

VERNISSAGE / PROFILES

Making a Scene

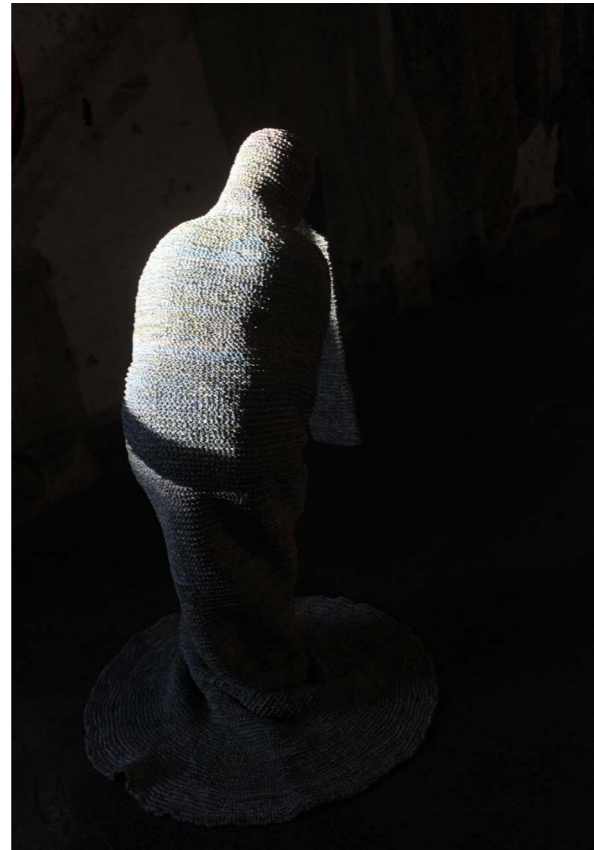
Despite recent challenges, Hong Kong's art scene is flourishing once again. We meet some of the individuals behind its success.

Text
Payal Uttam



Artist Movana Chen brings her knitted paper 'body containers' to life through performances in public spaces, including Hong Kong's crowded streets
Image by Pierfrancesco Celada

Movana Chen is perhaps best known for her other-worldly costumes made of knitted shredded paper, but her entire practice communicates ideas of humanity and common ground
 Images by Echo Guo (top) and Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art, Korea, courtesy of the artist and Flowers Gallery (bottom)



Artist Movana Chen

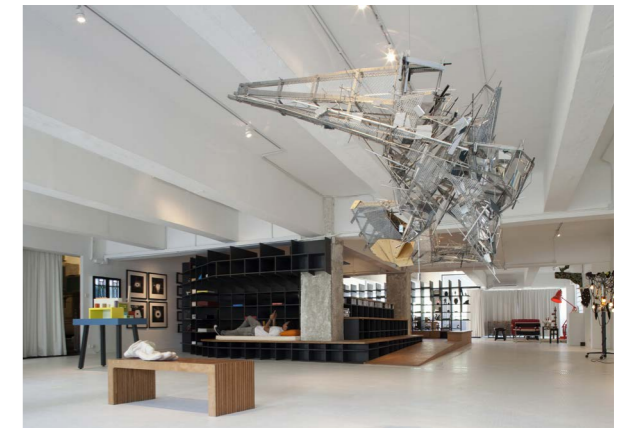
Movana Chen is easily one of the city's most compelling artists. Wearing other-worldly costumes made of knitted shredded paper — what she calls 'body containers' — she has performed in crowded streets in countless cities. Inside these snug, sculptural, sack-like garments, Chen's body is entirely obscured. 'But when you're inside, no matter who you are, you're simply a human. Inside we're all the same,' she says, explaining that the works affirm a sense of humanity and common ground. For other series, she has knitted together books and maps from across the world, creating works that literally break down borders and unify different cultures and countries.

In 2011, Chen hit on the idea of inviting others to weave with her to create a sense of community and connection. She has since hosted communal paper-knitting workshops with hundreds of participants. An intrepid traveller, Chen also continues to host impromptu sessions on the road, winning over the most unlikely individuals — like the Russian soldiers who once knitted with her on a trip on the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Chen has recently moved to Cascais, a coastal resort town in Portugal. She plans to keep travelling to collaborate with others around the world, and maintain her Hong Kong studio. 'You learn from the journey,' she says. 'You need to enjoy every moment and just keep moving, sharing your energy and inspiring others.'



Prominent art collector, artist, educator and architect William Lim's impressive private collection has featured in exhibitions at the likes of Grotto Fine Art (top), and in Lim's former studio space in Wong Chuk Hang (middle)
 Images by Nirut Benjananpot



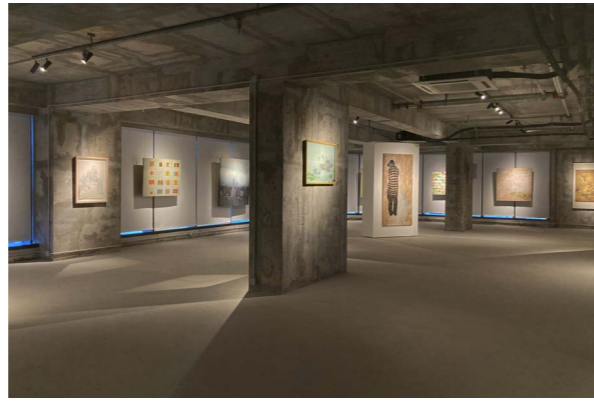
Collector William Lim

An art collector, artist, educator and the architect behind the H Queen's art hub, William Lim is a prolific individual. An early supporter of home-grown art, Lim began snapping up works by local artists more than a decade ago. 'We discovered the Hong Kong art scene at a time when nobody really paid much attention to it,' he says, explaining that he naturally gravitated towards deeply personal pieces. His instincts told him they would be important one day, and they proved to be right. Last year, new visual culture museum M+ accepted Lim and his wife Lavina's impressive donation of 90 works by 53 artists from Hong Kong and elsewhere.

For Lim, the role of a collector goes beyond simply buying works for himself or donating them to institutions. 'You start to be involved in an art community,' he says. 'I go to art schools and attend their graduate programmes too. Acquiring art is also a good way to encourage young artists to keep going.' Throughout his collecting journey, Lim has promoted local talent, whether it has been through publishing a book, loaning works to overseas museums or organising exhibitions abroad. These days, he's focusing on his own painting practice while continuing to expand his collection.



Founder of seminal Hong Kong gallery Grotto Fine Art, Henry Au-yeung is a stalwart of the local art scene. He recently opened a new space in Shau Kei Wan, where he plans on hosting artist residencies and collaborations with local arts groups
Images by Henry Au-yeung (top and middle) and Natalie Dunn (bottom)



Curator Henry Au-yeung

At a time when small galleries are shuttering across the globe, it's particularly heart-warming to see a local gallery expand. Earlier this year, Henry Au-yeung, founder of Grotto Fine Art, opened an additional space in the industrial neighbourhood of Shau Kei Wan. 'It's four times the size of our Central gallery, so we can do more exciting projects,' says Au-yeung, whose plans include hosting artist residencies and collaborating with young curators and other local arts groups.

A loyal supporter of the local art scene, Au-yeung is known for nurturing fledgling Hong Kong artists. Prominent names such as Lam Tung-pang and Chow Chun-fai had some of their first major solo exhibitions in the city at Grotto. 'It was a huge risk to focus on young artists, but I always trusted my eyes and my instinct,' says Au-yeung. As the gallery celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, its founder is proud to continue supporting emerging names. 'Our biggest contribution is not only giving young artists a platform, but giving them a five- to six-year career programme, with advice on how to progress,' he explains. 'This mentorship is important, and 20 years on, you can see it reflected in our artists' success.'

Helmed by executive director Connie Lam, the Hong Kong Arts Centre hosts significant events around Hong Kong, including the city's first international sculpture park in 2018

Director Connie Lam

Like many local creatives, Connie Lam practically grew up inside the Hong Kong Arts Centre (HKAC). She has fond memories of spending hours in the galleries and cinema of the Bauhaus-style building. Fast-forward to the present and she's at the helm, as the centre's executive director.

Reminiscing about the centre's early days in the late 70s, Lam describes it as a highly experimental hub that lit a spark in the local art scene. 'We started an interesting engine — a place that not only nurtured artists, but also audiences,' she says. Since then, HKAC has held many museum-quality shows, moving theatre productions and major film screenings, and it's also home to a thriving arts school. Over the years, HKAC has been active outside the building too, hosting events like the city's first international sculpture park in 2018, which saw a yellow Kusama pumpkin and other striking works enliven the Central Waterfront.

Today, there is still no other organisation quite like HKAC in the city. Lam is excited about the forthcoming M+ museum, but notes that HKAC still has an invaluable role. 'You need grassroots organisations to give artists a platform so they can develop and have breakthroughs,' she says. 'We'll continue to do the groundwork for Hong Kong art to rise up.'

