The Far East: Collectors and Collections today (Lyon, 24-25 Mar 2016)

Lyon, Mar 24–25, 2016
Deadline: Jun 30, 2015

Marie Laureillard

International Conference organised by the University of Lyon and National University of Taiwan

The objective of this conference is to study private and public collections connected to the Far East from a contemporary perspective. While we intend to pay particular attention to contemporary art, the considered collections can also be focused on more ancient objects, and not only on art objects. The term “Far East” will be here understood in a broad sense, including the islands of East Asia and South East Asia. The approach will be interdisciplinary, combining art history, aesthetics, anthropology, sociology, economics or even politics. We will divide the conference into four panels:

Panel I: Profiles and motivations of the collectors

Private collectors are enthusiastic about the visual and material cultures of the Far East. In China, since the 2000s, the number of collectors is growing at breakneck speed, at the same time as a booming art market has been developing: the art collection has become above all a status symbol for the wealthy and new rich and for a part of the middle class which numbers about 400 million people. From now on, Western collectors are far from being the only ones who are active on the Chinese art market. Among the various kinds of collectors (established fortunes, dynamic young employees, academics with a limited budget, fashionable bourgeois who invest in new neighborhoods, etc.), two categories in particular stand out in Japan: the one of the great entrepreneurs and, more recently, that of “salaried collectors”. The former, feeling themselves invested with a social mission, decide to open foundations rather than to speculate. With the support of their respective companies, they have opened the way for an original sponsorship model in a Japanese-style. The latter, enjoying a comfortable or at least regular income, are the symbol of an educated middle class acceding to the leisure of collecting. Through their various strategies of acquisitions and their relationship to various institutions, they daily sustain the art market. In this first session, we will focus on the socio-economic profiles of collectors in the Far East and will analyze their motivations to accumulate Asian art objects and artifacts. In fact, it is necessary to distinguish between psychological desires and ideas of an investment that can potentially be monetized (with a profit in the future). Moreover, what about the prestige and the social status of owners of collections which seem to be “important”? Can this type of private collectors claim to be contributing to increasing the scientific knowledge of Asian visual and material culture?

Panel II: Institutional and Collective Collections

Whereas the Japanese state is little active on the art scene (the possibility of the Agency for Cultural Affairs to support artists appears to be limited for budgetary reasons, while fiscal policy towards collectors, sponsors and foundations remains tentative), it is not necessarily the same case in China, Korea or elsewhere. In China, the state has openly supported the art world since the 1990s, and especially since 2000, by financing and organizing exhibitions, which are often related to Chinese contemporary art, trying to demonstrate its involvement in economic globalization. Everywhere, the state acts as a collector by bringing private collections into the public cultural domain. Whereas the development of such collections has changed over time with a significant decline in recent years in Japan, the museums still provide an important outlet for gallery owners. When they decide to exhibit - and even more so to acquire - the works of young artists, profits for the latter are substantial, at least symbolically. So what is the collective impact of these collections on the movements of prices of an artist's work, or in terms of support for contemporary art? How can we distinguish between "museum-oriented art" and "market-oriented art"? Can companies still influence collections in the light of the increased pressure from shareholders in a sector - culture - allegedly less "profitable" than sport or environment? What role do visual arts play in their sponsorship activities in Far East Asia ?

Panel III : Collections: Intersecting Views

Whereas Westerners don't often collect jade, fans or prints, preferring oil painting, Asians want to acquire calligraphy, paintings in monochrome ink or ceramic ... In this panel, we will study how the fantasies from a country are perceived in another one in this time of globalization and of an extraordinary opening of the art market to the most diverse cultures. We can also pay attention to the way boundaries between art, crafts and objects of all kinds fade. We can analyze Far Eastern art collections in Europe, for example, or Western art collections in Japan or China. The contemporary perspective will complete some research already done on this issue in the past. How does a contemporary European collector or a public museum select Asian works ? What is his impact on the local art scene ? We can question the strategies of Western collectors who associate themselves with an exotic and often idealized form of the Asian Other. What is the vision of a Taiwanese collector about European art ? How does a Japanese gallery owner consider contemporary Chinese art? It will also be an opportunity to discuss the differences in the way of collecting in the Far East and the West, as well as the consequences of globalization, since the differences between Western and Asian art tend nowadays to disappear.

Panel IV: Art market and identity issues

According to a survey which was performed in 2014 on behalf of the internet auction house artprice.com, a multinational company based in Lyon, 53 of the 100 most valued contemporary artists on the world-wide art market have Asian origins, among them a big Chinese majority. The recent creation of the Art Fairs and of the Biennales in Asia becomes more and more important, for example "Art Basel Hong Kong", "Art Fair Tokyo", and "Art Revolution Taipei". The dynamics of the economy and the technologies in the countries of the Far East play without any doubt an important role: several works actually showed that, contrary to the common idea that "art does not have frontiers" or that nationality does not have any impact on the rating of the artists, the long-term classification of the artists always places countries with the highest economic power on the top of the art market. Furthermore, do the creators of art collections and Asian artefacts

want to express an aspect of their national and ethnic identity (“indigenism”) by means of their collections? Collecting Asiatic objects is not a neutral affair but includes identity issues for which collectors are willing to pay higher and higher prices.

Proposals for papers (title, an abstract of at most 500 words, bio-bibliography of at most 10 lines, and 5 keywords in English or French) should be sent by 30th June 2015 to Cléa Patin (cleapatin@gmail.com) and Marie Laureillard (mlaureillard@free.fr).

The scientific committee will meet at the beginning of July to establish the programme of the conference. Notification of acceptance will be given on the 15th July 2015. The talks must not exceed 20/25 minutes to allow an open discussion after every talk. Presentations may be in English or in French.

Speakers will be asked to send a revised version of their paper by the end of the conference which will be examined with regard to a publication of the proceedings.

Scientific committee:
Annie Claustres (Associate Professor in History of contemporary art with an Accreditation to supervise research, Lyon 2 University),
Christophe Comentale (Chief Curator, Musée de l’Homme, Paris),
Marie Laureillard (Associate Professor in Chinese Language and Civilisation, Lyon 2 University),
Liu Chiao-mei (Associate Professor in Art history, National University of Taiwan),
Cléa Patin (Associate Professor in Japanese Language and Civilisation, Lyon 3 University),
Paul van der Grijp (Professor in Anthropology, Lyon 2 University)

Organising committee: Marie Laureillard, Cléa Patin, Paul van der Grijp
(Lyon 2 University, Lyon 3 University, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Museum of Confluences, National University of Taiwan)

Reference:
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