

Art Basel in Hong Kong: city's small galleries shine through with memorable displays

From DNA testing to a compilation of Hong Kong buildings, from Chinese scrolls to bamboo mobiles, there were plenty of local attractions from Hong Kong galleries at this year's Art Basel fair in the city

PUBLISHED : Monday, 02 April, 2018, 1:33pm

UPDATED : Wednesday, 04 April, 2018, 4:54pm



Art Basel week in Hong Kong this year was a particularly wonderful conglomeration of international artists, critics, galleries and collectors. But even with superstars such as Jeff Koons and the Guerrilla Girls in town, a number of smaller, local galleries still managed to shine through amid an exhausting avalanche of visual and mental stimulation.

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At a.m. space's Art Basel booth, the works in Wong Kit-yi's "Magic Wands, Batons and DNA Splicers" exhibition were sold on 99-year-leases, a reference to Hong Kong's peculiar land rights and also, a brilliant way to counter the capitalistic nature of the art market.

Two bona fide biochemists from City University of Hong Kong were also on site and claimed to "genetically embed" the sales contract into the purchaser's DNA, which takes *caveat emptor* to a whole new level.



Karsten Berning and a colleague from City University of Hong Kong in front of their DNA collection point at AM Space's booth during Art Basel Hong Kong 2018. Artist Wong Kit-yi can be seen talking to a visitor at the back. Photo: Enid Tsui

As one of the scientists involved explained to the *Post*, he could in theory find out a huge amount about everyone related to the person whose cheek he swabbed, just as Cambridge Analytica harvested information from the 50 million people who were "Facebook Friends" of the 270,000 individuals who offered the company information about themselves.

11 Instagrammable displays at Art Basel Hong Kong 2018

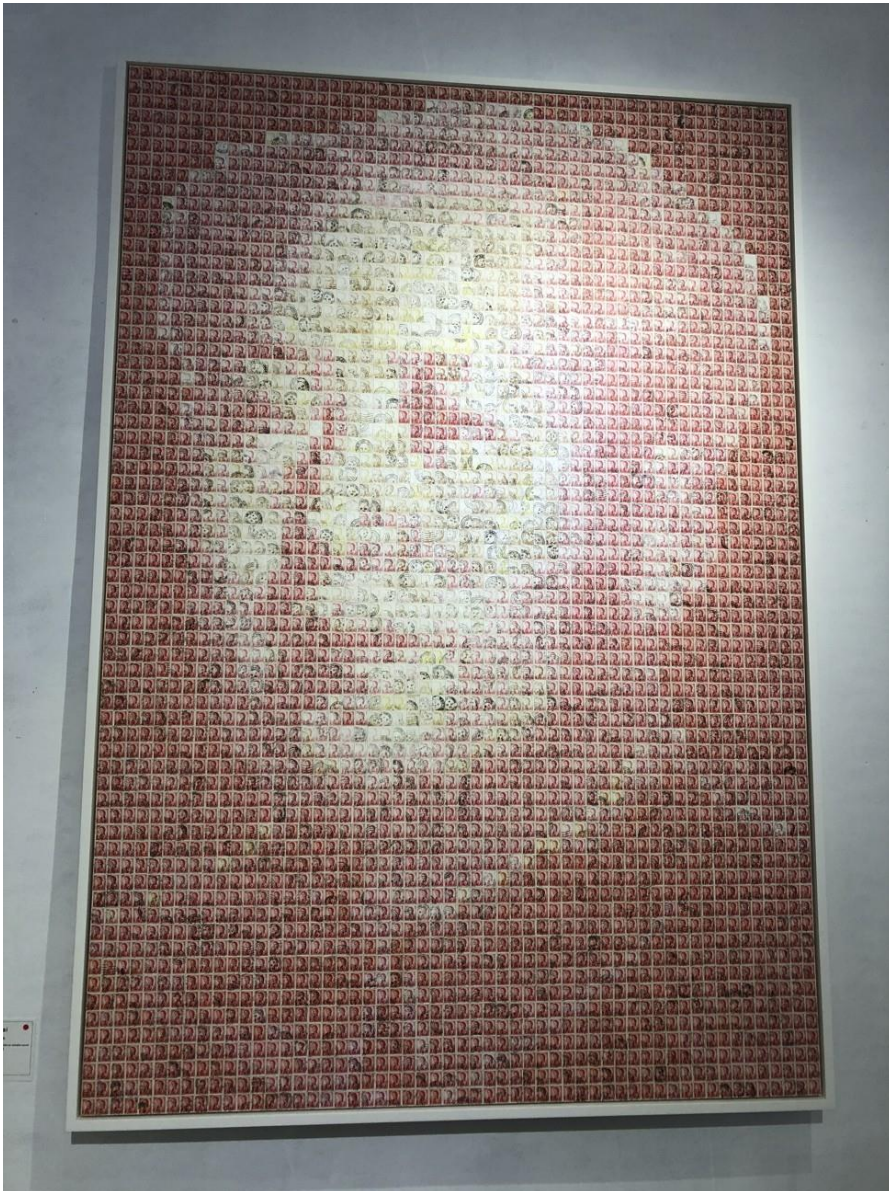
Beneath Emily Allchurch's sunny photo montages at Karin Weber Gallery's Art Central booth lurks a dystopian vision. Her new Hong Kong landscape is the latest in her *Tower of Babel* series, and it melds dozens of familiar landmarks, both sacred and profane.

It was probably one of the most Instagrammed works of the whole week as visitors competed to identify buildings such as the Wong Tai Sin Temple and the Central Plaza entrance.



Also at Art Central, Zhang Xiaodong's epic *Dream of The Red Chamber* (presented by Sin Sin Fine Art) was a sight to behold. The artist spent four years illustrating the Chinese classic and employed the laborious, ancient bookbinding technique called "dragon-scale binding" to create these hefty volumes, which were displayed like Chinese horizontal scrolls as a homage to lost traditions.

Bamboo mobiles by Laurent Martin "Lo" at Puerta Roja's booth offered much-needed Zen space in a whirlwind week. The largest piece was *Floating Tea House* (2017), a delicate and gently twirling bamboo cone that was first shown at the Wu Yuan Arts and Culture Centre in Taiwan.



Ng Lung-wai's One Person – Two Systems series includes portraits of Mao Zedong and Queen Elizabeth II. Photo: Enid Tsui

Outside the art fairs, A2Z Art Gallery held a solo exhibition for Ng Lung-wai, the Hong Kong artist who makes pointillist portraits of famous historic figures using unusual materials.

"One Person – Two Systems" featured portraits of Mao Zedong and Queen Elizabeth II – the heads of state of China and the UK when the artist was born in 1971. Peer closely at a red-tinted portrait of Mao and you can see it is made up of countless red 1960s Hong Kong stamps bearing the portrait of the queen.



Diagram I (2018) by Jes Fan. Part of the artist's Mother is a Woman series at Empty Gallery.

Over at Stephen Cheng's Empty Gallery in Tin Wan, visitors were asked to put on a beauty cream derived from artist Jes Fan's mother's oestrogen, which was extracted from her urine sample.

Creepy, yes, but this gesture to "feminise" the visitors added an immediacy and tactility to "Mother is a Woman", Fan's exhibition full of corporeal sculptures.

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The gallery also unveiled Xavier Cha's *Ruthless Logic* (2018) – a stunning film shot at Hong Kong's disused Shaw Studios that employs different action-film techniques, including bullet-time, wire-work and extreme slow motion, as two martial artists, German Cheung and Rafael Reynoso, fight with beautifully choreographed moves.

It is a tribute to a film genre that Hong Kong is famous for, and a tender portrayal of two artists' mutual appreciation even as they appear to be engaged in battle.

This article appeared in the South China Morning Post print edition as: Small players make their share of noise amid the clamour