Laurent Grasso's *Visibility is a trap*, 2012, at Hong Kong's Edouard Malingue Gallery.

THE NEW FRONTIER

With the growing success of Art Basel Miami Beach, the famed art fair heads east to Hong Kong for an inaugural showcase this May.

BY SUE HOSTETLER

With all its eye-catching sculptures, seven-figure painting purchases, and dazzling crowds, it's hard to imagine Art Basel anywhere but right here in Miami. But as any aficionado of the 44-year-old event knows, it did not start here, and with its global success, it certainly is not ending here. Enter Asia.

Almost two years after Art Basel parent company MCH Group bought a majority stake in Asian Art Fairs Ltd., which founded the Art HK contemporary art fair, the newly rechristened Art Basel in Hong Kong opens on May 23. Featuring work presented by 245 of the world's leading galleries, as well as an improved floor plan and architectural design (at the waterfront Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre), the show promises to provide Western audiences with the context to explore Asia's visual arts, a segment of the art market that has skyrocketed in recent years. Art Basel's expansion into Asia also gives the storied fair an unparalleled three-continent, year-round engagement with the art-world cognoscenti (its other shows being in Switzerland, home of the original since 1970, and Miami Beach). All told, the three extravaganzas will showcase artworks from more than 500 international galleries to over 200,000 guests this year.

PRESTIGIOUS ART DEALERS ARE PUTTING EFFORT INTO BUILDING THEIR ASIAN AUDIENCE.

"Attendees in Hong Kong will not only have an opportunity to possibly see and acquire works from this region of the world, but also to understand the context in which the work has been created," says Cathy Leff, director of Miami's prestigious Wolfsonian-FIU museum. Savvy collectors, like Miami's Don and Mera Rubell, started paying attention to this market a few years ago, visiting artists' studios and attending Art HK. As interest in Asian art has expanded and sales have risen, they will be joined by the multitudes at AB in HK this year.

Magnus Renfrew, the original fair's director and now director Asia of Art Basel, has overseen the expansion. "The fair will showcase artworks by more than 3,000 artists," Renfrew says, "ranging from young stars to the modern masters of the early 20th to 21st century, hailing from both Asia and the West." Renfrew has

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF EDOUARD MALINGUE GALLERY, HK

Cathy Leff

ICONIC INSIGHTS

Director of The Wolfsonian-FIU museum **Cathy Leff**, who was instrumental in bringing Art Basel Miami Beach to town 11 years ago, shares her thoughts on the show's expansion into Asia and Asian art's growing importance in Miami.

THE ART BASEL SHOWS ARE OFTEN REFERRED TO AS THE "OLYMPICS OF THE ART WORLD." WHY DO YOU THINK THE THREE FAIRS HAVE BECOME SO NOTEWORTHY, AND WHY EXPAND INTO ASIA NOW? I like your reference to the Olympics, as the three fairs bring together the strongest, best, highest-quality galleries. The expansion into Asia is smart for two reasons: With globalization and new wealth production, there are many more consumers/collectors of art, and strategically that supports the expansion. Second, as the world gets smaller and we learn more about cultural production in areas that previously were underrepresented by the fairs, the expansion allows them to tap into and get to know about the art that is being produced in countries less known to the market.

HOW DO THE HONG KONG AND ASIAN MARKETS DIFFER FROM EUROPE OR THE AMERICAS? I have not yet been to Hong Kong, although I have been to southeast mainland China. I imagine this new fair will present works created by artists in the region—perhaps different from those represented by galleries in the other two fairs. I also imagine that new galleries might enter this third fair, as the market may be slightly different. It also could provide an opportunity for younger galleries in Asia which might not have participated in the other two fairs.

WHY WOULD COLLECTORS FROM MIAMI TRAVEL ALL THE WAY TO HONG KONG FOR THE SHOW WHEN THEY CAN ATTEND ART BASEL MIAMI BEACH? One of the most brilliant aspects of the Art Basel organization is its ability to tap into the culture, spirit, and people of the cities in which their fairs take place. In doing so, each has taken on the personality of its location. I would expect as much with the new fair. It would also be a great opportunity for those interested to tap into the expertise and programs of the local cultural institutions, similar to what has happened in Miami and Basel. I think it's in Miami's youthful DNA and that of its collectors and institutions to look for emerging markets and emerging artists. Clearly, the expansion of the fair to Hong Kong will provide the opportunity for collectors and institutions to do this.

always believed that Hong Kong is the ideal home for a major international art fair. "We are geographically positioned at the heart of Asia, and we are the region's financial center," he explains. "There is no tax on the import or export of art, and Hong Kong has an increasingly expanding cultural sector and culturally interested population."

The rapid proliferation of art fairs globally has forced dealers to carefully select where to devote their resources. Many of the most prestigious are putting effort into building their Asian audience at Art Basel in Hong Kong; over the years, the Basel shows have become known for their selection committees' rigor in choosing participating galleries. "Each year will be an opportunity for galleries to participate, with every applicant undergoing the identical review process and given the same consideration," Renfrew says.

More than 170 exhibitors will show in Hong Kong's main section, including first-time Art Basel participants like New York-based Dominique Lévy gallery and 303 Gallery. Many eyes will be on the Insights sector, which is highlighting projects devised for the fair by 47 galleries from Asia and Asia-Pacific regions. The Discoveries segment will likely be the most experimental, presenting solo and two-person exhibitions by exclusively emerging artists and, in an exciting twist, features a $25,000 prize. But Renfrew reminds attendees about all of the ancillary activities. "In addition to the quality of art brought by our galleries, Art Basel is known worldwide for the parallel programming surrounding our shows," he says. "That includes Conversations and Salon discussion panels, and ambitious collaborations with powerhouse partners such as local museums and institutions."

Most of those local institutions are rolling out the red carpet. The M+ Museum presentation at its new space in the West Kowloon Cultural District will be the largest contemporary art show in Hong Kong to date, featuring inflatable sculptures by artists from South Korea, the USA, and China. "The new Asia Society Hong Kong Center, located in a former British army explosives compound, is extraordinary," says Renfrew. "Also not to be missed is the cutting-edge nonprofit Para Site, dedicated to exhibiting international art." For additional local interests, Renfrew suggests visiting Osage gallery, an interdisciplinary space that was the first Hong Kong gallery to show at Art Basel, representing outstanding Hong Kong artist Lee Kit in the Statements sector of the 2011 edition (Kit will also be representing Hong Kong in this year's Venice Biennale).

Outside the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, special events and exhibitions at local galleries will be of immense interest. The Hong Kong gallery scene has been invigorated over the last few years by the arrival of major international blue-chip players like Gagosian Gallery and White Cube, which have joined local stalwarts like Hanart TZ Gallery (around since the 1980s and well-known for championing emerging Chinese artists) and Osage. The dizzying number of special offerings at Hong Kong institutions will include a series of panel discussions and a keynote lecture by Asia Art Archive. This unique institution, widely regarded as the most important collection of source material for the recent history of art in Asia, has grown from a single bookshelf 13 years ago to more than 35,000 records comprised of thousands of physical and digital items. The government is also getting in on the act by celebrating the opening of its new venue, Artspace @ Oil Street, which was converted from a 1908 building into a project space for working artists, curators, and the public.

Not surprisingly, the Hong Kong show has proven attractive to corporate sponsors looking for a foothold in the fast-growing and significant region. Deutsche Bank has signed on as lead partner, joining existing associate sponsors such as Davidoff, Audemars Piguet, and Absolut Art Bureau, all of which support the shows in Switzerland and Miami Beach. In fact, Hong Kong shares some similarities to the Miami of 10 years ago. "The market is in a relatively early stage of development here, much like the atmosphere in Miami when we opened there," says Renfrew. "We want to be part of the cultural surge in this dynamic city, and the show provides the perfect global platform." **OD**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LYNTON GARDINER, THE WOLFSONIAN-FIU (LEFF); OPPOSITE: COURTESY OF CASA TRIÁNGULO GALLERY (*UNTITLED* BY MARIANA PALMA); WKCDA (WEST KOWLOON); ART BASEL (RENFREW)

ABOVE: *Untitled*, 2013, by Mariana Palma, presented by Brazil's Casa Triângulo Gallery; BELOW: Magnus Renfrew, Art Basel's director Asia.

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ABOVE: A view of Hong Kong's West Kowloon Cultural District.