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# Up and Coming: How Collector William Lim is Fostering the Rise of Contemporary Art in Hong Kong

ARTSY EDITORIAL  
A DAY AGO

Hong Kong-based architect William Lim compares collecting art to writing a novel with a gripping storyline. “It’s really a process. You can always work on the theme and build it up,” he says, sitting on a vintage red sofa in his warehouse studio. Located in a gritty factory building in the industrial neighborhood of Wong Chuk Hang, the 5,300-square-foot space houses his ever-evolving collection of Hong Kong art.

Known for his stylish hotel interiors, including Singapore’s Marina Bay Sands and EAST, Hong Kong, the 56-year-old collector has kept a relatively low profile in the art world until recently. “It wasn’t exactly a [conscious] choice. But in the last few years during Art Basel in Hong Kong, and previously, Art HK people were interested in seeing work by local artists, so I’ve been opening up my studio,” he says. In a city with limited museum infrastructure and only a handful of galleries showing homegrown art, Lim’s encyclopedic collection has become a magnet for visiting curators, collectors, and museums groups.

Brimming with contemporary Hong Kong art, the loft-like space also serves as a studio for Lim, who engages in experimental art projects. Works on display range from Lam Tung-pang’s dreamlike charcoal cityscape to a scientific installation of a refrigerator filled with milk pudding by [Nadim Abbas](#). Lim’s eclectic taste also encompasses established international names such as [Lawrence Weiner](#), [Julian Opie](#), and [Ai Weiwei](#). Lately, he’s added work by American painter [Hernan Bas](#), Scottish artist [Callum Innes](#), and Vietnamese-born [Danh Vo](#).

Educated at Cornell University, Lim returned to Hong Kong in the late ’80s and founded his firm CL3 Architects. He began collecting art from his travels, but soon became curious about the work emerging from local studios. “In 2006, mainland Chinese artists were very popular but





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“I found their work very interesting. It was an eye opener: It wasn’t commercial, it was very personal.”

Undeterred by their lack of visibility on the global art circuit, Lim took a chance and purchased his first work by [Wilson Shieh](#), an artist using the traditional Chinese style of *gongbi* to create playful ink paintings. Over the years, Lim has amassed 200-odd works by Hong Kong artists. He now sits on the boards of nonprofit organizations Asia Art Archive and Para/Site Art Space as well as Tate’s Asia-Pacific Acquisitions Committee.

This year he released a book on his collection, titled *The No Colors* and published by Hatje Cantz, with the aim of documenting the rise of contemporary art in Hong Kong. To celebrate the book launch, Lim hosted a Chinese banquet during Art Basel in Hong Kong in May, inviting more than 100 guests to meet some of the local artists featured in the publication. The event was held in Kam Tin, one of the city’s last remaining walled villages and the home of Tang Kwok Hin, a young Hong Kong artist whose career is just taking off. “I think there is a heart to his work,” says Lim. “He is definitely one to look out for.” In many ways, these words apply to his own efforts as a collector. Driven by a desire to support young artists, Lim has nurtured the city’s fledgling art community: “Collecting is not just about buying, it’s really about getting to know people in the art scene,” he explains. “It’s about growing with a group of artists.”

Asked what’s next, Lim says he’s planning an ambitious exhibition next year at ArtisTree, a large venue in Hong Kong that will showcase his own artwork, architecture projects, and potentially pieces from his collection. He’s also been busy loaning out his pieces from his collection to institutions across the globe. Going forward, he plans to focus on acquiring “crucial works” by established local artists and support emerging talent. With the contemporary art scene in Hong Kong being relatively young, its story has only just begun to unfold: “There is still a lot of room to grow,” Lim says.

—[Payal Uttram](#)

*Additional images: Lam Tung-pang, The Huge Mountain, 2011, courtesy Hanart TZ Gallery / Lam Tung-pang; Nadim Abbas, The Distance of the Moon (Moon-milk), 2012, courtesy Nirut Benjabanpot.*

*Photograph of William and his studio by Kitmin Lee for Artsy.*

*Additional works shown are available works by artists in Lim’s collection.*



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