

Art Basel in Hong Kong Kicks Off With Optimism and Style

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Kyungah Ham, Chandeliers for Five Cities (2016).
Image: artnet News

Art Basel in Hong Kong got off to a good start Tuesday despite the showers that plagued the city. The fair's fourth edition saw 239 galleries from 35 countries fill two levels of the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. More than 60,000 visitors are expected to attend Asia's premiere art fair through March 26.

Although China's economic downturn caused speculation over the fair's performance, Art Basel in Hong Kong director Adeline Ooi assured the press that this wouldn't reflect in sales at the fair, adding, "Asia isn't just China."

Art Basel in Hong Kong is "the greatest show that Asia has ever seen in an art fair context," Art Basel director Marc Spiegler told artnet News. These were big words for the continent's largest art fair, but the strength of the works on display validated Spiegler's grand statement.

The 2016 Encounters offerings boasted some of Art Basel in Hong Kong's strongest works. Curator Alexie Glass-Kantor selected just 16 artists, who included Isa Genzken and Lawrence Weiner, to create original commissions for the fair. Each piece told an interesting story, from [Kyungah Ham's](#) chandelier embroidery paintings manufactured by North Korean textile workers to Tintin Wulia's installation of cardboard and drawings that reference the cardboard recycling network created by Filipino migrant workers in Hong Kong's Central district.

"I hope that Encounters this year reflects the kind of texture of connectivity, of collaboration, of generosity of spirit," said Glass-Kantor at the press conference.

Kukje and Tina Kim galleries jointly presented an impressive installation of the work of Kyungah Ham, *Chandeliers for Five Cities* (2016), (pictured at top) in the Encounters section. For this series of works, the South Korean artist had sent large-scale canvases to be embroidered in North Korea, a process that takes at least one year to complete. "Sometimes," said the gallerist about the works, which were valued at over \$1 million, "they never make it back. So these are like survivors." According to the gallerist, several institutions, one a Hong Kong-based museum and another in the US, had expressed interest in acquiring the work.