

MR JOHNSON CHANG:

Thank you, Weng Choy, and thank you everybody.

Looking over my notes just now, I realise my role is more like a bit of an advertisement for Hong Kong but since, I think, good advertising improves with repeating I will sketch out what I wrote before.

This Asia Cultural Council has happened because of Hong Kong's geographical position, because of what Hong Kong represents to many people which is a place of exchange, it is a part of Asia where everybody feels comfortable because although it is on the edge of China, it is more like another culture attached to China and it was always an access point to China and also Southeast Asia.

Today I just want to say a few things about what I have done, although before that I would like to outline a little bit of what Asia Art Archive has done. For the last 20 years Hong Kong has become a very important conduit of Chinese contemporary art to the outside world and I was involved in part of that activity. But since early 2000, with the opening up of China, with the opening up of the contemporary as well as traditional art market in China, more and more people go directly to China and Hong Kong has rapidly lost its leading role as interpreter, as conduit for Chinese contemporary art. But because of this change, Hong Kong has also rapidly grown to another role which is a role as intermediary and apart from the official organisations in Hong Kong such as the Museum of Fine Art which has done many international exhibitions and has represented the official orthodox Chinese culture for Hong Kong and has represented it to the world, the non-profit organisation, Asia Art Archive, is one organisation I know and I would like to show you a few things if Claire has not done so already. I think the first thing I must say is that because of the hard work of the staff and managers of the archive, we have had a very successful cultural forum today and tomorrow.

What I have here are just a few images of the Asia Art Archive. The Asia Art Archive is a non-profit organisation and its purpose is to make it possible for everybody to come to somewhere and access

Chinese contemporary art, Singapore contemporary art, Filipino, Thai, Korean contemporary art, without actually having to travel to all these different places, and also to provide professional librarian work and archival work so that it makes scholarship possible. So it is really the workshop of our scholarship and it is one thing that I think Hong Kong can fulfill its role as a mediator.

This is the Asia Art Archive. This is the up-to-date equipment that the archive has. It first opened to the public in the year 2003 and before that it spent a year collecting materials. Its website started in March 2002 and since then it has become a very important source of information and current events of international Asian art. Apart from its work as an archive the archive is then several things.

This is an image from a big event that was held a year ago called "Archiving the Contemporary". It is really a series of forums for the professionals and about 40 professionals were invited to come here to speak about their experiences internationally, and in 2004 the Guggenheim Museum sent five different experts to Hong Kong and over a course of six months explained to the public and to the Hong Kong Arts School different aspects of the museum.

Here is Lee Weng Choy explaining to us what Singapore art is about. Michael Sullivan.

In the year 2003 the Asia market did a very major project. During the move of the museum to Brooklyn where they were renovating they sent the entire team of professionals in the museum to come to Hong Kong to give a weekend course to 40 invited participants from Asia and it was the first time they held their workshop outside of New York.

This is a workshop from the Guggenheim. This is just an example of the vast store of loot the archive has accumulated.

I think the archive is a very good example of how Hong Kong has actually made use of its geographical position and also has started to serve not just people in Hong Kong. It served people coming

through here for business and now it is serving people coming through here for culture and for scholarship.

I have been involved in artwork in various capacities. I have been an art critic, I have been an independent curator, I have been a dealer, I have been an academic. So in each of those roles I think Hong Kong has actually supported my functions by simply being here and by offering the services which were not possible at that time elsewhere.

In the 80s and through the 90s one of the things which Hong Kong served for my purpose was a link between the three Chinese communities: Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China. It was a place where these three communities met and for me, the most interesting thing was it was possible to try to understand how Chinese identity, how Chinese contemporary culture can be defined and to define it from a perspective which is Asian and with a foot outside of Asia, since Hong Kong was at that time a British colony.

Hong Kong was a link but it was also the place where local art and also other arts from China and Taiwan could reach outside. This is an exhibition of Hong Kong painter, Luis Chang, an exhibition in the Singapore National Museum. This was in 1987. Luis Chang was born in 1905 and died in 1995 when he was 90 years old so at that time he was 82 years old. He refused to fly in an airplane so he did not go to his own exhibition. This is the national museum in Singapore.

Also importantly, the link that Hong Kong served was to bring China out of China and in 1989, in January, I organised an exhibition called "Stars 10 Years" which is a review of the first radical avant garde group, the Stars Group, which organised the big protest march on National Day in 1979, the 30th anniversary of the People's Republic, and since then they have really become the pioneers of Chinese contemporary art and this was a project which included an exhibition, a play written by Wan Kah Ping which was performed at the gallery I was running in a basement in a condominium in Kowloon. There is Wan Kah Ping flashing himself. Haei Wei Wei, and at that time I innocently thought we could actually also try to create a

mass market for contemporary art by producing these boxes with edition paper cuts and edition prints from the artists and I think I still own most of these boxes because most of them, the artists, did not supply the artwork. The artists were very impressed with the exhibition. So these are all the artist in exhibition.

From Hong Kong I also used the geographical advantage of Hong Kong to bring Chinese and Taiwanese art to Europe and this is an exhibition of Ju Ming in London, Ju Ming the Taiwan sculptor, 1991 in the South Bank. As I always believe, Chinese contemporary art and the definition of Chinese modernity has to come from different geographical territories of China, different experiences, Hong Kong, Mainland and Taiwan as well as the Chinese emigre, we actually jointly define what is meant by "the modernity of Chinese culture" and in most of my exhibitions I try to include artists from all these different geographical regions.

This was an exhibition called "Reckoning With the Past". It was held during the Edinburgh Arts Festival in a contemporary art space called "The Fruit Market" in Edinburgh. There was Chang Jo Guang who I don't think is typical of an exhibition like today because those prices are unfathomable. You need very deep pockets. This is the exhibition. This is part of the Taiwan exhibition from the same show.

The exhibition was about these different geographical areas of the Chinese population, looking back into the recent past and how they interpret "modern" and this is China's interpretation. This is Wu Tin Jong with Yu Pan at the back, Chinese artist in the foreground. Taiwan artist.

Another exhibition, China's New Art post-1989, this exhibition became very successful because it was the first major collection of Chinese contemporary art which attempted to make a survey of the complete art scene of China and it was first exhibited in Hong Kong during the Arts Festival. This was a venue shot at the Hong Kong Arts Centre in January 1993 with Oscar Ho as a director of the gallery and he was the curator of the show in Hong Kong.

This is the Australian contingent at the exhibition. This exhibition travelled for five years and went to Australia after Hong Kong. It went to Canada and then America. It lasted until the beginning - it did not get back to Hong Kong until the beginning of 1998.

There is Oscar Ho, David Tang who paid for some of the costs and my two co-curators, Li Zheng Ting and Oscar Ho. Oh, x-rated art, destroyed art and foreign. In the 80s and in the early 90s I found my perception of Chinese art in Taiwan and mainland was that the imagination of "modern", of "modernity", of "contemporary" was really on foreign territory. For people in Mainland China in the 80s they read about the 20th century modern art of Europe and the modernity was somewhere on another shore and to get around that, to finally come back to study itself and to see its own modernity squarely, I believe the most important thing was really for artists to arrive on the same platform which was perceived to be on another shore. So at that time I tried as much as I could to bring exhibitions to the international platform and this was the first international biennial which Chinese artists from Mainland participated in and it was mediated through Josette Bauzer, who still lives in Hong Kong, and she actually lived in Sao Paulo in the 80s and this is the International Director of the biennial in 1994. Because the Sao Paulo Biennial was held - is being held - is always held in the one massive building, all the visitors who go to this biennial are a captive audience and it turned out to be very beneficial for Chinese artists because it was the first time a lot of international curators saw a selection of Chinese artists and some of them were invited to the centenary show at Venice next year and one was actually invited to the documentary later on so it became a very fortuitous event. This is a photograph of artists who came to the Sao Paulo Biennial in '94.

At that time a lot of artists were making artworks using the icon of Mao Ze Dung. There was a huge Mao fever and the craze for The Cultural Revolution iconography among artists was in fact not concocted for the art world. It was really something very indigenous. It happened all over China; it was something you would see riding a taxi and a taxi driver would hang a portrait of Mao

Ze Dung in the rear view mirror. Artists caught on to that as well and for the dissemination of Chinese art it became something very convenient because it was identified as a Chinese contemporary visual culture and this exhibition, because of that, became very successful.

Another very high profile exhibition was in '95 in Venice. It was a centenary exhibition in Venice and two Chinese artists were invited to be part of the centenary show and these photographs are actually part of more of a public lift campaign held for this exhibition. My friend, David Tang, invited his friend, Princess Diana, to a special exhibition in honour of the two Chinese artists and it gave them a lot of publicity. So this is Venice 1995.

In '96 Hong Kong participated in the biennial officially for the first time under the auspices of Governor Chris Patten, and at that biennial I was also asked to present a Chinese artist as part of an international special show and the two artists in the foreground, the artist on the right is Ho Siu Ki. The man with the beard is Tsu Siu Hwa, who was from China.

Again, Venice in 2001. That was the first time Hong Kong participated in Venice. But significantly, in the context of this forum, the Venice Biennale in 2001 under the auspices of the Home Office, Dr Patrick Ho, organised also a sort of a mini-Asia cultural gathering and we invited all the Asian artists and curators to a big party and it became one of the highlights of the Biennale that year and most of the important curators who were free that day came along.

So Hong Kong in a way benefited from being in Hong Kong, from being - to be next to neighbours, to a region which is being paid attention to by the international cultural community. So this is the Hong Kong Pavilion in 2001.

The artist, Ho Siu Ki during a performance. Again, Taiwan going to Europe. Ju Ming again. More of the same.

Since the mid-1990s when curators in the international exhibitions felt that it was obligatory to invite Asian artists and in particular,

Chinese artists, I think it was not the most important thing to present Chinese artists abroad but it was probably more important to investigate Chinese cultural issues and Hong Kong again became a very convenient meeting point and several projects which dealt with Chinese cultural issues in visual art, the first one, part of the work dealt with the visual culture of China and the language of power. This included artists from China, from Taiwan, and the colour banners are Hong Kong. They came from Kowloon.

Another exhibition which was held in Taiwan last year during the - a year and a half ago called "Yellow Box", this exhibition looked at the culture of connoisseurship, of traditional cultural connoisseurship, and the exhibition tried to find ways of interpreting that for the modern exhibition space, and beyond that, using that aspect of traditional Chinese connoisseurship to try to expand the possibilities of a Chinese taboo from curatorial practice and this is an exhibition held just now called "Yellow Box" again, but in Shanghai and which is held in a small traditional quarter of wood buildings which was just finished and the buildings were built by an artist so it was really an exhibition within an artwork.

Finally, I think curatorial practice has wider functions than just dealing with contemporary art and since contemporaneity is actually permitted to enter into forbidden zones of society I decided to use contemporary art to revive aspects of traditional culture which has still not been officially endorsed and supported as yet and at the beginning of this year I made a traditional - I tried to revive a traditional festival under the auspices of the China Art Academy and also at the same event I started an experiment with an artists' workshop in the Chinese style which is a kind of workshop based on the literati gathering but using contemporary artists. So this is my presentation.

All in all, to summarise, as a place for art, Hong Kong has been very efficient for me and also as a place where it is possible to look at modern western style lifestyle, to look at Chinese in different aspects of development, in different directions, it is also a very good meeting point, and of course, to look at culture

from a wider regional area of Asia this is also an ideal spot. So this is my advertisement. I think for curators, one of the things, out of everything I have been doing, is trying to close the gap between contemporary art and traditional and also, I think, every day practice and this is also various things which I think Hong Kong artists are doing and I think I had better stop here. Weng Choy has been looking at his clock. Thank you.