperate with other galleries to show sculptures”.

“Since prices are very affordable in Taiwan, my advice to collectors is to not choose works for investment purpose only - you must like them first. Contemporary art is a very competitive field, thousands of people in mainland China practise art; how do you choose? You better buy gold or other commodities. Buy works by

artists you like and maybe one day they become big”, says Liu.

“For a first comer to Taiwan interested in the emerging artists I would suggest that you see each Taiwanese contemporary museum awards show. It is the best way to approach the market since students from all over the country are participating. For more established artists, one needs to move towards important Taipei galleries like Tina Keng Gallery and Lin & Lin Gallery, they show established artists who are about 40-50 years old and have begun to enter the international art market” advises Liu.

“I go to Hong Kong twice a year at least to see the two fairs. For a gallerist I am relaxed, I want to start slowly, I have a vision but not that big, I want to take my artists works and take them to the next level. Now I represent 10 to 15 artists, some will leave and some will come, it is a good number. Those artists are just represented in Taichung” concludes Liu. ■



Jyu Sing Siao, Image courtesy Peter Liu