

In pictures: hanging ghost ships and upside-down architecture at Art Basel in Hong Kong

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Curator Alexie Glass-Kantor talks us through her selection of large-scale works at the fair this year

Diversity is important to Alexie Glass-Kantor, the director of Artspace Sydney and the curator of the Encounters sector for large-scale works at Art Basel in Hong Kong. She says she feels a responsibility “to make sure that not just the centres, but also the peripheries, are represented”. Her selection of 12 works from galleries’ proposals this year includes four female artists and several names that may not—yet—be familiar to the international art world. “I want to advocate for them to be acquired by major museums and private collections,” she says.

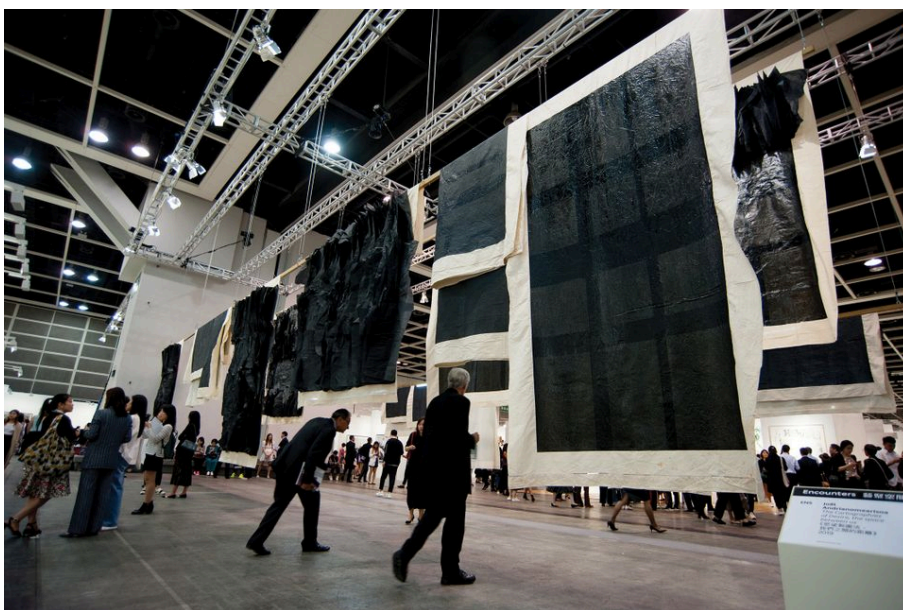
This desire to resist the status quo is reflected in the title of Glass-Kantor’s fifth iteration of Encounters, called Still We Rise. The phrase speaks to a “duplicity” she observed in many of the artists’ projects, she says, by which beautiful appearances bely “much more layered social, cultural or political ideas”.

Arrayed along four “meridians” on the fair’s two floors, the Encounters works must have immediate visual impact to capture the attention of Art Basel’s estimated 70,000 visitors. But beyond the selfie-friendly colours and mirrored surfaces, “there is a necessity for something more”, Glass-Kantor says. Here, she reveals the stories behind six of this year’s works.



Jose Dávila's *Homage to the Square* (2018-19). Sean Kelly Gallery. Photo: Norm Yip

“This is a new edition of 16 mobiles made specifically for Hong Kong in [Dávila’s] studio in Guadalajara. It directly relates to Josef Albers, looking at the perception of colour for the 100th anniversary of the Bauhaus. Hong Kong has such a strong connection to art, architecture and design—to ignore that would have been a missed opportunity. For me, abstraction was a hugely political movement. Abstraction isn’t about decor; of course, it can look lovely in your lounge, but the history of abstraction is one of resistance to conventions of representation.”



Joël Andrianomearisoa’s *The Cartographies of Desire, the space between us* (2019).
Sabrina Amrani Gallery. Photo: Norm Yip

“Joël is representing Madagascar in its first pavilion at the Venice Biennale this year. I had wanted to include him [in Encounters] for a couple of years and this was the right time. He not only studied art history but also architecture, and his practice cuts across both. We worked together to think about the space, how the paintings could face out and in. They are all paintings or collages on bedsheets after he slept on them. I think there’s something wonderful about that intimacy at a fair. He layers texture within the black, so what seems monochromatic and flat actually has nuance. I want audiences who will go on to Venice to have a memory of this and recognise Joël’s work.”



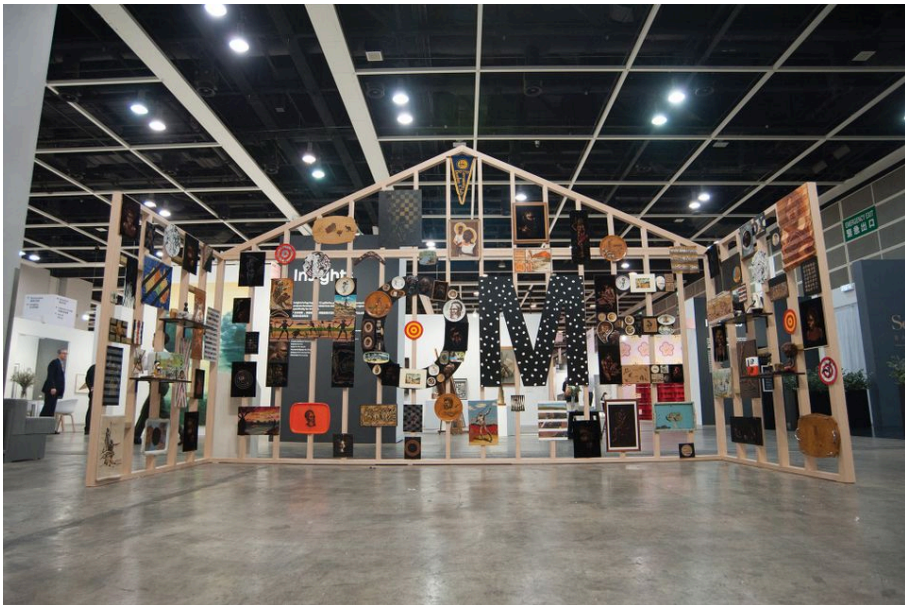
Elmgreen & Dragset's City in the Sky (2019). Kukje, Massimo De Carlo and Perrotin.
Photo: Norm Yip

"Elmgreen & Dragset have created a completely new work that is a composite of fictional cities. The architecture suggests buildings that we recognise, and there's an idea of cinema, with films like Metropolis, Bladerunner and Inception. This work is beautiful on the meridian with Lee Bul's zeppelin and reflective hexagonal floor. Here, everything is inverted—the mirroring is above you and you are immersed in a city in reverse. It looks beguiling and seductive, but each building has emergency lights on top, flashing red. The city could collapse down upon you. The surface appeal holds a mean threat."

"Mit lives and works just outside Chiang Mai in an open studio, with animals, children, people and activity at all times. Mit's is a social practice in many ways. He works with NGOs and a nearby community of minority people who have been forcibly blinded or experienced trauma. Rohingya refugees live in the studio compound. He employs them to mix paints and participate in the painting. At one point, they were peeling the paint off so he could keep paying them. The colour field in this work is so vibrant, but it's not about the gesture of the artist individually. Still We Rise—together we can make something that is more than the sum of its parts."



Mit Jai Inn's Planes (Electric, 2019). Silverlens and TKG+. Photo: Norm Yip



Tony Albert's Native Home (2019). Sullivan + Strumpf. Photo: Norm Yip

“When [Albert] grew up as a young Aboriginal man, he realised there was no one who looked like his family in the media or in popular culture. Instead, it was through souvenir tchotchke stereotypes that he saw people who represented him, but they were so pejorative. He began collecting these objects and reassembling them into Wunderkammer taxonomies. For this work we wanted to build an open house and think about indigenous people and the absence in many cultures of sovereign recognition. In the context of the fair, the installation speaks to the way we accumulate objects and what that says about who we are and how we want to be seen.”



Chiharu Shiota's *Where Are We Going?* (2017-18). Photo: Norm Yip

“I love this metaphor for the migration of ideas, people and places through time. Chiharu has taken boats that represent different cultures and communities and made sculptures that reduce them to their basic form. When we think about the movement and displacement of people seeking asylum and passage, work like this is not only beautiful, but has this other aspect to it. The title is *Where Are We Going?*—perhaps we don't always know exactly where we are heading, but we can at any moment find the potential for change. Chiharu is speaking to something optimistic, but there is a density and a darkness in this work.”