



The Asian Faces : Gallerists You Should Meet at Art Basel Hong Kong



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The best gallerists are more than just pretty faces – it takes real passion, business acumen, creative flair and an ability to make real, meaningful relationships to rise to the top. We highlight 12 movers and shakers in the Asian art world.

TEXT: CoBo Editorial Force

IMAGES: Courtesy of the galleries



Song Boyoung, Kukje Gallery (Seoul)

Recently named APOLLO Magazine's 40 Under 40 in the Asia-Pacific region, Song Boyoung was a researcher at the Insa Art Space of the Arts Council Korea, working with a slew of the country's most reputed curators before meeting her husband and business partner, Charles Kim, while doing her post-graduate degrees in Paris. It proved to be a perfect match in more than one – Kim's mother, art maven Hyun-Sook Lee, is the founder of Kukje Gallery, and Bo, with degrees in art history and cultural management, was asked to join the Seoul-based art space as Managing Director in 2011. Aside from organising exhibitions, including the acclaimed *The Art of Dansaekhwa* exhibition in 2014, the gallerist is also working to digitalise and translate the Kukje Gallery Archive for an international audience.



Lorenz Helbling, ShanghART Gallery (Shanghai)

As the son of an artist, opening a gallery was probably inevitable for Lorenz Helbling. What's surprising however, is that he chose to open it in Asia. While he learnt the ropes of the gallery business at the Hong Kong-based Plum Blossoms Gallery, he debunked for Shanghai in 1996, founding ShangART in the same year. As the gallery enters its 20th year, Helbling has a lot to look back on – not only has he been instrumental in the development of Chinese contemporary art, he is also credited with professionalising gallery business in China, training a bevy of gallery professionals, including Laura Zhou, who now heads White Cube's Asian operations. Focusing on discovering largely unknown local talent in its early days, the gallery now boasts four spaces – two in Shanghai, one in Beijing, one in Singapore – and represents a mix of Chinese blue-chippers including Zeng Fanzhi and Wang Guangyi and the newer kids on the blocks such as Zhang Ding and Sun Xun.



Leng Lin, Pace Gallery (Beijing, Hong Kong)

The president of Pace Beijing and Pace Hong Kong has been a force in the Asian art scene for many years. A graduate of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Leng Lin worked variously as a researcher, curator, critic, auction house manager, professor, and co-founded the 'Polit-Sheer-Form Office' art collective. In 2004, he founded Beijing Commune, an art gallery dedicating to showing emerging artists. As Pace's regional partner, he helped set up the Beijing and Hong Kong operations, in 2008 and 2014 respectively. Pace Beijing's stellar roster of artists include Zhang Xiaogang – with which Leng enjoys a particularly fruitful relationship – Hiroshi Sugimoto, Li Songsong, Song Dong and Yoshitomo Nara.



Li Yan, Lehmann Maupin (Hong Kong)

A career in the arts seems like a given for the Shandong-born Li Yan. "I was raised in a place where it was commonplace to have calligraphy scrolls hanging in your house. My dad practiced Chinese calligraphy." The gallerist spent her formative years in the U.K. but home was never far from her mind. After a brief stint as the Asia representative for Massimo de Carlo in Beijing, she was appointed Lehmann Maupin's Hong Kong Director in 2013. In her post, Li is instrumental in introducing the likes of Robin Rhode, David Salle, Hernan Bas and Suh Do-Ho to an Asian audience. For the gallery's founders, as for Li, passion and a heart to nurture are key to building any successful art business, "it's like marriage, an artist always knows if you're being genuine."



Alice Lung, Galerie Perrotin (Hong Kong)

As one half of the glamorous duo of Galerie Perrotin Hong Kong, Alice Lung is a tireless promotor of Asian contemporary art. After studying Business Management at Georgetown University in Washington DC, the Taiwanese-born, Korean-raised gallerist worked briefly for Seoul's Gana Gallery before jumping ship to Seoul Auction House, where she was tasked with setting up their Hong Kong office. In 2012, Lung was appointed co-director of Galerie Perrotin Hong Kong alongside Etsuko Nakajima. The gallery's programming features a mix of solid names, including Tatakshi Murakami and Terry Richardson, and emerging finds such as Huang Yuxing and Maria Taniguchi. Korean art remains close to Lung's heart, as she notes in an earlier interview with us, "I saw a Park Seo-Bo painting at an auction years ago and bought it without too much thought. Who would think that he is represented by Perrotin now and has become so successful."



Zhang Wei, Vitamin Creative Space (Beijing, Guangzhou)

Some galleries boast on a long roster of top art names, others rely on an intellectually-oriented programming to stand out in an increasingly commercial industry. Zhang Wei's Vitamin Creative Space can lay claim to both. Zhang and fellow founder, Hu Fang are both critics and curators, and this fact shines through in Vitamin's progressive programming. Integrating the visual arts, film and literature under one roof, Vitamin, with spaces in Guangzhou and Beijing, boasts an impressive roster of artists, including Olafur Eliasson, Danh Vo and rising media art star Cao Fei, who had her solo exhibition at MoMA PS1 in 2016. In 2015, Zhang and Fang opened Mirrored Gardens, a gallery-art studio-residence complex designed by famed architect Sou Fujimoto, in Guangzhou's Panyu district, as an alternative 'neo-agricultural' and 'non-intentional' exhibiting and art-making venue.



Tina Keng, Ting Keng Gallery (Taipei)

Not many could boast of being golf buddies with the late French-Chinese artist Zao Wou-ki. Taiwanese gallerist Tina Keng can. A fixture in the Taiwanese art scene for over two decades, Tina Keng founded the Lin & Keng Gallery in 1992, showing such Asian masters as Zao, Lin Feng-mian, Sanyu and Yun Gee. In 2010, Lin & Keng reopened as Tina Keng in Neihu, Taipei; Keng's daughter Shelly Wu, a graduate of New York's Fashion Institute of Technology, was appointed as co-director. The seven-metre-high, 1150-square-metre space debuted with Sanyu and Zao Wou-ki and has since played host to Su Xiaobai and Hsiao Chin.



Takayuki Ishii, Taka Ishii Gallery (Tokyo)

Takayuki Ishii has dabbled in multiple facets of the art field. An art student in the mid-80s, he got his start as a businessperson in the early 90s. In 1994, he set up Taka Ishii Gallery, debuting with a Larry Clark exhibition. Aside from established artists including Clark, Garry Winogrand, Daido Moriyama and Nobuyoshi Araki, the space also regularly hosts up-and-coming names such as Dan Graham and Elmgreen & Dragset. In 2014, Ishii expanded his sphere of influence beyond his homeland, opening a space in Paris. The opening exhibition, a Yosuke Takeda solo accompanied by Takashi Hamaguchi's reports on the 1960s student revolts in Japan, was as crowd-pleasing as it was intellectually stimulating.



Junior Tirtadji, Roh Projects (Jakarta)

It is all in the name. By calling his gallery ROH – the Bahasa Indonesia word for “spirit” – Junior Tirtadji made clear that his vision is well beyond the commercialisation of art. Coming from a family trading in property development and finance, it was a daring feat for him to set up his own art space in Jakarta right after university, in 2012. Together with Fiesta Ramadanti – ROH Project’s gallery manager – he developed a platform for emerging artists with alternative and experimental art practices. In the past few years, the gallery has progressively expanded their scope to include more established artists and emerging talents from the region. Part of Tirtadji and Ramadanti’s program is to promote artistic exchanges through collaborations with other galleries. “The future of the art world in Asia will only work if we work together,” said Tirtadji in a recent interview.



Isa Lorenzo and Rachel Rillo, Silverlens (Manila)

What makes a successful gallery? In the case of Manila art space Silverlens, it was perhaps Isa Lorenzo and Rachel Rillo's belief that success is about adding value to your life, as well as to everyone whose life you touch. Since 2014 Silverlens Galleries has confidently established itself as one of the top galleries in the country, representing artists such as Maria Taniguchi, Gregory Halili, and Patricia Perez Eustaquio. Lorenzo and Rillo are also accomplished artists themselves, which informs their aesthetic sensibilities. Educated in Manila and New York City, Lorenzo sits on the board of the Museum Foundation of the Philippines, and acts as adviser to prominent private collections. Rillo moved from Manila to San Francisco to attend the Academy of Art College, and returned to the Philippines in 2017 after working in Los Angeles' television industry.



Emi Eu, STPI (Singapore)

If the Singapore Tyler Print Institute can boast of being the first Singapore gallery to join Art Basel in Basel, it is thanks to Emi Eu, who became its director in 2009. Already an important member in 2001, she has steered the institution towards a more international outlook, making it much more than your regular print workshop. The STPI residency program has hosted artists coming from different art practices, from Amanda Heng to Rirkrit Tiravanija, who all tried their hand at printing and working with paper. The passion for art runs in Eu's family – her mother is an artist, Asian textiles scholar and embroiderer. Born in South Korea, Eu studied business at Boston University and worked in galleries in Venice, Paris and New York before settling down in Singapore. A lecturer at Singapore Management University, Eu is also a member of the Selection Committee for Art Basel in Hong Kong.



Roshini Vadehra, Vadehra Gallery (New Delhi)

Imagine a young and energetic director running one of the oldest and most respected art galleries in India. This is the case of Roshini Vadehra, whose Vadehra Gallery – founded by her father Arun – represents a roster of artists spanning over four generations. In 1987, when Vadehra Art Gallery was established in New Delhi, modern Indian art was still considered exotic and its access limited to the privileged few. Contrary to what many parents usually tell their children, Arun suggested Roshini to pursue art at Boston University instead of investment banking. To her, art is the best environment: “From day one, I realised I wanted to do this for the rest of my life”. The gallery was born out of the need for a professional platform to connect artists with art lovers from all walks of life, and Roshini keeps it relevant by showing contemporary artists such as Rakhi Peswani, Zakkir Hussain, Susanta Mandal and Gipin Varghese.