



Leaf (2)
eng
Kathy E
up in H
sculpt

Collecting 101

Artistic values

The popularity of Chinese paintings has created growing interest in works by artists from other Asian countries. **Michael Taylor** shares some collection pointers from experts

Collecting in Asia can be summed up in just three short words: art, art and art. At least that is the opinion of Shirley Ben Bashat, managing director of Opera Gallery Hong Kong. The reason, she explains, is that auction results – from London to New York to Hong Kong – are showing high returns on art as an investment. These results have drawn in many new buyers to the market," Ben Bashat says. "The supply is not balanced with the demand, so you see collectors fighting to get some pieces. The main interest is Chinese contemporary art, but you also see growing interest in Korean and Japanese art."

Opera Gallery, known in established art circles as a respected authority on European modern art, was established in Singapore in 1994. It has subsequently set up shop in Paris, New York, Miami, Hong Kong and London, with five more locations opening in the next year. "Opera Gallery opened its doors in Hong Kong in November 2004 in a little space on Des Voeux Road Central," Ben Bashat says. "Last

year, the gallery relocated to a grand 4,000-square-foot space on Wellington Street at the corner of Wyndham. The new location allows the gallery to carry bigger exhibitions and provide an ideal display for some of the world's best art works."

According to Catherine Kwai, founder and executive director of Kwai Fung Hin Art Gallery, also in Hong Kong, one of the reasons why collectors have started showing an interest in art



from other parts of Asia is that prices of Chinese works have gone through the roof.

"Starting in 2003, the market for contemporary Chinese art has become very hot and auction prices keep surging," Kwai says. "When the price of Chinese art became so high, people started to look into art from other parts of Asia, such as Japan, Korea, Indonesia and even India."

With today's uncertain financial markets, another trend has emerged. Collectors – both serious and casual – are becoming increasingly cautious about what they buy. They are also looking beyond nationality to the relative value of the work.

"Serious collectors are still buying, but they are only buying very high-quality work from established artists," Kwai says. "Other clients will buy artwork at reasonable and affordable prices according to their own taste. The nationality of the artist is not that important. The most important thing is the

SECOND HAND: Gaffer Studio co-owner Jules Lambe says buyers who intend to sell down the road should make sure there is a secondary market for the objects they collect.

Photo: Courtesy of Osage Kwun Tong

quality of the work. Kwai, who has since 1986, opened her gallery on House Street in Hong Kong 17 years ago. "I have been art collecting and buying for further growth," she says.

Emerging talent

While most eyes are on Southeast Asian art, there are still emerging – market Komala, chief executive in Singapore, modern art from the region is stepping

"In terms of quality, modern and contemporary Chinese counterpart icon of Asia – the Big One – yet, despite the recent price of Southeast Asian art, it's less than a tenth as expensive as contemporary Chinese art. Minjun, Zhang Xiaogang, whose paintings now sell for

Some of the big names include Nyoman Masriadi, Rudi Suwage from Indonesia and Anwar from Malaysia.