

# Bloomberg

## Billionaires Reveal Treasures as Asian Painters Edge Picasso in Singapore

A tattooed love-heart showing just below the sleeve of his shirt, artist David LaChapelle is waving his hands in the air as he describes a work to Chinese-American collector Richard Chang over lunch at a rooftop restaurant. Opposite him at Singapore's Marina Bay Sands hotel, Christie's International's Jakarta chief Amalia Wirjono is giving a potted history of Indonesian art to New York gallerist Fred Torres, while at the end of the table, Singapore gallery owner Jasdeep Sandhu trades news with Indonesian artist Nyoman Masriadi and his wife.

They are in town for Art Stage, Singapore's latest attempt to rival the Hong Kong International Art Fair. Singapore has tapped the experience and connections of Lorenzo Rudolf, who started Art Basel Miami during his 1991-2000 stint as director of Art Basel, the world's biggest contemporary art fair. "This has to be a place where you make contacts," Rudolf said over coffee a week before the fair's opening today. "To have the artists who are not normally at the fair, to have the collectors meeting the artists, that's interesting." The lunch yesterday before the VIP preview of Art Stage, which gathers more than 120 galleries from 26 countries, suggests Rudolf's emphasis on providing a forum for networking may be paying off. Unlike the Hong Kong Fair in May, which had 155 galleries last year, Rudolf restricted the number of Western exhibitors to keep the fair predominantly from around Asia.



David LaChapelle's chromogenic print "Alexander McQueen: Burning Down the House." Source: EsLite Gallery via Bloomberg

### Asian Marketplace

"Asia's at the point where it has to build up its own marketplace," he said. "It makes no sense to invite Western galleries that represent the same artists as the Asian ones." The key for Rudolf was to attract big collectors of Asian art from around the world. He worked with Singapore's government to set up an exhibition running parallel with the fair at the Singapore Art Museum and other venues called "Collectors' Stage: Asian Contemporary Art From Private Collections."

The show includes works from artists such as China's Ai Weiwei, India's Shilpa Gupta, Indonesia's Masriadi and Yoshitomo Nara from Japan. Many of the works spend most of their time in the houses and private museums of big Asian-art collectors such as Sylvain Levy, Oei Hong Djien and Deddy Kusuma. "It's exciting to have such a collection of contemporary art from Asia like this," said Levy, as he walked through a preview of the museum show. His DSL Collection of Chinese contemporary art contributed two works to the exhibition.

At the media preview of the fair, in the basement next to the casino of the Marina Bay Sands, galleries were putting final touches to their booths and eyeing the competition.

### Quality Boost

"I've seen loads of fairs in the Far East where the quality is quite low," said Armin Bienger, director of London-based Marlborough Fine Art, which was showing ink paintings by Chinese master Zao Wou-ki and works by emerging Asian artists opposite paintings by Picasso and Renoir. "Here, it is very good. I hope Lorenzo's concept of keeping it primarily for Asian galleries plays out." The fair includes more than 30 special projects as well as talks by collectors such as Levy, Oei and Uli Sigg, and artists including LaChapelle and Shen Shaomin. It also has stunning projects in the booths, including a suspended white forest from Japan and a reconstructed Malaysian grocery store. The next few days may show whether Rudolf can turn Singapore, sometimes called the Switzerland of Asia for its cleanliness and efficiency, into the Basel of Asia for art, a place where collectors, dealers, galleries and artists meet. It's a small beginning, but as Rudolf pointed out, the same was true for Art Basel. "When I began to change Basel, it took 7 years," he said.

Art Stage Singapore is at the convention center of the Marina Bay Sands from Jan. 12-16. The Collectors' Stage exhibitions at the Singapore Art Museum and the Tanjong Pagar Distripark on Keppel Road open tonight and run until Feb. 17. Contact +65-6224-4975 or visit <http://www.artstagesingapore.com>.

(Adam Majendie writes for Muse, the arts and lifestyle section of Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are his own.)