



TYR

The Young Reporter
-by HKBU journalism students since 1969-

07

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Hong Kong journalists are calling for better working conditions. The Hong Kong Journalists Association released the findings of a survey which shows that over 30 per cent of journalists want to quit within the next two years due to low pay and long hours. Meanwhile, the University of Colorado's journalism school is closing and other journalism programmes in the US are restructuring.

It has always been hard to classify journalism as a profession. It is primarily a white-collar job but some aspects of it are more blue-collar. It is not a profession in the sense that there is no licensing. But there are standards which distinguish serious and trained journalists from ordinary bloggers.

Journalism schools should teach those standards. Studying at one of the top journalism schools in Asia, I enjoy the privilege of being a student reporter and the freedom to run our own stories for *TYR*, the city's oldest journalism student publication.

This is the very last editor's note I write here. Please enjoy our special on art and culture in this issue. Issue 8 will be passed on to the next editorial board. Please stay with *TYR*.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Kwok Kim-fung".

Alan Kwok Kim-fung
Chief Editor

Preserving our musical heritage

Guqin-makers believe the craft of making the ancient musical instrument will pass on as more are learning to play it

BY JOHN XIAN



(Above) About ten *Guqin* are produced every year at the factory. (Left) Mr Choi Yik-man teaches his student *Guqin*-making techniques.

Experts have warned that local traditions and customs, including some skills and crafts, would soon disappear if the city failed to preserve them before they die.

To protect these intangible cultural heritage, the government appointed researchers to compile a list of traditions awaiting recognition from the Unesco.

Performing arts like puppetry and food-making skills like turtle essence jelly are also noted. The list identified masters and their crafts. And *Guqin* making is one of them.

“Love for *Guqin* is growing in the city as more people are interested in playing and making this instrument,” said Mr Choi Yik-man, 77, owner of Choi Fook Kee Musical Instrument Factory in Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre in Shek Kip Mei.

His factory has specialised in making *Guqin*, a Chinese traditional seven-stringed plucked instrument, for more than a century since Mr Choi’s grandfather Choi Chuen-fook opened the shop in Chaozhou in 1904.

Each *Guqin* requires at least 200 hours of work according to Mr Choi, leading to a slow production with ten *Guqin* finished per year.

The steps of making a *Guqin* start from wood selection and cutting to painting and lacquering. The most difficult task lies in surface painting. There is no exact formula for the amount of materials, like Cornu Cervi powder, to be mixed in the paint. It is all about practice and experience.

And different steps have to be carried out in different seasons. Winter’s dry and cold weather favours shaping and sticking while lacquering in summer is better due to the east and southeast winds and high humidity.

“Making a *Guqin* cultivates your personalities, and gives you a positive and long-lasting satisfaction,” the 77-year-old master said.

Mr Choi now teaches ten apprentices who all know thoroughly how to play the instrument. He believes only those who love playing *Guqin* have determination and patience to make a good one.

Apprentice Mr Tong comes to the factory every Saturday from Macau. Having learnt to make *Guqin* for more than a year, Mr Tong says he is now addicted to the craftsmanship.

“I feel amazed when I am playing an instrument made by myself and would never sell my own *Guqin* but cherish it like my own child,” he said.

As the successor of the century-old family factory, Mr Choi is worried about hinderance for the industry to grow, such as the city’s high rental costs and a narrow audience group.

But he is confident in *Guqin* making to be listed as intangible cultural heritage: “*Guqin* has a 4,000-year-old culture and it will not die out easily.”

Dr Chu Yin-wah, associate professor at Department of Sociology at Hong Kong Baptist University, suggests the government should vitalise *Guqin* making by nurturing more talents to compose new pieces and providing more chances for the young generation to appreciate *Guqin* culture.

EDITED BY LEILA POON

Jeté forward

HK ballet needs support and inspiration to face competition

BY JACKIE YIN

The 1,000-strong audience at the Lyric Theatre of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts burst into applause as the long-anticipated debut performance of the ballet “The Golden Lotus” drew to a close.

The three-act dance is a bold artistic exploration of lust and infamy based on a notorious Chinese novel of the same name by the Beijing Dance Theatre.

Ballet companies from the mainland are seeking new markets in the city. BDT choreographer Ms Wang Yuanyuan says: “Hong Kong is more suitable for doing arts.” She explains that “The Golden Lotus” is banned in the mainland due to its explicit sexual content.

Competition is keen but greater support is needed to provide infrastructure for local ballet to keep up, says the only ballet company of here, Hong Kong Ballet. They say the company lacks a proper regular training venue.

To leave room for other performances and annual events such as the Hong Kong Arts Festival, HKB has to leave their rehearsal hall at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre temporarily, and retreat to Sha Tin Town Hall.

“Ballet companies in other countries all have their own ‘homes’, where dancers



Hong Kong Ballet dancers perform in their show, “Stravinsky’s Revolution”.

and managers work and live together to achieve better communication. But we don’t,” says HKB’s principal dancer Ms Jin Yao.

HKB’s dancers practise every day from 10 am to 6 pm, with an hour long lunch break. Their salaries vary from \$16,000 to \$30,000.

“The cost of running a ballet theatre is huge,” says HKB executive director Ms Rebecca Ip Si-fen.

The government provides about \$31 million to the company each year, accounting for 70 per cent of its total revenue. Last year, HKB earned \$9 million from its performances and there was a \$4 million surplus.

HKB has performed at the Hong Kong Arts Festival only three times over the past 30 years, but has its own scheduled performances all year round.

Yet its plays seem to lack local popularity. Running out of audience support is a disadvantage to the company, says

Ms Ip. It staged 43 performances last year while the normal figure for a foreign theatre is around 100.

“The audience is important as it prompts us to produce more shows, which help sharpen the skills of our dancers,” she said.

But viewers want something fresh to stimulate their senses.

Ms Athena Luk, a student from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, watched HKB’s “Stravinsky’s Revolution”. She says she would only be interested in ballet if there were innovations: “The music in this show is unique. I want to feel something new.”

Among all seven productions of HKB last year, only one is original choreography as shown on HKB’s official website. By comparison, BDT, which was founded in 2008, has produced seven originals in the past two years.

The novelty of “The Golden Lotus” is that it challenges the limit of the stage and catches people’s attention.

“I bought a ticket immediately after seeing its poster,” said Mr Tu Boqun, 70, who tends to listen to Chinese opera only during his spare time.

Mainland dancers make up more than half of HKB’s 39 dancers and occupy all the four posts of principal dancer.

Ms Ip explains that their posts are opened to professionals around the globe and there should be no surprise about the large proportion of mainland dancers given its larger talent pool.



“The Golden Lotus” explores sexuality through nudity and positions.

EDITED BY DAISY ZHONG

Holding on to the past

Once a charming trend, Temple Street's open-air singing stalls are vanishing

BY SADIE LO



Hoa Pham

Middle-aged singer and customer are singing for the public and for their own souls.

Red lips, curly hair, heavy make-up and glittering clothes. A woman singing classic Cantonese songs under the dim yellow light bulbs dissolves in her own world. Nostalgia of the city's old days fills up the air right then and there.

Outdoor singing stalls on Temple Street have a history of up to 50 years. They are not well-equipped as modern karaoke stores. Most open from 7.30 pm to 11.30 pm, and are merely sheltered with sheets of nylon and plastic.

Customers are often served with water and they can pay \$20 to sing a song or as a "red packet" to the workers there.

"I earned about \$60 a day last month. The operation cost is about \$500. I have to pay everything myself, like the workers' salaries and the musical instruments," says Mrs Ho Pui-kei, who opened her stall in 1995.

Mrs Ho says back then people were more willing to pay.

"I had a part-time job in the daytime," Mrs Ho adds. "It's hard to survive by running the stalls but it's just better than doing nothing at home."

"*C'est la vie, mon chéri*" - a famous 1993 Hong Kong movie that depicts in details the life of street performers on Temple Street - helps explain how popular the singing stalls were in the past.

But now only five stalls are left and their owners are struggling to survive.

Ms Lee Hung, owner of a singing stall and tarot stall on Temple Street, has kept the tradition for more than three decades. She says the street in the past was crowded with people listening to songs, but the number of customers has greatly decreased in recent years.

A worker of Ms Lee, whose nickname is Betty, has worked there for half a year despite the no part-time job rule of her daytime job.

Betty and other five workers not only help Ms Lee to operate the stalls like canvassing and chatting with customers, but are also singers. They work every night, even when the weather is not good.

Betty doesn't care much about the salary. She works there just because she likes to sing: "I always join singing contests. Singing at the open-air stalls helps me build up confidence to sing in front of people."

Mr Ng Shek-tsun, 60, is a resident from Temple Street. He always goes to the roadside singing stalls after dinner. He prefers these singing stalls rather than karaoke bars nearby.

"Environment of karaoke bars is better. They are air-conditioned and indoor," he says. "But I have a sense of belonging to these stalls. The friends I made here

are like my brothers and sisters."

A customer who called himself "Brother Kuen" regards singing at the stalls as a way to relax.

The 57-year-old who lives in the New Territories has become a regular customer of Ms Lee for one and a half years. He goes there after work once a week. And nobody, not even his family, knows.

"My family would probably think it is a disgrace for a middle-aged man like me to sing publicly," he says. "But I enjoy spending my time here as nobody cares what you do."

"There is no restriction and I can simply leave my worries behind."

He thinks Hong Kong is a city all about money now and people have to pay a lot just to have fun.

"Hong Kong people are colder," Brother Kuen says. "Even the gap between family members has become bigger nowadays."

Mrs Ho says these stalls might be shut down and move somewhere else in 2020. The venue is yet unknown. She says she would retire by that time.

"Hong Kong needs roadside stalls but the government regards them as a shame," Brother Kuen says. "The officials want everything to be planned and standardised."

Cigarette smoke, beers, peanuts and foul language. The roadside karaoke stalls are probably not the best place for modern, money-driven people to have fun. But for many Hongkongers who belong to the older generation, this is where dreams and happiness of their youth lie.



Hoa Pham

Folders full of hearty old songs' lyrics.

EDITED BY HOA PHAM

A black and white game

Go - the Chinese chess game dating back 2,000 years is catching on among HK youngsters

BY JASMIN YIU

Parents are always concerned if their kids play too many games that affect their academic results and social life. But the chess game Go is an exception.

"He has just joined several classes, and has made improvement. I want him to maintain a healthy interest, not just playing video games all the time," said Mrs Lai, mother of a six-year-old boy, Lai Man-lok.

Mrs Lai sent Man-lok to learn Go because she wants her son to think and solve problems faster.

Go, known as *weiqi* in Chinese, is an ancient board game for two players, black and white, who take turns to place a game piece of their own colour along the grid on a Go board.

Man-lok first played Go when he was in primary school. But Mrs Lai was afraid that his teachers might not be able to take care of every student due to a large class size.

Although Go first originated in China over 2,000 years ago, it was not popular then. However, the game caught on in Japan and Korea.

Hong Kong Go Club, the first local Go club, was established in 1975. Go has

become popular in recent years and demand for Go classes has been growing.

Founding chairman of Hong Kong Go Association Mr Siu Sai-kit has been a Go teacher at different schools and associations for about 30 years. He learned Go in his 20s and his first Go board is a gift from his friend.

To promote Go and its culture to the younger generation, he set up Hong Kong Children's Go Academy in 2004 to teach youngsters problem-solving skills through playing Go.

"A few friends and I are very keen about the game, and we would like to popularize it to let more people in Hong Kong know about its fun," said Mr Siu.

"Go can help children raise their intellectual quotient, as well as emotional and adversity quotients," said Mr Siu.

"Children can develop their politeness and discipline through the game. It can also train their willpower and determination."

Hong Kong Children's Go Academy reaches students through nearly 60 local schools, which are their main source of income, according to Mr Siu.

"We insist not to increase our fee, because earning money is not our main

goal. But if we set the price too low, parents may doubt our teaching quality."

There are about ten to 11 Go schools in Hong Kong, and Hong Kong Go Culture Association, which is run by a group of young teachers, offers the lowest tuition fee of \$99 per class.

"We work on a part-time basis. We just want to get into groups and discuss our techniques," said Mr Wong Chi-wing, chairperson of HKGCA.

"There are only 20 students in the whole centre, but the atmosphere is quite good and we can focus more on certain techniques."

The 200-square-foot centre is in Kwun Tong. The rent costs about \$3,000 per month, which can be covered by fees from the current number of students.

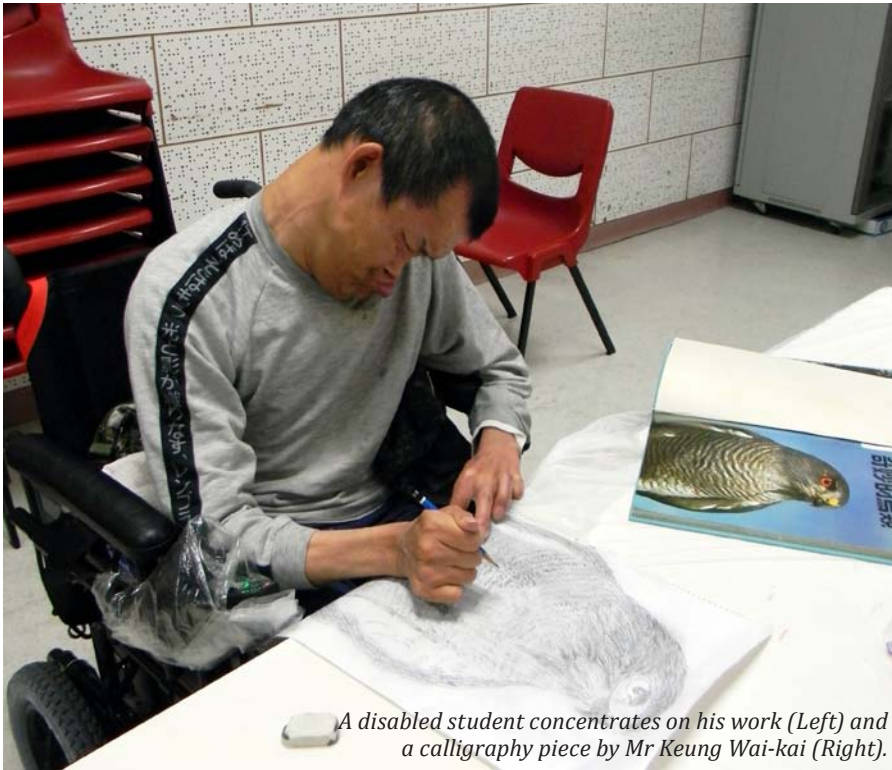
"There will be more people learning Go in the coming future, and the demand for young and talented teachers is getting higher," said Mr Siu.

"Therefore, I hope I can influence the younger generation to become full-time Go players and continue organising Go schools. The essence of the game will then be maintained and preserved".

EDITED BY STANLEY SUM



(Left) Mr Siu Sai-kit, chairperson of Hong Kong Children's Go Academy, give students guidance on how to play better. (Right) Go helps maintain a good discipline in children as they greet opponent before the game starts.



A disabled student concentrates on his work (Left) and a calligraphy piece by Mr Keung Wai-kai (Right).



No boundary for arts

Everyone can be equally good when it comes to creativity and imagination

BY HEI IN LAI

Arts for the disabled have increased in the past few years thanks to new government policies and grants aiming to help them integrate better into the community.

The Hong Kong Rehabilitation Programme Plan of 2007 has been subsidising non-governmental organisations that provide various interest classes and personal development programmes, such as painting, pottery and dancing.

The i-dArt gallery in Kennedy Town operated by the Tung Wah Group of Hospital is one of such places. It hosts different exhibitions of works by disabled people at the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Jockey Club Rehabilitation Complex.

An exhibition in March featured calligraphy works and attracted many people and media coverage.

Ms Maxica Lui Yee-yee, a member of staff at i-dArt gallery, says in art, it does not matter if the person is healthy or disabled as long as he or she has passion.

“Their creativity won’t lessen due to their disabilities,” she says. “It doesn’t stop them from painting better.”

These artists may face many difficulties, including poor wrist flexibility, control and concentration problems, but they never give up.

One of the artists featured in the i-dArt exhibition, Mr Keung Wai-kai, suffers from inherited muscular dystrophy. His drawings and calligraphies are often praised by visitors.

“When I get compliments, I feel more confident and it boosts my self-esteem,” says Mr Keung. “And when they buy my works, it motivates me to paint better because I know someone out there supports what I do.”

But Mr Keung’s disabilities restrict his creativity occasionally.

“I would like to write bigger words (calligraphy), but my wrists have limited range of movement,” he said. “It’s frustrating.”

He believes arts can help slow down

the deterioration of his disabilities.

Earlier this year a project named Community Art in JCCAC Bread & Puppet 2011 for disabled students was launched. It is under the Centre for Community Culture Development. Disabled students perform at four carnivals.

One of the performers is Ms Liu Tung-mui, who is a dancer. She won the Ten Outstanding Young People Selection in 2005. Her persistence and contribution to arts despite suffering from muscular retardation won the heart of judges.

“We can be braver, more creative and artistic in dancing,” expressed Ms Liu with her body. Her condition hinders her speaking abilities and mobility. Ms Liu’s father is her translator.

Her tutor Mr Maru Yuen Kin-leung says everyone is equal in arts irrespective of body abilities.

Ms Liu has a spirit that is infectious: “As long as you love arts, there is always a way to overcome difficulties.”

EDITED BY INES NARVAEZ



(Left) Magnan & Tse has its own collection of vintage clothes.
(Below) Ms Yuen Man (left) and her partner Tse.



Giving old clothes a second life

Redress: Over 200 tons of textile waste go to landfills every day

BY TANIKA CATO

Forget about Gucci and Prada. This year, it's all about vintage and environmentally friendly clothing.

Fashion designers have spotted a niche in the market which not only looks great but adds to the ethical fashion movement. But how exactly are clothes made in an eco-friendly way?

Designers are more conscious than ever to use sustainable materials, like organic cotton and natural dyes, when making garments.

Upcycling is the latest method adopted by local designers. It uses old clothes or fabrics to create new garments. Not only is it eco-friendly, it creates an eco-fabulous look which helps combat textile waste and sustain the environment.

Local fashion designer Ms Eileen Chan is the founder of upcycling label The Yesterdays Skin. She believes promoting vintage clothes here is a must. Her collection focuses on restyling old outfits and accessories from all over the globe to create a fresh fashionable look.

"I wanted to give a second life to vintage clothes from all over the world and create a unique yet affordable look. Changing and adding detail can instantly make a piece more stylish." She said.

Geometry and architecture are key to her inspiration when reconstructing pieces and designing new things.

"I first study the trend when I select the clothes I want to reconstruct, and then I'll look at the print cutting."

Statistics from the Environmental Protection Department show the average quantity of textile waste is 253 tons.

A number of NGOs and organisations have made sustainable fashion a priority on their agenda. According to Earth Pledge, at least 8,000 chemicals are used to turn raw materials into textiles and 25 per cent of the world's pesticides to grow non-organic cotton.

Collecting and recycling clothes has been a main project of Friends of the Earth (HK) since 2001.

The Yesterday Skin's collections are now only available online. Although Ms Chan feels her pieces are in step with the vintage trend, she wants to keep them online as they can be sold globally.

"There is a niche for vintage in Hong Kong. Local people aren't used to second hand clothes but are slowly accepting it. And the concept of recycling is becoming a trend," said Ms Yuen Man, co-founder of high-end brand Magnan & Tse.

Their latest collection is a recycled vintage line, which also uses upcycling as a technique, to alter garments collected from all over the world.

Redress is a local charity focusing on promoting sustainable fashion in Asia. "Wear sustainability is not a norm but a niche" is their motto. With the drive to educate consumers, designers and retailers on eco-fashion, they have held fashion shows, events and projects showing eco-fashion can be just as chic.

Founder of Redress Ms Christina Dean believes educating young designers to make them rethink their designs is important.

"At the moment the West is leading in the awareness of sustainable fashion and materials that go into making our clothes. If we can educate the young designers here in Asia, we can help the environment," she said.

Their recent project, the Eco-Chic Design Awards focus on textile waste and recycling small fabric materials like curtains and tablecloths. It will be the first local competition about sustainable fashion in which 30 finalists will create a party dress from waste fabric.

EDITED BY JESSICA ZHANG

Hong Kong fails to draw art students from overseas

Fashion design is one of a few art-related courses that attracts foreign students

BY STEPHANIE OTT

Hong Kong is commonly known as a gateway to Asia. But it is yet a popular destination for international students to study art and design.

As Chief Executive Mr Donald Tsang Yam-kuen said at the 2011 Going Global Conference, “Hong Kong welcomes students from all over the world.”

According to Mr Tsang, high degree of internationalisation distinguishes Hong Kong from other cities. Its unique history has provided a vibrant cultural diversity of “East meets west”. The government is determined to enhance the educational environment by spending \$54 billion on education in the current fiscal year.

“Staying in Hong Kong is an enriching experience and we saw a 47 per cent increase in non-local students between 2007 and 2010,” said Ms Michelle Li, deputy secretary for education.

There were 3500 exchange students from Asia, North America and Europe in the academic year 2009/2010. But few of them came here to study art-related subjects.

According to the International Office at Hong Kong Baptist University, only four out of about 350 exchange students at HKBU study visual arts this year.

In general, most exchange students come to Hong Kong for studying business or politics, but not art. They may



Going Global 2011 is an international education conference held in the city.



HKBU's Academy of Visual Arts locates in Choi Hung with spacious areas and scenic views to stimulate students' creative art works.

try out a few art courses for fun while their major is always something completely different.

Ms Jennifer Chan, programme officer at the International Office of HKBU, said: “Right now Hong Kong is not a very popular place to study art. Most of our exchange students are on business courses.”

According to the Times Higher Education, the top three universities in Hong Kong are the University of Hong Kong, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and Hong Kong Baptist University. They ranked 21st, 41st and 111st respectively in the Top 200 World University Rankings.

Among three of them, only HKU and HKBU offer fine arts programmes. Yet, they do not receive substantial numbers of exchange students for the sole purpose of studying Arts.

Nevertheless, fashion design is one of a few art-related courses that can attract foreign students to the city. The School of Design at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University gains reputation.

Ms Ekin Ulas, a UK exchange student studying fashion design at PolyU, said:

“The fashion programme here is great. It's a great city to study fashion because people here are very open-minded and have a unique style.”

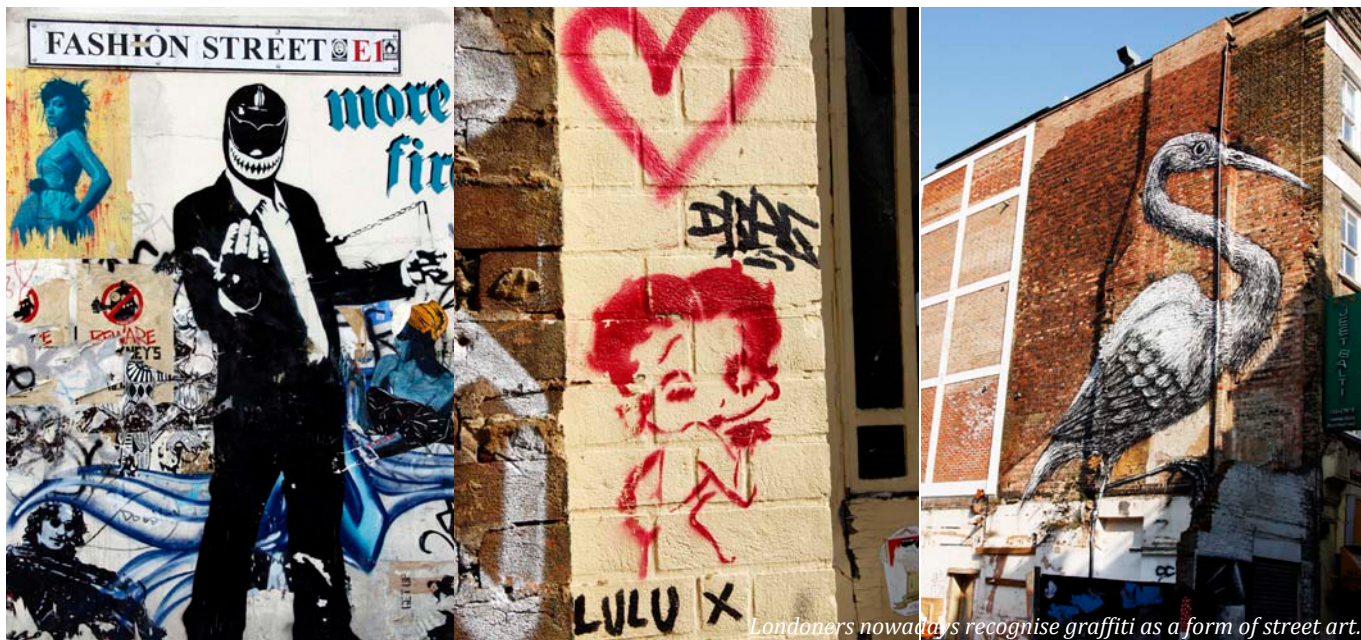
To attract more international students to study art and design here, local universities started improving their programmes by renewing their infrastructure.

The City University of Hong Kong invited renowned architect Daniel Libeskind to design its multimedia building, which is now the permanent home of the School of Creative Media. And visual arts students at HKBU have had theory courses in the new Communication and Visual Arts Building since 2010, while practical courses still remain in Choi Hung campus.

“Our visual arts academy is very new, so it is still developing and relatively small,” said Ms Chan.

She added that the academy currently had four partner universities worldwide. It is now working on establishing more partnerships, in order to allow students to learn from other cultures and go exchange abroad.

EDITED BY MINNIE LI



Londoners nowadays recognise graffiti as a form of street art.

Gang tags as art in London

Graffiti is illegal, but some graffiti artists have turned their works into a million dollar business

BY CARLOS CHENG in LONDON

Donning masks to hide their identity as they went about spraying names and drawings on the street walls, tunnels and trains of London, the perpetrators used to be regarded gangs and thugs. As time goes by, however, the results of their mischief have come to be recognised as graffiti art.

London's graffiti originated in the early 1980's with the influence of hip hop culture. Those words or drawings were widely regarded as vandalism with little artistic value.

They were used as a way of "tagging" territory by gangs. The more territories one tags, the more respect one gets.

But later with more individuals taking part and the help of some outstanding artists, graffiti is now considered as a humorous medium to express personal values in today's London.

"I was surprised by the amount and diversity of the graffiti here in London when I arrived," said Ms Mer Morrison, an exchange student from Canada at City University London.

"Every time when I go out, I take photos not only of landmarks like St Paul's Cathedral, but also of impressive graffiti around the town. They show the cultural

qualities of London."

Londoners are more open to graffiti nowadays. "I do think graffiti is a kind of art," said Mr Sam Kennelly, a London undergraduate working on a blog about London's street art.

"Graffiti can either be decent or crappy. It can be an art masterpiece or meaningless tags. But its artistic value is unquestionable."

Though painting on public properties is still illegal in London and graffiti artists sometimes get arrested, their works can be found in almost every neighbourhood because the cleaning authorities are not strict about removing them.

Some graffiti works are valuable and expensive. When Banksy, one of the most admired graffiti artists, showcased his works to the world, some of his masterpieces were sold for as much as £288,000 (about \$3.7 million).

They include a Mona Lisa with a rocket launcher that shows his anti-war stance and big slogans on a five-storey building that make fun of London's omnipresent surveillance system.

"Banksy shows the world that graffiti can be better than oil paintings because it can resonate with the surroundings to

look more realistic and meaningful. It brings power to pedestrians," said Mr Kennelly.

Some graffiti artists have even turned the illegal act into a successful business mode. Mr Darren Cullen was arrested when he was doing graffiti at the age of 16. His parents were so angry that they grounded him for six months.

"At that moment, I could do nothing but read comic books. I learned their drawings and practiced myself," he said. "I realised that graffiti is not only a cool stuff but also a profitable art form. Then I started to think about building up my career with my drawing skills."

He later collaborated with artists from different places and started a business firm called "Graffiti Kings", specialising in decorating offices and homes for their clients.

"Our government is still telling citizens that anyone with a spray can be a dangerous thug, but meanwhile we perform graffiti legally before the public," said Mr Cullen.

"We are trying to change that perception. The cultural diversity makes London a great place for graffiti."

EDITED BY EDWARD MA

Ukulele, a gift from Hawaii

The cute instrument that produces chirky and joyful music is getting more popular worldwide

BY HELEN WU in SINGAPORE



(Above) Ms Glyn Chan and Mr Simon Mok play the ukulele to round up a day.
(Right) Modern ukuleles are available in different colours, shapes and sizes.



Eight o'clock on Saturday night and Tom from Thailand arrives in Little India, a colourful district in Singapore, with two of his friends.

The three enter a small shop called Ukulele Movement and are welcomed by the unique music of ukulele, a small guitar-like musical instrument with four strings.

Due to the ukulele's small size, people can carry it around even when they are travelling.

"Some go on a voyage, and they bring a ukulele with them. It is portable and easy to play," said Ms Amirha, a university student who works as a part-time staff at Ukulele Movement.

Ms Amirha herself loves playing the ukulele too. Her first ukulele is a birthday gift from her bosses Ms Glyn Chan and Mr Simon Mok.

"I guess everyone's first ukulele is special," Mr Mok said.

In 2008, Ms Chan and Mr Mok discovered the "beautiful little instrument" when they watched a video on YouTube.

The couple then fell in love with ukulele after viewing more footages.

At that time, Mr Mok wanted to buy a ukulele for Ms Chan as a Christmas gift though few people played the instrument in Singapore then.

He learned from a search on the internet that ukulele originated in 19th century Portugal and was taken to Hawaii by Portuguese immigrants.

He also found that there was a ukulele revival in the United States and Britain, but it had yet to reach Singapore.

Numerous articles about the ukulele had appeared in The Telegraph, Financial Times and American music journal Music Merchandise Review.

"It was fun to play, beautiful to behold, delightful to own and portable and easy to learn. Any beginners can pick it up and start playing after a few minutes," Mr Mok said.

"This led us to believe that there is a group of people waiting for ukulele's music in the concrete jungle."

Thus the couple quit their jobs, reg-

istered a company and opened Ukulele Movement.

A dazzling array of more than 120 ukuleles of different shapes and sizes are displayed in the store. Prices range between SG\$69 and SG\$2007 (about \$450 to \$13,000). The more expensive ones are handmade in Hawaii and shipped to Singapore.

Ms Winona, a third year film student at Ngee Ann Polytechnic in Singapore, is another part-time staff at the store. She shares the same passion for ukulele with Ms Chan and Mr Mok.

"It is the best job that I've ever had," Ms Winona said. She plays the ukulele and sings to the music joyfully with her colleagues in the shop.

"There is a famous saying: Find something you love to do, and you'll never have to work a day in your life," said Mr Mok.

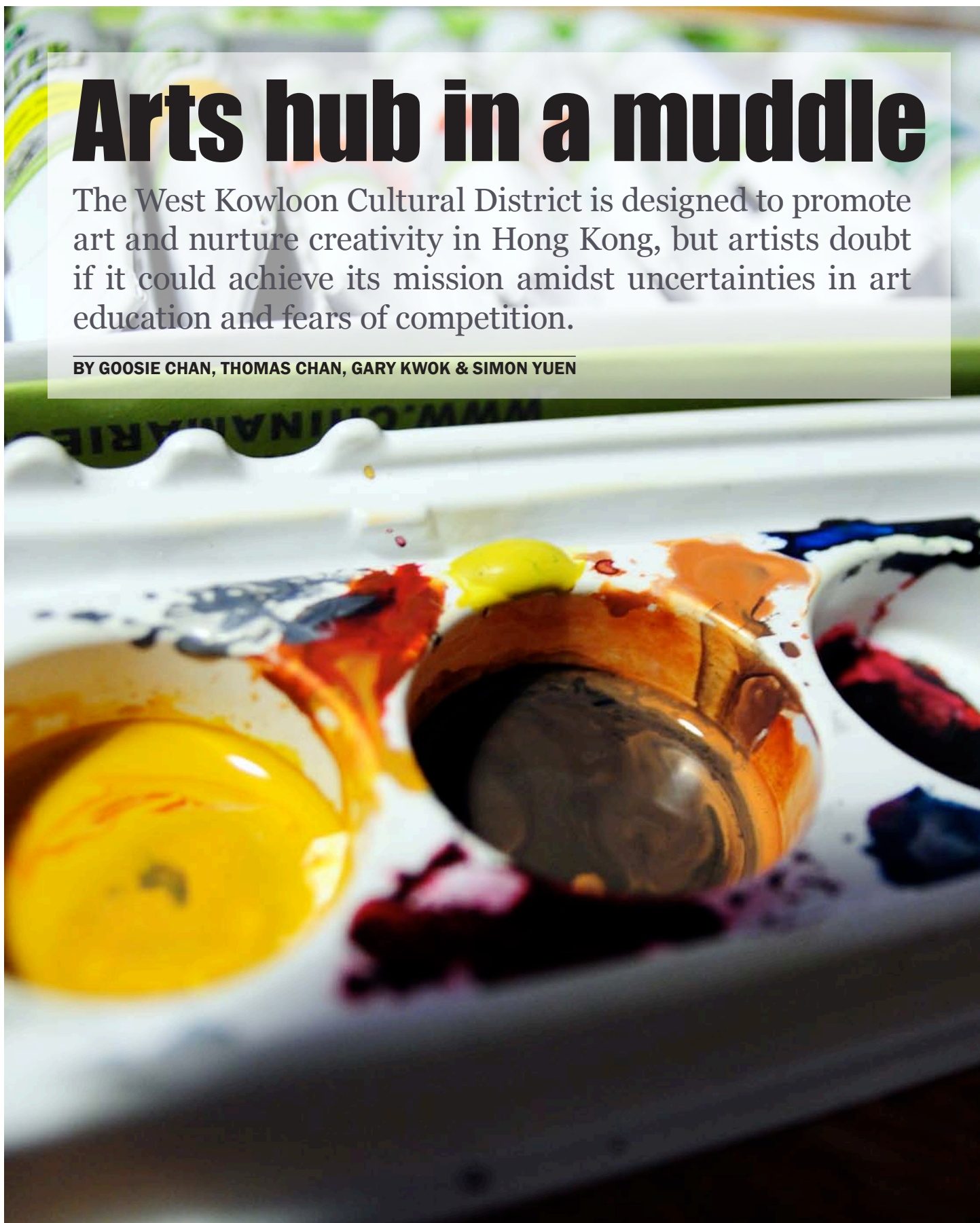
"The ukulele is an instrument that promotes community building and bonding in the world."

EDITED BY BONNIE FUNG

Arts hub in a muddle

The West Kowloon Cultural District is designed to promote art and nurture creativity in Hong Kong, but artists doubt if it could achieve its mission amidst uncertainties in art education and fears of competition.

BY GOOSIE CHAN, THOMAS CHAN, GARY KWOK & SIMON YUEN



Insight into education urged in arts hub plan

The local art community says the current plan for the West Kowloon Cultural District focuses too much on the construction of facilities.

It says more efforts on education as well as recruitment of administrators and quality performers are needed to make the WKCD successful.

Although 32,000 square metres have been allocated for education facilities under the winning plan “City Park” by Norman Foster, and education is supposed to be a vital part of the project, Mr Ko Tin-lung, artistic director of Chung Ying Theatre Company, is not satisfied.

“Educating the public to appreciate art is something that must be addressed without delay, if the cultural district is to be anything more than another Hong Kong property development with empty halls labelled as art centres,” he said.

He has repeatedly raised his concerns with the government. But only one document related to art education has been submitted by the WKCD Authority to the Legislative Council so far.

The document says more comprehensive proposals on developing art programmes and education will be drawn up this year with the establishment of a creative learning unit, an advisory body on networking with art groups.

Lawmaker Ms Tanya Chan Suk-chong said she also found the government lacked initiatives in art education consultation. “They never released any consultation results,” she said.

Apart from incorporating art education into the hub’s plan, the art community also urges the WKCD authority to take a more active role to encourage local students to visit the district frequently. But some students said it was not feasible for them.

“Travelling fee is the biggest concern for me,” said Ms Toby Tsang Tse-to, a form-five student studying at Tai Po Sam Yuk Secondary School.

Ms Chung Wing-yan, a form-five student living in Aberdeen, also said she

would prefer the art facilities in Sheung Wan and Tsim Sha Tsui because they were nearer to her home.

Mr Ko from Chung Ying suggests schools provide free trips for students to participate in the art activities and performances in the hub, and the government should subsidise art groups so that they could offer discounted tickets to students.

“The public does not want another theme park that merely attracts tourists. People are looking for a platform which will help transform the society and facilitate exchange of ideas,” said Mr Ko.

Ms Tanya Chan added: “The arts hub should provide low cost and flexible venues for students to showcase their talents. A one-off visit to museums in the hub is not regarded as art education.”

Although concerns are raised over the cultural project, some art professionals still believe the WKCD can be an oppor-

“The public does not want another theme park that merely attracts tourists.”

- Ko Tin-lung, artistic director of Chung Ying Theatre Company

tunity that improves art education.

Dr Vanessa Li Lok-wa, Education Bureau’s senior curriculum development officer of visual arts, said the arts hub would provide more chances for students to interact and learn from professional art groups.

“Face-to-face interaction with live performances is a way for students to appreciate and enjoy art,” she said.

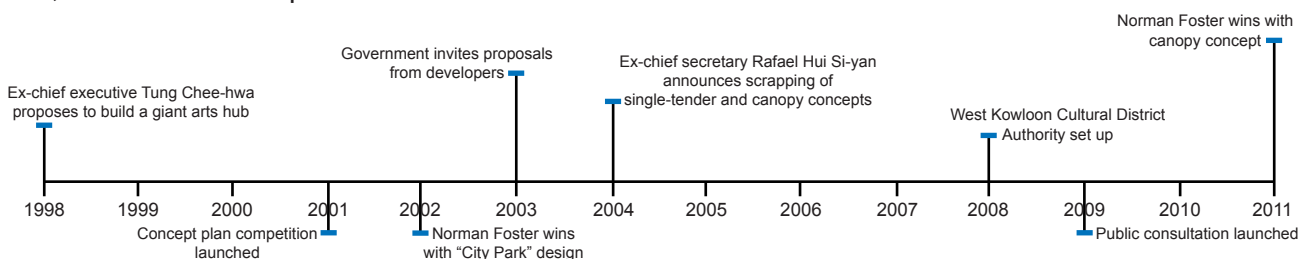
Along with the implementation of the new senior secondary curriculum, in which aesthetic development is included as part of students’ other learning experiences, the cultural district project can be an opportunity for the city to enhance its art education, said Mr Ko.



West Kowloon Cultural District panorama view, under "City Park" proposal

What's the plan?

City Park, Norman Foster's \$21.6 billion plan for the West Kowloon Cultural District, features an opera theatre, a museum M+, concert halls and a 15,000-seat arena as well as a 19-hectare park and a two-kilometre harbour-front promenade. The arts hub is designed to be an extension of the local community, with shops, offices and art education facilities. Its first phase is expected to open in 2015, and the second phase a decade later.



Artists fear threat from hub

Old theatres will face competition from modern facilities

Major art facilities in Hong Kong like the City Hall and the Hong Kong Coliseum are decades old. When the West Kowloon Cultural District becomes ready in a few years' time with modern and high-end facilities, there are worries that existing theatres will be adversely affected.

According to Mr William Yan, chief manager of performing arts services at the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the WKCD will have 15 new art facilities.

"For example, we now have the Grand Theatre inside the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, the WKCD will have a Great Theatre in the WKCD. We are concerned about direct competition between them," he said.

The first phase of WKCD is expected to open in 2015 and completed by 2031. Museums and theatres in the 40-hectare complex will be equipped with high-end technology and facilities.

"The Cultural Centre was built in 1989. We can only renovate it and other venues. There is no way we can compete technology-wise with the WKCD," said Mr Yan.

Lawmaker Ms Tanya Chan Suk-



The Grand Theatre in Hong Kong Cultural Centre in Tsim Sha Tsui.



Legislator Ms Tanya Chan Suk-chong performs regularly on stage.

chong, also an active stage performer, shares Mr Yan's view.

"Competition is inevitable in this context," said Ms Chan.

"In the past, the government did not think of improving the art facilities as there were no competitors around. But now a new domestic arts hub is coming and they will have to raise the quality of existing venues."

But low occupancy of existing art facilities may not be the worst consequence. Mr Castiel Kie Kwun-ping, member of a local cappella group, worries that the hub would instead wipe out small local art groups.

"It is hard for us (small art groups) to gain an opportunity to perform in the hub. When the WKCD invites some famous groups to perform at those fancy venues, people will be attracted. We are afraid we will be left out," said the 21-year-old artist.

But legislator Mr Alan Leong Kah-kit believes the WKCD development is not that pessimistic.

"There are many more similar art facilities in the Pearl River Delta Region, so we have to find a new position (for the arts hub) and avoid being repetitive."

What do they say?

"The WKCD is a mere real estate project. People who will really benefit from it are the developers. Also, the project has dragged for so long. I don't think it's going to work well."

- Mr Johnny Cheung, in his 40s, accountant

"The WKCD would be an attraction to tourists. I would definitely come to see it again when it is built. I think it will be interesting to see how Hong Kong presents its fusion of culture in a place."

- Mr Joe Baumgartner, 24, exchange student from Switzerland

"It is hard for us (small art groups) to gain a chance to perform in the hub. When the WKCD invites famous groups to perform at those fancy venues, people will be attracted. We are afraid we will be left out."

- Mr Castiel Kie Kwun-ping, 21, member of a local a cappella group

"Given the existing cultural facilities, the WKCD is a bit repetitive. I don't think I will go pay a visit after it is done unless my friends say it is really attractive and worth going."

- Ms Mandy Chan, 19, local student

A forgotten trade

The story of a repairman behind the city's central business district

BY AUNG MIN KHIN

Hidden in an alleyway in Central is a tiny, greenish wooden hut. An old man is adjusting the nook of an antique chair. Suddenly he slips and falls onto the floor. Luckily he is not hurt.

Mr Ho Kwok-wah repairs antique furniture for a living. Hunched over in his five-square-foot shop, the octogenarian has seen better days. Now with weak health and hearing, he still works from 9 am to 4 pm every day.

"I don't have regular income. If no one brings something to repair, I just sit here doing nothing," says Mr Ho. He charges about \$300 a chair and it takes two to three days to finish repairing.

Mr Ho was born in Guangzhou and had worked there for about ten years before coming to Hong Kong.

Life is hard now and he has to spend more time working to support his family. But Mr Ho believes he could still earn more in Hong Kong than in Guangzhou.

Although his adult daughters come to visit him once in a while and give him money, it is not enough for him to support the living of his second wife and their ten-year-old son.

Mr Poon Kam-pui, 78, is Mr Ho's colleague. "Hand-made chairs are rarely seen these days as many of them are



Mr Ho does not encourage people to follow his path because of little earning.

made by machine. However, the longer life of these antiques, the higher value they have. After fixing the edges and repolishing them, they may become more beautiful than new ones."

Mr Poon explains that most of the chairs Mr Ho repaired are made from rosewood, which is a hard reddish-brown wood of a tropical tree that has a pleasant smell.

Mr Poon is a veteran crafter. He retired from his job six years ago. After that he brought some old furniture and asked Mr Ho to fix them when he came to visit him. He says Mr Ho could not retire because the environment is getting worse now and he has to work hard to support his family.

Both Mr Poon and Mr Ho tries to teach their children their craft, but none of them is interested in this field since it is hard to make a living.

In a developed and modern city like Hong Kong, fewer people still want to get their old furniture repaired.

Ms Nicky Lung, a Baptist University student, says her family never repairs old furniture.

"We just throw them away and buy

new ones," she said. She does not even know whether they could find a place repairing their furniture in Hong Kong.

"Nowadays, we don't need to pay much to buy new things, so nobody wants to repair the old ones," she said.

Ms Chan Fung-ye, owner of an electronic company, says she doesn't have such antique furniture to repair, though she lives close to Mr Ho's shop. She has known the old man for over ten years: "He is a very kind person because he always helps neighbours."

During the Lunar New Year's time, Mr Ho can earn more because people will call him to help decorate their houses. This is the time of the year that he calls "good business times".

Mr Ho says he gets tired easily now.

"Sometimes I have to encourage myself to do the job," he says. He regrets not studying harder when he was young. "This is my life. I know nothing except this job."

So he would continue to do this job as long as he can. "I don't know when I can get retired, maybe until the moment I cannot work anymore," Mr Ho says.



EDITED BY CATHIE GUO



Sculpture Promenade in Tsim Sha Tsui is the new project of Mr Emil Adamec in Hong Kong.

Healing sculptures

Czech artist hopes to carve into the city's waterfront promenade

BY VERONIKA TOMANOVÁ

Tsim Sha Tsui's iconic coastline may be transformed if the 124 permanent sculptures by Mr Emil Adamec received permission from the authorities to be erected.

This is part of his global project – Acupuncture of Earth, which is inspired by Chinese medicine. Mr Adamec is trying to reconnect the energy flow on earth with his works and the idea of Sculpture Promenade is the first of its kind in Hong Kong.

His ambitions are high but whether it will succeed depends on if his application is approved. The plan is to create a series of sculptures, each being two to three metres high that would be visible from the sky. Participating artists are renowned sculptors from 120 countries including China, covering 1.5 km along the seafront, including Avenue of Stars.

Now as a world-class sculptor with sculptures erected in 25 countries, Mr Adamec did not want to become a sculptor when he was a child. His passion was painting: "I was very introverted, always on my own. I spent most of my time in nature painting landscapes and birds."

He got much closer to sculptures

during the third year of his university studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. Mr Adamec was interested in Taoism around the same time and decided to travel to China to find a master who would teach him the philosophies.

"Instead of a master, I found my future wife," laughs Mr Adamec.

The beginning of his lifelong project started out in China's Changchun Sculpture Park, where he created his first sculpture - a fountain - from stone. Now, 15 years later, Acupuncture of Earth consists of more than 100 monuments from all around the world including Czech Republic, Australia and Hong Kong.

Mr Victor Tai Sheung-shing, president of the Hong Kong Sculpture Society, supports Sculpture Promenade even though some might find it absurd.

"Some people may think that such a project would be impossible, however, didn't most people also think in the same way about the 'Acupuncture of Earth' project," says Mr Tai.

Mr Adamec already has two sculptures in the city - Rainbow Cloud and Wetland Heart Cloud. The second sculpture was made during the Hong Kong

International Sculpture Symposium led by him in 2008. As a result, ten statues were created in Tin Shui Wai Park.

Mr Ng Chi-man, who lives nearby, is a frequent visitor: "I pass the statues quite often with my family. Sometimes we stop and try to explain the meaning to our children. Sculptures are different during the day and at night. One day we saw the shadow of the dragon here."

Some people see art and sculptures as a rich person's hobby but Mr Adamec does not agree. "My works are not created for private collectors or galleries," he says. "They are for public places, for everyone."

All his creations are drapery sculptures in abstract forms made from wood and stone. His style is unique.

"No one else uses this technique and that's why I don't even have to sign my works," says Mr Adamec.

He believes that his statues are helping earth's energy flow and Mr Tai agrees. "Emil's determination to heal the earth with sculpture shows his heart and commitment to art and to people regardless of race or nationalities."

EDITED BY CARRIE CHENG

Same-sex love drama is a hit

Actor says love is difficult for queers as it is for straights

BY GOOSIE CHAN

In theatre or reality, Mr Joey Leung Cho-yiu is happy to be gay, not as a gimmick but to tell a true love story.

As one of Hong Kong's best-known theatre actor, the 34-year-old has starred gay in many of his previous productions such as "Queer Show" (2004), "Butterfly Lovers" (2005) and "Love Dies Slowly, Naturally and Silently" (2009).

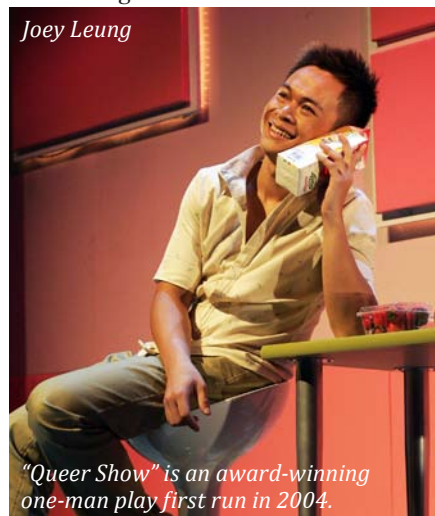
The openly gay actor says he wants to talk about difficult love because same-sex relationships are under social stress and often need to be hidden from friends and families.

"Love between a man and a woman is easy. There is no Romeo and Juliet in the society," says Mr Leung.

"But homosexuality is difficult. Same-sex couples dare not make their secrets public, at least, not in the office."

To him, being gay on stage is an ideal way to voice out for the city's homosexual community, which he says has received little care from the public.

"Through stories about same-sex



Joey Leung

"Queer Show" is an award-winning one-man play first run in 2004.



Mr Joey Leung cho-yiu, who came out to his family over ten years ago, often plays gay in his dramas.

Joey Leung

hardship, I want to tell how strong and determined our love could be," he says.

"Queer Show" is a one-man play about problems queer face and won him the "Best Leading Comedy Actor" (2005) and the "Most Impressive Actor in 20 Years" (2011) at the Hong Kong Drama Awards, organised by the Hong Kong Federation of Drama Societies.

The award-winning gay-culture comedy was run four times in two years. It was a hit with office ladies and, unexpectedly, straights too.

"It is hard to predict the target audience of every play. Sometimes you may get it wrong," says Mr Leung. "At first the target audience of 'Queer Show' was gays and lesbians. But there were more and more office ladies watching. And many even came with their boyfriends."

Mr Leung always wants to play different roles. He is never afraid of being labelled a gay-role actor only by acting gay so often.

"No one could label you as anything if you don't label yourself. As long as it is a good play and a challenging role, I will take the chance to act no matter it is related to what."

His acting break came by chance 15 years ago. Having just completed his A-levels, he was invited to play a role in a stage show. The director was impressed and suggested he apply for a place at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, which accepted him.

He developed a passion for acting because he got to experience the lives of different people.

"Stories we play are all about life. Without life, there is no story to tell," says Mr Leung.

He explains that a convincing character has lots of dimensions and is realistic. As a good actor, he could be extremely introverted sometimes, but outgoing at other times.

"If you could not understand the dimensions of a role, you were acting yourself only," says Mr Leung.

But the award-winning actor never feels his performance is perfect.

"If an actor thought he made a perfect performance, he is over," he says.

"When you take your career seriously, every moment would be challenging. I just try my best sincerely in every play."

EDITED BY ALAN KWOK

Invisible public runway

Hong Kong's third landing spot in Wanchai

BY WINNIE YIU

When people talk about runways in Hong Kong, Chek Lap Kok may be the first place that comes up in their mind. But local architect Mr Jim Chan Tsin-ching has created another runway amidst skyscrapers and commercial buildings in Wanchai.

Called "Taking off", the "runway", however, does not serve any airplane. Located above the footbridge connecting Wanchai waterfront and the Hong Kong Arts Centre, it is one of the few pieces of public art exhibited in public areas or outside museums and galleries in Hong Kong.

Even though "Taking off" is meant for public appreciation, passers-by can hardly view it unless they climb above the footbridge. The best vantage point is on the third floor of the five-storey Arts Centre. This hampers the public from

identifying or appreciating this piece of public art.

At first sight, the runway, on which the letters HKG and numerous arrows have been painted, is not very striking. Yet, it is this ordinariness that makes it stand out from other art forms. "Taking off" is integrated into the environment, transforming a public facility into a work of art.

The elevated runway floats above greeneries nearby and directs viewers' attention towards the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre next door and the Victoria Harbour beyond.

With a model aeroplane getting ready to depart on this runway, the work looks like a scene from the old days when Hong Kong was served by the Kai Tak Airport located in the middle of the city.

EDITED BY MINERVA CHENG



Installation art "Taking off" on a footbridge in Wanchai.



Art in the toilet

HK Arts Centre marks its 30th anniversary by building arty toilets

BY CLAIRE CHU

Eye-catching curtains and other objects are painted all over the walls. Even grass is growing from the ceiling. The sound of a flushing toilet takes you back to reality - you are inside a cubicle in one of the water closets at the Hong Kong Arts Centre.

The Anniversary Designer Toilet Series is part of the 30th anniversary celebration at the centre. Mr Derrick Tsang and other five volunteer designers renovated five toilets, adding artistic elements into their innovative designs.

The artists made use of every inch of the bathroom walls. There are playful black-and-white paintings outlining the city everywhere, accessorised with peculiar and vintage-like pictures. Art is literally everywhere.

When people first set foot inside this washroom, the mischievous decoration may make them mistake the place for a children's room. One may then surprise

to find themselves surrounded by layers of long and plain curtains in bright and appealing colour like orange.

The curtains separate compartments too. The curvy arrangement of the compartment "doors" is unorganised but somehow immaculate. It may remind you of how artistic minimalism can be.

In the next washroom, dried straws grow from the ceiling where lamps pop out occasionally. The ceiling looks like a garden full of sunflowers, except that it is shown upside-down. With blue walls personating the sky, the whole decoration is a refreshing taste of nature.

Whether you are a minimalism supporter or a fan of elaborated accessories, the Toilet Series artworks are good to look for inspiration. All innovative toilets show people that bathroom design can beautify one's life and the choice of remodeling your own bathrooms is always there.

EDITED BY ELEVEN LIU

Bagpipe music still alive in post-colonial HK

BY TIM HAMLETT

As the rain poured down on the handover ceremony in 1997 and a solitary bagpiper played a sad tune of farewell, it seemed that this might be goodbye, not only for his army, but also for his instrument.

The bagpipe had been played in Hong Kong for more than 100 years, but usually by Scottish visitors. The exception to this rule was the Hong Kong Police band, founded in 1954. Convention required that the bandsmen should be constables, but there were no expatriate constables, so the police pipers have always been local.

Gloomy predictions that the bagpipes would no longer be heard in Hong Kong turned out to be wrong. The bagpipe survives, not so much as an art instrument as an important part of social rituals.

Hong Kong has many uniformed organisations and groups. They all have

parades from time to time. The bagpipe has many limitations but it is uniquely suitable for outdoor parades because of its loud volume and penetrating tone.

As a result many uniformed groups keep up a band, and conversely all the large bands belong to uniformed groups: the Police, the Boy Scouts, the Auxiliary Medical Service, St Johns Ambulance Brigade and so on and on.

Smaller groups are much in demand for weddings. I am not sure how this got started but one of the variations offered by Hong Kong wedding planners is a “Scottish Wedding” with pipes, kilts and such things. Even if the bridegroom ducks the Scottish costume, it is a pleasing thing to have the happy couple led into the banquet by a couple of pipers in the full gear.

In fact some surprising people like to be led into the room by a couple of pip-

ers. Even rural Lions Clubs wish their formal banquets to include a little ritual in which the guest of honour is led in by pipers. The lead piper is then plied with whisky by the organiser, something of a hazard if the organiser is generous because the special cup used for this purpose is quite large and it is supposed to be emptied in one go.

The advantage of being a social instrument is that there are a lot of us about. Last year there was a “Pipefest” in which a massed band marched along the TST promenade in aid of cancer research. Several of the larger bands were “too busy” to participate but there were still more than 100 pipers and drummers on parade. For an alien instrument really better suited to cold climates this is pretty good.

The downside of the situation is that there is not much incentive for improvement. Most piping engagements involve short bursts and the audience is not taking much notice of the music anyway. Senior officers presiding at parades are willing, and may even prefer, to hear the same tunes they heard last year.

A few dedicated individuals reach high standards as soloists, usually by spending some time abroad. Bands face a dilemma: if they teach they must play tunes which the students can reach reasonably quickly. If they do not teach they can advance, but with a gradually shrinking membership.

Well, everyone has problems. Personally I am not Scottish and I only started playing six years ago when the prospect of retirement and endless leisure - so far a mirage - appeared.

The bagpipe has some serious drawbacks. The only volume available is loud, which makes practice difficult. There are only nine notes, but there are about 50 conventional ornaments which must be learned and practised. The instrument is difficult to tune and has lots of joints which need constant maintenance. Keeping up the necessary air pressure is demanding. But I must say also that when everything is working the end result is very satisfying.



Tim Hamlett is chairman of Hong Kong St. Andrew's Pipe Band committee and a veteran journalist.

Hong Kong St. Andrew's Pipe Band

Learning to appreciate art is more important than building an arts hub

BY MINNIE LI

Local art magazine “Muse” shut down in December after publishing for four years while “C for Culture” closed in March.

As construction for the \$21.6 billion West Kowloon Cultural District gets underway, it is ironic that the collapse of the two magazines about art and culture has not aroused much concern.

To be built on a 40-hectare site, WKCD will house more than a dozen new cultural venues. But many people doubt the need to build these additional facilities and their effectiveness in nurturing local talents.

Instead, they feel that it is far more important to nurture an audience capable of appreciating art via education, if Hong Kong wants to squash its unwanted reputation as a cultural desert.

Otherwise, WKCD will only become another property project, like the Cyberport in Pok Fu Lam, which was billed as an initiative to promote the development of the information technology industry, but is more renowned as a residential and office development.

There is much that Hong Kong could learn from Taipei, where art penetrates

every corner. For example, sculptures are found on many of its streets and they match perfectly with the environment.

The metro station at the National Dr Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall is a regular venue for photo and painting exhibitions. Besides, Taiwanese love visiting bookstores and works of literature always top their lists for best-sellers.

On the contrary, Hong Kong is where capitalism penetrates every aspect of our daily life. Advertisements are everywhere to stimulate consumption. The best-selling books are often about investing and getting rich. In such a money-oriented society, art is a luxury for ordinary people.

To develop art in Hong Kong, we should start with nurturing young people. Children should be taught to enjoy and appreciate art. Only then would they fall in love with art and become regular concert-goers and museum visitors when they grow up.

A half-price discount is available to all full-time local students at most drama theatres and music concerts. By making the tickets more affordable, students can be exposed to the arts. It

would be even better if a transportation subsidy could be provided to poor students who live in distant places.

The Young Friends of the Hong Kong Arts Festival, which is a branch of the Hong Kong Arts Festival company, aims to promote the arts among students. The 18-year-old organisation attracts more than 10,000 secondary and tertiary students to become members each year. Just as it plays a vital role in exposing students to the arts, similar groups dedicated to providing art education should be given funding to expand their reach.

It is time the government and the people of Hong Kong reflected on the right way forward for the society. Could the over-reliance on real estate and finance lead us to a better life and give our future generations a promising future? Waves of demonstration against the government over its land and housing policies tell us that the answer to this question is “no”.

Hong Kong has a dynamic and diverse lifestyle, but cannot claim to be a city with a high quality of life without its population developing a capacity for appreciating art.

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Night life in Hong Kong is no longer just about bars and pubs at Lan Kwai Fong in Central.



Along Hollywood Road in Soho, Hong Kong ArtWalk, a gallery crawl known for its exhibitions of works from around the world and fine restaurants featuring multicultural cuisines, is drawing more and more art lovers and gourmets.

HONG KONG ARTWALK 2011

Photos & Text by Cathie Guo
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