

Delhi

Art Basel Hong Kong 2025 spotlights the Art of Everybody

The art of rebels, women artists, installations on Delhi's Yamuna, old masters, new masters, performance art—Art Basel Hong Kong 2025 was an inclusive affair



Korean artist Shin Min won the inaugural MGM Discoveries Art Prize for her 'Ew! There is hair in the food!!' artwork Art Basel

Paramita Ghosh

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Art Basel Hong Kong (ABHK) 2025 is primarily a place of encounters. There is curation, there are roadmaps, and things are also left free. One morning you are packed into a bus to check into five galleries at a trot, running the gamut from surrealism to pop art to artworks in which tigers and ravens turn up among everyday objects on a canvas. And then you take the bus back to walk into the art fair, where a chance remark gets you into a conversation with a gallerist who turns out to be the niece of Jane Fonda, and the daughter of a woman who had portraits done by Diego Rivera!

Art, anti-art, installations, video art, performance art—besides a ringside view of these as part of a press tour, the big excitement for me were these impromptu conversations.

Nick Cage is a Black American hip-hop artist I met at the end of a long queue at the fair. He said he decided to grow his roots in Hong Kong due to the welcome he got here, and that he has expectations from Art Basel—he wants to perform here someday. “I didn’t come here to be American,” he said. “I’ve come to see who they took a chance on in the year two after Covid-19. Hong Kong has a great mix of artists. To get a foot in here, if you are good, you can go from here to the skyscraper.”



Hong Kong is a city that does take its public art seriously. Co-commissioned by M+ and the art fair, this year, Singaporean artist Ho Tzu Nyen took over the M+ museum's facade to beam his new work, *Night Charades*, an AI-generated animation of a cast of characters from the best of Hong Kong cinema, in a re-interpretation of the city's image, highlighting its ability to adapt, shape-shift and launch new creative collaborations. The Henderson Building's newly opened Art Garden and the rendering of Chinese artist Huang Yulong's hooded sculptures gazing up at the Hong Kong skyline at the Harbourfront are also areas with a new buzz.

Size, scale, purse

The nature, size, and ambition of contemporary art fairs are “going up,” said Shane Akeroyd, art patron and collector at the fair. Is that true even in the time of Trump's tariffs? Angelle Siyang-Le, director, Art Basel Hong Kong, said they were monitoring the tariff situation and that “so far there are no effects on art trading in Hong Kong”.

Scale was much in evidence at ABHK, which saw the participation of 240 galleries from 42 countries and territories, drawing significant attendance from artists, collectors, museum representatives, and art lovers in general. Old masters like Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele were spotted on the walls. The fair also unveiled a prize with a big purse. Korean artist Shin Min won the inaugural MGM Discoveries Art Prize, receiving USD 50,000, to be shared with her gallery, for her work. India's Saju Kunhan, represented by Mumbai's TARQ and Berlin's Sweetwater galleries, was one of three artists nominated for the award.



Indian artist Saju Kunhan, represented by Mumbai's TARQ gallery, was one of three artists nominated for the MGM Discoveries award Paramita Ghosh

There were other leg-ups the fair afforded in terms of visibility. Siyang-Le talked about galleries impressing from the Insights and Discoveries sector

came over galleries progressing from the Insights and Discoveries sector into the Galleries sector at the art fair, noting the selection was “not only based on the proposed project but on how well a gallery had invested in its relationship with the artist and contributed to his or her development”. This year, Delhi's Anant Gallery, which was showcasing the work of South Asian artist Aisha Khalid, made this transition. Khalid, a neo-miniaturist from Pakistan, sat at the Anant booth amid her arresting artworks from the 'I am and I am not' gouache-and-paper series. ABHK was a room of many riches with many ancillary events on and off site. Here's a quick wrap of what I saw and liked:

'Ew! There is hair in the food!!'

Women's hair, a part of her body, is all these things—hair is about cultural identity, a marker of class, the means to a woman's taming. Shin Min, a former worker in low-wage, high-pressure jobs at fast food chains such as McDonald's and Starbucks, used the packaging for French fries to put together her angry-women dolls wearing hairnets to present a project that was emotional and political, drawn from her personal experiences.



Bangkok artist Tanat Teeradakorn Paramita Ghosh

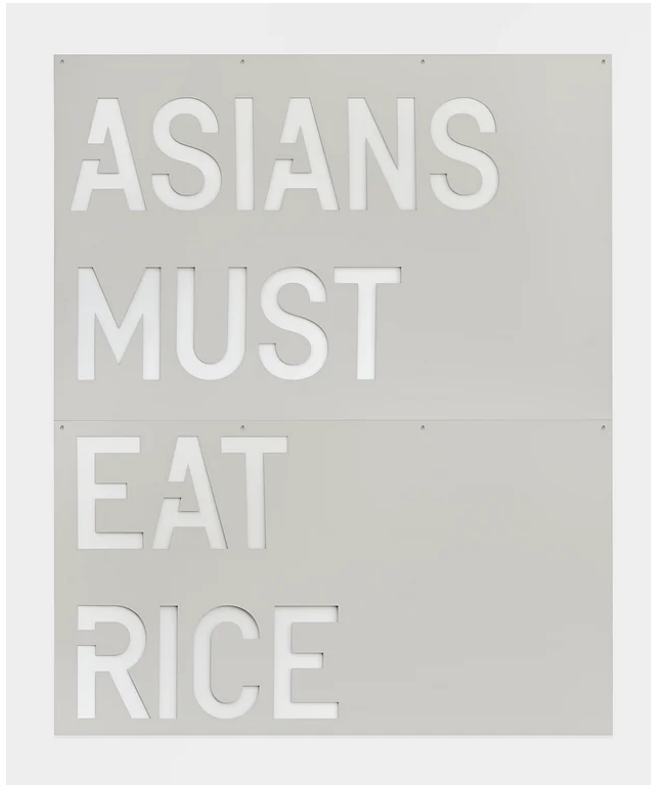
'The Rise and Decline of an Absolutism'

Bangkok artist Tanat Teeradakorn came to the fair with art centred on protest songs with traditional dance moves. His multimedia work, which included a stall, video, souvenirs and T-shirts with the anarchist slogan, 'If we can't dance it's not our revolution' was his attempt to create an archive of Thailand's postwar history, focusing on how traditional art forms such as *ramvong*, a Thai dance-drama, were censored following the 1947 military coup. "I want to understand socio- political structures through music and sound," he said.



‘Glazed Splendor’

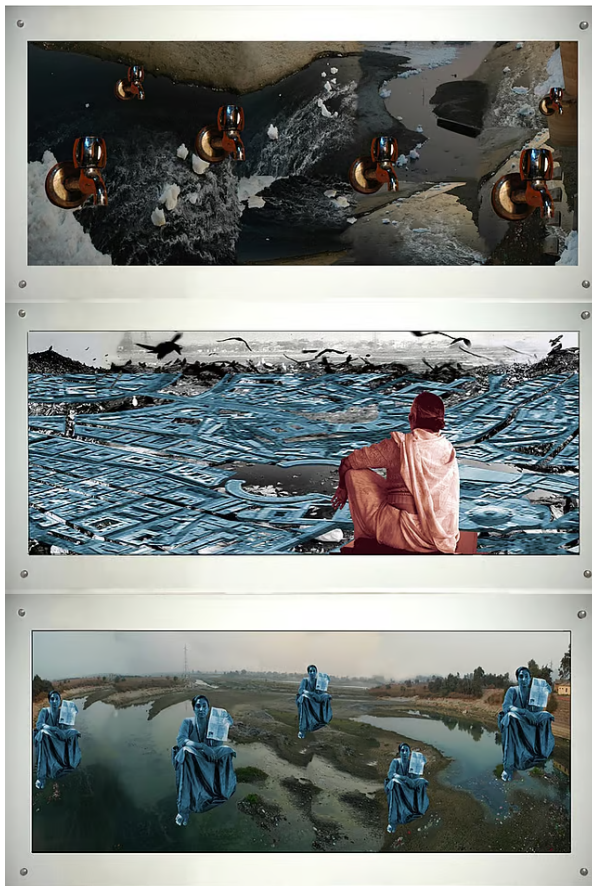
What happens when a craftsman of Guangcai porcelain— a type of porcelain characterised by intricate glazed, hand-painted decorations—and a Chinese haute couturist come together? Fashion designer Guo Pei and Master Tan Guanghui spent months placing 6,000 hand-painted porcelain tiles on a golden couture gown, the first time such tiles were used to develop a dress, Tang told TMS. Displayed at the UBS Art Studio, it was a sight to behold.



Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija | Courtesy: Pilar Corrias

‘Asians Must Eat Rice’

Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija is represented by Pilar Corrias. The Fonda and Rivera connections aside, Corrias, who runs a gallery in her name in London, is a curator, who is naturally in on the ambiguous statements Tiravanija makes with his installations. ‘Asians Must Eat Rice’ is a mirror made of polished stainless steel, inviting the viewer into the work. The title examines racial stereotypes while highlighting an ingredient, which Tiravanija regularly cooks with during his performances to incite communal (read community) action and discussion. A 2018 work, it can, however, be seen in continuity with his past work such as ‘Tomorrow can shut up and go away’, which was produced in 1999; it featured a life-size model of his apartment in which people apparently slept, took a shower, and had sex. The Tiravanija Way seems to be to get his art inside a gallery and then disrupt it.



Sheba Chhachhi, The Yamuna Series, 2005 Asia Art Archive

'In Our Backyard'

This exhibition spotlighted its team of curators from Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong and in India—Özge Ersoy, Samira Bose, and Sneha Raghavan—as they interpreted the personal archives of two documenters and organisers of the women's movement in India and Pakistan '80s onwards. Delhi-based Sheba Chhachhi's The Yamuna Series focused on the risk and flux of women who live by the river; they showed the expansion of her feminist concerns to embrace urban ecology. The late Lala Rukh's posters, photographs, and studio practice highlighted her empathy and the quality of witness as she captured Leftist and gender-justice movements and its activists in Pakistan and elsewhere.



Rika Minamitani's 'Unknown Friends' Art Basel

'Unknown Friends'

Rika Minamitani, an emerging Japanese artist's charmingly piquant oil painting 'Unknown Friends' was peopled with animals, human beings and human skeletons with elongated limbs. Its dream-meets-nightmare quality holds you captive. The painting hung at her booth, designed like a cabinet, in a section created at the fair to display multiple works of an artist. "After I finish a painting, I like to imagine the inner thoughts of the people I painted," said the artist.

(The writer covered the art fair at the invitation of Art Basel Hong Kong)

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