

# MODERN ART PATRONAGE

From artists-in-residence to angel investing, art patrons are increasingly invested in the early stages of an artist's career

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Hong Kong has always had a strong tradition of art collecting, from Chinese ink paintings and calligraphy in the early days to European Masters and increasingly, modern and contemporary art.

But has that translated into a tradition of art patronage? Does a collector automatically a patron maketh?

"You can be a patron when you're buying an artist's work from a gallery, but we like to classify a patron as the sort to have a direct relationship with the artist. There is a direct dialogue between the artist and patron, so the relationship is mutually negotiable," says Chin Chin Teoh, co-director of the MILL6 Foundation, a non-profit arts and cultural organisation.

In the case of MILL6, this relationship has come in the form of an artist-in-residence programme.

In recent years, the rise in artists-in-residencies has coincided with a call for greater support for young and mid-career artists. From the perspective of the patrons, there is something beautiful about

investing in an artist's early career, because they are not only collecting a tangible object (in most cases anyway), but also the set of ideals that an artist's work represents.

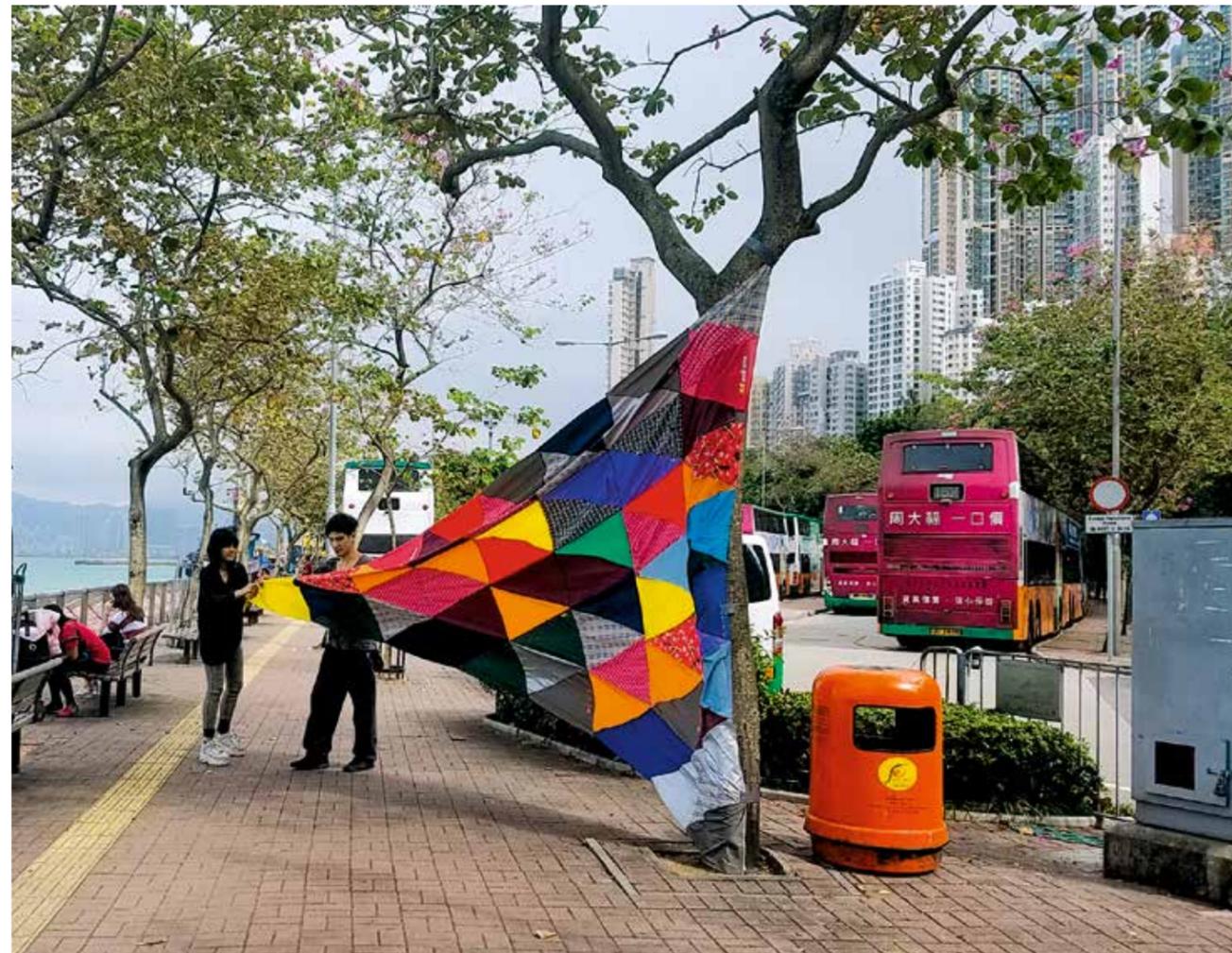
To qualify for MILL6's artist-in-residence programme, the criteria are simple: they are looking for pan-Asian artists who are interested in working with textiles in some way.

"Textile doesn't need to be featured as a medium, but the work must be related somehow to the history or memory of the textile industry. It could take the form of a video installation or a document of sorts. We like to work with artists who are continually trying to bring new interpretations," Teoh notes.

There is no open call for MILL6's artist-in-residence programme; instead, candidates are vetted by the Foundation's curatorial team.

Since launching in 2016, the programme has played host to three resident artists, including Yukihiro Taguchi, Mariana Hahn and Yeondoo Jung.

While the MILL6 Foundation will "sometimes bounce ideas



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT**  
Artist Yeondoo Jung working in MILL6 Foundation's Tsuen Wan studio; MILL6 Foundation artist Mariana Hnaa working on her fabric-based art; Mariana Hnaa's work on display; MILL6 Foundation artist Yukihiro Taguchi's work displayed in Hong Kong.

off" the artists, Teoh is quick to emphasise that the artists have total creative freedom. This bilateral input also extends to the relationship that the artist builds with the Hong Kong community, particularly that in Tsuen Wan, where the MILL6 Foundation is based.

During his residency in Hong Kong this summer, Jung held up a sign in the middle of Tseun Wan, requesting stories from former textile workers.

Aside from accommodation, the foundation provides a travel and

living stipend. Residences are up to three months, though the exact length depends on the artist. At the end of each residency, one or two of the artist's works will go towards MILL6's own art foundation.

"Naturally, it's entirely up to the artist which work they pick," says Teoh. "But that doesn't mean that it would be the end of our relationship. We might invite the artist for another show later."

Located on the tip of Hong Kong Island, Wong Chuk Hang's high-ceilinged buildings with their freight lifts and low rents

have always been the stuff that ideal galleries are made of. The off-the-beaten-track aura (though somewhat dampened by the arrival of the South Island line) also means it's conducive for setting up artist-in-residence programmes.

Spring Workshop led the way. Boasting living spaces, a fully-equipped kitchen, and an exhibition area, Spring Workshop has hosted a rich diversity of artists and musicians since opening its doors in 2011. Recent artists-in-residence have included Wu Tsang, Koki Tanaka and Tiffany Chung.

One block away, de Sarthe Gallery set up its first artist-in-residence programme in July this year.

"I think there are a lot of galleries in Hong Kong, and there are a lot of Hong Kong-based artists, but there's often not a lot of overlapping," says William Molesworth, de Sarthe's director. "I want to not only engage the art scene but engage it in a way that is beneficial. I really want to give the artist an opportunity to step outside their comfort zone and do something challenging and new."

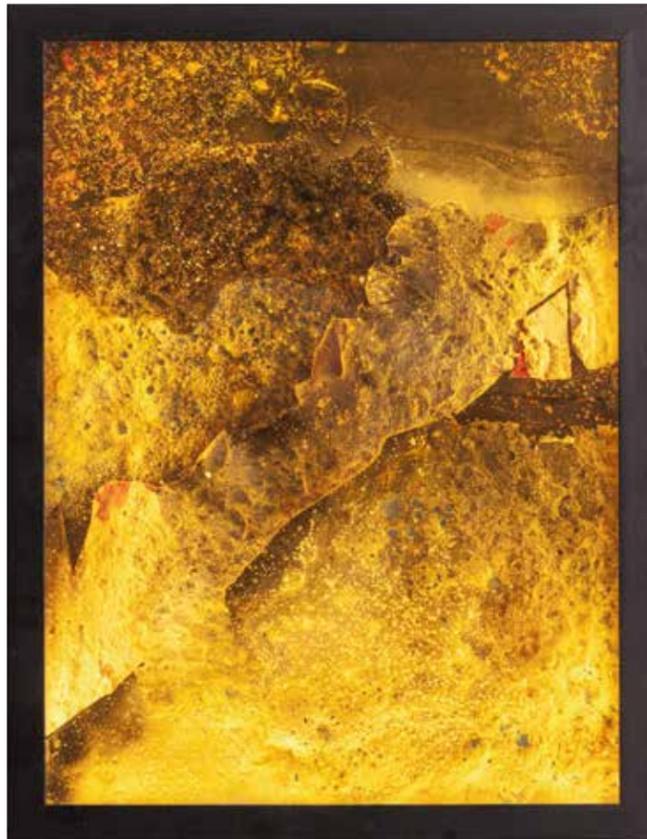
Prior to the residency, Molesworth invited a group of artists to survey the space and come up with proposals for it.

"I asked them for a proposal that really engages our space and engages the public because the residency does have this kind of atmosphere [where] the public will feel comfortable to come and participate," he notes.

The winning bid went to Andrew Luk, an artist whose oeuvre veers towards the conceptual. The one-month residency was tailed by a week-long exhibition at the gallery.

When we visit the gallery on a hot August day, bits of the floor have been ripped open, there are blackened air-conditioning covers hanging from the ceiling, and a

**CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT**  
*Horizon*  
*Scan No. 1* by Andrew Luk.; Amsterdam-based In4Art hosts a career development workshop for artists; Works by In4Art's artists such as this piece by Constant Dullaart, are made available to its patron members.



whiff of burnt synthetics in the air.

The artist was about to create an indoor climbing wall that investigated the idea of mapping. Professional climbers were invited to mark routes, and the public was encouraged to interact with it.

The gallery aims to host a similar artist-in-residence next year, though Molesworth says they're going to extend the exhibition period to two weeks.

"I think there is a huge disconnect between the actual cultural value of art and the economics behind the art world. I wish there was a way to motivate more funding for the artists, not just from the government but also from the public and the galleries, to support a whole wide range of artists, not just the tip of the iceberg," he notes.

Meanwhile, scale is the name of the game at K11 Art Foundation. Since its founding in 2011, the K11 Wuhan Art Village has played host

to a multitude of resident artists, including He Rui and Sha Lina, both of whom are participating in *The Best is Yet to Come* show at the chi art space in New World Tower.

While still in its infancy, the idea of angel investing in the arts is gaining traction among art patrons.

Looking beyond Hong Kong, Lija Groenewoud van Vliet is an art collector and founder of In4Art, an Amsterdam-based arts organisation equally invested in artists and the patrons who support them.

"If you look at families with double income, only one out of every 37 of them spends money on art. A lot of people from our generation aren't actively engaged in art, yet artists, due to the research they do, might be able to pave the way for new possibilities. Our generation is constantly searching for fulfilment, but they also want to be taken by hand,"



says Groenewoud, explaining the inspiration behind In4Art. "With us, they're able to develop an eye for art and participate actively in the development of the artists."

In4Art's patron programme is open to all, with the three-year memberships costing from 30 EUR (HK\$257) to 60 EUR each month.

Once a member, a patron gains access to In4Art's art collection, attends art studio visits and participates in workshops – in essence becoming an early investor in the artist's career. In4Art has 40 active members, mostly between the 30 and 50 age bracket. "I want it to grow slowly. For me, it's more about building a community, and creating a connection between patrons and artists," says Groenewoud. "Usually they are people who are

interested in art, but feel alienated from the art world.

The membership fees ultimately go to supporting artists.

The angel investment track is for established artists who have achieved public recognition, yet might lack the funds or resources required for a show. "Priscilla Fernandes is doing a huge show in Portugal. We invested in her artistic process, and in return she gave us one work," said Groenewoud.

Another case in point was Rana Hamadeh, who was nominated for the Prix de Rome 2017.

"She ran into a budget problem for her show, so we collaborated with her to develop a series of derivatives – in other words, small tangible objects that can be shown." One of these "derivatives" is now in In4Art's own collection.

Meanwhile, the incubation programme targets young art graduates and allows those practising an opportunity to reflect on their own practices and receive coaching at In4Art's project space. "In terms of coaching, it can be anything from art- or legal-related matters."

Eight artists were invited to participate in last year's KickSTART incubation programme, where three months of workshops, studio visits and masterclasses culminated in a group exhibition and auction in January.

In4Art is also looking towards "gamification", which in layman terms means employing game design techniques to enhance members' engagement.

Where does Groenewoud van Vliet see In4Art in five years' time?

"A hundred members. I think that's a solid base. We want to open up branches in other places, so when our members travel or go on work trips, they'd have access to resources in all the branches," she beams. ☺