

## feature



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# Chai Wan : the Post Industrial Era

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“What art offers is space – a certain breathing room from the spirit.”-John Up-like. This is a quote I came across on the Pure Art Foundation website. As an art space located in the industrial district - Chai Wan, quoting this line somehow deciphers the multiple possible connotations of space, both on the physical level and from the perspectives of thinking.

The location of an art space itself reflects the correlation between art and space. Previously, SOHO in Central boasts to be Hong Kong's art hub. But the skyrocketing rent has forced some of the galleries to migrate to Sai Ying Pun. Another active player of the art scene is Fotanian. Local creative have started to take refuge in the spacious lofts of vacant industrial buildings since 2000, and Fotanian Open Studio Programme is a major annual event in the local art scene.

In recent years, other industrial districts such as Kwun Tong, Wong Chuk Hang and Chai Wan also rise as new potential art territories. Out of them, Chai Wan is the main spot. The different art sites hidden in bland industrial buildings form an invisible network, which is now known as “Art

East Island”. A few years ago, some daring pioneers started to pay effort to exploit the region; and some other new comers join in every now and then. What lures the gallery owners is not only the impeccable scenery from windows overlooking the harbor; but also the possibility to reach for a wider and bluer sky.

## Printing and Art

Since the 70s', factories mushroomed in Chai Wan, forming an industrial estate. Later on, headquarters of local and foreign media were sited in this place, with Ming Pao being the most well-known, and the New Media Group which published *Weekend Weekly*. This place houses many printing companies, which served as the

backbone of the creative industry. Now, their geographical location impinges on the locations of art, design and photography companies.

Artify Gallery, which opening is due to be on 6th Dec, follows this pattern. It is sited in Block A of Ming Pao Industrial Centre just to neighbor its parent company Print-rite Limited. With a history of over 30 years, this printing company has translated its expertise into artistic forms. Besides featuring contemporary printing art, photography and drawing, its gallery will even host activities surrounding the theme of printing, including contemporary photographic prints, etch, intaglio, monotype, ink painting, silkscreen, woodblock, collage, paper work, etc.



## Offering Opportunities to Local New Rising Artists

Also opening on 6th Dec is another gallery, YY9, renowned for their unfailing support to new artists. Having run their gallery in Happy Valley for more than six years, they are now expanding to open up another art space in Phase 1 of Chai Wan Industrial City. Exhibitions will be held in this spacious 1000 sq. ft. new venue, although the sale of art pieces will still be carried in the more convenient old venue in Happy Valley. The new venue has greater capacity for large installations. Art lovers can certainly gear up for exciting exhibitions ahead! The forthcoming exhibition is a group exhibition - *Transformation*. It features mixed media installation artworks created by three Hong Kong artists - Ivy Ma, Pauline Lam and Winnie Yiu. Ivy Ma's new series of works aims to create a natural scene in an abstract and fictional, minimal yet chaotic way using a single kind of material in a repetitive approach. Pauline Lam's series of *The Late Version of Shan Hai Jing* expresses "intertextuality" between traditional and contemporary social states. By using plastic bags as the dominant medium, this series of artworks reflect the environmental problem caused by the abuse of plastic bags in Hong Kong. Winnie Yiu continued her last series of works *Line and Direction* by presenting the new installation work *Domina* by using the original lines of the body to create an illumination artwork which reflects the mutually interactive relationship between bodies and the community. The exceptionally high ceilings of this new gallery space allow interactive

ways of installing art works of the 3 artists, for example, two of the pieces will be installed one above another. Besides, lighting is designed in a way to cast unique silhouettes. Undoubtedly, with fewer restraints in the exhibition space, artists can find more ways to express their ideas.

When it comes to supporting new artists, there is another local name that we cannot ignore - Pure Art Foundation and its studio, Studio 52. Situated in Chai Wan Industrial City, this foundation carries passion no less than YY9 in nurturing young artists and fresh ideas in Hong Kong. It is a non-profit grant-giving organization founded by art lover and expert investor James Soutar and his wife, Abby Lai. They aim to help Hong Kong artists bring their ideas to life. Qualified local artists can be granted financial assistance or use of venue space in Studio 52. Grant application is open every year and the application result this year is soon to be announced.

Studio 52 is a 2300 sq. ft. space with high ceilings and splendid views; it has a homey feeling with bookshelves and pantry. Normally it serves as the shooting studio of Pure Workshop, but it also hosts exhibitions from time to time. Tracing back, the foundation took part in "Art East Island" in May this year. Participating artists included Nova Sy, Parallel Lab, Phoebe Wong, Tsang Tsui Shan and ifva Interactive Media Category, who are all photographers, or artists working mainly on media or video. Some projects supported by Pure Art Foundation put much emphasis on Hong Kong culture. For example, the installation project *Voltage* by two Hong Kong based Swiss

architects - Geraldine Borio and Caroline Wuthrich, aims to explore the use of public spaces in Hong Kong. They presented their research on the use of space of back alleys in Hong Kong. On the other hand, Tsang Tsui-Shan's *Flowing Stories*, a work following her award-winning *Lonely Planet*, is a documentary featuring Ho Chung village located in Sai Kung, in which several different generations of villagers were interviewed. The documentary watches from the future to the past how the village changed. Actually, what James Soutar and Abby Lai are trying to achieve is to give art in Hong Kong a push, and they do so by offering the most important elements - financial aids and venues.

Except from the four galleries mentioned above, Chai Wan, being the third largest art hub in Hong Kong, has seen an influx of design and photography companies starting from a few years ago. There are artists opening up studios, and sites following loft-style living, such as art bookstore Bondi Books and café Chaiwanese. The potential to develop this region is simply huge. Even though Chai Wan lies on the suburb regions of the city, the tranquility and spaciousness that it offers are almost impossible to find downtown. Just as Artify Gallery Manager Cherry said, "Space is more than the internal environment. It is also related to sceneries out of the window, and the density of the whole district." In the upcoming May, we long for the scene that something fresh will blossom in the "Art East Island", and that something will provide us with more choices other than just being commercial.



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