

Art fair's fifth edition is bigger and better

International festival brings together works by 266 galleries from across the world in Wan Chai

With 266 galleries from 38 countries showcasing contemporary art from around the world, the biggest and most vibrant edition yet of the Hong Kong International Art Fair opens to the public today at the Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wan Chai.

It's also the final time the festival will be known as ART HK, before becoming one of three annual shows under the Art Basel label next year, along with the original in Switzerland and Art Basel Miami Beach.

Despite the change, which comes after MCH Swiss Exhibition (Basel) bought 60 per cent of event organiser Asian Arts Fairs last year, fair director Magnus Renfrew says the event will retain its uniquely Asian flavour, with about half of the galleries continuing to come from Asia.

ART HK was inaugurated five years ago and has provided galleries such as Gagosian and White Cub with an international showcase, which both have built on by establishing permanent Asian outlets in Hong Kong.



The event has contributed to the development of Hong Kong's contemporary art scene, both on the trading side and by generating greater public interest. Last year's total of 63,511 visitors was the highest yet and a 38 per cent increase on 2010.

"I'm very proud of how it has developed over the last five years and how Hong Kong has bought into it," Renfrew said, adding the fair had put the city in the global spotlight.

With Basel's involvement, he believes the fair will grow even bigger.

"Basel has unparalleled access [to the art world]. There will be far more collectors and curators coming here, a more globalised interest in art in Hong Kong." Already, interest from galleries far exceeds space available - just 38 per cent of the 700 applications from exhibitors were accepted.

Galleries were selected by a committee, based on artistic merit. Organisers have also increased exhibition fees by between 6.5 per cent and 8 per cent.

Among the most eye-catching pieces on show are the Art HK Projects, 10 large-scale installations curated by Yuko Hasegawa of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo.

The pieces spread out across two of the exhibition halls and include artist-activist Ai Weiwei's powerful *Cong* (2008-2011), showing 123 letters from the government to the artist and his studio refusing to disclose information about the 2008 Sichuan earthquake and, on the other side, the names of 5,196 children who died when shoddily constructed "tofu" school buildings collapsed during the earthquake.

Other pieces in the project include Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima's *HOTO* (2008), a stainless steel installation containing 3,827 LED digital counters, and French conceptual artist Daniel Buren's striking *Photo-souvenir: From Three Windows, 5 colours for 252 places, work in situ* (2006).

The fair runs until Sunday.

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image: Alexander Seton, *The Soloist*, install at Sullivan+Strumpf, ArtHK12

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