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London antiques partnership boosts Fine Art Asia fair

By Bo Leung in London | China Daily Global | Updated: 2019-07-05 00:49



Visitors view art at the Fine Art Asia showcase at Masterpiece London at the end of June. [Photo by Bo Leung / China Daily]

A passion for classical antique Chinese furniture learned from his family inspired Hong Kong trader Andy Hei to establish the Fine Art Asia fair, which has now become an important date on the calendar for enthusiasts worldwide.

He is the second generation of the HL Hei family, where Hei learnt the trade from his father, dealing in *huanghuali* and *zitan* furniture from the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

In 1989, Hei worked in New York for renowned Asian art and antique dealer Robert Ellsworth, gaining his first experiences in top-end exhibitions and fairs.

Participating in the art fair industry "was an eye opener" for Hei, who saw it as an "elegant business in the west".

In 1999, Hei set up a shop on Hong Kong's Hollywood Road, Andy Hei Ltd., specialising in Chinese antique furniture, and used it as a way to introduce new platforms for the Asian art market.

He admitted he has been torn at times between maintaining old traditions and adapting to new trends.

"My father didn't agree to new platforms, he's more of a traditional (type), sitting in a shop and waiting for clients to walk in," Hei said.

After taking part in many overseas events, Hei organised an art fair in Hong Kong with a vision to create a physical platform similar to the ones in the West, and build up business in the Asian market.

In its inaugural year in 2006, Fine Art Asia in Hong Kong had 15 exhibitors take part, but it's come a long way since; 25,000 visitors attended the fair in 2018, including major collectors, dealers and connoisseurs from all over the world.

This year's event, in October, is expected to attract some 120 exhibitors with an estimated 28,000 visitors at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The event covers ancient and modern contemporary works of art between the East and West.

An event titled *Ink Asia 2019*, believed to be the world's first fair dedicated to ink art, will take place alongside the Fine Art Asia event.

"It's natural to merge these two events together, it gives people a chance to appreciate it all," Hei said.

Hei also revealed Fine Art Asia will be working with Masterpiece London, a leading cross-collecting fair, offering the finest works of art, design, furniture and jewellery, in a long-term partnership.

The Masterpiece Pavilion at this year's Fine Art Asia will comprise 25 exhibiting galleries introducing a selection of high-quality Western art, which Hei said "will bring an exciting market to Asian audiences".

Hei stressed the importance of updating and reinventing the art fair, which has evolved from a traditional antiques fair to featuring contemporary art and photography.

"We have no patience, especially the younger generation, and if you keep showing the same category in the same style, same decorations, same marketing for more than two years, they won't come back," Hei said.

The emergence of a younger generation of collectors and buyers is a growing trend that Hei sees as the future target audience.

Hei has found many younger collectors seek art which they can keep and appreciate, rather than just buy as an investment and then resell.

"We encourage them to seek guidance from experts such as myself and other dealers," Hei said. "They can obtain information through the internet, but it's not the same as hearing real and in-depth stories about an item from dealers."



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