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HABITAT

In Hong Kong

BY KATHERINE McMAHON

Artists in Hong Kong live in a city undergoing great change. In March, just one day after Art Basel Hong Kong closed to fairgoers from near and far, an election committee selected Carrie Lam as chief executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, an autonomous territory of the People's Republic of China. It was a historic moment for the first such female leader, but protest followed her election by a small pro-China committee representing a population of more than 7 million. "We are in for an intense and interesting time in the Pearl River Delta," artist Yuk King Tan told me. "China is changing. Hong Kong is changing. I think it's going to be a pyrotechnic interaction."

Asked for his take on the art scene in Hong Kong, artist and political activist Chow Chun Fai referred to a quote by Mark Rothko, speaking decades ago about the years leading up to the state of America in 1969: "For then we had nothing to lose and a vision to gain. Today it is not quite the same. It is a time of verbiage, activity, and consumption. Which condition is better for the world at large I will not venture to discuss. But I do know that many who are driven to this life are desperately searching for those pockets of silence where they can grow and root."

For this installment of Habitat, *ARTnews* visited the studios of artists growing from roots in Hong Kong.

Samson Young

In his studio in the post-industrial neighborhood of Kwai Fong, Samson Young was finalizing artwork to go to Italy for the Venice Biennale, where he is representing Hong Kong. His project "Songs for Disaster Relief" addresses the '80s-era peak of charity music singles such as "We Are the World" as markers of a culturally transformative moment. About the Hong Kong art scene, he said, "I think things are getting better," holding out hope for completion of the M+ museum scheduled to open in 2019 and a new wing of the Hong Kong Museum of Art. "There will be more spaces for emerging artists."





FEATURING

Samson Young

Kingsley Ng

Chow Chun Fai

Yuk King Tan

The Office

Winnie Siu Davies

Eric Niebuhr

Konstantin Bessmertrny



Chow Chun Fai

Chow Chun Fai works in Fo Tan, an artist community supported by studios in a sprawling industrial building complex. "It's a nice combination of different communities," he said of the area. "On my left is a soap maker; on my right is a furniture company. With a more complex ecosystem, more locals can survive." He is also involved with the Factory Artists Concern Group, for which he developed a petition in protest of governmental policies that push up land prices and drive artists out of spaces they call home.



Winnie Siu Davies

A recurring theme in the work of Winnie Siu Davies is the economic disparity between Hong Kong's rich and poor. Her studio in Fo Tan is packed with paintings referencing Chinese politics and society, including one with a poor man and an empty rice bowl framed by a prosperous city backdrop. Her style, self-described: "symbolic surrealism."