



Curatorial Statement of Guest Curator

Just what is it that makes Oi! so different, so appealing?

“Our culture decides, quite arbitrarily, what is waste and rubbish, but I have an African or Indian approach to what I find. I like to make use of everything. I can't bear to throw things away — a nice wine bottle, a nice box. Sometimes I feel like a wizard in Toytown, transforming a bunch of carrots into pomegranates”.

“I suppose I am interested, above all, in investigating the golden ability of the artist to achieve a metamorphosis of quite ordinary things into something wonderful and extraordinary”.

British pop artist and sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi

Artist Gary Card grew up in the quiet seaside town of Bournemouth in southern England and is known for his unique understanding and creativity in the arts of different cultures around the world. As a teenager, he not only loved cartoons and comics, but also enjoyed hunting for discarded “treasures” in second-hand shops — from antiques to obscure anime figures from Asia, kimonos to slippers, and even old Chinese vases converted into table lamps. In an era without the Internet, these items — especially handicrafts from East Asia – sparked Gary’s curiosity about the outside world. He saw the value in them, bestowed by the passage of time, as well as the stories of the people and objects behind them. Unearthing the stories behind these old items and showcasing the objectivity of things through the creation of art gradually became concepts for his work in his later artistic career.

In the two decades since the turn of the millennium,—society has entered an unprecedented era due to globalisation: material goods are in abundance, developments are rapid, values are constantly redefined, and consumerism has become the primary productive force in metropolitan areas. New trends continuously emerge, and streaming media, television and film occupy more and more space in the minds of consumers. Information and images – as a new type of entertainment product — rapidly flood our brains with dopamine and then are quickly forgotten. London-based artist Gary is also part of this collaborative globalised production; every season, his creations in the fashion industry quickly appear on shopping streets around the world, stimulating consumers’ senses and enticing them to make their next purchase. If pop artists create

fine art with commercial inspirations, then Gary, as a designer, creates commercial art with fine art inspirations.

Pop art emerged from Britain in the 1950s as an art movement characterised by consumerism and popular culture. It explores the aesthetics-of fast-moving goods and serves as a reflection of contemporary culture. Pop art employs the phenomenon of mass consumption, everyday images, and vibrant colours to create a powerful visual language that bridges the gap between commercial and fine art. Inspired by the collages of early British pop artists Eduardo Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton, Gary has been conceptualising a new “pop collage” sculpture and painting techniques—since the turn of the millennium. He interprets this theme through “barnacles of time” using the biological characteristics of barnacles — which attach themselves onto surfaces for survival — as a metaphor for the passage of time on objects, and in doing so, expands the creative boundaries and concept of pop art. This can be seen during Gary’s research and work on his *Homunculus* sculpture series; viewing articulated dolls as a form of sculpture in which he could explore the boundaries of traditional Western sculpture, combining classical-forms with pop culture references and everyday consumer goods. This ongoing-project draws additional inspiration from Asian export porcelain from the 17th to 19th centuries, puppets, figurines from various periods and cultural traditions, cartoon and anime, Asian, Baroque, and Victorian fashion, netsuke art, as well as the culture and aesthetics of classical Greek sculpture to name a few, imbuing his works with distinct material characteristics.

Gary’s work in fashion and art has taken him to many different cities around the world. To him, Hong Kong is not only a shopping paradise, but also a vast cosmopolitan maze where East meets West: bustling street markets and food stalls that sit next to luxury shopping malls, the treasure troves that spread through Hollywood Road and Lascar Row, the chatter of different languages at Chun Yeung Street Market, neon lights that cast dazzling colours over the Victoria Harbour at night, towering contemporary architecture that stands beside old tenement buildings... everything about the city keeps one enthralled. In the eyes of the artist, Hong Kong is like a splendid jigsaw puzzle, with an urban network resembling the growth rings of a tree, faithfully recording the passage of time. Oi! provides a platform for him to showcase multicultural art in Asia and invite discussions about the artistic value and the notion of objectivity in popular culture.

It is incredible that the old and new, the East and West coexist in harmony in Hong Kong; what appears to be crowded and chaotic is in fact orderly. The Celestials’ Hole



at Wah Fu Estate, Aberdeen, came as a delightful surprise to Gary, even more so than Mong Kok, the centre of anime youth culture. The Celestials' Hole is a cultural landscape — a hillside that serves as a dumping ground for more than 8,000 discarded mass-produced porcelain figurines and toys. The area is covered top to bottom with idols of deities and buddhas. Amidst the burning of incense, toys or travel souvenirs are turned into offerings to seek blessings. What is shown here is the waste from overconsumption turned into a form of pop art, as well as the wisdom of anti-elite grassroots art.

Oi! is located in a Grade II historic building which was formerly the Hong Kong Yacht Club. In the last century, the yacht club represented elite culture serving a selected few. Today, through the concerted efforts of the curatorial team at Oi!, it has become a public art space with the aim of promoting art in the community and connecting art with life. Gary's work often incorporates the transformation of the environmental space. In the pursuit of art as a transformative action, Oi! aligns with the artist in this shared vision. Drawing inspiration from the pop collage *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* by British artist Richard Hamilton, the historic building at 12 Oil Street has now become “different” and “appealing” after its function was changed into that of an art space. Gary's idea for “People Mountain People Sea” is to present his thoughts on the culture of the consumerist era through the unique use of colours and visual language of pop collage, allowing the audience to feel the passage and changes of time and the extraordinary transformation of the ordinary within the world of art. By combining the traces of history in the building with his distinct aesthetic, Gary turns Oi! into a playful, immersive landscape filled with dazzling colours.

The phrase People Mountain People Sea carries a sense of hustle & bustle, celebration, and excitement, which describes Gary's authentic experience garnered from China, the Pearl River Delta and Hong Kong during the creative process of his exhibition. The artist hopes that the audience will feel this energy and vitality in the exhibition, which is not only reflected in the colours he used — representing the city's vitality — but also deeply embodied in the Asian cultural elements that he draws upon in his work.

Guest Curator
Sylvia Zhan



About Guest Curator

Sylvia Zhan is a London-based curator and art programme organiser. As the Founder and Artistic Director of China Culture Connect (UK) (trading as Artability Art) and a university lecturer, Sylvia is a keen promoter for Chinese art and culture in the UK. She founded the Chinese Heritage Conference which advocates for the conservation of Chinese heritage, and the Chinese Visual Festival which introduces Chinese independent cinema, artists' films and moving image art to European audiences.